

CARINE VAN RHIJN

Priests and the Carolingian reforms: the bottlenecks of local *correctio*

“You should take care to refrain from drunkenness, and to preach that the people under your care should refrain, and that you should never go through the taverns eating and drinking, nor travel around through houses and villages out of curiosity, nor attend feasts with women or with any impure persons, unless some head of a household, perhaps, shall invite you to his home and, with his wife and children, wishes to rejoice with you in spiritual joy, and to receive the refreshment of your words and to offer you carnal refreshments in the duty of love, for it is fitting that, if at any time any of the faithful gives you the refreshment of carnal foods, he should be given spiritual refreshment by you.”¹

Thus sounds the stern voice of Bishop Theodulf of Orléans, writing to the priests of his diocese around the turn of the ninth century. The addressees are clearly not in the first instance the priests in his direct entourage, on whom he could keep an eye, but first and foremost those ministering in the many villages and hamlets of his large diocese. Those, in other words, who lived with all the temptations of the world on their very doorstep, without daily episcopal supervision to keep them on the right track. Face to face contact between bishops and what one may call ‘local’ priests was rare. Canon law and capitularies prescribe a yearly episcopal visitation to every church in the diocese, one or two diocesan synods, and a time when all priests came to collect their yearly ration of chrism, but even so, it is hard to tell how far such prescriptions were followed.²

Priestly drinking and feasting were not the only preoccupations that led the archbishop to write to his local clergy. The fragment is part of a long list of admonishments on a wide variety of topics, ranging from the proper way to celebrate Mass, via the correct priestly attitude towards women (which should be strictly pastoral and not too frequent), to directions on proper priestly conduct like the passage cited. Theodulf’s first episcopal statute, as the text has been baptised by recent scholars, thus reads as a concise *vade mecum* for the life and work of local priests, that extends beyond their direct ‘religious’ responsibilities. Theodulf cast the net wide and also devoted considerable attention to the lay community in the priests’ care. In the archbishop’s view, laymen should, for instance, be stimulated to pray, to do good works, to fast during the required periods and to give alms. It was, however, up to the priests to instruct their flocks in all these matters and “be ready to teach the people”.³

¹ Theodulf of Orléans, First episcopal statute (ed. Peter Brommer, MGH Capitula episcoporum 1, Hannover 1984) 73–142, at 112 (hereafter: Theodulf I): *XIII. Observandum vobis est, ut et vos ab ebrietate abstineatis et, ut plebes subditae abstineant, praedicetis. Et neque per tabernas eatis bibendo aut comedendo neque domos aut vicos curiositate qualibet peragretis neque cum feminis aut cum quibuslibet impuris personis convivia exerceatis, nisi forte pater familias quilibet vos ad domum suam invitaverit et cum coniuge sua et prole velit vobiscum spiritali gaudio laetari et verborum vestrorum refectionem accipere et vobis refectionem carnalem caritatis officio exhibere. Oportet enim, ut, si quando quilibet fidelium carnalibus vos reficit epulis, a vobis reficiatur epulis spiritalibus.* Translation: Paul Edward Dutton, *Carolingian Civilisation. A Reader* (Cardiff 1993) 94–106, at 96.

² Visitation: Karlmanni principis capitulare (742) 3 (ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1883) 25. Synod: Synodus dioecesisiana Autissiodorensis (561–605) 7 (ed. Carlo De Clercq, *Concilia Galliae a. 511-a. 695*, CC SL 148A, Turnhout 1963) 266; Concilium Vernense (755) 4, ed. Boretius 34. Collection of chrism: Concilium Suesionense (744) 4 (ed. Albert Werminghoff, MGH Concilia 2, Hannover 1906) 35.

³ Theodulf I 28, ed. Brommer 125f.: *Hortamur vos paratos esse ad docendas plebes.*

Theodulf's first episcopal statute is remarkable in its length and detail, and especially if we consider the date of its composition. Before, say, 800, hardly any detailed attention had ever been devoted in the Latin West to the local secular clergy at all, let alone in such an elaborate way. What is more, the text fell into fertile soil, and spread rapidly – even today, there are still 51 manuscripts containing this text, of which no less than 16 date back to the ninth century.⁴ Moreover, Theodulf's colleagues soon followed suit and started to produce similar texts for use within their own dioceses. Although these texts vary widely in terms of contents, composition and length, one may nonetheless say that in the early days of the ninth century, a new genre of texts was born, written by (arch)bishops and directed (in most cases) at local priests.⁵ Special attention for local priests in this form was, however, a phenomenon that did not long outlive the Carolingian period, and was therefore mostly restricted to the ninth century. Still, in the time between ca. 800 and the early tenth century, some 54 texts were written that are now considered to be episcopal statutes. Even if this label can be disputed in a number of cases,⁶ such an amount of texts remains considerable, and we may interpret it as a reflection of an upsurge of interest on the part of bishops in local affairs, local priests and local laity. For one thing, the emergence of all these texts opens up questions as to what was considered so interesting and important about local priests in the years around 800 and thereafter.

This article is not in the first instance about episcopal statutes, but about the priests these texts aimed to address. Why would a bishop like Theodulf, for instance, use his precious time and parchment to advise his diocesan priesthood not to over-enjoy alcohol and hang around in taverns, even if a long and rich tradition of canon law was available that advised against such behaviour?⁷ One may wonder where such episcopal preoccupations came from in the early years of the ninth century, and how we should understand them. A connection with the Carolingian reform-movement springs to mind immediately, and this is indeed an important part of the story. It would, however, be too easy to dismiss the subject at that. For one thing, attempts at *correctio* at a local level have so far remained largely unexplored in modern scholarship for want of primary sources. Moreover, the question as to how such endeavours were actually received is usually left unanswered for similar reasons. The case of the local priests of the Carolingian period, however, is exceptional in the sense that one can catch at least some glimpses of both processes, using the recently edited *capitula episcoporum* and a range of other material. Apart from that, as I hope to demonstrate, these priests in themselves form an important and understudied group in Carolingian society, about which a lot more can be said than has been so far.⁸

In the first section of what follows, I will therefore try and explain how and why the priesthood was, as it were, re-evaluated in the days of the Carolingian reforms, and how the new role and position they acquired led to closer episcopal scrutiny and an ever-growing number of rules and instruc-

⁴ Cf. Peter Brommer, Die Rezeption der bischöflichen Kapitularien Theodulfs von Orléans, in: Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte, kanonistische Abteilung 51 (1975) 113–160. Numbers of manuscripts of the various texts discussed can be found in the three volumes of the MGH *Capitula episcoporum* (ed. Peter Brommer, MGH LL 4, *Capitula episcoporum* 1, Hannover 1984); (ed. Rudolf Pokorny/Martina Stratmann, MGH LL 4, *Capitula episcoporum* 2, Hannover 1995); (ed. Rudolf Pokorny, MGH LL 4, *Capitula episcoporum* 3, Hannover 1995). The number of manuscripts containing Theodulf's first statutes is unparalleled among the *capitula episcoporum*.

⁵ For a more extensive discussion of the episcopal statutes as a 'genre' (intended in the widest sense possible), see my doctoral thesis: Carine van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord. Priests and Episcopal Statutes in the Carolingian Period* (doctoral thesis, Utrecht 2003), especially chapter 1.

⁶ For instance Theodulf of Orléans' so-called second episcopal statute, which has more in common with penitentials than with episcopal statutes and is therefore hybrid at best. See also the editorial comments by Peter Brommer (who also has his doubts but does take the 'episcopal statute' approach), in: Theodulf of Orléans, *Capitula* 2 (ed. Peter Brommer, MGH LL 4, *Capitula episcoporum* 1, Hannover 1984) 142–184, at 142–144.

⁷ Against priestly alcohol-abuse, see e.g. Concilium Turonense a. 461, 2 (ed. Charles Munier, *Concilia Galliae a. 314-a. 506*, CC SL 148, Turnhout 1963) 144f.; Concilium Agathense (506) 41, ed. Munier 210.

⁸ An important exception is the work of Wendy Davies, who so far and to the best of my knowledge is one of the very few to devote due attention to (groups of) local priests. See Wendy Davies, *Priests and rural communities in east Brittany in the ninth century*, in: *Études Celtiques* 20–21 (1983) 177–197; ead., *Small Worlds. The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (London 1988). See also Van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord* passim.

tions. Secondly, I will show under what circumstances these new texts were received. Reforming the countryside, and especially the local priesthood, it will turn out, was no easy matter. Increasing attention and an ever-growing quantity of prescriptions led to friction between priests and their episcopal superiors, thus obstructing the full attainment of the reformers' ideals. To a large extent, I will argue, this was a direct effect of what one may call the 'identity' of these local priests, in various senses of the word. The final part of this article will therefore be devoted to an exploration of the information we have about who these local priests actually were, and what position they held within their communities. In doing so, I hope to put local priests, as it were, on the map of Carolingian society, while at the same time shedding light on some rather understudied aspects of the Carolingian reforms.

NEW IMPORTANCE FOR LOCAL PRIESTS

The first text to devote considerable attention to the priesthood in the days of the Carolingians was the famous *Admonitio generalis*, composed and issued at Charlemagne's court in 789. In this text, the king and a group of reformers at the court outlined a programme of what they called "corrections", "emendations" and "admonishments" aimed at putting right what was wrong in all strata and segments of Frankish society.⁹ The ultimate aim of the operation would be to create an ideal Christian kingdom pleasing to their stern, Old Testament God, who would then preserve the realm until the end of times. From its very outset, the reform-movement was ambitious, as it was meant to reach even the humblest segments of society. In order to ensure the eternal continuation of the realm, it was felt, all inhabitants should learn how to behave like 'correct' Christians, ruled by their God-appointed king, who, in turn, would be advised and aided by his wise, just and trusted counts and bishops.¹⁰ There was no space for passive recipients of the reforms in this set-up: all had a place and function, which they had to fulfil to perfection in order to avoid divine wrath and the disasters that would doubtless spring from it. The key to success was instruction: if everybody knew what to do and how to do it, all would be well for the realm as a whole. The full responsibility for the education of the entire realm was, however, not intended to rest on the shoulders of the court alone. A division of labour was devised in which, for instance, the court instructed the bishops, who in turn instructed their clergy, who would then pass on the required knowledge to the lay communities in their care.

