CHRISTIANITY'S CRIMINAL HISTORY

Vol. II

Karlheinz Deschner

Front cover:

Imperial silver denarius
of Charlemagne, inspired
by Roman models.
This representation
is the closest thing to
a contemporary portrait
of the *Imperator*.

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'For a long time Christ had already taken a look at the Germanic peoples… A new spring dawned on the sky of the Church.'

—Leo Rüger, Catholic theologian

Editor's foreword

The two-book abridgement of the contents of the first volumes of Karlheinz Deschner's *Criminal History of Christianity*, originally published in German, is intended for white nationalists.

Both nationalists and historically literate people are unaware that Christianity was not imposed on the white man by preaching but by imperial violence. I chose the images for the covers of these two books, Constantine and Charlemagne, because they seem to me to represent not only how a cult of Semitic origin was imposed on the whites of the Mediterranean by order of the Roman Empire, but a few centuries later on the Northmen through genocidal wars.

The historical material collected by Deschner is very different from the psycho-historical material collected by Tom Holland in his 2019 book *Dominion* (Appendix II of this book lists an abridged version of *Dominion* available on my website *The West's Darkest Hour*). Holland discusses how Christian morality, from its origins, caused the rampant universalism and egalitarianism that infects the West today. On the other hand, Deschner collects the cases of Christian crimes hardly known to Christians and non-Christians alike, as it is the winners who write history; and since Constantine the imperial church was particularly successful in destroying the books of its critics. In the case of the Saxons annihilated by Charlemagne, they did not possess a culture as advanced as that of the Greco-Romans.

We have all heard of the crimes of the Catholic Church in the *second* millennium of Christianity: the Inquisition for dissenting men and the burning at the stake of innocent women labelled witches. But the crimes of the *first* Christian millennium are virtually unknown: a blind spot that this two-volume translation of a fraction of Deschner's work aims to cure. As I have said on my website, to cure the white man of the mental illness that is killing him, it's

necessary to become aware of both sides of the coin: the crimes of first-millennium Christianity (Deschner) and how Christian morality has fatally metastasised in today's secular world (Holland). Last month I finished abridging Holland's book to popularise it through PDF abridgement. Now it is the turn of Deschner's *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums*.

César Tort
July 2023

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The Middle Ages

'The life of medieval Christianity is impregnated, and even completely saturated, in its relations by religious conceptions. There is no thing or action that is not constantly related to Christ and the faith. Everything is built on a religious conception of reality, and we find ourselves before an incredible development of inner faith.'

—Johan Huizinga

A PANORAMIC VIEW

The divisions in historical times are not fixed in advance. They were not decreed in a 'higher' place, to be carried out later by humanity. Rather, the history of man is an unheard-of chaos of stories, and later he tries to put a certain order in the zigzagging course of events and the bewildering diversity of tendencies, reducing everything to perfectly clear schemes. It introduces structures and caesuras, and thus the whole appears as an expression of forces that act coherently, and in this way everything is presented as if it had to be that way and could not have been otherwise; as if, for example, the Roman Empire would only have occurred so that Europe could inherit it. That is a vision that favours our taste for periodisation, and that can undoubtedly also encourage it. In reality, all this delimitation and temporal ordering, all these supposed fixed points, indicative data and evolution lines are nothing more than the result of certain—or, better to say, very uncertain—points of view, of precarious attempts at orientation: pure constructions to which people have accommodated, either by giving them meaning or not.

The 'Middle Ages,' a period that runs from approximately the 6th to the 10th centuries, is a period of violent change and transformation. But it is also a time of compromises or, to put it more elegantly: of assimilation, of continuity, a period of decadence and transition, of old heritage and a new beginning. In it the constitution of the West, of Europe, takes place; and of Germany, the intertwining of ancient Christian and Germanic traditions, the separation of Byzantium, the Eastern Church, and the arrival of Islam. And it is an age in which politics and religion are inseparable.

The alliances of the popes with the states also change. However, as always when they turn and change direction with time, Rome continually seeks to cling to the strongest power: Byzantium, the Ostrogoths, the Lombards, the Franks, and it takes advantage of them.

From convinced subjects to convinced Lords

In Rome the temples collapsed, the imperial palace collapsed, in the theatres and the gigantic baths the ruins piled up and the weeds and ivy grew. And the priests took advantage. The old bath chairs became Episcopal chairs, the sumptuous alabaster and porphyry bathtubs became baptismal fonts and dubious urns of martyrs. Marble wall coverings, precious mosaic floors, beautiful columns and stones were removed from ancient villas to enrich Christian temples. The pagan temples became Christian churches and the Rome of the Caesars became a clerical city, in which the religious (or what was considered as such) prevailed; and in which all civil festivals disappeared in favour of ecclesiastical festivities. The belief in the imminent end of the world was generalised to such an extent, and such proportions acquired the privileges of the priests, that Emperor Maurice forbade in 592 the entry of soldiers into monasteries and civil servants into the clerical state.

The civil power of the popes—which was the basis of the future pontifical state or the Church—sprouted from ruins: from the rubble of the Western Roman Empire, thanks to the impotence of Byzantium and an ever-growing curial ambition for dominance. Already in the 5th century the bishops of Rome, supposed successors of Jesus, were the largest landowners of the Roman Empire. And the collapse of that empire only accelerated the rise of the bishops of Rome inheriting entirely the decadent imperial structure.

Under the Merovingians, in the early days of the Byzantine Empire, bishops gained power and influence also in worldly or civil affairs, throughout the communal sphere. They control state jobs and trades, urban fortifications, the supply of troops; moreover, they intervene in the appointment of provincial governors. All disgrace and decay are transformed by the Roman bishops into their prosperity, each failure is turned into a personal advantage, whether it is a disaster in the kingdom of Caesar or the kingdom of God. And even from the misery of the Lombard invasion they know how to make a fortune. First they distance themselves from Byzantium with the help of the Lombard swords—and Byzantium was weakened by the multiple pressure of the 'barbarians'—, later, they will destroy the Lombards thanks to the Franks… always on the

side of the robbers, with a parasitic strategy, such as the world had never known.

It is true that even up to 787 the popes date their letters by the years of the reign of the Byzantine emperors, but already under Gregory II (715-731) the Byzantine governor was expelled from Rome on the occasion of the 'Roman revolution,' just as the Byzantine army of Benevento and Spoleto was expelled with the help of course of the Lombard troops. After the Lombards had contributed to the excessive power of the popes, they used the Franks to annihilate them. From then on they collaborated and prospered with the Frankish emperors. And when they felt strong enough, they wanted to be the lords of the empire too.

Until 753 the Roman pope was a devoted subject (to a greater or lesser degree) of Constantinople. But soon in Rome time is no longer counted for the emperor's years, imperial coins are no longer minted, imperial images are removed from churches and the emperor's name is no longer mentioned in liturgical service. The pope, on the contrary, allies himself with the Germanic king against those who had hitherto been his sovereigns. And to the Germanic king the pope confers imperial privileges, among which there are some completely new ones, and even offers him the imperial crown. It is a policy that benefits the pope above all since it almost makes him the 'father of the ruling family.'

The imperial coronation of Charles in 800 in Rome by Pope Leo III was an unlawful act, a provocation to the Byzantine emperor, until then the only legal supreme head of the Christian world, and in Constantinople it could only be interpreted as a rebellion. In fact, the turn of the popes towards the Franks caused the definitive break with Byzantium. And although in 812 Emperor Michael I Rhangabe recognised Charles 'the Great' as imperator of the West and as a peer sovereign, deep down Byzantium always considered the Western empire a usurpation. At Lothair's coronation in 823, the pope gave him the sword for the defence and protection of the Church: and gradually Rome brought the Roman-Germanic kings under its influence. Indeed, after the fall of the western Roman monarchs, new symbioses were introduced with the new rulers: Theodoric, Clovis, Pepin and Charles. But the future great Germanic empires of Alfred, Otto I and Olaf the Saint—who promoted the spread of Christianity with barbaric methods—could

only be established on a Christian basis, not to mention the medieval Germanic empire. That Holy Roman Empire certainly had hardly anything Roman and absolutely nothing sacred and holy. Be that as it may, by liquidating the achievements of Arians and pagans and by obtaining a state of its own, the papacy achieved the constant enlargement of both its power and its possessions.

Especially at the beginning of the Middle Ages the chaining of State and Church was very close. Not only did civil and canon law have the same basis, but clerical wishes and demands also found expression in civil law. The decrees of the 'mixed council' were valid for the State and the Church alike. The bishops also came from the aristocracy and were related to it as brothers, nephews and children of the civic nobility. And with it they shared the same political and economic interests. Consequently, throughout the Middle Ages they were also drawn into the struggle of the lords, they fought with the kings against the emperor and with the emperor against the pope, and with one pope against the other for 171 years. They fought with the diocesan clergy against the monks and also against their colleagues, giving them battle in the field, in the streets and the churches with the dagger and with the poison and in every imaginable way. High treason and rebellion were for the clergy, according to the Catholic theologian Kober, 'a completely common phenomenon.'

Faced with the States and the so-called authorities, the great Christian Church had in practice no other principle than this: it always pacts with the most profitable power. In all its state contacts the Church was only guided by taking advantage of the situation (in her language, guided by 'God'). Opportunism was always the supreme principle. Only when that Church achieved what it wanted was it also willing to give something and naturally as little as possible, even if it promised a lot. 'You annihilate the heretics with me, and I will annihilate the Persians with you,' the patriarch Nestorius invited the emperor in his inauguration speech in 428 without imagining that he himself would soon be condemned as a 'heretic.'

Church and State… Throughout more than a millennium the history of the two institutions could not be separated. Furthermore, 'At the epicentre of all interests, whether they were spiritual or political, was the Church; to her belonged the action and

omission, politics and legislative power, all the driving forces of the world were at her service and from her they derived their prerogatives. The culture and history of the Middle Ages are confused with the Church.' With its powerful material protection, its organisational strength and participation in the legal and political-state life, its influence grew continuously. The pre-Constantinian Catholic Church strictly forbade clergymen to accept public office; but already in late antiquity a bishop of Gaul was entrusted with certain military options, such as building a fortress. And what was lost in the south to the Arabs, the 'infidels,' was offset by the spread of Christianity northward.

Under the Merovingians, Christianity became the ideological deciding power. There were almost formal dynasties of bishops, to the point that Chilperic I famously uttered the phrase: 'No one governs more than the bishops; that is our glory.' Also among the Arian Ostrogoths the episcopate assumed state functions. In early Middle Ages England, ecclesiastical prelates are members of the diets, statesmen, and field marshals. Together with the regent they define the law, they are his first advisers; they elect the kings, overthrow them and raise them. Also in Italy bishops and abbots acted, along with the counts, as administration officials and, together with the lords of the civil aristocracy, acted as legislators. It is evident that from the middle of the 6th century to the end of the 7th century, public life there was totally marked and dominated by the Church.

Also later, if we look beyond the period to which we are referring, *the Church survived its allies and overcame all the collapses.* One power was sinking, and she was already rising with the next; or at least she was prepared for it. It was indeed only a state together with other states, but her 'metaphysics' was ahead of all of them. And while she always pretended the religious, the spiritual visions while proclaiming to the whole world, she aspired to the political dominion of the world.

Relatively early, popes and bishops had already tried to make the state their bailiff, submitting it to themselves. Some Church Fathers, such as Ambrose or John Chrysostom make it clear that way. But it is Pope Gelasius I (492-496) who only a few generations later proclaims with the greatest arrogance his 'doctrine of the two powers,' which was to have such relevance in world

history. Shortly after, the royal power will have to 'piously submit the neck' to the sacred authority of the bishops. Augustine, however, does not yet know the doctrine of subordination of the State. At a time when the Church lived in harmony with it, the saint was able to assure—heaven knows how many times—that the Christian faith reinforced the loyalty of citizens to the state and that it created obedient and willing subjects. It was totally indifferent about who the ruler was. 'What does it matter which government man lives under, who must die anyway? The only thing that matters is that the rulers do not induce him to impiety and injustice!'

If at the beginning the papacy defended the doctrine of the two powers or authorities, the *auctoritas sacra pontificum* and the *regalis potestas* which complemented each other, then the doctrine of the 'two swords' was later introduced (*duo gladii*). According to the Roman affirmation, Christ would have granted to the papacy the two swords, the spiritual and civil power; in a word, it would have given her hegemony. For when the Roman pontiffs seized power and became sovereigns of a State, they no longer needed a strong hereditary Germanic monarchy, nor did they need the monarchical unity of Italy, which for the same reason they fought with all means to its scope, even by force of arms. The objective of the papacy was then the political domination of the world under spiritual slogans. While it exercised a spiritual guardianship over the masses and while it referred the whole of life to a future kingdom of God and the obtaining of eternal happiness, it did not stop pursuing more and more material interests. The papacy emancipated itself from the western empire and in a secular struggle it made the Hohenstaufen bite the dust to become sovereign of everyone and everything. A true parasite, who after having drunk the blood of others, after having perched on high with lies and falsehoods and after having been eliciting more and more rights and powers, stripped them and even took up arms, and with celestial speeches continued to worry about its earthly power in an extremely brutal way.

In theory, the Pauline doctrine of the divine institution of authority and the duty of general submission became fundamental for relations with the State. The obedience that is preached there, the absolute docility of the subjects, contrasts openly with the hatred against the State so widespread among the first Christians, but it has continued to be decisive to this day. In this way the

Church wins over the respective rulers, with whom it has to collaborate to keep itself in power. With Gregory VII (author of the *Dictatus papae*), who in 1076 began the fight against the emperor, who claimed rights over Corsica and Sardinia, over the Norman kingdom of southern Italy, over France, Hungary, Dalmatia, Denmark and Russia, there are already perceived certain resonances of a theory, according to which the pope has all power, including the right to dispose of the States. According to Gregory and his successors in the late Middle Ages, and always in connection with Augustine's thought, imperial power has its origin in the devil. It is a 'carnal' power as are generally all worldly principalities. But the diabolical power can be turned into blessing through the forgiving, healing and saving power of the papacy, through subordination to the Priest-King. Furthermore, the founding of every new state in this world tyrannised by the devil is only legitimised by papal recognition. The pope appears there as the sole supporter of truth and justice, as the sovereign lord and judge of the world. Everything must render obedience to the successor of Peter. This is how the pope wrote: 'Whoever is separated from Peter cannot obtain any victory in the struggle or any happiness in the world, for with rigour as hard as the steel he destroys and smashes everything that comes his way. Nobody and nothing escapes its power.'

THE CHRISTIANISATION OF THE GERMANS

> 'The introduction of Christianity among the Germans was the most precious gift from heaven.'
>
> —Pastoral letter from the German episcopate, June 7, 1934.

At the end of Antiquity and during the succeeding centuries, Christianity conquered the Germanic world. By armies and merchants it had spread beyond northern Gaul to the Rhine. In the old Rhineland provinces probably there were Christian communities as early as the end of the 3rd century; churches were erected from Constantinian times in Bonn, Xanten, Cologne and, especially, in Trier: the official residence of Caesar since 293. At the end of the 4th century, Christianity was already the dominant religion in some Rhineland areas because 'the laws of Theodosius, Gratian and Valentinian II imposed its entry into those lands.'

In the late 5th century evangelisation of the Franks began; at the end of the 6th century that of the Anglo-Saxons and the Lombards; in the 9th century the Christianisation of northern Europe was undertaken and, at the end of the millennium, that of the Czechs, Poles, and Hungarians. Since Christianity was no longer a despised religion as it had been in pre-Constantinian times, but the official religion of an empire, the popes no longer trapped some individuals but entire peoples in their net. They also annihilated entire towns 'leaving neither green nor withered,' as the father of the Church, Isidore, boasts. Such was the case, for example, with the Ostrogoths and the Vandals, of whom the Marseillaise monk Prosperus Tironis provided an insightful picture of the Middle Ages, and who were often the subject of 'cruel propaganda' (Diesner).

Conversion methods

The Christianisation of the Germanic peoples—designated in the sources as *nationes*, *gentes*, *populi*, *civitates*—not only took place at very different times but also in very different ways. Two typical Christian activities converged in the Germanic mission: preaching and destruction. In Merovingian times, preaching was not the primary instrument of mission. There was a more eloquent method to demonstrate to the pagans the impotence of their Gods and the supreme power of the Christian God: the destruction of the Gentile sanctuaries. In other words, Gentile temples were transformed into Christian churches, expelling evil spirits through rites of exorcism and re-consecrating the buildings. The church transformed and incorporated everything that seemed useful, destroying everything else as a nefarious work of the devil.

An important motive in the conversion of the pagans, and also in the mentoring of those already converted, was without a doubt the constant infiltration of scruples and fears in an alarmist attitude that sowed fear for centuries. Fear, in effect, was 'the characteristic state of the common man in the Middle Ages: fear of the plague, fear of invasion by foreign armies, fear of the tax collector, fear of witchcraft and magic and, above all, fear of the unknown' (Richards). The priests of many religions feed on the fear of those whom they lead, and especially Christian priests. It is very significant that St Caesarius of Arles (died in 542), an archbishop absolutely faithful to Rome, in almost all his propaganda interventions, which number more than two hundred, scares the readers with 'the final judgment.' Whatever the occasion of his homiletical effusions, he rarely fails to insistently evoke the 'court of Christ,' the 'eternal judge,' his 'harsh and irrevocable sentence,' etcetera.

The conversions of pagan Germans to Christianity were frequently due to purely material motives, already acting for 'reasons of prestige,' especially when they came under the tutelage of Christian neighbours. Illustrious Gentiles could be chased 'like dogs' from the banquets of their princely courts, because Christians were forbidden to sit at the same table with pagans. It is symptomatic that also among Bavarians, Thuringians and Saxons,

the nobility was the first to immediately prostrate themselves before the cross.

Jesus becomes the Germanic broadsword

With its acceptance by the Germans, Christianity was also nationalised and Germanised from the beginning. And not only in epic poems did Christ appear to German eyes as a kind of popular and cantonal king. The Franks were immediately seen as his special courtship, his chosen and preferred people. Warriors clustered around him, just as they clustered around princes. The saint is also now felt as the herald of Christ and God. Traditional Christian concepts are filled 'with totally new content: Germanic, aristocratic and warrior content' (Zwolfer). 'From the religion of patience and suffering, from the flight and denial of the world, the medieval Germans made a warlike religion; and of the Man of Sorrows a Germanic king of the armies, who with his heroes travels and conquers the lands and who must be served through struggle. The German Christian fights for his Lord Christ, as he fights for the landlord he follows; even the monk in his cell feels like a member of the *militia Christi'* (Dannenbauer). And naturally the clergy knew how to make the Germans proud of having converted to the Roman cross. In the prologue to the Salic law, the oldest hereditary right of the Franks, the fact of conversion is thus exalted:

> Unclean people of the Franks, created by God himself, brave with arms, firm in the covenant of peace, profound in counsel, of great corporal nobility, of uncontaminated purity and superior complexion, bold, prompt and fiery—become to the Catholic faith, free from heresy.

Indeed, according to Christian doctrine, all peoples have been created by God; but flattery is always greatest where it is most needed. In this way the Franks appear here occupying the place of the chosen people of the Bible, of the people of Israel. And in a more recent prologue to the aforementioned Salic law, Christ also appears as the legitimate sovereign of the *gens Francorum*. He appears 'personally before the Franks.' He loves those who are far superior to the old world power, 'the chosen people of a new alliance.' 'They have defeated the Romans and they have broken the Roman yoke.'

Undoubtedly, many German princes converted for purely political reasons. They worshiped in Christ the 'strong God' and

especially the superior captain, to whom he granted victory. Thus the Frankish Clovis, Edwin of Northumbria and the Vikings converted—all of whom were baptised after having cast a vow and carried out a slaughter. And just as old Odin was considered a 'God and lord of victory' and Wotan (Odin's name in the south) was considered a warrior God, so Christ is now seen as the same. He occupies the place of the ancient Gods of battle, he is politicised and mythologised, presenting him 'almost as a national God' (Heinsius). And from now on it will be a matter of honour for each Christian king to fight 'the barbarians, who by their very condition as pagans are out of the order of the world.'

The Franks, educated in believing fanaticism, considered it their duty and right to 'fight for Christ' (Zollner). And still in the 7th and 8th centuries the Frankish Christians had themselves buried with their weapons, under the old pagan belief of survival after death. On a tombstone found in the Frankish cemetery of Niederdollendorf, near Bonn there is even a risen Christ holding in his right hand the spear, the Germanic sign of sovereignty, instead of the staff of the cross. It is understandable that the Old Testament, often so bloody, was in tune with the men of the Middle Ages better than the partly pacifist New Testament; and it is understandable that the Old Testament kings were exalted by proposing them as models of the Frankish princes, who liked to compare themselves with them. For the historian Ewig, this constitutes a new stage 'in the Christianisation of the idea of the king.'

Among the Carolingians, decisive victories were frequently attributed to the attendance of St Peter. 'But now rest assured,' declares Pepin to the papal legate Serge in the battle against the Bavarians, 'because due to the intervention of St Peter, Prince of the Apostles, by divine decree Bavaria and the Bavarians belong to the sovereignty of the Franks.' Even minor achievements, such as the conquest of a fortress or even the discovery of a fountain during the war against the Saxons in 772 are presented as great divine miracles. But when misfortune befell—and it happened so often!—the priests were never troubled. Then the misfortune, the catastrophe, was a punishment from God for little faith and the overflow of vices.

The weed of the past

As a rule the Germans did not convert individually, but rather in a cooperative and tribal way. And that because, unlike the Greeks and educated Romans, the 'barbarians' easily accepted the Church's tutoring without the cultural and historical-religious depth with which their Christian 'converters' presented the stories. In a not excessively laborious way, a great many 'barbarians' were subdued, who soon revered respectfully all the 'holy' priests and monks and were deeply impressed by exorcisms, ceremonies and miracles. With faith they welcomed such strange mysteries, dogmas and with fearful devotion put themselves at the service of that arrogant southern shamanism, seemingly animated only by the desire to make the Church rich and powerful, for the salvation of their souls, out of the horror of fire from hell and longing for paradise.

Evangelism took place unevenly, outside the cities at a slower pace, for although the pagan Franks did not usually put up much resistance, from time to time, and especially in the countryside, they stubbornly indulged in the destruction of their town idols. In the religious field, man is especially conservative. And just as the peasants still do today—the inhabitants of the towns remain more firmly in Christianity—, so also at the end of Antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages it was the peasants who persisted the longest in paganism. The Germans were mostly peasants, and in Austria the pagan Franks and Germans were more numerous than the native Christians. This religion was an urban religion and since it became a state religion it was also the religion of the feudal and ruling circles, who sought above all their own benefit. For a long time the peasants persisted in their traditional beliefs, in their divinities and above all in their Gallic triad: the cult of Jupiter, Mercury and Apollo. And even after they had 'converted' they returned again and again to the veneration—undoubtedly much more beautiful and coherent—of trees, stones and fountains.

For centuries synods lashed out at pagan customs, from the Council of Valence (374) until well into the 9th century. Only between the synod of Orleans (511) and that of Paris (829) did the canons of at least nineteen episcopal assemblies launched diatribes against the beliefs and practices of peasant paganism, which preserved the tradition with much greater tenacity than the

accommodative nobility. The Germans had a natural piety, so to speak, not camouflaged or imposed but identical to their lifestyle. They had a natural religion with clearly pantheistic features, marked by the worship of the Gods of the forest, the mountain, the fountains, the rivers and the sea; the veneration of the Sun, light, water, trees and springs; deep down, as it has been known today, a thousand times more coherent veneration than the Christian faith in spirits.

'Demonstrative destruction'

During the Merovingian period certain problems of the power of the Christian God often came to the fore in evangelisation: on the one hand, 'miracles'; on the other, the destruction of pagan places of worship. The images of the Gods—through unpunished annihilation—were easily demonstrated as the powerless work of man, while the 'spiritual' Christian God reigned untouchable over the clouds of heaven. Besides, the pagan Franks were generally tolerant and did not have a priestly caste as they faced a fanatical ecclesiastical organisation, which did not back down from forced baptisms, although it is true that at least in the beginning it was fair enough for the church that a formal condemnation of the old beliefs was uttered with a confession from the lips of the new faithful. R. W. Southern accurately describes medieval Europe as a coercive society, in which each person triumphed by baptism. But that was not all; soon the demolition of pagan temples and altars began as well…

St Gal, an uncle of Saint Gregory of Tours and later Bishop of Clermont-Ferrand, being a priest and companion of Theuderic I, the eldest son of Clovis, reduced to ashes in Cologne a pagan temple with all the 'idols,' and only with great difficulty could the king save him from the fury of the peasants. Around 550 Deacon Wulflaicus induced the peasants of the city of Trier to demolish an imposing statue of Diana (originally no doubt of Ar-duinna, the Celtic Goddess), whom the people adored. As he was too weak the peasants did it for him, after he had ceaselessly weakened the will of ordinary people. 'Well, the other images, which were smaller, he had already smashed them personally.' Without a doubt, miracles also happened there.

Some of the Christian saints known in the fight against paganism became arsonists and robbers. In Tyrol St Vigilius, Bishop of Trent, worked 'with fervent zeal for the spread of Christianity' (Sparber) until one day he destroyed in Rendenatal a highly revered one, which stood on a steep rock, a statue of Saturn. About four-hundred irritated peasants, 'heathen, stubborn and ferocious' stoned him. In Italy many dozen churches are dedicated to him. In Monte Cassino St Benedict (died 543), the 'father of the western monasticism,' and whose severity caused several assassination attempts against him by his first monks and a Florentine priest, went on rage against the ancient temple of Apollo, the last temple of that God that history remembers. Benedict still found pagans there, cut down their sacred groves and destroyed the sculpture and the altar; but still in 1964 Pope Paul VI named him patron of Europe.

One of the fiercest fighters against paganism in Western Europe was Martin of Tours (died 397). Despite the stubborn resistance sometimes manifested by the peasants, with the help of his henchmen of his monastic horde he razed the temples, tore down the stones of the Druids and cut down sacred oaks, often viciously defended. 'He trampled on altars and idols' according to Sulpicius Severus. And yet the saint was 'a man of admirable meekness and patience; from his eyes radiated a gentle serenity and an imperturbable peace' (Walterscheid, with *imprimatur*). This champion of faith undoubtedly had the best requirements for the annihilation of paganism. He had crowned a storming career in the Roman army (Julian being the emperor) and had started his Christian career as an ejector of demons. Significantly, he believed he saw the devil in the figure of Jupiter, Mercury and even Venus and Minerva, having otherwise the firm conviction that Satan was hiding in the 'idols.' Due to his 'resurrections of the dead' Martin of Tours became a bishop, later becoming the saint of the Merovingian kings and Carolingian emperors, to end up being the patron saint of the French. Even today 425 villages in France bear his name. The name of an arsonist, a thief, who ruined what was holiest and destroyed all the temples, became the 'symbol of the Frankish imperial church' and, even more, 'an integral part of the imperial culture of the Franks' (Bosi).

His international fame was owed to the murderous king Clovis, who had enormous veneration for Martin. For his cause he beat a soldier of his own to death, who had caught some hay in the fields of the man of God: 'Where are our prospects of victory if we offend Saint Martin?' On their military expeditions the Merovingian princes wore this man's legendary cloak as a holy relic. Oaths were formulated on it and alliances were made. The place in which the cloak was kept was called *capella* (diminutive of *cape*), and the clerical who watched over it *capellanus*. Such is the origin of the words 'chapel' and 'chaplain' that with small variations have entered all modern languages. And, as in all the places where Martin of Tours had razed pagan centres of worship he immediately had Christian buildings built on the ruins, including the first Gallic monastery (Ligugé), he is still considered today as 'the precursor of Western monasticism' (Viller Rahner). The destruction of Gentile temples is certified by many ecclesiastical sources.

The monasteries were preferably built on the ruins of destroyed pagan temples. Thus arose, for example, Saint Bavo Church in Ghent, Saint Médard in Cambrai, the monastery of Wulfilaic in Eposium or Fleury-sur-Loire, which occupied the place of an ancient Druid sanctuary of the Gauls. The Martyrium of St Vincent de Agen, erected as early as the 4th century, evidently stood on a pagan plot of consecrated ground. In Cologne, where perhaps Irenaeus of Lyons preached Christianity, a vast pagan necropolis has been found under the church of Saint Ursula. Although in the West many temples and many altars were simply removed, among Franks, Saxons and Friesians the Church burned or completely destroyed the pagan sanctuaries, turned the places of sacrifice into cattle gullies and cut down sacred trees. Together, State and Church promoted the spread of the new faith and the annihilation of the old beliefs. Thus King Childebert I states, in a constitution of the year 554 'in agreement, no doubt, with the bishops' (A. Hauck): 'The pagan idols of the fields and the images dedicated to the demons must be removed immediately, and no one can prevent bishops from destroying them.'

In the following century Pope Boniface V (619-625) spread Christianity throughout England and wrote to Edwin, King of the Angles, in these terms: 'You should destroy those whom you have hitherto considered Gods, being made of earthly material, with all

zeal they must be smashed and shattered to pieces.' And so, shortly thereafter, in 627, Coifi, converted archpriest of Northumbria, broke a spear in a temple. The *Concilium Germanicum*, the first council convened in 742-743 in the Germanic territory of the Frankish empire, also provided that 'the people of God should not promote anything pagan, but reject and abhor all filthiness of the Gentiles.'

CLOVIS, FOUNDER OF THE GREAT FRANKISH EMPIRE

'One of the most outstanding figures in universal history.' —Wilhelm von Glesebrecht, historian

'And it is certain that he knew himself to be a Christian, and a Catholic Christian, something that is manifested over and over again in the various performances of his reign.' —Kurt Aland, theologian

The Rise of the Merovingians

The original land of the Franks, whose name was associated at the beginning of the Middle Ages with the concepts of 'brave,' 'audacious' and 'daring,' was in the Lower Rhine. These people, which lacked a unitary leadership, arose probably from the coalition of numerous small tribes throughout the 1st and 2nd centuries c.e., between the rivers Weser and Rhine. They are mentioned for the first time just after the first half of the 3rd century, when they fought fierce struggles against the Romans that would continue throughout the 4th and 5th centuries. The Franks settled on the right bank of the river and then breached the Roman line of defence of the Rhine, which some had probably already overcome before by infiltrating the border region. They advanced on Xanten, that the Roman population had evacuated towards 450, having occupied it later by the small Frankish tribe of Chatuarii. They then entered the territory between the Rhine and the Moselle; the Franks took Mainz and Cologne, a city that, on occupying it definitively around 460, became the centre of an independent Frankish state, immediately on the left bank of the great river. Little by little they annexed more territory. During the first half of the 5th century they conquered the city of Trier four times and the Romans recovered it as many times, until in 480 it became definitively owned by the Franks. The number of its inhabitants, from about 60,000 in the 4th century, dropped to a few thousand in the 6th century.

The invaders founded small Frankish principalities in Belgium and northern France, each subject to a *kinglet* or little king. As early as 480 the entire Rhenish region between Nijmegen and Mainz, the Maas territory around Maastricht, as well as the Moselle valley from Toul to Koblenz, belonged to the Frankish territory. The Romans allowed the Franks to settle on the condition that they rendered certain military services as *foederati* (allies) and they became their most loyal comrades in arms of all Germans, although they were generally torn apart amid fierce tribal strife. But in the end it was the Merovingians who bid for all of Roman Gaul.

King Childeric died in 482. Almost twelve hundred years later, in 1653, a doctor from Antwerp discovered his tomb at Tournai, endowed with such wealth and sumptuousness that it far surpassed the more than 40,000 tombs of the Merovingian period uncovered by archaeologists. At the death of Childeric in 482 he was succeeded by Clovis I (466-511), aged sixteen and apparently an only child. Allied with different sister tribes, Clovis expanded the Salic territory around Tournai, which was insignificant and reduced to a small part of northern Gaul in Belgium Secunda, though he continued the plunder, assassinations and wars, increasingly widespread over the regions from the Roman province to the left bank of the Rhine. Such attacks reached first as far as the Seine, then as far as the Loire and finally as far as the Garonne, bringing the Gallo-Romans under the rule of the Franks. Even then, that was called 'having the Franc as a friend, and not as a neighbour.'

Such a bellicose people, over which the reputation of disloyalty also floated, was attractive to the Christian clergy from the beginning. The Arians, and even more so the Catholics, sought to win over their leader. In fact all the notable princes of that time in the West were Arian or heathen. Thus, as soon as Clovis was appointed King of Tournai, he was addressed by the Bishop of Reims, St Remigius, a man of 'eminent science' and resurrector of the dead according to the praise of Bishop Gregory who simultaneously highlights both traits.

A great bloodbath and the German Church

Clovis soon passed from Soissons to Paris, which became the most important city and, at least since the 7th century, the true

epicentre of the Frankish kingdom, in which almost all the Merovingian kings are also buried.

