

## Passing on the Faith under the Carolingians

Faculty Talk, April 20, 2009

I spent my leave finishing a volume with the unexciting title, *A Catalogue of Creed Commentaries and Explanations of the Faith in Carolingian Manuscripts*. The first part offers a catalogue of over 300 texts pertaining to the explanation of the Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian or other creeds or to the creedal faith more generally. The second part describes the manuscripts in which these texts are found. The mss were written in the late eighth and ninth century, a period famous for the Carolingian Reform.

Don't worry, I'm not going to read you the Catalogue. While I hope it will be useful to scholars in my field of Carolingian studies and others interested in identifying anonymous texts in Carolingian manuscripts, I am not going to talk about the details of the catalogue too much.

Rather, I want to talk about the task of passing on the faith under the Carolingians, and how the catalogue has thrown some light on the nature and process of this task. The Carolingian era is a particularly critical moment, when the patristic period had ended (with Bede's death in 735), and the salvaging and transmitting of classical Christian culture took place on a vast scale. To understand the process by which this happened is crucial to students of western intellectual history, including our own students, who often do not know where the ideas they hold or hear or read about come from.

The common assumption has been that the Carolingians were unselective and uncreative transmitters, who offered little of their own. But the catalogue tells us that,

when it came to passing on the faith, far more went on than simply the mechanical copying of patristic texts. We get a very different picture of the process from the catalogue, and I hope in what follows to describe to you something of both the Carolingians' selectivity and creativity.

There are two aspects to their selectivity and creativity, which relate to the persons responsible for choosing which works should be copied and how they should be arranged in their mss, whom I call the ms compilers; and the persons who wrote or edited the works themselves, who are the texts' composers. We will look at the work of both.

I begin with the manuscripts in which I found the texts. (This is a bit narrative.)

The catalogue took shape out of my interest in the education of the clergy during the Carolingian Reform. The ultimate goal of the Carolingian Reform was the Christianization of all levels of society. The key figure in the implementation of the Reform was the diocesan priest, for he was the final direct link to the people, who was with them day in and day out, and their only contact with the world of learning. The palace court and local archbishops, bishops, and abbots of the Carolingian realm joined in an intense effort to raise the level of education of diocesan priests so that they could be knowledgeable instructors of the people. They did this through legislation, books, and schools. Hundreds of Carolingian manuscripts still survive in which were collected texts for the priests' study, covering theological, liturgical, disciplinary, and moral-spiritual areas of knowledge. These "collection volumes", as they are sometimes called, for example typically contain expositions on baptism, the mass, the Lord's Prayer, and the creed. I began studying the baptismal expositions in them, and intended, after that, to offer a catalogue of the creed

expositions in them, because no one had done this. Most of these mss I termed “clerical instruction readers.”

It became obvious to me, from examining the entire contents of these mss, that the Carolingians used other texts as well as creed expositions in the strict sense of phrase by phrase explanations of the text of a creed, in order to explain the creedal faith. What one finds in these manuscripts is a variety of texts pertaining to the explanation of the faith grouped together with a creed exposition in the strict sense, creating a mini library of creed commentary, a sort of compendium on the faith, in one section of the manuscript. Clearly, the ms compiler considered all these associated texts on the faith to be creed commentaries in a broad sense. Because of this, I included all these associated texts in my catalogue of creed commentaries. This greatly expanded the size of the catalogue, but this newly conceived catalogue provided a more realistic picture of the extent and variety of works used to explain the creedal faith to the clergy and people.

