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my work on computer; how
it helps.

Susan, can you tell us a bit about your work?

Yes! We as yet know very little about the most significant event in European history: the popular conversion of early medieval civilization to Christianity. I have been engaged in uncovering and assembling a corpus of texts in eighth and ninth century manuscripts, half of which have never been published, that are permitting us some insight as to how the common people of village and countryside received the Christian teachings and way of life in the face of their pagan ethics, beliefs, fears, and superstitions. The closest we may ever come to knowing what people were taught and thought in thousands of rural parishes across Carolingian Europe may be contained in the hitherto neglected literature written during the late eighth and ninth centuries for the education of the parish priest. The corpus of sixty-one texts in 129 manuscripts I am now systematically analyzing consists of instructions for parish priests on the meaning of the

The catechesis or homily was delivered orally. This we will not recover. But the instruction of the parish priest who delivered that catechesis or homily is based on texts.

ceremonies of baptism. *These baptismal instructions become more & more significant to us today, if we consider how important baptism was for the Carolingian world.*

There's no question-- I'm working in a very exciting period for history scholars today. Carolingian studies, however, can hardly be called a "hot topic." Historians of western civilization have long recognized the critical role this period had following upon the "Dark Ages" and the barbarization of Roman society. Thanks to this era, "civilization", as Kenneth Clark of television fame has put it, "came through by the skin of its teeth." Without the Carolingian renaissance in letters and the prodigious copying of classical works, many of these would have been lost forever. For example, Tacitus' minor works exist in only one, ninth-century, manuscript. The literary productivity of the Carolingians is just one manifestation of their importance in the formation of European thought. In administrative techniques, in artistic works, in law and politics, their activity was the basis on which medieval society and early modern Europe was built.

Quote unquote "Europe" emerged geographically in this era. Charlemagne's empire in the year 800 stretched from the Spanish March to beyond the

Rhine and from Frisia to Naples. The administration of such a vast realm was an extraordinary feat. Historians have studied and restudied the huge bulk of reform legislation which sought to bring political organization and cultural unity to the empire. Within its boundaries existed a formidable diversity of peoples, languages, codes of law, and ancient customs and beliefs. The only common bond extending over all the members of Carolingian society was their baptism into the Christian faith. In many areas, however, the people were Christian in little more than name. They had received baptism obligatorily at the time of their submission to Frankish overlordship, but their knowledge of the faith they were baptized into and their observation of its rules and orthodox comprehension of its rites were minimal or nonexistent.

Baptism was fundamental to the very incorporation of Charlemagne's empire. Baptism was also key in his efforts to maintain its integrity and strength. This is because the acceptance of Christianity not only separated the baptized from the unconquered pagan tribes, but also because baptism necessitated the instruction of

every individual in the basics of the Christian faith. (At least, ideally.) "Education" for the vast majority of the population began and probably ended with their religious instruction at the hands of the parish priest or missionary. His function was essential if Charlemagne was to achieve a unified society with a single faith and worship. Who was this parish priest or missionary? Where did he come from? Who appointed him? Was he educated? Were there schools to educate him? How was he looked upon by the people in his charge?

My interest in the Carolingian period began with my inquiry into the literature surrounding the famous baptismal questionnaire Charlemagne sent to his archbishops in the year 812, in a seminar called "The Rite of Christian Initiation in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages" in my first year of graduate school. Professor Arnold Angenendt, then visiting the Pontifical Institute in Toronto from Münster, told me that there was work to be done on the archbishops' responses, because several anonymous letters on baptism had been published that seemed to be as yet unidentified responses. From this beginning my interest in the Carolingian baptismal

literature grew as I discovered that there are far more manuscripts of the known responses than have previously been identified or edited, but also, that there are tracts on baptism in Carolingian manuscripts never before brought to light. Some seem to be directly related to Charlemagne's questionnaire, others, perhaps indirectly related, that are instructions to clerics briefly explaining the ceremonies of baptism in their liturgical order. From the didactic nature of all the tracts as well as from the specific kind of manuscript in which many exist-- the clerical manual-- it is clear that their composers' aim was the instruction of clerics on baptism. The multiplication of treatises on baptism in the late eighth and ninth centuries was not the result of any theological dispute over the sacrament, but was the result of Charlemagne's decrees to bishops to see that the priests of their dioceses were able to explain and celebrate the rite of baptism. This legislation together with other clerical educational reform legislation was constantly repeated by the Carolingian reformers.

