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Confession in the Regnum Francorum *(742–900): The Sources Revisited*

by DAVID BACHRACH

The rite of confession is generally recognised by scholars to have been an essential feature of medieval Christianity. However, there is no scholarly consensus regarding the frequency or character of confession by lay people before the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Since it is important to understand the background to these matters, this study examines confession both as it was supposed to be practised and as it was reported in practice among soldiers in western Europe prior to 1215. By focusing on the fighting men of Western Europe, a particular but not insignificant segment of lay society, this knotty problem is addressed from a new angle.

The recent publication of *Debating the Middle Ages: issues and readings* has once again brought into focus the sharp division in scholarly views over the religious practice of medieval Christians.[1] An older historiography, exemplified by the works of Étienne Delaruelle, Jean Leclercq and Gabriel le Bras, tended to describe medieval society as Christian even if this Christianity took divergent forms.[2] Over the last three decades, however, scholars have tended toward a new model of medieval society that emphasises these divergent forms, frequently portraying religion as a chasm that divided a Christian clerical elite from the vast majority of people.[3] Jean-Claude Schmitt, a proponent of an extreme form of this dichotomy whose

I would like to thank Fr Michael Driscoll, Professor of Medieval Liturgy at the University of Notre Dame, for his kind efforts in reading this essay and for his insights concerning the rite of confession.

[1] Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein (eds), *Debating the Middle Ages: issues and readings*, Malden 1998, 367–87.

[2] The most thorough survey of medieval lay religious historiography remains John Van Engen, 'The Christian Middle Ages as an historiographical problem', *American Historical Review* cix (1986), 519–52.

[3] Ibid. 528–32, and the literature cited there. For a more recent survey of the literature dealing with the division between popular and elite religion see Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and religion in Merovingian Gaul A.D. 481–751*, New York 1995, 18–20.

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important contribution to this question appears in *Debating the Middle Ages*, has argued that there is a continuing need to consider medieval religion in terms of a 'two-tiered model' characterised by points of 'contention' and 'resistance' between the clergy and the people.[4]

The conflict over the nature of medieval lay Christianity is being fought on a variety of fronts. One of the most important areas of controversy deals with the rite of confession and its practice among lay Christians. As might be expected, given the widely divergent models of medieval *Christianitas*, there is as yet no scholarly consensus concerning the role that confession played in the lay Christian experience during the Middle Ages.[5] The poles of the debate are now represented by André Vauchez and Joseph Avril, two leading French scholars dealing with medieval Christian practice. Vauchez holds the minimalist view that early medieval society was only superficially Christian and that lay people rarely if ever participated in the rite of confession.[6] He traces the origins of the intellectual development of individual confession and penance to the twelfth century, and insists that regular lay participation in confession only became possible after the hierarchical Church made spiritual reformation of the laity a high priority.[7] By contrast, Avril argues for a more positive view of early medieval Christianity. According to him, regular confession by lay people was a standard element in Christian religious practice by the early ninth century, and continued to be treated as such by lay Christians right up to the eve of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.[8]

For the most part, scholars have relied upon two types of source to demonstrate the regular practice of lay confession in the early Middle Ages. Avril, and Bernard Poschmann before him, emphasised the importance of episcopal statutes from the ninth through the eleventh century that enjoined mandatory confession upon all lay adults annually or even three times a

[4] Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'Religion, folklore, and society in the medieval west', in Little and Rosenwein, *Debating the Middle Ages*, 376–87 at p. 380.

[5] Alexander Murray, 'Confession before 1215', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser. iii (1993), 51–81 at p. 53, notes the 'sic et non' character of the debate about the practice of confession in the early and high Middle Ages with some scholars holding the position that lay people regularly participated in individual confession, and other scholars arguing that confession was rare, even for monks, before the twelfth century.

[6] André Vauchez, *Les Laïcs au moyen âge: pratiques et expèriences religieuses*, Paris 1987, 49.

[7] Idem, 'Présentation', in *Faire croire: modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XIIe au XVe siècle*, Paris 1981, 8–16 at p. 10.

[8] Joseph Avril, 'Remarques sur un aspect de la vie religieuse paroissiale: la pratique de la confession et de la communion du Xe au XIVe siècle', in *L'Encadrement religieux des fidèles au moyen-âge et jusqu'au concile de Trente*, Paris 1985, 345–63 at p. 345–9. A recent article by Rob Meens, 'The frequency and nature of early medieval penance', in Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (eds), *Handling sin: confession in the Middle Ages*, Woodbridge 1998, 35–63 at pp. 36–7, tends to support Avril's conclusions while questioning the value of the prescriptive evidence upon which he bases his case for regular lay confession.

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year.[9] Poschmann and other scholars, including Allen Frantzen, Raymund Kottje and Michael Driscoll also point to the hundreds of surviving penitential manuals from this period, which they argue demonstrate the continuing emphasis on repeatable confession throughout the early Middle Ages.[10] A recent study by Rob Meens of 106 penitential texts from the period 800–1000 confirms that most were written for parish priests and were intended to aid them in their pastoral efforts.[11]

Those historians favouring a twelfth-century time-frame for the introduction of regular lay confession do not dispute the fact that statutes and penitential manuals regularly prescribe it in the early Middle Ages.[12] Instead, they change the terms of the argument. One tactic that they employ is to deny the value of early medieval evidence by characterising it as merely prescriptive and therefore not a guide to 'real' lay practice.[13] However, this view is problematic. Although it is certainly the case that the mere existence of a corpus of statutes cannot be understood as a demonstration of general lay compliance, it is equally important to recognise that these statutes are not without some descriptive value. Statutes provide a clear indication of the goals of those who promulgated them. In the case of ninth-century bishops, including Theodulf of Orléans, Halitgar of Cambrai and Raoul of Bourges, it is evident that they, with the backing of the Carolingian secular government under whose auspices the episcopate operated, considered regular confession by lay people to be of great importance.[14] To discount as mere wishful thinking the efforts

[9] Bernhard Poschmann, *Buss und letzte Ölung*, Freiburg 1951, 71–7. Allen J. Frantzen, 'The significance of the Frankish penitentials', this JOURNAL xxx (1979), 409–21 at pp. 409–10, forcefully rejected the argument of Rosamond Pierce (McKitterick) in 'The "Frankish" penitentials', in Derek Baker (ed.), *The materials, sources and methods of ecclesiastical history* (Studies in Church History xi, 1975), 31–9, that penitential handbooks had only a brief history of use in the Frankish Church.

[10] Frantzen, 'The significance of the Frankish penitentials', 409–21; Raymund Kottje, 'Die Tötung im Kriege, ein moralisches und rechtliches Problem im frühen Mittelalter,' *Beiträge zur Friedensethik* xi (1991), 1–21 at pp. 2–3; Michael S. Driscoll, 'Penance in transition: popular piety and practice', in Lizette Larson-Miller (ed.), *Medieval liturgy: a book of essays*, New York 1997, 121–63 at pp. 124–38 (see n. 5 for a useful introduction to the literature); Meens, 'The frequency and nature of early medieval penance', 40–7.

