

GENESIS AND CAROLINGIAN ECOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY

THIS CHAPTER TRACES how three foundational texts of Charlemagne's reforms—the *Admonitio generalis* (789), the *Epistola de litteris colendis* (Letter on the Cultivation of Learning), and the Synod of Frankfurt (794)—set the stage for a new wave of biblical commentary at court, especially on Genesis, and how these efforts were bound up with the articulation of Carolingian ecological sovereignty. I begin by examining how *correctio*, framed as an aspirational totalizing mandate of reform, linked royal legislation, biblical exegesis, and the production of “corrected” texts in opposition to heterodox rivals. I then situate Alcuin's influence and the intellectual strategies of the royal court within these documents, before turning to Wigbod's Genesis commentaries as the first official exegetical projects commissioned by Charlemagne. By following the interplay of legislation, commentary, and court culture, I argue that Genesis offered Carolingian thinkers models of rulership and dominion over creation that were central to Charlemagne's claims of sovereignty over both land and people, and that this biblical re-ordering of knowledge was essential to their vision of empire.

In March 789 Charlemagne's court issued a capitulary known to posterity as the *Admonitio generalis*, a wide-ranging document that established many different goals related to Carolingian reforms. It portrayed Charlemagne as a new King Josiah, bringing his wayward people, religious and lay alike, back to the right biblical teachings.¹ Capitularies were a kind of legislation that gave concrete form to royal pronouncements.² The Frankish ruler issued capitularies, and although they were linked by medium and custom to laws, their imbued power derived not from legal convention per se but rather from the authority of the king's words they embodied.³ In this case, the *Admonitio generalis* called for sweeping reforms across the Frankish kingdom “to correct what is erroneous, to cut away what is unwarranted, to strengthen what is right.”⁴ Charlemagne sought to transform the daily

1 Contreni, “The Carolingian Renaissance,” 710.

2 Maclean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century*, 20.

3 Wormald, “*Lex scripta* and *Verbum regis*,” 123.

4 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 141; Contreni, “The Pursuit of Knowledge in

lives of his subjects through the institution of corrected methods of teaching, reading, writing, and preaching.⁵ The idea of “correction” (i.e., *correctio*) was “omnipresent in Carolingian capitularies and applied to all categories of society: the sovereign, the bishops, the abbots, the counts, the whole Christian people.”⁶ *Correctio* put both the biblical text and commentaries on it at the centre of political action in the Frankish kingdom, and shaped the development of Carolingian ecological sovereignty. Early Carolingian exegetes looked to the Bible for examples of good rulership, because doing so both satisfied the needs of *correctio* and offered powerful (and acceptable) models for Charlemagne’s emulation.

Doubtless some part of the notion that the Franks had wandered from correct teachings stemmed from the Carolingians’ deliberate rejection of alleged failures on the part of the previous Merovingian rulers. But the sources also offer specific examples of these deficiencies. Among them lay the charge against the clergy that prayers and other essential spiritual services, the obligations of the religious, were missing their mark: that is to say, the blessing of both their patrons and the realm itself. This failure was an abrogation of the basic compact between ecclesiastical and lay partners, that the former would ensure the spiritual safety of the latter in exchange for security and sustenance. In this political-theological context, Charlemagne was seen as ruler of the Christian empire, inspired by the Old Testament examples of David and Josiah, bridging the legacies of Rome, the Frankish kingdom, and expanded territories in Saxony, northeastern Iberia, and northern Italy. This worldview not only privileged the role and works of Carolingian exegetes, but connected many of them to powerful patrons who, in some cases, commissioned the works themselves.

The dearth of acceptable biblical commentaries was a real concern to Charlemagne and his advisors. They alleged that the lack of good Bibles and commentaries led to bad prayer and teaching. According to the *Admonitio generalis*, the surest method of combatting this ignorance was rigorous training in correct biblical teachings. The court’s reforming energies were harnessed and transmitted through subsequent actions documented in the Council of Frankfurt in 794 and in Charlemagne’s famous letter to Baugulf, the abbot of Fulda, the *Epistola de litteris colendis*. These texts further tied

Carolingian Europe,” 107. “errata corrigere, superflua abscidere, recta cohartare.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 52–62.