It is within this line of reasoning that we first encounter the priests in the *Admonitio generalis*. In the typical way of thinking of the reformers, they were not addressed directly, but via their direct episcopal superiors:

"To the bishops. That the bishops throughout their dioceses patiently investigate the priests, their belief, the way in which they baptise and celebrate Mass, so that they hold the right belief, baptise in the Catholic manner and understand the prayers of Mass well, and so that they modulate the psalms properly following their verse, understand the Our Father and explain it in preaching understandably to all, so that everybody knows what it is he asks from God. And that he sings the 'Gloria Patri' with full respect in front of all. And together with the holy angels and the people of God the same priest should sing 'Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus'.

⁹ *Admonitio generalis* (789), ed. Boretius 53, introductory statement: ... *quapropter placuit nobis vestram rogare solertiam, o pastores ecclesiarum Christi et ductores gregis eius et clarissima mundi luminaria, ut vigili cura et sedula ammonitione populum Dei ad pascua vitae aeternae ducere studeatis, et errantes oves bonorum exemplorum seu adorationum humeris intra ecclesiasticae firmitatis muros reportare satagimini, ne lupus insidians aliquem canonicas sanctiones transgredientem vel paternas traditiones universalium conciliorum excedentem, quod absit, inveniens devoret. ... Quapropter et nostros ad vos direximus missos, qui ex nostri nominis auctoritate una vobiscum corrigerent quae corrigenda essent.*

¹⁰ *Admonitio generalis* (789), ed. Boretius 53, introductory statement: *Considerans pacifico pie mentis intuitu una cum sacerdotibus et consiliariis nostris abundantem in nos nostrumque populum Christi regis clementiam, et quam necessarium est non solum toto corde et ore eius pietati agere gratias incessanter, sed etiam continua bonorum operum exercitatione eius insistere laudibus, quatenus qui nostro regno tantos contulit honores, sua protectione nos nostrumque regnum in aeternum conservare dignetur...* A very good overview of the Carolingian reforms is given by Giles Brown, Introduction: the Carolingian renaissance, in: *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge 1994) 1–51.

And it should be taught to the priests and deacons that they should not bear arms, but have more trust in God's defence than in weapons."¹¹

A few chapters further on in the text, bishops are also instructed to see to it that the "ministers of the altar of God shall adorn their ministry by good manners ... We implore them to lead a just and fitting life ... so that by their example many may be led to serve God ..." ¹² Priests were, in other words, not only expected to execute their ministry properly, but also to teach the laity by their own example of good conduct.

The idea that priests should do their work properly and lead decent lives was not at all new in the days of the Carolingian reforms, albeit that before that period, the attention given to such matters in conciliar decrees and capitularies was, as we have seen, quite minimal. In the long text recording the proceedings of the Council of Agde (506), for instance, the main concern lies with preventing priests from stealing (or even selling) liturgical vessels, marrying, or owning hunting dogs and falcons (a status-symbol of the wealthy), all of which were forbidden to them.¹³ Indeed, the guidelines for their correct behaviour seem to be focussed mainly on preventing them from indulging in the pleasures of a lay life.¹⁴ As to the precise contents of the priestly ministry, pre-Carolingian councils and capitularies remain largely silent, apart from some infrequent prescriptions that priests, for instance, know their *canones*.¹⁵ In all these texts, priests are, moreover, lumped together with other categories of clerics and never addressed as a group by themselves. In this light, the sudden wave of attention for priests and their ministries on the part of the Carolingian reformers is all the more remarkable. For the first time, we find lists of required knowledge for priests and detailed descriptions of various aspects of their lives and work. What is more, priests are treated as a separate and clearly distinguishable group for the first time.

The key to understanding this rather sudden shift in attention to my mind lies in three interconnected factors, all anchored in the reform-ideals of the time. One is the overall importance of priestly ritual purity. Again, this is an old theme: the idea that sacraments were only valid when executed with 'clean hands' was centuries old.¹⁶ What was new in the reformers' minds was the notion that such ritual purity should be maintained round the clock, with the consequence that priests should *never* indulge in any kind of defiling activity. Where a sixth century council could still instruct priests

¹¹ Admonitio generalis (789) 70, ed. Boretius 59: *Sacerdotibus. Ut episcopi diligenter discutiant per suas parochias presbyteros, eorum fidem, baptisma et missarum celebrationes, ut et fidem rectam teneant et baptisma catholicum observent et missarum preces bene intellegant, et ut psalmi digne secundum divisiones versuum modulentur et dominicam orationem ipsi intellegant et omnibus praedicent intellegendam, ut quisque sciat quid petat a Deo; et ut 'Gloria Patri' cum omni honore apud omnes cantetur; et ipse sacerdos cum sanctis angelis et populo Dei communi voce 'Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus' decantet. Et omnimodis dicendum est presbyteris et diaconibus, ut arma non portent, sed magis se confideant in defensione Dei quam in armis.*

¹² Admonitio generalis (789) 72, ed. Boretius 59–60: *Sacerdotibus. ... ut ministri altaris Dei suum ministerium bonis moribus ornent ... obsecramus, ut bonam et probabilem habeant conversationem ... ut eorum bona conversatione multi protrahantur ad servitium Dei ...* Translation: Dutton, Carolingian Civilisation 80f.

¹³ Concilium Agatense (506), ed. Munier 193f. Theft or sale of liturgical vessels: *ibid.* 5, ed. Munier 194; and *ibid.* 2 (49), ed. Munier 225. Marriage: *ibid.* 39, ed. Munier 209f. Ownership of hunting dogs and falcons: *ibid.* 8 (55), ed. Munier 226.

¹⁴ Against priests being sexually active e.g. Concilium Claremontanum seu Arvernense (535) 13, ed. De Clercq 108; against unpastoral contacts with women a.o. Concilium Aurelianense a. 538, 2, ed. De Clercq 114–115; Concilium Aurelianense a. 541, 17, ed. De Clercq 136; Concilium Turonense a. 567, 10, ed. De Clercq 179; against wordly dress and arms: Concilium Matisconense a. 581–583, 5, ed. De Clercq 224; against priests' singing and dancing during a feast: Concilium Autissiodorense (561–605), 40, ed. De Clercq 270; against priests' committing usury or making a profit: Concilium Clippiacense (626/7), 1, ed. De Clercq 291–292.

¹⁵ See the Concilium Aurelianense (533) 16, ed. De Clercq 101, that requires knowledge of the ordo of baptism, the Synodus dioecisana Autissiodorensis (561–605) 6, ed. De Clercq 266 on the proper way of dealing with chrism, Concilium Leudegarii episcopi Augustodunensis (663–680) 1, ed. De Clercq 319 requiring knowledge of the Creed. None of these requirements is explained in much detail. Priestly knowledge of the canones is prescribed in the Concilium Aurelianense a. 538, 36 (33), ed. De Clercq 126.

¹⁶ See Arnold Angenendt, "Mit reinen Händen". Das Motiv der kultischen Reinheit in der abendländischen Askese, in: *Herrschaft, Kirche, Kultur. Festschrift für Friedrich Prinz zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Georg Jenal/Stephanie Haarländer (Stuttgart 1993) 297–316.

not to say mass after heavy eating and drinking, the very idea that priests should ever do such a thing was quite unthinkable to the Carolingian reformers.¹⁷ The third episcopal statute by Bishop Gerbald of Liège shows this clearly when he writes that priests should be ready at all times to administer the sacrament of the dying, so that nobody would pass away without having received the *viaticum*.¹⁸ After all, unbaptised children could die at all times of the day or night, and a priest who had been defiled by sex, alcohol or worldly affairs was simply not capable of executing a valid ritual. This was particularly serious since invalid, corrupted ritual would block the way to eternal salvation for the deceased.

This brings us to the second factor. General ideas about the importance of the correct behaviour of priests were, as we have seen, already in place by the time of the *Admonitio generalis*, and so was, at least on a basic level, the notion that they should execute their tasks properly. Again, the reformers pushed these ideas beyond pre-existing notions: not only should a priest behave and minister in a proper manner, from the early ninth century he was also held personally responsible for the loss of every single soul that he could have saved. The ultimate consequence of priestly inadequacy would therefore not only be the loss of lay souls, but also of the priest's own eternal reward in heaven. In order to grasp the importance of this idea, let us again hear Theodulf of Orléans addressing his priests:

“You ought to know and always to remember that we, to whom the care of governing souls has been entrusted, will render an accounting in regard to those who perish through our neglect, but in regard to those whom by word and example we shall have gained, we shall receive the reward of eternal life. For to us the Lord has said: ‘You are the salt of the earth.’ Because if a faithful people is God’s food, we are the spice of this food.”¹⁹

This fragment makes clear that ultimately, priests had to answer to God Himself for their deeds, and in this sense one may argue that the priesthood became a *ministerium* in the age of the Carolingian reforms. This is not to say that they all of a sudden rose to a position equal to bishops and counts, whose *ministeria* were clearly on a different level altogether. Still, in the way that priests’ responsibilities extended beyond the proper execution of their tasks and their leading flawless lives, taken together with the notion that they were not only answerable to the bishops directly responsible for them, *ministerium* is the term which best describes the new way in which the priesthood came to be seen in this period. Although their *ministerium* was a derivative of that of the bishops who were their direct superiors, their place in the Frankish world was taken very seriously indeed.²⁰

The third Carolingian innovation in perceiving the priesthood is directly connected to the first two, and takes us back to the ideals of reform outlined in the *Admonitio generalis* and transmitted in the episcopal statutes. It is no exaggeration to state that the success of the Carolingian reforms depended in no small way on the priests. As local representatives of the church in the enormous stretches of countryside, which remained for the most part outside the direct influence of the court- and city-based bishops, they were locally the only people who could teach the Frankish population how to be good Christians. Priestly teaching and preaching by word and example thus served the higher purpose of guiding the realm as a whole towards salvation, starting at a grass-roots level. It

¹⁷ Synodus dioecesisiana Autissiodorensis (561–605) 19, ed. De Clercq 267.

¹⁸ Gerbald of Liège, Third episcopal statute 11 (ed. Peter Brommer, MGH Capitula episcoporum 1, Hannover 1984) 37–42, at 40 (hereafter: Gerbald III): *Ut omnis presbyter curam et sollicitudinem agat, ne aliquis in infirmitate positus ad extremum veniens sine viatico permittat de hoc saeculo exire eos, ad quos ipse accedere potuerit. Quod si exinde negligens fuerit, periculum sui honoris subiacebit.* A similar prescription can be found in the Capitula Parisiensia 10 (ed. Rudolf Pokorny, MGH Capitula episcoporum 3, Hannover 1995) 25–36, at 32. Gerbald of Liège, First episcopal statute 11, ed. Brommer 19 (hereafter: Gerbald I), also tells priests to be ready for emergency-baptisms at all times.