The Alemanni (or Suebi), first named in 213, had emigrated from the Elbe region and probably by the end of the 2nd century had made themselves strong in the Main region through various incorporations of German emigrants and soldiers. The name 'Alemanni' would mean what anyone who knows some German can still understand today: all males (*alle Manner*). The Alamanni, who were pressing on the Rhine and the line of fortifications on the frontier of the Roman Empire, broke in 406, accompanied in part by Vandals and Alans, dispersing through Gaul and Hispania. When they tried to advance north-west from there, they clashed with the Franks, and in particular with the Francorans, who dominated the Moselle region. They had already allied with the Burgundians in 475 against the Alemanni, without clearly prevailing around 490 in a battle near Cologne, where the local kinglet Sigobert was wounded in one knee. Reason enough for Clovis to attack: in around 496-497 the Alaman king of unknown name died on the battlefield of Toibiacum. Clovis advanced into the German territory of the right bank of the Rhine and annihilated a good part of its still pagan inhabitants.

It is true that a decade later, around 506, they rose again; but again they suffered a bloody defeat, probably near Strasbourg, the Alaman king dying in battle again. Pursued by the Franks, they fled south to the pre-Alpine regions: Raetia Prima (province of Chur) and Raetia Secunda (province of Augsburg): territories under the influence of the Ostrogoth king Theodoric, who restrained his brother-in-law Clovis and who settled to the fugitives in Retia, Pannonia and northern Italy. But in the southern part of the Rhenish Hessen, in the Palatinate and the basins of the Main and Neckar the Alemanni were victims of the direct arrogance of Clovis. And from there the Franks later spread eastward to the Saale, the Upper Main and almost to the Bavarian Forest.

King Clovis had himself baptised in Reims with great pomp and with the assistance of numerous bishops. According to some, it ran *annus* 496-497, according to others 498-499; while according to some researchers, who put the war against the Alemanni in 506, we should think of the years 506-508. 'It is the first date in the history of the German Church' (Kawerau). Curiously, the event is linked to a great bloodbath and constitutes one of the most important events

of the early Middle Ages. The baptism of Clovis was a great feast. Streets and churches sparkled with their ornamentation. The baptismal church was filled with a 'heavenly fragrance,' to the point that the attendees believed they were transferred 'to the pleasant perfumes of paradise.'

Clovis was venerated as a saint in France.

Gregory of Tours refers that the king 'advanced to the baptismal bath like a new Constantine,' and the comparison is terribly accurate, 'to purify himself in the clean water of old leprosy and the dirty stains, which he had from ancient [pagan] times.' And Remigius, 'the saint of God,' spoke to him with eloquent words: 'Sigambrer, meekly bend your neck and worship what you burned and burn what you worshiped (*adora quod incendisu, incende quod adorasli*).' Who was this saint, who so arrogantly incited persecution, as did his colleague Avitus in his time? St Remigius, like most of the prelates of that time (and not only of then), was of 'illustrious' lineage and already at the age of twenty-two promoted to bishop of Reims. His older brother, Principius, was also bishop (of Soissons) and a saint too (their relics were to be burned by the Calvinists in 1567). Remigius, the apostle to the Franks, preached Catholicism to pagans and Arians with fervent zeal, something that clearly developed a 'radical war' (Schuitze) in which, according to a council of Lyon, 'smashed the altars of idols everywhere and vigorously spread the true faith with many signs and miracles.'

Catholic Clovis made his own converts, pagans or Arians, so that the entire house of the Franks ended up being Catholic.

Henceforth, a close 'alliance between monarchy and episcopate' (Fleckenstein) was created. The princes of the Church occupy the position of honour in the surroundings of Clovis and exert the maximum influence over him, especially Avitus and Remigius. And naturally the clergy are generously rewarded with the war spoils of the Merovingian. He rewards the prelates with largesse and splendour through foundations and donations of land Since then 'monarchy and church acted together for the further spread of Christianity' (Schultze).

From the research that we have today, it can well be argued that in reality the conversion of Clovis was political as that of Constantine had been before. Unlike the other Germanic peoples, the king and his people accepted Catholicism because it provided in advance a link between the conqueror and the Gallo-Romans who were subjected or who were to submit; a linkage that did not occur in the rest of the Germanic kingdoms. Clovis, a sympathiser of the Church from an early age, became a Catholic to subdue the Arian Germanic tribes and win over neighbouring Gaul more easily with his strong majority of Roman Catholics.

A moralistic assessment of history?

After Clovis had won the war against the Visigoths with the help of the Francorans, between 509 and 511, the last years of his life, he achieved royal dignity over them. In any case, it forced the fusion of the Francorenan tribes with the Salian Franks.

He first instigated Chlodoric, son of King Sigobert of Cologne, to get rid of his father. 'Look, your father has grown old and is limping with a crippled leg.' Sigobert 'the Lame,' a former companion of Clovis, was limped since the battle of Toibiacum against the Alemanni in which he had been wounded. At the hands of a hired assassin the prince eliminated his father in the beech forest. Through a delegation, Clovis congratulated the parricide and through it, he crushed his skull. The German historian Ewig describes all this with an elegant expression, too elegant we would say, of 'diplomacy of intrigues.' After the double act Clovis went to Cologne, the residential city of Sigobert, solemnly proclaimed his innocence in both crimes and, joyfully welcomed by the people, seized the 'kingdom and the treasures of Sigobert' (Gregory).

Then he fell on the Salian kings, with whom he was related. Such was the case, for example, of a Frankish king, Chararic, who had not once fought against Syagrius. With tricks Clovis seized him and his son. Later he locked them up in a monastery, had their hair cut off (the tonsure was a sign of the loss of royal dignity), forced Chararic to be ordained a priest and his son a deacon, and after having them beheaded he took over their treasures and kingdom.

Another relative, King Regnacar of Cambrai, his first cousin, was defeated by Clovis after having won over his entourage with a great amount of gold, which later turned out to be fake. After the battle, he mocked Regnacar, who was led into his presence in chains and who in 486 had helped him in the war against Syagrius: 'Why have you humiliated our blood to that point and allowed yourself to be put in chains? You'd be better off dead!' And he smashed his head off with an ax. They had also arrested Richar, the king's brother: 'If you had helped your brother, we would not have taken him prisoner,' Clovis rebuked him and killed him with another blow. 'The named kings were close blood relatives of Clovis' (Gregory of Tours). He also had their brother, Rignomer, liquidated in the vicinity of Le Mans. 'Clovis thus strengthened his position throughout the Frankish territory,' to quote again the historian Ewig, thus summarising the existing situation. The victims of Clovis' consolidation of power throughout the Frankish territory were, it seems, several dozen Frankish cantonal princes. The tyrant had them murdered, seized their land and wealth, without ceasing to complain that he was alone:

> 'Woe to me, now I find myself as a stranger among strangers and none of my relatives could help me, if calamity befalls me!' But this was not meant because he was sorry for their death, but by cunning, in case perhaps there was still someone he could kill.

Such is the comment of St Gregory, for whom Clovis was a 'new Constantine,' and who embodied 'his ideal of the ruler' (Bodmer) and to whom he frequently appeared 'almost like a saint' (Fischer). Without shame the famous bishop adds:

> But day after day God brought down his enemies before him and he increased his kingdom, because he walked with a right heart in His presence and did what was pleasing to His divine eyes.

This, as the context shows, also applies to Clovis' murders of relatives. All is holy in the extreme, even the extreme crimes! Such, then, was the *primus rex francorum* (Salic law), the king who ruled following to the letter the words of St Remigius at his baptism: 'Worship what you burned and burn what you worshiped.' Such was the Catholic king, that no longer tolerated any pagan vestige, although he commanded almost like an absolute tyrant and was bursting with hypertrophic brutality and rapacity, showing himself cautious and cowardly in front of the strongest and mercilessly crushing the weakest; the king who did not back down from any treachery and cruelty, who waged all his wars in the name of the Christian and Catholic God; the king who, with a sovereign power like few others and at the same time as a good Catholic, combined war, murder and religious piety, who 'began his Christian reign with all premeditation on December 25,' who with his booty built churches everywhere, then he splendidly endowed and prayed in them, who was a great devotee of St Martin, who carried out his 'wars of the heretics' against the Arians of Gaul 'under the sign of an intense veneration of St Peter' (K. Hauck), and whom the bishops at the National Council of Orleans (511) exalted as 'a truly priestly soul' (Daniel-Rops).

That was Clovis. A man who, hearing the passion of Jesus, seems to have said that had he been there with his Franks, no such injustice would have been committed against the Lord. In the words of the old chronicler, he was as 'an authentic Christian' (*christianum se verum esse adfirmat*—Fredegar). And as the current theologian Aland also says: 'And it is certain, and again and again he manifests it in the different performances of his reign, that he felt of himself as a Christian, and certainly a Catholic Christian.' In a word, that man who made his way 'with the ax' to climb the absolute rule of the Franks—as Angenendt graphically puts it—was no longer simply a military king, but thanks precisely to his alliance with the Catholic Church became the 'representative of God on earth' (Wolf). A man who, in the company of his wife St Clotilde, finally found his last resting place in the Parisian Church of the Apostles, which was later called Sainte Geneviéve, when he died in the year 511, just turning forty: a great criminal, devious and ruthless, who established himself on the throne and, according to the historian Bosi, 'a barbarian, who civilised and cultivated.'

The theologian Aland qualifies Clovis as akin to Constantine and euphemistically says that both were men of power, violent sovereigns and believes that justifiably: 'Such rough times could only be controlled by such men.'

But is it tough times that make tough men? Or is it not rather the other way around? One and the other are intimately united. Already St Augustine had corrected the stupid accusation of the times: 'We are the times; which are we, that's the way the times are.' Aland wants to leave open the question of whether Constantine and Clovis were Christians:

> Because both the sons of Constantine and Theodosius were rulers, of whose Christian confession there can be no doubt, and yet committed perfectly comparable acts of blood. If we want to understand them, we must free ourselves from such a moral assessment of history. Well, who among us whose people have a history of 1,500 years behind under the sign of Christianity, can say that he is Christian? Luther speaks of Christianity, which is always being made and which is never finished.

The Merovingian chroniclers glorify Clovis mainly for two reasons: for his baptism and his many wars. He became a Catholic demolishing and depredating everything around him he could destroy or prey. And thus, from an insignificant territorial principality, he created a powerful German-Catholic imperium, sealed in France the alliance between the throne and the altar, and became the chosen instrument of God who day after day struck down his enemies before him 'because before God he walked with an upright heart, doing what was pleasing to His eyes,' according to the enthusiastic praise of the bishop, St Gregory.

As long as history is viewed in this way, as long as it remains outside of its 'moral' valuation and the vast majority of historians continue to crawl before such hypertrophic beasts of universal history with respect, reverence and admiration, history will continue to unfold as it does.

THE SONS OF CLOVIS

> 'The successors of the first great Frankish king also protected the Church and the worship; monasticism developed… The remnants of paganism were fought with increasing energy.' —H. H. Anton

The kingdom of Clovis was divided almost *aequa lance*, almost equally, passing in principle to his four sons: all 'kings of the Franks', all heirs with the same rights, according to the German rule of succession; all Catholics, except for Theuderic I, with a saint for his mother. And they all also led a life full of hideous cruelties, wars and military campaigns. In the proven tradition of their father they systematically expanded the kingdom and conquered Thuringia (531), Burgundy (533-534) and Provence (537). The aforementioned annexations were joined by numerous raids in search of loot in an extraordinarily troubled time, one of the darkest and bloodiest times in history, brimming with disorder and brutality, fratricides, wars between brothers and betrayals: a race unleashed 'for power and wealth' (Buchner), a 'foolish desire for loot and slaughter' (Schulze). But even critical historians bend the knee before the 'founding of the kingdom' of the Merovingians, before the bridge they built 'between Antiquity and the Middle Ages,' before their contribution to the triumph 'of Catholic Christianity' to the alliance 'between throne and altar.' As if all this had not made the story much more gruesome.

The boundaries of the four partitions of the kingdom are not stated with sufficient precision. The one we know best is the inheritance of Theuderic I (reign 511-533). The presumed Hugdietrich of the saga received the lion's share with the capital, Reims, a territory which would include what later became Austria with its predominantly Germanic population: the entire east, from Burgundy to the Rhineland, and perhaps even as far as the Fritziar and Kassel region, as well as large territories that had belonged to the Alemanni, which was the case in eastern Aquitaine. But each of

the sons obtained a part of the Aquitaine lands south of the Loire, which the father had taken over; three of them were exclaves.

Chlothar I (reign 511-561), the youngest of Clovis' sons, and perhaps not yet twelve years old, the Salic age to reach legal age, obtained mainly the territory of the Salian Franks with the royal cities of Tournai and Cambrai. For the same reason, it included the old Frankish territory between the coast of the English Channel, the Somme and the Carboniferous Forest, with approximately the same borders that it had before the predatory incursions of his progenitor. As the seat of government Chlothar chose Soissons, in the extreme south. Southern and western France corresponded to Chlodomer and Childebert respectively.

Chlodomer (reign 511-524) was around fifteen when his father died and ruled as king of western Aquitaine, the northernmost territory of the middle Loire, at Orleans. And Childebert I (reign 511-558) controlled the coastal lands from the Somme to Brittany; he resided in Paris, the undisputed capital.

A saint and murderer

Shortly after the Auvergne rebellion, the Catholic Frankish kings attacked the Catholic kingdom of Burgundy. Sigismund (reign 516-523), son of the Burgundian king Gundobad, still ruled there. Since 501 Sigismund was viceroy in Geneva. And what the jealous Avitus had not achieved with the father, he obtained with the son. Around the year 500 Sigismund converted from Arianism to Catholicism. Sigismund later introduced Catholicism throughout Burgundy. He was the first German king to make a pilgrimage to Rome.

Sigismund, the murderer of his own son, makes his way as a saint of the Catholic Church! They ended up thanking him for the conversion of the Burgundians to Catholicism. Soon his cult began in the monastery of St Moritz founded by him. Those with fever had masses celebrated in honour of Sigismund (who allegedly helped against malaria and tertian fever). In the 7th century he also appears as a saint in the so-called *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*. At the end of the Middle Ages he will be one of the patron saints of Bohemia and even become a fashionable saint. The Archbishop of Prague declared the feast of Sigismund a feast of the archdiocese. His statue appears on French and German altars as well as in the

Freiburg Cathedral; there are churches dedicated to Sigismund and a brotherhood named after him. His relics were requested, which initially rested at St Moritz. The head was taken to the church of St Sigismund, although a fragment of it is found in Plozk of the Vistula; in the 14th century a part of the body was deposited in St Vitus Cathedral in Prague, and another was taken around the same time to Freising, which eventually became the centre of its veneration in Germany.

On the death of Chlodomer, his three brothers, 'warriors above all and simple gang leaders' (Fontal) shared the inheritance, ignoring all the rights of the three minor children of the deceased king and without allowing any regime of tutelary government from their mother. The pious Childebert got, it seems, the lion's share. He was a true father of the nation, who promoted ecclesiastical institutions, enjoyed dealing with bishops granting them real estate, war spoils and large sums of money while being in constant communication with the 'Holy See.' And as Childebert and Chlothar, who had married Guntheuc, the widow of Chlodomer, certainly feared that the hereditary rights of Theuderic and Gunthar, Chlodomer's minor children, would be asserted, Childebert didn't doubt in encouraging their murder, of which Chlothar 'was very glad.' After all, both sovereigns had a saint for their mother, Saint Clotilde, and furthermore, being already a Catholic princess, she had imposed baptism on the children of Clovis, had 'raised them with love' and had certainly given them a good Catholic upbringing. And since Clotilde also took care of the education of the minor children of the late Chlodomer, the kings Childebert and Chlothar, who had taken over her nephews, asked Clotilde if she wanted her grandchildren to 'continue living with their hair cut off [like monks] or if they had to kill them both.' And 'the ideal figure of the desire for feminine holiness,' the francorum apostle who felt for the two children 'a singular affection' (Fredegar), replied: 'Rather dead than tonsured, if they are not going to reign.'

Chlothar put the knife to the neck first to one and then to the other of his brother's sons, who cried out in anguish. 'After they had also dispatched the boys' servants and educators' Chlothar mounted his horse 'and left.' One of them was ten years old and the youngest seven. Queen Clotilde led such a life that she was venerated by the whole world. 'Her conduct was always of the utmost purity and honesty: she granted goods to churches,

monasteries everywhere to holy places, willingly and supplying them with whatever they needed.'

The third son of Chlodomer, the youngest, named Clodoald, was saved from the carnage and entered the clergy, after allegedly shearing himself. 'He renounced the earthly kingdom and dedicated himself to the Lord,' Gregory writes beautifully. And Fredegar adds: 'And he led a dignified life; the Lord deigns to perform miracles on his grave.' Clodoald was the founder of the monastery of Saint-Cloud in Paris, which bears his name, and died around the year 560. Clotaire, the uncle-murderer and the executioner, obtained Tours and Poitiers, with the sanctuaries of the patron saints of France, Martin and Hilary, together with the treasure.

Theudebert I and kings killer

Theudebert [the son of Theuderic I and the father of Theudebald—*Ed.*] was the first Frank to call himself Augustus and who felt he was the successor of the Roman Caesars and liked to adopt imperial attitudes like minting gold coins with his image that could be described as illegal. He ordered circus games to be held in Arles in the manner of the emperors and must have even thought of the conquest of Constantinople, cherishing the hope of seizing imperial dignity and world domination through an incursion against Byzantium, something planned jointly with the Gepids and Lombards. Such a man naturally had to be on good terms with the Church. King Theudebert was a benefactor of the Church, which he 'exempted from tax obligations and deliberately favoured' (Zollner) while he did nothing more than bleed his Frankish subjects with taxes in the Roman manner. Very significant is the fact that his finance minister, Parthenius (grandson of Bishop Ruricius de Limoges, the murderer of his wife and her lover), on the death of Theudebert and despite the episcopal protection, was removed in Trier from a church, spat on, beaten and stoned by the enraged people.

Even more criminal and even more devoted to the Church was the family clan, which outlived Theudebert. Chlothar I also fought almost continuously during the last years of his life, without this fact bothering at all and not even attracting the attention of those who preached peace and love of neighbour and enemy. The

king, undoubtedly the weakest of the Frankish princes until after the death of Theudebert I (558), took over the entire kingdom. He had nevertheless criticised the growing ecclesiastical wealth, but per his brother's constitution of 554 he also tried to uproot whatever was left of the indigenous religions of his subjects. It is true that in a winter campaign (555) against the Saxons he bore the worst of it, but the following year he imposed himself on the association of Saxons and Thuringians and even sent troops against the Ostrogoths of Italy. In 557 he fought again against the Saxons, apparently reluctantly, but 'he was beaten with such enormous bloodshed, and with such a great multitude of casualties on both sides that no one can calculate or evaluate' (Gregory). But he managed to beat the Danes and Eutenians.

When Clotaire died, with him died the last of Clovis' four sons, all of whom—like their father—had lived for robbery, murder and war. Everywhere they had gone in search of relics of martyrs, had taken care of relocating them and had promoted the veneration of the saints. They founded many monasteries and endowed them generously. They awarded large real estate to the clergy and made donations to them. The old annals abound in their praises. But Clotaire I, in whose territory the Church was poorly organised and the victim of special relaxation, perhaps didn't care about Christianity at all. Anyway, he too became a Christian and a faithful Catholic, who waged war after war and had his closest relatives murdered, including young children, maidens, and even his own son, while personally bankrupting himself with countless concubines and at least six marriages 'and not always successive'

(Schultze). Despite this, the ecclesiastical author of the 7th century compares this king with a priest, showering him with praise.

Childebert I showed a very special fervour and devotion to the clergy. The usurper and incestuous erected the Holy Cross and the Spanish proto-martyr Vicente de Zaragoza—whose martyrdom was adorned with great propagandistic displays—a basilica in Paris, which would later become the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. He made a pilgrimage to the cell of Saint Euspicius, in whose honour he also built a church. He made donations of land and large sums of money, including the spoils of his wars for Catholic churches and monasteries, in which he ordered to pray for the salvation of his soul and the prosperity of the Frankish kingdom.

Thus he distributed among the Frankish churches dozens of chalices and numerous patens and gospels, all made of gold and precious stones, and all material that he had stolen in his Spanish war. Childebert made Orleans the ecclesiastical capital of his kingdom. There four national synods met (in the years 533, 538, 541 and 549). All Frankish kings sent their bishops to them (exception made for the one celebrated in 538). In 552 Childebert summoned another national council in Paris. He promulgated a decree against 'paganism' that was still alive, mostly in northern and eastern France. He harshly persecuted anyone who erected 'idols' in the fields. He forbade even pagan banquets, songs, and dances, though certainly without demanding conversion by force.

Vigil, the murderous pope, described Childebert in 546 as 'our most glorious son' and praised his 'Christian will, pleasing to God.' Pope Pelagius died in 561, the same year that Clotaire I died: the last son of Clovis. In that same decade, and together with the Franks and the Visigoths, another Germanic people began to play an increasingly important role: the Lombards.

THE INVASION OF THE LOMBARDS

The Lombards (the men with long beards, according to the traditional interpretation of the name) belonged to the East Germans more than to the Westerners. They were a demographically small town and probably hailed from Scandinavia, perhaps Gotland. They became sedentary around the time that is indicated as the passage from the Ancient Ages to the Middle Ages, and thus related to the Saxons in the lower Elbe, where part of their people remained constantly and where still in the 20th century names as Bardengau and Bardewick remember them.

For centuries the Lombards are hardly mentioned in history. Their presence is proven in the manner of geological strata, the emigrants first followed the course of the Elbe to spread from the 4th century, and for two hundred years, through Bohemia, Moravia and a part of present-day Lower Austria, 'Rugiland,' which they occupied around 488, after the withdrawal of the Rugian: another Germanic people, also native of Scandinavia and who left the name of their island there, Rugen. Through Hungary they advanced south, creating in the Danube basin a kingdom that extended as far as Belgrade.

Auxiliary Lombards troops had supported Justinian's wars against the Persians, as well as in 552 under the command of Narses, in the decisive battle against the Ostrogoths. Disillusioned by Byzantium, its leader Alboin allied himself with the misers, in union with whom he annihilated in another decisive battle (567) the kingdom of the Gepids, another East Germanic people. The carnage on both sides was such—there were 60,000 deaths—'that out of such a large crowd hardly a messenger to announce the destruction survived' (Paul the Deacon). Alboin took Rosamund, daughter of Cunimund, the defeated Gepid king, as his wife. The Gepids no longer continued their settlement between the Lombards and the Avars, who broke in immediately. In the spring of 568—according to a contemporary Burgundian chronicler—'the entire

Lombard army, having set fire to their settlement, left Pannonia, followed by the women and the rest of the population.' Under the pressure of greedy expansion and attracted by the south, at the orders of their boss Alboin they stormed through Emona and the gorges of the Julius Alps, entering the generally unprotected north of Italy. It was the same path that Alaric and Theodoric had already travelled.

This was the last great advance of the invasion of the Nordic peoples. With the Lombards, who together may have formed a people of 130,000 souls, came other tribal populations from Pannonia, the Noricum, numerous Saxons, remnants of Gepids, Thuringians, Swabians and Slavs. And just as the Lombards were open to the integration of other peoples, they were also open to religious tolerance. Converted to Christianity in good part from about the year 500, the majority of the population was made up of Arians. But among them there were also Catholics—Alboin was first married to Chothsind, daughter of Chlothar I—and there were above all pagans, who for a long time continued their sacrifices and sacrificial banquets.

The last Merovingians

'No one rules more than the bishops,
our glory no longer exists.' —Chilperic

While the difference between Franks and Gallo-Romans disappeared little by little, although not the different legislation, the external borders of the Merovingian kingdom remained until the end of the Merovingian period. There were indeed political complications, as well as some attacks by the misers against Thuringia and by the Visigoths against southern France, as well as some outright riots and raids of prey beyond the borders. But the main objective was no longer expansion outwards, nor the expansion of the kingdom as a whole, nor the subjugation and exploitation of strange and distant neighbours. It was the kings, once again four, and their numerous successors who sought to enlarge their possessions and territories at the expense of the territories of others, and in an almost uninterrupted way to harm and weaken them in this way. In a word, each was seeking supremacy.

This caused that at the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th century almost all the Merovingian princes died a premature and violent death, that brutalities and large-scale outrages continued to occur in the kingdom, that civil wars and looting would incessantly break out, that many places were reduced to ashes, entire areas were devastated and innumerable looting, mutilations and murders were committed, to which were added plagues and famines. The peasants hid in the woods and robbed for their own account. Amid this debauchery and impasse, all means were good for the combatants.

'No other country in the Western world experienced such a profound and lasting transformation by Christianity as Spain' (Willliam Culican). After the defeat of Poitiers (507) at the hands of Clovis, the great Toulouse kingdom collapsed completely and the Visigoths, almost entirely expelled from southern France, concentrated in Spain, where they had conquered one province after another. From 473 they were owners of the entire peninsula, except for the small Swabian kingdom in the northwest and the Basque territories of the Bay of Biscay. Its new capital was Toledo, which supplanted Toulouse.

Liuvigild, the last Arian king of the Visigoths, certainly reinforced the power of the crown. He improved the monetary system, and revised the laws, filling in deficiencies and eliminating superfluous aspects. He was the first German prince who founded cities, the most important of which he called Reccopolis, after his son Reccared (in the upper reaches of the Tagus). During his eighteen-year reign he re-unified the Visigothic kingdom, which was crumbling. Even St Isidore of Seville, who attributes Liuvigild's successes to the favour of fate and the bravery of his army, admits that the Goths, until then reduced to a small corner in Spain, came to occupy most of the territory. 'Only the error of heresy obscured the reputation of his bravery.' That was naturally the decisive point: 'the pernicious poison of that doctrine,' the 'deadly plague of' heresy.' The bishop added: 'Full of the fury of Arian infidelity, he persecuted the Catholics and exiled most of the bishops. Liuvigild deprived the churches of their income and privileges and through terror he drove many into the Arian pestilence and won many more without persecution with gold and gifts. In addition to other

heretical depravities, he even dared to re-baptise Catholics, and not only lay people but also members of the priestly state.'

In reality, and in the face of radically intolerant Catholicism, Liuvigild carried out a proven policy of *detente*. During his reign many Arian monasteries were founded and many churches were built. The king personally endowed Abbot Nanctus and his monks from Africa with real estate. Moreover, he theologically compromised with the Catholics through certain concessions in Trinitarian doctrine.

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Editor's interpolated note: After five pages of describing fights, Deschner writes about how the tide turned from Arianism to Catholicism, and he concludes:

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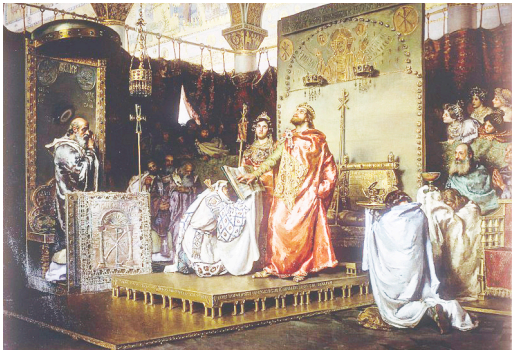
Finally, the Goths who—Bishop Isidore writes— had drunk so thirsty and so long retained the 'pernicious poison of heresy,' 'thought of the salvation of their souls, freed themselves from the deeply ingrained and by the grace of Christ reached the only beatifying faith, which is the Catholic faith. Hallelujah!' At the III Council of Toledo, held in May 589, and whose worthy preparation was preceded by a three-day fast, ordered by the king, part of the Arians went to the victor's field. The king declared Catholicism the official state religion and began by uprooting Arianism quickly and completely: destroying its ecclesial organisation, excluding the Arians from all public office, and burning their sacred books. At the same time that Reccared, together with the bishops, put an end to Arianism in Spain, he also turned the Church into an instrument of oppression as had never happened before in the history of the Goths. All Christian opposition disappeared, the Arians were forbidden from any public office, all Arian ecclesiastical property passed to the Catholic bishoprics and celibacy was imposed on the converted clergy.

Conversions were also reached by force. Some within the Arian episcopate, such as the obstinate prelate of Mérida, Sunna, met their death in exile. It seems that Sunna responded to Reccared's demands for conversion: 'I will never become a Catholic

[Catholicus nunquam ero] but in the faith in which I have lived I want to live also in the future, and I will gladly die for the faith that I have maintained since my youth!'



The Conversion of Reccared I as recreated by
Antonio Muñoz Degrain, Senate Palace, Madrid.

Many Arian bishops embraced Catholicism just as in Liuvigild's time many Catholic clergymen had joined the Arian national Church. Then began the alliance of the State with the Catholic Church, what Bishop John of Biclaro[1] calls the *renovario*, the attitude of the *christianissimus imperator*. According to the old Catholic tradition, Reccared ordered the immediate burning of all Arian Bibles and doctrinal writings in Toledo in the public square. 'Not even a single Gothic text was left in Spain' (Thompson).

[1] ***Editor's note:*** John of Biclaro attended the council of Toledo where Reccared converted to the Catholic faith, represented in the painting above.

POPE GREGORY I (590-604)

The altar of St Gregory in St Peter's Basilica,
which contains the remains of Pope Gregory.

'The history of the Church,' wrote Heinrich Kraft, 'has not produced many characters who have rightfully carried the nickname of The Great.' Of the more than 260 popes, only Leo I and St Gregory I (590-604) are the pontiffs who, in addition to the title of Doctors of the Church, bear the appellation of 'The Great' (San Gregorio Magno). The first monk who reached the supposed chair of Peter was of the senatorial lineage of the Anicius; that is to say, of the high and rich Roman nobility, *de senatoribus primis*. All ecclesiastical writers emphasise the 'noble' or rich origin of their heroes. Even in the purely external aspect of him it was the 'miracle of his time' for being a man of average height, with small, yellowish eyes, a discreet aquiline nose, and four miserable little curls, and a powerful, almost bald skull: a miracle in himself and not only in his

time. Well, that truly extraordinary head multiplied and, like a holy relic, it could be in many cities at the same time: Constance, for example, possessed the head of Gregory, as did Prague, Lisbon and Sens.

By 573 Gregory was *praefectus urbis*, the highest civil office in Rome. Decked out in precious stones and flanked by an armed personal guard, he resided in a sumptuous palace because, although he was 'already driven by the yearning for heaven,' as he confesses, he was interested in beautiful appearances, in their 'external standard of living' and without excessive disgust he served 'the earthly world.' The family was wealthy with possessions in and around Rome, and especially in Sicily. He even had contacts in Constantinople, and also apparently was intensely religious. Wealth and religion are not excluded in any way. Quite the contrary: whoever God loves makes him rich, and despite the camels and the needle eyes, he gets to heaven. The powerful bloodline of Gregory had already given the world two popes: Agapetus I and Felix III, whom he himself calls his ancestor (*atavus*). And the Church also canonised his mother Silvia.

Already between his election and consecration on September 3, 590, Gregory, who because of his weakness almost always lay in bed, had called to fight the bubonic plague from Egypt, to which even his predecessor Pelagius II had succumbed on February 8, 590. Of course, Gregory declared the plague as punishment from God, as revenge for the sins of the Lombards, the 'pagans,' the 'heretics' and demanded their conversion 'to the true and upright Catholic faith' through repentance, penance, prayers and songs of Psalms for three days, 'while it is still time for tears.' He also set in motion among the ruins of the destroyed city a spectacular seven-round procession—with it Ferdinand Gregorovius begins *History of Rome in the Middle Ages*—with pitiful choral songs and tedious invocations to all possible martyrs, including those who never had existed but were invented in the bloody comedy of the doctor of the Church, St Ambrose of Milan. The success was tremendous but an eyewitness told St Gregory of Tours that then 'in the space of an hour, while the people raised their voices in prayer to the Lord, eighty men collapsed and fell dead.' In any case, in Constantinople, by God's inscrutable design, between 542 and 544 the plague had claimed the lives of 300,000 people.

Amid such gloomy feelings, visions and realities of worldly decay—not only was the plague raging: ancient temples were also being razed, and even the papal granaries and churches—, Gregory, who has been called 'the last Roman' and 'the first medieval pope,' surprisingly started his career knowing exactly what he wanted. In 590 Gregory ascended the pontifical throne despite his ailments and, naturally, supposedly against his will. This was part of the etiquette and until the 20th century it has been part of clerical hypocrisy. In his time, however, even the humblest ecclesiastical offices were so coveted that in 592 or 593 Emperor Maurice forbade soldiers from entering monasteries and civil servants from embracing the clerical state. And Gregory knew very well that 'someone who strips off his worldly garments to immediately occupy an ecclesiastical office only changes places, but doesn't leave the world.'

From Gregory I, the humble servant of servants, until the 20th century it is well known that the popes had their feet kissed. The peculiarities were regulated by the ceremonial books. But, as we also know, the one who was actually being kissed was not his foot, but God's. That is why all the emperors, including Charles V, also regularly performed this ugly rite on the portico of St Peter's basilica. It is understood that Gregory's personal conscience was marked by the origin, career and status of his character. He always made himself respected by both the clergy and the laity. In modern parlance it could be said that he was a law-and-order type: a person of order, a former prefect of police, a judge of the criminal who strongly insisted on obedience and discipline, especially by monks and nuns, taking a special interest in their morality—or immorality—as well as in the observance of their vow of poverty.