I told you I would not read the catalogue, but it is difficult to describe adequately their variety. These creed-associated texts might address many or only one or two creedal themes, such as God as Trinity, Christ’s incarnation, the resurrection of the flesh, or eternal life, and they may range in form from definitions and glossaries, to letters, to sermons, to clerical examinations. Others of them are professions of faith, whether personal confessions (often falsely attributed to a famous authority, such as Augustine or Jerome), or the professions of faith of local or regional church councils (such as the symbol of the first council of Toledo in 400 AD). These are creeds, but in certain ms contexts they are performing the function of creed explanation, whether because the Carolingians thought they restated the Apostles’ or Nicene Creeds in nuanced or richer

ways, or because they contain some interpretation of the articles of faith. Yet others of these creed-associated texts are polemical tracts, or defenses of the faith against various heresies, such as Vigilius of Thapsus' (fl. Ca. 500) "Dialogue Against the Arians, Sabellians, and Photinians (*Contra Arianos, Sabellianos, Photinianos dialogus libri tres*).

At the same time the catalogue expanded to include all these creed-associated texts, it also expanded in the number and kind of mss on which I based my catalogue, because I found these clusters of texts pertaining to the creedal faith not only in "clerical instruction readers" but in other mss, some of which I labeled "schoolbooks" (monastic or episcopal), some bishops' handbooks for the instruction of their clergy, some missionary manuals, some library exemplars, some more vaguely "study-volumes" (perhaps for private study). In short, this clustering of texts, or mini library method of explaining the faith by bringing together a variety of works, extended to the point of being a general rule for the passing on of the faith, whether the volume was destined for a parish priest, a bishop, a missionary, a school, a library, or a private individual.

In the final form of the catalogue, only 58 of the 308 texts listed are creed commentaries in the strict sense. The remainder of the texts are these creed-associated texts found clustered together with a creed commentary in the strict sense and/or with a creed itself (usually the Apostles' or Nicene). Works that you would not at all consider creed commentaries appear in the catalogue because they were used that way by some Carolingian ms compiler. For example, the "Tome" of Pope Leo can be found in dozens of canon law collections as part of the *acta* of the Council of Chalcedon, but I list it in my catalogue because it was used as a creed commentary in a ms of Fulda, which we can look at in a moment.

In sum, by virtue of ms context, the catalogue gives us a wide variety of texts and a view of what the passing on of the faith looked like, with ms compilers selecting and bringing together a specific group of texts. The choice and combination of these clusters of texts is different in almost every manuscript. This is important, because it indicates that the compiler of the manuscript had made an intentional selection of the material.

What, then, led the compiler to select the texts that he did and, presumably, to reject others? I began to study these clusters, what I called “creed commentary collections” in individual mss. It seemed that the choice of the material was determined by the intended destination of the ms, that is, by the needs of a particular person in a particular area. It is not always easy to determine the intended use or recipient of the ms. But whatever my guess, each ms is always a carefully designed book, whose compiler had a particular purpose and probably a particular recipient in mind.

Let me give you one example of a “creed commentary collection” in a ms of Fulda. The ms is called the Codex Ragyndrudis or “Bonifatius 2”, the very book St. Boniface took with him on his mission to the Frisians in 754, and held over his head to fend off the blows of his attackers when his skull was smashed. Today this book is in the Treasury in the Cathedral of Fulda, a precious relic. It is mutilated with the slash marks from the hatchets of Boniface’s attackers. A facsimile was made, which visitors can see under glass. Let us look at the contents of this ms, which is on your hand-out.

The first item, on folios 2v-11v, is the Tome of Pope Leo. It is no. *132c* of the Catalogue. It has been called the clearest, most precise expression of the Christological doctrine of the Latin Church. It is followed by another letter of Pope Leo on giving and receiving penance, obviously useful in Boniface’s work among the newly converted.

Then, from folios 14v-57r, follows a string of seven creed commentaries and explanations of the faith, including the text of the Nicene Creed itself (designated by my catalogue nos. 66a, 105b, 192a, 140a, 115c, 32, and 36).