¹⁹ Theodulf I 1, ed. Brommer 104f.: *Veraciter nosse debetis et semper meminisse, quia nos, quibus regendarum animarum cura commissa est, pro his, qui nostra negligentia pereunt, rationem reddituri sumus, pro his vero, quos verbis et exemplis lucrati fuerimus, praemium aeternae vitae percipiemus. Nobis enim a domino dictum est: ‘Vos estis sal terrae.’ Quod si populus fidelis cibus est dei, eiusdem cibi condimentum nos sumus.* Translation: Dutton, Carolingian Civilisation 94.

²⁰ Cf. Van Rhijn, Shepherds of the Lord 82–87.

is in this context that we should regard the new interest in the local priesthood and the appearance of the episcopal statutes.²¹

REFORM IN THE FIELD: THE GRASS-ROOTS PERSPECTIVE

A new perception of priesthood was thus developed at the court, and transmitted to the priests ‘in the field’ by means of, most prominently, episcopal statutes. Although these texts are neither spread evenly over the Frankish lands, nor over the Carolingian period, some general observations can be made as to their purpose and their reception by local priests. It is, therefore, now time to shift our perspective to the receiving end of such prescriptions, for what exactly did such new attention look like, and how did the priests themselves react to this quite sudden barrage of episcopal attention? For the purpose of this article, two ‘types’ of prescriptions are important, although a lot more could be said about this subject.²²

First of all, we find prescriptions that show how bishops indeed kept a closer eye on local affairs than before. Some of these prescriptions build on well-known themes, providing more detail than ever before, whereas others are entirely new. Especially the latter are occasionally so precise that they seem to suggest direct supervision on the spot undertaken by bishops or their representatives. Theodulf of Orléans, for instance, patiently explains to his priests that churches are not meant to double as barns:

“We frequently see in churches harvested crops and hay piled up, and for this reason we wish it to be thoroughly observed that nothing should be stored in a church except ecclesiastical vestments and holy vessels and books ...”²³

In a similar vein, he clarifies how priests should come by the bread needed for the celebration of Mass (his advice being straightforward: “bake it yourself or let your *pueri* do it for you”)²⁴ and makes clear that holy vessels should not be used for anything than that for which they are intended.²⁵ Hincmar of Rheims, in turn, addresses the problem of pigeons nesting under the roof of the church and defiling its interior²⁶ – and one can add many other examples to this short list. We do not find any signs of positive or negative reactions to such rules, which seem to have had the purpose of increasing priestly knowledge of a variety of subjects where pre-existing canon law showed lacunae. It is, after all, not very difficult to imagine a priest storing surplus tithes in church if other space was lacking and he had never been told that a church was no fit place to do so.

Secondly, we do find hints of priestly resistance and outright disobedience to a specific cluster of regulations. Sources are, admittedly, very scarce on this subject, but even the few traces we find show that priests tended not just to do what they were told by their direct ecclesiastical superiors. Interestingly, it is the episcopal statutes themselves that bear traces of priestly disobedience, which again shows that at least some bishops kept a close eye on, and reacted to, local affairs. Witness, for instance, Gerbald of Liège, who in his third episcopal statute seems to be genuinely angry:

²¹ This goes, at least, for the episcopal statutes that saw the light between ca. 800 and 820. There is a second, later cluster of texts (written between ca. 850 and 875), which should be regarded differently. Such matters are, however, outside the scope of this article. See Van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord*, ch. 3 and 4.

²² Cf. Van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord*, ch. 3 and 4.

²³ Theodulf I 8, ed. Brommer 108f.: *Videmus crebro in ecclesiis messes et fenum congeri. Unde volumus, ut hoc penitus observetur, ut nihil in ecclesia praeter vestimenta ecclesiastica et vasa sancta et libri recondantur ...* Translation: Dutton, *Carolingian Civilisation* 95.

²⁴ Theodulf I 5, ed. Brommer 107: *Panes, quos deo in sacrificium offertis, aut a vobis ipsis aut a vestris pueris coram vobis nitide ac studiose fiant.*

²⁵ One imagines priests laying the table for a fancy dinner-party with chalices and patens, cf. Daniel 5, 2–4: Theodulf I 18, ed. Brommer 115f.: *Nullus sacerdos seu laicus praesumat calicem aut patenam aut quaelibet vasa sacra et divino cultui mancipata ad alios usus retorquere. Nam quicumque de calice sacro aliud bibit praeter Christi sanguinem, qui in sacramento accipitur, et patenam ad aliud officium habet, quam ad altaris ministerium, deterendus est exemplo Balthasar, qui, dum vasa domini in usus communes assumpsit, vitam pariter cum regno amisit.*

²⁶ Hincmar of Rheims, Second episcopal statute 13 (ed. Rudolf Pokorny/Martina Stratmann, *MGH Capitula episcoporum* 2, Hannover 1995), 45–70, at 49 (hereafter: Hincmar II).

“C. 1. As the holy synod of Nicea has forbidden, no priest should ever allow women to live in his house with the exception of his mother, sister, or aunt, and neither should they allow women to enter separate little rooms or the cellar. Who will allow this hereafter should know himself to be relieved of his priestly honour, because we have already so often forbidden this in accordance with canonical decrees, and priests frequently do not obey. We therefore ordain that he who wishes to keep his rank, should in every way steer clear from closeness to women, so that there will be no chance for an enemy to suggest sin and the people can never voice accusations of a bad reputation.”²⁷

Indeed Gerbald (not to mention centuries of canon law) had already forbidden the very same thing in his first statute, albeit much more briefly, but apparently that had not been enough.²⁸ Although one should certainly not over-stretch evidence like this, the problem of overly close contacts between priests and women seems to have been a general one. There is hardly an episcopal statute that does not mention the prohibition, and a few decades after Gerbald, Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims made the problem into one of the main themes of his second episcopal statute.²⁹ The perseverance of this subject in episcopal statutes throughout the ninth century is interesting in itself, as it seems to indicate how bishops tried to get a firmer grip on the doings of their priests, but never entirely succeeded where it came to certain areas of conduct.³⁰ A case similar to that of women can be made for priests’ dealing with money, their investing in land and other property, and their involvement in a variety of secular affairs, all subjects that keep returning in episcopal statutes throughout the ninth century.³¹ All these matters, it may be noted, concern the centuries-old desire to separate priests from the lay world, a theme to which I will come back shortly.

Generally speaking, then, this re-evaluation of the importance of local priests led to closer control by bishops and their representatives, and resulted in an increasing number of detailed prescriptions aimed directly at local situations. Sometimes such increased control led to friction between priests and bishops, especially where it came to rules that meant to exclude priests from the world in which they lived as a result of their function. Given such tension and outright disobedience to their bishops, it seems that priests were by no means just members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy without having any other ties: apparently the lay world drew them as well. If we consider the fact that it was exactly via these priests that the reformers meant to unlock the countryside, it is not hard to see how this could lead to rather serious problems.

THE IDENTITY OF LOCAL PRIESTS

Who were the priests of the Carolingian era, and how can we explain their occasional disobedience to their direct, episcopal superiors? Given the existence of such friction, there must have been some factors that led to a situation in which the ecclesiastical chain of command did not always function as it should. Three elements will be discussed in what follows: first of all the priests’ background, secondly their social position, and thirdly some evidence for priests acting in groups to defend their

²⁷ Gerbald III 1, ed. Brommer 37: *Sicut sancta synodus Nicena interdicit, nullus umquam presbyter in domo sua habitare secum permittat mulierem extraneam praeter matrem et sororem atque amitam vel materteram, vel etiam ad secretum cubiculi vel cellario nullus presbyter feminam aliquam adire permittat. Quod si fecerit post haec, sciat se ab honore presbyteratus deponi, quia haec frequenter secundum canonicam institutionem prohibuimus et pleniter a presbyteris observatum non fuit. Ideoque praecipimus, ut, qui gradus honoris sui retinere vult, omnimodis a familiaritate extranearum mulierum se abstinere faciat, ut nulla occasio inimico pateat suggerendi peccatum et famam malam a populo nullus eorum incurrat.*

²⁸ Gerbald I 15, ed. Brommer 20 : *Ut nullus sacerdos extranearum mulierum habeat familiaritatem nec in sua domo, in qua ipse habitat, nullam mulierem umquam permittat habitare.*

²⁹ Hincmar II 19–26, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann, 51–70.

³⁰ These prescriptions are often too elaborate and specific to be dismissed as mere *topoi*, and should, to my mind, therefore be taken seriously. The often repeated requirement that priests should know their *canones* (to mention just one example) is, I think, a different matter that does tend towards convention.

³¹ A few examples: money: Gerbald III 14, ed. Brommer 41, against priests practising usury, *Capitula Parisiensia* 8, ed. Pokorny 31, against priests participating in trade. Land: Hincmar II 18 and 19, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 50f. Other worldly matters: Gerbald I 16, ed. Brommer 20, against priests acting as oath-helpers, Haito of Basle, *Episcopal statute* II, ed. Peter Brommer (*MGH Capitula episcoporum* I, Hannover 1994) 210–219, at 213 (hereafter: Haito), against priests attending lay *placita* and participating in games.

common interests. Evidence in all three cases comes from a variety of sources and is very fragmentary at best. It should therefore be kept in mind that the image created through these sources may seem more coherent than the situation in the ninth century actually was.