Gregory used to call his clerics and officials, whose influence was decisive in the Roman municipal administration, 'soldiers of Peter' and also 'soldiers of the Roman Church' (*milites beati Petri*, *milites Ecclesiae romanae*). The first monk elevated to the pontifical throne administered the Lateran almost in the manner of a monastery, populating it in any case with monks, whom he elected to high offices. But he, who adopted the humble monastic catchphrase of 'servant of the servants of God'—which after his death became an official title of the popes—naturally wanted to be 'the first servant in the Church of God' (Altendorf). Gregory never used the name of St Peter without the tag 'prince of the apostles.'

He strictly forbade subjects (*subditi*) to dare to pass judgment on the life of prelates or superiors (*praepositi*). Even if they were unworthy and justly deserved to be censured, they should not be reproached. Rather, one had to voluntarily embrace the yoke of reverence.

The man of double standards

Where he had power, Gregory exercised it without regard, very proud of his justice in front of his subordinates. Archdeacon Lorenzo, who for his sake was preferred in the papal succession and who could not hide his disappointment, lost his post. A year later, Gregory burned him in a solemn ceremony and in the presence of all the clergy 'for his pride and other crimes.' Yet more significant is the following event. The monk Justus, a doctor at the Monastery of Saint Andrew, who cared for the increasingly ill pope, confessed to brother Copious that he had hidden three gold coins. When Gregory found out, he rigorously forbade anyone to treat Justus, that no one from the monastery should visit him on his deathbed or assist him. And after his death his corpse had to be thrown with the three coins into a dunghill while the assembly shouted: 'To hell with you and your money!' With such severity Gregory understood the monastic vow although, personally, everything that he hadn't given to his monasteries he sold, distributing the money among the poor. As a monk he was so wealthy that in 587 he was able to make another donation to the Monastery of Saint Andrew (to which with the expression of owner he called 'my monastery'). Furthermore, at least thirteen years after becoming a Benedictine monk, he still possessed many rustic goods.

Undoubtedly, the pope was also a man of compromise and double standards. As hard as he was always with the defrocked monks and nuns, forcing them to return to the monastery, in the case of nobles he could make exceptions. Venantius, a patrician of Syracuse and probably a friend of Gregory, left his monastery in contempt of the ecclesiastical precept. He took home the beautiful and dominant lady Italica who made him the father of two girls, also becoming the epicentre of a circle of anti-monastic literati. But Gregory didn't force him to return to the monastery. He only tried with great effort to convince him to do it voluntarily, although in vain. What is more, he aided the children born of that anti-canonical marriage, proving once more—as Jeffrey Richards, his

modern and often benevolent biographer says—'that in Gregory's image of the world was a law for the rich, and another for the poor.'

One last example about Gregory's double standards: When Bishop Andrew beat a poor woman who lived off ecclesiastical charity so barbarically that she died shortly after, the pope simply forbade him to celebrate Mass for two months—perhaps to the satisfaction of the bishop himself. On the contrary, Gregory had 'all carnal sinners' locked up in the prisons of the monasteries, so that a modern researcher (Grupp) writes that this 'evokes the old slaveholders,' taking such crowds into those monastic houses of repression that according to the monk John Climacus—a contemporary of Gregory, somewhat younger than him—they 'could hardly take a step.'

Thinking differently: a crime worthy of death

Soon this pope, like most of his predecessors and especially those who followed him, intervened harshly against those who thought differently: all non-Catholics. His great goal was *propagatio fidei*, the planned extension of papal power, at almost any cost. For this reason he interfered in the affairs of England and in the Frank-Merovingian kingdom, whose kings he vainly sought to win over to ecclesiastical reform. He recommended torture and imprisonment as coercive means, and occasionally also the peaceful transformation of pagan places of worship or Gentile customs, 'so that people thus confidently go to the usual places,' always following the circumstances. He also advised, on occasion, promising converts a tax cut and 'converting' the stubborn with higher taxes. To the Sardinians, who still persisted in their paganism, their bishop had to Christianise them by force, as if they were slaves.

But not only did Gregory propagate the conversion of the 'pagans' in Sardinia, Sicily, Corsica, and elsewhere. He also tirelessly fought 'heresy' and intervened with great zeal in the war against heretics within the missionary war for the expansion of the faith outward, gladly called 'defence of the Roman Church' or 'the pastoral care of the pope.' Not even those who were simply outsiders or disagreed could remain unmolested. 'Thinking differently than most, leading a different way of life from that led by people in general, increasingly meant a direct questioning of the

doctrines and practices of the common people, already constituting almost a crime worthy of death' (Herrmann).

Gregory was a propagandist convinced of the virtue of humility. And humble, of course, is only he who obeys him with the greatest submission. Conversely, in Gregory's mind a 'heretic' could in no way be humble. The 'heresy' was *a priori* the opposite, a division of hearts, the ruin of souls, a service to Baal and the devil; it was apostasy, rebellion and pride. 'The place of heretics is pride itself… the place of the wicked is pride, as conversely humility is the place of good.' Tolerance towards 'heretics' was unthinkable from the beginning, from New Testament times. The 'heretics' were already fought in the primitive Church as 'antichrists,' as 'firstborn of Satan,' 'animals in human form,' 'beasts,' 'devils,' 'slaughter cattle for hell' and so on. All of this was, indeed, an old and accepted tradition in the Church, which a worthy predecessor of Gregory, Pope Gelasius I (492-496), had summed up in this sentence: 'Tolerance towards heretics is more pernicious than the most terrible destructions of the provinces by the barbarians.'

In Africa, where after the total annihilation of the Arian vandals the Catholic imperial house prevailed again, the pope was annoyed by the Manicheans, some remains of the Arians, and to a great extent also the Donatists. Once again, as in Augustine's time, domination was the champion of the impoverished. But soon Gregory forced the repression of the 'heretics.' In a letter to the African prefect in 593, he is extremely surprised that the state does not act energetically against the sectarians. He later protested also by sending three bishops as delegates to Constantinople before the emperor, for the violation of the imperial laws in Africa. But the truth is that in the second half of his pontificate there is no longer any talk of the Donatists at all.

The 'great' pope hated anything that wasn't Catholic, otherwise he wouldn't have been 'great.' For Gregory, the pagans had neither divine nor human rights. And messing it all up—as has been done in his circles to this day—he presented the pagans as persecutors of the Catholics! It is true that he did not advocate outright violence, lashing, torture and jail at any cost for the Gentiles, who according to him 'live like wild animals.' Nothing of that! Magnanimous and good-natured as he was, he cordially encouraged to wipe out the pagan tenants from ecclesiastical lands by financial imposition. The stubborn and hard-headed peasant

who refused 'to return to the Lord God' had to 'be burdened with so many taxes that this punishment would push him to enter the right path as quickly as possible.' And if even with the most unbearable tax pressure someone was reluctant to enter 'the right path,' the Holy Father was a little tougher. He then ordered a rigorous prison and, in the case of slaves, even torture which Augustine, the preacher of the *mansuetudo catholica* or ecclesial meekness, already allowed. And he allowed it not only with slaves but also with all schismatics (Donatists). The clever Numidian thinker twists the words and calls torture *emendatio*, as if it were a kind of baptismal cure and preparation, a trifle compared to hell.

Gregory thus Christianised the sad remains of Sardinian paganism in the light of doctor Augustine. In 599 he exhorted by letter 'with the greatest fervour' to Archbishop Januarius of Cagliari 'to pastoral vigilance against idolaters.' He first recommended conversion through 'a convincing exhortation' and not without evoking 'divine judgment.' Then he wrote clearly:

> But if you find that they are not willing to change their way of life, we wish that you arrest them with all zeal. If they are slaves, punish them with whipping and torment, seeking their correction. But if they are free people, they must be led to repentance employing severe prison, as it should be, so that those who despise hearing the words of redemption, which save them from the danger of death, may in any case be returned by bodily torments to the desired healthy faith.

Through bodily torments a healthy Catholic mentality is achieved… At that time, 'pagans' still existed in many regions, not only where Archbishop Januarius himself tolerated them among his tenants. There were pagans in Corsica, in Sicily, in Campania, let alone in Gaul and even in Great Britain. Everywhere Gregory pushed for their disappearance.

For this he not only set in motion his clergy but the nobility, the landowners and the civil arm too. He had to strike everywhere in union with the ecclesiastical arm. Thus, in 593 he ordered the praetor of Sicily to render all his assistance to the bishop of Tyndaris in his work of annihilating the 'pagans.' And in 598 he ordered Agnelo of Terracina to seek out the tree worshipers and punish them so that 'paganism' would not be passed on to others. He also required the assistance of Mauro, the local military

commander. And of course all of this happened, to put it in the words of John the Deacon, 'through the application of legitimate authority.'

Pope Gregory accepted and even openly sanctioned the religious war to subdue the Gentiles. They had to submit by force without further ado and then more or less smoothly seek conversion: a rule that the Catholic historian Friedrich Heer defines as 'the Christian policy of conquest and expansion until the eve of the First World War.' In this regard Gregory worked, as we see in his letter to the emperor, with the old Ambrosian idea that 'the peace of the *res publica* depends on the peace of the universal Church.' He consequently kept his military commanders and even his own soldiery, which repeatedly prevailed victorious. In the eyes of the Catholic historian of the popes, all this happened 'in an absolutely natural way' as by himself Pope Gregory was 'the bulwark and leader,' the 'consul of God,' who took in his hands 'in an autonomous way the history of Italy, the history of his country.'

Use and abuse of slaves as livestock

From Gregory himself we know that many bishops did not care for the oppressed or the poor. On the occasion of the appointment of the *defensor romanus* as rector, he wrote to the *coloni* of Syracuse:

> I therefore recommend that you obey his orders with good spirit, which he considers appropriate for the furtherance of the interests of the Church. We have authorised him to severely punish anyone who dares to be disobedient or rebellious. We have also instructed him to resume the investigations on all slaves who belong to the Church but who have escaped and to recover with all prudence, energy and promptness the lands that someone illegally occupies.

For the cultivation of his lands it is natural that Gregory needed entire armies of slaves, of settlers tied to the ground. 'Free ecclesial peasants were scarce' (Gontard). The pope did not confront slavery. Where else could the 'treasurer of the poor' have obtained the money to meet his needs? Not to mention the maintenance of 'jobs,' which in his time was the concern of any master. Gregory certainly reminds the lords that slaves are people and that they have been raised equal by nature to their masters. But

although men have been created equal, absolutely equal, without a doubt that circumstances have completely changed. Then it would be necessary, according to Gregory, to admonish the slaves 'so that at all times they consider the baseness of their state' and that they 'offend God, when with their presumptuous behaviour they contravene the order established by him.' Slaves, the holy father teaches, must 'consider themselves as servants of the lords,' and lords as 'fellow-servants among servants.' Beautiful expression!

Isn't this a profitable religion? By nature, Gregory teaches that 'all men are equal' but a 'mysterious disposition' places 'some below others,' creates the 'diversity of states,' and of course as 'a sequel to sin.' Conclusion: 'Since each man does not walk in the same way through life, one has to dominate over others.' God and the Church—which in practice are always identified with the high clergy—exists for the maintenance of slavery. And from Great Britain to Italy, passing through Gaul, there was in his time a constant trade in Christian slaves.

The Roman Church needed slaves, and the monasteries needed them. Gregory himself encouraged, through the Gallic rector Candide, the purchase of Anglic boy slaves for the Roman monasteries. Everyone bought and abused slaves as if they were cattle. And even to an enemy such as Agilulf, king of the Lombards, the pope could assure him that the labour of the forced ones would be beneficial to both parties. If the most unfortunate escaped their misery, which happened frequently enough, the holy father naturally pressed to be returned to their owners. He chased the escaped slave from a Roman monastery as well as the escaped baker from his brother. But then the pope was magnanimous and instead of punishing the crime of the *coloni* with the deprivation of his possessions, he wanted to see them punished with a beating by 'duly returning the slaves to his friends' (Richards).

Gregory, who insistently proclaimed the imminent end of the world, and who with the struggle for faith made this preaching the 'guiding idea' of his pontificate, still had time to do great business. And he made Saint Peter an increasingly wealthy character. He greatly increased the profits of his estate and laid the foundations for the decisive and victorious territorial rule of the papacy. With his Sicilian latifundia he supplied grain to Rome, paid the imperial troops of the Roman parts, took care of supplies and defence, and in times of crisis he even commanded the Roman

garrison. In this way the 'treasurer of the poor,' as he called himself, set in motion the evolution towards the State of the Church, with a hardly imaginable sequence of failures, wars and deceptions.

We can thus consider Gregory as the founder of the temporal power of the papacy. Without yet existing a Church-State there was already a kind of State, or at least an important factor of power. Gregory elected the bishops, together with the large landowners, the provincial governors and defined their powers, especially the judicial power. The pope also influenced commerce and controlled, in conjunction with the senate, measures and weights. And to him they belonged—this being perhaps what increased his power the most—enormous territorial extensions, great agricultural estates throughout Italy and beyond. Despite everything Gregory remained, like his predecessors, the subject of the emperor, his superior. The imperial person and government were considered sacred. The monarch of Byzantium also fought 'heresies,' promulgated ecclesiastical edicts and convened councils.

Between the exarch of Ravenna and the pope there were no good relations. Italy, and especially the territorial chaos of its middle part, was a focus of small, almost continuous wars. That is why the exarch wanted to protect the corridor of land between Ravenna and Rome, and the pope himself wanted to protect Rome; but there were no longer enough troops for it. The Roman garrison, considerably depleted by the plague and without receiving soldiers, was on the brink of a mutiny. Gregory assumed command. He took charge of the city, intervening decisively in all military actions, from the appointment of officers to the operations of the generals or the negotiation of armistice conditions. He took care that no one evaded the service of arms under the pretext of service to the Church. Furthermore, he recruited people from the monasteries to guard the city walls, although he avoided putting soldiers in the nunnery monasteries. He even designed military installations for Campania, Corsica and Sardinia. He took care to reinforce the weak points of the imperial enclaves with reinforcement troops and fortifications. He appointed a commander for Naples, whose population he threatened: 'Whoever opposes his just orders will be considered as a rebel against Us, and whoever obeys him obeys Us.'

The beginning of papal propaganda in England

The beginnings of Christianity in Britain remains in the dark. Early Northern Christians had been Scandinavian merchants. In the year 314 there is a testimony of three British bishops who participated in the synod of Arles. Roman rule over Britain, established in 43 c.e. by Emperor Claudius with four legions (barely 40,000 men), had finished around 400. In 383 Theodosius abandoned Hadrian's Wall, and at the beginning of the 5th century the Romans, under the orders of Stilicho and Constantius III, withdrew. Faced with the attacks of Picts and Scots, the British called to their aid the Germanic tribes of Jutes and Saxons, and later also the Angles, who created a series of regional kingdoms that fought each other. Such were those of Kent, Sussex, Essex, and Wessex as well as those later of Mercia, Northumbria, and Middlesex, both rising to supremacy. But the period between 450 and 600, called Dark Ages, remains the least known period in English history.

In the time of Gregory the province of Brittany of the old Roman rule consisted of the Roman-British kingdoms in the west and the pagan kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons, who had established themselves in the rest of the island territory. In August 598, Gregory wrote to Bishop Eulogius of Alexandria that the Anglo people lived 'in an outer corner of the world' and that 'they still venerate the tree and the stone' with a veneration that was not without sense and beauty. Towards the end of the 6th century King Ethelbert of Kent married the Merovingian and Catholic princess Berta, great-granddaughter of Clovis, niece of Brunichilde and daughter of the Frankish King Chabert of Paris. In her entourage was Bishop Liuthard, who was supposed to celebrate the Christian liturgy, although Ethelbert was still a pagan. But upon becoming the most powerful king of England and being recognised as sovereign, Gregory hastened to send (595-596) the prior of his monastery of St Andrew, a man called Augustine, with some 40 monks, as emissaries to the 'barbarians.' Unfortunately Ethelbert allowed the Roman monks to develop their propaganda in the kingdom.

The fables of the Trinity and Peter now replaced the cult of Odin and the Druids. At Pentecost 597, or more likely 601—if it really happened—the king had many Angles baptised. There are no sure testimonies of the 'conversion' of Ethelbert, but he was

certainly the founder of three Episcopal churches in Kent and Essex: those of Canterbury, Rochester and London, which already existed in 604 when Augustine died. And with his predominantly civil laws the king protected ecclesiastical possessions as well. But at his death in 616 (or 618), and this does appear with certainty, his son and his successor Eadbald was still pagan, and so was probably his second wife.

In 602 reinforcements arrived from Rome. Abbot Mellitus, who two years later was already bishop of London, came with his troops dressed in monastic robes, carrying all kinds of ornaments, sacred vessels, relics, and various papal letters. The news of the conversion reached Constantinople. Nor was the exhortation lacking to destroy paganism and to continue the work of conversion amid the warnings and evocations of the terror of the final judgment. 'Therefore, my most illustrious son,' Gregory wrote to the king, 'keep carefully the grace you have received from God and hasten to spread the faith among the people who are subject to you. Increase still more your noble zeal for conversion; suppress idolatry, destroy their temples and altars.' Thus wrote the preacher of humility. But when the occasion required it—and that was always the supreme rule of his conduct—Gregory knew how to act with greater caution and adopt an apparently more conciliatory tone, which at times may even seem comical. For example, to his 'dearest son,' Abbot Mellitus, leader of the new troop of propagandists, he wrote that he had resolved

> after long reflection on the situation of the Anglos. It is unnecessary to destroy the pagan temples of those towns, but only the idols that are in them. Then those temples must be sprinkled with holy water, altars erected and relics deposited. Because if such temples are well built, they can perfectly be transformed from a dwelling place of demons into houses of the true God, so that if the same people don't see their temples destroyed, lay down their error from their hearts, recognise the true God and pray and go to the usual places according to their old custom…

Isn't this a magnificent religion? If the temples are 'well built' there is no need to demolish the devil's work. None of that: they can then serve the work of God. You just have to destroy the 'idols' and let the new ones in exclusively.

Burning classical libraries

Modern research attributes to this pope regular studies and very solid instruction, 'an eminent cultural and moral training' (*RAC*XII 1983). However, precise data on Gregory's scientific culture are lacking. In that blessed Christian age, it did not actually exist. 'Criticism and judgment fade,' wrote Ferdinand Gregorovius in the middle of the 19th century. We no longer hear from schools of rhetoric, dialectics and jurisprudence in Rome. Instead, he discovers that 'more room than ever has been made for mystical enthusiasm and material worship.' And in much more recent times Jeffrey Richards confirms: 'The philosophical and scientific training had long since disappeared.' Gregory had probably only studied Roman law, having reached the last remnant of classical training.

At that time there was hardly anyone in Rome who knew Greek. And the papal biographers of the *Liber Pontificalis* show how badly Latin was written. For Gregory the only relevant philosophy is in the Bible, 'his supreme authority' (Evans). And all the wisdom in the world, 'science, the beauty of literature, the liberal arts' are things that only serve for the intelligence 'of Scripture,' that is, for a life of constant repentance and penance. But everything that does not directly serves religion is rejected by Gregory. He eliminates it completely.

The pope, one of the four 'great' fathers of the Latin Church and patron of educated people, ordered the burning of the imperial library on the Palatine (where the western emperors, their Germanic heirs and the Byzantine rulers continued to reside) as well as the library of the Capitol. In any case, the English scholar John of Salisbury, bishop of Chartres, affirms that the pope had had manuscripts of classical authors destroyed in Roman libraries.

Around 600 Gregory lectured harshly in a letter to the Gallic bishop Desiderius of Vienne, because he taught classical grammar and literature. Filled with shame and 'great disgust' he attributes to his 'grave iniquity' a blasphemous occupation, as if the same mouth could not 'sing the praises of Jupiter and the praises of Christ.'

Pope Gregory's books

The triumphs of the abstruse, not to say of foolishness, in no less than thirty-five books, which the author himself described as *libri morales* and that in the Middle Ages, to which they served as a compendium of morals, were called *Magna Moralia*, with incessant summaries, compilations, commentaries and enormous diffusion. And that creation of Gregory, the most ancient and vast, founded his fame as an expositor of Scripture (*deifluus*, radiator of God) and a moral theologian: the product of a mind that contemporaries and posterity placed above Augustine and exalted as incomparable, whose works in copies or epitomes and summaries flooded all medieval libraries and for centuries obscured the West.

The famous papal book, which, like everything else written by Gregory, lacked any originality, summarised, it was said, what had already been formulated by the three 'great Latin fathers'—Tertullian, Ambrose and Augustine—and at the same time transmitted to the Middle Ages the ancient exegesis of the Catholic coryphaeus. No doubt this great work deserves consideration.

The imposing and grandiose work *Dialogues on the Life and Miracles of the Italic Fathers* soon became extraordinarily popular with the help of God and the Church, exerting 'the widest influence' on posterity (H.J. Vogt). It contributed through the Lombard Queen Theudelinde to the conversion of her people to Catholicism. It was translated into Arabic, Anglo-Saxon, Old Icelandic, Old French and Italian. Pope Zacharias (741-752), a Greek who was characterised above all by 'prudence,' translated it into Greek. It was to be found in all libraries and greatly broadened the spiritual horizons of the religious. It was 'read by all learned monks' and with its ideas about the afterlife, which created a school, and especially with its numerous miraculous claims, it gave rise to 'a new type of religious pedagogy' (Gerwing).

There is nothing crude or superstitious here, which goes by the name of virtues: healings of the blind, resurrections of the dead, expulsions of unclean spirits, miraculous multiplications of wine and oil, apparitions of Mary and Peter, apparitions of demons of all kinds. In general, punitive miracles enjoy special preference. Creating fear was—and is—the great speciality of the parish priests.

It is no coincidence that the fourth and last book 'for the edification of many' (Gregory) revolves dramatically around death, the so-called afterlife and the reward and punishment in the beyond: *extra mundum, extra carnem*. During the plague of 590, Gregory says that in Rome 'one could see with one's bodily eyes how arrows were shot from the sky, which seemed to pierce people.' A boy who, out of homesickness and a desire to see his parents, escaped from the monastery for one night, died on the very day of his return. But when he was buried, the earth refused to receive 'such a shameless criminal' and repeatedly expelled him, until St Benedict placed the sacrament in the boy's breast. Criminals were naturally those who, even as children, were locked up for life in the monastery exclusively for the ecclesiastical ambition of power and profit.

Pope Gregory 'the Great' records a whole series of resurrections of the dead, carried out by the priest Severus, St Benedict, a monk of Monte Argentario, and Bishop Fortunatus of Todi, the famous conjurer of spirits, who also immediately restored sight to a blind man with the simple sign of the cross. On the other hand, an Arrian bishop was punished with blindness. And among the Lombards there is a demon who was dragged out of a church by monks. Gregory tells us of the multiplication of wine by Bishop Boniface of Ferentino, who with a few bunches of grapes filled whole barrels to overflowing. And the Prior Nonnoso of the monastery of Mt. Soracte, in Etruria, with his prayer alone moved a stone which 'fifty pairs of oxen' had not been able to move. Gregory reports that Maurus, a disciple of St Benedict, walked on water. 'O miracle unheard of since the time of the Apostle Peter' and that a 'brother gardener' tamed a snake, which stopped a thief; that a raven carried away bread that was poisoned ('In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ take this bread and carry it to a place where no man can find it. And then the crow opened its beak').

Gregory the Great! A nun forgets to 'bless with the sign of the cross' a head of lettuce before eating it, and so gobbles up Satan, who snarls out of his mouth: 'But what have I done, what have I done? I was sitting quietly on the head of lettuce, and she came and bit me.' Bad woman but blessed be God: a saint expels Satan from her, Gregory the Great! But there are also altruistic and helpful devils; devils who even, and precisely, render their services to the clergy and obey their word. 'Come here, devil, and take off

my shoe!' a priest orders his servant, and the devil promptly serves him personally. Oh, and Gregory knew the devil in many of his forms: as a snake, a blackbird, a young black man and a foul monster. Only as pope he didn't know him. Indeed, caution and enlightenment were called for.

According to Gregory, the holy bishop Boniface performed one miracle after another. Once, when he was in urgent need of twelve gold coins, he prayed to St Mary, and immediately found in his pocket what he needed: in the folds of his tunic appeared 'suddenly twelve gold coins, glittering as if they had just come out of the fire.' St Boniface gives a glass of wine, the contents of which don't run out, although one constantly drinks from it. And what about the miracle of the caterpillars, or the miracle of the wheat? No, Gregory 'cannot pass them by in silence.' Indeed, when St Boniface 'saw how all the vegetables withered, he went to the caterpillars and said to them: "I adjure you in the name of the Lord and our God, Jesus Christ, get out of here and don't destroy these vegetables". Immediately they all obeyed the words of the man of God, so not one of them was left in the garden.'

But for this doctor of the Church, 'the Great,' not even all this gross nonsense—which whole generations of Christians have believed, they *had* to believe—didn't exclude him from the supreme honours of a Church. The miracles of punishment have always been preferred. Sometimes a fox falls dead, sometimes a minstrel. The important thing is that the power of the priests is seen. Even the most believing churchman cannot believe (and not only today) that the 'great' pope would have been so gullible. But Karl Baus, for whom the 'greatness of Gregory' lies precisely 'in his vast pastoral action,' doesn't say a single word about the very pastoral *Dialogues* in the four-volume *Catholic Handbook of Church History*. And Vogt opens the chapter on Gregory with a grandiosely comic sentence about his greatness: 'Gregory the Great, the last of the four great doctors of the Latin Church, lived in an age which neither demanded nor permitted great achievements.' *A la bonne heure!* Well said, indeed.

He who was to be the guide of the centuries to come also enriches the topography of hell. Its entrances, he declares, are mountains that spew fire. And as in Sicily the craters were getting bigger and bigger, he declared once again the imminent end of the world: due to the agglomeration of the damned, wider and wider

accesses to hell were required. Whoever enters there will never return. But Gregory knew that some of the dead were released from purgatory after thirty masses. This was the case with a monk who had broken his vow of poverty. Gregory also knew that not all are freed from limbo, and that even children who die without baptism burn in eternal fire. The modern progressives, who are now rushing to extinguish hellfire—because it seems incredible to them—have against them not only the great pope and doctor of the Church, but also Jesus himself and countless other coryphaei of the Church. For Gregory, the eternity of the pains of hell 'are true with all certainty,' and yet he teaches that 'the torment of his fire is for something good.'

Isn't this a magnificent religion, the religion of love?

Catholic Church historians of the 20th century celebrate Pope Gregory as 'one of the most important pastors among the popes' (Baus), and 'one of the most remarkable and cleanest figures on the chair of Peter' (Seppelt/Schwaiger) and have long seen him occupying a 'place among the great ones in the kingdom of heaven' (Stratmann). Harnack, on the other hand, undoubtedly wiser than all the above and certainly more honest, rightly calls Gregory *pater superstitionum*, the father of (medieval) superstition.

Gregory I often failed to intervene effectively against recalcitrant bishops or even lost the battle. He had no influence on the course of events in Spain and the conversion of the Visigoths to Catholicism. Among the Merovingians, with whom he tried to establish a dialogue with every possible concession and warning, he failed completely, without achieving the reform of the Frankish church or the synod he so desired. The Merovingian imperial church became even more independent than it already was. Even against the Lombards it had little lasting success. And even his greatest mark of honour, the conversion of England to Catholicism, soon fizzled out, although only after his death. His successors had to start afresh and built up what is falsely attributed to him.

Gregorian chant, 'that jewel of the Church' (Daniel-Rops), known at least by name to many who know nothing of Gregory, in no way comes from him, even if it displeases certain sentimental Christians. In reality, the liturgical changes he introduced are few and insignificant. Even so, throughout the Middle Ages the Gregorian Sacramentary, the Missal, the Gregorian Antiphonary, the sung Missal and Gregorian chant all came to be the work of

Gregory, who would have reordered, corrected and expanded the traditional chants of the Church. Recent research is unanimous in denying him such merits; the evidence is compelling.

When Gregory I died on 12 March 604, the world was covered in the thickest darkness in his eyes. He was ill, in his last years he could no longer walk, lying almost always in bed, harassed and exhausted by pain. The Lombards, whom he had not tamed, were threatening Rome, whose famine-stricken population was cursing the pope. And while in the North Gregory was venerated after his death, in Rome itself he was almost forgotten for centuries: a probable consequence of the triumph of the diocesan clergy over his monastic rule. Is it a credit to Europe that this ambitious, intolerant and poor-spirited pope could be called the 'father of Europe'?

THE CHRISTIANISATION OF THE IDEA OF KING

In the year 592, the oldest of the Merovingian kings, Guntram, died in the Frankish kingdom after a series of threats and attacks, and he died without leaving any descendants. But after the death of his own sons he had adopted his eldest grandson, still a minor, Childebert II (575-596), leaving him part of his kingdom. He thus ruled two partial kingdoms: Austrasia and Burgundy. Childebert, who in the last period of his life subdued the rebellious Bretons in the west and a Thuringian people between the Saale and Elbe in the east, soon came under the full influence of his mother.

The powerful Brunhilda, the most prominent figure in the Frankish kingdom, had in 575 imposed her five-year-old son's rule in Austrasia and settled the ensuing power struggle with the Austrian nobles of Guntram's camp in her favour, and in favour of the kingship. In his letters, the holy father completely ignores Brunhilda's dreadful family discord. He sees her, her son, her kingdom and all the other kingdoms won for the right faith 'as bright lamps shining and illuminating amidst the night darkness of unbelief.' He repeatedly thanks her for the support she has given to his English missionaries on their journey through the Frankish kingdom. He extols her 'love for the prince of the apostles, Peter, to whom you are wholeheartedly devoted, as I know.' And he asks for her help, often in vain, against simony, schismatic groups and 'pagan' cults.

Gregory exhorts Brunhilda to forcibly prevent the worship of sacred trees and other idolatries and recommends the use of scourging, torture and imprisonment to obtain the conversion of rebellious 'pagans.' And, of course, the pope also sent relics to the queen. Gregory I wrote to the powerful queen, who supposedly ruled the Church, about a dozen letters, usually in a tone of syrupy flattery, which he also used with the imperial house. With some restraint he began the first papal epistle: 'Your Excellency's character, praiseworthy and pleasing to God, is to be seen both in

your government and in the education of your son,' but it soon got louder. And while 'Gregorian chant' had nothing to do with Gregory, here he could sing in higher and higher tones:

> How great are the gifts which God has bestowed on you, and with what clemency the grace of heaven swells your heart, not only do your many other merits attest, but they are especially recognised in the fact that you rule the coarse hearts of heathen peoples with the art of cautious prudence, what is still more meritorious, the regal power is accompanied by the adornment of wisdom.

Brunhilda was not only powerful but also useful to the Church. She made numerous donations and built abbeys, and the pope even asked for her support for the reform of the Frankish Church and the protection of ecclesiastical property.

The Christianisation of the idea of kingship

On the death of Childebert II, he was succeeded by his two sons: Theudebert II (595-612) in Austria, and Theuderic II (595-613) in Burgundy. Brunhilda was the first to rule in the name of her grandchildren, who were still minors, and who only gradually began to intervene in the struggles with the royal house of Neustria after they had reached majority. In Burgundy, of which she soon became the true ruler, she continued the struggle against Chlothar and, to take revenge on her Austrian enemies, instigated Theuderic against his brother Theudebert of Austria, who, she kept repeating, was not the son of a king but of a market gardener. As late as 600, the two brothers had jointly inflicted a heavy defeat on Chlothar II, who was then only sixteen years old, and had sacked his kingdom, reducing it to a narrow coastal strip around Rouen, Beauvais and Amiens. And still in 602 they had jointly fought the Basques and 'with God's help' had subjected them to tribute. But afterwards they fought each other fiercely and bloodily. *The Chronicle of Fredegar* recounts that

> never since time immemorial had the Franks or any other people fought so fiercely. Such was the deadliness between the two armies that, where both sides began the battle, the corpses of the dead had no place to lie, but the dead were so crowded together among the other bodies that they stood upright as if they were alive. But Theuderic, with the

> help of God, defeated Theudebert once more; and the vassals of Theudebert during their flight from Zülpich to Cologne were put to the sword, covering the ground in stretches. On the same day Theuderic came to Cologne and seized all the treasures of Theudebert.

In Cologne, where the Franco-Burgundians entered, Theuderic had his brother tonsured and then cut off his head and annihilated his entire family. 'Even a very young son of his was grabbed by the foot by order of Theuderic and beaten against a rock, until his brains fell out of his head,' says he *Chronicle of Fredegar*. It was the end of one of the innumerable purely Catholic fratricidal wars.

The victor then attempted to seize control of the whole of Gaul and immediately advanced on Neustria. But when he was at the height of his triumph he died unexpectedly, still in his youth, in the year 613. His sons were also killed by Chlothar II of Neustria. But not his godson Merovech, whom Chlothar imprisoned in a monastery, but 'whom he continued to love with the same affection with which he had taken him from the sacred font of baptism' (*Chronicle of Fredegar*).