**66a** is Cerealis', a late 5<sup>th</sup>-century North African bishop, short work entitled "Against Maximinus the Arian" (*Libellus contra Maximinum Arianum*). In it, Maximinus questions Cerealis, and Cerealis provides testimonia from Scripture to support the equality of the Father and the Son, the omnipotence of the Son, the Holy Spirit as God, Creator, Vivifier and omnipotent, and disproves other Arian objections. This would be useful to Boniface, because Germanic Arianism was still alive in the West in Boniface's day. **105b** is Agnellus', 6<sup>th</sup>-century bishop of Ravenna, letter to Arminius "On the reason of the faith." It is also against the Arians, and treats such questions as whether the begotten has to be subordinate in time to the begetter. Agnellus says: "Even among created things we can find examples of the begetter and the begotten coming into existence simultaneously; for example, the voice and its word." Agnellus also compares the unity of the Father and the Son to a river and its source, drawing on earlier writers. The last question of Agnellus' letter is whether God was crucified with Christ on the cross. This question takes on a special pertinence, perhaps, to newly converted Germanic peoples, who could accept Christ as God as a hero figure, but not as a suffering, stabbed, deserted lord. As the Heliand, the Anglo-Saxon version of the four gospels tells it, Christ the Mighty Chieftain is still Ruler on the cross. The orthodox answer Agnellus supplies is that "God was bound with Christ, but the divinity did not suffer: a sunray falls on a tree; it is engaged with the tree, but when the tree is cut down, it doesn't suffer." **192a** is another work "On the Reason of the Faith" perhaps by Faustus of Riez (ca. 408-ca. 490),

again against Visigothic Arianism, treating the equality of the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Father. **140a** is Pseudo-Ambrose (perhaps Faustus of Riez), a brief work called “The Faith of St. Ambrose” (*Fides sancti Ambrosii*) on the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son, based on Ambrose’s work, “On the Holy Spirit” (*De spiritu sancto*). **115c** is a fifth-century North African florilegium of sentences from Scripture against the Arians, falsely attributed to Augustine. **32** is a profession of faith, called “The Faith of the Romans” (*Fides Romanorum*) which has been falsely attributed to Pope Damasus, Phobadius of Agen, Gregory of Elvira, and Gregory Nazianzus. Next is the Nicene Creed (original version, closing with the anathema against the Arians, “As for those who say there was a time when he was not...”), and then finally **36**, which is the symbolum, or creed, of the First Council of Toledo of the year 400.

Why were precisely these eight texts selected to form a compendium on the faith? Or why not six or ten? If we never know all the reasons motivating the compiler, we do see the pertinence of these texts to someone who needed to understand the orthodox view of Christ. (The codex may have been originally commissioned by a Lombard queen whose husband was an Arian.) The compiler seemed to go out of his way to find texts that would suit a particular need, casting his net quite widely. His “selectivity” does not mean he felt confined in his selection.

From what I have just shown you in the Fulda ms, you might gather that the Carolingians contributed little of their own. Few of the works in the catalogue are, in fact, Carolingian in origin, but many are not simply straightforward copies of patristic works. We must now turn to the work of the composers, the persons responsible for editing the works.

Often a Carolingian has reworked the patristic text or compiled a florilegium of excerpts from a number of patristic authorities, or used only a fragment of a patristic work. It is the way some Carolingian composer edited his sources, combining them, selecting from them, omitting sentences and adding others, that must be appreciated. (I say “composer”, but the ms compiler could be involved too, because it is impossible to know how much redacting a ms compiler may have done of the texts he chose to include in his ms.) While there is, certainly, repetition among the texts of the catalogue whose composers made use of the same sources, rarely is it exact repetition for more than a phrase or a sentence. The composers and/or ms compilers took time and trouble over these texts, not only in selecting, but also in reworking and rewording their sources. Clearly, they were interested in the doctrine of the creed commentaries, that is, in the interpretation of the faith they were delivering to the clergy. When one reads the original sources alongside some of the Texts in the Catalogue, one is at times surprised at the effectiveness of these Texts to convey their sources' theological ideas more simply or effectively.