Background

Although a lot of priests from the Carolingian period are known by name, we know virtually nothing of their lives before they were consecrated as priests. There is evidence to suggest that some of them were born unfree,³² although a candidate was required to be made free before he could be ordained.³³ At the same time it is clear that not all priests came from such backgrounds. Hincmar of Rheims's second episcopal statute (c. 18), for instance, mentions priests with private possessions inherited from their family (*patrimonia*).³⁴ Herard of Tours, in turn, distinguishes between a priest's inheritance (*hereditas*) and other property acquired during his priesthood. The former category, so the bishop instructs his priests, could be distributed as they wished, while the latter type of property devolved to their churches.³⁵ It seems, then, that whereas some priests came from rather humble backgrounds, others came from well-to-do families of free land-holders, who, at least at a local level, constituted the higher strata of society.³⁶ The notion that priests were by definition recruited from the ranks of the *nihil habentes* should therefore be put into perspective.³⁷

³² E.g. in a letter from Charlemagne to his son Pippin in Italy, dating to 806–810, ed. Boretius 103, in which a distinction is made between priests born free and those born unfree when it comes to the proper compensation for wounded or murdered priests: *Verumtamen de presbyteris videtur nobis, ut si liber natus est presbyter, tripla compositione secundum tuam legem fiat compositus; et si plagatus fuerit, secundum qualitatem plagarum vel disciplinae tripla compositione emendetur qui hoc perpetraverit. Si tamen presbyter servus natus fuerit, secundum illius nativitatem tripla compositione solvatur in plagis et disciplinis*. This distinction between free and unfree by birth is, however, not made in other sources concerning the murder of priests, like e.g. Council of Mainz (847) 25 (ed. Wilfried Hartmann, *Die Konzilien der Karolingischen Teilreiche 843–859*, MGH LL 3, Concilia 4, Hannover 1984) 173. See also Council of Rome (853) 40, ed. Hartmann 330, where priests with the status of *coloni* are mentioned: *Ut presbiteri ordinati per loca ad proprii episcopi venire nullo modo concilium neglegant. Presbiteri vero, qui in diversis locis, baptisteriis vel quibuscumque sacris oratoriis ordinantur, instanter hac inexcusabiliter ad concilium diocesis episcopi occurrere secundum sanctorum statuta patrum decrevimus. Hi autem, qui colonatur possessiones retinent, nihilominus volumus ad episcopi indifferenter conveniri concilium; nam si per contumaciam se quasi in alterius polestate subtraxerint et proprio non subiciantur episcopo, canonicis correptionibus subiacent*.

³³ This went for all clergy, as decided in the Statuta Rhispaecensia, Frisingensia, Salisburgensia (799–800) 13, ed. Werminghoff 211, which states that a slave had to be set free before he was ordained in any clerical function, so that his former master could no longer exert any power over him. This idea is repeated under Louis the Pious in the *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* (818/9) 6, ed. Boretius 276–277.

³⁴ Hincmar II 18 ed. Pokorný/Stratmann 51: *Investigandum similiter, si nichil patrimonii habens, quando proventus est ad ordinem ecclesiasticum, postea emerit predia, cuius iuris sint, quoniam ecclesiae, ad quam de nihil habentibus promotus est, esse debent iuxta canonicae auctoritatis decretum*. This is a prescription frequently found in contemporary conciliar acts, e.g. Council of Aachen (816) 89, ed. Werminghoff 369, and Council of Paris (829) 16, ed. Werminghoff 623. Similar conclusions on the variety of backgrounds of priests, but then for the Merovingian period, are drawn by Robert Godding, *Prêtres en Gaule mérovingienne* (Subsidia Hagiographica 82, Bruxelles 2001) 3–6.

³⁵ Herard of Tours, Episcopal statute 44 (ed. Rudolf Pokorný/Martina Stratmann, *MGH Capitula episcoporum 2*, Hannover 1995) 128–137, at 137 (hereafter: Herard): *Ut res, quas in sacris ordinibus adquisierint, propriis ecclesiis derelinquant, hereditarias vero iuxta arbitrium propriae voluntatis distribuant*. Radulf of Bourges, Episcopal statute 17, ed. Brommer 245f. (hereafter: Radulf) also states that property acquired after ordination fell to the priest's church and should not be considered as private.

³⁶ Chris Wickham, *Rural society in Carolingian Europe*, in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History 2, c.700-c. 900*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge 1995) 510–557, at 528–529, however, points out that there were many ways and levels of land-ownership, that many peasants were free, and that they sometimes owned some of the land they worked. See below. The term '*patrimonium*' in Hincmar II 18, ed. Pokorný/Stratmann 50, however, seems to point to more substantial land-ownership. Jan Frederik Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus* (Leiden/New York/Köln 1993) 775, translates the term with 'estate, manor'.

³⁷ On the supposed poverty of priests see Janet L. Nelson, *Making ends meet: wealth and poverty in the Carolingian church*, in: *The Church and Wealth. Papers read at the 1986 Summer Meeting and the 1987 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. William J. Sheils/Diana Wood (Oxford 1987) 25–33. reprinted in eadem, *The Frankish World* (London 1996) 145–153, at 152.

As to the education of priests, the sources suggest several possibilities. The most specific information we have comes from a few so-called *litterae formatae*, letters of introduction or recommendation written by (arch)bishops for individual priests. Such a letter was needed when, for instance, a priest wanted to move from one diocese to another or to travel through a diocese other than his own, and is often prescribed in contemporary *canones* and capitularies.³⁸ In the few examples we have of such letters, we find brief descriptions of the priest's career, telling the recipient, among other things, where the priest was educated. Bishop Ebroin, for example, informs us that his priest Dodobert was born, educated and consecrated in his own diocese.³⁹ In a similar letter from Archbishop Teutgaud of Trier we learn that the priest Heligo grew up in his diocese of Trier, where he was also educated (*nutritus*) and where he received his tonsure.⁴⁰ The term *nutritus* is interesting here, as it may imply that the priest was educated in the bishop's household, but it could also mean that he was schooled in a monastery,⁴¹ while a third possibility might be that the priest was educated from childhood in both places. A letter dating to 865, written by Bishop John of Cambrai for his priest Teuderic, suggests that the latter was educated at the cathedral school of Cambrai (*apud matrem Ecclesiam nostram*), where he also completed all of his ecclesiastical grades before he was ordained a priest.⁴² A similar education in an episcopal cathedral school is implied in an early tenth century letter written for the priest Gislemar, who, his bishop writes, was "*ecclesiastice educatus*".⁴³ It seems that on the basis of this evidence, we may assume that priests had often received an education at a cathedral school before they were ordained as priests and appointed to a church. There is no direct, unequivocal evidence for priests being trained in monasteries, although this remains a possibility.

At the same time, though on a more hypothetical level, such schooling may have formed only the second phase of their training. Quite a few episcopal statutes⁴⁴ and also the proceedings of some important councils, mention local schools,⁴⁵ organised by local priests and run by them or one of their *clerici*.⁴⁶ Here, according to the Admonitio generalis (789), local *pueri* should be taught how to read.⁴⁷

³⁸ E.g. Council of Ver (755) 12, ed. Boretius 35; Admonitio generalis (789) 3, ed. Boretius 54; Synod of Frankfurt (794) 27, ed. Werminghoff 169; Council of Meaux-Paris (845/6) 50, ed. Hartmann 108. But see Council of Paris (829) 36, ed. Werminghoff 635: apparently a lot of people blatantly ignored this prescription.

³⁹ Ebroini Bituricensis ad Magnonem Senonensem archiepiscopum pro Dodoberto presbytero, ut in ejus parochia apud Hercambaldum manere possit, PL 129, 1389A-C, at 1389B: *De caetero notum facimus sanctitati vestrae quia istum praesentem presbyterum, nomine Dodobertum, parochianum nostrum, in nostra dioecesi natum, et sacras litteras edoctum, ad ordinem sacrum promovendi jussimus.*

⁴⁰ Teutgaudi archiepiscopi Trevirensis epistola generalis ad Carolum Calvum regem, episcopos et alios universos, pro Hegilone presbytero ad sanctorum loca peregrinante, PL 129, 1390B-1391D, at 1390D: *... frater nobis carissimus, et cunctis benevolentibus, nomine Hegilo, quia dioecesanus noster erat, in nostra videlicet dioecesi nutritus et tonsus, sacroque dogmate sanctorum Scripturarum plenissime eruditus, et honestissime conversatus, atque in Ecclesia nobis commissa ad sacerdotii dignitatem fuerat promotus ...* This letter dates to the time of Charles the Bald and can be dated no more precisely than that.

⁴¹ Cf. Niermeyer 725, 'nutritus'. On the specific monastic meaning of the term *nutritus* see Mayke de Jong, In Samuel's Image. Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 12, Leiden et al. 1996) 126-132.

⁴² Joannis episcopi Camaracensis epistola generalis ad omnes episcopos, pro Ursione presbytero, ut in qualibet illorum parochia recipi possit, PL 129, 1391D-1392D, at 1392A: *Et quibus praesens sacerdos, Ursio vocabulo, a beatae recordationis praedecessore nostro Teuderic, apud matrem Ecclesiam nostram per omnes gradus canonice promotus, religioseque dum licuit conversatus, suppliciter efflagitavit litteras ...*

⁴³ Ratbodi Trevirensis archiepiscopi ad Rotbertum episcopum Metensem, pro Gislemaro presbytero, ut ei deinceps in ipsius parochia degere liceat, PL 129, 1396A-C, at 1396B: *... quia praesenti presbytero nostro, nomine Gislemaro, has dimissorias dedimus litteras, quem in nostra dioecesi ecclesiastice educatum, de ordine clericatus ad presbyteratus proveximus gradum.*

⁴⁴ E.g. Walter of Orleans, Episcopal Statute 6, ed. Brommer 189 (hereafter: Walter); Herard 17, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 131; Capitula Trecensia 4, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 169.

⁴⁵ E.g. Admonitio generalis (789) 72, ed. Boretius 59-69; Council of Mainz (813) 45, ed. Werminghoff 271; Relatio episcoporum (829) 24 (ed. Alfred Boretius/Victor Krause, MGH Capitularia regum Francorum 1, Hannover 1897) 37.

⁴⁶ About a clericus running the local school see Hinemar II 11, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 47: *Si habeat clericum, qui possit tenere scolam ...*

⁴⁷ As prescribed in the Admonitio generalis (789) 72, ed. Boretius 59f.: *... Et ut scholae legentium puerorum fiant ...* Also Theodulf I 20, ed. Brommer 112: *Presbyteri per villas et vicos scholas habeant. Et si quilibet fidelium suos parvulos ad discendas litteras eis commendare vult, eos suscipere et docere non rennuant, sed cum summa caritate eos doceant ...*

Should we rule out the possibility that there were future priests among these *pueri*, who later on continued their education elsewhere when they had shown talent? I think not, although it may have depended on their background whether or not they went on directly to a cathedral school or a monastery. The possibility that future priests received some education locally should, I think, be taken into consideration.⁴⁸

Family may also have played a role in determining whether or not a boy would work his way towards the priesthood. In Brittany, Wendy Davies has shown that there were families “that consistently produced priests”.⁴⁹ Although Brittany was by no means representative of the Carolingian realm as a whole (as Davies makes abundantly clear), and comparable research for the rest of Carolingian Europe is lacking, there are some hints that, outside Brittany too, family may indeed have been a factor in steering boys towards the priesthood. In a charter in the Cartulary of Fulda we find a priest named Waldbraht making a donation to the monastery together with his cousins, the priest Albwin and the *clericus* Heimbraht.⁵⁰ This is an extraordinary example, but it does show that there were families whose members included more than one priest. There may have been ways that priests could usher their relatives towards clerical orders, as can be inferred from Theodulf of Orléans’s first episcopal statute:

“If any of the presbyters wishes to send his nephew or other relative to school, in the church of the Holy Cross, or in the monastery of Saint Aignan, or of Saint Benedict, or of Saint Lifard, or in others of those monasteries which it has been granted us to rule, we grant him permission to do so.”⁵¹

It is not much to go on, and there are no episcopal statutes, contemporary capitularies, canon law or other sources that show priests helping their relatives to train as monks or secular clergy. However, it is probable that it did happen on occasion. As we shall see later on, at a local level at least, the priesthood could be a relatively prestigious ministry, and it stands to reason that priests would have wanted to help their relatives attain such an august position, perhaps by asking a favour from the local bishop, as suggested by Theodulf.