5 Meens, “Religious Instruction in the Frankish Kingdoms,” 55.

6 Depreux, “Ambitions et limites des réformes culturelles à l’époque carolingienne,” 732–33.

spiritual efficacies to the study and production of correct biblical texts, best achieved through repeated reading of patristic sources *and* classical, pagan literature and grammar. Reconnecting with the Church Fathers was no small task, because in Francia most of their works were circulated abridged or in collections of *florilegia*. For example, when the first new biblical commentaries began to be compiled at Charlemagne's court, scholars often knew of a source such as Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* (On the Literal Meaning of Genesis) only through an intermediary such as Bede. The centuries following the patristic era (ca. 500–750) saw the creation of thirty-five new biblical commentaries, of which Bede bore responsibility for no fewer than fourteen, although he was joined in this effort by Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville. In their contrast to the voluminous and enduring legacy of the Church Fathers, Carolingian writers lamented a dearth of novel exegetical materials compounded by decades of scribal errors and textual inconsistencies in the Bible itself that hampered systematic study of the scriptures.⁷

This chapter reads closely the “constitutional” documents of the Carolingian reforms, the *Admonitio generalis* and the *Epistola de litteris colendis*—duly noting Alcuin's role in their production and influence—along with the Synod of Frankfurt (794) and shows how they lay behind the outpouring of new biblical exegesis at Charlemagne's court. Further, I argue that these developments propelled political culture and helped define Carolingian ecological sovereignty.

In fact, the first “official” Carolingian commentary focused on Genesis and emphasized the adventures of the first man and the supervision of the land and creatures of Eden. That Adam should have been a model for Charlemagne's sovereignty is not at all obvious, since only tenuous references—namely, as we shall see, in Alcuin's Genesis “captions”—link the Frankish ruler with Adam by name. Nevertheless, Adam's successes and failures in the supervision of the first garden taught Charlemagne another articulation of authority and new understandings of sovereignty for his nascent empire. Alcuin recognized Charlemagne as a kind of Adam, and this identification was meant not only to legitimate the ruler's claims of sovereignty over natural spaces but also to situate him in Christian history. As a type of Adam who was supposed to dominate, supervise, and redeem the land and its inhabitants, Charlemagne would both achieve salvation for his people

7 Contreni, “Carolingian Biblical Culture,” 3; Fox, “Alcuin the Exegete.” Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville were prolific authors of the sixth and seventh centuries, but produced comparably fewer exegetical commentaries on books of the Bible than Bede.

and accelerate Christ's (the last Adam's) return. This helps explain the late eighth-century Frankish royal court's focus on the reform of scripture and biblical exegesis of Genesis: the recovery of both furthered the aims of *correctio* and legitimated Charlemagne's imperial aspirations.

The *Admonitio generalis*

Alcuin's influence on the legislation of Charlemagne's early efforts to reform Carolingian religion, education, and practices stands out through the style, tone, and content of this text. The *Admonitio generalis* is a hyper-analyzed text which "suffers from over-familiarity," so much so that modern readers take for granted "Charles's view of his princely functions" as fact and miss the document's novelty.⁸ The *Admonitio generalis* is not the fullest expression of the Carolingian reform program, but rather heralds its enthusiastic launch.⁹ Often treated as the beginning of Carolingian reform, its language stresses guidance and admonition rather than coercion. The text repeatedly frames its program as instruction meant to educate and guide church leaders so that they can improve the condition of the church.¹⁰ In fact, the emergence of cultural, intellectual, and spiritual *renovatio* (renewal), built on complementary concepts of *emendatio* (improvement), *admonitio* (admonition), and *correctio* (correction), sprang from roots anchored to both late Roman imperial practice and the (either fruitless or undocumented) efforts of their Merovingian predecessors.

It was, however, in the *Admonitio generalis* that the "synthesis of ideology and administrative action" was first accomplished by the Carolingian ruler, who prioritized this project and had better luck than those who had come before him.¹¹ In particular, the aim and scope of the final twenty-three sections following the fifty-nine canons borrowed from the *Dionysio-Hadriana*, the collection of canon law sent to the Franks from Rome at Charlemagne's request, reveal Alcuin's hand in shaping policy.¹² More broadly, the document reveals a court still determining how its authority should operate. It acknowledges problems, asks bishops and abbots to assume

8 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 141–42.