To give you an example, I have printed out for you “Text 2” of the catalogue. Would someone be willing to read it? (Warren?—it begins with Ambrose!) (READ TEXT 2)

Text 2 is anonymous, untitled, and seemingly incomplete. Furthermore, not a single phrase of the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, or any other known creed is found in it. Again, the best way to show you why I included Text 2 in the catalogue is to look at a description of one of the manuscripts of Text 2.

As you can see from the handout, the Montpellier manuscript of Text 2 consists of 105 folios, the first eighty of which are ninth-century. I have tagged the manuscript a “clerical instruction reader.” It does contain some prayers and liturgical formulae, but it

was not intended as a service book. Rather, these liturgical pieces were included to instruct the cleric as to what an ordo of penance *was*, or what an exorcism *was*, or what appropriate prayers for the dead *were*. This is clear because of the combination of them with expositions on the creed, the Lord’s Prayer, baptism, and the mass, some of this material in question-response form, as if to test the cleric. You can see from the string of bold numbers at folios 41r-49r—nos. **245, 99, 200**, and **2**, which represent creed commentary texts listed in my catalogue, that the compiler of this manuscript brought together four texts to form a block of instruction on the creed. **245** is entitled “On the Creed” (*De symbolo*), and contains a phrase by phrase exposition on the Apostles’ Creed. **99** is the profession of faith of a bishop before his ordination. **200** is an explanation of the faith focusing on the Trinity and Christ, in question-response form. And last in the block is our Text **2**. It is clear from the location of Text 2 in this manuscript that the compiler considered this Text, as well as Texts 99 and 200, although not in the genre of creed expositions in the strict sense, as nevertheless fulfilling the function of explaining the creedal faith.

Why was Text 2 added? The presumption is that Text 2 said something not emphasized in whatever creed expositions (in the strict sense) were at hand, or said it in a different way, or gave it increased authority. Presumably Text 2 enriched explanation of the creedal faith or increased understanding of a particular point of the creedal faith. For which of these reasons did someone originally compose Text 2, and for which of these reasons did some ms compiler choose to copy it into the Montpellier ms?

Let us now look at Text 2.

The composer of Text 2 brought together two passages (somewhat altered) of two unquestionable authorities, Ambrose and Jerome. The subject of the text, the two generations of Christ, is related to the creedal declarations by which Jesus is “eternally begotten of the Father” (as the Nicene-Constantinople Creed puts it) and “born of the virgin Mary” (as the Apostles’ Creed and N-C Creed put it). The two births of Christ, celestial and virginal, however, are not conveyed by dry theological language, but through two images, taken from the beginning of John’s Gospel and the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel.

John’s Gospel begins with Jesus in heaven, as the divine eternal word, who then descends and comes among us. We see him in our mind’s eye as a God-man, appearing fully grown, on the banks of the Jordan, and being pointed out by John the Baptist as the one capable of taking away the sins of the world.

Matthew’s Gospel begins with the genealogy of Joseph, husband of Mary. Through the question of Mary’s status as a virgin betrothed to Joseph, we first see Jesus in our mind’s eye as a fetus threatened in a womb, and as a defenseless infant fleeing the wrath of Herod.

The reader is taught the two natures of Christ—divine and human, in a single person-- Christology in a nutshell—by bringing together these two biblical images.

Text 2 was astonishingly popular—at least it survives in six Carolingian manuscripts written in quite different areas of France. One manuscript is now in Montpellier, although we do not know where it was originally written; another manuscript, now in Albi, was written in southern France. One might speculate that the text was composed in relation to Spanish Adoptionism, which spread to the area of

southern Gaul and involved Carolingian theologians from the north, south, east, and west of the empire writing against its teaching. The orthodox position was that Spanish Adoptionism was a kind of Nestorianism, in which Christ's divine and human natures were so separate that he seemed to be two persons. Spanish Adoptionism said Christ was the adopted son of God, not the natural son of God, in as much as one was speaking of his human nature. But the orthodox response was no, he is always the true son of God, because you cannot separate his two natures. Text 2, by bringing together Ambrose on Christ's divinity and Jerome on Christ's humanity, brings together the two natures of Christ in his one same person, refuting the idea that he could be called the adopted son of God in the same way as we are adopted children of God, even though he was fully human, like us.

