Conclusion

This book has examined tenth- and eleventh-century local priests in the former Frankish lands from three different angles: their economic resources, their kinship networks and their relations with the bishop, both through their collective participation in the diocesan synod and through their accountability to the bishop in the locality as presented by manuals for the *Sendgericht*. Throughout, our aim has been to centre local priests in their own lives and in historiographical narratives alike, reconstructing as far as possible the evidence for their *Spielraum* or 'room for manoeuvre'. As suggested in the introduction to this book, this is a relatively unusual strategy in the wider historiography, which has tended to focus on episcopal or monastic concerns; where local priests do appear in this historiography, it is often in the background, as a homogenous and somewhat passive group.

In pursuing this agenda, the book has attempted to make the best use of surviving material to bring us closer to what it meant to be a priest, and how their contemporaries recorded their activities or described them. For this reason, we have drawn on a variety of methodological approaches, and have taken a wide-ranging geographical view that focuses on pockets of material or specific case studies, rather than offering a survey of visible change and continuity in any specific region over the tenth and eleventh centuries. This has highlighted how much regional tendencies in medieval historiography shape our understanding of priests. For instance, without the southern French charter archive of Lézat, the documentary evidence for local priests' wives and children before 1050 would be very rare north of the Alps, while our understanding of how and why manuscripts were produced for the *Sendgericht* is almost entirely dependent on intellectual centres in the Rhineland. In both these examples, we can see regional differences shaping how people talked about priests (and thus how we talk about them a millennium later), but these differences also reveal the spectrum of experiences of local priests across the Latin West.

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In this conclusion, we wish to summarise our findings, consider what lay behind the changes that we can discern and see how this new picture fits with the existing historiography of the Church in this period.

1 Continuities and Changes

We have been struck by the continuities with the Carolingian world that emerge from our study. These continuities are visible at multiple levels and shaped all aspects of priests' lives. Taking these in order, let us turn first to the economic concerns of local priests we considered in Chapter 2. When Carolingian royal and episcopal legislation allocated a tithe income to baptismal churches, the result was that local priests serving at those churches always had access to a regular revenue stream, however ample or meagre this was in practice. As we have seen, there were subsequently important changes in the allocation of this income, but the tithe itself remained a fundamental part of the landscape. Right across the former Carolingian empire, tithe incomes continued to provide economic support for the clerics dispersed in ever-growing numbers across the countryside, even as other actors staked claims to portions of it. Although not the only factor, this income played a major part in positioning local priests at the centre of communities and ensured the maintenance of their social status as established in the ninth century. Their status as conduits for local issues to be brought to wider audiences, and for the concerns of elites to be brought to bear upon localities, endured throughout the period.

We have seen too that there were no significant shifts visible in priests' kinship relations either, whether in comparison with the Carolingian or even over the post-Carolingian period. This is significant in two respects. In the first place, the changes in how clerical continence was talked about from around the 1050s onwards, the heightened attention paid to priests in particular and the attempts for the first time to articulate defences of clerical marriage do not correspond to anything we can see in the documentation prior to that moment. Some tenth-century priests certainly were or had been married, but their wives have a very low profile, just as they had in the Carolingian period. Second, the long-standing historiographical emphasis on 'nuclear' priests' families of wives and children does not reflect how they themselves or their contemporaries viewed their kin, at least to judge from the documentary evidence. Throughout this period, siblings, parents, nephews and nieces were important to priests, and, of course, vice versa. We can see family units working together with priests at their centre across generations to secure family-owned property.

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There are also broad continuities in how these priests interacted with their peers and their superiors, the bishops. The way that local priests in the *vita* of Ulrich of Augsburg, written in the late tenth century, seem to inhabit a Carolingian world, at least in relation to their bishop, is sometimes attributed to the author's reliance on Carolingian-period material. Yet our examination has revealed that this depiction of local priests may have been equally influenced by contemporary practice. Although levels of episcopal oversight depended on kaleidoscopic geographical and political factors, there is good reason to suppose that across the period, tenth- and eleventh-century bishops took a keen interest in the activities of the locally rooted clergy. Bishops in late Carolingian Francia used diocesan synods and the *Sendgericht* to manage the priests in their locality and to ensure their adherence to the role expected of them; succeeding generations of bishops were no different. Indeed, the evidence for this oversight in this period is in some ways stronger than for the preceding century.