On the death of Theuderic in Metz, Brunhilda immediately had his eldest son and great-grandson, Sigibert II, who was about ten years old, proclaimed king of Austrasia and Burgundy. But the Austrasian grandees betrayed her. Led by the glorious ancestors of the Carolingians, the two traitors, the steward Pepin of Landen and Arnulf—the future saint and bishop of Metz—, went over to the side of Chlothar II. And after the high treason of the Austrian aristocracy, the queen was also abandoned by the feudal lords of Burgundy under the steward Warnachar. They had decided it beforehand 'and of course both the bishops and the rest of the great lay lords, according to the contemporary chronicler, resolved not to let a single son of Theuderic escape, but to kill them all and then annihilate Brunhilda and to promote the sovereignty of Chlothar.'

This sealed the queen's ruin, the exclusion and even the elimination of the Austro-Burgundian branch of the Merovingian dynasty, as well as the triumph of the nobility over the crown. Brunhilda's army deserted without resistance. She fled to the Jura and tried to sneak into Burgundy, but at Orbe (in today French

Switzerland), by Lake Neuchatel, she was taken prisoner by the Frankish steward and handed over to her nephew.

Chlothar, as God-fearing as he was cruel and thoroughly ecclesiastical-minded, and who as the first Frankish king compared to David, whose piety *The Chronicle of Fredegar* exalts, was a ruler who granted the clergy new rights and abundant donations, guaranteed them freedom of episcopal elections, exempted them from all the burdens of ecclesiastical property, 'clement and full of kindness to all.' The queen consort of Chilperic I, Fredegund, subjected her to torture for three days in the year 613.[2] This happened when Brunhilda was already almost septuagenarian; she then had the soldiers ride her on a camel, and finally tied by her hair, one arm and one foot 'to the tail of the wildest steed' and dragged her to death, until 'her limbs were torn off one after the other' (Chronicle of Fredegar). Her bones were burned. And her offspring were also eliminated up to her great-grandchildren, with the sole exception of Prince Merovech, Chlothar's godson. But a modern researcher writes: 'It was precisely under this ruler that, as can be clearly demonstrated, the Christianisation of the idea of the king reached its first peak' (H.H. Anton).

Pope Gregory had miscalculated. It was neither Brunhilda nor the Austrian branch that emerged victorious from these massive atrocities: the victor was the Neustrian Chlothar II, to whom Gregory had sent only a single letter of his 854 letters that have been preserved. In 614 the king convened a national synod in Paris which marked the beginning of the national Frankish Church, independent of Rome for a century.

Mission and slaughter

Under Dagobert I, whose chief advisors included Arnulf, bishop of Metz, and Kunibert, bishop of Cologne, the paganism on the left bank of the Rhine was increasingly combated, and all the Jews in the kingdom were forcibly baptised. Dagobert also opened the mission of the Frisians, to which Bishop Kunibert had formally committed himself, with an edict imposing baptism. And just as the king fought in the south, west and north, and just as he fought the

[2] ***Editor's note:*** *Ed.:* queen Brunhilda of Austrasia was Fredegund's sister-in-law

Basques, Bretons, Saxons and Frisians, he also invaded the first Slavic kingdom, the great kingdom of the Frankish merchant Samo, which stretched from the Erzgebirbe or Ore Mountains to the eastern Alps. The only source, which recounts the genocide of the Bulgars, is found in the *Chronicle of Fredegar:*

> After their defeat the Bulgars were expelled from Pannonia: 9,000 men with women and children, who turned to Dagobert, begging him to take them into Frankish lands for a lasting settlement. Dagobert ordered the Bavarians to take them in for the winter, while he consulted with the Franks about what to do next. When they had been distributed among the various houses of the Bavarians, Dagobert ordered the Bavarians—after taking advice from the Franks—that each of them should kill the Bulgarians on a certain night with the women and children he had in his house. And the Bavarians carried it out immediately.

And of the 9,000 people, only 700 escaped the slaughter and fled across the Windisch to the Duchy of Walluc. The main reason for the unprecedented carnage was probably 'the annihilation of the Bulgarian ruling class' (Stórmer). In principle, this had nothing to do with the 'mission' but with an *Ostpolitik* or Eastern policy, which in turn had a lot to do with a 'mission.' 'Mission, Catholicisation and the healing of souls appear in the 5th-6th centuries in close connection with the Frankish king, with the deputy duke of Bavaria and the Frankish aristocracy in the west and east,' writes Kari Bosi after narrating the great slaughter, and adds: 'It is no accident the name of the last great Merovingian king Dagobert I who pursued a vigorous *Ostpolitik* strongly emphasised in the *Lex Baiuarium.* It is known for the close collaboration between Dagobert and St Amandus.'

Moreover, it is known that the *rex torrens* was considered a saint like other murderers of entire populations, such as Charlemagne. And finally, it is known that St Amandus reproached King Dagobert, 'something that no other bishop dared to do,' with *capitana crimina* for very serious crimes; although these crimes, which one saint reproached another saint for, were less about the sexual life of the sovereign than about his violent actions. But that was an exception. For nothing prevented the old chroniclers from comparing Dagobert, the great beheader, the initiator of the Bulgarian slaughter and an unscrupulous man in general, with

Solomon, the *rex pacifica*, and exalted as 'benefactor of the churches' (*ecciesiarum largitor*), as 'most vigorous nourishing father of the Franks' (*fortissimus enutritor francorum*) who brought peace to the whole kingdom and won the respect of the neighbouring peoples; which also doesn't prevent us from reading: 'He filled all the surrounding kingdoms with fear and terror' (*Liber Historiae Francorum*). Nevertheless, or precisely because of this, the 'great' Merovingian king, the friend of the monks, Dagobert, who died after a brief illness on 638 or 639, still lives on today especially in France, as the *bon roi Dagobert* (the good king).

Detail of Dagobert's tomb, 13th century.

THE CHURCH IN THE MEROVINGIAN PERIOD

> 'The Frankish reign of the Merovingians was an age bathed in blood and murder, full of the most dreadful tragedies, at the same time replete with believing zeal and holiness.' —Franz Zach, Catholic
>
> 'No one in history ever founded so many monasteries again.' —P. Lasko
>
> 'Naked violence reigned everywhere… the continually renewed spectacle of almost unspeakable crimes.' —Daniel-Rops, Catholic

In the Merovingian period Gaul was already fundamentally Christian, and became increasingly Christianised. It is true that its oldest inscription, certainly Christian, only dates from the year 334 and Lyon; but today it has been lost. And, indeed, at that time Christians were still a minority, even in the cities where the Christian emperors, and of course their Christian collaborators too, lived.

In any case, the spread of Christianity in Gaul had already made rapid progress, and it seems that by 250 there were already bishops there: in Toulouse Saint Saturninus, Arles Marcianus, Paris Saint Dionysius and Narbonne, where a few decades later there is evidence of a Christian cemetery. And in any case, these bishops, like those of Tours, Clermont and Limoges, were in no way delegates of Rome. The alleged Roman mission is undoubtedly a falsehood of the 5th or 6th century: an attempt by the papacy to assert its authority. And, naturally, such a falsehood also had to ensure the apostolic origin of these Gallic bishoprics. The same motif is also found in Spain.

But in the 4th century, episcopal sees already swarmed Gaul. In the Belgian-Germanic territories, too, there are more and more bishoprics: in Orléans, Verdun, Amiens, Strasbourg, Speyer, Worms, Basel, Besançon, and Chalon-sur-Saone. Not to mention

older ones, such as those of Trier, Metz and Cologne, all of which—like those of Tongeren and Mainz—falsely claimed to be foundations of disciples of the apostles. At the end of the 5th century, when Gaul became the epicentre of Western history, some 115 bishops ministered there, almost exclusively in cities. And by the end of the 6th century, Gaul was occupied by 11 metropolitan sees with 128 dioceses: Arles had 24 bishoprics, Bordeaux 17 and Bourges 9, Lyon 10, Narbonne 7, Reims 12, Rouen 9, Sens 7, Tours 8, Trier 9 and Vienne 5.

A kind of holy cancerous ulcer

This period, in which Christianity infected the Germanic world, the dominance of the Frankish nobility was forged and the typical medieval society of royalty, church and nobility emerged from the 5th century, was an era characterised, as few others had been, by unbridled passions and bloody atrocities, betrayals and untold crimes. Palace intrigues, dynastic quarrels, incessant betrayals, the unscrupulous elimination of kings and princes (the average lifespan of the Merovingians was 24.5 years) and the bestial campaigns to wipe out entire families were as commonplace as drunkenness and epidemics, famines and plundering. The history of Gaul in the Merovingian period is a unique chronicle of barbarism. Administration, trade and agriculture all collapsed to a greater or lesser extent, and crime triumphed to the full.

There has hardly ever been a more anarchic period in Europe than these early centuries of the Middle Ages. And yet the clergy didn't think of forbidding intervention. The prelates were not overly incited by the desire for martyrdom. And the Church itself came to enjoy all the plundering and pillaging. Its real estate, which had already increased in the 4th century, then increased immeasurably. Already in the 6th century its wealth grew 'to infinity' (Dopsch). 'During the Merovingian period no memorable rebellion of ecclesiastical authority ever broke out, simply because the Church was not in opposition to the civil power, but collaborated closely with it' (Bodmer). Indeed, the Frankish bishops participated in the power struggles between kings and grandees 'albeit with material and not spiritual weapons' (Bund), going so far as 'the *de facto* usurpation of instruments of state and military power' (Prinz).

In reality the high clergy and the first nobility are the driving forces of that immense confusion. In the imperium, they set up semi-independent powers, causing it to lurch either to one side or the other in permanent crises, which led to chaos. There have never been so many saints, perhaps except for the martyrial era with its squadrons of so-called blood witnesses. In the 7th century alone, no fewer than eight hundred have been counted. Moreover, 'that Merovingian century, so decisive for the development of the West,' found 'a spiritual expression appropriate to the age in the lives of saints,' hagiography having experienced 'an undoubted increase.' The saints enjoyed high prestige. They built great monasteries with pompous churches. Like their biographers, they had an unmistakably positive attitude towards the monarchy and the nobility, most of them coming from aristocratic families. One could almost have the impression that 'nobility was the anteroom to sainthood,' and one could speak of the 'self-sanctification' of Merovingian noble society (Prinz).

This was just as beneficial to the Church as the caste of the lords. Its desire for political-charismatic domination, which had been damaged by the apostasy of the old faith, was strengthened by the resources of the new faith providing Christian legitimisation. At the same time, however, the epoch, and especially the 7th century, was characterised by a 'flowering' of hagiography and a taste for the miraculous, which amounted to 'the greatest falsification of historicity,' and consequently led to 'the state of prostration of Western historiography.' All in all, this 'was the result of a barbarisation, after the ancient stream had dried up' (Scheibelreiter).

Ignorant, criminal and a good Catholic

It is true that we cannot judge that epoch, an epoch of ignorant, superstitious, fallacious and bloody people, with our—oh so ethical—modern standards: we must not act anachronistically against history! But can we and should we still measure that era, a thoroughly Christian era, by Christian criteria, by certain biblical criteria, such as the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount or the commandments of the Decalogue? And precisely because we look at it in this way, shouldn't we recognise it by its fruits? The Catholic author Daniel-Rops, too, feels a prevailing sense of 'horror' at 'the

continually repeated spectacle of crimes that are frankly unspeakable.'

> Everywhere there is blatant violence, ready to explode at any moment. Nothing stops it: not family ties, not the precepts of the most elementary decency and not even the Christian faith.

Not even that? Didn't the faith allow all that to go on? Didn't it provide what we might call the supreme consecration, the endorsement of the status quo? Didn't the faith pray for the rulers, the generals, the cutthroats? Didn't it pray before wars, during wars, and after wars? Didn't it participate in wars and plundering, or make continual donations to the Church from the spoils of war or plunder? Didn't it fatten the powerful on the misery of the masses?

The Church unreservedly sided with the scoundrels and butchers. And while the violent acts of the kings are more and more unbridled, the chain of blood vengeance never ends, the murders of relatives multiply precisely among the great ones: the Catholic son kills the Catholic father, the brother kills the brother who is as Catholic as him, the Catholic uncle kills the Catholic nephew. And while the robberies of the Merovingian kings occur, the annihilated enemies who were Germanic princes, and the snatched booty of gold, jewels and weapons could hardly be hidden any longer under the underground vault of the palace of Braine, the episcopate saw in those crowned Catholic criminals the legitimate representatives of state authority, the representatives of God on earth.

Since the Church sided with the Merovingian potentates from the beginning as their ally, it was able to develop as it hadn't done for a long time. Its influence grew, and both the secular and monastic clergy became incredibly wealthy. And to a large extent the almost permanent catastrophes, and the terror that rarely ceased, greatly favoured the appearance of donations to the Church. 'As people expected protection and help from them, and were continually threatened by looting, arson, murder and violence, they turned to the Church and its saints' (Bleiber).

The Church thought nothing of opposing this. Its wheat increased. It was only between 475 and the beginning of the 6th century that the number of Gallic monasteries increased tenfold; but in the first half of the following century more abbeys were built there than ever before or since. And looking back to the middle of

the 7th century, a modern researcher even speaks of 'an episcopal and monastic state' (Sprandel). The episcopate, which was a 'great power' not only economically but also politically (Dopsch), played almost as decisive a role in the kingdom as the absolute sovereign monarchy did in the Church. The two were closely linked and intertwined, for the ruler also had to show himself *devotissimus* of the Church and, at least in the Carolingian period, was regarded 'as a clergyman' (Brunner).

The whole period, cruel in the extreme and extraordinarily fraudulent, was at the same time very 'pious.' Attendance at Sunday mass was widespread 'at the ringing of the bells they crowded into the churches' (Pfister). Eucharistic communion became almost as widespread. Church singing was zealously cultivated. Almost everyone attended the processions. Catholic festivals were celebrated as great popular festivals. People prayed before they began to eat, and not a glass of water was drunk without first making the sign of the cross. And it was not only God who was prayed to, but all imaginable saints were invoked continually. Numerous churches were built with marble columns and marble-covered walls, stained glass windows and many paintings; the rich even had their own domestic chapels. The kings dealt with saints, as Theuderic I did in 525-526 with St Gallus in Cologne (who set fire to a temple there, 'because none of the foolish pagans were to be seen' after which the arsonist took refuge in the royal palace). Childebert I visited a saint. Queens, like Radegund for example, washed the feet of bishops. Crass superstition was commonplace. Relics from Rome and Jerusalem were hoarded, and pilgrimages were made, looking for health, to the supposed tombs of the apostles.

In a word, there was a deep conviction 'of the reality and power of the living God' (Heinsius). There abounded 'a vigorous and fresh faith in God and his providence; one dealt with the divine, not as an abstraction or an idea, but as a very real force. This conviction prevailed among all, shared by ecclesiastics and laymen without distinction.' The first half of the 7th century was openly regarded as 'a flourishing period of the Frankish Church' (Hauck), which was seen to be 'deeply rooted in the people of the Franks' (Schieffer), and the bishops and episcopal synods 'applied to the work' (Boudriot).

St Gregory of Tours

When we read the *History of the Franks*, as amorphous as it is detailed, by Gregory of Tours, which is the main source of that period, we are surprised that the same head in which such a grotesque belief in miracles and the devil was floating around, and that seems to have no other concern than some obscure miracles and signs—for him unquestionable facts, *gesta praesenti*—, we are surprised, I repeat, that this same head relates with the most realistic tone and often with an almost amoral indifference the horrors of the time without admiring either the decadent displays of conscience or the most criminal heroes of the age.

He doesn't feel the slightest scruple and knows nothing of the conflicts between loyalties, being unreservedly in favour of the brutal policy of the princes, that is, in favour of their crimes insofar as they represented the advance of the Catholic Church. This means, however, a halfway between securing for the Church a stable situation and for the high clergy's ever-increasing riches. He belonged to that clergy (someone has observed that the episcopal ministry, supposedly so exhausting, left Gregory sufficient time to write his extensive works).

No doubt civil and fratricidal wars didn't entirely fit into the saint's mind, for they naturally affected him and his Church. But external wars, wars aimed at the aggrandisement of the Christian kingdom—the annihilation of the 'heretics' and especially the Arians (four times he tells the hoax story of the fathers of the Church, according to which Arius burst in the toilet); the extinction of the pagans and other infidels—, could never be terrible enough. Thus, at the beginning of the fifth book of his *History of the Franks*, he confesses without a qualm:

> Would that you too, O kings, were engaged in battles like those in which your fathers struggled, that the heathen terrified by your union might be crushed by your strength! Remember how Clovis won your great victories, how he slew opposing kings, crushed wicked peoples and subdued their lands and left to you complete and unchallenged dominion over them!

Fighting battles, killing enemy kings, and subjugating hostile peoples as well as his own, is what a famous Catholic saint, after more than half a millennium of Christianity, calls all this. For 'the

triumphs of the Franks are also the successes of Gregory' (Haendler). Even when it comes to sexually motivated murder, Gregory acts as a modern 'progressive.' Without batting an eyelid he recounts the case of the exuberant Deoteria. While her husband was on a trip to Béziers, she sent word for King Teudebert: 'No one can resist you, dearest lord. We know that you are our master. Come, then, and do what is pleasing in your eyes.' And Theudebert came to the castle, made Deoteria his concubine, his wife. And Bishop Gregory calls the Catholic lady (who afterwards began to fear her own daughter's rivalry and had her killed at Verdun) 'a skilful and clever woman.' As skilful and clever as Theudebert himself because, as Gregory himself proclaims, 'she ruled her kingdom with justice, honoured the bishops and made donations to the churches' and 'all the taxes, which had hitherto reverted to the royal treasury of the churches of Auvergne, she graciously remitted to them.'

In other words, Gregory turns a blind eye to the well-known Catholic double standard.

The throne and the altar

From the 4th century the bishops also exercised public law functions, and in late antiquity became 'lords of the cities' and the foundations of monasteries increasingly frequent in their cities, further increasing their power.

The high clergy steadily seized all possible powers. It took advantage, for example, of the release from military service, so inflexibly imposed on others. The same was true of the release from taxes and duties, which it naturally imposed on others. At least until the 5th century, the bishops were exempted from the annual grain tax (*annona*) and from the land tax on all church property, as well as from the *munera sordida* (dirty work) and the special allowances or *extraordinaria*. They fought for emancipation from other public obligations and for new rights, such as the right of asylum for their churches, which was so abused.

They also acquired ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the *privilegium fori*. And they increasingly extended their juridical authority. They had almost unlimited jurisdiction over their clergy, and in certain cases even over the laity, while they could only be condemned by an episcopal assembly. And secular judges, who without their

authorisation pronounced on canon law, were excommunicated. The clergy needed the bishop's permission to do anything. The bishop also held sway in the monasteries. It was the bishop who decided on the legates to the monasteries, subjected the abbots in matters of appointment and penalties, and had almost unlimited authority over the monks.

But the influence of the bishops was all the greater because the Germanic kingdoms of the 5th and 6th centuries did not touch the possessions of the Church at all. Moreover, the Church's possessions were increased by the extensive donations of the kings in the 6th and 7th centuries, as well as by many other transfers of property. In a short period, the Church became 'the largest landowner after the king' (Stern/Bartmuss). It is true that the growing power and wealth of the Church led to certain tensions and disagreements. But monarchy and episcopate saw that they depended on each other and worked together. The hierarchical structure of the Frankish national church supported the political system, and the political system in turn favoured it. It was the old *Do ut des* business. A 'tight intertwining of state and church' (Aubin) prevailed. It was precisely the most powerful families of the Merovingian kingdom—the lineages of the Waldeberts, the Burgundopharones, the Crodoins, the Arnulfingians and the Pipinids—who reinforced their old privileges through Christianity and even through the work of the saints who came from their ranks.

Of course, these princes also recognised the ecclesiastical authority of the pope, who in turn could hardly impose his decisions against the royal will. The Merovingians often had ecclesiastics in their court administration and bestowed episcopal sees as sinecures on meritorious fighters. They showered some prelates with enormous possessions and privileges, but almost all were treated with great veneration. The most powerful bishops had particularly extensive holdings, occupying an almost feudal position. Some even maintained personal relations with the emperor of Byzantium. They were protected and dominated by Merovingian kings, who became the princes' godfathers. They not only accepted their violence but supported it, complacently sanctioning their wars and cruelties.

In addition to the ever-increasing Church lands—which represented an enormous and, to say it again, inalienable source of

income—there were other financial advantages. Such were, for example, the offerings, the raising of taxes, the tithe, which was invented in the 5th century as a kind of alms until the end of the 6th century when it was transformed from a moral obligation into a legal duty, with corresponding penalties for transgressors. Anyone who refused to pay it was excommunicated. A document, drawn up shortly after the Council of Tours (567) and signed by the metropolitan of the place and three of its bishops, demanded that the faithful pay the tithe, and not only of goods but also of slaves. This is the first time that the tithe is mentioned in a Merovingian text. The Synod of Macon threatened excommunication against anyone who violated the correct application of the tithe. In 779, under Charles 'the Great,' it became a compulsory tax.

The bishops, who had long since ceased to come from the middle class of society—Chlothar II (584-629) made it a rule that they should be chosen from among the members of the upper nobility—oppressed the people with the rest of the ruling class. Sometimes they ruled like true despots. They hardly fornicated and drank less than the laity. Sitting at the king's table, they spoke of their perjuries and adulteries Bishop Bertram of Bordeaux was even suspected of having had something to do with Queen Fredegund. They often appointed their successors themselves.

It happened that some towns even had two bishops at the same time. Thus, in Digne-les-Bains, two bishops divided the ecclesiastical property between them, before a synod deposed them both. Something similar happened in the monasteries, which also represented from the 5th century onwards important points of support in the urban sphere for the episcopal government of the cities. Since from the 6th century onwards they multiplied considerably and from the 7th century they belonged to the most important landowners in the country. At the end of the 7th century, when there were more than four hundred monasteries in the whole kingdom, such monasteries and churches owned a third of Gaul.

ST BONIFACE, 'APOSTLE OF THE GERMANS'

> *The Greatest Englishman* —Title of an anthology by Timothy Reuter
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> 'Moreover, any historian—including an atheist—should recognise that Boniface opened the door wide for us, that through him the frontier of Europe was opened to the east. The same is true of Charles's wars against the Saxons.' —K. König and K. Witte
>
> 'Boniface, who has influenced the history of Europe more profoundly than any other Englishman after him, was not just a missionary but a statesman and a genius of administration, and above all a servant of the Roman order.' —Christopher Dawson
>
> 'The glory of the Middle Ages rests in a good part on his work.' —Joseph Lortz, Catholic theologian

The ascension of the Carolingians

The political events of those years lie in a dense fog. The second half of the 7th century ranks among the darkest epochs of medieval history because at the end of the *Chronicle of Fredegar* in 643 the contemporary sources are almost completely silent.

Alongside the Saxons (and the Bretons), it was the Frisians who put up the fiercest resistance to the Franks. It took Christian soldiers and missionaries a whole century to subdue them. The Frisians were a people of peasants, fishermen and merchants, who didn't abandon their tribal settlement by the North Sea in the coastal territories between the Ems and Weser, even during the migrations of the Nordic peoples. Perhaps as early as the middle of the 6th century, the Frisians were (partly) subdued under the rule of Chlothar I. What is certain is that in 630 King Dagobert gave the Bishop of Cologne the castle of Utrecht with the task of converting them. During the bloody feuds under Dagobert's successors, Frisia's potential and economy flourished, and some foreign

preachers resumed conversion attempts, to no avail. Bishop Wilfrid of York, vigilant of Roman observance, wasn't happy.

Pepin himself made his fortress of Traiectum (Utrecht) the seat of Willibrord 'because the spread of Christianity among the Germans strengthened his political influence on the border of the kingdom' (Buchner). 'Frankish rule and Christian mission were mutually supportive' (Levison). 'Political and ecclesiastical interests went hand in hand in the new mission territory' (Zwolfer). All this has long been proven and undisputed. First the sword of the nobility, then the loquacity of the clergy, and finally the general bloodletting. On Pepin's death the pagan Frisian duke Redbad, who called himself king, repulsed the Franks. He reconquered the territories west of the Alter Rhein, and without Frankish rule the Christian Church collapsed. Only after Redbad died in 719 did the Franks break into West Frisia. Charles Martell, who supported Willibrord's ministry with magnificent donations and tax concessions, marched three times against the Frisians and in two wars against Duke Bobo (733 and 734). He seized the whole of central Frisia while eastern Frisia, at one with the Saxons, could only be subdued by Charlemagne.

In 718 Charles Martell (depicted above in the French book *Promptuarii Iconum Insigniorum*) ravaged Saxony as far as the Weser and in the same or the following year defeated a detachment at Soissons under the command of the steward Raganfred and Duke Eudo of Aquitaine. He soon led further campaigns against the Saxons, fighting them until 738, and even then Charles Martell was able to impose tribute and hostages on 'those incorrigible heathens.' These are the words of our source: 'The valiant Charles broke through with the Frankish army, encamped according to an intelligent plan at the mouth of the Lippe, by the stream of the Rhine, destroyed most of that strip of land with much bloodshed,

made some of that savage people tributary, took many hostages and with God's help returned home victorious.'

Charles Martell consolidated his power through continuous raids. Year after year he marched on a campaign, not only to secure his frontiers but also to expand them by subjugating and enslaving peoples. He didn't only advance against the Neustrians; he also fought everywhere against the Alamanni, over whom he achieved in 725 and 730 extremely bloody victories, while at the same time making Bishop Pirmin missionary in favour of his hegemony. Martell waged several wars against 'the savage maritime nation of the Frisians' ('one of the main achievements of his life'—Braunfels) and two campaigns, in 733 and 737, ending even with a 'bold maritime excursion' and 'with the right number of ships' he advanced with his fleet up the Zuider-zee. He completely devastated the country, killed the duke, the 'crafty councillor' of the Frisians, and burned the pagan sanctuaries—with the good Christian art of spreading the good news of the gospel. He fought the Saxons, whom he sent Boniface with a letter of recommendation. He marched against the Thuringians and the Bavarians, over Burgundy and Provence.

The irruption of Islam

Islam, which sought to re-establish the original religion, the 'religion of Abraham,' did not see in Moses and Jesus false prophets but authentic prophets who hadn't known the whole truth or whose teachings had been falsified by their disciples. Curiously, the new faith was at first regarded only as a 'heresy' of Eastern Christianity; nor is it strange that the scholastics still hesitate to designate the Muslims as 'heretics or pagans.'

Under Abdul Malik (685-705) and his son Al-Walid I (705-715) the Muslims conquered Turkestan, the Caucasus and northern Africa where they 'converted' the Berbers. In 681 they reached the Atlantic coast of Morocco and in 697 conquered Carthage. By 698 they had definitively seized all the North African fortifications, and from Tunis, the new capital, the occupiers' fleet controlled the western Mediterranean. Even before the end of the 15th century, the Arabs possessed the largest territorial empire in the history of the world, larger than the empire of Rome or the empire of

Alexander. Their empire eventually stretched from the Aral Sea to the Nile and from the Bay of Biscay to China.

Within a generation, the Church had lost two-thirds of its faithful to Islam. And almost all Islamic conquests, except the territories of Spain and part of the Balkans, have remained Islamic to this day. The first troops arrived on the Iberian peninsula, a group of about 400 men, in July 710. And the following year an invasion army of 7,000 soldiers arrived, soon reinforced by another 5,000. They entered through Gibraltar (named after the Arab sub-commander Tariq ibn-Ziyad). In the same year the invaders annihilated the army of the Hispanic Visigoths at the Battle of Jerez de la Frontera (Cadiz). By 715 they had occupied all the important cities in the country and in 720, after crossing the Pyrenees, they conquered Narbonne. The infidels were even said to have advanced as far as Tours to plunder the church treasury, stored in the tomb of Saint Martin.

It was there that Charles Martell faced the 'infidels' with the army summoned from all over the kingdom: plunderers against plunderers. Before the battle north of Poitiers they stalked each other for seven days, before the defeated Arabs, on 17 October 732, withdrew to Spain. Charles Martell continued his fight against the Arabs in 735, 736, 737 and 739, repeatedly penetrating into Aquitaine, 'the land of the Goths,' and Provence, the Roman province *Gallia Narbonensis*. After taking Avignon by assault, he had the defenders killed. Charles destroyed Nimes with its ancient amphitheatre and ravaged the cities Agde and Béziers. He had the most famous cities razed to the ground, with their houses and city walls set fire to them and reduced them to ashes. He also destroyed the suburbs and fortifications of that territory. When Charles Martell had defeated the army of his enemies, he, who in all his decisions was guided by Christ, in whom alone is the gift of victory, returned safe to his region, the land of the Franks and the seat of his government…

The first 'Carolingian' ruled over the whole kingdom, moving among the Merovingian puppet kings. The sources call him *dux* and *princeps* and the popes occasionally gave him the titles of *patricias* and *sobregulus* while, for his part, Martell accurately proclaimed himself *maior domus*. But he also financed many of his massacres with ecclesiastical goods—something which modern scholars have often falsely labelled secularisation—and continued to

live as a plunderer of the Church. However, Charles Martell was anything but hostile to the Church or the clergy, as is shown by his exaltation by such prominent propagandists of Christianity as Pirmin, Willibrord and Boniface.

Saint Boniface

Around 680, probably at the age of seven, the Anglo-Saxon boy Wynfreth (Winfrid), later called Bonifatius in Rome, was given by his father to the monastery as *puer oblatas*.[3] 'But the boy, who had been entrusted to the monastery without consulting his will, grew up to become a man of his own free will,' writes the German scholar Schramm today. In a monastery! A man of his own free will? As if Boniface had not been a servile slave of Rome for the rest of his life! 'Day and night he cultivated scientific studies to procure eternal happiness,' according to the priest Willibaid in his bombastic *Vita Bonifatii*, which he wrote about his monastic hero in Mainz at the end of the 8th century. Boniface began a propagandistic pilgrimage, but with a 'missionary authorisation' from Rome. Pope Gregory II (715-731) commissioned him on 15 May 719 'to exercise the service of the kingdom of God among all peoples imprisoned in the error of unbelief.' He was to examine—again in the poetic language of the biographer Willibald—'whether the uncultivated fields of their hearts were to be ploughed by the plough of the gospel.'

Deliverance from 'all uncleanness' among the people of Hesse, Thuringia, Saxony and some bloodshed

The inhabitants of Hesse were still largely pagan, while the Thuringians—among whom the Frankish conquerors built the first churches in their feudal castles—had been partially converted to paganism by Saxon raids and pagan reactions. In any case, despite his honey-sweet doctrine, Boniface quickly failed there, partly because of the Christian bishops and priests and partly because of the lack of military support. Still in 719 he left Thuringia and went,

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[3] ***Editor's note:*** Anyone familiar with the work of Lloyd deMause knows that paedophilia is not a recent phenomenon in the Catholic Church. From its earliest days parents who didn't love their young donated them to monasteries—the institution of *Oblation*—where they could be sexually used by the elders.

'filled with great joy' at the death of the Frisian Duke Radbod (according to *Vita Bonifatii*), to Frisia until 721 where he was placed under the command of the elderly missionary Willibrord, an 'Oblate' like himself, i.e. already spiritually violated as a child.

With the backing of the high Frankish nobility and the force of Frankish arms, Willibrord had, since 690, spread his knowledge among the West Frisians under Pippin II and, briefly and unsuccessfully, among the Danes and Saxons. He fled from Radbod with little apparent martyr's vocation and only returned after his death. Only the victorious campaigns of Charles Martell in 718 and 720 (repeated in 722 and 724) against the Saxons made possible the beginning of their Christianisation, their liberation from 'demons,' 'error' and 'diabolical fraud' (Gregory II). With the invocation of the Holy Trinity, Willibrord destroyed the 'idols,' desecrated and reduced to ruins the sanctuaries of the Frisians, killed their sacred animals and worked astonishing miracles. To put it briefly: it was in connection with the military men Pippin and Charles Martell that he weeded out 'the tares of unbelief' and strove to 'renew by baptism those who had just been subdued by force of arms' and 'to spread without delay all the light of the gospel' (Alcuin).

In 721 Boniface separated from Willibrord for reasons we ignore. He had refused to be consecrated bishop by Willibrord and returned to the territory of Hesse-Thuringia, where he founded a small monastery on the Amoneburg. After the first successes Gregory II called Bonifacius back and on 30 November 722 consecrated him a missionary bishop (without a fixed see). He thus became entirely bound to Rome by oath. Boniface benefited from the campaigns of Charles Martel and his donations to the church of Utrecht and the monastery of Echternach, which soon became the basis of gigantic Catholic propaganda that extended as far as the Meuse, the Scheldt and the mouths of the Rhine. In 722 Gregory II had also given the 'apostle of the Germans' a missionary commission for the Saxons. It is true that in 718 they had been driven out of the lower Rhine and defeated by Charles, but they remained almost entirely faithful to their ancient beliefs. They were one of those Germanic tribes east of the Rhine. The planned 'conversion' of the Saxons with mass baptisms only came about after Charles' long and carefully prepared campaign of 738, which was carried out in close cooperation with the clergy. Gregory III (731-741), who once called the Frankish warlord who waged war

almost year after year 'St Peter's beloved son,' declared the following in a letter to Boniface on 29 October 739:

> You have given us knowledge of the peoples of Germania, whom God has delivered from the power of the pagans, by having gathered into the bosom of the holy mother Church hundreds of thousands of souls by your efforts and those of the Frankish prince Charles (*tuo conamine et Caroli principis Francoruni*).