[11] Meens, 'The frequency and nature of early medieval penance', 40–1.

[12] Murray, 'Confession', 58.

[13] Ibid. 58–9, asserts a categorical distrust of church canons dealing with confession as useful evidence for lay behaviour. This is a consequence of Murray's view that 'these documents are all of the sort which say how things should be done, not how they are'.

[14] Concerning the promulgation of episcopal statutes dealing with lay confession see Avril, 'Remarques sur un aspect de la vie religieuse paroissiale', 346. On the role of secular and ecclesiastical cooperation in the Carolingian Church see Thomas P. Oakley, 'The co-operation of medieval penance and secular law', *Speculum* vii (1932), 515–24; F. L. Ganshof, 'Charlemagne et le serment,' *Mélanges Halphen*, Paris 1951, 261–7; É. Delaruelle, 'Charlemagne et l'église', *Revue d'histoire de l'église de France* cxxxiii (1953), 165–99; Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian reforms 789–895*, London 1977.

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of these sophisticated and highly motivated clerics and their secular supporters seems unjustifiable. Indeed, as Julia Smith argues in volume ii of the *New Cambridge medieval history*, episcopal statutes dealing with the abuses of the penitential system can be used as evidence for the effectiveness of other statutes that required lay people to confess their sins on an annual or even triannual basis.[15] Thus, for example, when in 829 the Council of Paris warned priests against considering gifts, love, fear or favour when assigning penances, the bishops present were calling into question the manner in which the rite of confession and subsequent penances were being carried out.[16] The implication is that at least some people were confessing their sins and attempting to find an alternate means of satisfaction.

Furthermore, as Smith also notes, the warning by the bishops at Paris to maintain established standards of penitential discipline does not tell the entire story regarding lay attitudes to this rite.[17] At least some lay people thought of confession and penance as good things. In the course of composing a treatise in 841 to prepare her son William for his new life at the court of Charles the Bald (840–77), Dhuoda, a Carolingian noblewoman, included several sections dealing with the importance of confession. She emphasised that William should regularly confess his sins privately to the priests, and that during these rites he should both weep and sigh.[18] Dhuoda also told her son to play close attention to the Psalms because it was there that he could find a model for the intimate confession of his sins and a full prayer for divine mercy.[19]

This brings us to our second point. Some scholars argue that episcopal statutes stand alone as evidence for the participation of lay people in the rite of confession, and that it is therefore impossible to corroborate these prescriptive documents, issued by bishops for their dioceses, from other sources.[20] This underrates the testimony of other material. In addition to Dhuoda's

[15] Julia M. H. Smith, 'Religion and lay society', in Rosamond McKitterick (ed.), *New Cambridge medieval history*, II: *c. 700–900*, Cambridge 1995, 654–78.

[16] MGH, *Concilia aevi Karolini*, i/2, ed. Albert Werminghoff, Hanover 1908, 633, where priests who, 'aut muneris aut amoris aut timoris aut certe favoris causa tempora modumque paenitentiae ad libitum paenitentium inducunt …', are instructed to take heed of God's wrathful message to wrongdoers delivered through the prophet Ezekiel. Smith, 'Religion and lay society', deals with this text at p. 667.

[17] Smith, 'Religion and lay society', 666.

[18] 'Da illis, ut melius nosti, tuam occulte cum suspiro et lachrymis veram confessionem': Dhuoda, *Manuel pour mon fils*, ed. Pierre Riché, *SC* ccv. 225, Paris 1975, 196.

[19] 'In psalmis invenis intimam confessionem peccatorum tuorum, et integram deprecationem divinae atque dominicae misericordiae': ibid. 362.

[20] Murray, 'Confession', 60, argues that, 'in the absence of direct evidence of pastoral practice, we must rely on indirect; and this, seen in its legal-political context, mostly tells against the fruition of the reformers' plans for the general observance of confession'. However, as Avril, 'Remarques sur un aspect de la vie religieuse paroissiale', 349, notes, an exhaustive study of the evidence for lay participation in confession would have to consider both saints' *Lives* and chronicles. A study of this type does not yet exist for the early Middle Ages.

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advice to William, noted above, there is a substantial corpus of pre-Lateran IV texts, including sermons, letters, religious treatises, government documents and even epic poems, which deals with confession by lay people outside the context of episcopal statutes and penitential manuals. These will be discussed in detail below.

Confession by soldiers in the regnum francorum c. *742*–c. *900*

This study will focus upon the religious behaviour of soldiers for three reasons. First, the number of men serving in one or another capacity in the armies of the Carolingian mayors of the palace, kings and emperors was vast.[21] Every adult male living in the Carolingian *imperium* was subject to military obligations and could be expected to be mobilised at some point during his life, even if only for local service.[22] Over the course of his forty-six-year reign, Charlemagne routinely commanded armies numbering several tens of thousands of soldiers from every corner of the *regnum francorum*.[23] During the reigns of Charlemagne's sons and grandsons, warfare became even more generalised as attacks by the Northmen, civil wars and rebellions brought military conflict directly into the Carolingian heartlands. Thus, by the second half of the ninth century, the great mass of poor men obliged to serve in local defence forces was forced on an increasingly frequent basis to face the prospect of going into battle. As a consequence, a study dealing with Carolingian soldiers offers insight into the religious behaviour of a significant portion of the lay population of the *regnum francorum*.

The second reason for considering the religious behaviour of soldiers is that this group included a cross-section of the entire spectrum of contemporary society ranging from peasants to kings. Admittedly, we are dealing

[21] K. F. Werner, 'Heeresorganisation und Kriegsführung im deutschen Königreich des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts', in *Ordinamenti militari in occidente nell'alto medioevo* (Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo), Spoleto 1968, ii. 791–843, challenged the prevailing assumption that Carolingian armies were small, that is of between 5,000 and 10,000 men, and argued for a manpower pool of up to 100,000 highly trained fighting men available for expeditionary military service. Werner's views were subsequently adopted by most leading medieval military historians. On this point see Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones, Oxford 1994, 25 (originally published as *La Guerre au moyen âge*, Paris 1980), and Bernard S. Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare: prelude to empire*, Philadelphia 2001, 57–9. The efforts by Timothy Reuter in 'Plunder and tribute in the Carolingian empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th ser. xxxv (1985), 75–94, and 'The end of Carolingian military expansion', in Peter Godman and Roger Collins (eds), *Charlemagne's heir: new perspectives on the reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, Oxford 1990, 391–405, to substitute a minimalist model for Carolingian military organisation have not been accepted by military historians.

[22] Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare*, 52–71.

[23] Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 25.