Underpinning these continuities is a broad normative stability from the Carolingian period. It is true that bishops in the former Frankish lands more or less ceased to issue new episcopal statutes from around the year 900, with a few outlying exceptions. However, we should remember that all the Carolingian manuscripts that survive today survived then too, including the priestly handbooks that helped mediate this knowledge to the local level. Some may have passed already into monastic libraries, but others were still in active service (for instance, Vatican City/Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 485 and Sélestat, Bibliothèque humaniste, MS 132, both contain tenth-century notes and additions, and the Vatican manuscript seems to have seen especially long service).[1]

More importantly, we can perhaps read the end of episcopal statutes as indicating that the normative framework around priests had bedded down and could now be supported through more generic texts, such as the widely copied *Admonitio Synodalis* (translated in app. 3). The *Admonitio* was effectively a precis of Carolingian-period norms around local priests. There were different versions of this text, but though the differences between them are revealing, it is the shared material that dominates. Through the *Admonitio Synodalis*, a succinct definition of what being a local priest meant was widely disseminated. Carolingian specialists have in recent years argued against assuming that 'Carolingian reform' was

[1] Discussed by Waagmeester, *Pastoral Works*, chapter 3. Doctoral research currently carried out by Samuel Schatz on tenth- and eleventh-century copies of 'Carolingian' texts for priests (such as Theodulf's episcopal statutes) will shed more light on this question.

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characterised by uniformity, instead pointing to the diversity of initiatives from this time; ironically, such uniformity is much more apparent in the post-Carolingian period.[2] This fundamental normative stability is important, since it suggests that the relative absence of discussion of these priests was not because there was no longer any meaningful regulation of them, but because their duties and pastoral responsibilities tended to pass without notice until something went wrong.

This continuity also dominates, we suggest, these priests' relationship with their parishioners, though there is not really enough evidence to allow us to study this in detail.[3] That is not to say that this relationship was in stasis. In areas served by the *Sendgericht*, for instance, the laity, or at least its more socially prominent members, would have been given an instrument to hold their priest to account, with the opportunity to bring misdeeds directly to the bishop's attention. On the other hand, the increasingly sharply conceptualised set of dues that the laity owed to these clerics could have led to more onerous obligations, for instance, as burial fees became effectively compulsory rather than (at least nominally) discretionary. Perhaps many peasants silently shared the views of a certain Leutard from Châlons-en-Champagne, as described by Raoul Glaber in the 1030s. According to Raoul, Leutard, possessed by the devil, preached that it was 'completely unnecessary and mere folly to pay tithes'.[4]

Yet, Leutard is an exceptional voice in our sources, and there are few signs of 'tithe strikes' until the later eleventh century (when they were anyway led by aristocrats).[5] In general terms, despite the complexification that we have unpacked, the continuities with the Carolingian period were probably the dominant note for the lay community that the priests served. That is the implication of the huge interest in the *Admonitio Synodalis* text, a work entirely made up of Carolingian material, including in its emphasis on the priest's conscientious fulfilment of basic pastoral care. Evidence for collective involvement in the appointment of priests, occasionally visible in

[2] A. Westwell, I. Rembold and C. van Rhijn (eds.), *Rethinking the Carolingian Reforms* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

[3] For continuity in the important dimension of penance, see R. Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe: 600–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. pp. 140–54 and S. M. Hamilton, 'Inquiring into Adultery and Other Wicked Deeds: Episcopal Justice in Tenth and Early Eleventh-Century Italy', *Viator* 41 (2010), pp. 21–44.

[4] Radulfus Glaber, *Historiarum libri quinque*, J. France (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 1–253, here bk. 2, c. 11 (22), pp. 88–90, the quotation at p. 90: 'Nam decimas dare dicebat esse omnimodis superfluum et inane'.