Despite the importance of the Carolingian period and the number of studies done on it, our knowledge of this era is still

extremely limited. For questions regarding the life and thought of the common people, we must usually confess "we don't know." But even a large proportion of what historians have pretended is known and have written as fact is supposition and not demonstrable. This is because their major source of information has been the large body of legislative documents written under the Carolingian reformers. These offer a picture either of an ideal system aimed for by the laws or of an extremely degenerate system to be reformed by the laws. From the clerical reform decrees, for example, we have a picture of a clergy that is illiterate, unequipped with the vessels and books of his office, living with a woman, wearing filthy vestments, renting out his church as a hayloft or market place, off hunting, visiting taverns, whooping it up with the boys and showing racous behavior in public, absent from his parish, failing to preach on Sundays, charging a fee for the sacraments, and so forth! From the secular legislation, for example, we have a picture of a highly systematized and centralized administration with missi, delegates of the crown, who visit the counties and dioceses annually, enforce the laws, make reports,

examine the clergy, and see that there is a school in every bishopric.

Do these two pictures reflect reality, and were the reform laws actually effected? The legislation is no proof of its actual implementation.

Can we ever know, then: was an educational program for the parish clergy actually undertaken? If so, of what did it consist? And how effective was it? Did it reach everyone and was there improvement? In short, we would like to know what the degree of literacy was among those responsible for the education of the people at the "grass-roots" level of society.

An answer, in part, is possible. The baptismal instructions, when collected, identified in their manuscripts for their date and place of origin and popularity, and systematically analyzed, can offer evidence that is not supposition, that is not legislation, but is the effective result of legislation. We can begin to move from theory to fact in our knowledge of Carolingian society.

Here lies the value of my work on a seemingly obscure corpus of texts (usually relegated in manuscript catalogues to the oblivion

of "miscellaneous liturgical"). The reason Carolingian studies are called a "hot topic" right now is due to the increasing perfection in the latter half of this century of the sciences of paleography and codicology. Manuscripts can now be identified far more accurately as to their date and place of origin. This has opened up a virtual frontier for scholarship in eighth and ninth century texts hitherto not securely identifiable as Carolingian. There are literally hundreds of ninth century manuscripts in European libraries at the present time whose contents have never been completely identified! This is a very surprising fact to many of my colleagues in other areas of history, who assumed that Carolingian manuscript research was fully exhausted. Not only is this untrue, but the research is leading to new knowledge.

Using the baptismal instructions, some of the major questions I hope to shed some light on are:

- 1) What do they tell us about the level of literacy among the parish clergy responsible for the religious education of the masses?

2) What do they tell us about the content of the faith taught to the people and, thus, about the monumental undertaking of the Franks to convert an entire society from paganism to Christianity?

3) What do they tell us about the effectiveness of Carolingian reform legislation: was it implemented everywhere? With what problems did it meet?

4) What do they tell us about the development of the parochial system from archdiocese to bishopric to parish as a means for disseminating the clerical reform laws from the metropolitan down to the parish priest?

What the baptismal tracts are telling us in some cases simply confirms what has been hypothesized. In other cases, it permits us to seek answers to questions never before possible. For instance, what did the people hear in Sunday sermons in thousands of rural churches in this formative era of Christian Europe? How did Christian instruction deal with their lingering pagan notions? (Are there parallels to be drawn with the liberation theology taught in South

America today?) or in the "Accommodation" of Christianity to the Chinese by the medieval missionary Matteo Ricci?

People ask me, why haven't these tracts been studied before? Because 1) paleog. imperfect
2) not identified in mss 3) thought repetitive 4) anonymous.
But, w/ a systematic analysis of all contents, show amazing variety, sometimes discrepancy, in
what the ceremonies meant + how baptism should be performed. 10

To say a few words about the tracts themselves. First, the rite of baptism that is explained included, in this period, all the initiatory sacraments we know today as baptism, confirmation, and first reception of the Eucharist. Typically, a baptismal instruction might run three typewritten pages. Beginning with the ceremonies of the catechumen it describes all the ceremonies of baptism in liturgical order. For example, a typical tract will be broken up into fifteen chapters or headings, such as "on the catechumen", "on the exorcism", "on the giving of salt", "on the scrutiny", "creed", "anointing of nose, ears, breast, and back", "immersion", "post-baptismal anointing", "white robes", "episcopal laying on of hands and chrismation", and "the Lord's Body and Blood." The order of topics is not invariable and often reflects the rite of baptism celebrated locally and not the Roman rite that Charlemagne's decrees tried to impose. One tract, for example, describes the foot-washing ceremony, a distinctly old Gallican or Ambrosian rite. Under the heading "creed" is often a full exposition of the Catholic faith. It is fascinating to find that, with one exception, it is never the Nicene

Creed of the Roman baptismal rite that is explained, but the Apostles' Creed used in the Gallican rite.