Thus we see the creativity of the Carolingian composer who found a way, through biblical pictorial images, to teach the people how to perceive Christ according to orthodox belief. What might appear to a modern manuscript cataloguer to be an incomplete fragment cannot be ignored. Its survival in 6 mss (a very high number for texts in the catalogue) attests its effectiveness.

Let me give you one more example of the Carolingians teaching theology at the popular level, this time a text conveying a sentiment of church fathers, but quoting none of them directly. The text is a sermon. Again, it made it into the catalogue (it is Text no. 6) because it was considered a creed commentary by the compiler of its manuscript. The ms is a collection volume composed of five parts put together in the early ninth century perhaps at Worms. Today it is in Wolfenbuttel, (Weiss. 91, s. IX ½). The fourth part contains Text 6 followed by a string of five further creed commentaries. The first (97) is a brief extract from Isidore's *Sentences*, stating that the Creed and the Lord's Prayer

express in brief all of Scripture. The second (88) is a sermon on the creed, comparing it to a pact made by sea-merchants, and giving a phrase by phrase exposition on the Apostles' Creed. The third (26) is Pelagius' declaration of his faith to Pope Innocent. The fourth (9) is an exposition of the Apostles' Creed attributed to Hilary of Arles (5<sup>th</sup> c.), and the fifth (177) is Venantius Fortunatus' (6<sup>th</sup> c.) exposition on the Athanasian Creed). The fifth part of the ms is famous for containing a catechism in OHG, which includes the Lord's Prayer and its explanation, the names of the criminal sins, further expositions on the Lord's Prayer and the creed, the text of the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed, and the Gloria, all in OHG.

Text 6 is a seemingly simple sermon about achieving salvation. Heading the group of creed commentaries in its ms, it shows that understanding the faith was inseparable, for the Carolingians, from doing penance and converting. The partial creed quoted in Text 6 is positioned in such a way that it both explains why we should repent, and why we should do good works. The composer sets up God's love for us as the motivating force, which the story of the creed teaches.

The sermon begins with the preacher's justification of his task based on Ezekiel 3, 18-19, and you can follow the text on your handout.

"Dearly beloved, clerics as well as lay, young as well as old, hear how the Lord spoke to his priests through the prophet: *If you make known to an unjust person his injustice, you indeed will save your life; but if you do not make it known, he will in fact die in his injustice, but his blood I will require at your hand* (cf. Ezek. 3, 18-19); that is, their sins.<sup>1</sup>"

Then he calls the people to repentance, quoting Isaiah 55, 6-7:

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<sup>1</sup> See note 1.

“Therefore, seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked person abandon his evil ways and the unjust man his worst thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, for the Lord abounds in forgiveness (cf. Is. 55, 6-7).

What does returning to the Lord consist of? Belief in the Creedal faith! The preacher’s very next words are:

“First of all you ought to believe IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH; AND IN JESUS CHRIST HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD,<sup>2</sup> (= the Apostles’ Creed), THROUGH WHOM ALL THINGS WERE MADE,<sup>3</sup> (= the N and N-C Creeds), true God and true man (cfr the Athanasian Creed, “perfect God, perfect man”); AND IN THE HOLY SPIRIT,<sup>4</sup> (= Aps’, N., N-C. Creeds), enlightener and guarantor of every good thing: three persons and one God in trinity, one substance and one majesty.” (Cfr the Athanasian Creed: “on God in Trinity” and “coeternal majesty”.)

How can such a God be approached? There is no weak point in the Trinity, no point of entry, no one of the persons less in power and majesty. But then the story gets interesting. God is, in fact, in love with us, intimately concerned about us. The sermon continues:

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<sup>2</sup> In God — Lord] symb. Ap.