Theodulf’s permitting his local priests to send members of their family to a school within his diocese also divulges some other interesting information, which concerns the priests’ interaction with their families. The *litterae formatae* concerning the priests Dodobert and Hegilo cited above, explicitly state that these priests were born and educated in the diocese in which they ministered, which suggests that they were geographically not far removed from their families, even though some dioceses were quite large. Theodulf’s c. 19 shows, in turn, that contacts between priests and their relatives were, at least in some cases, close and active, while the fact that priests came into inheritances, as mentioned previously, points to the same thing. Other evidence shows that priests not only remained embedded within their family network, but actually lived among their relatives. Hincmar of Rheims’s second episcopal statute, for instance, instructs priests to maintain the local poor only with that part of their church’s tithes designated for this purpose. Local cow-herds or swine-herds did not qualify as poor enough, whereas a very poor or sick relative of the priest would have been eligible for such support. Priests should, however, feed and clothe other relatives from their own portion of the

⁴⁸ Peter Brommer holds a different view, and sees a clear division between priests educated in monasteries as opposed to the rural population educated locally. See MGH Capitula episcoporum 1, 116, n. 68, where he comments on Theodulf I 20 (see previous footnote): „Wahrscheinlich sollte hier im Gegensatz zur Klosterschule, wo in erster Linie Priesternachwuchs herangebildet wurde, ... in einer Art Volksschule auch die Landbevölkerung unterrichtet werden ...“ I personally do not think this division is plausible, and moreover, Brommer does not give any sources for local priests educated in a monastery.

⁴⁹ Davies, *Small Worlds* 68.

⁵⁰ *Urkundenbuch des Klosters Fulda 1: Die Zeit der Äbte Sturmi und Baugulf* (ed. Edmund E. Stengel, Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck 10, 1, Marburg 1958) 265, possibly dated around 790. They give all their possessions in Heimesgeshusum, Aschfeld and Niwiheim to the monastery, together with twenty serfs.

⁵¹ Theodulf I 19, ed. Brommer 115f.: *Si quis ex presbyteris voluerit nepotem suum aut aliquem consanguineum ad scolam mittere, in ecclesia sanctae Crucis aut in monasterio sancti Aniani aut sancti Lifardi aut in ceteris de his coenobiis, quae nobis ad regendum concessa sunt, ei licentiam id faciendi concedimus.* Translation: Dutton, *Carolingian civilisation* 97. Note that the first school mentioned is a cathedral school, while the others are all monastic.

tithes.⁵² ‘Local’ is well-defined in this case, as a local church was meant to take care only of the poor and sick within its community. This means that it was not unusual for a priest to have relatives, even close ones, who were members of his church. Furthermore, in his first statute, Hincmar warns against bribery from “public sinners or incestuous people”. Under no condition should priests accept gifts from these people in exchange for ‘forgetting’ their sins, nor should they refrain from telling the bishop about them, not even out of respect for the person or because the sinner was a relative.⁵³ Another piece of evidence that shows a priest living in the very same place as members of his family is in a letter from the same Hincmar to Pope Hadrian, dating from around 870. The priest Trising, subject of part of the letter because he had caused a lot of trouble, is described as living in the same hamlet as his married brother.⁵⁴ What is more, the priest even goes out drinking with his brother’s brother-in-law at a nearby *castellum*.⁵⁵

As far as we can see, then, priests did not stray far from home while in office and remained with the church they were appointed to. They were, thus, ‘local’ in more than one sense: both by having family ties in the region where they ministered, and by functioning as shepherds of their local church’s flock. Although by ordination they were members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and subject to the bishop alone, this must have had consequences for their position within their communities. How a priest’s local status was perceived by his community is, however, very difficult to find out. Certainly his clerical rank had some influence, but within a lay community, status and position were, apart from family connections, determined by wealth. One way of estimating a priest’s local status, therefore, is to ascertain how wealthy or poor he was, a question that has been the subject of some recent scholarship.⁵⁶

With their local backgrounds and their (often long) ties to the church in which they were appointed,⁵⁷ priests must have become integrated members of their lay communities, despite the fact that no-one could enter the priesthood before the relatively late age of thirty.⁵⁸ But what position did they have in such a community? What was their status? Given the obvious connection between status and wealth, it should be possible to get an impression of priestly status locally by estimating how much or how little they possessed, as well as trying to find out what opportunities they had to acquire goods and money. Interestingly, there are sources that show the existence of both poor and rich priests, although it remains to be seen how common either situation was. For the time being, and in accordance with the evidence for the priests’ backgrounds, there is reason to assume that there was economic diversity within the whole group of Carolingian priests.⁵⁹ In what follows I hope to

⁵² Hincmar II 17, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 50: *Ut matricularios habeat iuxta qualitatem loci, non bubulcos aut porcarios, sed pauperes ac debiles et de eodem dominio, nisi forte presbiter habeat fratrem aut aliquem propinquum debilem aut pauperrimum, qui de eadem decima sustententur. Reliquos autem propinquos, si iuxta se habere voluerit, de sua portione vestiat atque pascat.*

⁵³ Hincmar of Rheims, First episcopal statute 13, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 40f. (hereafter: Hincmar I): *Ut nemo presbiterorum exenium vel quodcumque emolumentum temporale, immo detrimentum spiritale a quocumque publice peccante vel incestuoso accipiat, ut nobis vel ministris nostris peccatum illius reticeat, nec pro respectu cuiusque personae aut consanguinitatis vel familiaritatis alienis peccatis communicans hoc nobis vel ministris nostris innotescere detractet ...*

⁵⁴ Epistola Hincmari Rhemensis ad Adrianum papam, PL 126, 641B–648D, at 646C: *Quaedam libera femina, soror hominis nomine Livulfi, de ipsa in qua praefatus Trisingus presbyter fuerat ordinatus, accepit maritum fratrem ipsius Trisingi presbyteri: et hac familiaritate idem Trisingus coepit frequentare domum fratris sui ...* On the Trising-case and other problematic priests, see most recently Gerhard Schmitz, *De presbiteris criminosis, Ein Memorandum Erzbischof Hinkmars von Reims über straffällige Kleriker* (MGH Studien und Texte 34, Hannover 2004) esp. 7f.

⁵⁵ Epistola Hincmari Rhemensis ad Adrianum papam, PL 126, 646C–D: *Et quadam die ipse presbyter, atque praefatus Livulfus perrexerunt ad castellum quod Mosomus dicitur, et inebriaverunt se in quadam taberna contra nostrum episcopale interdictum ...*

⁵⁶ For instance in Nelson, *Making ends meet*, and Davies, *Priests and rural communities*.

⁵⁷ Gerbald I 13, ed. Brommer 19 literally says this: *Ut nulla presbyter a sede propria sanctae ecclesiae, sub cuius titulo ordinatus fuit, admonitionis causa ad alienam pergat ecclesiam, sed in eadem devotus usque ad vitae permaneat exitum.*

⁵⁸ E.g. Council of Orléans (538) 6 (ed. Carlo de Clercq, *Concilia Galliae a. 511–a. 695*, CC SL 148A, Turnhout 1963) 116. *Admonitio generalis* (789) 50, ed. Boretius 57.

⁵⁹ Janet L. Nelson, *Making ends meet*, also notes this divide at 152–153. She also links wealth and social position at 147.

demonstrate that, contrary to current understanding, the evidence for priestly wealth has been underestimated, whereas evidence of priestly poverty has been considerably exaggerated.

Poor priests

Let us begin with the evidence for priestly poverty – how poor were poor priests? To begin with an extreme example: Einhard, in a letter to an unnamed bishop, describes a priest living under what can only be called destitute circumstances. This priest was not well-off to begin with, but “now he has fallen into great poverty, for his already humble benefice, which he had in Bavaria, has been taken away from him and given to others.”⁶⁰ As it had become very difficult for the priest to do his job properly, Einhard asked the anonymous bishop to help the priest so that he might manage to support himself.⁶¹ Here, indeed, we have a clear example of a poverty-stricken priest, although it is clear that he was not indigent to begin with but became so for a specific reason which was presumably outside his control and not because of any wrong-doing on his part. Was it a lay lord who took his benefice from him? We can only speculate, but it is interesting to note that at some stage at least he *had* a benefice, small though it might have been. Such a possession put this priest into the category of free land-holders, and this was by no means the most humble of social groups, certainly not at a local level.⁶² There is no doubt that there were more priests, who, like him, lost their property to others, especially in the middle and later decades of the ninth century when church-land was often prey to alienation.⁶³ Moreover, certainly not all priests were treated with the “due reverence” that bishops demanded of everyone. We have already briefly encountered the priest Heimric in Hincmar of Rheims’s letter cited above, who was ousted from his church (although no reason is specified), and, given the number of warnings against such practices in contemporary conciliar proceedings, this was presumably not an isolated case.⁶⁴ It seems likely, then, that there were more priests like the one for whom Einhard wrote his letter, people who lost their property by alienation and with the help of their ‘network’ tried to find some new benefice. With the support of a man like Einhard, such poverty might have been only temporary. Bad as the situation for the unnamed priest may have been, it was clearly not impossible to find a way out. It is interesting to see in this context that a priest could indeed call upon the help of an important person to resolve the situation, which shows that the priest was not entirely helpless or hopeless when he lost his land.⁶⁵

It is also important to remember that such situations did not stand by themselves but were part of wider developments. Alienation of church-land and the associated tug-of-war between bishops and

⁶⁰ Letter of Einhard to an unnamed bishop 30 (ed. Karl Hampe, MGH EE 5, Berlin 1899) 124: *Iste presbiter nomine N. rogavit me plurimum ut pro illo apud vos intercederem, ut erga illum misericorditer agere dignaremini. Qui sicut ipse asserit, in magna paupertate constitutus est, et nunc maxime, quando ipsum parvum beneficiolum, quod habuit in Baioaria, ablatum est ab illo, et alteri datum.*

⁶¹ Letter of Einhard to an unnamed bishop 30, ed Hampe 124: *Et nunc nescit, quid agere vel qualiter seniori suo servire debeat, nisi per vestram intercessionem dominus Hl. ei aliquod solacium ad vitam praesentem sustentandam dare dignabitur.*

⁶² Cf. Wickham, *Rural society 526–529*, where he points out that there were many kinds of land ownership in the peasant societies of Carolingian Europe and that the way in which land was owned varied regionally. But on the whole “there could be a very wide variety in levels of land owning in any village, from regional and local aristocrats, through village notables with dependent tenants, small owners, cultivators who owned some of their land and rented the rest, and free tenants, down to servile tenants and landless slaves. There were many intermediate grades between these, as well. None of the divisions was entirely clear-cut.” (ibid. 528). The ownership of a small *beneficium* would put our priest with those ‘with dependent tenants’ or with the ‘small owners’.