9 McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms*, 1.

10 Kramer, "The Problem(s) with the Carolingian Reform(s)," 27.

11 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 141; Brown, "The Carolingian Renaissance," 6.

12 Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe," 107; Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 142.

responsibility for teaching and correction, and portrays the royal court as assisting these efforts. In this sense the text emphasizes vigilance and moral responsibility rather than the imposition of fixed solutions.¹³ The *Admonitio generalis* was a bold document, importing a swath of Roman ecclesiastical practices and adapting them to Frankish requirements. The preface merits special attention for its general mandate, applicable to all who dwelt in the Frankish kingdom, and for its totalizing scope, binding ruler, clergy, and lay people together in what Bullough refers to as the “synthesis of ideology and administrative action.”¹⁴ As McKitterick observes, the *Admonitio* stemmed from a long coevolution of Christianity alongside the “institutional and political framework of the Frankish realm,” in which prior Carolingian “mayors and kings” had organized lay-ecclesiastical assemblies for policymaking and enactment.¹⁵ However, the legislative muscle flexed in the *Admonitio* seems to have been a novel method both for confronting heterodox strands in and launching the wholesale transformation of Frankish society.

In the first half of the eighth century, before the issuance of the *Admonitio*, Archbishop Boniface of Mainz’s accusations of heresy against a bishop named Adalbert demonstrate earlier practices quite unlike the *Admonitio*’s model. Adalbert had allegedly deceived the everyday folk that he encountered with cheap tricks based on suspect relics that an angel from the other end of the world had supposedly given to him.¹⁶ Boniface and the Frankish episcopate interpreted these bizarre acts and the popular enthusiasm for them as a threat against established churches and the well-being of the Frankish people. Resorting in the end to an ecclesiastical synod involving the pope, Boniface and other bishops stripped Adalbert of all authority and condemned him to monastic penance for the rest of his life. Before the *Admonitio generalis* this was how the Frankish church combatted heresy, though the anxieties stoked by Adalbert would resurface in the 780s.¹⁷

More than the spectre of false teachings, by 789 the Carolingian reformers confronted what they claimed was a dearth of patristic knowledge and a corrupted biblical text. In the new vision addressing the court’s concern to “all the orders of ecclesiastical piety and authorities of secular power,” the *Admonitio generalis* placed both groups under the authority of Charlemagne,

13 Kramer, “The Problem(s) with the Carolingian Reform(s),” 30.

14 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 141.

15 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 240.

16 Innes, “Immune from Heresy,” 111.

17 Firey, *A Contrite Heart*, 111–14.

the “king *and* leader (*rector*) of the kingdom of the Franks...devout defender and humble helper of the holy church.”¹⁸ This depiction of Charlemagne relied on a “correct” understanding of Isidore of Seville’s definition of *rex* as one who rules rightly (*recte*), and thus corrects rightly: Charlemagne intended to “order” his kingdom.¹⁹ The recipients of this care, most especially the “shepherds of Christ’s churches and leaders of his flock,” were to:

strive to lead the people of God to the pastures of eternal life, and make every effort to carry back the wandering sheep on the shoulders of good example and exhortation within the walls of ecclesiastical stability, lest the lurking wolf find anyone who transgresses canonical sanctions or exceeds the traditions of the fathers and the universal councils (which God forbid) should devour them.²⁰

The stakes were high. In the eyes of Charlemagne and his close advisors, the price of bad teaching and misunderstanding of patristic authorities could not be clearer.

The prescribed solution to these problems was correction, which called for teachers to “keep themselves within the bounds of the (church) fathers’ decrees,” and “the examples of the saints are always to be followed.”²¹ Charlemagne provided for these exhortations to be enacted by his representatives and clerics working together: “We have sent our envoys to you, who—by the authority of our name—might, together with you, correct those things that need to be corrected.”²² The most obvious solutions for “faulty” doctrines were the correction of the Vulgate, the recovery and transmission of authoritative biblical commentaries, and the production of new ones.

18 “Ego Karolus...rex et rector regni Francorum et devotus sanctae aeclesiae defensor humilisque adiutor, omnibus ecclesiasticae pietatis ordinibus sue saucularis potentiae dignitatibus.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 53. Emphasis mine.

