

The rhetoric of election – 1 Peter 2.9 and the Franks

Gerda Heydemann & Walter Pohl¹

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Could the Franks be regarded as holy, as a chosen people? Alcuin wrote in his *Vita Vedastis* that through the baptism of Clovis the Franks had become a ‘holy nation’ (*gens sancta*), a ‘people of His own’ (*populus acquisitionis*).² This seems like a strong statement of Christian Frankish identity by Charlemagne’s Anglo-Saxon advisor, based on a quote from the First Letter of Peter in the New Testament.³ It raises a number of important questions. What does it tell us about the attitude of ‘religious Franks’ towards Frankish ethnic identity? And how exactly were *ecclesia*, *regnum/imperium* and *gens* related? We owe fundamental insights on this problem to Mayke de Jong: ‘From the late eighth century onwards, the notion of *ecclesia*, including all its connotations of the eventual salvation of God’s people, was harnessed to the identity of the Carolingian polity, with the ruler’s responsibility for the salvation of its people as its defining factor.’ Therefore, ‘the Holy Church or the Christian people (*sancta ecclesia vel populus Christianus*) could be one way of defining the identity of the Frankish polity.’⁴

Of course, that did not mean that educated Franks considered Church, kingdom and people to be one and the same, but they strove to make them converge. Political thinking in early

¹ Research for this article was supported by the Austrian Research Fund (FWF) in the Wittgenstein Prize project ‘Ethnic processes in Early Medieval Europe’ (2005–2010) and in the SFB ‘VISCOM’ F42-G18. A first version of this paper was discussed in January 2010 at a workshop in Hawarden, UK, in the context of a Research Councils UK grant, ‘Constantine’s Dream’, run by Kate Cooper (Manchester).

² Alcuin, *Vita II Vedastis* 2, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SS rer Mer.* 3 (Hannover: Hahn, 1896), pp. 414–27, p. 417f.

³ 1 Peter 2.9–10; and see below.

⁴ M. de Jong, ‘*Ecclesia* and the early medieval polity’, in S. Airlie, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Staat im frühen Mittelalter* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), pp. 113–32, at p. 119, referring to *Annales regni Francorum*, a. 791, ed. F. Kurze, *MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol.* [6] (Hannover: Hahn, 1895), p. 58.

medieval Europe was inspired by biblical models, and not least, by the Old Testament. However, Christian authors were cautious with equating contemporary *gentes* with the ‘chosen people’ of Israel. As Mayke de Jong rightly maintained, ‘no self-respecting biblical scholar at the beginning of the ninth century ... would argue that his polity was “Israel”, let alone the “New Israel”.’⁵ Direct enunciations of the idea of the ‘Franks as the New Israel’ were rare.⁶ But what do they mean when they occur? In this article, the passage in 1 Peter that Alcuin paraphrased in the *Vita Vedastis* will be used as a test case for the ‘rhetoric of election’ and its uses in the early Middle Ages.

The First Letter by Peter told the early Christians: ‘But you are a chosen lineage (*genus electum*), a royal priesthood (*sacerdotium regale*), a holy nation (*gens sancta*), a people of His own (*populus acquisitionis*), so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. You once were not a people (*populus*), but now you are God’s people. You were shown no mercy, but now you have received mercy’ (1 Peter 2.9). The English translations of the key terms – race, priesthood, nation and people – are in part misleading, in particular, ‘race’ and ‘nation’, so tainted with modern ideologies; we will therefore mostly quote the Latin terms. Peter’s text is based on several similar passages from the Old Testament, most importantly Exodus 19.5–6, which narrates the conclusion of the covenant between God and Israel (addressed as *regnum sacerdotale et gens sancta*) on Mount Sinai. Peter used the Old Testament language of election to underline that the Christians superseded the Jews whose priesthood was a privileged caste, while every Christian had priestly status by virtue of baptism. Therefore, they were the true people of God. This remained a challenge for exegetical interpretations of the passage and for its moral and political uses. When Christianity expanded beyond the chosen few of early Christian

⁵ De Jong, ‘*Ecclesia*’, p. 120.

⁶ M. Garrison, ‘The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an identity from Pippin to Charlemagne’, in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 114–61, who emphasised that it was the non-Franks such as Theodulf and Alcuin who ‘were responsible for some of the most explicit articulations of the idea.’ (p. 120).

communities, the exhortational use of the language of election by the Old Testament prophets, stressing the moral dynamic of loss and return to grace, came to the fore again.⁷

1 Peter 2.9 represents a ‘uniquely emphatic description of members of the Church as a race, a nation, and a people’, as David Horrell has stated.⁸ It forms part of a wider current of thought discernible in early Christian texts, whose authors often used ethnic terms to define and position the early Christians as a group in relation to the wider political framework of the Greco-Roman empire.⁹ However, some scholars doubt that terms such as *ethnos*, *gens* or *populus* can be understood as ‘ethnic’ in a modern sense in these texts.¹⁰ Erich Gruen has rather bluntly dismissed the ethnic character of 1 Peter: ‘This passage suits the context in lacking ethnic overtones.’¹¹ He argues that when religion is the issue, ethnic terms cannot have ethnic meanings. However, if a language consistently used for tribes and peoples is applied to religious groups it makes no sense to ignore these deliberate ethnic overtones. The self-stylisation of the Christians as the New Israel created the paradox of an ethnic identification for a religious community with an emphatically supra-ethnic scope, a paradox that spurred exegetic debates and successive efforts of interpretation that continued well into the Middle Ages. It is of little value to debate whether or not the terms used in 1 Peter were

⁷ Cf. Hosea 1.9f. and 2.24 ; Isaiah 9.2.

⁸ D. G. Horrell, ‘“Race”, “Nation”, “People”: Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1 Peter 2.9’, *New Testament Studies* 58 (2011), 123–43, at 134. See also J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 407; J. H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4–10 and the Phrase *basileion hierateuma** (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

⁹ D. K. Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); J. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ A. P. Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argumentation in Eusebius’ Praeparatio Evangelica*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 25–54.

¹¹ E. Gruen, ‘Did ancient identity depend on ethnicity? A preliminary probe’, *Phoenix* 67:1/2 (2013), 1–22, at p. 18. For a critique, see W. Pohl, ‘Disputed Identifications: The Jews and the Use of Biblical Models in the Barbarian Kingdoms’, in Y. Hen (ed.), *Jews and Barbarians* (Turnhout, forthcoming).