[5] For instance, MGH Epp. sel. 2.2, IX, 5, pp. 579–80, in which Pope Gregory VII encounters *milites* who refused to pay tithe to fornicating priests.

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Carolingian-period evidence, dries up, as churches were more thoroughly entangled in patronage networks; parishioners' say in who was their priest was probably increasingly tenuous. But not until the thirteenth century were local priests routinely labelled as *dominus* or 'lord' in the surviving documentation, using a title that separated them honorifically from the community they served and lived amongst; before this point, they were presumably still seen as honourable members of that community.[6]

2. Typical Priestly Lifeworlds, ca. 900 and ca. 1050

The influence of the Carolingian normative and institutional legacy on the priesthood was evidently strong, and the lines of continuity between the local priesthood in the ninth century and that of the following century and a half are significant and far-reaching. Nevertheless, changes to what it meant to be a priest were taking place in the tenth century. These would often have been imperceptible within an individual priest's lifetime, but viewed across the broad geographical and chronological parameters of this study, they amount to some clear developments. To illustrate the impact of these, let us compare two priests, one from around 900 and one from 1050. Unfortunately, we do not have enough evidence to be able to present biographies of real individual priests; the vast majority of evidence for individual priests from this period is anecdotal or provides us with snapshots into priests' lives over a longer time period but without the vital contextual clues that would bring any one of these figures into the light enough to consider them here. However, a composite image of local priests, very roughly sketched, might present the 'typical' priestly experience as something like the following in 900 and 1050, respectively.

Around 900, a local priest at a baptismal church would enjoy a stable income generated through the tithes he received, in addition to whatever he received from lands attached to the church where he served, whether this was rents, money from produce or the produce itself. These revenues alone might have made him into one of the more important local residents, and combined with his vocation would almost certainly have done so, in all but the wealthiest areas. Our priest, who – if he had risen through the ranks according to canon law – was at least thirty years old, might have married and had children prior to his previous ordination as a subdeacon or deacon but, according to expectations of the time, perhaps lived

[6] For the change in honorific, see Arnold, *The Making of Lay Religion*, pp. 384–5 (our thanks to John Arnold for this reference).

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separately from his spouse. He may have managed property alongside his wife and children, if the latter were adults, and may even have continued to cohabit with them. If he lived near his other family, he was a prominent member of the kinship group in their interactions with neighbours and landholders and may have represented them. This role integrated him and his family into the world outside the village. The church at which he served might have been owned by a bishop, or a lay aristocrat, to whom he would have owed some dues as a consequence; in some cases, though, it was the priest himself and his family who were the owners. His knowledge and performance of the ministry may have been assessed intermittently by conscientious bishops or their representatives, and their meetings in his own village or one nearby might include an element of testing and examination. If he faced challenges to his position, he might take his case to the episcopal synod, where he could expect a judgement that involved his peers.

If we turn our gaze to a local priest around the year 1050, the picture looks quite different. First, he was likely to be poorer than his tenth-century antecessor (to whom he might or might not have been related, in view of the extent of priestly mobility). Population growth may have increased the revenues from individual churches, but new churches had also been established and stood in closer proximity to each other than before. Moreover, more people were now appointed as priests 'absolutely', while waiting for a church to become available, which would have made the competition around desirable appointments more intense. Our priest was much less likely to own the church at which he served himself; the clerical and lay elites who did were not only taking dues as a kind of rent, as had already happened in Carolingian Francia, but were increasingly staking claims to own significant proportions of the regular income generated at these local churches, which cannot be seen in ninth-century evidence. How much that left to the priest would have varied considerably from one church to another.