19 Depreux, “Ambitions et limites des réformes culturelles à l’époque carolingienne,” 733–34, 737.

20 “o pastores ecclesiarum Christi et ductores gregis eius...populum Dei ad pascua vitae aeternae ducere studeatis, et errantes oves bonorum exemplorum seu adhortationum humeris intra ecclesiasticae firmitatis muros reportare satagimini, ne lupus insidians aliquem canonicas sanctiones transredientem vel paternas traditiones universalium conciliorum excedentem, quod absit, inveniens devoret.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 53.

21 “intra paternas sanctiones se contineant.” And also “sanctorum semper exempla sequenda.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 53–54.

22 “nostros ad vos direximus missos, qui ex nostri nominis auctoritate una vobiscum corrigerent quae corrigenda essent.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 53.

Alcuin would be involved on these fronts, producing for Charlemagne a corrected version of the Vulgate in 801, after many years of labour.²³

Among the twenty-three sections added to the Roman canons in the *Admonitio generalis* were three pertaining to correct knowledge and understanding of both the Bible and the Church Fathers. Each of these new sections assumed the primacy of the Bible not as a theological text alone, but as an authoritative document for the actual mapping out of Frankish political and religious society and the structuring of intellectual life.²⁴ Section seventy-two of the document addressed clergy:

And let schools be established for boys learning to read. Correct well the Psalms, the notes, the chants, the *computus*, and the grammar throughout the several monasteries and bishoprics, and the Catholic books too—because often, while some desire to pray to God properly, they pray poorly due to uncorrected books.²⁵

This statement linked people's ability to communicate with God to the accuracy of available scriptural texts: their prayers might not work if they did not know how to pray, on account of their faulty Bibles. Furthermore, this section warned clergy to "not let your boys corrupt them, whether in reading or copying; and if it is necessary to copy the Gospel, the Psalter, or the Missal, let men of mature age do the writing."²⁶ These were not tasks that could be undertaken lightly or without adequate preparation.

23 Efforts to correct Jerome's Vulgate underwent several phases during Charlemagne's lifetime. The Frankish king encouraged Maudramne the abbot of Corbie from 772–781, as well as Theodulf of Orléans. But it was Alcuin, while he was abbot at Saint-Martin of Tours, who undertook the wholesale revision of the Bible. Labouring diligently with the support of those around him at Tours from 797 to 801, Alcuin worked to complete this request of his king. On Christmas Day 801, Alcuin presented to Charlemagne the completed version for the anniversary of his imperial coronation. Over the course of the ninth century this "Alcuinian" version would supplant older versions. Riché, "Instruments de travail et méthodes de l'exégète à l'époque carolingienne," 151.

24 Contreni, "Carolingian Biblical Culture," 3.

25 "Et ut scholae legentium puerorum fiant. Psalmos, notas, cantus, computum, grammaticam per singula monasteria vel episcopia et libros catholicos bene emendate; quia saepe, dum bene aliqui Deum rogare cupiunt, sed per inemendatos libros male rogant." Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 60.

26 "Et pueros vestros non sinite eos vel legendo vel scribendo corrumpere; et si opus est euangelium, psalterium et missale scribere, perfectae aetatis homines scribant." Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 60.

The *Admonitio generalis* took great pains not only to promote the correction and production of authorized biblical texts and commentaries, but also to condemn heterodox writings. Section seventy-eight of the document spelled out clearly this expectation, singling out “*pseudografia* and dubious stories, or those that are entirely contrary to the catholic faith,” as its prime target.²⁷ Here the *Admonitio* hearkened back to the earlier struggle against Adalbert, who purportedly erected and burned little crosses, and also offered his own nail trimmings and hair clippings to followers at mass gatherings, claiming their association with the relics of St. Peter.²⁸ Adalbert also allegedly received penitents seeking confession and absolution with the rather Christ-like claim that his gaze had already laid bare their hidden secrets; they had no need to confess because he already interceded on their behalf before God.²⁹ This decades-old episode seemingly continued to resonate among the people and unnerved the Frankish ecclesiastical establishment:

...and the most wicked and utterly false letter, which in the year past some (erring themselves and driving others into error) were saying had fallen from heaven: let these neither be believed nor read, but rather be burned, lest the people be led into error by such writings.³⁰

Here James Palmer detects “the shadow” of Adalbert, suggesting that Frankish popular religion was “inherently apocalyptic.” If that were the case, the legislation of Carolingian *correctio* confronted “incorrect” apocalypticism, redirecting these energies through approved media “to lend urgency to its fight.”³¹ Carolingian ecological sovereignty would stretch this further still, channelling such apocalyptic fervour into the persona of Charlemagne as the “penultimate Adam.”