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here with an entirely male population engaged in activities that required them to be prepared to kill and be killed. One might reasonably suspect that the active devotion of such men on campaign was greater than that of their fellow laymen left at home. Furthermore, one might also expect that there were some differences in the overall religious experiences of men and women during the eighth and ninth centuries, and that these differences might have been strengthened by the military service of the former. Nevertheless, after taking these points into consideration, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the religious behaviour of soldiers can provide some insights into the religious practice of the lay population as a whole. First, soldiers were unlikely to have adopted entirely new patterns of religious behaviour or participated in religious practices with which they were unfamiliar when they went to war. To make this point somewhat differently, it is unreasonable to assume that soldiers turned to unknown or unfamiliar religious practices in moments of great stress such as those faced by fighting men before battle. Consequently, the religious behaviour of soldiers can be understood to reflect their passive knowledge of, if not their active participation in, similar rites and ceremonies in the course of their normal lives.[24] Secondly, in considering the heuristic value of the religious behaviour of soldiers for understanding contemporary female lay religious practice, it must be emphasised that although women and men often played very different roles in society, contemporary statutes dealing with lay confession made no distinction between the sexes in requiring

[24] Throughout the course of western military history, both before and after the Middle Ages, the religious behaviour of soldiers has been seen to reflect the practices of the societies from which they were drawn. Studies emphasising this connection include John Helgeland, 'Roman army religion', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt. ii Principat 16.2*, Berlin 1978, 1470–505; J.-R. Vieillefond, 'Les Pratiques religieuses dans l'armée byzantine d'après les traités militaires', *Revue des études anciennes* xxxvii (1935), 322–30; Michael McCormick, *Eternal victory: triumphal rulership in late antiquity, Byzantium, and the early medieval west*, Cambridge 1986, 100–11, 237–52; Albert Michael Koeniger, *Die Militärseelsorge der Karolingerzeit: ihr Recht und ihre Praxis*, Munich 1918, 16–18; Anne Laurence, *Parliamentary army chaplains, 1642–1651*, Woodbridge 1990, 76–87.

Demonstrating their recognition of the close connection between army and civilian religion, both secular and religious officials in the eighth and ninth centuries consistently treated the religious practices of soldiers within the general context of lay religiosity and directed soldiers to follow established Christian rather than simply military guidelines when engaged in religious rites, including confession. For example, when in 742 the *Concilium germanicum* required that the commander of every military unit in the Carolingian army must have on his staff a priest capable of hearing confessions and assigning penances to the soldiers under his care, this statute was issued within the context of a church synod concerned with the reformation of the Carolingian clergy and the provision of proper pastoral care to the laity as a whole: MGH, *Concilia aevi karolini* i/1, ed. Albert Werminghoff, Hanover 1906, 3. Similarly, when writing to Charlemagne, Pope Hadrian I (772–95) addressed the question of priests serving in the field with Carolingian troops within the wider context of the provision of pastoral care to all the laity living in the *regnum francorum*: MGH, *Epistolae merowingici et karolini aevi*, i, Berlin 1892, 625.

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annual or triannual confession.[25] Furthermore, although numerous works dealing with the extraordinary elements of female religion have appeared in the past two decades, there are, to my knowledge, no compelling studies that show that womens' adherence to statutes requiring confession and penances differed significantly from that of their male counterparts.[26]

Finally, I have chosen to focus this study on soldiers because, by and large, texts, including sermons, letters, religious treatises, government documents, and works of literature dealing with confession by lay people in the period 742–900 provide evidence for the behaviour of soldiers. This is true largely because writers in the early Middle Ages generally ignored the ordinary religious behaviour of lay people, presumably seeing it as simply too mundane to be of interest.[27] By contrast, military affairs were of great concern to early medieval writers. As a result, everything that had to do with warfare, including the religious lives of laymen serving in the army, received considerable attention in the sources.

The mid-eighth century was a particularly important period in the development of lay confessional practice for soldiers and all other lay people in *Francia* for it was at this time that the revolutionary idea of repeatable confession began to be adopted as a regular element in lay religious life.[28] The older Christian doctrines dealing with penance had permitted a once-in-a-lifetime confession for lay people, a rite that was understood to serve as a second and final baptism, after which the penitent was to adopt a monastic lifestyle.[29] During the fourth and fifth centuries, it was accepted at the highest levels of the Church that once a soldier had confessed his sins and received penance he would have to leave the military life.[30] Pope Leo I (d. 461) made

[25] The equal treatment of men and women with respect to their participation in the rites of confession and penance are clear in the statutes of several prominent churchmen. See MGH, *Capitula episcoporum*, i, ed. Peter Brommer, Hanover 1984, 127 c. 30 for the views of Bishop Theodulf of Orleans (798–818); and MGH, *Capitula episcoporum*, ii, ed. Rudolf Pokorny and Martina Stratmann, Hanover 1995, 73 c. 1, for a statement of policy on this issue by Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims (845–82).

[26] Studies dealing with the distinctive elements of female religious practice include Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy feast and holy fast: the religious significance of food to medieval women*, Berkeley 1987; Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (ed.), *Sanctity and motherhood: essays on holy mothers in the Middle Ages*, New York 1995; and Ulrike Wiethaus (ed.), *Maps of flesh and light: the religious experience of medieval women mystics*, Syracuse 1993.

[27] Meens, 'Frequency and nature of early medieval penance', 53, notes that the lack of reporting of confession in the eighth and ninth centuries is likely to have resulted from its common rather than its extraordinary nature.

[28] Bernard Poschmann, *Die abendländische Kirchenbusse im frühen Mittelalter*, Breslau 1930, 73–91; Pierce (McKitterick), 'The "Frankish" penitentials', 31–9.

[29] Poschmann, *Busse und letzte Ölung*, 18–64.

[30] Carl Erdmann, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens*, trans. into English by Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart as *The origin of the idea of crusade*, Princeton 1977, 16–17. The translation is superior to the original German because of the addition of new notes and a useful introduction by the editors.

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this point explicitly in a letter to Bishop Rusticus of Narbonne, stating that 'it is completely contrary to all the rules of the Church for a soldier to return to duty after receiving penance'.[31] This system of penitential discipline would appear to have changed gradually, however, as the older idea of once-in-a-lifetime penance gave way to repeatable penance. This process of change came about under the influence of Irish missionaries, who, in the seventh century, brought with them to the mainland the innovative tariff books.[32] These pastoral manuals were essentially schedules of sins with corresponding penances. The underlying theory was that every sin had a specific penance attached to it and that once this penance had been satisfied the sinner could rejoin fully the Christian community.[33]

The rite of repeatable confession with the concomitant assignment of individual penances by the confessor was clearly open to soldiers by the early eighth century. A *poenitentiale*, or penitential manual, precariously ascribed to Bede (672/73–735), a monk at the monastery of Jarrow in Northumbria and one of the leading scholars of his day, included a provision that killing in the course of a war ('bellum publicum') merited forty days of penance rather than a lifetime spent in prayer and fasting.[34] The relatively light penance assigned to soldiers can be compared with killing someone out of anger in the course of a brawl. The author of this penitential considered this act to be worthy of four years of penance, while killing a monk or another cleric was such a heinous crime that it merited not only seven years of penance, but also required that the perpetrator lay down his arms ('arma relinqui'), and dedicate his life to God's service ('Deo servire').[35]

[31] 'Contrarium est omnino ecclesiasticis regulis, post poenitentiae actionem redire ad militiam saecularem': Pope Leo I, *Epistolae*, *PL* liv. 1206–7.