In some parts of the former Carolingian empire, the priest would have had more regular contact with the bishop and his agents in the locality, as mechanisms for inspection were honed and expanded, especially in those areas where the *Sendgericht* was prevalent. Like his predecessors, our priest would have occasionally travelled to the cathedral to attend synods, where he would encounter many other priests from across the diocese, both those who served in the cathedral canonry and those who had travelled long distances, like him, to be there. Meetings at the diocesan centre were now, however, increasingly designed as moments for the projection and

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representation of episcopal authority, rather than 'quality control': the Carolingian-period concentration on testing knowledge was increasingly balanced out with a focus on conduct. The priest would not be expected to do very much beyond listening attentively to the sermons and the episcopal announcements and making the customary payments (though he might have had other priorities once the formal parts of the meeting were over). Though not in itself an innovation, it seems likely that bishops were increasingly alert to the financial possibilities that this network of churches offered and were beginning to keep better records about it. That said, priests remained embedded in family relations, and these kinship ties helped ensure that the thickening out of the episcopal network in the diocese was not necessarily to individual priests' disadvantage; it depended on their own networks.

3 The Causes of Change

What kind of changes lay behind this contrasting picture? While the allocation of tithes to baptismal churches under the Carolingians had provided these churches and the clerics required to staff them with a dependable source of income, we can see these income streams were changing as the tenth century progressed. In the late ninth century, bishops began to redistribute the tithe revenue amongst other churches with pastoral responsibilities to the benefit of many churches that had previously been classed as chapels. At the same time, the concept of 'tithe revenues' was becoming more formalised, but also more capacious. Tithes were parcelled into fractions that could themselves be exchanged, redistributed or the subject of negotiation, while other ad hoc revenues were increasingly treated as individually coherent rights or dues. This process led to the dynamization of local parochial revenues.

As a consequence of these changes to how income was apportioned and distributed, we begin to see a greater disparity in wealth amongst local priests than is visible for their Carolingian-era predecessors. Some appear to have been significantly wealthy: the early tenth-century *Capitula Sangallensia*, for instance, envisage a priest having control over two or three churches,[7] and sometimes, this multiple ownership appears in the charter evidence.[8] Yet, other priests serving at local churches were likely

[7] See Chapter 5, p. 210, n. 142 above.
[8] E.g. Saint-Vincent de Mâcon, no. 497, in which the cleric Willebert is given two churches, one immediately and the other after the death of its priest.

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becoming poorer as lay owners or powerful institutions found ways over time to divert at least some of the revenue streams into their own purses or bought up assets in their entirety. Here we can see a drift towards the rural landscape familiar from the later Middle Ages: one inhabited by relatively impoverished rectors and vicars subsisting on a fraction of the income that the church they served accrued, alongside better-off priests. However, a limit to this impoverishment was placed by the custom in many places – though one not formalised in law – that a certain share of the tithes, usually around a third, should remain at the local priest's personal disposition.

A second difference from evidence of the Carolingian period is a clearer insight into how kinship could tie networks that went beyond the locality, often to the cathedral at the centre of the diocese. This may be simply due to the thickening of the documentary record, rather than marking a shift on the ground, but it could equally show how kinship networks were adapting to the new institutional environment. It could also be another sign of the social and economic diversification of the realities of local priests. Some local priests were related to canons and cathedral clergy, and these were probably the priests at the upper end of the scale; priests at the lower end are unlikely to have had such connections.

Finally, while episcopal oversight of clergymen operated within parameters that would have been familiar to Carolingian bishops and priests alike, we can discern new methods through which priests were brought to account. Bishops and their circles devised new ways of staging and exercising episcopal authority and new ways for these same circles to gather information about priests, leading potentially to more effective ecclesiastical discipline and encadrement. Some of these changes may have been simply a natural consequence of the expanding church network in the landscape, as growing numbers of rural clergy meant bishops had to manage more people and delegate appropriately. It is also possible that the expectations of priestly offices in rural contexts were becoming clarified and streamlined.[9] After all, at the beginning of the tenth century, the author or authors of the aforementioned *Admonitio Synodalis* managed to encode an entire programme of normative exhortation within a twenty-minute sermon, a format that was widely copied and relatively stable in its form.