The number is certainly exaggerated. But the Saxons were 'delivered from the power of the heathen' only by the military expedition of Charles Martell (738) 'with dreadful bloodshed' (*Fredegarii continuationes*). And in connection with this came the mass baptisms of the Saxons. Their conversion to Christianity took place 'in close contact with the military-political organisation' (Steinbach). This is probably even a 'large-scale attempt at a Saxon mission before the period of Charlemagne' (Schieffer). It is true that Charles Martell was not very religious, but for political reasons he was 'extremely interested' (Buchner) in the spread of Christianity in the east. And there is no doubt that Boniface 'owed everything to the victorious arms and personal protection of Charles Martell' (Zwölfer).

Already in the years 718, 720, 722 and 724 Charles had fought against the Saxons, as mentioned above. He repeatedly crushed uprisings of the Frisians and Saxons, and it was only through these bloody acts of violence that the 'conversion' or, as Boniface puts it, the liberation of 'all the heathen's filth' depended. Gregory III attributed the missionary success as much to Charles Martell as to Boniface. And Boniface personally confesses to the English bishop Daniel of Winchester: 'Without the protection of the prince of the Franks (*sine patrocinio principis Francorum*) I could neither have guided the people of the Church nor defended the priests and ecclesiastics, the monks and servants of God, nor without his command and his fear could I have eliminated the pagan customs and the horrors of idolatry in Germania.'

The *beatissimus dominus* took care of women of 'the tribe of the Angles.' His kinswoman Leoba, a whole generation younger than himself, he appointed abbess in the see of the archbishopric; Thecla, a relative of Leoba, he made abbess of Vitzingen and Ochsenfurt-on-the-Main. And all certainly for the great cause, the

mission of all Germany, for the one whom Gregory III called 'the apostle of the Germans' (in reality: of Rome) and whom he appointed archbishop on a further journey to the Catholic capital (732), all for 'the very advantageous business' (*talis commercii lucro*) as is explicitly stated in such a context. Hence, the pope, with the whole Church, victoriously vindicated the apostle.

Of course, 'business' doesn't mean the 'pinch of silver and gold' (*argenti et auri tantillum*), which Boniface occasionally donated to the holy father, but the conversion of 'paganism and heterodoxy to the knowledge of the true faith.' From Hesse to Friesland he destroyed everywhere, 'more as a conqueror than as a converter' or missionary: the pagan places of worship and on their ruins with their very stones and timber, he erected Christian churches. He demolished the idols of Stuffo, Reto, Bil, the goddess Astaroth and so on. He tore down their altars, and felled the sacred trees in the Hessian forest, probably where, because they were under the direct protection of the Frankish fortress of Büraburg, they were in no personal danger, such as the oaks of Donar in Geismar, the tribal shrine, erecting with their wood a chapel to St Peter, 'his first sign of victory' (Haller).

St Boniface statue (Mainz).

But Boniface also had to see no less than thirty churches and chapels destroyed in Thuringia. In Rome, however, the apostle didn't only fight paganism, but at least as much, and probably even more, the sort of Christianity which wasn't obedient to Rome, as

among the Bavarians and the Alamanni. That was the second and shorter, though more important, phase of his activity. Bavaria, where Boniface reformed (739) the church with the help of duke Odilus, after his relations with Charles Martell had cooled, had already been Christianised much earlier, though not Romanised. Thus, Roman Christianity and the Scottish missionary, 'the first "Von-Rom Movement" (far from Rome!)' (Behn), 'clashed violently' in Bavaria (Schieffer). But there and in Thuringia Boniface, at the behest of Gregory II, eliminated as far as possible the old Christianity which had developed without violence. He tried to wrest the communities from the successors of these ecclesiastics and, with the help of state power, to bring them unceremoniously under the pontifical yoke. But the papal legate also and especially fought against the Frankish clergy, who had preserved their autonomy vis-à-vis Rome and whose reformer he had avoided, if not fought against. In 738 Gregory III therefore strongly recommended obedience to his man regarding the bishops of Bavaria and Swabia, and at the same time insisted: 'You must detect, prevent and annihilate the pagan customs and doctrines of the Bretons who roam everywhere, or of false and heretical priests and all their depravities.'

Boniface, who met with the 'fierce resistance' of many freemen (Epperlein), who was rude in his foreign manners, had no compunction and always went about with a large retinue; he was as obliging as they could wish for in Rome and more papist than the pope. He never asked why; he simply had to obey, as he had been taught. He was in fact 'the heir of the Roman Church in England' (Lortz).

The 'apostle of the Germans' was so unsure of his faith and so imbued for life with his tendency to sin, that he continually sent real questionnaires to Rome 'as if we were kneeling at your feet,' to receive answers to the supreme questions of conscience. Gregory II, who on 22 November 726 calmed his apostle's eagerness to ask questions, let him know 'the position in our Church.' An example: if parents have already deposited their sons or daughters 'within the walls of the monastery' (*inter septa monasterii*) at an early age, under no circumstances may they later leave the monastery and marry. 'We strictly forbid it, because it is a sin to loosen the reins of pleasure on children, who were consecrated to God by their parents.' What barbarism beats in that answer! Or behind this one:

'You have also asked the question whether, when a contagious disease or mortality invades a church or a monastery, those who haven't yet been affected can flee from that place to avoid the danger. That seems utterly foolish, for no one can escape the hand of God.' This rhetoric has not always, but quite often in everyday practice, been a function of minimisation, discharge and beautification. Theologians and historians, thanks to their phrase 'link to the times,' have no need to call the crimes and criminals of the Church and the State crimes and criminals. Those were times when some served two sides, attended the Christian liturgy and at the same time offered sacrifices to Wotan; they 'ate bulls and goats sacrificed to the pagan gods,' which could in no way harm either Christ or Wotan.

On 5 June 754, after twenty-five years of ministry, Boniface together with his choral bishop of Utrecht, and fifty companions were killed by the Frisians of Dokkum on the Doorn, fiercely defended by his men, in the fight of 'arms against arms' (*Vita Bonifatii*), as befits the Christians. Uselessly he held over his head 'the holy book of the gospels' against the deadly blow. And in a genuinely Christian manner, in 'the land of the infidels' burst 'at once the swift warriors of future vengeance, well-kept but unsatisfied guests' (*sospites sed indevoti hospites*), as the priest Willibald of Mainz wittily puts it, inflicting 'an annihilating defeat on the pagans who confronted them.' The Frisians fled, 'were beaten down in a huge mass, and turning their backs they lost their goods, estates and heirs with their lives. But the Christians returned home with the spoils of women, children, servants and handmaids of the idolaters' (*Vita Bonifatii*). Isn't that a joyful and pious religion? Especially when the Frisian survivors of the plunder, the enslaved women and children terrified by murderers, 'and by divine punishment,' embraced the faith of the one whom they had killed. Traces of this persist to this day in Fulda. Of course, this is only a half-truth. The whole truth is told by the priest Willibald at the end of the eight chapter of his *Vita* (the ninth and last chapter is 'a later addition'—Rau). The point is that, then, many miracles overflowed there:

> Where the sacred corpse had been deposited… divine favours overflowed abundantly. And all who came there, afflicted with the most diverse diseases, found health of body and soul through the intercession of the holy man. So that

> some, whose bodies were almost completely dead, who were almost exanimate and seemed to be breathing their last breath, regained their former health; others, whose eyes were covered with blindness, recovered their sight, and still others who, imprisoned in the snares of the devil, had their spirits troubled and had lost their reason, obtained the primitive freshness of spirit.

And all this thanks to 'the champion in the race of the spirit.' And, as is to be expected and as Willibald's work concludes, 'through the Lord, to whom be glory and honour for an eternity of eternities. Amen.' Unfortunately, we haven't finished with Christianity. On the contrary, by now it is developing more and more magnificently. While Boniface committed to the popes, the popes made a commitment for themselves. And for them the most important factors of power were still, above all, the Byzantines and the Lombards.

The dispute over the images begins

If we are well-informed about the 6th century of Byzantine history, thanks especially to the detailed descriptions of the historian Procopius, the 7th and 8th centuries remain in great obscurity. Only the chronicles of two theologians, both defenders of the images and who died in exile—that of the patriarch of Constantinople Nicephorus and, somewhat more extensively, that of Theophanes the Confessor—shed little light on that violent period within which the late 7th and early 8th centuries are regarded as one of the darkest epochs of Byzantine history.

Emperor Justinian II (685-695, 705-711), who tried so hard to derive imperial power from the will of God, had many thousands of Slavic families, previously deported by him, executed. In 695 he was expelled from the throne and, with his nose cut off, banished to Crimea. Subsequent rulers succeeded one another in rapid succession, and for two decades total anarchy triumphed. In addition, the Bulgars, nomads from the Volga territories, broke into the empire and in 711 advanced under Chan Terwel to the vicinity of Constantinople. In 717 the Arabs reappeared and besieged the capital, although Leo III (717-741) the Isaurian was able to repel them. But it was precisely this saviour of Byzantium, so exalted by Christianity to this day, who was also the author of a bloody

Christian quarrel, which shook the Byzantine world for more than a century and more violently than any other religious dispute, and contributed to no small way to the estrangement between eastern and western Rome.

By general estimation the conflict began in 726, when a devastating earthquake in the southern Aegean was interpreted as a 'judgement of God' because of the new 'idolatry' that had penetrated the Church: the worship of images. Emperor Leo III ordered the removal of all representations of saints, martyrs and angels, and in 730 ordered their destruction, not excluding images of Christ and Mary. Iconoclasm, which caught on not only among the clergy but also among the masses, has often been the subject of study but has been explained perhaps more contradictorily than any other phenomenon in Byzantine history. What is certain is that it shook the empire to hardly imaginable limits. Much more than a mere theological dispute or religious reform movement, it also represented a clash between civil and ecclesiastical power and reduced the state to a heap of ruins; and this at a time of a certain political recovery within and beyond the borders and when the Christological controversies had already ended.

Moreover, the starting point of the dispute over images was a purely theological-dogmatic problem. Already the primitive Indo-European religion was devoid of images, as were the Vedic, Zarathustrian, Old Roman and Old Germanic religions. And so was the Jewish religion in particular. The Old Testament already strictly forbade any worship of images. Nor did early Christianity know of any figurative representation of God. Quite the contrary. Just as ancient Judaism expressly condemned the making of representations and just as the prophets mocked 'those who make a god and worship an idol,' so also the early church fathers fought long and hard against the worship of images, which was to become so widespread later on. Even in the 4th century, theologians such as Eusebius and Archbishop Epiphanius of Salamis were against graphic reproductions, while the Council of Elvira forbade the reproduction and worship of images. On the contrary, it was 'heretics,' the Gnostics, who initiated the change and who introduced the image of Christ and its veneration into Christianity.

Its use spread to the East from the 4th century, and by the 6th century it was as widespread there as it is today. Not only images of Christ were venerated, but also those of Mary, the saints

and angels. It was mainly the monks who encouraged this practice for a very specific material reason: iconolatry was part of their business (e.g. the pilgrimages that brought money). The pro-icon theologians (*iconodules*) justified it all, because according to their interpretation it was not the dead image that was worshipped, but the living God and, as Nicephorus said, 'a vision leads to faith.' On the other hand, the destroyers of images (*iconoclasts*) tried to give renewed validity to the Christian prescriptions, which were unquestionably older.

But the people venerated the icons themselves as bearers of health and miracles. The icon became the content and synthesis of their faith. It was engraved on their furniture, clothes and armour. Thanks to heaven or priestly art, icons began to speak, bleed, to defend themselves when attacked. Moreover, there were eventually icons that represented a real novelty, since they were 'not made by human hands' (*acheiropoietai*). Thus the believing people increasingly exalted the images, identifying them with the saint they represented. They kissed the statues and the representations, and lit candles and lamps for them. The sick sometimes took coloured and scratched particles from them to obtain health. They were incensed and the faithful knelt before them; in a word, the people treated such objects in exactly the same way as the pagans treated their 'idols.'

And it was precisely the opponents of iconolatry, the iconoclasts, who interpreted this as a kind of idolatry. They came from the imperial household, from the army and especially from certain regions under the influence of anti-image Islam, such as the territories of Asia Minor. They also lived in the borderlands of the eastern part of the empire, where especially the Paulician admirers of the Apostle Paul were opposed to the worship of the cross and images, ceremonies and sacraments. These were 'heretical' Christians, who first appeared in Armenia in the middle of the 7th century and who for more than two centuries were extremely active on the eastern Byzantine frontier.

It is, however, curious, and at the same time sheds some light on the whole controversy, that the emperors and army, who were the most bitter enemies of the cult of images, had earlier been its special promoters. The rulers of the 6th and 7th centuries, taking advantage of the delirium of the masses for images, had used them for their political and especially military purposes. The images were led into countless battles and whole cities were placed under their

protection, turning them into fortress defenders. But all too often they had failed in that function as one city after another fell to the 'infidels,' which undoubtedly brings us closer to the direct cause of iconoclasm. If the images had performed the miracles expected of them, their destruction would probably never have happened. 'But the icons hadn't delivered what the people expected' (Mango).

The revolt had come mainly from the Eastern episcopate. The iconoclastic party had its main representatives in the minor Asian bishops Constantine of Nakoleia, Metropolitan Thomas of Klaudioupolis and Theodore of Ephesus. The iconoclastic party also had its first fatalities: several of the soldiers sent to remove the images were killed in a popular uprising. The iconodules, the image-worshippers, were found in almost every corner of the empire. In the East they included the nonagenarian Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople (715-730) and the metropolitan John of Symnada, as well as monks. In the West, the cult of images was defended by the great masses, and above all by the papacy, which claimed greater autonomy and even political leadership from the very beginning. It was no coincidence that Byzantine sovereignty succumbed to a considerable extent in central Italy.

The imperial court soon renounced iconoclastic actions in Italy. Although the monarch Constantine V (741-776), a vehement enemy of images, who declared himself a true friend of Christ and a worshipper not of his image but his cross, personally wrote some polemical writings and created his own theology, especially against the representation of Christ, which for him was an expression of Nestorianism or Monophysitism, i.e. the separation or mixing of 'the two natures' in Christ. And the Council of Constantinople (757) rejected outright the worship of images as the work of Satan and as idolatry.

The papal revolution fails

The mass of the clergy naturally knew that their power rested above all on the magic of the cause, on the beautiful appearance, on the outward and sensible charm of religious services; therefore they had to stand by the people, who venerated the sacred images. Gregory's irritation wasn't exclusively for theological reasons, but also very specific material reasons. Emperor Leo III successfully defended Constantinople by land and

sea (717-718) against the Arabs in one of the most decisive slaughters in world history. And so Asia Minor, which gradually freed itself from Islamic rule in a series of annual campaigns, remained Byzantine and Christian for almost seven centuries. To balance its finances after the war against the Arabs, new taxes had to be imposed; this affected above all the Roman Church, which with its extensive territorial holdings was the leading economic power in Italy.

The monarch had an image of Christ replaced by a cross at the entrance to his palace. But Pope Gregory II was the real leader of Italy in the uprising against his lord; he was 'the head of the Italian revolution' (Hartmann). So 'Be subject to authority' no longer counted; what counted was 'It is necessary to obey God rather than men.' And in practice God is always where the pope is! And the pope not only encouraged the patriarch of Constantinople, St Germanus, to fight against the emperor, but he called on the whole world, and so civil war broke out everywhere. Consequently the exarch Paulus was ordered to depose Gregory from his papal chair. But when the Ravenna militia arrived, the pope opposed them with a league of Italian soldiers and Longboards. Imperial governors and officials were expelled from Venice, Ravenna, Rome and Byzantine troops in Benevento and Spoleto. The exarch Paulus was eliminated by murderous hands. His generals were also eliminated. Doge Exhileratus and his son Adrian, excommunicated for years by the pope because of irregular marriage, were seized and killed by the Roman militia. The Roman doge Petrus had his eyes gouged out for having written to the emperor 'against the pope.' The uprising triumphed everywhere: His Holiness and the Longboards rose in common rebellion against the emperor. But the emperor eventually overpowered the rebellion. He seized all the pope's patrimony in southern Italy, with Sicily alone representing a loss of 350 pounds of gold.

The dispute over images continued throughout Leo's reign and became even more acute under his son and successor Constantine V (741-776), called *Ikonokiastes*, the destroyer of images (and also *Kopronymos* for having soiled the water at his baptism, and *Caballinus* because he liked the smell of horse manure). It is true that when in 742 an iconodule usurper rose, his brother-in-law Artabasdos kept Rome on the side of the iconoclast emperor and had the eyes of the vanquished and his sons gouged out, and Pope

Zacharias bequeathed a generous donation of land. Constantine, who took an active part in the long-standing dispute and who showed a remarkable interest in theological questions, had the invocation of the saints and Mary banned and all images of the saints removed or destroyed from the churches. This emperor especially persecuted the monks, who were all the more fanatical supporters of the cult of images because they had an economic monopoly on the manufacture of icons. The monasteries were expropriated and closed, transformed into barracks and bathing facilities or destroyed, as was the case with the monasteries of Kallistratos, Dios, Maximinos and others. Their inhabitants had to choose between giving up their habits and taking wives or being blinded and banished. In Ephesus, nuns and monks were forced to marry and others were executed with the backing of a council held in Constantinople in 754.

The 'blood and fire' struggle culminated in the 760s. Abbot Stephanos of Mount Auxentius, leader of the iconodule opposition, was lynched in the streets of Constantinople in November 765. In August 766 alone, sixteen high-ranking officials and officers, supporters of the cult of images, were executed. The following year the head of the patriarch Constantine was also rolled into the palace. The emperor had already had him flogged. Constantine, clean-shaven and wearing a derisory sleeveless dress, was led through the streets on a donkey to the hippodrome, where he was insulted and spat upon by the entire Christian populace. The donkey was led by the halter by his nephew Constantine, whose nose had been cut off. 'When he arrived in front of the circus games, they came down from their seats, spat on him and threw filth at him. At the stop in front of the imperial tribune, they threw him off his horse and stepped on the back of his neck.' At the end of the month the man disavowed his belief, and after demanding reparation, he was beheaded. His corpse was dragged through the streets to the slaughterhouse of the executed and his head hung by the ears for three days as a public chastisement.

CHARLES I, KNOWN AS THE GREAT OR CHARLEMAGNE, AND THE POPES

'The Christian religion, in which he was instructed from a young age, he always cultivated with great sanctity and piety (*sanctissime et cum magna pietate coluit*). He visited the church assiduously, morning and evening, also at night and during mass.' —Einhard

'His most important interlocutors throughout his life were the popes. The pivot of Carolingian politics, around which everything revolved, was the relationship with the Holy See.' —Wolfgang Braunfels

'The Merovingian state had been predominantly profane; the Carolingian empire, by contrast, was a theocracy.'

—Christopher Dawson

While the dispute over the images was raging in Byzantium and its repercussions were shaking Byzantine Italy, King Liutprand was trying to seize the opportunity to extend the Lombard kingdom throughout Italy, especially in Emilia and Romagna. He systematically annexed Byzantine territory, conquered castle after castle, and strengthened his authority over the duchies of Spoleto and Benevento. In short, he continually increased his political power within and beyond his borders. And when in 732 (or 733) Liutprand first conquered Ravenna—which had been in Byzantine hands for almost two hundred years and the exarch fled to the

Venetian lagoons—the ally proved too dangerous for the Papacy. Liutprand was a pious person, a faithful Catholic, a friend of the priests and an outspoken promoter of the Church. He erected a domestic chapel in his palace and was the first Lombard king to procure private chaplains. He instituted ecclesiastics 'to celebrate daily divine service for him' (Paul the Deacon). One of his relatives was the bishop of Pavia. He was generous with the clergy. He founded monasteries, built many churches which he decorated and practised the superstitious cult of relics. A prologue to his laws opens with a biblical quotation. And in a later prologue he expressly presents himself as a defender of the Roman Catholic faith. Gregory II fought against the return of the nuns to civil life, and Liutprand supported him with a relevant law.

Transamundus II had forcibly deposed his father Farvald in 724, imposing on him the tonsure and entry into the clerical state. When Liutprand advanced against him (738-739), set fire to the Pentapolis and ravaged Spoleto, Transamundus took refuge with the pope, who put the Roman army at his disposal against Liutprand. Liutprand in turn stormed into the Roman duchy, sacking it and conquering its castles on the northern frontier. And war broke out everywhere, both in Roman territory and in the lands of Ravenna. It is true that Transamundus provisionally (in December 740) conquered its capital and killed the new duke Hilderic, instituted by Liutprand. But the pope, who also used his bishops in the Lombard kingdom against his sovereign, was wary of the king's power and appealed to the Frankish prince Charles Martell, who was far away but strong. The Frankish steward, who from 720 undisputedly controlled the whole kingdom and fought almost without pause—also involving the Church to a large extent and using the monasteries as bridgeheads (Schwarzach, Gengenbach, Schuttem, the abbey of Reichenau)—saw the expansion of his authority and the spread of Christianity as inextricably linked. To put it briefly, Charles had become the most powerful man in Europe, and so accustomed was he to war and conquest that, as contemporary sources expressly note, there was hardly a year without war (namely 740). And that man appeared precisely as the true patron and protector of Christ's representative.

So Gregory III tried repeatedly in 739 and 740 to incite Charles Martell against Liutprand, although the two were personal friends. The pope dreamed of unshackling Rome from the

Byzantine empire and offered Charles the collation of the Roman consulship as well as the rank of patrician. Gregory III, who persisted in his efforts until his death appealed in vain to Charles. The latter, who was little devoted to the Church, who was genealogically related to the Lombards, who was allied with and a friend of Liutprand, who in 737 adopted his son Pepin, remained completely deaf to the first call for papal help and died before a second could eventually reach him.

Among the ancestors of the Carolingians, Charles is the only one whom later ecclesiastical authors condemn, casting him into hell for all eternity because of the systematic reduction of the ecclesiastical patrimony due to him (*precaria verba regis*). In his lifetime this was interpreted in a completely different way, even if he had one of his ecclesiastical relatives beheaded, Abbot Wido, who, according to the monastic chronicle, was more fond of hunting and war than of divine service. Of course, he didn't have him beheaded for that but a conspiracy against Charles. What we know for sure is that he was far from being a stubborn enemy of the Church. We know of eight donations of goods, which he made to him personally.

The most momentous event of the Middle Ages

A month after Charles Martel died, in December 741 Gregory III, the last Roman bishop to be confirmed by the Emperor of Byzantium, also died. His successor was Zacharias (741-752). Liutprand died at the beginning of 744, after thirty-twoyears of rule. Before the death of Charles Martel, Charles had divided the power of government between his sons Carloman, Pepin the Short and Grifo.

Already in the year of the change of government, bishoprics were created in Hesse and Thuringia (planned by Boniface since 732), and in the years 743 and 744 three great synods were held in Austrasia and Neustria, in which the total elimination of 'heresy' and 'paganism' was decreed. Charlemagne and Pepin—both educated in monasteries, Charlemagne probably in the monastery of Echternach by Willibrord, and Pepin in the monastery of Saint-Denis—carried the war far and wide. Both were, as Pope Zacharias says of his 'most illustrious sons', the 'companions and assistants' of Boniface. Moreover, both were 'under the inspiration of God'

(*inspiratione divina*). Thus, the holy father was able to guarantee the two great butchers also 'an abundant reward in heaven' for 'blessed is the man by whom God is blessed.' Even Pepin the Younger (741-768), who generally resided in the palaces of Quierzy, Attigny, Verberie and Compiégne and to whom Pope Zacharias had already given the title of *christianissimus* in 747, was 'a good Christian' (Daniel-Rops), 'inspired entirely by the Christian spirit' (Büttner). In his fight against the Saxons he reached the Weser in 753, in a campaign in which Hildegard, bishop of Cologne, perished on 8 August. In 758 he entered the territory of Münster and promised the Westphalians, on whom he had inflicted a heavy defeat, loyalty, an annual tribute of 300 horses and the free movement of Christian missionaries.

In eight campaigns, conducted between 760 and 768, he subdued Aquitaine, where he had once, and still in the company of Charlemagne, set fire to the suburbs of Bourges and destroyed Loches. Now he destroyed the castles and ruined the country. He set fire to Bourbon-l'Archambault as well as Clermont, setting fire to countless villages. He was accompanied by the eldest son of Pepin, Charles ('the Great,' Charlemagne): quite a school of life! Year after year, the Franks systematically plundered and destroyed the entire region from one end to the other. And the devastating effects of these wars could be traced back for generations.

Theodor Mayer writes about the state conception of the Carolingian period: 'It is clear what happened in the royal period of Pepin and Charles. It is the conception of kingship as an office, which does not derive from the divine descent of the royal lineage nor a military kingship, but which was instituted by God and conferred by the pope.' It was not until the Carolingian era at the latest when kingship was given a theocratic foundation and the sovereign became 'king by the grace of God' (*rex Dei gratia*), which is a formula of legitimation. 'The revived idea of "by the grace of God" had elevated and sanctified the royal dignity since the anointing of Pepin' (Tellenbach). And ever since the sons of Pepin, who were Carloman and Charles 'the Great,' all medieval kings bore the title *gratia Dei rex Francorum*, king by the grace of God. The king was thus sharply separated from the people, to whose choice he originally owed his privileged position, and placed close to God. This means that, since 'God,' properly understood and in a political vision, is only a symbol for the high clergy and their need for

power, insofar as the king is separated from the people, he is linked to the priestly hierarchy and placed at their service.

The king became an organ of it, a sharer in its ministry, its creature: an 'ecclesiastical person.' God meant *de facto* the Church, which gradually made its power more and more felt, which had even assigned the office of king, and the more the theocratic character of kingship was accentuated, the greater its influence. But this collaboration with the king led to an ever more marked weakening of the people and their total powerlessness. For it was no longer the people who were to control the king, but the high clergy. The king was consciously distanced from the people and presented as *majestas* far above the people. The people ceased to be subjects of rights; they had only duties, absolutely subject to the sovereign, who was no longer accountable to them. In any case, this is what the models developed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy were intended to do, although they were only imposed in the following decades and centuries.

Criminal excesses at the papal court

Pope Stephen II, who at the decisive moment had generously granted himself the 'Constantinian Donation,' died on 26 April 757. At his death, he left a considerably large territory, which for the time being remained in his family. Paul I (757-767), in fact, Stephen's successor, was also his younger brother, and the second Orsini pope to occupy the Lateran palace. Pope Paul, to whom his unofficial biographer constantly attributes a propensity for clemency, wanted a permanent war against the Lombards.

Scarcely had Paul I closed his eyes on 28 June 767, practically abandoned by all those close to him, when a violent revolt broke out in Rome, as so often before. Already the next day Toto, Duke of Nepi and head of a powerful family, stormed into Rome with his armed colonists and had his brother Constantine, a layman, elected as Paul's successor. The foundation of the church-state, the papacy's strengthened position of power, made it increasingly attractive to the nobility. Constantine seized the Lateran, received the relevant clerical orders and within six days was the pope. In St Peter's Basilica, he was solemnly consecrated by the bishops of Palestrina, Albano and Porto.

Constantine II (767-768), although elected in an anti-canonical manner, occupied the discredited throne for thirteen months without particular difficulty, conducted business, ordained clergy and even presided over a synod. But then he succumbed to a conspiracy of influential people, chief among them his chancellor and provost Christophorus, head of the papal officials, and his son, the chaplain Sergius. Placed under house arrest, at Easter 768 they both preferred to move to a monastery in Spoleto, San Salvatore in Rieti. They undertook to remain there by oath but fled to take refuge with the Lombard king. With the king's permission, they gathered reinforcements in Rieti, and at the end of July 768 these forces marched on Rome under the orders of the priest Waldipertus. There, one of the city gates was opened to them and a series of bloody street battles ensued; but a traitor, a creature of Christophorus, the ecclesiastical archivist Gratiosus, stabbed Duke Toto in the back. Pope Constantine fled from church to church, until he and his closest entourage were captured and imprisoned.

Cardinals and bishops had their eyes and tongues gouged out. Constantine, deposed and discovered by chance, was dragged through the streets of Rome in an ignominious procession, locked up in a monastic prison and tortured there under the orders of the ecclesiastical archivist Gratiosus, also the murderer of Duke Toto (and later himself a duke). No less bloody was the persecution of his closest supporters, who were mutilated and blinded. Bishop Theodore, who supported Pope Constantine to the end, had his eyes and tongue torn out and was imprisoned in the monastery of Clivus Scauri where he soon succumbed in horrible pain. Passivus, Toto's brother was also imprisoned in the monastery of St Silvestre, and all his property was seized. Likewise, the priest Waldipertus, the agent of the Lombards who had placed Philip on the papal throne, was given a short trial. True, he sought asylum in a sacred place, the church of Santa Maria Maggiore; but he was torn from there with the image of the Madonna to which he was embraced, and thrown into a dungeon of the Lateran, where he died mutilated.

At Easter 769 a synod was held at the Lateran. In addition to twenty-four Italian bishops, it was attended for the first time by thirteen Frankish bishops. This underlined, as His Holiness said in his opening speech, the ecumenical character of the cause. Constantine, already blind, was led and interrogated on 12 and 13 April in the basilica. In the first session, he confessed to having

more sins than there was sand in the sea. He prostrated himself in the dust but declared that the people had made him pope by force because they were not satisfied with the harsh regime of Paulus. The assembled fathers threw themselves furiously upon Constantine, slapped the pope whom they had already deposed and threw him out of the church. They burned the acts of his pontificate, including those of his election, which Stephen himself had signed. But the pope then intoned a *kyrie eleison* and all fell to the ground and confessed themselves sinners for having held communion with the reprobate Constantine. He was condemned to lifelong penance and probably spent the rest of his life in a monastic prison.

Again and again, it becomes clear that Christians have a compassionate heart; not all enemies are eliminated at once. Here, too, people live and let live.

The beginning of the pro-pope warfare

Shortly before Pope Stephen died at the end of January 772, Carloman had died (after having made large donations to churches and monasteries, and especially to the cathedral of Rheims and the abbey of Saint-Denis) on 4 December 771, near the beautiful forests of Laon where he liked to hunt. He was only twenty years old. Such a misfortune probably triggered a fratricidal war that was already in the offing. Charles, then probably in his early thirties, became ruler of the entire Frankish kingdom in flagrant violation of the law, as he deferred the inheritance rights of Carloman's two sons, both of whom were still children, and in a swift act of plunder he took over his brother's kingdom. This was a centuries-old Christian tradition, both in the East and in the West. And it ran in the family, since Charles Martell, Charles's grandfather and also a bastard, had already excluded the direct heirs in a very similar way. And in 754, didn't Charles' father Pepin tonsure the sons of his brother, the deposed Carloman, locking them up in a monastery and burying their right of inheritance there forever?

The founders of Europe!

Strangely enough, we know almost nothing about Charles' childhood and youth. Even the year of his birth is disputed. The new *Lexicón des Mittelalters* (still unfinished), however, gives per other sources that are supposedly second-rate the date 2 April 747. The

specific date comes from an old calendar from the monastery of Lorsch. For a long time Charles was also considered to have been born out of wedlock; it was believed that he was born before the marriage of his parents, Pepin and Bertrada, daughter of Count Charibert of Laon, a relationship that only years later became a real marriage. Einhard wrote his famous book, *Vita Karoli Magni*, fifteen or twenty years after Charles's death; but twenty years before that date he was already living in the palace of the then fifty-year-old king. He soon became part of his innermost family circle, sitting at his table and becoming his confidant; so it is completely implausible that he had heard nothing about his hero's childhood and youth—especially when Einhard says that Charles spoke almost continuously, that he could be considered a 'chatterbox.'

Pope Stephen's successor was Pope Adrian I (772-795), who reigned longer than any of the popes who preceded him. Adrian, who belonged to the Roman nobility, was already the third pope of the house of Colonna, and at the same time a strong supporter of his relatives, who held the most important offices of state. In foreign policy Adrian broke with the pro-Bardic attitude that had been maintained by his predecessor. He soon mounted a front against Desiderius, who refused to return to the Roman Church some of the cities and territories that had been the fruit of Pepin's wars of plunder. By papal order, as soon as Paulus Afiarta, a supporter of the Lombards, returned from their court, he was seized by Archbishop Leo of Ravenna who had him tortured and executed.

The elimination of the leaders of the pro-Lombard faction of the curia again provoked the Lombard king's threats and attacks on the Church-State, with the obligatory arson, plunder and robbery. And so again came the Pope's cries for help. He openly reminded Charles of the example of Pepin. He repeatedly urged and pressed him to intervene 'against Desiderius and the Lombards in the service of God, in favour of the rights of St Peter and for the consolation of the Church,' and to 'complete the preservation of the holy Church of God.' In this way he prepared the way for Charles' intervention in Italy, who would later march south five times, anticipating the numerous Italian campaigns that the Germanic emperors would carry out in the future. Einhard says: 'At the request of Bishop Adrian of Rome he [Charles] launched the war against the Lombards. The pope, whose enlisted troops on all

sides could not even remotely cope with the military might of his enemies, was burning with impatience for Charles' intervention.'