[32] Poschmann, *Die abendländische Kirchenbusse im frühen Mittelalter*, 73–91; Pierce (McKitterick), 'The "Frankish" penitentials', 31–9. On the importance of these books for priests serving with the Frankish army in the eighth century see Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare*, 152–3.

[33] For the tariff books see Cyrille Vogel, *La Discipline pénitentielle en Gaule des origines à la fin du VIIe siècle*, Paris 1952; Poschmann, *Busse und letzte Ölung*, 131–8.

[34] This text is discussed and translated into French by Cyrille Vogel in *Le Pécheur et la pénitence au moyen âge*, Paris 1969, at pp. 73–80. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 267, considers this penitential manual in the context of the Christianisation of warfare. The edition of Pseudo-Bede's *Poenitentiale* is available in F. W. H. Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche*, 1851 repr. Graz 1958, 220–30 at p. 225. It is likely that this penitential manual and a similar work from Rheims were modelled upon a penitential manual attributed to Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury (d. 690). On this point see Raymund Kottje, 'Die Tötung im Kriege', 3. Allen J. Frantzen, 'The penitentials attributed to Bede', *Speculum* lviii (1983), 573–97, notes the close connection between the penitentials attributed to Bede and other English churchmen, and those composed in *Francia* during the eighth century. The impact of the Pseudo-Bede text on penitentials in this region has been reiterated by Reinhold Haggenmüller in *Die Überlieferung der Beda und Egbert zugeschriebene Bussbücher*, Frankfurt-am-Main 1991, 129–49, 243–6. See also idem in *Aus Archiven und Bibliotheken*, ed. H. Mordek, 1992, 149 ff.

[35] Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, 224–5.

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The earliest surviving evidence concerning confession by soldiers in the *regnum francorum* comes from the *Concilium germanicum* held in 742 under the direction of Carloman, Carolingian mayor of the palace, and Boniface, the papal legate to the Frankish court.[36] As a frequent visitor to Rome, who in addition had contacts with the leading scholars in England, Boniface was in a good position to know of contemporary developments on the island, including the role played by confession and penance in the pastoral care of soldiers.[37] He was, therefore, well-placed to advise the Carolingian mayor of the palace about the pastoral opportunities available to soldiers elsewhere in the west. However, scholars have suggested that Boniface may have been influenced not by English practice, which he had experienced during his youth on the island, but rather by his experiences in Italy where he may have seen chaplains serving with Byzantine troops.[38] In addition to these two models, the possibility cannot be excluded that the initiative for dealing specifically with the pastoral care of soldiers came from Carloman and the Frankish episcopate.[39]

Whatever the origin of Carloman's effort to enact reforms in the area of military pastoral care, it is quite clear that the participants in the *Concilium germanicum* were concerned with the problems of confession and penance in the army. The second canon issued by the council required that the commander (*praefectus*) of every military unit in the Carolingian army have on his staff a priest capable of hearing confessions and assigning penances to the soldiers under his care.[40] The wording of this canon, particularly the

[36] Canon two of the *Concilium germanicum* has been discussed by Koeniger, *Militärseelsorge*, 12–17; Erdmann, *The idea of crusade*, 9; Friedrich Prinz, *Klerus und Krieg im früheren Mittelalter*, Stuttgart 1971, 8–9; Wilfried Hartmann, *Die Synoden der Karolingerzeit im Frankreich und in Italien*, Paderborn 1989, 50–3. The most recent discussion of the council and its relevance to Carolingian warfare is now Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare*, 49–50.

[37] Dorothy Whitelock, 'After Bede' (Jarrow Lecture 1960), Jarrow 1960, 5–8.

[38] Koeniger, *Militärseelsorge*, 22–3. On the pastoral care available to Byzantine soldiers see A. Heisenberg, 'Kriegsgottesdienst in Byzanz', *Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Sprachgeschichte vornehmlich des Orients*, Munich 1916, 244–57; Vieillefond, 'Les Pratiques religieuses dans l'armée Byzantine', and Paul Goubert, 'Religion et superstitions dans l'armée Byzantine à la fin du VIe siècle', in *Orientalia christiana periodica: miscellanea Guillaume de Jerphanion* xiii (1947), 495–500.

[39] There is no evidence that Boniface dealt with the provision of pastoral care for soldiers in any other context either before or after the *Concilium germanicum*. Consequently, the inclusion of clauses dealing specifically with this question in canon 2 of the council may be understood to have come about as a result of local interest rather than Boniface's own overriding concern for the reform of the Church.

[40] 'id est unum vel duos episcopos cum capellanis presbiteris princeps secum habeat et unusquisque praefectus unum presbiterum, qui hominibus peccata confitentibus iudicare et indicare poenitentiam possint': *Concilia aevi karolini*, i. 1. 3. One of the major purposes of this council was to formalise the religious obligations of priests with respect to the laymen under their care. This canon was clearly intended to ensure that Carolingian soldiers also had access to pastoral care while on campaign. The text of the canons issued by the council was quickly reissued by Karlmann as a capitulary in 742. On this point see MGH, *Capitularia regum*

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requirement that each priest be capable of assigning penances ('indicare poenitentiam possint'), also indicates that the responsible authorities in the Carolingian government intended soldiers to have an opportunity to make individual confessions while serving in the field away from their home parishes and priests. The very nature of the tariff-type penance required that the penance fit the sin, a circumstance that could only occur when the priest responsible for assigning penances had heard a list of sins from the individual penitent, in this case the individual penitent soldier.[41] In situations where soldiers gathered together and offered a common admission of guilt in a general form, priests were not in a position to assign penances specific to the sins burdening the souls of soldiers facing battle. The bishops composing this canon must have been fully aware of the connection between individual confession and penance. Consequently, it is unlikely that they would have made it a basic requirement for priests serving in military units to be able to assign penances, if the bishops did not expect soldiers to confess their sins on an individual basis.