Throughout the tracts are constant references to paganism, idolatry, sorcery, and superstitious beliefs. These seem to reflect local problems. For example, the baptismal instruction written by Leidrad of Lyons emphasizes social sins like adultery and fornication that we know plagued the Lyon community. These baptismal instructions offer firm evidence of the prevalence of paganism and may even tell us where it was an overwhelming problem, as more of their manuscripts come to light and can be pin-pointed as to their place of origin.

Theological issues regarding the effect of the sacrament, such as the forgiveness of sins, the stage at which one becomes "Christian" and a member of the Church, the role of the sponsor, the necessity of confirmation, to what extent one is "saved" by baptism, who can baptize, when, and where, and what is the role of the bishop, are touched on. Sometimes the most surprising statements are made, showing the diversity in the understanding of the Christian faith at this time.

One of the most fascinating aspects of these tracts is what they reveal about clerical literacy. The level of expectation was certainly not high. Most of the tracts are extremely simplistic and suggest a text that could be memorized. In fact, four of the tracts I have collected are nothing more than clerical primers, consisting of a vocabulary list juxtaposed with synonyms, whose selection of words comes from the prayers of the baptismal rite. Originally they were full glosses of the texts of the prayers, but gradually and more to their actual purpose they became vocabulary lists for illiterate priests, omitting the prayer text and retaining only selected glossed words. Also, a comparison of an early and later manuscript of the same list of words shows that their synonyms were changed to give the word an entirely different meaning than it had in its original prayer context.

I am often asked, "what language are these tracts written in?" The answer is Latin. I have not found one clerical instruction entirely in Old High German. Two contain some OHG phrases written above the Latin. This despite the fact that reform legislation said

that priests were to preach to the people in a language that they understood. I think the fact we find no OHG baptismal instruction strengthens the evidence that the purpose of the tracts was to educate the clergy. They had to learn to read Latin to be able to read the Scriptures and liturgical books.

The history of literacy is of lively interest to historians today, who, possibly with the influence of quantitative history, are paying increasing attention to the study of history at the popular level. One famous historian long ago envisioned our goal: "...the thoughts of our forefathers, their common thoughts about common things, will have become thinkable once more." (Maitland, Domesday Book and Beyond, p. 520) My colleagues have been amazed to find the parallels that exist between the Carolingian literacy dilemma and effort to instruct the preachers and teachers and the illiteracy of their own periods. Phil Hoffman told me there was exactly the same movement to educate the local clergy in sixteenth and seventeenth century counter-reformation France. Larry Poos from Cambridge told me of the same effort to train the parish clergy in seventeenth and

eighteenth century England. Morgan Kousser said the effort to educate blacks in so-called "colleges" in the ante-bellum South involved instruction that was about as simplistic in nature as that given to the Carolingian parish clergy. *(Blantz, perhaps, can see parallels?)*

I see one of the most important functions of my work to show other historians that the evidence I have assembled is only the tip of an iceberg. Some idea of its huge size can be gathered by considering that my some sixty manuscripts surviving from the eighth through ninth century can only be a minute fraction of the number written that have been lost in the intervening 1200 years! Furthermore, probably not one of my manuscripts is the original of a tract. This means that at the very least there had to be double my number of manuscripts containing baptismal instructions in the ninth century. If we can never see the whole iceberg, there is an enormous amount yet for scholars to do. The number of unedited works makes Carolingian studies a frontier of knowledge. I propose no less than a complete re-writing of Carolingian history based, not on assumptions derived from legislative sources, but on empirical evidence of texts composed

in response to that legislation and actually received, used, and valued by Carolingian society. The texts for the clergy's use may be baptismal instructions, penitentials, canon law collections, homilies, books of prayers, sacramentaries, expositions on the Mass, the creeds, and the Lord's Prayer, and practice examinations. Some of these areas have recently or are now receiving attention by scholars in the U. S. and abroad. Together, these monographs will permit that new history to be written, with, I predict, some astonishing new insight on the complexities of Carolingian life.