‘ethnic’, and according to which definition (Gruen uses the term in a radically restrictive sense).¹² Such a black-and-white take would completely obscure the complex early Christian search for identity and its long-term implications.

Peter’s letter, and many later Christian authors, deliberately employed the ethno-religious language of the Old Testament. Such usage can, first, be analysed in order to understand how the early Christians styled themselves as the new chosen people, and to explore the interplay between ethnic and religious identifications. The combination of ethnic language with words of holiness and election joins two of the strongest ways to express belonging, and offers metaphors of allegiance and solidarity. That may explain the success of the passage in later periods. The letter, which was probably written in the early second century, was soon ascribed to Peter the Apostle, which lent extra weight to it. Later, this and similar pieces of rhetoric could be used in arguments about the role of particular communities within the universal church in specific historical contexts. This leads to a second line of inquiry, pursued in the present article and so far hardly addressed: How did the often emphatic use of ethnic rhetoric in a Christian context shape medieval perceptions of ethnicity and peoplehood? The strong religious overtones attached to the whole range of terms for ethnic groups and peoples could not but have an impact on their role in the political landscape of the period.

If we wish to understand how Christians in the early Middle Ages perceived the language of election and peoplehood in 1 Peter 2.9, it is useful to take a look at biblical exegesis. Christian exegetes clearly recognised the central aim of the passage, which was to claim that Christians were God’s new chosen people, having replaced the Jews of Old Israel. They therefore frequently used the passage to develop the idea of a Christian covenant both in analogy and in contrast to the Old Testament. Appropriating this model for Christians, however, necessitated de-emphasising its strong implications of ethnic particularism in favour of a more universal vision of community. Unlike in the Old Testament, where God’s call was restricted to the

¹² For the problems of defining ‘ethnicity’: W. Pohl, ‘Introduction: Strategies of identification – a methodological profile’, in W. Pohl and G. Heydemann (eds), *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 1–64.

people of Israel, the promise of election in 1 Peter 2.9 was addressed to all the *gentes*.¹³ Faith or allegiance (*fides*) to Christ and his gospel, rather than common origin, became the central marker of belonging to this new people.

This exegetical approach towards 1 Peter 2.9 is well exemplified by the work of Bede, whose comprehensive explanation of the passage in his commentary on the canonical epistles, along with remarks in some of his other works, became authoritative for later, Carolingian exegetes. Bede's commentary emphasizes the parallel between the 'old people of God' and the Christians by evoking the conclusion of the covenant through Moses and the typological connections between Israel's history and that of the Christians. The origin of the Israelites and their liberation from Egypt foreshadow the emergence of the 'new people'.¹⁴ Bede stressed the universal nature of the Christian covenant, which was not restricted to one single people, and stated that the priesthood was no longer a privilege of one tribe, Levi, but rather was open 'to all the *gentes* who have been called to the faith.' The *genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus acquisitionis* comprised 'everyone who longs for justice and wishes to belong to the court of the true David.'¹⁵ Using the metaphor of the church as Christ's body, Bede explained that all of its members became *rex* and *sacerdos* like Christ. According to Bede, every Christian was a priest in a spiritual sense, performing the sacrifice through works of faith and proper Christian behaviour.¹⁶

¹³ Needless to say, the relationship between universalism and particularism in the Bible was much more complex than such a simplistic opposition between the Old and the New Testament might suggest, see J. D. Levenson, The universal horizon of biblical particularism, in: Ethnicity and the Bible, ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden/Boston/Köln 1996) 143-169.

¹⁴ Bede, *In Epistulas canonicas*, In 1 Petrum II.9, ed. M. L.W. Laistner, CCSL 121 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), pp. 179–342, at 237–8.

¹⁵ Bede, *In primam partem libri Samuhelis*, III.21.6, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1962), p. 197.

¹⁶ Bede, *In Epistulas canonicas*, p. 237; *De templo*, c. 16, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), 194. See also e.g. Origenes, *Homiliae in Leviticum*, IX.1 and 9, ed. and trans. Marcel Borret, SC 287 (Paris: Éd. Du Cerf, 1981), p. 72–75; 114–117.

Other patristic exegetes developed a similarly universalising notion of kingship which was applicable to everyone who exercised self-government.¹⁷ Some authors moreover associated this with baptism: Christ's status as 'king' and 'priest' was extended to all Christians through the anointment (which itself connected Christ to his biblical types, the Israelite priests and kings).¹⁸ Bede did not make this connection, but underlined repeatedly that Christians could be called a 'chosen' people by virtue of their faith in Christ.¹⁹ Bede carefully explained how each of the verse's epithets applied to the Christians, and focussed on the adjectives expressing the distinctiveness of this community, suggesting an open, spiritual understanding of the collective nouns.

The group terms as such (*genus, gens, populus*) are only rarely problematised in exegesis of 1 Peter. They continued to be applied to the Christians as a group, and some authors also evoked the idea of spiritual kinship with Christ or among Christians. Even if 1 Peter 2.9 was commonly thought to refer to all Christians, regardless of their specific position or status, some patristic authors applied it to more specific groups within the Christian community, such as monks, ascetics or bishops, reminding them of their exalted status and the moral and religious obligations associated with it.²⁰ It also features in texts which explain the

¹⁷ Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Hiob*, XXV. 7, ed. M. Adriaen, *CCSL* 143B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), pp. 1237–1243; *Regula pastoralis*, II.3, ed. and trans. B. Judic and C. Morel, *SC* 381 (Paris: Éd. Du Cerf, 1992), p. 180–186, 184. Cf. P. Dabin, *Le sacerdoce royal des fidèles dans la tradition ancienne et moderne* (Brussels: L'Édition Universelle, 1950).

¹⁸ Ambrose, *De sacramentis* IV.1.3, ed. H. Chadwick (London: Mowbray, 1960), p. 29; Hesychius, In Leviticum VI, *PG* 93, col. 787–1180, at 1068B ; cited by Hrabanus, In Leviticum VI.18, *PL* 108, col. 245–586, at 491A-C. For the connection with unction (chrism), see also Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, In ps. XXVI.2, 2, ed. C. Weidmann, *CSEL* 93 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011), p. 94.