The impact of Carloman's legislation, supported by his brother Pippin, and its establishment as an ecclesiastical canon with the help of Boniface in the council of 742, can be gauged by the rather rapid spread of information regarding the institutionalisation of the service undertaken by priests in carrying out the details of pastoral care for soldiers serving in the Carolingian army. Thus, for example, during the reign of Charlemagne, who succeeded his father Pippin, Carloman's brother, as king of the Franks in 768, Pope Hadrian I (772–95) indicated that he had taken an interest in various aspects of the behaviour of priests who were hearing the confessions of soldiers serving on campaign in the Frankish army. In a letter to Charlemagne, sent between 784 and 791, the pope rehearsed several of the main points of an earlier conversation that he had had with Duke Garramanus, the Frankish king's *missus* to the court of St Peter.[42] The colloquy between the pope and Charlemagne's representative concerned a certain monk named John, who had been in Charlemagne's service but seems to have earned papal opprobrium as a result of discussing in public certain of his theologically questionable visions.[43] Thus, at Charlemagne's request, Garramanus conveyed in a letter to the pope the king's petition that he grant John his grace ('eum suscipere') and thus absolve him from the consequences of his delict.[44]

francorum, i, ed. Alfred Boretius, Hanover 1883, 24–6, where the entire collection of canons from the council was reissued as a capitulary.

[41] I would like to thank Fr Driscoll for bringing to my attention this crucial aspect of the rite of confession.

[42] *Epistolae merovingici et karolini aevi*, i. 624–5.

[43] 'Porro de revelatione eiusdem Iohannis monachi, sicut eius referebat locutio, vere fantasma esse existimatur': ibid. i. 625.

[44] John had earned Charlemagne's gratitude by bringing to his attention the capture of certain individuals and other crimes committed by 'depraved men'. On this point: *Epistolae merovingici et karolini aevi*, i. 624.

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It is clear from the nature of this letter that the pope and/or his functionaries questioned John closely in order to obtain full details of his behaviour. In the course of this interrogation, it became obvious that John had information regarding Charlemagne's plans to use bishops actively on military campaign, probably – in light of their status – in a command function.[45] Perhaps in an effort to demonstrate his own adherence to church statutes, John answered the questions of his papal interrogators by emphasising that he had told the Frankish king that bishops were permitted only to use spiritual weapons and were prohibited from using material weapons. This point was obviously consistent with both general church teaching and with the specific requirements of the canons issued by the *Concilium germanicum* in 742.[46]

The pope used the opportunity provided by this mention of John's conversation with Charlemagne about the military service of bishops to urge the Frankish king to avoid involving his bishops in improper actions.[47] However, Hadrian then contrasted the improper use of bishops with Charlemagne's practice of bringing bishops and priests to war for the sake of providing pastoral care to Frankish soldiers serving in the field. According to Hadrian, it was proper for the king to bring clerics with him to any place that he wished in order for them to hear the confessions of the soldiers ('eorumque confessionem suscipere').[48] Hadrian's letter clearly indicates that he saw nothing peculiar in the practice of having priests serve in the army for the purpose of hearing confessions. In fact, he understood this task to be an important part of their priestly duties ('inreprehensibiliter sacerdotalem gerere officium').[49] The sense that confession by soldiers to priests was a mundane element of military life also appears in two other types of sources: a collection of real and forged documents made during the mid-ninth century for the purpose of maintaining clerical liberties against enroachments by the secular government, and an epic poem known as the *Waltharius*, probably composed at the Carolingian court during the reign of Charlemagne.[50]

[45] Prinz, *Klerus und Krieg*, 73–113, makes clear that Charlemagne did require many of his bishops to participate in military campaigns.

[46] 'Fatus quippe est nobis prelatus Iohannes monachus, quia dixisset vobis [Charlemagne], ut omnis episcopus spiritalem teneret armam et non terrenam': *Epistolae merovingici et karolini aevi*, i. 625. The pope indicates here that he knew John because of the latter's remonstrance to Charlemagne concerning the service of bishops on military campaign. It is difficult to see how the pope could have acquired this information without having interrogated John either directly or through papal agents.

[47] 'Quatenus, si ita est, quia militaris induunt arma, hortantes vestrae notescimus a Deo protectam regalem excellentiam, ut nullo modo sic fieri permittat': ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Alf Önnerfors, *Die Verfasserschaft des Waltharius-Epos aus sprachlicher Sicht*, Düsseldorf 1978, 42–6, argues for an early ninth- rather than a late ninth-century or early tenth-century date for

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Around 850, a deacon known by modern scholars as Benedict the Levite compiled a corpus of royal and imperial edicts, some of which were genuine and some of which were forgeries, for the purpose of creating a dossier of arguments against the improper exploitation of church resources and personnel by the secular government.[51] The compiler included texts in his dossier that dealt specifically with the question of a priest's duties when he served with military forces on campaign. The most detailed of these documents, ostensibly drafted to prohibit the military service of bishops and priests in the army, not only provides a list of the cleric's duties, but also describes in great detail the reasons why they were so essential to the war effort.[52]

The text begins with an injunction against priests serving in an armed capacity in the army, drawn from prohibitions against such behaviour issued by the papal see and by numerous episcopal synods, including the *Concilium germanicum* of 742.[53] However, the author then added the clause that two or three bishops, chosen by their fellow prelates, along with a picked group of priests ('electi sacerdotes') could serve with the army in order to provide pastoral care to the troops.[54] This specially selected group of priests was required to have a thorough knowledge of a variety of religious duties, including the assignment of penances to soldiers ('qui bene sciant populis poenitentias dare').[55] In this context, two points must be emphasised again. First, in order for the priests to have assigned penances, the soldiers must have made individual confessions. Secondly, the dossier of documents in

Waltharius, as had been widely accepted by scholars up to the publication of his work. Karl Ferdinand Werner, '*Hludovicus Augustus*: gouverner l'empire chrétien – idées et réalités', in Peter Godman and Roger Collins (eds), *Charlemagne's heir: new perspectives on the reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, Oxford 1990, 3–123 at pp. 104–5, 121, also argues for an early ninth- rather than a late ninth-century date. For the most up-to-date overview of the literature see Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare*, 74, 192. Bachrach argues for a late eighth-century date for the composition of *Waltharius*. He suggests that *Waltharius* (ed. K. Strecker, German trans. P. Vossen, Berlin 1947) lines 764–7, are an attack on Saxon pedantry that may be taken as a jab at Alcuin and his Saxon origins. The English advisor to Charlemagne left the royal court in 796 after being named abbot of St Martin of Tours where he died in 804.

[51] On Benedict see F. L. Ganshof, *Recherches sur les capitulaires*, Paris 1958, 8–9, 71; Eugen Ewig, *Handbook of church history*, iii, trans. Anselm Biggs, New York 1969, 167–9; Hubert Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium regum francorum manuscripta: Überlieferung und Traditionszusammenhang der fränkischen Herrschererlasse*, Munich 1995, 1032–5. On Benedict the Levite's use of sources see Gerhard Schmitz, 'Die Waffe der Fälschung zum Schutz der Bedrängten? Bemerkungen zu gefälschten Konzils- und Kapitularientexten', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Hanover 1988, ii. 79–110. Schmitz argues specifically (p. 92) that Benedict created his collection from previously existing materials.

[52] MGH, *Legum*, ii/2, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, Hanover 1837, 110, c. iii. 141.

