

Pastoral works. Priests, books and compilative practices in the Carolingian period

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English summary

Priests are the main subject of this dissertation; clergymen that served communities of laypeople via local churches where they provided them with pastoral care. By examining the books they used for this purpose, we can get a glimpse of what early medieval Christianity and life in a rural context looked like. The dissertation's main question is how these books can be instrumentalized and what kind of knowledge this yields. The question is answered via the study of how these books and their contents were compiled.

Priests' books emerged against the background of increased concern for local priests under the rule of the Carolingians (751-987). These Frankish rulers established an empire spanning a large part of Europe that was first and foremost a Christian empire, where a king (later emperor) ruled over various groups of pious subjects that together formed the *populus christianus*. Still, the Carolingian elite, too, was aware that this was an ideal and that many things had to change before this could become a reality. The people had to be instructed on the basics of the Christian faith and be corrected where necessary, so that they lived according to God's will, thereby averting disasters and securing prosperity for the empire as a whole. Priests played an important role in their plans, as they were the clerical 'boots on the ground' by whom virtually every inhabitant of the empire could be reached. From the late eighth century onwards, they received more and more attention, which meant that the emperor and their direct superiors the bishops, drew up various documents prescribing them with directions of how to perform the duties of their office in a proper way.

One of the instructions they received concerned their books. Priests were required to possess several books containing material to help them during their daily work, such as missals, penitentials and lectionaries. In addition to these books, priests also possessed books that were compiled specifically to be used by them, either during their own education or for administering pastoral care to a community of laypeople. These books are the central sources for this study. Characteristic for such compendia is that they are very diverse; it is not possible to find two of them with the same content. Furthermore, they do not appear in the documents issued by the Carolingian emperor and his bishops and are completely anonymous. This presents two of the main methodological difficulties that have to be solved in order to use these priests' books to examine the life of early medieval priests and the people they cared for. The problematic attribution of the manuscripts to priests, in fact, to any

historical context, due to the great variety and anonymity of the source material, was solved by developing a 'twofold approach'. In this approach manuscripts are first examined in their entirety, thereby taking into account anything that can connect the source to its historical context, such as codicological and palaeographical evidence, and traces of use. When a manuscript context is established the individual texts can be studied, thereby focussing in particular on the ways the manuscripts and texts were put together. The process of selection the compilers went through presents some of the ideas that formed the basis for the material and shows what considered to be important for priests living and working among the laity. At the same time, it demonstrates how the ideals of the Carolingian elite were implemented in the local church far away from the royal and episcopal courts.

In the first chapter, the source material itself and the proposed methodology are examined. Two priests' books are selected that share an unusually high number of texts, which suggest that they might originate from the same exemplar. However, when the two manuscripts are studied very closely, following the twofold approach, it appears that they are indeed similar in many aspects but were not copied from the same model. One of these similarities is the structure of the manuscripts. In both cases, the contents are structured in the same way. This is especially interesting because the way in which the manuscripts were put together is very different. One is a composite codex, composed out of separate parts of which some were used individually before being bound together, while the other is a planned codex that was copied and put together as a complete book. Both manuscripts are the product of careful consideration but not of the same kind. It shows that the compilers of the manuscripts, despite having different resources to work with, nevertheless shared a similar idea of what a priest's book should look like. When comparing the texts in the manuscripts this is confirmed, as the texts are also very similar but never share the same exemplar. This is an important observation because it shows that in the wide-ranging variety that characterizes these books, it is possible to identify certain common traits. These priests' books were produced by contemporaries according to a shared idea that closely matches the preconditions for the ideal Christian empire of the Carolingians.

The second chapter is concerned with baptism and the liturgy of the local church. As each Christian obtained access to salvation through his or her baptism, it was of the utmost importance that everyone was baptized. Whereas the norm was the baptism of children at specified times during the year, mainly during Easter and Pentecost, the liturgy used by priests seems to have been more flexible. It has been adjusted to fit its context, where priests operate in isolation and always had to be prepared to baptize. In one particular priest's book, the descriptions of liturgy (the *ordines*) had been adjusted in such a way that all the other clergy that was usually present, mostly to support the priest and guide the laity

through the ritual, had been removed. Almost all of the tasks that remained were taken over by the priest. In the same way, the liturgy also was made shorter. Certain parts were omitted to focus solely on the rite of baptism itself. Finally, all references to time and place were removed as well, making for a rather flexible liturgy that could be performed under a wide variety of circumstances.

Aside from being adjusted to the local church, *ordines* were also copied into books to be used for study by clergy and, since the words of baptism were well-known at that point, also to provide their authority to new compilations of liturgy as a familiar introduction. In both cases, texts were adapted to different contexts, which meant that the liturgy became even more concise and fragmented. Therefore, a characteristic that is often associated with the ideals of the Carolingian elite, namely the standardization of liturgy in accordance with papal Rome, is no longer fitting and has to be reconsidered. At the level of the local church, the diversity of liturgical practice seems to be the norm and is even actively pursued. Multiple *ordines* are included in the same manuscript, describing various traditions of baptismal practice, to enable priests to select the most fitting material themselves.