It seemed almost impossible to take the passes that the Lombards had closed and to cross the gorges, 'the Gates of Italy.' Walls, fortifications and towers enclosed the gorges of the valleys between mountain and mountain. The Franks were pinned between steep walls, their cavalry still less able to manoeuvre than their foot troops. Charles, huddled and sulky in his tent, held one council of war after another with his military, parleyed with the Lombards and softened his demands more and more; but in vain. Then a skilful deacon, sent by Archbishop Leo of Ravenna, led a *scara francisca* over a high, undefended ridge, which centuries later, with the ruins of such fortifications still standing would be called the 'Path of the Franks.' Surprised to suddenly see the Franks in their rear, the Lombards thought they were surrounded and abandoned their positions in disarray. It was a ruse that Charles often used in the war against the Saxons. The aggressor first conquered Turin and then his army, crossing the Po plain 'like an immense tide of floating ice' (Stormer), fell on Pavia. Charles rejoined the other army corps and at the end of September laid siege to the Lombard residential town, which was heavily fortified and well supplied with soldiers, arms and supplies.

Charles prepared for a long siege, had his sons brought from the far-off homeland and also his wife Hildegard, who was fourteen years old. And when he heard that Adalgis, son of Desiderius, had taken refuge with Carloman's widow and children in Verona, then undoubtedly the most fortified city in Italy, he set out at once with a small troop. Whether due to treachery or regular surrender, Verona soon capitulated. The kinsmen, Gerberga with her sons, passed at Charles' disposal but the sources are silent about their fate. At best—as twenty years earlier with the beloved relatives of his father Pepin—they were tonsured into monasteries. In any case, they disappeared from history.

The bloody mission of the Saxons (772-804)

Desiderius, the last king of the Lombards, went with his wife and daughter, Charles' ex-wife, to a Frankish prison, then disappeared into a monastery (probably in Corbie), where he still survived for some time. In any case, he disappeared forever. The

Longobard kingdom was wiped off the map. 'Of all the wars Charles fought,' writes Einhard, 'the first was the Aquitanian. After that war was over Charles was induced by the entreaties and pleas of [pope] Adrian, bishop of Rome, and declared war on the Longobards. He then resumed the war against the Saxons uninterrupted for thirty-three years.' The Saxons, whose name means companions or people of the sword, are first mentioned in the writings of the mathematician, astronomer, and geographer Claudius Ptolemy, who lived in the 2nd century. 'Without avarice and without excess, quiet and isolated, they do not provoke any war, nor cause devastation by campaigns of plunder.' Their armed raids were carried out by sea and by land: the former in hollowed-out tree trunks, in which they could fit about three dozen men.

Arriving perhaps from Scandinavia, they preferred to settle in coastal areas. For a long time they stayed in the northern part of France, which was called *sinus saxonicus* (Saxon gulf), and in Flanders, also occupying the Lüneburg territories after the withdrawal of the Lombards. In the mid-5th century a large part of the Saxons moved to England, but the majority remained on the continent, where their kingdom extended throughout what is now northwest Germany, with the exception of the Frisian territories.

Of all the German counties, only the Saxon shires, of which we know more than a hundred by name, remained in the same hands. Less exposed to Roman influences they also preserved their national identity better than the peoples living further south. And those pagan Saxons had 'the best laws' as even the abbot of Fulda, Rudolf, acknowledges. 'And they strive for many things of profit and in accordance with the natural law they pursue honourable things with the honesty of manners.' Their name doesn't comprise a single tribe, but rather an association of tribes (about which researchers argue), to whose formation contributed, in addition to the Saxons, the Angrivarians, the Cheruscans, the Lombards, the Thuringians and the Semnones. Later, the Westphalians, Ostrophalians and Elbe Saxons also joined them. The Franks, however, regarded them as members of a single people and generally called them 'Saxons' without further distinction. After their joint conquest of Thuringia with the Franks in 531 they took the eastern part, which still bears their name.

It is probable that the Saxons, too, originally had kings, but no real kingdom or duchy developed among them. Their society

consisted of four classes: nobles (*nobiles*), freemen (*liberi*), *liti* and slaves (*servi*); the 'liti' being those bound to the soil, the serfs of the glebe. The lower classes defended themselves against the Christianisation and domination of the Franks, while the nobility sought to safeguard their interests by relying on the enemy of the state. Elsewhere, too, it was the wealthy class that was the first to convert to Christianity. While, for example, the nobility of Civitas Treverorum in the bishopric of Trier converted at the end of the 4th century, the tenant farmers, serfs and farm labourers remained longer and more stubbornly attached to the old beliefs, converting only in the middle of the 5th century. And also among the Slavs their princes probably preceded their tribes in baptism. According to Flaskamp:

> This was the way things went everywhere with officially directed missionary work, there being nothing special about the fact that the Frankish mission developed 'from the top down.' A 'democratic' construction, starting from below, from the socially insignificant popular strata, would have been impossible, for it would have appeared as demagogy and would have been rejected by the nobility.

It can hardly be considered accidental that in the complete change of the situation during the first Christian centuries it was everywhere the ruling class that obtained the greatest advantages from the religion of love.

Plunder and Christianisation, a trump card of Frankish government policy

While the Franks had fought in unison with the Saxons in the annihilation of the kingdom of Thuringia in 531, in 555-556 Chlothar I conducted two campaigns against them. In the first he succumbed to a significant defeat, but in the next he imposed a tribute on them. Around 629, during a devastating campaign, Chlothar II had all Saxons who lifted more than his sword killed. But when in 632-633 they helped Dagobert I against a Vendean army, and although they contributed little to the campaign, the king waived the 500-cow tribute they had been paying for over a hundred years. They were thus fully independent. But when they broke into the lower Ruhr territory in 715 Charles Martell waged a series of devastating wars against them, forcing them to pay tribute and taking them hostage. As among the Frisians, neither among the

Saxons considered to be 'the most pagan' (*paganissimi*) did the attacks alone achieve any success. All these advances beyond the Frankish realm 'involved something irremediably reckless' (Schieffer). And, as among the Frisians, the clergy also soon collaborated closely with the conquerors in the subjugation of the Saxons. Both helped each other. First the country was plundered by the sword, then the common rule was consolidated by Christian ideology and ecclesiastical organisation; thus the conquered and 'converted' adapted and were economically exploited.

The Frankish kings and nobles had no more devoted collaborators than the clerics, and the clerics found no more solicitous promoters than Frankish feudalism. The military victory brought with it immediate Christianisation. Where the Frankish sword didn't reach, like the Danes for example, there was no mission either. Hence, just as among the Frisians, so also among the Saxons their struggle for freedom was immediately transformed into a struggle against Christianity, which appeared to them as a symbol of slavery and foreign domination. Hence, both Frisians and Saxons particularly hated the clergy, destroyed churches in any uprising, expelled missionaries and not infrequently killed bishops and priests, and were suspicious *a priori* of any Christian preacher who appeared. He was almost always, in fact, in the service of a hostile power which imposed the yoke and acted as its introducer and stabiliser.

The aim was to 'convert' at once as many people as possible: a whole tribe, a whole people. Massive success was sought beforehand, as was always the case later on in the Middle Ages. Thus, in the 8th century, more and more attempts were made to open the way for Christianity at any cost and to baptise the vanquished by force. 'This connection of war and Christianity heralded the new form of cooperation between Church and State' (Steinbach). Christianisation was now on the heels of the campaign of subjugation, with the undeniable aim of binding the subjugated more strongly to the kingdom: 'A trump card of the Frankish governmental policy, which responded to the conviction that the evangelical doctrine of compulsory obedience was capable of subduing obstinate rebellion even more than the power of the sword' (Naegle). Among the Saxons, among whom the enslaved peasants were extraordinarily numerous, the lower working classes partly put up violent resistance to Frankish expansion and forced

conversion. For them it led to a kind of slavery. The Saxon nobility, on the other hand, whose dominance was threatened by free and slave in a class struggle that was becoming more and more acute, was much more open to the new religion, which was in fact feudal, and more willing to compromise (the situation was at least very similar in Thuringia). The Saxon nobility very early on favoured missionary action to secure its dominance over the lower classes and to strengthen their position, a characteristic behaviour throughout the war. In 782 and 898 the same nobility openly handed over their less trustworthy peasants to the Franks. They also immediately made numerous donations to the Church. On the other hand, the lower classes (*plebeium vulgus*) still rejected Christianity in the second half of the 9th century.

The people maintained pagan sacrifices and customs and hated Christian parish priests. Only Charles' sword achieved the goal. Crushings and uprisings followed one after the other, provoking campaign after campaign. It took a war of more than thirty years, which devastated the country continually, decimated the population, and soon assumed the character of a war of religion, to spread the good news and the kingdom of God a little further into the world; to lead the Saxons 'to the one true God, to convince them that there was something greater than fighting and victory, than death on the battlefield and pleasures in Valhalla' (Bertram).

It was the bloodiest and longest war waged by the Franks, according to Charles' confidant Einhard in his *Vita Caroli Magni*, the first hagiography of a ruler of the Middle Ages. And this 'iron-tongued preaching'—to use a 9th-century expression—with which the country of Saxony was converted became a kind of model for all Christian missionary practice in the Middle Ages. Only Frankish accounts of the Saxon wars exist, so the clerical chroniclers distorted the mission of blood and fire until it was passed off as a serene and entirely peaceful work of conversion.

The Christian banners enter Saxony

Charles' armies—which in the larger campaigns consisted of just 3,000 horsemen and between 6,000 and 10,000-foot soldiers—sometimes numbered more than 5,000 or 6,000 warriors. Unlike in the time of his grandfather Charles Martell, the core of the army was made up of heavy cavalry. The horsemen were armed with

chain mail, helmet, shield and shin guards, with lance and battle-axe (worth approximately 18 to 20 oxen). And all this for Jesus Christ. The foot companies, still numerous, fought with mace and bow. Only from 866, under Charles the Bald, was every Frank who owned a horse obliged to military service so that the infantry ceased to play an important role in the army. Moreover, in the Carolingian wars, no soldiers were paid: the spoils of plunder were shared out.

The Christian butchery ('mission by the sword'), with which Charles continued his father's Saxon wars, began in 772. The 'gentle king,' as he is repeatedly called in contemporary royal annals, then conquered the frontier fortress of Eresburg (today's Obermarsberg, next to the Diemel), an important starting point of his military operations during the first half of the Saxon wars. And he destroyed (probably there) the Irminsul, the Saxon national shrine, consisting of an extraordinarily large tree trunk which the Saxons venerated as 'the pillar supporting the Universe' in a sacred grove in the open air. Later Charles entrusted Abbot Sturmi of Fulda with the command of the fortress of Eresburg which had been recaptured, again and again, lost, destroyed and rebuilt. But other bishops and abbots also provided Charles with military services. Like the counts, they were also obliged to maintain a camp, an obligation which was also incumbent on the abbesses. Even at that time, clerical troops accompanied the Frankish army, so that, according to Sturmi's biographer, 'through sacred instruction in the faith, they might subject the people, bound from the beginning of the world with the chains of demons to the gentle and light yoke of Christ.' Exactly from that year onwards, Charles used a seal with the inscription: 'Christ protects Charles, King of the Franks.'

After the Christians had completely plundered the place of worship, set fire to the sacred grove and destroyed the pillar, they left with the sacred offerings piled up there and with abundant treasures of gold and silver, 'the gentle King Charles took the gold and silver he found there,' as the Royal Annals succinctly state. And soon after, on top of the plundered and destroyed gentile sanctuary, a church was built 'under the patronage of Peter' (Karpf), the gatekeeper of heaven, displacing the Saxon God Irmin (probably identical to the Germanic God Saxnoth / Tiwas). In the following years, 'the gentle king' fought mainly in Italy. Through the emissary Peter (that was the name of the envoy), Pope Adrian had invited him 'for the love of God and in favour of the right of St Peter and

the Church to help him against King Desiderius' (*Annales Regni Francorum*). But already in 774, barely back from the plunder of the Longobard kingdom, the good King Charles sent four army corps against the Saxons: three of them 'were victorious with the help of God,' as the royal analyst once again reports, while the contingent corps returned without even having fought, but 'with great booty and without loss' to the sweet home. And then Charles himself somehow introduced 'Christian banners into Saxony' (Groszmann), with the result that 'the war became more and more the war of faith,' as Canon Adolf Bertram acknowledged in 1899.

Concerned about the further course of the war, Charles had consulted an expert by courier if there was any sign that Mars had accelerated his career and had already reached the constellation Cancer. He conquered Sigibur on the Ruhr and crossed the Weser, 'many of the Saxons being slain there,' advancing towards Ostfalia, intending 'not to give up until the defeated Saxons had either submitted to the Christian religion or had been completely exterminated.' It was the programme of a thirty-three-year war 'with an increasingly religious motivation' (Haendier). Indeed, in its planning, it represented something new in the history of the Church, 'a direct missionary war, which is not a preparation for missionary work but is itself a missionary instrument' (H.D. Kahl).

This was precisely the decade in which the prayer of a sacramentary (a missal) openly called the Franks the chosen people. Charles' wars against the Saxons were already regarded as wars against the heathen and were therefore considered just. 'Rise, thou chosen man of God, and defend the Bride of God, the Bride of thy Lord,' the Anglo-Saxon Alcuin, one of his closest advisors, urged him. And later the monk Widukind of Corbey wrote: 'And when he saw how his noble neighbouring people, the Saxons, were imprisoned in vain heresy, he strove by all means to lead them to the true way of salvation.' By all means. As far as the year 765 is concerned, the royal *Annals* make it lapidary clear: 'After having taken hostages, seizing abundant booty and three times provoking a bloodbath among the Saxons, the aforementioned King Charles returned to France with the help of God (*auxiliante Domino*).'

Booty, bloodbaths and God's help are things that keep coming back, and the good God is always on the side of the strongest. In 776 'God's strength justly overcame theirs and the whole multitude of them, who in panic had fled one after another,

killing one another, succumbed to the mutual blows and so were surprised by God's punishment. And how great was the power of God for the salvation of the Christians no one can say.' In 778 'A battle began there, which had a very good end. With God's help the Franks were victorious and a great multitude of Saxons were slaughtered.' In 779 'with the help of God…' etc. And between the regular mass murders in the summers, sometimes in this palace estate and sometimes in that city, the so-called peaceful king celebrated Christmas.

The heathen were being fought, and that justified everything. Groups of clergymen accompanied the beheader. Miracles of all kinds took place. And after each campaign, they returned with abundant booty. In the principality of Lippe, there were mass baptisms, especially of nobles: the Saxons came with women and children in countless numbers (*inumerabilis multitudo*) and had themselves baptised and left as many hostages as the king demanded. And at the brilliant national assembly, held at Paderborn in 777 they again thronged and solemnly abjured 'Donar, Wotan and Saxnot and all evil spirits: their companions' and pledged faith and allegiance 'to God the Father almighty, to Christ the Son of God and the Holy Spirit.'

A mission along military shock lines

So now the Saxons not only had to answer for their subordination 'with all their freedom and property,' but the territory of which they were dispossessed was immediately divided, and in the presence of numerous bishops, between the bishoprics of Cologne, Mainz, Würzburg, Lüttich, Utrecht as well as between the monasteries of Fulda and Amorbach and into mission dioceses, according to the respective geographical situation, becoming firmly incorporated into the Frankish kingdom. Still, during Charles' lifetime, the bishoprics of Münster, Osnabrüch and Bremen, the real 'nerve centre' of Christian propaganda among the Saxons, were established. Thus the division of the missionary bishoprics corresponded from 777 'to the military shock lines of the Franks on the Lower Rhine and Main' (Lowe).

Soon Charles brought missionaries from everywhere to the conquered territory: missionaries from Frisia, Mainz, Rheims and Châlons-sur-Mame. Clerical propagandists from episcopal cities and

monasteries which in ancient times were already 'feudal castles' (Schuitze), but which at the beginning of the Middle Ages already had functions that later, when medieval politics was largely a politics of the burgs, belonged to the burgs proper. From Cologne, Lüttich, Utrecht and Würzburg; from Echtemach, Corbie, Visbeck, Amorbach, Fulda and Hersfeld came the bearers of the good news to the adjacent heathen country. Everywhere the sword was followed by 'the mission in inseparable connection' (Petri), and the salvific event was 'now inextricably interwoven with the military conquest of foreign territory as a common work of the Church and the feudal state' (Donnert). Annexationist war, missionary politics and the sword and the cross—the military and the clergy—, all now formed an inseparable unity, working side by side as it were. What the sword took away, preaching had to preserve. 'The mission had made a promising start' (Baumann).

The military backbone of Charlemagne's wars, 'veritable bloodbaths' (Grierson), were according to the Roman model the frontier fortresses, built on mountains and on the banks of rivers, which were difficult to conquer. It is therefore not surprising that the first fixed episcopal foundations were at the entrance and exit gates of the Weser fortress: Paderbom, where Charlemagne later, on his return from East Saxony, stopped again and again with his troops where he built a royal palace and, as early as 777, a 'church of admirable grandeur' (*Annales Laureshamenses*): the church of St Saviour, Osnabrück and Minden as well as the two oldest monasteries of the early Frankish period in Saxony, Corvey and Herford. 'Under Charlemagne, new monasteries were founded almost exclusively as footholds in the newly subdued pagan country' (Fichtenau). The bishoprics of Würzburg, Erfurt and Büraburg in Fritziar had also already been erected, precisely where a few years later Carloman and Pepin conducted their campaigns against the Saxons (743, 744 and 748). In addition to the missionary centres in Saxony, the monastery in Fulda also played a special role; also the monastery of Mainz, which soon became an archbishopric around 780, to which the bishoprics of Paderborn, Halberstadt, Hildesheim and Verden were soon subordinated. Thus the ecclesiastical province of Mainz was, until its dismemberment in 1802, the largest in the whole of Western Christendom while the new Westphalian foundations of Münster, Osnabrück and Ninden were annexed to the bishopric of Cologne.

It is easy to understand why ever larger estates were confiscated there in favour of the Church and protected by the burghs. Charlemagne generously endowed many monasteries and supported them in their struggle against his serfs. Therefore, the Saxons must not only have seen in every Frankish missionary a spy or a defender of foreign sovereignty but 'in every Christian settlement they saw a foothold for the aggressive Frankish armies' (Hauk). Every war against the Christians was for the Saxons a kind of religious war: a struggle for paganism and political freedom at the same time. This is precisely what intensified the Saxon resistance, why churches were repeatedly destroyed and churchmen were expelled or killed. And just as in the first years of the Saxon conflict King Charles had already sent out repeated military expeditions against the Lombards, so in 788 he also made a famous 'excursion' against the Moors in northern Spain, an armed expedition, which, however, turned out somewhat differently. Since Charlemagne's Hispanic intermezzo failed the king tried all the harder to get even with the Saxons.

The butcher of the Saxons

While Charles was making his conquests in northern Spain and losing them again—the only defeat suffered by a Frankish army under his command—Widukind, a Westphalian nobleman who had returned from Danish emigration, advanced with his Saxons south to Fulda and west to Koblenz and Deutz. Feudal castles and churches were destroyed and villages burned and annihilated in a rampage that was not so much for booty as for revenge. In 779 Charles advanced to the Weser, and in 780 to the Elbe. Again not only the East Saxons but even the Wenden on the other side of the Elbe and 'people from the north' were baptised. Again there were pledges of allegiance and new hostages were taken. At a national assembly in Lippspringe, the sovereign tried 'explicitly to promote [the spread of Christianity in Saxony] and thus accelerate the development of feudal relations' (Epperlein). Christian priests spread the new 'enlightenment' among the occupied burghs. 'They carried crosses and sang pious songs; soldiers heavily armed with all kinds of weapons were their escorts, who by their determined gestures accelerated Christianisation' (De Bayac).

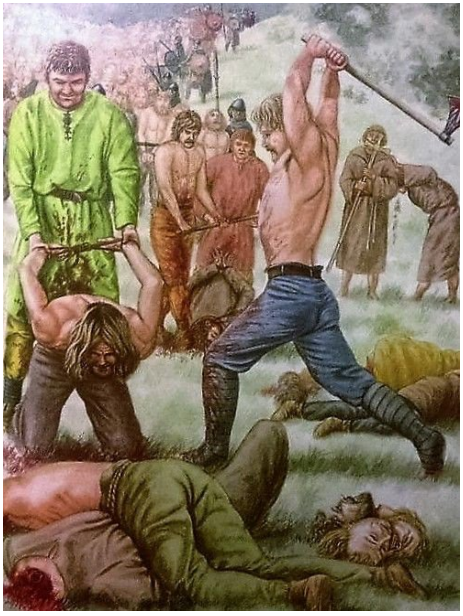
The plundered territory continued to be distributed to bishops and abbots; missionary dioceses were created, churches were built and even minor monasteries, such as those of Hersfeit, Amorbach, Neustadt on the Main, were incorporated by Charles into the conversion of the 'pagans'; and above all Fulda, whose abbot Sturmi held ecclesiastical and military command over the Saxon fortress of Erasburg until shortly before his death. In the northwest, the propaganda was carried out by Bishop Alberic of Utrecht, who had destroyed the remnants of 'paganism' in West Frisia. On his orders and backed by Charles' military power, Alberic's monks smashed the statues of the Gods and plundered the pagan shrines and everything of value they could find. The monarch gave part of the treasures of the temples to the bishop for ecclesiastical purposes. The Anglo-Saxon St Wilehad, who had already indoctrinated the Frisians, albeit without much success, organised the northern part of subjugated Saxony on Charlemagne's behalf from 780 onwards. Similarly, St Liudger worked in Central Frisia at Charlemagne's request.

But when the East Frisians, and also large sections of the population of Central Frisia, rose in revolt against the Saxons, destroyed the churches and turned to their former beliefs, the Christian preachers left the country in haste. The Englishman Wilehad, who shortly afterwards was consecrated bishop for the Saxon mission and first prelate of Bremen, fled to Rome and then devoted himself—according to Echternach—'for two years to study and prayer' (*Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*). St Ludger, later Bishop of Münster, took refuge in Rome and Monte Cassino. Without the protection of the Frankish arms, the heralds of the good news couldn't survive. But as soon as the occupiers regained control of the countryside, the ecclesiastical lords also returned with their swords to the propaganda front. Wilehad took up his seat in Bremen and St Liudger established himself, on Charles' orders, east of the Lauwers. There, with the backing of royal power, he destroyed the pagan shrines (*fana*), advanced to the islands and, with the support of Frankish soldiers, devastated the sacrificial places of the Frisian God Phoete in Heligoland.

For the rest, many churchmen must have returned only reluctantly among the rebellious Saxons. And when the Saxons, along with the Vendeans, rose again under Widukind, their fury was focused on the clergy and Christianity, with many of the churches

being set on fire, while the priests fled. A Frankish army was wiped out at Süntel, 'almost to the last man being slain by the sword' according to the *Annals*, which adds: 'The Frankish loss was even greater than the figures might indicate.' Two dozen nobles also perished in the slaughter. But before Charles arrived, the Saxon nobility and some Frankish troops had already crushed the rebellion. The Saxon 'nobles' surrendered the rebels.

And then Charles intensified the expansionist and missionary war until the famous beheading of Verden on the Aller and then, as usual, celebrated Christmas and Easter, the birth and resurrection of the Lord.



One day in the late autumn of 782, there stood 4,500 Saxons, squeezed like animals in the slaughterhouse and surrounded by their own 'nobles,' who had handed them over, and by the paladins of the great Charles, 'the pilot light of Europe,' as a manuscript from St Gallen of the 9th-10th centuries calls him. By his sentence, they were beheaded and thrown into the Aller which swept them into the Weser and then into the sea. 'There were 4,500 of them and that is what happened' (*quod ita et factum est*), as the royal analyst laconically puts it, 'and he celebrated Christmas,' just where the future 'Saint' soon had a church built (not an expiatory

chapel, but rather a triumphal chapel) and where the cathedral of Verden stands today: literally, on rivers of blood.[4]

Just imagine: 4,500 people beheaded and then the canonisation of the murderer!

'It is true that he eliminated 4,500 Saxons,' writes Ranke, adding later, 'but later on the serene tranquillity of a great soul stands out in him.' The resistance of 'the most heathen' against Christianity and Frankish sovereignty didn't disappear, but rather grew stronger. Rebellion broke out again throughout the country. Again Widukind appeared at the front, dragging the Frisians into his uprising. And again all offered sacrifices to the Gods between the Lawers and the Fli. All that was Frankish and Christian was persecuted, rejected and eliminated.

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[4] Even in the 20th century, 'professionals' in the Catholic and Protestant camps have sometimes tried to deny the orgy of cruelty and barbarism. Episcopalian devotionalists and some 'specialised theologians' worked shoulder to shoulder on this subject, especially during the Nazi period. In 1935, the ecclesiastical spokesman of the Osnabrück bishopric spoke of 'the fable of the Verden blood trial.' Similarly, the Protestant professor of Church History at the University of Munich, Kari Bauer, claimed in 1936 that the verb *decollare* (to cut the throat), which appears in the sources, was a misspelling instead of the original *delocare* or *desolare* (to banish); consequently, 4,500 Saxons were only expelled from the place. It must be said, however, firstly, that this verb or a similar one isn't used in the various sources; and secondly, that four yearbooks of the time speak of the 'slaughter' (*decollare / decollatio*) of the Saxons. Such are the royal *Annals*, the *Annales Amandi*, the *Annales Fuldenses* and finally, in the first half of the 9th century, also the *Annales Sithienses*. And the chroniclers all from the most diverse places would have committed in a highly mysterious way the same 'errata.'

And it would be a very different 'misprint' if, as one researcher suspected earlier, the author of the sources 'as a result of a false reading of the original had removed a couple of zeros' (H. Ullmann). On the contrary, Donald Bullough rightly observes: 'But not to believe the king capable of such an action was tantamount to making him more virtuous than almost all the Christian kings of the Middle Ages.' The stabbing of a vanquished enemy on the battlefield was then commonplace unless one expected more profit from the slaves and the ransom money. And one thing is also easily forgotten: that most of the hostages, which the king took year after year, were regularly killed, as soon as those whose obedience the hostages guaranteed rose against the king again.

Charlemagne, or rather Charles, rushed to Saxony, leaving the still-fresh grave of his young second wife, the blessed Hildegard, who died on 30 April 783 in Diedenhofen. Her disappearance must certainly have affected him, unlike the death of the 4,500 Saxons (yet that same year she gave him a successor, who was once again a female child). And through Saxony he advanced again with much bloodshed and 'with the help of God.'

With God's help the Franks were victorious, and a very great number of Saxons fell there so that only a few were saved by flight. And from there the most glorious king arrived victorious in Paderborn. And there he assembled his army. And he continued his march to the Haase when the Saxons rejoined. There another battle was fought, and not a few of the Saxons fell, and the Franks were victorious with the help of God. Those royal *Annals*, which we have just quoted, about the year 783, refer to the only two great pitched battles of the whole war, near the present Detmold and on the Haase, in the very heart of the Weser fortress. Only 'a few of the great multitude escaped,' the chroniclers say of the Saxon defeat at Detmold, and 'many thousands' were killed. And according to another ancient source, also at the Haase an 'innumerable multitude of Saxons' covered the battlefield, 'again many thousands, more than before.' Again Charles won 'with divine help,' returned among the Franks and 'celebrated Christmas' and in the meantime also many thousands were reduced to slavery.

In the following year (784) the monarch devastated Saxony, especially Ostrophalia while his son, following in his footsteps, devastated Westphalia again with God's help of course. 'With God's help Charles, the son of the great King Charles, was victorious with the Franks after many Saxons had died. By divine design, he returned unscathed to his father in the city of Worms.' The winter of 784-785 was spent by Charles with the very young Fastrada, whom he had married the previous year, with her sons and daughters in Eresburg. And only then did the resistance of the Saxons gradually collapse. And while he was celebrating the resurrection of the Lord, he again sent out a soldiery, and he undertook 'a campaign' of devastation, plundering and clearing roads, setting fire to whole forests, destroying crops, blinding springs, murdering peasants, taking fortresses and fortified towns 'for an order is an essential condition for their work' (Daniel-Rops).

In 785 the Saxon people, so severely punished, were almost exhausted their capacity for resistance, and seemed, at last, to have submitted 'to the soft and light yoke of Christ' as the biographer of Abbot Sturmi, that fanatical missionary of the Saxons—who preached the fight against the 'pagans', demanded the destruction of the temples, and the cutting down of their ancient sacred forests to build churches on them—had long wished. Charles had communicated his victory to the pope, who had sent him his congratulations, and at the end of June 786 he ordered a triduum of thanksgiving to all Christianity in the West, even beyond the seas, wherever there were Christians.

Last uprisings, war of annihilation

The war of the Saxons, which lasted for more than ten years didn't, however, affect the foreign sovereignty of the Franks, or even Christianity as such. Rather, it was directed primarily against their representatives and institutions, against the Church, their rigorous attacks on private property, and their brutal collection of tithes of which Alcuin, Charles' Anglo-Saxon adviser, had already complained seeing predators (*praedones*) in the missionaries rather than preachers (*praedicatores*). 'That tithes had destroyed loyalty and faith' seems to have been a proverbial saying among the Franks. The northern Albigensians then fought the Church with the same harshness that the latter had shown. Everywhere the new temples were destroyed, the ecclesiastics expelled and not infrequently the Christian Saxons murdered and their possessions plundered. In short, the entire ecclesiastical organisation north of the Elbe was completely eradicated.

The uprising grew into a war of annihilation lasting more than ten years, with extreme cruelty on both sides. The counter-offensive, which was only resumed in the autumn of 794 and in which Charles took several relics with him, consisted of simple raids of destruction. Several times he even used pagan Slavs, such as the Wilzos and the Obrodites, whose King Witzin was attacked and killed by the Saxons at the Elbe crossing. Charles plundered, destroyed and ravaged everything he could find, mainly with the use of firebrands, and killed thousands of people. After a victory at Kiel it seems that 4,000 Saxon corpses littered the battlefield. And year after year he made large numbers of hostages, taking every third

males—'as many as he wanted' the chronicler says—most of whom he 'regularly killed' (Bullough). Until 799 the 'apostle of the Saxons, he who preached the gospel with a bronze tongue' (Bertram), marched annually against them. In 802 he sent out another army, while he spent the whole summer in the Ardennes indulging in the pleasures of hunting. In 804 he returned in person to the battlefield, where the Saxons finally succumbed to his power. To make any uprising impossible, he ended up ordering mass deportations with frightful large-scale population transplants, such as the Byzantine Christians had already practised. 'He took out such several hostages as had never been seen in his day, nor the days of his father, nor in the days of the Frankish kings,' says one chronicler. The man who, as early as 794 at the synod of Frankfurt, openly presented himself as 'head of the Western Church,' had his army settle thousands of Saxons with their wives and children in the years 795-799 and 804, totalling 160,000. Even today the event is still remembered by some place names on Frankish soil, such as Sachsenfahrt and Sachsenmühie.

Many of the deportees, however, were placed in closely guarded camps and had to spend the rest of their lives there. One source even speaks of 'total extermination.' And not a few Saxons, who had certainly not yet been cleansed of all 'pagan filth' by the sacred bath of baptism, were sent in the course of the war to Verdun, the great slave emporium. Thus, in the North, the relations of ownership and possession were completely changed. For even the territory stolen from the Elbe was again divided among bishops, priests and his lay vassals. And in the 9th century, numerous monasteries were founded in Saxony at the expense of private nobles.

Thus, using a thirty-three-year war, Charles had convinced 'the most heathen' of the idea 'that there is still something superior to fighting and victory, superior to death on the battlefield,' as Cardinal Bertram, the encourager of two world wars and Hitler's assistant, assures us. Charles had 'planted the victorious and beneficent cross in the virgin soil of the Saxon country.' And, finally, most importantly, 'the serene height of the staff acted beneficently and alongside the power of the royal sceptre and sword.'

Charlemagne's bloody laws

The king issued draconian laws, evidently whenever he believed that he had finally subdued the Saxons and could bring them to 'order.' Notable in this respect are the *Capitulatio departibus Saxoniae* (782) and the *Capitulare Saxonicum* (797). And as conversions to Christianity were forced by mass baptisms, while the Saxon people secretly persisted in their 'paganism' and abhorred the clergy, Charles imposed a complete change of ideological education based on the total eradication of ancient beliefs and their rites, and by the forced baptism of all Saxons. Of the fourteen provisions of the *Capitulatio*, which carry the death penalty, ten refer exclusively to crimes against Christianity.

He had previously sought the advice of the pope and was clearly guided by the missionary method of the Fulda monks for the extirpation of 'paganism,' which began with unceremonious mass baptisms and the total destruction of their shrines. A stereotypical *morte moriatur* (die without remission) threatened everything the heralds of the good news wanted to erase: the plundering and destruction of churches, the cremation of the dead, the rejection of baptism, the secret avoidance of baptism, the mockery of Christianity, the undermining of church property, the offering of pagan sacrifices, the practice of *gentile customs* and so on. This was its tenor:

• If anyone violently breaks into a church and steals anything from it, or sets fire to the church, let him die without remission.