<sup>3</sup> Through — made] symb. N.; symb. N.-C.

<sup>4</sup> and in the Holy Spirit] symb. N.; symb. N.-C.; cf. symb. Ap.

“Then, let us love God the Father *with all our heart, with all our soul* (cf. Mt. 22, 37; Mk. 12, 30; Lk. 10, 27), who loved us so much that *he did not spare his own son, but handed him over for the sake of us all* (cf. Rm. 8, 32). Let us love this Son of God, who is equal to God the Father in every way. FOR US HE BECAME the Son of MAN,<sup>5</sup> in order to redeem us, as *by his own blood he washed us from our sins* (cf. Rev. 1, 5). Let us also love the Holy Spirit, proceeding FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON,<sup>6</sup> (= the N.-C. Creed), with whose sanctification we have been sealed in baptism and made children of God, and by whose inspiration we do all the good that we do.”

Then, without so much as a sentence break, the sermon continues:

“And behold (et ecce) here are the works which the Lord himself commands that you should practice: love, *for love covers a multitude of sins* (1 Pet. 4, 8); chastity, because chastity draws humans to heaven; justice, for it is written: *Blessed are they who observe justice at all times* (cf. Ps. 105, 3); humility, because *everyone who humbles himself will be exalted* (cf. Lk. 14, 11; 18, 14); patience, for it is written: *in your patience you will be master of your lives* (Lk. 21, 19); kindness, because all good things will be given to the one who has a good will; modesty and gentleness, just as it is written: *But the gentle will inherit the land, and be delighted in abundant peace* (Ps. 37, 11); hospitality, because many have pleased God through hospitality; alms-giving to the poor of Christ cheerfully

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<sup>5</sup> for us – man] cf. symb. N.; symb. N.-C.

<sup>6</sup> proceeding – son] cf. symb. N.-C. (“ex patre filioque procedit”).

without regret, for *God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Cor. 9, 7), and: what you do not wish for yourself, do not do to another (cf. Tob. 4, 16<sup>7</sup>).”

Then the sermon addresses their daily challenges: “Do not sin, either by theft, fornication, murder, rape, or doing violence to anyone. Do not be greedy, or let a curse proceed from your mouth. Do not be envious, because through envy death entered into the world, and envy devours everything good. Do not be detractors, plotting evil against anyone. But above all, dearly beloved, flee the criminal sins that drown a person in eternal punishment (some of which we have mentioned already), that is: sacrilege, murder, adultery, false witness, theft, rape, pride, envy, anger, drunkenness, and lust, which is the root of all evils. Whoever is aware they have done even one of these sins, unless they shall have done penance, will not be able to possess the kingdom of heaven. For the Holy Spirit does not lie, saying through the apostle: *Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers will possess the kingdom of God* (cf. 1 Cor. 6, 9-10). And let no one force another to drink more than one ought. Do not commit perjury, for it is written: *A man who swears many oaths will be filled with iniquity* (Sir. 23, 11; [Eccli. 23, 12]); but rather, always foreseeing what is good, redeem prisoners, help the liberators, clothe the naked, visit the sick, give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. Listen, incline your ears, and from your heart hold to the words of God, for it is good to hear *the law of Christ* (Gal. 6, 2) and fulfill his commands. When you shall have satisfied these you will be just and perfect, and without sorrow you will sit in the seat of the just. When you shall have done these, you will be sound, and you will live forever in heaven with the angels, happy and blessed, because

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<sup>7</sup> See note 2.

without any sadness or suffering. Pain will not be remembered there, nor will old age or sleep weigh down anyone where there is no night, where there is always dignity. There all the just will shine like the sun, just as the Savior himself said: *The just will shine like the sun in the kingdom of my Father* (cf. Mt. 13, 43).