¹⁹ Bede, In Epistulas canonicas, 237.

²⁰ 1 Peter 2.9 is used in this sense in fourth-century treatises on ascetism, for example Jerome, *Adversus Iovinianum* I.39, *PL* 23, col. 221–352, at 278; Ambrose, *De fuga saeculi* 2.6, ed. C. Schenkl, *CSEL* 32/2 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1897), p. 167. Cf. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* I.19, ed. and trad. M.-J. Delage, *Source*

significance of monastic tonsure (or discuss its correct form).²¹ Bede, by contrast, tended to argue against a restricted interpretation of 1 Peter 2.9 as pertaining only to a (clerical) elite within the Christian community, stressing instead that also the more simple-minded had a place among the *genus electum*.²²

The tension between a universalising reading of 1 Peter 2.9 and its appropriation for specific groups within the Church is found not only in exegetical texts, but also in Christian discourses about community in a broader sense. The interplay between religious, ethnic and political meanings provided an opportunity to negotiate the relationship between Christian and political communities, and to argue either for their convergence or necessary distinction. By the fifth century, Christians had ceased to be a distinct minority in many communities, and the question arose to what extent a Christian *populus* was, or should be, coextensive to cities, ethnic groups, kingdoms or empires.²³ Augustine described the inescapable tension that lay beneath these seeming equations. No state, people or city could hope for salvation in its entirety, and the City of God could never be equated with any actual community on earth.²⁴ Later Christian intellectuals, often well-versed in Augustine's thought, did not necessarily follow his approach, as the examples in which the rhetoric of the elect was indeed used to

Chrétiennes 175 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), p. 266–268; Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* II.3, p. 184.

²¹ Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II.4.4, ed. C. Lawson, *CCSL* 113 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), p. 55; taken up by Carolingian authors such as Hrabanus Maurus, *De institutione clericorum* I.3, ed. D. Zimpel, *Fontes Christiani* 61 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), I, p. 134–136.

²² Bede, *De templo* c. 16, p. 194. See, however, his *In Esdras* I.3, ed. D. Hurst, *CCSL* 119A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), p. 264, for an application of the passage to religious leaders specifically.

²³ G. Heydemann, 'Peoples of God? The uses of the bible and the language of community in the post-Roman West', in E. Hovden, C. Lutter and W. Pohl (eds.), *Meanings of Community Across Medieval Eurasia* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming)

²⁴ R. Corradini, 'Die Ankunft der Zukunft. Babylon, Jerusalem und Rom als Modelle von Aneignung und Entfremdung bei Augustinus', in W. Pohl and G. Heydemann (eds.), *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 65–142.

address an earthly community show. Most of these instances have an appellative and/or ideological function, and can often be explained from specific political contexts.

For instance, Pope Leo the Great used the letter ascribed to Peter several times in his sermons to address the Christian community in Rome, promoting Petrine primacy in a time of political instability and theological crisis.²⁵ In 441, Leo took the feast day of Peter and Paul as an occasion to convey to his audience a providential view of the Roman empire and of the religious significance of the city of Rome. He juxtaposed Rome's secular origin myth with its Christian foundations, replacing Romulus and Remus with Peter and Paul. Leo identified Rome as 'a holy *gens*, an elected *populus*, a priestly and royal *civitas*', arguing that she derived her position as *caput orbis* from being the seat of the apostle Peter.²⁶ The language in 1 Peter was carefully modified so as to appeal to both religious and civic layers of Roman identity. In another sermon preached on the anniversary of his own elevation to the papal throne, Leo balanced a universalising reading of 1 Peter 2.9 with a more particular one to evoke a spirit of community and cohesion among his audience. He exhorted the entire congregation, and indeed the whole church, to join the papal celebration, since they also shared with the pope the dignity of kingship and priesthood.²⁷ The theme of election was subsequently developed into a praise of the uniqueness of Saint Peter (and, therefore, turned into an argument about the primacy of his successor), a claim that was well-suited to Leo's dispute with Hilary of Arles and the agenda of the Roman synod of 444.²⁸ The sense of distinction implied by the passage could also be mobilised in polemics against heterodox

²⁵ On Leo, see S. Wessel, *Leo the Great and the Spiritual Rebuilding of a Universal Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

²⁶ Leo I., Sermo 82, rec. *α*, c. LXXXII, ed. A. Chavasse, *CCSL* 138A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1973), p. 509. Cf. Wessel, *Leo the Great*, pp. 365–70; C. Lepelley, 'Saint Leon et la cité de Rome', *Revue des sciences religieuses* 35 (1961), 120–50 (pp. 147–49).

²⁷ Leo I., Tractatus 4 (29 Sept. 444), c. 1, p. 16–17.

²⁸ As Leo reminded his audience, although 'there are many priests and shepherds in the people of God', none was equal to Peter, who oversaw 'the calling of all the *gentes* and to lead all the apostles and fathers of the church'. Leo I., Tractatus 4, c. 2, p. 18. Cf. W. Ullmann, 'Leo I and the theme of papal primacy', in W. Ullmann, *The Church and the Law in the Earlier Middle Ages* (London: Variorum reprints, 1975), IV: 25–51.

groups living within the city of Rome. In one of his anti-Manichean sermons, Leo emphatically appealed to his audience to stay clear of the error of the Manichees, telling them that they alone could legitimately claim to represent the holy people addressed by Peter, as long as they stuck to the faith according to which they were baptized.²⁹ Sharp boundaries were needed to separate the chosen people from its rival communities. The promise of election, combined with a strong message about both the unity and the exclusivity of the orthodox church, was designed to reassure Leo's congregation.

Leo's collaborator, Prosper of Aquitaine, gave the passage in 1 Peter a slightly different spin. The context is the debate about predestination, and the problem whether all human beings are called to salvation. Undoubtedly, most individuals of past generations had not received the call. Yet all the nations are being called at some point. Prosper quotes the Acts of the Apostles (14.14): 'In past generations he (i.e. God) allowed all the *gentes* to go their own ways', and concludes that God 'has never denied the gifts of his goodness to any of the *gentes*'. Therefore, he underlines that Peter's passage is addressed to 'the *gentes* of his own and of future times'. 'When that was preached', he asks after a full quote of 1 Peter 2.9, 'were those men still there whom God had, in previous generations, dismissed from entering his ways, and were also those who had previously been left to their will now called from the dark to the admirable light?'³⁰ The call to salvation cannot be understood individually; and Peter's ethnic rhetoric offers welcome support to Prosper's argument that the call has gone out to all the peoples, not to all the people.