• If anyone out of contempt for Christianity does not keep the sacred fast of forty days and eats meat, let him die without remission.

• If anyone, according to heathen custom, causes the body of a deceased person to be destroyed by fire and reduces his limbs to ashes, let him die without remission.

• If anyone in the future among the Saxon people pretends to hide without having been baptised because he wants to remain a pagan, let him die without remission.

• If anyone in agreement with the heathen plots something against the Christians and seeks to maintain hostility against the Christians, let him die without remission.

Even the transgression of the precept of fasting carried the death penalty! Baptism in the first year of life, church attendance on Sundays and feast days, the taking of oaths in churches and even the observance of the canon law on marriage were ordered. As Alcuin had already criticised, 'severe penances were imposed for the slightest faults.'

Since the forcibly converted Saxon people cared little or nothing for Christianity, they had to continue to be forced to support the Church. Everyone, noble, free and common, had to give the Church a tithe for the harvest of their fields and all their earnings. In addition, each church was to get two rural estates, as well as one manservant and one maidservant for every 125 inhabitants, so that the mass of the Saxons was exploited as never before. The aim of Charles' war could hardly be stated more clearly and convincingly: the destruction of 'paganism,' the expansion of Christianity and annexation.

Karolus serenissimus augustus

As the beginning of his prolix title already read in 801, that peacemaking Caesar, crowned by God and reigning also *per misericordiam Dei*, the one who from 802 was also called *imperator christianissimus* and who (supposedly) died with the words of Psalm 31: 'Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit,' that man had prepared one slaughter after another, and in his forty-six years of rule—from 768 to 814—he had warred almost continuously with about fifty military campaigns. For only two years (790 and 807) he didn't fight 'A happy period for the Church' (Daniel-Rops).

There is nothing strange about the fact that in the *Chanson de geste*—the French epic poems of the early Middle Ages—he is already 'more than two hundred years old,' accompanied by his bravest paladins. He fought against the Lombards, the Frisians, the Bavarians, the Avars, the Slavs, the Basques and the Arabs in Spain, and the Byzantines in southern Italy, with offensive wars almost coldly planned and with which he inflicted death, often cruel and terrible death, on countless people. And not only did he kill in the wars, but he also had 4,500 prisoners murdered and thousands of families banished. Or, as it is said in one of the oldest liturgical poems in honour of Charles: 'He struck down thousands, cleansed the earth of the heathen weeds, converted the infidels, broke the

statues of the gods, drove out the foreign gods.' For him, according to his biographer Einhard, the wars against the Saxons and the Avars were more important than all other political tasks. Moreover, for certain ecclesiastical circles in the 10th century, the Saxon wars were the most important work he did for the Christian mission.

It is not just that Charles 'the Great' in fact killed, subjugated and enslaved without pause (winters generally excepted); that he was nothing but a warrior, conqueror, murderer and predator on the grandest scale—which, as the most learned of scholars have long since taught us, was then so commonplace, so much a part of the 'Saxon way of life' was then so commonplace that to criticise it would be a crass anachronism, from our 'enlightened' time as well as being arbitrary, rigorist, moralistic and square-jawed in the extreme. No, it is also about the fact that Charles 'the Great' carried out all this incredible bloodshed with the most intense participation of Christianity and the Church of his time (which, of course, were also 'sons of their time'! according to the apologists). And that this Church never protested, but rather took full advantage of it all.

The point is that the Christian feudal state and the Christian feudal Church were one and the same thing—and the same thing in crime. Charles, whose true 'book of state' was the Bible, and whose favourite works included Augustine's *City of God* (*De civitate Dei contra paganos*), not only ruled and acted as king of the Franks but also as an enlightened protector of the Church, an interlocutor and ally of the pope evidenced by his legislation, epistolary correspondence written by ecclesiastics and his closest collaborators. This monarch was a kind of priest-king, he was *rector et devotus sanctae ecclesiae defensor et adiutor im omnibus* (guide and devoted defender and helper of the Holy Church in all things).

Empire and Church became indissolubly intertwined in the *imperium christianum*, with hardly any difference between political diets and ecclesiastical councils. Charles convened synods, over which he presided; he chose bishops and abbots as he pleased, and in Saxony he instituted the bishoprics he needed. When he needed an archbishopric for his attacks on the miserly, he had the pope erect the archbishopric of Salzburg. He also disposed of church property, enriching popes and bishops with territories. He granted them numerous privileges of immunity and punished the violation of ecclesiastical immunity with the doubled royal penalty of 600

solids. He freed the bishops from taxes and granted them the right to mint money. He punished the plundering and burning of churches with capital punishment. But above all, he imposed the universal obligation of tithes on the clergy and demanded tithes for the Episcopal churches at the state level. He also bequeathed three-quarters of his cash to the Church, which he took special care of in his last years (while he left only one-twelfth to his children and grandchildren as a whole, and one-twelfth to the palace servants). And the prelates were also entirely dependent on him, although their influence during his reign grew considerably: under Charles, they marched to war, acted as judges alongside the counts and were at the head of the royal court.

A 1967 study lists no less than 109 places of worship of St Charles. These include Aachen (where Charles' death day, 28 January, is still celebrated in the cathedral today, and where I celebrated my name day as a child), Bremen, Brussels, Dortmund; Frankfurt, Fulgem and Falkirk (three of the main places of Charles' cult), Fulda, Halle, Ingelheim, Cologne, Constance, Lüttich, Mainz, Minden, Münster, Nuremberg, Regensburg, Strasbourg, Trier, Vienna, Würzburg and Zurich. It is also noteworthy that Charles received cultic veneration throughout Saxony. For centuries Charles 'the Great,' Charlemagne, has been regarded as the ideal model ruler, and for many, for very many, he still is today.

Voltaire and Gibbon stigmatised his barbarism and denied him personal greatness. At the beginning of the 19th century, Napoleon was exalted to the full extent of his power as a 'Charlemagne redivivus.' After the founding of the German Reich in the 19th century, Germans rediscovered Charles' Germanness and his bellicose spirit. In the fascist era, amid the Second World War, the 1200th anniversary of Charlemagne's birth was celebrated on 2 April 1942, and he was presented as 'Charles the Unifier.'

The Carolingian empire, the *imperiun christianum*, as Alcuin called it from 798, the *regnum sanctae ecclesiae* (*Libri Carolini*), stretched from the North Sea to the Pyrenees and the Adriatic. It covered what is now France, Belgium, Holland, western Germany, Switzerland, most of Italy, the Marca Hispanica and Corsica. It was approximately 1,200,000 square kilometres in area: almost as large as the Western Roman Empire.

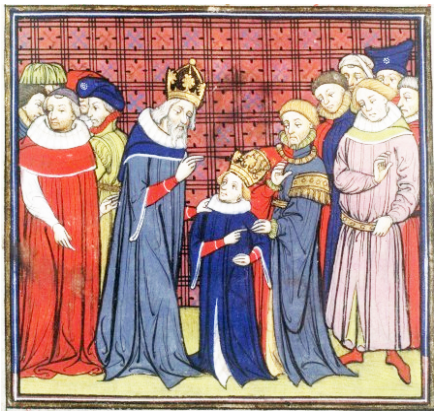
LOUIS THE PIOUS

> 'Ludwig's empire was in fact to be an empire of peace… This, however, did not exclude wars against the pagans, but demanded them precisely, since they were regarded as allies of Satan.' —Heinrich Fichtenau

Charlemagne, the saint, was not only active on the battlefields. As far as we know, he also had nineteen children, eight sons and eleven daughters, and of course with nine different wives (still an almost modest figure compared to the 61 children of Bishop Henry of Lüttich, that tireless worker in the vineyard of the Lord, or Pope Gregory X of the 13th century, who had '14 children in 22 months'). But despite the Carolingian blessing of the sons, there was no problem in the matter of succession. In case of death, Charlemagne divided the empire among his three sons through the so-called *Divisio regnorum*. In addition, each was to assume the *Defensio Sancti Petri*, the protection of the Roman Church.

But quite unexpectedly the father saw the two eldest sons go to their graves: in 810 Pippin and the following year Charles, to whom the imperial crown had long been assigned as the main heir. All this affected the ruler to such an extent that he even considered becoming a monk. Of his 'legitimate' sons only the youngest remained and, as he was well aware, the one least suited to the throne: Louis, born in 778 in Chasseneuil near Poitiers. He would be enthroned emperor at the age of thirty-six, only to be deposed and enthroned again, losing the throne once more and regaining it later. In any case, Louis the Pious had what it takes: even as a child 'he had learned to fear and love God always,' as one of his contemporary biographers reports around 837. Charles exhorted his son and successor to love and fear the Almighty especially; to keep his commandments in all things, to rule his churches, to honour priests as fathers and to love the people as his children. He was to

force proud and wicked men to enter the way of salvation, help the monasteries and procure God-fearing servants.



Charlemagne crowns Louis the Pious.

From that coronation onwards Charles, who was already quite decrepit and limping on one foot, did nothing—if we are to believe Bishop Thegan—but pray, give alms and 'improve' or 'correct magnificently' (*optime correxerat*) as Thegan himself says, the four gospels, the infallible word of God, before he died on 28 January 814. He left his son a gigantic empire, almost entirely the fruit of the plundering that he and his illustrious predecessors and ancestors had carried out, and consisting of four strong units: France, the centre of the state with the royal courts and the great abbeys; Germania, Aquitaine and Italy.

Killing and praying

Two fields that had long defined every Christian ruler, and would continue to define them decisively for many centuries, also marked the life of the young Ludwig: war and the Church. All Christian nobles had to learn the profession of war from an early age. As a rule, they had to be trained in equestrian combat even before puberty, and at the age of fourteen or fifteen, and sometimes even earlier they had to be able to handle weapons. And naturally, 'the nobles were burning with the desire to go into battle' (Riché).

Louis, too, who had a vigorous body and strong arms, and who in the art of riding, drawing the bow and throwing the spear 'had no equal,' but who, according to the results of research, was a

peaceful man, accompanied his father in his desire to annihilate the Avars at least as far as the Viennese forest. Shortly afterwards, in 793, again on his father's orders, he supported his brother Pippin in a punitive campaign in southern Italy. And yet Ludwig was a particularly good Christian, even better than his saintly father. On Charles's orders, the pious and peaceful son also broke into Spain. He subdued and destroyed Lerida. 'From there,' writes Astronomus, 'and after having devastated and burned the other cities, he advanced as far as Huesca. The territory of the city, abundant in fields of fruit trees, was razed, devastated and burnt by the troops and everything that was found outside the city was annihilated by the devastating action of the fire.'

As was almost always the case at the time, only winter prevented the young Louis from pursuing the actions typical of Christian culture. For the rest, the Catholic hero not only set fire to cities; sometimes he also burned men but only 'according to the law of retaliation' (*Anonymi vita Hludovici*). All very biblical: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. And, according to the same source, as soon as 'this was done, the king and his advisors felt it necessary to begin the attack on Barcelona.' And after the besieged, starving for weeks had devoured the old hides that served as curtains at the forty-one gates and others, driven by the desperation and misery of war, had thrown themselves headlong from the walls, the evil enemy surrendered. And Louis celebrated 'with a feast of thanksgiving worthy of God,' marched with the priests, 'who preceded him and the army in a solemn procession and amid songs of praise, entered the city gate and made his way to the church of the holy and victorious Cross.'

Genuine Christianity.

In this connection we read of Ludwig in an old Catholic standard work that 'he was always in good spirits,' that his spirit was 'noble' and his heart was 'adorned with all good habits' (Wetzer/Welte). A bloody sword and a heart of gold is something that fits perfectly into this religion. Was it not even a distant and modest reflection of the good God and his handling of hellfire? This is how the doctor of the Church and Pope Gregory 'the Great' expresses himself with his knife-sharp theology: 'The omnipotent God, as a kindly God, takes no pleasure in the torment of the wretched; but as a just God he defines himself as uncompassionate by punishing the wicked for all eternity.'

A comfortable religion: something that works for all cases. It was precisely with this God, kind but 'not compassionate for all eternity' towards the wicked—and all enemies are wicked—that all kinds of robberies and murders took place, as was already the case in the time of the Merovingians and the Pippinids, constantly repeated in the Christian West. And again we read:

> But trusting in God's help, our people, though greatly outnumbered, forced the enemies to flee and filled the path of the fugitives with many dead, and their hands did not cease in slaughter (*et eo usque manus ab eorum caede non continuerunt*) until the sun disappeared and with it the light of day and the shadows covered the earth and the bright stars appeared to illuminate the night. With the assistance of Christ, they departed from there with great joy and bringing many treasures to their own.

With Louis I (Ludwig or Ludovico Pio i.e., the Pious) 'the Christian doctrine reached the lowest strata' and is becoming more and more firmly established. In order that the blood of all those barbarously murdered should not splash too much, that this chronicle of cruelty should not overflow to the brim, the spiritual and divine are always emphasised with greater emphasis, only to be smeared with blood in a dignified manner later on. That is why in the same context the chorepiscopus Thegan says: 'He never raised his voice to laughter.' And likewise: 'When he went to church every morning to pray he always bent his knees and touched the ground with his forehead, praying humbly for a long time and sometimes with tears.'

Louis the Pious was influenced by the clergy from his childhood. For this reason he was so early subject to the Church that, had his father not prevented him, he would have become a monk. And, as Astronomus also celebrates after his death, 'he was so solicitous for the divine service and the exaltation of the holy Church, that judging by his works he might be called a priest rather than a king.' Pious, super-clerical and even rather hostile to the culture imposed by his father, he not only replaced the sensual courtiers in Aachen with clerics but also expelled all prostitutes and locked his sister in a monastery.

The emperor, the clergy and imperial unity

Louis the Pious was even more accommodating to the clergy than his father and the many historians who call him devout, clerical and prudish are quite right. Already at the beginning of his reign, the young monarch renewed all the ordinances that had been issued in the time of his predecessors in favour of the Church of God. For this, he relied almost exclusively on clerics, mostly 'Aquitanians,' of whom Bishop Thegan, a personage well acquainted with the emperor, said that 'he trusted his counsellors more than necessary.'

The one who probably became the emperor's most important adviser was the Visigoth Witiza, whom he greatly revered, with his programmatic monastic name of Second Benedict, and who was the son of the Count of Maguelonne, one of the dreaded swordsmen. In any case, this Benedict educated in the courts of Pippin III and Charles I (his feast is celebrated on 11 February) took part as a good Christian—a 'good Christian' certainly, as well as a 'great soldier'—in the military campaigns of Pippin and Charles, before the tragic death of his brother pushed him to wear the monastic cowl. But he failed again and again in his ascetic career. He left the monastery of Saint-Seine in Dijon because he found it too lax. Then, at his father's estate of Aniane in Montpellier, he drove away his first disciples with his rigorism. He then professed the monastic rules of Pachomius and Basil, because he found the Rule of Benedict of Nursia useful only 'for weaklings and beginners.' But when he again entered into a vocational crisis, he extolled the Rule of Benedict of Nursia, which he reviled as the only valid norm for a monastic existence.

But one can hardly speak of weakness in the Benedictine Rule. When monks were rebuked by a prelate, they had to prostrate themselves at his feet until he permitted them to rise. And if a monk ran away, Benedict ordered him to be dragged back with his legs locked and whipped. The saint also ordered to have a prison in every monastery, and the monastic prisons of the Middle Ages were barbarous, and the conditions of existence in them were extremely harsh, for imprisonment 'was equivalent in its consequences to corporal punishment.' (Schild). Moreover, this monastic reform 'always contained a touch of bitterness against human science and culture' (Fried). Abbot Benedict of Aniane—to whom Louis first

entrusted the Marmoutier Abbey in Alsace and then the monastery of Inden—spent much more time at court than at his monastery. The sovereign went there frequently anyway, and so he was given the name of 'the Monk.' Benedict, who ruled over all the Frankish abbeys, remained until his death (821) the key man at court, where he dealt with trifles, memorials and complaints as well as important and serious matters, advising the emperor above all on the vast politico-ecclesiastical reform begun in 816.

The reform movement of the abbot, inspired by the Rule of Benedict of Nursia, aimed at the formation of a single Christian people out of the numerous peoples of the empire—which corresponded exactly to state policy. It sought to make Christianity the basis of all public life; moreover, it wanted to establish the *Civitas Dei* on earth: one God, one Church, one emperor, whose office always counted within the Church more than any ministry conferred by God. The prelates were therefore strongly interested in the unity of the empire, and their leaders passionately defended the idea of such unity. But they were in no way primarily interested in the empire but in the Church, with the benefit of the Church foremost in their minds.

Benedict's monastic reform, his 'principle of one rule,' affected not only monastic life, the so-called spiritual affairs. At least as important, if not more so, was the ecclesiastical patrimony. The emperor did not want it to be divided or diminished either in his reign or in the reign of his successors. He also forbade the already long flourishing soul-hunting, the luring of children into the monastery with flattery to gain their fortune, thus prohibiting a practice which had been in vogue since ancient times and which is still practised today, namely the disinheritance of relatives in favour of the churches.

Louis the Pious had his enemies' eyes gouged out and made a public confession of his sins

The first rebellion against Louis' new order, which was to ensure the unity of the Empire and the Church, of the throne and the altar, came from Bernard of Italy. The only son of King Pippin, the predator of the Avars' treasure, educated after his father's death (810) in the monastery of Fulda, officially adopted the title of 'king of the Longboards' after the imperial assembly of Aachen (September 813). When, under the *Ordinatio Imperii*, he had to

submit to Lothair I, son of Louis, as he had previously submitted to his grandfather Charlemagne and Emperor Louis, he rebelled with numerous magnates of his kingdom. The sources are unanimous in stating that this initiative didn't come from the young sovereign, who was then in his early twenties, but from his advisors.

A few months after the publication of the *Ordinatio Imperii* of 817, Bernard, together with 'some wicked men' (*Annales regni Francorum*)—including the court poet Bishop Theodulf of Orleans, Bishops Anselm of Milan and Wolfold of Cremona, as well as some abbots—mounted an uprising which was widespread but poorly organised. The aim was to dethrone Louis and put Bernard in his place. But everything suggests that it was not so much a question of dethroning as of ensuring the continued existence of Bernard's small kingdom.

The emperor mobilised large contingents of troops, and demanded that the abbots and abbesses 'do military service' because 'by Satan's cunning King Bernard had prepared for sedition.' He set off southwards at full speed and passed over the Alps into Italy. But even before the uprising had properly begun, and without even having crossed swords, Bernard appeared with his loyalists at Chalon-sur-Saône, apparently of his own free will. He laid down his arms and threw himself at the emperor's feet. Bernard's great ones acted similarly, who 'as soon as the first interrogation began, they openly and *motu proprio* declared the whole course of the affair.' In vain. Louis had them arrested, sent them to Aachen and there, in the spring of 818, during the imperial assembly, in a delicate manner—as the imperial analyst repeats—and only after 'the fasting time of Lent had passed' he had them sentenced to death, at least all those considered civilians, and then 'pardoned' the death penalty by the cruel punishment of plucking out their eyes. 'They were simply deprived of their sight' which was 'legally irreproachable' (Boshof).

King Bernard, whom Louis had earlier called his son, and who in turn had just fathered a child named after his grandfather Pippin, was severely punished. He died with his eye sockets emptied 'notwithstanding the emperor's clement manner,' two days later, on 17 April 818. His treasurer and advisor Reginhard, as well as Reginhar, the grandson of a Thuringian rebel against Charlemagne, also defended themselves and succumbed to the terrible procedure, for 'not having endured with sufficient patience to have their eyes gouged out' (*Anonymi vita Hludovici*).

In August 822 Louis made a public confession of his faults at the imperial diet of Attigny. He regretted his crime against his young nephew Bernard, who died miserably; he regretted the hardness of his heart against his little half-brothers, on whom he imposed the clerical tonsure, and against Adalhard and Wala, his father's cousins. This was a singular procedure in the history of the Franks, a humiliation of the emperor by the clergy, behind which were perhaps in a very special way Charlemagne's cousins who had been deeply humiliated in the past.

Foreign policy

Louis the Pious waged war almost year after year, as befitted a Christian and believing ruler, mainly because of dynastic conflicts and internal political problems. But again and again, he also crossed the frontiers or had them crossed: as a universal ruler, he hardly ever took part in the campaigns himself but had others fight for him. This had long been the method of all rulers in the biggest massacres of the time. Pacts were scarcely of any interest any more.

In 815 a Saxon-Obotrite army attacked the Danes but, after a series of devastations everywhere, it returned with forty hostages without having achieved anything. In 816 Louis sent his troops against the Sorbs. This time they 'efficiently carried out' (*strenue compleverunt* according to the imperial annals) the emperor's orders and attacked them, as the sources say, 'as swiftly as easily with the help of Christ' and 'with the help of God they gained the victory.' The emperor, however, 'gave himself up to hunting in the Vosges forest.' At the other end of the empire, on the northern slopes of the Pyrenees, the Basques revolted and were 'completely subdued' (*Annales regni Francorum*). Louis repeatedly waged devastating campaigns against the Breton Levantines, whose princes claimed the title of king at various times. On several occasions he attacked the 'mendacious, proud and rebellious people,' whom even his father hadn't managed to subdue completely and whom the Merovingians, before Charles and Pippin, had repeatedly tried to subdue. In the summer of 818, he marched in person—almost his only military campaign as emperor—with an army of Franks, Burgundians, Alamans, Saxons and Thuringians against the 'Breton rebels, who in their audacity dared to name one of their own, named Morman, king, refusing all obedience' (Anonymous).

The pious sovereign, of whom his contemporary Bishop Thegan carefully exalts that 'he progressed from day to day in sacred virtues, the enumeration of which would lead too far,' crushed the Bretons with his arrogance. He reduced to ashes all the buildings except the churches, and amid all the fires and murders he had the monasticism of the country widely reported by the Abbot of Landévennec. To kill and to pray, to pray and to kill; so everything went well and everything was permitted, at least in the war, as long as it was in favour of the 'orthodox' side. A great multitude was taken prisoner, plentiful cattle were taken from them, and the Bretons submitted 'to the conditions imposed by the emperor, whatever they were. And such hostages were selected and taken as he ordered, and the whole territory was organised at his will,' writes Astronomus.

In 819 Louis sent an army across the Elbe against the Obotrites. Their deserting prince Sclaomir (809-819) was captured and taken to Aachen, his territory occupied and he was exiled. Shortly afterwards they defeated him again, but while still in Saxony he succumbed to an illness and in the meantime received the sacrament of baptism. The Slavic people on the banks of the Elbe were still totally pagan, and the supremacy of Louis was still exposed to serious uprisings in the years 838 and 839.

On the other side of his borders, the counts of the Spanish March penetrated across the Segre 'as far as the interior of Spain' and 'from there happily returned with a great booty,' having 'ravaged and burned everything,' as Astronomus writes. The imperial analyst also notes the devastation of fields, the burning of villages and 'no small booty,' adding: 'In the same way, after the autumn equinox the counts of the Breton Mark raided the possessions of a rebellious Breton named Wihomarc and devastated everything with blood and fire.'

In 824 the monarch marched again with three army groups—he personally commanded one—against the Bretons and their prince Wihomarc, Morman's successor. In forty days, according to Frankish sources, Louis the Pious ravaged 'the whole country with blood and fire' and 'punished it with a great devastation' (*magna plague*). He was 'the most pious of emperors,' as the chorepiscopus Thegan praises him, 'for even before he respected his enemies, fulfilling the word of the evangelist who says 'Forgive and you will be forgiven.' Louis destroyed fields and

forests, annihilated a good part of the flocks, killed many Bretons, took many prisoners and returned with hostages 'of the disloyal people.' King Wihomarc was soon afterwards surrounded in his own house by the people of Count Lambert of Nantes, who beat him to death.

Pope Paschal, who gouges out eyes and cuts off heads, is declared a saint

Why did Leo III enter the Roman martyrology in the 17th century? Why was this monstrous murderer declared a saint?

He wasn't canonised for his brutality, nor for his liquidations, and still less for his genuflection before Charles 'the Great' to whom alone he owed his survival. He was canonised because at Christmas 800 he had placed the crown on Charles' head; because he had so impressively forced the passion for domination, the never-satiated desire for supremacy of the popes; because, with that radiant sign through the ages, with that 'trait of genius' (de Rosa), he had inscribed once and for all in the sad book of history the aspiration of the popes for absolute leadership. This is also the reason why Franz Xaver Seppelt, the Catholic historian of the popes, sees the name of Leo III shining in the 'catalogue of saints' despite all the fatalities of his long pontificate and all the corpses that litter his path: 'Saint, saint, saint' (his feast day, 12 June).

His successor Stephen IV, a Roman nobleman educated from boyhood at the Lateran, elected pope after ten days without consulting the emperor, ruled only a few months but his illustrious family provided in the century two other popes. Paschal I (817-824), Stephen's successor, immediately had the *Pactum Hludowicianum* established with his predecessor confirmed by the emperor, i.e. the full extent of the promises of donation and the actual donations made by Pippin and Charlemagne, grandfather and father respectively of Louis, as well as the autonomy of the state from the Church; the papal rights of sovereignty and above all the free election of the pope. Two of the highest papal officials, Theodore, belonging to the high nobility (and still in 821 a pope ambassador at the Frankish court) and his son-in-law the nomenclator Leo 'because of his loyalty to Lothair' (Astronomus) were blinded and beheaded by the pope's servants in the Lateran

Palace without any legal process. Everything was attributed to the pope or 'to his approval,' says Astronomer.

The whole affair is somewhat reminiscent of the bloody proceedings of St. Leo III in 815. But in 823 the monarch also sent his judges to Rome, retiring for the rest of the summer and in the autumn to the district of Worms to hunt in the Eifel region. Paschal, however—so beloved of the Romans that at his burial they provoked a riot—, refused any complicity and escaped the trial, perhaps with good reason, by publicly taking the oath of cleansing in the presence of thirty-four bishops and five priests and deacons. This was a 'means of proof' already used by St. Leo III in December 800, and especially frequent among ecclesiastical officials. At the same time, he anathematized the murdered men as high treason, declared their death an act of justice since they had received their due as criminals of *lèse majesté*, and took the assassins as servants of St. Peter (of the family *Sancti Petri*), granting them 'his most resolute protection' (*Annales regni Francorum*).

Mosaic of Paschal
at Santa Prassede.

Emperor Louis resigned himself. And Pope Paschal I died in 824 amid the family *Sancti Petri*. The man was cunning while Ludwig was superior and tough. When Paschal I was alive and the monks of Fulda brought him unpleasant news, he had them imprisoned without delay and threatened their abbot Mauro with excommunication. In Rome itself, they abhorred his rigorous rule which completely disrupted the state. And since not only his planned burial but also the subsequent papal election were under the sign of serious turmoil, Paschal's body remained unburied for a long time until his successor could give him a burial, although not

in St. Peter's. Much later, however, at the end of the 16th century, Paschal's name managed to enter the saints' calendar of the Catholic Church (his feast day, 14 May) through the work of the historian Caesar Baronius, an Italian cardinal of the Catholic Church.

Frankish bishops humiliate the emperor

The bishops strove to subjugate the state and in 829 in Paris, going back to the arrogant teachings of Pope Gelasius I, they demanded that no one could judge them, that they would be responsible only to God and that the other great ones, on the other hand, would be subject to them: the bishops. Indeed, their *auctoritas* was even above the *potestas* of the king and the emperor, who would otherwise become a tyrant and any moral right would disappear with his rule. Their arrogance, sometimes clothed in the rhetoric of apparent modesty and false humility—the notorious sanctimonious hypocrisy—could hardly be greater. They praised, and rightly so, the humility of the emperors because they always found humility in others very praiseworthy. But they always presented themselves as those on whom the Lord bestowed the power to bind and unbind, and recalled the supposed words of Emperor Constantine to the bishops (according to Rufinus' ominous history of the Church): 'God has made you priests and has given you the power to judge us also. Therefore we shall be rightly judged by you, whereas you cannot be judged by men.'

Too beautiful to be true.

The Empress Ermengarde had borne three sons to the sovereign: Lothair (795), Pippin (797) and Louis (806). When she died on 3 October 818 in Angers after about twenty years of marriage it was feared that the pious widower would shut himself away in a monastery. And, naturally, for the clergy, it was preferable to have 'a monastic mentality on the throne rather than an emperor in monastic habit within the walls of a monastery' (Luden).

The first uprising of 830 against the sovereign opened a decade of continuous palace rebellions and civil wars in the pious and family-friendly West. Understandably, the emperor's eldest sons were irritated by the course of events. Especially Lothair, whose kingdom was seriously diminished in favour of Charles, and who saw his future supremacy in jeopardy. But also the younger couple

of Pippin and Louis were threatened by another loss of territory. The ecclesiastical hierarchy, concerned about the unity of the empire, also feared its idea of unity.

Bernard, a descendant of the high Frankish nobility and son of William—Count of Toulouse, who was highly regarded under Charles I and who, on the advice of his friend Benedict of Aniane, became a monk of great asceticism—had little inclination for the Emperor's tastes. It seems that he was much more attracted, according to especially episcopalian gossip, to the bed of the young empress. And Louis the Pious had protected the man from an early age, had him baptised and later made him Count of Barcelona. At the head of the conspiracy were former supporters of the emperor, some of his advisors, the then chancellor Elisachar, the arch-chancellor and abbot Hilduin of Saint-Denis, Bishop Jesse of Amiens and, above all, Abbot Wala, the spiritual leader of the uprising and Louis' most dangerous enemy. He coined the slogan *Pro principe contra principem* and his monastery in Corbie became the de facto centre and headquarters (Weinrich) of the rebels. (Over the centuries, some Catholic monasteries became the headquarters of conspirators, as happened for example during the Second World War.)

The rebels wanted not only to drive away Bernard and the young empress and her entourage, but also the old emperor, and if possible to put Lothair in his place. After various tortures Judith, the second wife of Louis the Pious, was even threatened with death and a promise was extracted from her that she would force the emperor to have her hair tonsured and enter the monastery, and she had to shave her hair and go into seclusion among the nuns of the Holy Cross (Sainte-Croix) in Poitiers.

Lothair, who was viciously persecuting the supporters of the reclusive princess, avoided depriving her father of all power at the Imperial Diet of Compiégne (May 830). He contented himself with annulling his dispositions of the last year, or that he had the upper hand. But while the great men became more and more at odds with each other, each seeking his own advantage, far from improving the situation distrust of the new government grew, and the emperor succeeded in setting his two younger sons against the elder. He offered Louis and Pippin an extension of their kingdoms, which quickly attracted them to his side and divided the allies, especially since the brothers felt that the supremacy of Lothair was no less

oppressive than that of their father. For all these reasons the *coup d'état* failed.

Since Lothair was now confined to Italy, the emperor assigned in February 831 roughly equal kingdoms (*regna*) to his other sons Pippin, Louis and Charles. But in early 833 the three elder brothers allied to attack their father with greater military force, trampling on their oaths of vassalage and filial duties. They appealed to the people 'to establish a just government.' For even Louis the Germanic (who had already risen again and again in 838 and 839) and Pippin of Aquitaine felt themselves to be under attack and threat. With a hastily mobilised army, Lothair marched into Burgundy together with Pope Gregory IV (827-844), who had tried to win over the Frankish clergy even from Italy. The archbishops of the region, Bernard of Vienne and Agobard of Lyon, immediately went over to his camp. The latter was the rabid enemy of the Jews who now, disregarding also the fourth commandment, published a manifesto advocating the right of the children against the father.

Lothair re-joined his brothers and once again took the lead of the rebels. As Louis was in danger of defeat, fewer and fewer prelates stood by his side. The pope mocked his haughty and foolish writings, and especially disputed the reproach which the imperialists had everywhere levelled at him, saying that he had become a mere instrument of the sons to launch the excommunication against their enemies.

The pope had to justify the uprising in the eyes of the masses and win over the rest of the wavering rebels to his side. Just after his return to the brothers' camp, almost the whole of Louis' army (despite his additional oath of loyalty to fight against his sons as against the enemy) treacherously switched to the latter's side 'like an impetuous torrent,' writes Astronomer, 'partly seduced by the gifts and partly terrified by the threats.' The clergy on Lothair's side recognised this as a divine miracle. And then almost all the bishops, who had previously threatened Gregory IV with deposition, also changed front so that the pope, who had fulfilled his obligation, was able to return to Rome with Lothair's approval.

But the old emperor had to surrender unconditionally that summer. He was then regarded as overthrown by the hand of God, as a 'non-king,' as a second Saul, and the bishops and others 'did him much harm,' as Thegan puts it. To begin with, Lothair had taken him through the Vosges, via Metz and Verdun, to Soissons,

where Louis was imprisoned in the monastery of Saint-Médard. Prince Charles, who was barely ten years old, was taken from him and placed in the monastery of Prüm in the Eifel region under a severe prison regime as if he were a great criminal, as Charles would later say, although he was not made a monk. But the brothers of the empress were tonsured and sent to Aquitaine, Pippin's territory, while she was immediately taken with Gregory to Italy and banished to Tortona.