⁶³ Cf. Van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord*, ch. 4.

⁶⁴ Against laymen throwing priests out of their churches a.o. *Capitula ad lectionem canonum et regulae S. Benedicti pertinentia* (Oct.? 802) 2, ed. Boretius 108; *Capitula ecclesiastica* (810–813) 2, ed. Boretius 276; *Capitula e canonibus excerpta* (813) 2, ed. Werminghoff 294; Council of Attigny (822) 5, ed. Werminghoff 472; Council of Mainz (847) 12, ed. Hartmann 168. Ousting a priest (like appointing one) was only possible with the permission of the local bishop.

⁶⁵ Einhard’s letter is not the only example, see e.g. a letter from Lupus of Ferrière to archbishop Wenilo of Sens (dated 842–862) on behalf of the priest Erlegaudus: Lupus of Ferrière, *Epistola* 82 (ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH EE 6, Berlin 1925) 74.

lay magnates, and within the episcopacy itself, were among the problems against which bishops reacted by trying to consolidate their hold over church-land and their diocesan clergy.⁶⁶ This, of course, did not make poor priests richer, but it did ensure episcopal support against wrongs committed against the priests' possessions, personnel and interests, which resulted in these matters attracting much attention in councils and correspondence.⁶⁷ All in all, references to chronically poor priests are extremely rare; Einhard's letter is exceptional in its lack of ambiguity. The majority of sources on which one could build a theory based on there being large numbers of poor priests in the Carolingian period, lack this clarity, and merit special attention here, especially as their interpretation remains inconclusive and open to discussion.⁶⁸

There are many sources that have been interpreted as pointing to exploitation of priests and as evidence for their poverty. Janet Nelson, for instance, cites a letter by Agobard of Lyons according to which priests are used by their lay lords as servants, "who serve at table, or mix the wine, or take the dogs out, or act as grooms for horses on which women are mounted, or look after plots of land".⁶⁹ Such a lack of reverence for priests and their ministry is also voiced in the Synod of Valence (855), where lay lords are described as submitting their priests to "very hard service", while confiscating their meagre possessions as well as their church's land (*dos*).⁷⁰ Other texts warn against exploitation of priests during visits by laymen or on episcopal visitations. Radulf of Bourges, for instance, admonishes laymen not to take up residence in a priest's house with their wives (or any women, for that matter) and dogs, as this could lead to "lay oppressions", meaning that it would divert the priest's attention from the care for his flock.⁷¹ Hincmar of Rheims, in his fifth episcopal statute, tells the archdeacons who conducted visitations on his behalf not to demand special things from a priest like fodder for their horses, special food for themselves or involuntary gifts.⁷² If one takes these texts at face value, things do, indeed, look grim for these priests. Similarly, one may interpret priests' asking payment for sacraments⁷³ as indicating that they were so poverty-stricken they had no other means of raising money. The same could be said for priests who pawned their liturgical vessels and vestments.⁷⁴

But do all these pieces of evidence point towards severe exploitation or priestly poverty? Not necessarily, it seems. On closer inspection, none of these sources calls priests 'poor' or even hints at their potential poverty. The term 'exploited' is used, as we have seen, but here the context in which these texts were written is important. The fragment from the Council of Valence cited above is a good example, for after the statement that lay lords abused and otherwise mistreated their priests, the real issue comes to the fore. The point of this *caput* is not so much exploitation of priests, as the

⁶⁶ Cf. Van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord*, ch. 3 and 4.

⁶⁷ See Hincmar of Rheims's tract *Pro Ecclesiae libertatum defensione*, PL 126, 1035C–1070C, in which the subject of alienation of ecclesiastical possessions gets a lot of attention.

⁶⁸ Most notably Janet Nelson, *Making ends meet*, has made a case for exploited and poor priests, though the evidence she brings forward may also be interpreted in a different way, as I hope to demonstrate in the following.

⁶⁹ Agobard of Lyons, *Epistola* 11, 11 (ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH EE 5, Berlin 1899) 203, as cited in Nelson, *Making ends meet* 146. The Latin reads as follows: ... *qui aut ad mensas ministrent, aut saccata vina misceant, aut canes ducant, aut caballos quibus femine sedent regant, aut agellos provideant.*

⁷⁰ Council of Valence (855) 9, ed. Hartmann 358: ... *quia parochiales presbyteri gravissime et indigne a saecularibus premuntur, nullaque reverentia sacerdotali gradui, ab aliquibus servatur et quia possessiunculae vel dotes basilicis collatae irreverenter auferuntur durissimoque servitio extenuantur, quod clamor sacerdotum et ruinae etiam basilicarum produnt ...*

⁷¹ Radulf 9, ed. Brommer 239f.: *Omnes in commune seniores ecclesiarum laicos monemus, ut in domibus sacerdotum, quae mundae et castae ac religiosae esse debent, cum uxoribus vel aliis feminis seu canibus habitare nullatenus praesumant, quoniam illicitum est eum, qui soli deo servire iubetur... Hoc vero nefas deinceps fieri vetamus, ne dei ministri saeculari oppressione laedantur et Christi grex carissimo pretio comparatus negligentia pastoralis morte damnetur aeterna ...*

⁷² Hincmar of Rheims, Fifth episcopal statute 4, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 87 (hereafter: Hincmar V), against demanding special food; *ibid.* 5, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 87, against demanding gifts; *ibid.* 6, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 88, against demanding fodder for horses.

⁷³ As forbidden in a.o. Radulf 18, ed. Brommer 246f.

⁷⁴ Hincmar I 11, ed. Pokorny and Stratmann 39–49, forbids such practices: *Ut nullus presbiter praesumat calicem vel patenam aut pallam altaris vel vestimentum sacerdotale aut librum tabernario vel negotiatori aut cuilibet laico vel femine in vadimonium dare.*

fact that priests strayed from the ecclesiastical hierarchy by working for a lay lord in the ways described; according to the text, priests should be left undisturbed to execute their ministry under their bishop, “whose helpers they are”.⁷⁵ It is probably going too far to interpret the abuse of priests as depicted in this text as pure rhetoric on the part of bishops who wanted to keep their priests under their own control, but given the time and the circumstances, this perspective is not totally invalid either. It is no real surprise that the bishops thought that lay lords should leave their priests to execute their ministry properly, so that any infringement on this might very soon have signalled exploitation in their eyes. This also goes for Radulf’s warning about laymen staying in priests’ houses cited above – clearly the ‘oppression’ did not lead to poverty, but to a distraction from the proper execution of the priest’s ministry. The case of priests pawning liturgical vessels is even more debatable as proof of priestly poverty; this might simply indicate that some priests were not adverse to making money in every conceivable way open to them, irrespective of their financial position. Although this practice was, of course, strictly forbidden, we should not imagine that the local liturgy came to a grinding halt when a chalice or paten went missing – as far as we know, most churches had more than one.⁷⁶ Of course it is not impossible that there were priests who pawned chalices in a desperate attempt to find some money for their own sustenance, but it seems equally plausible that this was a clever way of cashing in on surplus church-equipment. In principle, it was forbidden to all priests to have anything to do with money or trade,⁷⁷ and it would be reading too much into the evidence to infer poverty from prohibitions against these practices.

Similar questions may be asked when it comes to the exploitation of priests as ‘servants’ of lay lords; do such responsibilities automatically indicate exploitation? Not necessarily, I think, although we can but speculate on this point. Such specialised services, after all, required some specialised skills (like reading and writing of charters), and priests were presumably among the few people locally who possessed such capabilities. So is it unthinkable that priests actually agreed to fulfil these tasks because they themselves profited from such an arrangement too? Episcopal indignation about such an agreement can, moreover, only be expected in a period when bishops tried to strengthen their grip on their local clergy, so that they may have cried ‘abuse’ when the priest himself was happy with the situation. Again, the evidence can be interpreted as pointing in either direction, but should not automatically be understood in a negative sense. All in all, then, the existence of chronic priestly poverty cannot be concluded from these sources. But were they rich?

Wealthy priests

We learn from the second episcopal statute by Hincmar of Rheims that, at least according to the rules, every priest appointed to a local church should have “a *mansus* of twelve *bunnuaria*,⁷⁸ a cemetery and a yard where his church and house are situated, and four *mancipia*”.⁷⁹ They had, in other words, some free land and a few people to work it, which, together with the tithes they received, would, in principle, constitute their economic base. Now there is every reason to suppose that this amount of land and number of serfs was a minimum requirement, and that in practice, the size and hence the wealth of local churches varied widely. An example of a very well-endowed local church is described in much detail in a text edited under the name *Brevium exempla ad describendas res eccle-*

⁷⁵ Council of Valence (855) 9, ed. Hartmann 358: ... *ut ipsi presbyteri sub episcopis, quibus adiutores sunt, maneant et sub matre ecclesia liberi et quieti officium ecclesiasticum exequantur...*

⁷⁶ See for instance the *Brevium exempla ad describendas res ecclesiasticas et fiscales* (ca. 810) 2, ed. Boretius 250–251, in which the contents of a church are described. Among many other objects, there were two patens and two chalices.

⁷⁷ Against priests and money/trade: Gerbald III 14, ed. Brommer 41; *Capitula Parisiensia* 8, ed. Pokorny 31; *Capitula Corbeiensia* 7, ed. Pokorny 13; Radulf 35, ed. Brommer 260.