Driving these changes was how a new resource, in the form of a revenue stream directly benefiting dispersed rural churches, largely created by

[9] Patzold, *Episcopus*, pp. 37–43, esp. chapters 5 and 6.

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Carolingian legislative initiative, was socially 'processed' in the period that followed. It became an increasingly important token in social and political strategies on the part of elites, such as bishops, wealthy aristocrats and monasteries. However, these changes did not mean that priests themselves were completely swallowed up in patronage networks. In the first place, they were often themselves figures of some substance, supported by significant family networks, and their position on the ground meant that they could never be completely controlled. Second, bishops in Carolingian Francia maintained a clear sense of their authority over all clerics in their diocese, and the evidence studied in this book suggests this was sustained in the post-Carolingian period, too. Diocesan synods were held, which priests were expected to attend, and the copying of episcopal handbooks for the *Sendgericht* is a positive indication that judicial inspections took place, for why else would the manuscripts have been laboriously compiled?

It is in this context that we should read the vernacular oath of loyalty demanded by bishops from the clerics they ordained, the so-called *Klerikereid*. The oath is usually reckoned to be ninth-century in origin, and may well be so, but it is significant that it survives in two tenth-century episcopal manuscripts.[10] In one of these manuscripts, it follows immediately from the *Admonitio Synodalis*, suggesting a potential wider relevance beyond the ordination ceremony:

> On the oath for bishops, from those who are being ordained by them. That I will be loyal to you, Bishop N., as far as my strength and knowledge allow, on my own initiative being useful and avoiding harm, being obedient and dutiful and staying in his bishopric, as I rightly should according to the canons.[11]

This oath has been interpreted as remarkable for how it creates a direct link between bishop and ordained cleric, but without the notion of *Eigenkirchenrecht* (or 'proprietary church law') as a background assumption, this seems less surprising. This oath is preserved in manuscripts from tenth-century Bavaria, but there is no evidence to suggest that any bishop elsewhere would have thought very differently about the relationship: after all, the standard ordination ceremony in Latin also required a commitment to the bishop from the priest, and there is good reason to believe that

[10] München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6241, ff. 100rv and München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 27246, f. 91v.

[11] Esders and Mierau, *Klerikereid*, p. 4: 'Daz ih dir hold pin N demo piscophe, so mino chrephti enti mino chunsti sint, si minan vuillun fruma frummenti enti scadun vuententi, kahorich enti kahengig enti statig in sinemo piscophtuome, so ih mit rehto aphter canone scal'.

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contemporary bishops in western Francia were also demanding an oath of obedience from priests as a pre-condition for ordination.[12] That said, what the *Klerikereid* does demonstrate with unusual clarity is that the priests in question had their own capacity to help the bishop; they were people whose agency mattered enough to have them swear an oath, whose terms were not unilaterally imposed but regulated by church tradition (*aphter canone)*. Priests were never simply the staff of church owners, nor simply the pawns of bishops. Though the evidence does not let us see it in detail, the existence of these competing claims would presumably have helped priests to win some *Spielraum* by playing one off against the other.

4 *Ausblick*

We hope in this book to have recovered something of the lived experiences of the local priests whose activities provided the chief religious framework for the vast majority of the population. However, we also wrote this book to think about the place of local priests in narratives of historical change between the Carolingian and Gregorian 'reforms', and to question whether closer consideration of them might in turn enable or even require these narratives to be adjusted. At this point, what can be said about this question on the basis of our findings? In the introduction, we mentioned three approaches to the history of the Church in this period, namely the discussions around the *Eigenkirchenwesen*, territorialisation and papal-led reform. These approaches highlight the issue of church ownership, the organisation of space and debates amongst elites as to the location of authority within the church. All three of them suppose an inflection around the mid eleventh century. All are important, but none leaves much space for the agency of the local priest; as a final consideration, let us investigate how putting this figure back into the history of the Church changes the picture.