Leo and Prosper explored several ways of using the ethnic language of the passage for particular communities, and of negotiating their relationship with Christianity. Another

²⁹ Leo I., Tractatus 24, c. 6, p. 116; Wessel, *Leo the Great*, pp. 121–7.

³⁰ Prosper, De vocatione omnium gentium 1,10, ed. R. J. Teske and D. Weber (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009) 86: *Sicut est quod sanctus Petrus apostolus scribens sui et futuri temporis gentibus, ait [followed by 1 Peter 2.9]. Numquid cum haec praedicarentur, adhuc illi homines permanebant quos omnes Deus in praeteritis generationibus dimiserat ingredi vias suas (Act. XIV, 15), et iidem ipsi, qui prius traditi fuerant voluntatibus suis, nunc de tenebris in lumen admirabile vocabantur?* Cf. also Prosper, Responsiones ad capitula calumniantium Gallorum, PL 51, col. 162B.

context in which ideas of divine election of peoples were repeatedly expressed was the conversion of pagan peoples to Christianity, although within this context the emphatic language of 1 Peter was rarely used. While there is little evidence for ideas of providential choice and identifications with ‘God’s own people’ in the Merovingian period, they became more common for the Franks under the Carolingians. It seems that the notion was first advocated by the popes, who needed Frankish support against the kings of the Lombards. In 756, Pope Stephen II wrote to Pippin III, whom he had recently anointed king, in the guise of Peter the Apostle, addressing the peoples of the Franks as ‘particularly Our own among all nations’.³¹ The passage from 1 Peter is used in a similar context in Pope Paul I’s letter to the Franks, in which the Franks are directly addressed as *gens sancta, regale sacerdotium, populus acquisitionis*, ‘whom the Lord God of Israel has blessed, rejoice and exult because your and your kings’ names are praised in heaven’, and in a letter by Pope Stephen III to Carloman and Charlemagne.³² The papal chancery of the period in fact used some of the strongest ethnic rhetoric attested in the early Middle Ages.³³

Janet Nelson has drawn a connection between this use of 1 Peter 2.9 and the royal anointings performed by the popes.³⁴ Papal use of the passage depended on its exegetical interpretation,

³¹ Codex Carolinus 10, ed. W. Gundlach, *MGH EE 3* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1891), pp. 469–657, p. 502. See T. Noble, ‘The Bible in the Codex Carolinus’, in C. Leonardi and G. Orlandi (eds), *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages* (Florence: Sismel, 2005), pp. 61–74.

³² Codex Carolinus 39, p. 552; cf. 45, p. 561.

³³ W. Pohl, ‘Why not marry a foreign woman: Stephen III’s letter to Charlemagne’, in V. Garver and O. Phelan (eds), *Rome and Religion in the Early Middle Ages* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 47–63.

³⁴ J. Nelson, ‘The Lord’s anointed and the people’s choice: Carolingian royal ritual’, in eadem, *The Frankish World, 750–900* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 99–131, at 109–11. For the link between royal anointing and baptism, see also the discussion in A. Angendent, ‘Pippins Königserhebung und Salbung’, in *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung*, ed. M. Becher and J. Jarnut (Münster: Scriptorium, 2004), pp. 179–210; and J. Clauss, ‘Die Salbung Pippins des Jüngeren in karolingischen Quellen vor dem Horizont biblischer Wahrnehmungsmuster’, in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 46 (2013), pp. 391–417, who emphasizes Old Testament models.

in which the anointing of Old Testament kings and priests was seen as a prefiguration of the baptismal anointing of all Christians, who thus became 'kings and priests'. As Nelson observes, 'such scriptural imitation in the Frankish liturgy [of the Old Testament anointments] was a matter not just of drawing analogies, but of recognising and making concrete a symmetry that was divinely drawn, and extended beyond priests and kings to the whole people: it was the Franks' destiny to be a new Israel.'³⁵ 1 Peter 2.9 was a very poignant expression of that symmetry, given that its wording mirrored the formula of the covenant. If the Franks could be thought of as a chosen people, however, it was in the New Testament version. The numerous baptismal instructions and commentaries produced in the Carolingian period show that Carolingian clerics were very much aware of the parallel between Christian initiation and membership in a chosen community. Alcuin, for example, cited 1 Peter 2.9 when he explained the significance of post-baptismal anointing in the baptismal commentary known as *Primo paganus*, which was one of the most widely circulated texts on baptism in the Carolingian world: 'Then the head is anointed with holy chrism and covered with the mystical veil, so that [the baptized person] may understand that he bears the royal diadem and the priestly honour, as the apostle says: "You are a royal and priestly *genus*, presenting yourselves as a sacrifice to the living God, holy and God-pleasing" (combining 1 Peter 2.9 and Romans 12.1)'.³⁶

Other Carolingian commentaries on baptism offer detailed explanations of the typological link between the Old Testament and post-baptismal anointing, invoking kingdom and priesthood even where they do not explicitly cite 1 Peter.³⁷ In the words of Theodulf of Orléans, by virtue of the anointment, Christians joined the 'kingdom and priesthood of the

³⁵ Nelson, 'The Lord's anointed', p. 109.

³⁶ Alcuin, Ep. 134, ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH EE* 4 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), pp. 1–481, at 202–3; more recently edited by S. A. Keefe, *Water and the Word: Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire*, 2 vols (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), II, Text 9, pp. 238–45; cf. *ibid.*, I, pp. 80–99 for discussion; O. Phelan, 'Textual transmission and authorship in the Carolingian period. *Primo paganus*, baptism, and Alcuin of York', *Revue bénédictine* 118 (2008), 262–88.

³⁷ E.g. Keefe, *Water and the Word*, Text 25, pp. 371–3 (Leidrad of Lyon) and 30, pp. 425–7 (Jesse of Amiens).

church' and acquired the right to the Christian name (*Christiani nominis praerogativa*).³⁸ It is in the liturgical context of baptism that identification as a Christian was conflated most effectively with notions of divine election and membership in a sanctified community.