Therefore, dearly beloved, let us always give thanks to this almighty God, and always pray his mercy that he preserves us in this present life, and leads us to eternal life, to whom is *honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.* (1 Tim. 1, 17)

The composer of Text 6 was a true theologian, for whom the goal of understanding the faith (*intellectus fidei*) is spiritual perfection, the attaining of heaven. I have not been able to find a single sentence in it that precisely quotes a patristic text. Yet its message repeats the teaching of the fathers that the creed is a love story, and that its purpose is to lead souls to eternal joy in heaven. In this sermon the people are not threatened with the punishment of hellfire, but the tone is one of encouragement from a pastor who is also, like God, in love with his flock. The people of the Carolingian realm were taught they could have eternal bliss through acts of hospitality and alms-giving.

Not complicated, but it put the creed smack in the middle of their daily sins, brought its words to bear on people, like us all, who wanted to make sense of death. One is impressed by how well the words of Text 6 on the kinds of sins that should be avoided (like violence and getting others drunk) fit the need of a rural community.

Text 2 and Text 6 are two very different examples of the Carolingians' creativity when it came to passing on the faith. In these two cases they re-invented patristic doctrine in a Carolingian context. I have suggested that these texts responded to the needs of the

people, in one case facing the Spanish Adoptionist error, in the other facing the problem of the difficulty of being a Christian in a violent world. In their manuscript context, one is permitted to see the task of passing on the faith under the Carolingians as the transformation of society at large. This could not be done by a centralized group of highbrows issuing a model text for a vast, diverse realm.

In sum, what does the variety of the texts signify (which represents only a tiny proportion of the true variety, given the number of lost manuscripts), and what did it mean for the passing on of the faith that local manuscript compilers created their own syllabi of what their own local pastors needed or ought to know? No single creed commentary was especially preferred, but furthermore, there was no limit to the variety of patristic and Carolingian works that could be employed to explain points of doctrine.

We perhaps rarely stop to think why the Nicene faith held firm among the majority of the population, while we focus on the lamentable ignorance, superstitious beliefs, and idolatry that challenged the church, and included some local parish priests themselves.

The answer may be the openness of the tradition of the faith. If one read all the works listed in the Catalogue, one would have to discard any notion that the tradition of the faith was a narrow corridor of doctrine. The faith could be broadly interpreted. The Trinity, or “hell,” or “the communion of the saints” were explained in many different ways.

If the passing on of the faith is the continual, historical process of interpreting or re-explaining it for each new age and place, or circumstance and need, then the Nicene faith held firm because it was re-interpreted to speak to the people by local individuals.

If this WAS how the Carolingians went about the task of preserving from late antiquity the faith of the church, what was at stake? Nothing less than our western heritage of thought.

If we are ever to understand why past believers of Christianity acted and thought the way they did, and why we have the ideas we do about so many aspects of the faith, we must return to the critical Carolingian era and its work of interpretation.

(I did not give this in the talk😊

Perhaps there is a message in all of this for us, and perhaps the message is: BE NOT AFRAID. Consider our publications, our sermons, our syllabuses, our classroom lectures, our conference papers. Our ideas as to how we interpret the Bible, how we address Judaism, feminism, racism, science, the environment, written down and circulated in books, enter the mainstream of the interpretation of the faith. What at first may be lofty speculation can become commonplace thought. The student or parishioner or Borders' browser often has no consciousness of our fallibility. By what criteria are people today holding to the truth of the faith, or making value judgments of our books? The passing on of the faith needs room for experimentation, if not everything pans out. But sometimes an idea that was once completely unacceptable can become unquestionably acceptable (gay rights, women's ordination), or, vice-versa, what was once acceptable can become completely unacceptable (torture, violence, salvery, apartheid).

You might immediately ask: why multiple explanations of the faith in a single ms? You might think, given Charlemagne's efforts to establish model texts, such as one official sacramentary, one canon law collection, one monastic rule, one penitential book, and one method of chant, that he might have specified some one creed commentary as a standard in his legislation on the teaching of the creed. He did not, but nor were the manuscript compilers happy with one same exposition on the creed.