The third chapter of the study involves canon law. Like baptism, canons were an important aspect of creating the ideal Christian society, as they provided a much-needed framework of principles and regulations to live by based to a large extent on the Bible, church councils and papal letters. During the Carolingian period, this had become a vast body of work that existed in various collections which were mostly tied to certain regions of the empire. Priests were told repeatedly to 'know their canons' by the bishops, but what this meant was never specified. Based on their books it seems that priests did have access to canon law and mainly in the form of excerpts. The understanding of canon law was also rather practical. In one priests' book, we find an excerpt concerning the ecclesiastical grades, which they were required to know as well. To make this excerpt, first, a collection was selected from which all chapters were omitted that did not concern clerical grades. The compiler did not stop there, however, and also removed all the canons so that only the introductory paragraphs for each grade remained. In another manuscript, an excerpt of canons on marriage was copied, which was based on one particular chapter of a larger collection of canon law. The excerpt had been reorganized to make it more systematic, thereby also removing all canons that could be considered duplicate or contradictory and adding a few canons from the collection's other chapters. In this way, a new text was compiled for a priest to teach laypeople on Christian matrimony from its early stages to the very end.

Still, canon law was used for more than learning about the clerical grades and marriage. In yet another excerpt, it provides priests with guidelines for living among the laity. It deals with many different topics that range from social behaviour, relationships and persistent (unorthodox) habits to rule reinforcement and monastic vows. This last topic was added by including various canons from

other collections to enable priests to adequately deal with nuns that left their convents for to many different reasons. The excerpts show how precisely tailored some of the texts were that priests worked with. The material was adjusted to meet the particular needs of its user and the context he operated in. Furthermore, it presents a lively image of Christianity at the level of the local church, where the priest was able to offer guidance on communal life in good times and bad via his expert knowledge of canon law.

In the fourth and last chapter religious instruction is discussed, which priests received during their clerical education and later also passed on to laypeople during catechesis. It concerns the education on the Lord's Prayer that was considered by the Carolingian elite to be fundamental knowledge for each and every Christian. It was also essential for the teaching of morals and the understanding of the Bible. Educating an entire population was not a small feat, however. For this purpose, many short texts were produced, also known as expositions, which explain the Lord's Prayer to the reader one petition after another. These are interesting for the reason that they shed light on religious education during a period in which it was assumed that it no longer existed. The efforts by the Carolingians to educate their subjects are considered by various historians to be empty words that had no effect in reality. In the chapter three sets of expositions are compared, each consisting of an A and B version, which show how the material was adjusted to both a clerical and lay audiences.

The examples show how texts from Church Fathers can be transformed into short expositions, without any reference to their former composers. Not their authority was considered to be important but the content of the Lord's Prayer itself. Once again, the image of the Carolingians, so often considered to be preoccupied with the promotion of ancient authors, has to be reconsidered, at least for those outside the circles of the intellectual elite. To explain the seven petitions in the best possible way, two expositions were also merged to create a new text. This material contained information on specific theological concepts and additional biblical references, presumably for the education of clerics. Naturally, as the expositions on the Lord's Prayer proved to be rather flexible, a process in which texts are made simpler can be observed as well. In one instance, all concepts not essential to the understanding of the Lord's Prayer were omitted. A clear focus was established on the meaning of the words of the prayer itself. The examples show that the understanding of the Lord's Prayer was gradual and that those who provided religious instruction were expected to understand different aspects of the prayer than their audience. In addition, it demonstrates the far reach and deep integration of the ideals formulated at the court. Despite the religious instruction of all the empire's inhabitant being a huge undertaking, the material to make this happen was composed, distributed and found its way to the village dwellers via the books that priest carried around with them.

In this dissertation priests' books were used to study early medieval Christianity and life in small settlements. The main conclusions are as follows:

- Priests occupied a central role in the communities they served. Besides their pastoral work, they functioned as sources of knowledge on communal life in general.
- This knowledge that priests had was contained in texts compiled specifically for them, often tailored towards a specific situation for which local practice was ultimately the decisive factor. Despite their many shapes and forms, priests' books were compiled with great care. Where the manuscript had to be used, by whom and the internal coherence of the texts all impacted the final result.
- The immense variety in the books demonstrates the broad and active engagement with the material. It means that the Carolingian ideals had far-reaching consequences that impacted the lives of local priests and that of the people they attended to. This was not achieved, however, by imposing one form of standardized religious practice throughout the empire. Instead, orthodoxy was sought after based on a few key principles that were interpreted and integrated into local custom.

Through the study of priests' books, it is possible to observe images of early medieval life around the local church, which are full of details that are otherwise lost. It provides new perspectives away from the centres of power that make its history less susceptible to overarching narratives. For this reason, priests' books are valuable sources and will undoubtedly contribute to a more complete history of the Carolingian period and the many things that came after.