Carolingian visions of baptism take us back to Alcuin's quote in 1 Peter cited in his *Life of St. Vedast*, the legendary founder of Saint-Vaast at Arras, with which we began this article.³⁹ A Merovingian version of the text is attributed to Jonas of Bobbio, who had also written the *Life of St. Columbanus*.⁴⁰ Alcuin's version starts with a dedication to Rado, Abbot of Saint-Vaast, which contains lengthy admonitions about monastic life and the duties of those 'who have taken over leadership of a flock of Christ'.⁴¹ The *Vita* clearly reflects concerns of the 790s: the appearance of *pseudodoctores* who introduce new sects, which is a reference to the adoptionist controversy; an extended version of the destructions at Arras by Attila as a punishment for the sins of the population, which points both to the Viking raid on Lindisfarne in 793 and to the Avar wars, which were legitimized as retribution for Attila's incursions.⁴²

Alcuin considerably extended the chapter about the baptism of Clovis. In the first *Life of St. Vedast*, the account of the victorious battle was based on Gregory of Tours, with numerous verbatim quotes; it introduced Vedast as the king's spiritual teacher who accompanied him to

³⁸ Theodulf of Orléans, *De baptismo*, c.15, ed. Keefe, *Water and the Word*, pp. 307–8. Cf. Isidor, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II. 26, ed. C. M. Lawson, CCSL 113 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989) p. 106–7.

³⁹ *Vita Vedastis duplex*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SS rer Mer.* 3 (Hannover: Hahn, 1896), pp. 399–427.

⁴⁰ Cf. A.-M. Helvétius, 'Clercs ou moines? Les origines de Saint-Vaast d'Arras et la *Vita Vedastis* attribué à Jonas', *Revue du Nord* 93 (2011), 671–89.

⁴¹ Alcuin, *Vita Vedastis* II, *Dedicatio*, p. 415. Cf. C. Veyrard-Cosme, 'Alcuin et la réécriture hagiographique: D'un programme avoué d'emendatio à son actualisation', in M. Gouillet and M. Heinzelmänn (eds), *La réécriture hagiographique dans l'Occident médiéval*, *Beihefte der Francia* 58 (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2003), pp. 71–86.

⁴² Alcuin, *Vita Vedastis* II, *Dedicatio*, p. 415, using 2 Peter 2.1, and c. 7, p. 421. Cf. W. Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa* (München: C.H. Beck, 2002), p. 313.

Rheims, whereas the act of baptism itself was only described briefly.⁴³ Alcuin elaborated all parts of this account. Already in the context of Vedast's teachings, he anticipates the effects of the king's baptism. The two saints, Vedast and Remigius (whom Alcuin, in a deliberate *adnominatio*, calls Remedius), together 'bring the temporary king to the eternal king as a present'. Clovis 'entered the door of eternal light, for the very strong people of the Franks (*gens Francorum*) believed in Christ, and was turned into a *gens sancta, populus acquisitionis*, so that His virtues were announced to them, who called them from the darkness into His admirable light.'⁴⁴ The actual description of the act of baptism in the following chapter accentuates this decisive step in Old Testament comparisons once again, describing the joy in the Church when 'the king of Niniveh, after the preaching of Iona, stepped down from the threshold of his majesty, sitting in the ash of penitence and humiliating his head of excellency under the pious right hand of the priest of God! Thus the king with the noblemen and the people was baptized.'⁴⁵

The rhetoric of election is used here to underline the fundamental contrast between pagan damnation and salvation through baptism. The Franks had not been a chosen people from the start; it was the act of baptism in which the divine 'acquisition' was expressed. This miraculous *rite de passage* is operated by God's grace through the pious deeds of the two saints who bring remedy to the souls of the king and his Franks. As compared with the accounts in Gregory of Tours and also in the first *Life*, the king's agency is further diminished, and the importance of the religious erudition imparted to Clovis by St. Vedast takes centre stage. The correct form and spiritual value of baptism was another contentious issue of the 790s, in which Alcuin disagreed with Charlemagne about the use of force in the conversion of the Saxons.⁴⁶ It is also remarkable that unlike Gregory and the author of the first *Life of St. Vedast*, Alcuin stressed the necessity of Clovis's penitence before his baptism. This expressed concerns about the 'penitential state' that should become so important under

⁴³ Vita Vedastis I, c. 2–3, pp. 406–8.

⁴⁴ Alcuin, Vita Vedastis II, c. 2, p. 418.

⁴⁵ Alcuin, Vita Vedastis II, c. 4, p. 419.

⁴⁶ I. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe 400–1050* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), pp. 80–9.

Louis the Pious.⁴⁷ Only after the double ritual of penitence and baptism can Clovis return to the exercise of power.

The concept of election behind the passage therefore does not mean that the Franks were ‘the’ true Israel, the one chosen people among the many *gentes* of the period. They had become a *gens sancta* by their conversion. The cumulative act of baptism was a special display of God’s grace. The circumstances also mattered, involving divine intervention by granting victory to the *gens Francorum* and its king, and featuring two holy men who had guaranteed that both the religious teaching and the ritual act were impeccable. The limits of election become clearer by comparison with two further passages in Alcuin’s work that also use 1 Peter, but refer to other peoples. One is Alcuin’s letter to Aethelheard, Archbishop of Canterbury, written in the wake of the sack of Lindisfarne. ‘As is attested by the Prince of the Apostles: You are a *genus electum, regale sacerdotium*. By the insistence of your preaching we will be, as follows in the same letter: *gens sancta, populus acquisitionis* ... who once were not a people but now are the people of God.’⁴⁸ 1 Peter 2.9–10 is fully quoted here, slightly modulated by introducing the first person plural: this, in Alcuin’s eyes, was about ‘us’, the Christian Angles, and this element is reinforced by the next passage: ‘Our fathers, God allowing, although pagans, took this land by their bellicose virtues. How big is our disgrace that we Christians lose what those pagans won. I say this because of the scourge that recently came to parts of our island, which has been inhabited by our relatives for almost 350 years.’ Christian and ethnic language are closely interwoven here.