To begin with, we have seen how the churches at which local priests served were often owned and managed, in increasingly complicated ways, by elites; yet these priests had their own resources, both economic and

[12] See Introduction, p. 11, for another such ordination oath; Burchard of Worms, *Decretum*, bk. II, ch. 157, fol. 47, notes that priests must make a commitment to the bishop on their ordination. Abbot Abbo of Fleury secured a privilege from Pope Gregory V in 997 for his monastery, which included the clause 'ne episcopus saltem subjectionem ab eis requirat quos ordinavit', which was implicitly therefore normal practice around Orléans. For this charter, see L. Roach, *Forgery and Memory at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), pp. 173–7.

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social. At no point in the tenth century were local churches ever wholly subsumed within a lay network, completely beyond the bishop's reach; a church was, in the end, never treated as just like a mill, and a local priest was never just like a miller. The ownership of these churches is an interesting topic, but we have not found any evidence for the *Eigenkirchenwesen*, according to which lay control over local churches (and other churches) became close to total, thus leading to the immiseration, and moral and educational decline, of the local clergy – until the popes and their allies finally grappled with the issue in the late eleventh century and fought for *libertas ecclesiae* (the 'freedom of the Church'). As should be clear by this stage, this is not a view that we share, because it finds little concrete support in the evidence we have studied.

As for the question of territorialisation, there can be no doubt that there were important changes in the conceptualisation, creation and use of space in this period, including a steadily growing territorialisation of the parish. However, our findings suggest that it was not just the space that was changing but also the *pôle* to which that space was oriented: from a human point of view, the priest who served in the church. This central point was becoming more complex, subject to the influence of more people with their own varied capacities for action. The institutional Church was organised spatially, and the modes of this organisation could and did evolve; it remained, however, always at root a network of people, directed to the care of souls, in which mission the local priest played a crucial, and evolving, role.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, there is the question of papal reform. That the institution of the papacy in Rome was transformed in the course of the eleventh century is of course hardly in doubt, nor can its growing impact on the ecclesiastical network from this point onwards be questioned. But when one looks at it from the perspective of local priests, the origins and scope of this movement, and the debates it generated, look a little different. While it has been framed in general terms as a response to post-Carolingian 'decline', the evidence we have found for how the Church operated in the localities reveals a continuing broadening of bandwidth, as the parameters for priestly life worlds expanded. This has two implications. The first is that we cannot connect the papal reform movement to an image of a degenerate or decayed Church at the local level; there was no dramatic crisis, for instance, in priestly continence or priestly independence from lay influence. The second is that the picture was nevertheless constantly evolving; insofar as the popes in Rome, their supporters and their opponents did have local churches in mind in their

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programmes, their reaction was to recent developments, not generic early medieval conditions (such as a supposed *Eigenkirchenwesen* defined under Charlemagne and Louis the Pious). That is not to say that the critiques expressed by contemporaries such as Peter Damian were completely detached from reality. Rather, we should see them as attempts to claim moral authority by proposing simple solutions to complex problems and indeed by framing complexity itself as a kind of decay.

We do not, therefore, wish to replace old narratives of reform with bland assertions of continuity. This book has shown how the post-Carolingian world of the tenth-century priest was in motion. However, this change was not one of decay, but of complexification. We can see how Carolingian normative and institutional legacies were being adopted and adapted: stretched, but not out of recognition. Expectations around local priests' roles were becoming standardised, with better means for enforcement. Yet, the situation on the ground was, if anything, becoming more diverse, as a result of growth in the wider socio-economic context: there were, in broad terms, more churches, and more priests needed to serve them, in the countryside and also in expanding urban settlements. In view of these dynamics on the ground, the maintenance and elaboration of the imperial normative framework developed in the preceding decades is all the more striking.

Indeed, when one takes full stock of the scale and depth of the local priesthood in this period, and of the momentum of its long development, the turbulence at the ecclesiastical network's highest points can seem rather remote, like thunder faintly heard at a great distance, with only the occasional rare lightning bolt hitting some locality. For most people in Francia after the Carolingians, the Church was embodied by the priest they saw, listened to and spoke with regularly, and the change to his world followed its own slow, distinctive rhythm.

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