With papal approval, the transfer of the empire from the hands of the old emperor—now designated by the bishops as 'the venerable man' and also 'Lord Louis'—to those of Lothair was decreed. For his part, Rabanus Maurus, abbot of Fulda and one of the champions of the unity of the empire, embraced the party of Louis the Pious and in a treatise dedicated to him wrote that it was 'totally inadmissible for sons to rebel against their father and subjects against their sovereign.' Rabanus showed the injustice of the plot against Louis.

Stained glass depiction of
Lothair, Strasbourg Cathedral

Neither Lothair was authorised to dethrone his father, nor could the episcopate condemn and excommunicate him. But how was Louis' defeat interpreted by the prelates gathered at Compiègne, who with all the grandees had sworn an oath of loyalty to Lothair? As a consequence, of course, of his disobedience to the

exhortations of the priests. He had committed many evils against God and man and had brought his subjects to the brink of catastrophe. And so he was declared 'tyrant,' while his victorious son and successor was proclaimed 'friend of Christ the Lord.' They, the 'representatives of Christ,' the 'bearers of the keys of the kingdom of heaven,' demanded from the old ruler a general confession of his sins: a renunciation of the world and presented him with a document of his crimes, so that 'as in a mirror he might behold the abominable deeds.'

In his recent *History of the Councils*, Wilfried Hartmann observes: 'Such procedures were only possible because the Frankish episcopate had already formulated certain theses in Paris in 829 which envisaged a kind of control of the political sovereign by the bishops.' Thus, canon 55 proclaimed: 'If someone governs with piety, justice and clemency, he is deservedly called a king; but those who govern in an impious, unjust and cruel manner are not called kings but tyrants.' But whether a king is to be called just or unjust is naturally determined by—the prelates.

Louis must have been deeply humiliated at the Abbey of Saint-Médard de Soissons, where the prelates read him the card again, having to prostrate himself three or more times before the bishops and a multitude of other clerics, having to confess all that they had instilled in him with precise words—what is still called brainwashing today—and having to ask for their forgiveness.

To savour his wickedness, the hierarchs had staged this spectacle before the altar of the monastery's St. Mary's Church. In the presence of a large crowd, they had the confession of his sins, which they had drawn up, read three or four times to the emperor 'aloud and amidst a copious stream of tears,' lying in a penitential garment of manes. The whole process was intended to morally annihilate the emperor and render him incapable of returning to the throne and even of bearing arms: canon law excluded him, as Louis knew very well, after a public canonical penance. On the other hand, the unbelievable degradation had to demonstrate the total superiority of the bishops.

It was 33 years since Charlemagne had judged Pope Leo III. Now the Frankish episcopate was judging the emperor! With the deplorable ceremony, the greatest opprobrium in Louis' life and one of the deepest humiliations that any prince could have suffered, far worse than that of Canossa, Louis the Pious was also excluded from

ecclesiastical communion and henceforth could only treat and speak with a few chosen persons. Archbishop Otgar of Mainz acted as the jailer of the deposed Louis.

The leading role in this tragedy, which triggered a series of civil wars between 833 and 843, was played by Archbishop Ebon of Rheims, a close friend of Agobard of Lyons and a true prototype of ecclesiastical ingratitude and perfidy, as well as a man of notable missionary success. Years earlier, in fact, 'on the advice of the emperor and with the authorisation of the pope, he left for the country of the Danes to preach the gospel, having converted and baptised many.' This prelate, appointed by Pope Paschal I as the legate of the north in the framework of the Scandinavian policy of the Carolingians, is considered to be the initiator of the Nordic mission.

The conscienceless episcopal mob once again changed sides

After Louis's deposition in 833, long years of bitter struggles ensued not only between father and son but also between the brothers, with frequent changes of sides. The desire to dominate various portions of sovereignty led to shifting coalitions according to the expected advantages. This was the strongest political principle, the *punctum saliens par excellence*. In the beginning, it is clear that the three brothers were looking for ways to increase their power: Pippin of Aquitaine and Louis the Germanic against Lothair, and Lothair against both of them.

In the meantime, in November 834, at the imperial diet of Attigny, the general bad situation had again been mentioned, and again a promise had been made to remedy it. But all that happened was Louis the Pious' command to return as soon as possible the ecclesiastical goods alienated in Aquitaine. The misery of the people remained unchanged. At an imperial assembly convened on 2 February 835 in the palace of Diedenhofen, which was above all an ecclesiastical assembly, Louis demanded that the declaration of the nullity of his deposition and canonical penitence, which had already been made at Saint-Denis, be repeated explicitly and more solemnly. And, naturally, the venerable prelates now agreed. 'A great assembly of almost all the bishops and abbots of the whole empire' naturally declared 'unworthy' the resolution of Compiègne—which was theirs—and declared the machinations of the imperial enemies and

the 'disloyalty of the wicked and enemies of God' to be annulled by a new 'sentence of God.'

Thus, just one year after Louis' release, those always repugnant opportunists again proceeded most solemnly to the reinstatement of the sovereign within the imperial assembly held in the cathedral of Metz on 28 February 835. It is true that Louis' confidence in the ecclesiastical leaders may have been somewhat shaken. In any case, he remained deaf to their complaints and entreaties, apart from the fact that he had to return the stolen ecclesiastical property. Louis the Pious, whose lungs had become obstructed, whose chest had weakened and who had aged prematurely, and who was also afflicted by an incurable ulcer, perhaps pulmonary emphysema, began to languish with frequent chest tightness, nausea and a total refusal of food. After passing through the royal palace of Salz in the Frankish Saale and after having arrived by boat on the Main to Frankfurt, Louis I died on Sunday, 20 June 840, in a 'tent-like summer dwelling' on a small island in the Rhine downstream from Mainz. The island was opposite Ingelheim and the site was the sumptuous Carolingian palace where his father had once subjected the Bavarian Duke Tassilo and his family to a notorious trial; later Charles IV converted it into a monastery and it was finally demolished during the Peasants' War and the Thirty Years' War.

Louis had been King of Aquitaine for 37 years and Emperor for 27. Those closest to him, his wife Judith and his son Charles were far from him in Aquitaine. Instead, several prelates, including his former jailer Otgar of Mainz, surrounded his deathbed. As long as he could, the emperor made the sign of the cross on his forehead and chest. He also had a splinter of the (claimed) cross of Christ placed on his chest. The body of Louis the Pious was taken to Metz, and there, in the old family pantheon of the Carolingians, he was laid to rest 'with all honour' next to his mother Hildegard—although all the children were absent—by his half-brother Drogo. At the time of the French Revolution, the body was removed from the sarcophagus.

The men of the Aquilon

The Normans, also called Vikings and Northmen, were known in the Middle Ages as 'men of the Aquilon,' the Scandinavians. From the end of the 8th to the 11th century, while still pagan at first, they invaded other lands out of a desire for adventure and plunder and driven by dissatisfaction with their living conditions, eventually settling here and there in Friesland, at the mouth of the Loire and other bridgeheads.

Their highly mobile and reputedly diabolical tactics were full of trickery, with a particular preference for lightning attacks. Suddenly their sails would appear on the horizon, and before the coastal watch could intervene, they had already departed with their booty. On the Christian side, moreover, the civil and ecclesiastical leaders were 'often the first' to flee in disarray (Riché). Hincmar of Rheims, the famous archbishop, had forbidden the retreat of the priests, 'who have neither wife nor children to feed,' but in 882 he fled in haste, escaping the invaders.

The Norman plundering began in 793 with a surprise raid on the monastery on the island of Lindisfarne (later known as Holy Island). The monastery had been founded in the 7th century by Irish and Scottish monks, off the northern English coast of Northumberland, a very wealthy abbey. It managed to survive and acquired more and more land on the continent, but was abandoned again in 850. The Norwegian Vikings, who usually stayed at sea for weeks at a time, needed timely supplies, so they cut the monastery's cattle's throats and brought them aboard their ships in dragon form, stealing all the treasures and murdering the monks. The Northerners invaded Ireland, upon which the catastrophe was unleashed in 820. 'The sea threw up waves of strangers upon Erin, and there was no port or place or fortification or burgh or haven without fleets of Vikings and pirates,' report the annals of Ulster. The northerners fell upon England and from there increasingly invaded the Frankish empire, especially western Franconia with its long and attractive coastline; and from 799 they also attacked Frisian territory. They seized valuables and took hostages for ransom money. And not only did they ravage the coastal places, but with their swift sailing ships they sailed up the rivers, burning cities

such as York, Canterbury, Chartres, Nantes, Paris, Tours, Bordeaux and Hamburg, where they reduced the episcopal see to ashes. They gladly attacked the monasteries, as they did, for example, those of Jumiéges and Saint-Wandrille. On the Atlantic coast, in 836, the monks had to abandon the monastery of Noirmoutier, which had been under attack since 820.

It is hardly coincidental that Norman attacks began to become alarmingly frequent at a time when Carolingian family feuds were at their fiercest and when the defensive strength of the empire was at its weakest externally, i.e. in the mid-thirties of the 9th century. Nor is it a coincidence that the Nordic pirates, especially the Danes, then the most formidable enemies, returned year after year. From then on and throughout the century the Norman tide invaded the Christian world.

In 834 and 835 the Danish Vikings fell upon the most important trading centre in the north, 'the famous Wijk of Duurstede, and devastated it with unheard-of cruelty.' But of 'the pagans,' men who were still fervently attached to their old Gods, 'no small number fell' (*Annales Xantenses*). Also between 834 and 837 Dorestad, an important trading centre in the Netherlands was abandoned (near the mouth of the Rhine and south of today's Wijk bij Duurstede): the temporary or permanent seat of the Bishop of Utrecht. It was sacked four times and partly burned. In 836 the Normans fired on Antwerp and the port town of Witla at the mouth of the Meuse River. In 837 they made a surprise attack on the island of Walcheren, 'killed many and completely stripped an even greater number of inhabitants of their goods; after settling there for some time and having collected an arbitrary tribute from the inhabitants, they continued on their raid towards Dorestad and there exacted tribute in the same way' (*Annales Bertiniani*). In 838 a storm prevented a new attack, but in 839 they ravaged Frisia again. They also devastated the territories of the Loire as far as Nantes: a 'scourge of God' of which monastic writers still lamented, perhaps also exaggerating: 'Pirates, murderers, robbers, profaners, devastators, bloodthirsty, diabolical and, in a word, heathens…'

Ah, how much better the Christians were in their military expeditions! But why did the Vikings also devastate in this way? Wielant Hopfner writes: 'They had had their first experiences with Christianity. Their contemporary Charlemagne had issued the Saxon Laws to impose forced conversion on the Saxons. The most

frequent expressions in them sound like this: "He shall be punished by death…, he shall be put to death…, it is forbidden on pain of death…, it belongs to the property of the Church…, he shall be put to death"…' Charles' bloodthirsty laws, which could be described as a derivation of the Good News, threatened with a stereotypical *morte moriatur* everything that was intended to be extirpated among the Saxons. As we have said, of the fourteen provisions of the Capitulate imposing the death penalty, ten refer exclusively to crimes against Christianity.

The Normans knew that the Carolingians 'had enriched the Church beyond measure' with treasures that came 'primarily' from the plundered 'pagan places of worship.' The Christian chroniclers reveal that monasteries and churches 'had been magnificently built' or 'wonderfully decorated.' They also wrote: 'Where could these riches have come from, if not from the property and the personal provision of the Germanic population?'

The Slavic worm and the Frankish people of God

The 46 years of Charlemagne's reign were an almost uninterrupted war with nearly fifty military campaigns. To mention only the Saxons, the 'super-pagans,' he fought them mortally for thirty-three years. So what was happening on the periphery of the great and ever-expanding predatory empire was not something that affected the internal 'peace.' Quite the contrary. The more 'peace and order' there was within, the better the slaughter, enslavement and annexations outside the borders worked. However, the 'everywhere abundance and joy' didn't exist even in the interior of the kingdom. It was enjoyed only by the ridiculously small stratum of the possessors, the nobility and the clergy, who swam in the blood-soaked riches of others, while chronic malnutrition ravaged the ignominiously deprived people themselves. Misery and famine wiped out a third of the population of Gaul and Germania in 784.

Under Charlemagne's grandsons, foreign war was simply replaced by internal war, by the so-called civil war. Perhaps the Treaty of Verdun wasn't yet, as some early historians (Waitz, Droysen, Giesebrecht) believed, a kind of 'birth date' of the German and French nationalities, of two peoples in whose interests it was certainly not agreed. But a German history and a French history are emerging: nations are beginning to emerge from older

tribes, from the populations of certain countries, and the pre-national consciousness of the tribes will eventually become the national consciousness. In addition, the emergence of other national kingdoms, for example in England, Spain, Scandinavia, Poland, Bohemia and Hungary, marked the early Middle Ages politically. Certainly, throughout the whole of the 9th century, there was still no thought of nationalist categories, no people still felt themselves to be a 'national unit' and no one felt themselves to be 'German' or 'French,' perhaps not even in the 10th century, although this was the immediate transitional phase.

That division of the Carolingian empire, which was followed by further divisions and reunifications in the 9th century, was a compromise imposed by circumstances. For the time being, it certainly put an end to the tradition of rushing against each other; but it also meant that the empire gradually lost its pre-eminent position vis-à-vis the papacy, that the triple division of Germany, France and Italy was prepared, and that the old unity never reappeared, if we leave aside the episode of Charles the Fat. The Slavs were 'pagans,' and even in Christian countries such as Thuringia, Hessen and the East-Franconian cantons they remained 'infidels' for longer than the rest of the population. Their culture was demonstrably higher than is sometimes assumed.

The Temple of a Slavic God (painting in oil by V. Ivanov).

We must bear in mind that for a long time, from the 7th to the 11th century, Franco-German accounts of the Slavs came almost without exception from Christian priests, who moreover were often not eyewitnesses but had second- or third-hand accounts. And, as was almost always the case, the Christians were at war with the Slavs and mocked them. But when they were regarded as allies, they were suddenly well-liked and sometimes even remarked that they were 'wonderfully worthy' of any sympathy. The Carolingian and Ottonian historiographies also differ in their judgement, although a certain popular hatred, if not hereditary hostility, has long prevailed due in large part to religious motives, to the opposition of 'pagans' and Christians. This had been the case since Merovingian times. Later, the Slavs were willingly condemned across the board. The more Christian the world becomes, the worse the others become. They are all 'evil,' i.e. people separated from God; they are all 'infidels.' In the medieval view derived from Augustine, this is equivalent to 'minions of the devil, who must be annihilated by all means if they do not convert to the cause of God' (Lubenow).

In the eyes of the Christians, the Slavs were useful only as slaves: a word derived directly from *slavus* or as pure targets of death; people who were mocked as 'worms' and 'mowed down like the grass of the meadow' by pious Catholics, for whom they were just that, subhuman beings, animals. 'What do you want with those toads? Seven, eight, even nine of them I used to skewer on my spear and shake them around, muttering something to myself.' The Slavs were also radically false and treacherous. 'The Wendos broke their word in their usual disloyalty to Louis,' comments the *Annales Bertiniani.* According to the ecclesiastical conception, every Christian prince had to fight the 'pagans' within the country and on the borders. Indeed, according to the dominant Augustinian doctrine concerning the expansion of the kingdom of God on earth, it was necessary to conquer the Slavic East to 'convert' it. It is no coincidence that Charlemagne's favourite reading was Augustine's magnum opus, *The City of God.* And Charles himself, the Carolingians, the Frankish aristocracy at one with the other classes of landowners, all without exception, were all the more interested in the 'plunder,' robbery and tribute of the East when in their own country the agricultural productivity was low and the prospects of

increasing land and estates insignificant. The Slavic territories were also always a breeding ground for auxiliary troops and slaves.

The Christian nobility didn't always view the Slavic mission with unreserved joy; and naturally for a very selfish reason. With the acceptance of Christianity by the pagans, at least as far as the Saxon noble class bordering directly on Christian territories was concerned, a pretext for attack, subjugation and plunder disappeared. 'Although the Christianisation of the Slavs didn't entail the complete depletion of an important source of income, it certainly at least made it more difficult for the Saxons to plunder their neighbours' (Donnert). And of course for the Christians their bloodletting was always more important than the gospel; the Catholic princes were concerned above all with power, greed, the increase of their agrarian possessions and feudal rents, for as Abbot Reginus said 'the hearts of kings are greedy and always insatiable.' Archbishop William of Mainz said that the claim of his father Otto 'the Great' about the spread of Christianity was an excuse. And in the Slavonic chronicle of Helmhold, referring to Henry the Lion, it is later stated in no uncertain terms: 'There was never any talk of Christianity but only of money.'

But it is not simply 'that Christianity first gained a foothold beyond the Elbe and the Saale in connection with the war' (Fleckenstein). No, the Christian Church, and of course, the German Church, was also a 'driving force' in this highly aggressive eastward expansion: a force for which faith was also a means to an end; a force, writes Kosminski, that

> was on the hunt for tithes, goods and personal services and saw the conversion of the heathen as a highly profitable business. It was most energetically aided in this by the papacy, which was one of the main organisers of the military campaigns against Eastern Europe, hoping to extend its sphere of influence and increase its income.

An independent ecclesiastical mission, such as that of Bishop Ansgar, bought boys in Denmark and Sweden to make clerics of them: the mission of Bishop Adalbert of Prague at the end of the 10th century or that of Günther of Magdeburg among the Luthites at the beginning of the 11th century. As these attempts at conversion met with little success, the Church opted for a second way: spreading the Good News through state armies, by blood and

fire or by bribery. In any case, acceptance of Christianity was for the Slavs 'tantamount to slavery' (Herrmann), and acceptance would be all the easier the more effective weapons could demonstrate the power of the God of the Christians and the impotence of the old Gods. It has been calculated that the Catholic Franks and Saxons in less than 400 years, namely from Charlemagne's raid against the Liutians in 789 to the onslaught of Frederick Redbeard and Henry the Lion against Poland in 1157, waged 170 wars against the Slavs! Of these, twenty failed the imperial troops, and in barely a third of them, they were successful.

The papacy in the 9th century

When in August 846 seventy-five Saracen ships appeared at the mouth of the Tiber, around eleven thousand men and five hundred horses fell on the districts of Rome to the right of the Tiber, completely sacking the church of St Peter outside the wall of Aurelius as well as the basilica of St Paul and taking prisoner all those who had not fled, 'including the inhabitants of the monasteries, men and women' (*Annales Xantenses*), the contemporaries saw it as a punishment of Providence against the corruption that was invading Rome.

After the surprise attack it was the defeat, the disgrace provoked by Saracens and pagans, which inflamed the faithful. Why had Saint Peter not been better defended? A capitulary blames the sins of Christianity and points out the remedies: to fight against one's wickedness, against the sins of the flesh and the theft of the ecclesiastical patrimony. In addition, Lothair I ordered alms to be collected throughout the empire and imposed a special tax for the reconstruction of the church of St Peter and its protection, to which the emperor and his brothers contributed 'not a few pounds of silver.' In the meantime, Pope Sergius II had died. And on the very day of his death, his successor was elected: a Roman, educated from childhood in the Benedictine monastery of St Martin and an 'exemplary religious' (*Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*). It was Leo IV (847-855), who after a six-week *interpontificium* was consecrated pope, and again without imperial approval, which had been necessary since 824. It seems that the crisis caused by the Arab pirates didn't permit any delay, although the oath of allegiance to the emperor was subsequently demanded of him.

This saintly father achieved a reputation as a master builder of fortifications that can be said to have lasted until the present day. He transformed the suburbs of Rome on the right bank of the Tiber, the entire neighbourhood of the Vatican, into a castle in an undertaking that was important for centuries. It was a plan that Leo III had already been contemplating, but which only Leo IV brought to fruition. In a work of years, personally inspected by him on foot or horseback, he reinforced the old city walls, created new fortifications and thus became the creator of the *civitas leonina*, to which he modestly gave his name ('city of Leon'). Between 848 and 852 he built a wall almost forty feet high and as many feet thick, reinforced with 44 towers. The work of fortifying required abundant materials and numerous workers, who had to contribute to cities and monasteries of the Papal State, dominions and militias. But the papal stronghold also cost large sums of money, which came mainly from the Frankish Empire—something the papal biographer completely omits—on the orders of the very obliging Lothair.

The devastated St Peter's was again lavishly decorated. On the high altar were placed sheets of gold enamelled with precious stones, each weighing 216 pounds; a gold cross, embossed with pearls and emeralds, weighed 1,000 pounds and a silver ciborium or baldachin over the altar weighed 1,606 pounds. As St Paul's and many temples, even in the provinces, were also expensively decorated it could be seen how immensely rich the Church was, for which collections were already being made everywhere because of its 'poverty' (as they still are today). It is understandable that the 'sons of Satan,' who came from Sardinia, appeared at the mouth of the Tiber as early as 849, long before the fortification of Leon was erected. At last, they had seen what was hidden in those Christian temples and what was piled up at St Peter's. 'The imagination cannot comprehend the richness of the treasures piled up there' (Gregorovius).

John VIII (872-882), a pope in his own right

Inspired by Gregory I and Nicholas I, his models, he took the directional role of the popes to an extreme. Just as Leo IV transformed St Peter's, the Vatican quarter, the 'Leonine City,' into a fortification, so John VIII walled up St Paul's Basilica and the

entire annexed suburb, which he called 'Johannipolis.' And just as his predecessor—after having generously released Louis II from an oath issued through Duke Adelchis of Benevento in 871—had urged the emperor 'to resume the struggle' (Regino of Prüm), so also Pope John accompanied Louis' war against the Saracens with vigorous biblical sentences and, as did Leo IV, absolved from their sins all those who 'fall with Catholic piety against pagans and infidels' and promised them the peace 'of eternal life.'

This representative of Christ also recruited soldiers, obtained a Moorish cavalry from the King of Galicia, probably founded the office of president of the shipyards and probably in a 'fresh initiative' (Seppelt, Catholic) founded the first papal navy: ships occupied by troops, equipped with catapult machines capable of throwing stones, spears and hooks for boarding and moved by slave oarsmen. He was the first pope-admiral to go on the hunt for Saracens, managing to kill many of those 'wild animals'—as he called them with the language of a true saintly father—and seize eighteen ships from Cape Circe. A 'heroic deed,' according to the Catholic Daniel-Rops. He was also determined to prevent any serious collaborationist contagion by threatening Christians who negotiated with the Saracens with excommunication.

John VIII worked to destroy the empire and the kingdom of Italy to increase the power of his see, to dominate bishops and princes alike, and to direct Italy politically. 'He who is to be raised by Us to the imperial dignity must first and foremost also be called and chosen by Us,' he declared with astonishing boldness while dazzling with the imperial crown, sometimes simultaneously, almost all possible candidates such as Boson of Vienne, the king of Provence, the sons of Louis the Germanic, Carloman and Louis III, and above all the West Frank Louis the Stammerer, son of Charles the Bald. And to each, he promised all exaltation, glory and salvation in this world and the next, all the kingdoms of the world. And to each he inculcated that he was the only candidate, claiming that in no other had he sought help and assistance. And when at last it was clear to him that he could not expect much from the Franks, he turned to Byzantium.

On 16 December 882, in a palace riot, a pious relative, who himself wanted to be pope and rich, poisoned him; but as the poison did not act quickly enough as the *Annales Fuldenses* report in brief but impressive words: 'He struck him with a hammer until it

stuck in his brain' (*malleolo, dum usque in cerebro constabat, percusus est, expiravit*). It was the first papal assassination. And the example created a school.

While the Christians were thus attacking one another, not only in the narrow circle of the popes and not only in Italy, while their great ones were extorting money from one another, and while in the south they were robbing, killing and burning the Saracens, in the north the Normans were still present. Indeed, the Norman danger had grown worse. Even the Frankish king Carloman II asked in 884: 'Is it any wonder that pagans and foreign peoples lord it over us and take away our temporal goods when each of us violently deprives his neighbour of the necessities of life? How can we fight with confidence against our enemies and those of the Church, when in our own house we keep the spoils stolen from the poor and when we go on a campaign to fill our bellies with stolen goods?'

EDITOR'S NOTE & APPENDIXES

'I would rate Charlemagne well up in the top five most evil characters of European history.'

—Arthur Kemp
(personal communication)

Editor's note

Because I discovered Karlheinz Deschner's work through a translation by a Spanish publisher, his books *Historia Criminal del Cristianismo* covering the 9th to the 10th century exist in my mother tongue. If the present translation were intended for academics, after Charlemagne's immediate successors Deschner's chapters on Alfred (871-899), Otto I (936-973) and Olaf the Saint (1015-1028) should also have been translated, and directly from German. Like Charlemagne and his sons, Alfred, Otto and Olaf 'promoted the spread of Christianity with barbaric methods' as Deschner said on page 15 of this book. But my aim, as I said in the Foreword, is solely to shed light on an obscure historical matter for the benefit of the sick Aryan man of today. And from this angle, the most practical thing to do has been to translate only the essentials.

On my website, I have been very critical of American white nationalism. It is time to criticise German National Socialism.

When a decade ago I read Hitler's after-dinner talks in an edition of Ostara Publications, historian Arthur Kemp's publishing house, the Führer's laudatory comments on Charlemagne (Appendix I) surprised me. It is true that in 1935 Himmler's SS created a stone monument in memory of the Saxon victims murdered by Charlemagne and his henchmen. But if Hitler had become truly wise, instead of risking his newly created Reich in a foolish adventure against the Soviet Union, he would have devoted all his efforts to founding a New Germania which would have been the cultural centre for exposing Christianity and its bastard son, neo-Christianity (which I now try to do in *The West's Darkest Hour* without the Reich's formidable resources!). Gradually, the Third Reich could have become the intellectual lighthouse that, by now, would have illuminated Europe after the Dark Middle Ages—and the Dark Modern Ages! (read the book *Dominion* excerpted in *Neo*-Christianity, cf. Appendix II).

By putting all the emphasis on the Jewish Question and not on the Christian Question, and by launching a premature war (lack of atomic bombs) against the Soviet Union, Hitler's Reich put the cart before the horse.

Both Nazis and today's white nationalists ignore that it is impossible to solve the Jewish problem if we don't first understand that it is precisely Christians—think of the fanatically philo-Semitic Americans—, and atheistic neo-Christians, who have empowered Jewry, blacks, immigrant Muslims in Europe, so-called liberated women, so-called gays, transgender men... Despite his genius, Hitler never had the opportunity to read scholarly books about Charlemagne's crimes that had not been written, such as the one eventually written decades after the very young Karlheinz was wearing his Nazi uniform. If Hitler, Rosenberg and others at the top of the Nazi intelligentsia had known what we now know, that Jesus didn't even exist and that the entire New Testament was written by Jews,[5] they wouldn't have fantasised about an Aryan Jesus and perhaps would have focused all their efforts on refuting Christianity, and its bastard son, in a Germania that could well be depicted in the image above, Oldtown.

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[5] The books that would hit the nail on the head on this issue were published about seven decades or more after the death of Nazi Germany: *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* by Richard Carrier (2014), *Resurrection and Reception in Early Christianity* by Richard C. Miller (2015), and *The Jesus Hoax: How St. Paul's Cabal Fooled the World for Two Thousand Years* by David Skrbina (2019). Carrier's and Miller's books are for scholars, Skrbina's is an essay.

Appendix I

Hitler's pronouncements on Charlemagne in his dinner talks (italics by Editor)

4th February 1942, evening

SPECIAL GUEST: HIMMLER

The fact that Charlemagne was able to federate the quarrelsome and bellicose Germans shows that he was one of the greatest men in world history.

31st March 1942, at dinner

That's why I've drawn [Alfred] Rosenberg's attention to the fact that one mustn't let the great German Emperors be relegated to the background, to the benefit of perjurers, and that it was improper to call a hero like Charlemagne by the name 'killer of Saxons.' History must be interpreted in terms of the necessities of the time. It's possible that, in a thousand years—supposing that, for one reason or another, the Reich is again obliged to pursue a policy directed against the South—some pedagogue may be found who will claim that 'Hitler's Eastern policy was certainly well-intentioned,' but that it was nevertheless crack-brained, since 'he should have aimed at the South.' Perhaps even some caviller of this type will go so far as to call me 'the killer of Austrians' on the grounds that, on my return from Austria to Germany, I locked up all those who had tried to thwart the enterprise!

Without compulsion, we would never have united all the various German families with these thick-headed, parochially minded fellows—either in Charlemagne's time or today. *If the German people is the child of ancient philosophy and Christianity* it is so less by reason of a free choice than by reason of a compulsion exercised

upon it by these triumphant forces.[6] In the same way, in Imperial times it was under the empire of compulsion that the German people engineered its fusion beneath a Christianity represented by a *universal Church*—in the image of ancient Rome, *which also inclined to universality*. It is certain that a man like Charlemagne was not inspired merely by a desire for political power but sought, in faithfulness to the ancient idea, for an expression of civilisation. Now, the example of the ancient world proves that civilisation can flourish only in States that are solidly organised. […]

Guided by these rules, which are quite simple and quite natural, Charlemagne gathered the Germans into a well-cemented community and created an empire that continued to deserve the name long after his death. The fact is that this empire was made of the best stuff of the ancient Roman Empire—so much so that for centuries the peoples of Europe have regarded it as the successor to the universal empire of the Caesars. The fact that this German empire was named 'the Holy Roman Empire' has *nothing whatsoever to do with the Church* [!] and has no religious significance. [Editor's exclamation mark]

11th April 1942, at dinner

The idea of human solidarity was imposed on men by force, and can be maintained only by the same means. For this reason it is unjust to condemn Charlemagne because, in what he considered to be the best interests of the German people, he built up the whole organisation of the State on a basis of constraint. Stalin, equally, has during these last few years applied to the Russian people measures very similar to those of Charlemagne because he, too, has taken into consideration the very low level of culture among the Russians. He realised the imperative necessity of uniting the Russian people in a completely rigid political organisation; had he not done so, he could not possibly have ensured a livelihood for the heterogeneous masses which make up the USSR, nor could he have extended to

[6] ***Editor's note:*** Following the moral of the book listed in Appendix II, *Neo-Christianity*, it never occurred to Uncle Adolf that if at least a portion of Aryans hadn't been forced to convert to Christianity, those peoples wouldn't be suffering from what today has become a thoroughgoing mental illness: ethnosuicide.

them those benefits of civilisation, such as medical care, the value of which they cannot appreciate.

7th June 1942, at dinner

It is with such semblance of humility that the Church has always wormed its way into power and succeeded in winning its way by flattery into the good graces of the German Emperors, from Charlemagne onwards. It is the same technique as that employed by sophisticated women, who at first exude charm in order to gain a man's confidence, and then gradually tighten the strings, until they hold them so firmly that the man dances like a puppet to their whims. With a little diplomatic *savoir faire* such women manage even to persuade their husbands—exactly as in the case of the Church and the German Emperors—that it is they who rule the roost, and this in spite of the nosering on which they are so obviously being led!

4th July 1942, at dinner

When Charlemagne was kneeling at prayer in St. Peter's, Rome, at Christmas in the year 800, the Pope, giving him no time to work out the possible effects of so symbolic an action, suddenly bent down and presto popped a golden crown on his head! By permitting it, the Emperor delivered himself and his successors into the hands of a power which subjected the German Government and the German people to five hundred years of martyrdom.

1st August 1942, midday

SPECIAL GUEST: GENERAL GERCKE

I, on the other hand, have to think twice before I can remember my cousins or my aunts; to me the whole thing is uninteresting and futile. One of our Party members was most anxious to show me the results of the laborious investigations he had made into the history of his own family. I cut him very short. 'Pfeffer,' I said, 'I am just not interested. All that sort of stuff is a matter of pure chance; some families keep family records, others do not.' Pfeffer was shocked at this lack of appreciation; and there are people who spend three-quarters of their lives in research of this kind. Pfeffer was, however, most insistent in his desire to show me that his wife, at least, was a descendant of Charlemagne.

5th September, 1942

I can understand most things, but I shall never understand why, when once one has seized power, one does not hold it with all one's might! Princes constitute a race unique in the world for the depth of their stupidity; they are the classic example of the laws of selectivity working in reverse. If the Habsburgs were to return to Hungary, they are so stupid that their presence would immediately give rise to a crisis without parallel. There are circumstances in which an attitude of passivity is absolutely untenable. With each generation, the Princes of Europe become a little more degenerate. In Bavaria this process developed into tragedy, for they eventually became insane. When all is said and done, the whole of the European royal families are descended from the old Prankish nobility, which was founded by Charlemagne and has since withered away through inbreeding.

Appendix II

The following books have been written, edited, presented, or simply treasured by the Editor:

Christianity's Criminal History Vol. I by Karlheinz Deschner

Hellstorm: The Death of Nazi Germany by Tom Goodrich

Neo-Christianity (abridged compilation of two books by David Skrbina and Tom Holland)

Memories and Reflections of an Aryan woman by Savitri Devi

The Fair Race's Darkest Hour (anthology)

On Exterminationism (anthology)

On Beth's Cute Tits (anthology)

Daybreak (anthology)

Autobiographical

Day of Wrath

Letter to mom Medusa

Hojas susurrantes (in Spanish)

¿Me Ayudarás? (in Spanish)

El Grial (in Spanish)

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