Alcuin’s emphatic self-identification, a device to veil his implicit critique of the British bishops, then turns into severe admonishment. How could it be that Christians lost what pagans won? This must be a punishment for their sins, and Alcuin turns to Gildas to drive the point home. Gildas had paralleled the misfortunes of Israel with those of the Britons: ‘I said to myself, when they strayed from the right track the Lord did not spare a people (*populus*) that was peculiarly his own among all nations (*nationes*), a royal stock, a holy race (*semini regali*

⁴⁷ Cf. M. de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴⁸ Alcuin, Ep. 17, p. 47. See Mary Garrison, ‘The bible and Alcuin’s interpretation of current events’, in *Peritia* 16 (2002), pp. 69–84, at pp. 73–76.

gentique sanctae) ... what will he do to the darkness of this our age?’⁴⁹ Alcuin uses Gildas to argue that the Britons lost their fatherlands because of the greed of the princes, the iniquity of the judges, the sloth of the bishops and the sins of the people.⁵⁰ Let us be careful not to squander the divine protection of our fatherland, Alcuin concludes. The bishops, he insists, must open heaven’s door to the people of God by their assiduous preaching. In his final array of biblical admonishments, Alcuin also directly refers to the case of Israel: ‘Spare, Lord, spare your people, and do not give your inheritance to the disgrace of the *gentes*.’⁵¹

The letter is a rhetorical showcase, discharging fireworks of almost thirty biblical quotes and high-sounding rhetoric, continually juxtaposing encomium and severe moral exhortation. Alcuin was a master of the genre of *increpatio* that became so central to courtly debates under Louis the Pious.⁵² The Peter passage derives its significance from his strategy to convince the English bishops that they were simply too important to fail. The fate of the ‘holy’ people of the English depended on their preaching and moral conduct. Remarkably, Alcuin splits the epithets addressed by Peter to the early Christians in two: *Vos*, the bishops, are the *genus electum*, the *regale sacerdotium*, and by their preaching *nos*, the English people, including Alcuin, will be the *gens sancta* and the *populus acquisitionis*. In his *Vita Vedastis*, Alcuin only used the last two epithets for the Franks as well. He distinguished between the kin of the elect, the royal priesthood – the chosen few – on the one side and the whole people on the other side – contrary to Peter’s intention. Furthermore, God’s people was by no means chosen from the start, and neither had it simply become ‘holy’ through conversion. Its holiness continued to depend on its actions, and on the support of the bishops; it always lay in the future, and was not more than a promise, an aim to pursue with all dedication. The failure of

⁴⁹ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, Preface 13, ed. and trans by M. Winterbottom (London: Philimore, 1978), p. 15 and p. 88. On a similar note of moral condemnation, Gildas 107, p. 76, used a full quote of 1 Peter 2.9–10 to castigate corrupt priests (p. 139).

⁵⁰ Alcuin, Ep. 17, p. 47. A similar reference to Gildas is found in Alcuin, Ep. 129, p. 192. Cf. D. A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 271.

⁵¹ Joel 2.17; Alcuin, Ep. 17, p. 48.

⁵² De Jong, *Penitential State*, pp. 142–7; Irene van Renswoude, *The Rhetoric of Free Speech in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge, forthcoming).

the Jews to live up to the requirements of the covenant, but also the perdition of the Britons constituted dire warnings.

Some years later, Alcuin addressed a letter of admonishment to the brothers and fathers *in provincia Gothorum*.⁵³ The main issue was the regional practice that laymen refused to confess their sins to the priests, and Alcuin argued that confession and penitence were absolutely necessary. Then, he addressed the brothers (who needed to confess) directly: ‘You are sons of light and not of darkness, a people of acquisition and not of perdition, *gens sancta*, appropriated by the blood of Christ.’⁵⁴ Those who confess their sins will pass from darkness to light, and God’s mercy will elect them as sons.⁵⁵

In all three cases, different as the circumstances may be, Alcuin’s rhetoric of election came in the context of moral exhortation and admonishment. Membership in a *gens sancta*, and all the more divine election to royal priesthood required high moral standards, and was always at risk. In Alcuin’s view, this made it unlikely that a whole people, for instance the *gens Francorum*, could securely and collectively claim the status of a chosen people over time. However, the ethnic language was far from meaningless to Alcuin. God could and did send signs of distinction and predilection to certain *gentes*, for instance, by easing their conversion, by granting them victory over their enemies or by honouring them through the presence of holy men. On the other hand, several of Alcuin’s letters written under the impression of the sack of Lindisfarne and of further British calamities use Old Testament examples to show that an entire people could be punished for its sinfulness.⁵⁶ The sins of many individuals among the people could be compensated by God’s mercy, as long as the shepherds of the flock did all they could to lead it towards salvation. But there were also warning signs, such as the sack of Lindisfarne, that the moral credit of a *gens sancta* was about to be squandered. In that case, the people collectively risked loss of the homeland like the Jews or the Britons. It was the

⁵³ Alcuin, Ep. 138, p. 216.

⁵⁴ Alcuin, Ep. 138, p. 219 (dated to c. 798).

⁵⁵ Alcuin, Ep. 138, p. 219: ‘et elegit vos sibi in filios pietate paterna, ut per vos nomen illius annuntietur in gentibus’.

⁵⁶ E.g. Alcuin, Ep. 16, p. 43, ll. 12-15; Ep. 20, p. 57, ll. 8-11 (Joel 2.17); Ep. 101, p. 147 (Is. 1.4); Ep. 229, p. 373 (Ps. 32, 12); see Garrison, ‘The Bible and Alcuin’s interpretation’.

mission of spiritual and political leaders to mediate in this process of communication between God and the earthly community.

The efforts of Carolingian exegetes to understand the implications of the model of community as described in 1 Peter 2.9 were based on patristic traditions, most notably on Bede, and acquire particular interest in the context of ninth-century debates about the relationship between empire and *ecclesia*, and about ways in which the people and its leaders could live up to the requirements of a people chosen by God.⁵⁷ Hrabanus Maurus discussed and cited 1 Peter 2.9 frequently in his vast exegetical corpus. He relied heavily on Bede's interpretation, for example in his commentary on Exodus, where he incorporated the relevant passage from Bede's commentary on 1 Peter into his exegesis of the description of the Mosaic covenant, juxtaposing it with its Christian version.⁵⁸ Hrabanus consistently emphasised the universal nature of the covenant and reiterated the notion that all Christians acquired royal and priestly dignity through their allegiance to Christ.⁵⁹

The theme of the priesthood and kingship of all faithful is modulated in interesting ways also in passages which do not directly depend on Bede. In the commentary on Chronicles,

⁵⁷ For the significance of exegesis in political discourse, see M. de Jong, 'The empire as *ecclesia*: Hrabanus Maurus and biblical historia for rulers', in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 191–226.