The only antidote to wrong texts was right texts: “only the canonical books, Catholic treatises, and the sayings of the holy authors are to be read

27 “Item et pseudografia et dubiae narrationes, vel quae omnino contra fidem catholicam sunt.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 60.

28 Firey, *A Contrite Heart*, 111–14.

29 Innes, “Immune from Heresy,” 112.

30 “et epistola pessima et falsissima, quam transacto anno dicebant aliqui errantes et in errorem alios mittentes quod de cel cecidisset, nec credantur nec legantur sed conburentur, ne in errorem per talia scripta populus mittatur.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 60.

31 Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 149–50.

and taught.”³² This prescription was buttressed in a subsequent section by an injunction against those who “invent and preach to the people new or non-canonical ideas based on their own opinion and not according to the Holy Scriptures.”³³ Rather than making use of divergent viewpoints for political ends, the *Admonitio* clearly marked these aberrant texts and testimonies as harmful and destructive, in very real and tangible ways, to Frankish spiritual wellbeing. And as the Council of Frankfurt in 794 demonstrated, the best way to test doctrine and text was to examine them in light of the Church Fathers. Thus, the greatest threat came not from external opponents but from those within the group who introduced new modes of interpretation. Such figures were dangerous precisely because, as Irene Van Renswoude puts it, they “employ the exact same language and retain the same values as the other members of the community,” yet also “challenge the shared interpretation of the community and introduce difference into what is so far an unquestioned, undifferentiated practice of determining truth.”³⁴ These conflicts did not revolve around new knowledge but new interpretations of a shared body of foundational texts. In response, early medieval communities developed mechanisms not simply to refute error but to manage it socially. The anxiety provoked by such debates was epistemological and social at once: how to preserve unity of interpretation without fragmenting the community. Frankish clerics and their king deployed communal mechanisms for distinguishing truth from falsehood and for managing internal divergence.³⁵

The Synod of Frankfurt of 794

In 794 Charlemagne and his spiritual advisers were busy confronting the Adoptionism controversy at home and the distant spectre of what they perceived to be Byzantine iconoclasm abroad. In that year Charlemagne summoned bishops and magnates from every corner of the realm to an assembly and synod, intended as a “universal” church council, the “largest and most auspicious” such gathering of the Frankish king’s reign to that point.³⁶

32 “Sed soli canonici libri et catholici tractatus et sanctorum auctorum dicta legantur et tradantur.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 61.

33 “et non sinatis nova vel non canonica aliquos ex suo senso et non secundum scripturas sacras fingere et praedicare populo.” Charlemagne, *AG*, ed. Boretius, 61.

34 van Renswoude, “Error Assessment,” 179.

35 van Renswoude, “Error Assessment,” 205.

36 Ganz, “Theology and the Organisation of Thought,” 763; Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 160.

The principal focus and eventual outcome of the synod, as the *Annales regni francorum* (Royal Frankish Annals) related, was the condemnation of Adoptionism, with Alcuin himself likely having penned one of the letters from Charlemagne to the Spanish bishops.³⁷

Adherents of Adoptionist teachings believed Christ emptied himself of divinity in order to take in all aspects of humanity except for sin. Once filled with human nature, God adopted Christ back into the Trinity. Carolingian theologians generally held the opposite view, which maintained that Christ assumed a human nature through sinless union with humanity; God did not lower himself, but rather lifted humanity up out of sin.³⁸ What might seem like an arcane dispute over fine points of theology was a major political-theological crisis. Even more than most other controversies Adoptionism heightened ecclesiastical anxiety. It had popular appeal, stoked fears about the long-dormant heresies of Arianism and Nestorianism and threatened the authority of Frankish bishops to pronounce doctrine and instruct their king.³⁹

Alcuin's presence and influence in this gathering stand out clearly in the last chapter of the capitulary. It published the results of the synod, which saw fit "to receive Alcuin into its fellowship and its prayers, on the grounds that he was a man learned in ecclesiastical teachings."⁴⁰ Courtier-theologian Alcuin's presence and status as a holy man of exceptional erudition lent credence and import to the theological and political proceedings of the synod. Alcuin had been educated in English cathedral and monastic schools before having been "transplanted" to the Frankish kingdom where he applied that acquired knowledge and experience to the considerable goals of Carolingian social and cultural reform.⁴¹ This transaction could not have been one-way; but even as Charlemagne doubtless sought to impose his will, his relationship to Alcuin and other influential spiritual advisors surely stirred his thinking.