[53] 'Secunda vice propter ampliorem observantiam apostolica auctoritate et multa sanctorum episcoporum ammonitione instructi sanctorumque canonum regulis edocti … volumus ut nullus sacerdos in hostem pergat': ibid. [54] Ibid. [55] Ibid.

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Benedict's collection was intended to limit the obligations of priests to a level acceptable to churchmen concerned with the overextension of ecclesiastical resources and personnel. Consequently, those duties specifically mentioned in these documents are likely to have been common rather than extraordinary.

Benedict's expectation that it was a normal part of a soldier's religious life to confess his sins to a priest is mirrored in *Waltharius*, an epic poem composed in the late eighth or early ninth century. According to the story, Walter, an Aquitanian once held hostage at Attila's court, who subsequently rose to be commander of the Hunnic army, was conscious both of his relationship to God and the need to express this relationship through participation in formal rituals. This religious feeling was made manifest when Walter was forced into battle against a group of Frankish soldiers whom he defeated one after the other in single combat. As night fell, Walter sought solace in prayer. According to the story, he first turned to the east and threw himself to the ground. Then addressing God, Walter thanked his saviour for protecting him from the spears of the enemy and for keeping him from disgrace.[56] He then confessed his sins directly to God with a contrite mind ('contrita mens'), wishing to turn from sin and to rid himself of the guilt that burdened him.[57] It was only after completing his confession that Walter again felt able to commit himself to battle.[58]

Of course, the *Waltharius* epic is a work of fiction, and its representations of soldiers' religious expectations must be read in this light. Furthermore, it should be noted that Walter confessed his sins directly to God rather than to a priest, as would appear to have been normal in the Carolingian period.[59] However, these facts should not obscure the important role played by the act of confession – particularly Walter's sense of contrition – when reconciling himself to God. Furthermore, the incidental nature of the detail concerning Walter's religious behaviour suggests that the poet was using easily recognised elements of soldiers' ritual practice to add realistic background elements to his narrative. Finally, the views attributed to Walter concerning God's role in warfare and the need to reconcile oneself to God before going into combat are fully consonant with other non-fictional texts from roughly the same period.

For example, a sermon, probably delivered to Carolingian troops sometime during the last three decades of the eighth century, explicitly stated that

[56] *Waltharius*, lines 1160–4. For a valuable discussion of this text's religious imagery see Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare*, 56.

[57] 'Deprecor at dominum contrita mente benignum, / Ut qui peccantes non vult sed perdere culpas': *Waltharius*, lines 1165–6.

[58] 'qui postquam orandi finem dedit, ilico surgens': ibid. line 1168.

[59] On the propriety of confession to God see Vogel, *Le Pécheur*, 161.

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the rite of confession was an essential and integral part of military life.[60] The sermon was composed in simple Latin and seems to have been intended to be understood by the common soldiers to whom it was addressed.[61] It began with a short seventy-word exhortation to the soldiers to remember that they were Christians with Christian obligations. The preacher emphasised this identity by reminding the men of the sacred bond that they shared with Christ through the rite of baptism.[62] Thus, from the very start of his exhortation the preacher emphasised that the religious obligations of the soldiers were not unique to their current situation but were rather incumbent upon all those who had joined Christ's Church.

In the next section of the sermon, the preacher made an explicit connection between success in battle and the proper reverence for Christ, which he insisted was best demonstrated through participation in the rite of confession. The preacher drew an apt analogy for his audience of soldiers by comparing participation in confession to standing in a battle line (*acies*) with Christ.[63] He then emphasised that in order to avoid being wounded by the spears thrown by the devil it was necessary to confess one's sins.[64]

The preacher went on to enunciate the reasons why soldiers, even more than their civilian contemporaries, had an immediate need to participate in the rite of confession. He argued that no person could predict how long he

[60] Joseph Michael Heer, *Ein karolingischer Missionskatechismus*, Freiburg 1911, 60–2, argues that the sermon was preached during the Avar wars of 791–9. Joseph Schmidlin reviewed Heer's book in *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenchaft* ii (1912), 257–8, and concluded that the Avars were indeed probably the opponents considered by the author of the sermon. These arguments are summarised by Koeniger, *Militärseelsorge* (p. 51 n. 1) who accepts a late eighth-century date for the preaching of the sermon. Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare*, 348–9 nn. 184, 190, reviews the treatment of this text by scholars after the appearance of Koeniger's *Militärseelsorge* in 1918, and concludes that Erdman, *The idea of crusade*, 16, is unsuccessful in his effort to discredit this text and a second military sermon identified by Koeniger, discussed below, as actual sermons.

[61] For an overview of recent work on the question of early medieval latinity and its relationship to vernacular speech see Michel Banniard, *Viva voce: communication écrite et communication orale du IVe au IXe siècle en occident latin*, Paris 1992, and a review of this work by Roger Wright in the *Journal of Medieval Latin* iii (1993), 78–94. On the ability of Carolingian soldiers to understand simple Latin of the type used in this sermon see Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare*, 348 n. 190. Bachrach accepts Banniard's view that Latin was the vernacular in *Francia* until at least the end of the eighth century, and concludes that these sermons would have been intelligible to the Carolingian troops who heard them.

[62] 'A Christo enim nomen christianum sumpsit exordium et quia Christo nos [MS vos] domino nostro in baptismo spondimus … ideo maxime nobis oportet, ut, quod Christo promisimus, omni studio ac devotione reddamus': Koeniger, *Militärseelsorge*, 68–70. Koeniger's edition of this sermon is the first, and to my knowledge, only complete version of the text available in print.

[63] 'stemus viriliter in acie Christi, pugnemus fortiter, ut vincamus efficaciter et coronemur feliciter': ibid. 69.

[64] 'formidandum est, ne venenatis diaboli telis vulnerati in laqueum incidentes peccati absque confessionis remedio pereamus': ibid.

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would live, and therefore it was necessary for each Christian to confess while time still remained. The preacher then stressed that confession was necessary for everyone, but that it was even more important for soldiers to confess their sins because they were risking their lives immediately by going into battle.[65] Then, after reminding the soldiers of the stark realities of the battlefield, the preacher once again encouraged them to take advantage of the opportunity to confess their sins to God. He pointed out that priests were standing by who could help them. Indeed, the preacher emphasised that these priests were the specialists who held the 'spiritual antidote' which could cure their souls of the wounds of sin.[66]

The content of this sermon sheds light on three important points concerning the rite of confession. First, the preacher underlined the obligations of all Christians to participate in the rite of confession and warned against waiting until the moment of death, since this cannot be known in advance with any surety.[67] Secondly, the rhetoric of the sermon suggests that the preacher thought his audience already understood the rite of confession and what it was meant to accomplish. Simply put, rather than introducing them to a new religious practice, he urged his audience to do what they knew they were supposed to do. Finally, the numerous priests serving with the army were ready to hear the individual confessions of the soldiers.[68] The preacher

[65] 'confessionem igitur peccatorum iugiter exhibere necesse est, quia incerta sunt unicuique huius vitae spatia et quia nemo scit horam vel tempus vocationis suae. Unde nos dominus ammonet dicens "vigilate itaque quia nescitis diem neque horam." Cum ergo omnibus est confessio necessaria, quanto magis his, qui cotidie visibiliter contra inimicos suos dimicant': ibid.