⁵⁸ Hrabanus Maurus, In Exodum, II.10, *PL* 108, col. 9–245, at 89B-D; cf. also Smaragdus of Mihiel, *Collectiones in epistulas et evangelia*, In Ep. 1 Petri, c. 2, *PL* 102, at 269C–270C; Walafrid Strabo, In Ep. 1 Petri, c.2, *PL* 114, col. 682D–683B.

⁵⁹ E.g.: Hrabanus, In Regum, III.6, *PL* 109, cols 9–280, at 164A and In Paralipomenon, III.4, *PL* 109, col. 279–540, at 452A-C (both times citing Bede's *De templo*); *ibidem* I.6, col. 313A-B; In Leviticum, II.1, col. 295A-B; In Numerum, II.24, *PL* 108, col. 587–838, at 705A-B; In Ecclesiasticum, VIII.7, *PL* 109, cols 763–1126, at. 1020C-D; In Jeremiam, XIII.33, *PL* 111, col. 793–1272, at 1065C-D; In Paralipomenon, I.6, *PL* 109, 279B-540B, at 313A-B.

dedicated to Louis the German,⁶⁰ Hrabanus explained how the Old Testament king Josaphat could stand as a type for the Christian people as a whole, reminding his readers that all Christians, kings and their subjects alike, derived their ‘Christian name and the royal dignity’ from Christ, since all of them had been baptized and anointed.⁶¹ To corroborate this perception of the Christian people, Hrabanus cited 1 Peter 2.9. The link between the righteous king and the Christian community was further strengthened by the fact that Josaphat’s name, which signified ‘gift’, suggested a close connection to the *ecclesia gentium*, which had received the diverse peoples (*nationes*) and the diversity of virtues. Alternatively, the gifts offered by his subjects in the kingdom of Juda signified the souls of the faithful offered to Christ, the ‘true king’, in perfect unity.⁶² Josaphat’s campaign against idolatrous shrines throughout the country could also be understood as a model for the action of a pious king on behalf of the Christian people. Such a king, according to Hrabanus, not only took care to eliminate any cause for scandal from amidst the faithful, but also directed ‘princes and priests’ to the cities in his realm in order ‘to educate the people about the precepts of God’s law’. Starting from the typological link between the biblical king and the Christian *ecclesia*, Hrabanus thus moved to suggest the responsibility of the former for building up the latter.⁶³

Like Alcuin, Hrabanus was also aware of the precariousness of a community’s status as a chosen people. In the commentary on Jeremiah, Hrabanus dealt with the threat faced by the people of Israel of losing their status as God’s people due to their idolatrous practices, and

⁶⁰ Hrabanus, *Ep.* 18, ed. E. Dümmler, *MGH EE* 5 (Hannover: Weidmann, 1889), pp. 422–4. On the royal court as audience for Hrabanus’ exegesis, see De Jong, ‘The empire as *ecclesia*’, with pp. 204–05 for the dedication of the commentary on Chronicles.

⁶¹ Hrabanus, In Paralipomenon, IV.17, col. 488C–489B.

⁶² On the theme of Old Testament kings and Christ’s kingship in Carolingian exegesis, see E. P. Miller, ‘Christ’s kingship in the biblical exegesis of Hrabanus Maurus and Angelomus of Luxeuil’, in C. Leonardi and G. Orlando, *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages* (Firenze: SISMEL, 2005), pp. 192–213.

⁶³ Hrabanus made a similar argument about kings as builders of the church in his Commentary on Daniel (Dn 14.19–21), likewise dedicated to Louis the German, see S. Shimahara, ‘Le commentaire sur Daniel de Hraban Maur’, in P. Depreux, S. Lebecq and M. Perrin (eds), *Raban Maur et son temps* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 275–91, at pp. 286–8

compared this to the punishment for the individual sinners, who forfeit the gifts of baptism and the unction by the holy spirit and thus their membership in the *genus electum* and *regale sacerdotium* evoked by the epistle of Peter.⁶⁴ Hrabanus' younger contemporary Paschasius Radbertus, in his commentary on the Book of Lamentations, combined the citation of 1 Peter 2.9 with the image of a chosen people which was afflicted not only by sin, but also by its 'carnal and criminal' prelates.⁶⁵ Although the more sober tone in these commentaries is partly explicable by the nature of the specific biblical texts they dealt with, it is tempting to also associate it with the changed political experiences in a divided empire.

In Carolingian exegetical texts, 1 Peter 2.9 was consistently used to negotiate the relationship between priesthood and kingship, and between *regnum* and *ecclesia*. The analogy between the *persona* of the bishop and the king on the one hand and every baptised Christian individual on the other did not remain a mere exegetical trope; it came to be deployed in very concrete political debates about royal power and its limits in a Christian society. Hincmar of Rheims, orchestrator of royal anointings and an influential counsellor to king Charles the Bald, used the passage to this effect in his treatise regarding the divorce case of Lothar II, written 860 in response to the queries of a number of bishops who opposed the divorce and the decisions of the synods at Aachen.⁶⁶ Hincmar rebuked Charles the Bald for having protected Hucbert, queen Theutberga's brother and allegedly also her incestuous lover, who had fled to West Francia. He first put away with attempts to use Deuteronomy 23.15–16 ('Thou shalt not deliver to his master the servant that is fled to thee') as a justification for providing shelter for Hucbert. Following Augustine, Hincmar explained that this biblical prohibition pertained only to persons fleeing from one kingdom or *gens* to another, and therefore had no force in the present case. After all, the Carolingian empire, albeit ruled by more than one king,

⁶⁴ Hrabanus, *In Heremiam*, XVIII.2, col 1200C-D.

⁶⁵ Paschasius Radbertus, *In Lamentationes Hieremiae*, V. lin 424, ed. B. Paulus, *CCCM* 85 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988), p. 324–5.