⁷⁸ In the *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* (818/819) 9, ed. Boretius 278, this is called a *mansus integer*. A *bunnuarium* is about a quarter of an acre, or somewhat over 4000 square meters.

⁷⁹ Hincmar II 2, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 46: *Si habeat mansum habentem bunnuaria XII preter cymiterium et curtem, ubi ecclesia et domus ipsius conteneretur, aut si habeat mancipia IIII*. The number of serfs prescribed, however, varies: the Council of Valence (855) 9, ed. Hartmann 358, mentions three.

siasticas et fiscales, dating from around 810. Here, the possessions of a church in the diocese of Autun are carefully listed, and apart from an extensive church-inventory, containing many objects of precious metals and a substantial number of books, we find a lot of land, buildings, cattle and serfs. The difference from the ‘standard’ church’s three acres of land or thereabouts, is striking: “In the same place we have found an estate (*curtis*) and a manor (*casa indominicata*), with further buildings in the care of the aforementioned church. Belonging to this estate are 740 *iurnales*⁸⁰ of arable land; there are meadows enough to produce 610 cartloads of hay.”⁸¹ Although this may be an example of an extremely rich church, it does reveal the range within which the size of a church’s property could fall. Some priests, then, had a substantial amount of land, goods and people at their disposal.

These lands and goods were, however, church property and not owned privately by the priest. All the goods that a priest acquired after his ordination would, according to the rules, also devolve to the church after the priest’s death.⁸² This means that priests were not allowed to treat the possessions of their churches as their own, and could not buy or sell any of this land without the permission of their bishop.⁸³ There is, however, ample evidence of their doing exactly that. The Council of Paris (829), for instance, mentions priests who “with the goods of the church to which they are appointed ... buy immobilities” and thus exploit their church and cause a scandal.⁸⁴ Hincmar of Rheims also had a keen eye for such malpractices, for he instructs his representatives to find out whether there is “any priest, who, under another name, has bought goods from the income of the church or from oblations or from the gifts of the faithful, and whether he has put buildings there”.⁸⁵ Some priests even neglected their churches in order to acquire land, on which, Hincmar was informed, they built manses where they allowed women to live – and these manses were not left to the church after death, but to relatives or other lay people.⁸⁶ More evidence for priests’ private ownership of (sometimes substantial) possessions comes from several monastic cartularies, in which gifts to these monasteries were recorded. Priests regularly appear in these records. Sometimes, the gifts came from their inheritance, as in the case of a priest called Burgarad who donated a farm in Hiruzfeld or Beogo, “and in another place called Uuintgraba in the *pagus* of Salageuni, what everybody knows that I own there in lands, houses, buildings, woods, fields, and water, which came to me as an inheritance” to the monastery of Fulda.⁸⁷ Clearly, this was a valuable donation, for the monastery compensated him with a hundred pounds of gold and a hundred of silver. In other cases, it is explicitly stated that the priest did *not* inherit these goods but obtained them in another way. The priest Solo donated to the same

⁸⁰ One *iurnale* or *diurnalis* equals the amount of land that can be worked in one day, so the size will vary per soil-type as, for instance, heavy clay is harder to work than sandy soil-types.

⁸¹ *Brevium exempla ad describendas res ecclesiasticas et fiscales* (810) 7, ed. Boretius 251: *Invenimus in eodem loco curtem et casam indominicatam, cum ceteris aedificiis ad praefatam ecclesiam respicientem. Pertinent ad eandem curtem de terra arabili iurnales DCCXL; de pratis, unde colligi possunt de foeno carradas DCX.*

⁸² Cf. Hincmar II 18, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 50: *Investigandum similiter, si nihil patrimonii habens, quando proventus est ad ordinem ecclesiasticum, postea emerit praedia, cuius iuris sint, quoniam ecclesiae, ad quam de nihil habentibus promotus est, esse debent iuxta canonicas auctoritatis decretum.* See also Council of Paris (829) 16, ed. Werminghoff 623.

⁸³ E.g. Hincmar II 19, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 51.

⁸⁴ Council of Paris (829) 16, ed. Werminghoff 623: ... *Similiter et de praesbyteris, qui de ecclesiarum rebus, quibus praesunt, praedia eo modo emunt, faciendum statuimus, quoniam multos presbiterorum occasione taliter emptarum rerum ecclesias, quibus praesunt, expoliassent et a suo ministerio multis modis exorbitasse et se diabolo mancipasse multosque laicorum ex hoc facto in scandalum dampnationis et perditionis protraxisse cognovimus.*

⁸⁵ Hincmar II 19, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 51: *Inquirendum, si occasione huius praecedentis capituli aliquis presbiterorum abhinc de redditibus ecclesiae vel oblationibus ac votis fidelium alieno nomine res comparaverit et ibi structuras fecerit ...*

⁸⁶ Hincmar of Rheims, Fourth episcopal statute 4, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 84f. (hereafter: Hincmar IV): *Quosdam vestrum ecclesias nostras negligere et alodes audio comparare et in eis mansos extruere atque excolere ac in eisdem mansis feminarum habitationem habere eosque mansos non ecclesiis secundum sacros canones derelinquere, sed contra sacros canones vel propinquos vestros vel alios quibuscumque distrahere.*

⁸⁷ Urkundenbuch Fulda 1, ed. Stengel 56 (17th Jan. 772): ... *in locis nuncupantibus Hiruzfeld seu Beogo in marca et Nisartano et in Hnutilin[um] una hobunne; et in alio loco nuncupante [Uu]intgraba situm in pago Salageuni, quicquid ibidem ad me noscitur pervenisse tam terris, domibus, aedificiis, s[er]vis, campis, pratis, aquis aquarumque decursibus, quicquid in hereditatem mihi convenit, ad praefatum monasterium ...*

monastery “all I have acquired by gifts and through my work in Alemannia and Bavaria”.⁸⁸ Most often, however, it is not stated how a priest came into the possession of the goods he bequeathed to a monastery. It was not even uncommon for them to donate entire churches (or parts thereof). The second part of the aforementioned *Brevium exempla* contains a short list of those who had given donations to the monastery of Wizunburch – of six people, two are priests and one is a *clericus*. The priest Hartwic is recorded as giving half a church, a *mansus* with four serfs and five vineyards;⁸⁹ Birniho, another priest, gave a whole church, a *mansus*, seven serfs, three vineyards as well as a meadow worth twenty cartloads (presumably of hay).⁹⁰ By donating these gifts, they were not outdone by the laymen mentioned in the list. The monastery, however, gave goods in return, and here we see some very interesting details. Hartwic receives a (whole) church, a *mansus* with six serfs, five vineyards and a field worth twenty cartloads in such a way that he was allowed to hold these good *in precarium* as long as he lived, after which they would revert to the monastery.⁹¹ Was this perhaps a priest who tried, against all prohibitions, to get a better church, in this case by exchanging goods with a local monastery? Whatever the answer, these data show that some priests did occasionally possess extensive amounts of land and buildings, and that they traded, swapped or donated these goods as they saw fit.

All in all, there is plenty of evidence that shows priests doing business with both their inherited goods and those that were officially owned by the church, and presumably they profited from this too. On occasion, as we have seen, such transactions generated substantial amounts of money, like the 100 pounds of gold and of silver paid to the priest Burgarad. Locally at least, these priests would certainly have qualified as wealthy, although land transactions were not the only money-making enterprises open to them. This brings us to the many prohibitions in the episcopal statutes against usury or asking payment for all kinds of ‘services’ to which the priest held a local monopoly. Gerbald of Liège, for instance, in his third episcopal statute writes “that no priest should use his money for usury, nor receive back more from somebody than he has lent.”⁹² The *Capitula Parisiensia* also forbid usury, and mention it in the same breath as trade.⁹³ Radulf of Bourges is most elaborate on the point, and shows yet another way in which priests could generate money:

“It is fitting to priests and all those of the community of the faithful, when they gather and pile up the fruits of the land or any other proceeds, that they do not behave in such a way that they sell it expensively and gather treasure, but that they come to the aid of the poor in times of need, nor that they give anything in usury, for the lord himself [=Charlemagne] in the law has forbidden to all to give anything in usury. Usury means that one asks more back than one gives.”⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Urkundenbuch Fulda 1, ed. Stengel 214 (793/94): *Ego Solo humilis presbyter trado sancto Bonifacio bona omnia qua acquisivi precio et labore meo in partibus Alamannie et Bawarie, precipue tamen Jusen et Muleheim.*

⁸⁹ *Brevium exempla* 10, ed. Boretius 252f.: *Hartwic presbiter tradidit ad ipsum monasterium supradictum in pago Wormacinsis medietatem de illa ecclesia quae est constructa in villa Hessiheim, et cum casa dominicata mansos vestitos serviles IV, et de vineis picturae V ...*

⁹⁰ *Brevium exempla* 13, ed. Boretius 253: *Birniho presbiter tradidit ad ipsum monasterium in ipso pago in villa Franco-nadal ecclesiam I, et cum casa dominicata mansos vestitos serviles VII, de vineis picturas III, de prata ad carradas XX ...*

⁹¹ *Brevium exempla* 10, ed. Boretius 52f.: *... et contra recepit illam ecclesiam in villa Unkenstein, et cum casa dominicata mansos vestitos serviles VI, de vineis picturas V, de prata et carra XX; in ea vero ratione, ut id ipsum quod tradidit diebus vitae suae habeat in precariam.*

⁹² Gerbald III 14, ed. Brommer 41: *Ut nullus presbyter suam pecuniam ad usuram donet nec a quoquam plus recipiat quam commodaverit.* See also *Capitula Corbeiensia* 8, ed. Pokorný 13. Usury is also regularly forbidden in conciliar acts, e.g. *Concilium Arelatense secundum* (a. 442–506) 14, ed. Munier 117; *Concilium Clippaciense* (626/7) 1, ed. De Clercq 291f.