[66] 'ideo ammonemus dilectionem vestram, ut confiteamini domino peccata vestra; quaerite testes confessionis vestrae, sanctos sacerdotes domini, qui antidoto spiritali vestrorum curare praevaleant vulnera peccatorum': ibid.

[67] This argument is also put forward by Patriarch Paulinus of Aquileia and Alcuin of York in treatises that they wrote for two of Charlemagne's officers, Duke Eric of Friuli, and Wido, count of the Breton march. Paulinus of Aquileia emphasised that 'Ne quaeso taliter cogitemus, quia summa stultitia est haec cogitare … Ideo, inquam, ne talia cogitemus, cum nesciamus qua die morituri sumus. Nemo enim hominum novit diem exitus sui. Non omnes in senectute moriuntur, sed in diversis aetatibus de hoc mundo migrant: et in quibus actibus unusquisque homo inventus fuerit, in eisdem judicabitur, quando anima exierit de corpore': *Liber exhortationis*, *PL* xcix. 197–282 at cols 242–3. For his part Alcuin argued 'Nonne homines subito moriuntur?', and 'Si subito intrat dies extremus, perit dilatio et restat damnatio': *De virtutibus et vitiis liber*, *PL* ci. 613–38 at col. 223.

[68] The presence of priests serving with Carolingian troops in the field is further attested in a letter sent by Charlemagne to his wife Fastrada in which he noted the religious rites celebrated by his army 'Et sacerdos unusquisque missam specialem fecisset, nisi infirmitas inpedisset. Et clerici, qui psalmos sciebant, unusquisque quinquaginta cantasset': MGH, *Epistolae karolini aevi*, ii, ed. E. Dümmler, Berlin 1895, 529, Charlemagne's letter is corroborated by a report in *Annales regni francorum*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH, *Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum* 10, Hanover 1895, 88, where it is noted that priests serving with the Carolingian army, 'constituerunt laetanias faciendi per triduo missarumque sollemnia celebrandi; Dei solatium postulaverunt pro salute exercitus et adiutorio domini nostri Iesu Christi et pro victoria et

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made this point explicitly when he told the men to seek out the *sacerdotes domini* who could cure the wounds of their sins with a 'spiritual antidote'. The preacher's language here strongly suggests that the men were to receive penances through which they could purge themselves of sin.

A similar military sermon, perhaps dating from the reign of Louis the Pious (814–40), likewise emphasises the crucial role of confession in reconciling soldiers to God, and urges the men to confess their sins individually to priests serving with the troops.[69] The soldiers are told that it is necessary to prepare their consciences and remember each of the sins that they had committed.[70] Every man is urged to confess his sins to a priest ('confiteatur sacerdoti') in a devoted manner, in order to free himself from the wounds caused by sin. We can see here that the author of this sermon used the same metaphor that we saw in the earlier text. Finally, each soldier was to propitiate God in order to wash himself clean before going into battle.[71]

As with the earlier military sermon, this text appears to be dealing with individual confessions by soldiers to priests. First, each man was instructed to search his own conscience and remember his own sins, a prerequisite for making a full confession and evidence of self-consciousness. Secondly, the soldiers were told to confess these sins to a priest. The language here is not ambiguous. There is no suggestion in the sermon that the soldiers were to confess as a group that they were guilty of some unspecified failings. Each man was told to remember his own sins and then confess them to a priest. Finally, the soldiers were told to satisfy God after having confessed their sins,

vindicta super Avaros'. Michael McCormick, 'The liturgy of war in the early Middle Ages: crisis, litanies, and the Carolingian monarchy,' *Viator* xv (1984), 1–23, considers these texts within the context of the successful efforts of the Carolingian government to provide pastoral care to soldiers in the field.

[69] The text was originally published by Wilhelm Schmitz, 'Tironische Miszellen', *Neues Archiv* xv (1890), 605–7, and then reprinted with some alterations in *Miscellanea Tironiana*, Leipzig 1896, 26–8. The sermon may have begun as a letter of consolation intended for a recipient about to go to war but this has not been proved. On this point see Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare*, 348–9 n. 190. Koeniger, *Militärseelsorge*, reprints this sermon (pp. 72–4) and suggests (pp. 52–3) that even if it began as a letter, it is still representative of contemporary military sermons. McCormick described this sermon as a type of *vade mecum*, composed during the 830s as part of a collection of texts intended for military chaplains in the field. His comments came in the course of a paper that he delivered at the University of Notre Dame during a symposium on military chaplains (18–19 March 2000) entitled 'Military chaplains in their contexts', organised by David S. Bachrach and Doris L. Bergen. McCormick's essay will appear in a forthcoming volume from this conference to be published by the University of Notre Dame Press.

[70] 'praeparet sibi unusquisque contra conscientiam suam, rememoret peccata sua, quae prius fecit; non portet ea apud se in praelium Christi': Koeniger, *Militärseelsorge*, 71.

[71] Ibid.

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which is a clear indication that the men were to accept the penances imposed upon them by the priests in camp.[72]

Both of the sermons discussed here offer valuable evidence for the expectations of priests serving with Carolingian soldiers in the field. Of particular importance are their views concerning the crucial role that confession by individual soldiers could play in reconciling them to God before they risked their lives in battle. However, these sermons are also likely to offer insight into the views of the Carolingian soldiers themselves. Alexander Murray has shown that sermons can shed light on the expectations and beliefs of audiences. His argument is that preachers familiar with their audience addressed them in a manner that those present could understand and that they would appreciate. Otherwise, the preachers would fail in their task to motivate people to behave in a proper manner.[73] The same understanding of the relationship between preacher and audience can be postulated for the Carolingian soldiers who formed the audiences for the sermons discussed above. Even if these military sermons were never preached, they nevertheless can be understood to represent the views of priests familiar with the men for whose spiritual well-being they were responsible.