⁶⁶ Hincmar of Reims, *De divortio Lotharii regis et Theotbergae reginae*, ed. L. Boehringer, *MGH Concilia* 4, Suppl. 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1992). For context, see K. Heidecker, *The Divorce of Lothar II. Christian Marriage and Political Power in the Carolingian World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); S. Airlie, 'Private bodies and the body politic in the divorce case of Lothar II', *Past and Present* 161 (1998), 3–38.

nevertheless constituted one single realm and one single church.⁶⁷ More importantly, Hincmar reminded the *principes catholici* of their written agreement, in the treaty of Meerssen 851, not to provide shelter to fugitives from another *regnum*. By breaking such laws as confirmed by their own hand kings not only acted unjust and sinful: they risked to lose their claim to the royal title and office. To bolster this argument, Hincmar adduced a canon from the Council of Carthage in 419 stating that bishops were legally bound by their subscriptions to conciliar decisions and by the provisions of canon law. To counter the objection that this rule regarded bishops rather than kings, Hincmar reminded them that they as well derived their dignity and office from Christ, the true king and priest, and he cited 1 Peter 2.9 to make the point that kings share their anointment and their royal dignity not only with priests, but with every baptised Christian. 1 Peter 2.9 and the analogy proposed by its exegetes between the individual Christian and the person of the king and priest functioned as the key argument for extending the legal provision of the council of Carthage from bishops to secular rulers. Hincmar thus warned the kings that they risked depriving themselves of the royal title and the dignity of the office if they did not comply with previous legal statements in the eyes of God, if not in human eyes.⁶⁸

Janet Nelson has underlined the significance of this argument for Hincmar's thought on royal power as bound by written law and subject to episcopal control.⁶⁹ It provided a biblical basis for juridical restraints on the royal office. In his *De libertate ecclesiarum*, addressed to Charles the Bald in 868, Hincmar formulated the same argument in even clearer terms in the context of ecclesiastical property rights. This time, Hincmar linked the king's duty to keep the relevant legal provisions (*statuta*) not only to his status as a king anointed by bishops, which subjected him to the canon of Carthage 419, but also to the specific legal promises (*professiones*) given by the king to that effect in Beauvais 845 and Quierzy 858.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Hincmar, *De divortio*, Resp. 12, p. 187.

⁶⁸ Hincmar, *De divortio*, Resp. 12, p. 188.

⁶⁹ J. Nelson, 'Kingship, law and liturgy in the political thought of Hincmar of Rheims', in J. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London/Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1986), pp. 133–71, esp. pp. 160–5.

⁷⁰ Hincmar, *Pro ecclesiae libertatum defensione*, PL 125, col. 1035–1070, at 1040C-1042B. Cf. Nelson, 'Hincmar', p. 165.

The symmetry between kings, priests and ordinary Christians, all of whom shared the status as Christ's anointed, meant that kings were firmly placed within a Christian order, in which they were responsible for maintaining the rule of both divine and secular law. Hincmar used 1 Peter 2.9 to remind the Carolingian kings of this responsibility in yet another context, namely in the synodal treatise *De raptu viduarum*, where he exhorted them to take action against the abduction of women, a practice which he perceived as a sacrilege and a grave violation of the divinely sanctioned order.⁷¹ In this case, the passage served to evoke the convergence between church and empire (and, therefore, the need to harmonize divine and secular law), as well as the underlying unity of this Christian people even under the circumstances of divided rule in the Carolingian empire: 'although secular power in this realm of the Christians (*regnum Christianorum*) is at present divided according to divine judgement there exists only one single church in and from all protected by Christ, one Lord, one faith, one elected *gens*, royal priesthood, one holy *gens*, one acquired people'.⁷²

The rhetoric of election addressed to the Christians by 1 Peter was used in many ways in the early Middle Ages. Exegetes continued to identify the recipients of the message with the entire Christian people. Addressing all Christians as a 'holy priesthood' could be a powerful statement in some contexts, but it also created problems. Alcuin therefore tried to split the passage in two, reserving *gens electum* and *sacerdotium regale* for bishops and priests, but that did not remove the tension. Even addressing all Christians as *gens sacra* was rarely evident in an affirmative sense. The passage thus acquired an inescapable dynamic, already present in its Old Testament models; election depended on moral conduct and on God's grace. Most often, 1 Peter 2.9-10 is employed to admonish bishops, clerics, political leaders or the whole people, as in Alcuin's letters. Even its straightforwardly appellative use, as in the sermons of Leo the Great or the papal letters to the Franks, implies insistent requests for

⁷¹ Hincmar, *De coercendo et exstirpando raptu viduarum, puellarum ac sanctimonialium*, *PL* 125, col. 1017–36. On the text, the date of which remains debated, see S. Joye, *La femme ravie. Le mariage par rapt dans les sociétés occidentales du haut Moyen Âge* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 405–34; R. Stone, 'The Invention of a theology of abduction: Hincmar of Rheims on raptus', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60 (2009), 433–48.

⁷² Hincmar, *De raptu*, *PL* 125, col. 1017B-C.

(collective) action. The strong words of 1 Peter increase the sense of urgency of the moral and political imperatives connected with them. They may also be used, as in Gildas, to decry the failure of the Christians and their clerics to live up to the promise of the passage. Many identifications of particular groups as a chosen people relied on implication. Only extraordinary circumstances, such as the conversion of a pagan *gens*, allowed addressing a whole ethnic group with Peter's high-sounding epithets. Otherwise, their use is often conditional, following the arcane logic of winning or losing God's grace.

Thus, no consistent ideological attempt to style the Franks as 'the' chosen people versus all the others is discernible in the Carolingian reception of 1 Peter. However, the admonitory use of the passage, as in Alcuin, presupposes an at least implicit understanding that Franks or Angles enjoyed God's special grace that should not be squandered. Thus, the amalgamation between sacral and ethnic language could radiate both ways. On the one hand, it helped to establish an emphatic Christian vision of community that linked divine election with a strong sense of inner cohesion. On the other hand, the political role of Christian *gentes* could become more evident through their providential legitimation in biblical discourse. It allowed close conjunctions between Christian and ethnic identities, between the *ecclesia* and the Frankish polity. By the use of biblical models, ethnic terminology acquired a range of additional meanings that remained available in European political thinking for many centuries to come, and could serve as a basis for providential concepts of modern nationalism.