⁹³ *Capitula Parisiensia* 8, ed. Pokorný 31: *... neque usuras vel negocia exercere...*

⁹⁴ The part about selling harvest expensively is an amended quote from the Council of Châlon (813) 8, ed. Werminghoff 276. The part about usury comes from Ansegis’s collection of royal capitularies (see chapter 4), so that ‘the same lord’ is probably Charlemagne. Radulf 35, ed. Brommer 260f.: *Oportet sacerdotes et omnes in commune fideles, ut, si quando fruges vel quosdam redditus terrae congregant et protelant, non ideo hoc faciant, ut carius vendant et thesauros congregent, sed ut pauperibus tempore necessitatis subveniant nec ad usuram aliquid dent, quoniam ab ipso domino in lege omnibus interdictum est ad usuram aliquid dare. Usura enim est, ubi amplius requiritur quam datur.*

Surplus tithes, then, could be sold at a profit, which could be lent to others with interest. Other prohibitions involve requesting money for a burial place, for burial itself,⁹⁵ for baptism, penance or other rituals, and show the indignation of bishops at such priestly “malign instincts” in their dioceses.⁹⁶ Hincmar of Rheims even mentions priests forcing the poor to act as their servants in exchange for sustenance from the churches’ tithes which was theirs by right. Tithes and gifts to the church should not be sold to the poor but given, an indignant Hincmar tells his priests, for they are given by the faithful in order to seek remission from their sins. The poor should be taken care of with compassion (*misericordia*), and those who ask something in return do not deserve to be priests.⁹⁷ As for hospitality, this should likewise be provided without asking for compensation.⁹⁸

Some priests, in other words, tried to make the best of their positions in an economic sense by asking payment for their services, selling food at a profit and lending money. They had the poor work for them, went to local feasts of conviviality, rode to the local tavern on horseback,⁹⁹ used weapons in disagreements with others¹⁰⁰ and, all in all, behaved like the local elite. All this is rather similar to the situation around the Breton monastery of Redon, which was studied by Wendy Davies, who places the early medieval village priests of Brittany firmly in the top *stratum* of local society.¹⁰¹ Breton priests accumulated, bought and sold land and other property, they had “more liquid capital than any other social group”,¹⁰² which they readily lent with interest. Sometimes they owned a lot of local land that they had inherited from their equally local family.¹⁰³ It seems that this situation was not unique to Brittany, and we should consider it to be the general pattern throughout the Frankish kingdoms. There was, in other words, a social stratification within the ranks of Carolingian priests, in which the poorest could barely sustain themselves and the richest were members of the village elite.

Collaboration among local priests

Presumably, the priests of a diocese were in regular contact with one another. They would see each other during the prescribed two synods a year, and also at meetings of local clergy on the first day

⁹⁵ Hincmar I 13, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 40f.; Hincmar III 2, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 74; Radulf 18, ed. Brommer 246–247.

⁹⁶ Radulf 18, ed. Brommer 246f.: *Audivimus quosdam sacerdotes maligno instinctu agitados pro baptismatis gratia sive pro sepulturae loco pretia iniusta a nonnullis accepisse. ... Similiter de paenitentia danda et de sacramento in ecclesia faciendo ecclesiastica vetat auctoritas nullum prorsus exquirere donum.*

⁹⁷ Hincmar IV 2, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 82f.: *Saepe vos admonui de matriculariis, quales suscipere debeat et qualiter eis partem decimae dispensare debeat, sed admonitionem nostram, immo dei per nostram exiguitatem, quosdam parvipendere comperi. Unde necesse mihi est iterare, quod quosdam cognosco neglegere. Interdixi enim vobis dei auctoritate, ut nemo presbyter pro loco matriculae quodcumque xenium vel servitium in messe vel in quocumque suo servitio praesumat requirere vel accipere et matriculariis debitam partem decimae, quam fideles pro peccatis suis redimendis domino offerunt, nemo praesumat vendere. ... Et presbyter, qui de redemptione peccatorum, id est de decima fidelium, quodcumque xenium requiret aut accipit, non est dignus inter presbyteros nuncupari, sed deici ...*

⁹⁸ Theodulf I 25, ed. Brommer 113; Radulf 11, ed. Brommer 241.

⁹⁹ Hincmar II 20, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 52, says that there were laymen who asked him whether they could have the priest’s horse and cape if they caught him in a tavern and there were witnesses: *Inquirendum, si de tabernis et de commessationibus et de familiaritate indebita mulierum se custodiant presbyteri, sicut sepissime interdiximus et interdicimus, quia ad contumeliam nostram laici me petunt, ut, si evidenter cum testibus, quo negari non possit a quoquam, presbyterum in tabernis invenerint, caballum et cappam inde eis habere liceat.* Against attending feasts of conviviality also Hincmar I 16, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 43. Proper behaviour at clerical gatherings is described in Hincmar I 14 and 15, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 41–43.

¹⁰⁰ Like the priest Trising, who in a disagreement with a layman used the latter’s sword against him, and chopped off some of his fingers in an attempt to kill him. Cf. Hincmar of Rheims, Ad Adrianum papam, PL 126, 641B–648C, at 647A: *Tunc ipse presbyter irruens super filium Livulfi, qui spatam ad collum protabat, extravit eandem spatam; et volens percutere eum per medium caput, ut illum occideret, levavit idem Livulfus manum contra spatam, et suscepit spatam ictu, et abscissi sunt illi duo digiti de eadem manu...*

¹⁰¹ Davies, *Small Worlds* 108.

¹⁰² Davies, *Small Worlds* 101.

¹⁰³ Davies, *Small Worlds* 100.

of every month.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, some professional collaboration was needed. Bishops' visitations were organised in such a way that they saw a small number of communities simultaneously, which presupposes some kind of organisation between priests. The same goes for the collecting of chrism, oil for catechumens and oil for the dying. Radulf of Bourges instructs his priests to choose representatives who would visit the bishop on behalf of themselves and ten colleagues to get chrism and oil for all of them, but only if they lived more than six or seven miles from the bishop's see.¹⁰⁵ But also, given the priests' local backgrounds and schooling, as well as the length of time they were often appointed to one church, they must have known each other well and worked together if circumstances demanded. It thus seems that local networks of priests existed and functioned. Such networks, however, had a side-effect that greatly worried people like Hincmar of Rheims. It is in the context of priests' trying to purge their names of suspicion that we find most of the evidence for local loyalty and active collaboration among groups of priests in a diocese, which, on occasion, turned against the local bishop.

Hincmar of Rheims, again, provides some information about such practices. In a letter to his colleague John of Cambrai he writes about a priest called Hunold, "who has told me he had priests to help him clear his name by oath from bad rumours concerning some woman". When Hincmar wished to interrogate these potential oath-helpers to make sure that their oaths would be reliable, the priest refused to co-operate, after which Hincmar felt obliged to depose him from his ministry.¹⁰⁶ Hincmar feared perjury, and therefore refused to accept these priests' oaths as a valid way for Hunold to clear his name. This situation was a difficult one, for there were no reliable witnesses nor even a proper accuser to support the imputation of misconduct, so it was left to the priest to redeem his good name. This could only be done, writes Hincmar, with neighbouring priests "of whom we know that they will not commit perjury when swearing an oath".¹⁰⁷ If there was any doubt about the credibility of such priests as oath-helpers, they should be interrogated, for the archbishop himself had experience of priests who entered *coniurationes* and conspired to redeem each other's names by committing perjury.¹⁰⁸ Groups of local priests did not therefore only help each other in executing their duties towards their bishop, but, on occasion, also collectively protected their own interests against him.

CONCLUSION

All this goes to show that priests were not only part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy but moved within a variety of local structures, all of which influenced their ways of life and work. Whereas episcopal statutes make it sound as if the only relation that counted to a priest was the one with his bishop, and as if the only things he spent his days doing were those activities prescribed by their ministry, this article has, I hope, shown that reality was very different. Priests were members of

¹⁰⁴ Proper behaviour during such meetings is prescribed in Hincmar I 14 and 15, ed. Pokorny/Stratmann 41–43.

¹⁰⁵ Radulf of Bourges 14, ed. Brommer 243f.: *De presbyteris, qui accipiendi chrismae gratia ad civitates in cena domini venire soliti sunt, constituimus, ut ex decem unus eligatur, qui acceptum chrisma sociis suis diligenter perferat. Hi vero, qui non longius a civitate quam sex aut septem milibus habitant, ad accipiendum chrisma per se veniant. Tres autem omnes secum deferant ampullas, unum pro chrismate, aliam pro oleo ad caticuminos, tertiam pro oleo ad infirmos unguendos ...*

¹⁰⁶ Hincmar of Rheims, Epistola 34. Ad Joannem episcopum Cameracensem. De Hunoldo et malae famae presbyteri purgatione, PL 125, 253B–254C, at 253C: *Iste presbyter, nomine Hunoldus, dixit mihi quia presbyteros habens cum quibus famam suam sacramento purgare voluit de quadam femina, et quoniam examinationis iudicium noluit facere, ut illi presbyteri cum eo securius jurare possent, sacerdotale ministerium interdictum est illi.*

¹⁰⁷ Hincmar of Rheims, Epistola 34, PL 125, 254A: *Si autem mala fama ex similitudine per parochiam de presbytero exierit, et accusatores et testes legales defuerint, ne contra Apostolum infirmorum corda de mala fama presbyteri percutiantur, et ne vituperetur ministerium nostrum, neque securiores presbyteri existentes licentius in peccatum labantur, secundum decreta majorum, cum denominatis sibi vicinis presbyteris, quos scimus se nolle perjurare sacramento, famam suam purget.*

¹⁰⁸ Hincmar of Rheims, Epistola 34, PL 125, 254A–B: *Si autem denominatos a nobis sibi presbyteros ad famam suam purgandam habere nequit, et alios ad secum jurandum conduxerit, quoniam experti sumus quosdam ad invicem conspirasse et reputati mutuo in sua purgatione jurent, sicut et presbyteri pleni iniqua cogitatione adversus Susannam conspiraverunt, coram misso nobis credibili, presbyteri, qui in purgatione infamati sacerdotis se una cum eo ad jusjurandum offerunt, examinationem iudicis per advocatum infamati presbyteri recipiunt, et in sacramento se Deo non perdant, sicut quosdam hinc jam revictos comperimus.* This idea is nearly literally repeated in Hincmar II 25, ed. Stratmann/Pokorny 55.

families; the rich ones also belonged to the group of local free land-holders which constituted, socially and economically, the top echelon of local power-brokers. They took part in all kinds of business transactions involving land and money, and had the opportunity to marshal help from local colleagues should their positions be threatened by local gossip and rumour, resulting in an official enquiry by the bishop. There were ties with local monasteries as well as with lay lords. On the whole, it seems that most priests were relatively rich and relatively powerful at a very local level, and in that sense we are dealing with a privileged group of people.

No wonder, then, that attempts at local *correctio* on the part of bishops did not always result in the desired effects, especially when their prescriptions threatened the priests' local position. At least within their own community, priests often seemed to have had a lot to lose were they to give in to the bishops' requests – and on occasion, the lay world, of which they were officially no part at all, pulled harder.