Regarding the promotion of good biblical writing and commentaries to combat bad understandings, rooted in the traditions of patristic authorities,

37 *Annales regni Francorum*, ed. Kurze, 96. For the Alcuin connection: Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 177.

38 Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era*, 53–55.

39 Chandler, "Heresy and Empire," 508.

40 "Aliquinum ipsa sancta synodus in suo consortio sive in orationibus recipere dignaretur, eo quod esset vir in ecclesiasticis doctrinis eruditus." *Synodus Franconfurtensis*, ed. Boretius, 78.

41 Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe," 106.

the synod had a great deal to say. It is worth considering these words in their full context:

Understand, brothers, what you read, and do not invent new and unknown names, but hold fast to those found in Holy Scripture. For the names found there concerning Christ God have honourable meanings, fitting for our salvation. Do not be tossed about by human inventions but fortify (*roborate*) yourselves in the solidity of the Holy Scriptures. Read them, teach them—for in them is eternal life. You have pressed the point again and again, and repeated over and over, that the testimonies you assert agree with the holy Fathers. But, as we have demonstrated, you understand their words far otherwise than how they themselves understood them, those who inserted these very testimonies into their books. And we have found, as we said before, that you have most certainly infected their most holy writings with the poison of heretical depravity and inserted words which we read nowhere in their books—unless perhaps your teachers held such a view, whose names, we suppose, would have remained unknown to the holy and universal Church of God until now, had this schism of error not been made known to the world through you.⁴²

There are several overlapping and contingent obligations threading through this canon. First, Frankish clergy were enjoined to read, but at the same time warned against looking for or making up answers that have not been found either in the Bible or tested by established authorities, namely the Church Fathers.

The imagery evoked by the word choice (*roborate*) of the scribe calls to mind the firm, steadfast rootedness of the oak (*robor*), planted in the sure and nurturing soil of holy scripture, standing strong against the shifting waves of uncertainty. The stakes could not have been higher, for in the refuge of that deeply rooted tree, into which the Church Fathers had grafted

42 “Intelligite, fratres, quae legitis et nolite nova et incognita nomina fingere, sed quae in sancta scriptura inveniuntur tenete. Illa enim, quae ibi inveniuntur de Christo Deo, honestas habent significationes et nostrae saluti convenientes. Et nolite per humanas inventiones fluctuare, sed in soliditate sanctorum scripturarum vosmetipsos roborate. Illas legite, illas docete, quia in illis est vita aeterna. Inculcastis iterum iterumque replicastis vos consona sanctis patribus ponere testimonia. Sed, ut probavimus, longe aliter vos illorum intellegitis dicta, quam illi ipsi intellexerunt, qui haec ipsa testimonia libris inserebant; et invenimus, sicut et ante praefati sumus, certissime vos illorum sanctissima scribta hereticae pravitate veneno infecisse et interservisse verba, quae nusquam in illorum legimus libris, nisi forte vestri magistri ita sensissent, quorum nomina sanctae et universali Dei ecclesiae ignota putamus hucusque remansisse, si huius erroris scisma per vos mundo ea non innotuisset.” *Concilium Francofurtense*, ed. Werminghoff, MHG Conc.2.1156, lines 8–19.

sensible truths, could be found eternal life. The exhortation to read and teach, driving the point home repeatedly, was the only sure way to apprehend the meaning of what the Fathers said when they joined their wisdom, via commentaries, into the trunk of biblical knowledge. Like pure water, their words could act as a solvent to dilute the poison of false teachings. Therefore, the only surefire way to make certain that one's theological understanding and instruction was "correct" was to test it against those words and doctrines that planted the Frankish church in the orchard of its new mission. However, the desire for good knowledge was not in itself enough to qualify a reader to fully comprehend the complex layers of literal, metaphorical, and allegorical instruction in either patristic writings or the Bible itself.