The texts we have examined thus far concern the confessions made by soldiers before they went into combat. However, as Christians, these men had a great burden of sin to bear because of the deaths that they caused during battle. Consequently, bishops in the Frankish Church found it necessary to establish a penitential regime that maintained the Christian belief in the sanctity of life, but balanced this against the need for soldiers to kill their enemies in the course of just wars. Already in the early eighth century, as is clear from the contents of penitentials composed during this period, English churchmen were familiar with special penances imposed on soldiers for killing in battle that were far lighter than those that could be expected for homicide committed outside the context of the legitimate exercise of force. By the mid-eighth century, penitential manuals were being produced in northern *Francia* that also included penances for soldiers who killed the

[72] It was not necessarily the case, however, that these soldiers would have been required to complete their penances before going into battle in order to merit salvation. That this view was widely accepted is indicated by Benedict the Levite's inclusion of a text in his dossier stressing that it was the act of accepting the penance rather than carrying it out immediately that made the penitent worthy of salvation. In fact, the text clearly states that when individuals who are facing the possibility of death accept penances imposed upon them by priests, they are not to be understood as condemned if they die before satisfying their penance. However, if the penitent survived he was still responsible for carrying out his penance. See Benedict i (125), 'placuit his, qui accepta poenitentia ante reconciliationem migrant ad Dominum, communicari pro eo quod honoraverunt poenitentiam … Qui si supervixerint, stent in ordine poenitentium'.

[73] Alexander Murray, 'Religion among the poor in thirteenth-century France: the testimony of Humbert de Romans,' *Traditio* xxx (1974), 285–324 at pp. 286–8.

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enemy in battle. As noted above, these penances were lighter than those imposed for other forms of homicide, although not quite as light as those that were imposed in the penitential manuals following English models. For example, in the manual called 'Paenitentiale oxoniense II' by modern scholars, and in at least three other similar manuals composed in the eighth and ninth centuries, soldiers were required to undergo a penance of twenty-two weeks for killing enemy soldiers without cause rather than forty days.[74]

That Carolingian soldiers performed these penances on at least some occasions is indicated by a controversy arising from the battle of Fontenoy fought in 841 between the allied forces of Charles the Bald (840–77) and Louis the German (840–76) on one side, and those of Lothar I (840–55) on the other. Disturbed by recent attempts to alter the requirement that soldiers do penance for killing in battle, Archbishop Otgar of Mainz requested that Abbot Rabanus Maurus of Fulda produce a teaching text to deal with problems then current in the penitential system.[75] Within the context of his reply to the archbishop, Rabanus noted that some supporters of Louis the German, who had been victorious at Fontenoy, were arguing that it was not necessary for soldiers from the winning side to confess and do penance for their actions during the campaign.[76] Rabanus strongly rejected this argument and pointed out that even soldiers who fought in a just cause could be motivated by impious factors including personal greed and the desire to please their temporal lords. He added that fighting and killing for the sake of these base motives carried an appropriate penance.[77]

Rabanus' vehement opposition to the general elimination of penances for killing the enemy in battle, even in the course of just wars, was supported by many contemporary ecclesiastical and secular leaders, as well as many among the rank and file of Frankish soldiers. Nithard (d. 845), an illegitimate cousin of Charles the Bald and Louis the German, noted in his account of the battle of Fontenoy that following the victory by Louis' and Charles' soldiers, their bishops gathered in a public council in order to issue decisions about the

[74] 'si quis aliquem in expeditione publica occiderit hominem sine causa, ieiunet ebdomadas XXII': Kottje, 'Die Tötung im Kriege,' 5, 21. The penances imposed for other types of homicide were not correspondingly increased.

[75] MGH, *Epistolae karolini aevi*, iii, Berlin 1899, 462. Rabanus' role in the penitential controversy is noted by Kottje, 'Die Tötung im Kriege', 6–7.

[76] 'Quod autem quidam homicidium, quod nuper in seditione et proelio principum nostorum perpetratum est, excusant, quasi non necesse sit pro hoc cuilibet agere paenitentiam': *Epistolae karolini aevi*, iii. 464.

[77] 'unde oportet eos considerare, qui hanc necem nefariam defendere cupiunt, utrum illos coram oculis Dei quasi innoxios excusare possint, qui propter avaritiam, quae omnium malorum radix est … atque favorem dominorum suorum temporalium aeternum Dominum contempserunt, et mandata illius spernentes, non casu sed per industriam homicidium perfecerunt': ibid.

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religious implications of the conflict.[78] According to Nithard, the bishops concluded that although the victory was a manifestation of God's will, whoever was conscious ('quicumque consciens') of the fact that he had fought out of anger, hatred, or vainglory was responsible for confessing his sins privately ('vere confiteor secrete') to a priest and then being judged according to the nature of his guilt.[79] Nithard added that the soldiers felt so strongly about the importance of confessing their sins in order to obtain divine mercy, that they even carried out additional penances on behalf of their dead comrades. They hoped that by praying and holding fasts, the soldiers who had died without having an opportunity to confess, or who had carried out their penances in an imperfect manner would be granted mercy by God.[80]

This study has been concerned with the practice of confession by a specific but large category of lay people in the eighth and ninth centuries. We have examined six different genres of evidence: conciliar canons, government capitularies, letters, chronicles, sermons and an epic poem, all of which were composed independently of one another. Each of these sources points in the same direction and suggests that soldiers regularly confessed their sins as individuals and accepted penances from priests, not only before going into combat, but also when returning from battle. When combined with the hundreds of surviving episcopal statutes and penitential manuals from the same period, the evidence developed here supports the model of early medieval religious life favoured by Avril rather than that espoused by Vauchez. Some scholars may see Carolingian soldiers, including the vast majority of the Frankish army who served as a result of their obligations in the rural militia, as fundamentally different from other lay people. For such scholars the participation of Frankish soldiers in individual confessions to priests may be understood as a religious curiosity. Nevertheless, even such a narrow interpretation of the evidence supports the views of Poschmann, Avril and Driscoll, that individual confession to a priest was part of lay religious experience during the Carolingian period.

Some scholars may recognise, however, that most Carolingian soldiers were only part-time fighting men, and thus lived lives very similar to those of their family and neighbours. In addition, they may also recognise that

[78] Nithard, *Historiarum libri iii*, in *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte*, ed. Reinhold Rau, Berlin 1955, 428–30.

[79] 'at quicumque consciens sibi aut ira aut odio aut vana gloria aut certe quolibet vitio quiddam in hac expeditione suasit vel gessit, esset vere confessus secrete secreti delicti et secundum modum culpe diiudicaretur': ibid.

[80] 'verumtamen in veneratione ac laude tantae declarationis iusticiae pro remissione delictis mortuorum fratrum suorum – in eo, quod inperfecti peccatis interventibus se noverant, ut in multis volentes nolentesque delinquebant – ut suo adiutorio ab his exuti liberarentur … proque his omnibus triduanum ieiunium inventum immoque libenter ac celebre celebratum est': ibid. 430.

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Frankish soldiers were seen in this light by both the Carolingian government and by the papacy. Consequently, it might be understood that individual confession by soldiers reflected wider behavioural patterns in society at large four centuries before the celebration of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Of course, it may be the case that the collapse of the Carolingian *imperium* at the end of the ninth century resulted in major changes in lay religious practice, causing an end to individual confession by lay people until the mid-twelfth century. However, this hypothesis is far from being proven. It would require another study constructed along lines similar to this one in order to discover whether the period *c.* 900–1150 was in fact free from lay participation in the rite of confession, particularly individual confession to priests.

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