***Epistola de litteris colendis*—Letter on the Cultivation of Learning**

The *Admonitio generalis* set the dynamo of Carolingian reform into motion, a process observable in the canons of the Synod of Frankfurt in 794. I examine here the *Epistola de litteris colendis* as it laid out more of the rationale and thinking undergirding these efforts and should be read considering the former documents. *De litteris colendis* urged religious leaders

not only not to neglect the study of letters, but indeed to pursue it eagerly with a most humble intention pleasing to God, so that you may more easily and more rightly penetrate the mysteries of the divine Scriptures.⁴³

These texts are often linked in discussions of the renewal of Latin literature and the prioritization of biblical knowledge, and they share an author, of influence if not of the words themselves, in Alcuin.⁴⁴ When read alongside the earlier documents, the letter reveals the central role of biblical exegesis

43 "Quamobrem hortamur vos litterarum studia non solum non neglegere, verum etiam humillima et Deo placita intentione ad hoc certatim discere, ut facilius et rectius divinarum scripturarum mysteria valeatis penetrare." *Karoli Epistola de litteris colendis*, ed. Boretius, 78–79 (hereafter, *EDLC*).

44 Riché, "Instruments de travail," 148–50. Luitpold Wallach detected the authentic voice of Alcuin by comparing the phrasing and word selection to the more than 250 letters of his correspondence that survive. Furthermore, in addition to these characteristically Alcuinian words and turns of phrases, the letter "contains elements of Alcuin's style, and educational ideas which, like those of Alcuin, belong to the tradition of Anglo-Saxon humanism," further cementing Alcuin's influence in generating the letter. Wallach himself admitted, however, that the version of the letter sent out from the court would have necessarily been penned by the hand of a scribe of the royal *capella*, which was responsible for producing authentic documents of the king. Wallach, "Charlemagne's *De litteris colendis* and Alcuin," 292–94.

in Carolingian *renovatio*. *De litteris colendis* not only further elucidated the nascent Carolingian educational policies, but it demonstrates Alcuin's ongoing influence in these matters. Charlemagne ostensibly sent this letter to Baugulf, abbot of Fulda from 779–802, out of frustration with the bad Latin in letters received from clerics across the realm.⁴⁵ Many scholars have accepted the letter as a normative text, presenting a general mandate addressed to all the religious houses of the Frankish kingdom to improve their Latinity, literacy, and education, in order to be better able to understand and teach others the lessons of the Fathers and the Bible.⁴⁶

These themes are all present in the text, and the letter clarifies and enhances several sentiments of the *Admonitio generalis* pertaining to the improvement of scriptural knowledge and general education. Relating *De litteris colendis* to the *Admonitio* rests on diplomatic analysis of the letter as a mandate.⁴⁷ Using the legal formulaic structure of the language and argument, put together in the style of the king's royal voice, and the relationship established previously between Charlemagne and Fulda in an immunity charter of 774, the letter seems authoritative. Although it did not possess the same legal heft as a capitulary, Luitpold Wallach believed it was "an expression of the king's will concerning educational matters which cannot be enforced by law."⁴⁸ However, the purpose and context of this document are not entirely clear, as a more recent detailed study of the text by Thomas Martin has shown. By setting the internal contents of the letter against what is known regarding other common types of texts used in the Carolingian world, Martin argues against the *De litteris colendis* as mandate, legislation, or circular letter. Martin sees the *De litteris colendis* as a truly personal letter from the king to Baugulf but admits that the instructions to pass on copies to his other supporters and bishops suggest that Charlemagne was thinking

45 Contreni, "Learning for God," 101.

46 See, e.g.: Diem, "The Emergence of Monastic Schools, 34–37; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 240; Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge," 107; Contreni, "Learning for God," 101.

47 Wallach stated: "It is quite clear that Charlemagne's letter cannot be simultaneously a *circular letter* addressed to schools, a *double circular letter* addressed to archbishops and bishops, a *triple circular letter* sent to monasteries, a *personal letter* addressed to Baugulf subsequently used as a circular letter, and a *capitulary* sent to abbots." Luitpold Wallach, "Charlemagne's *De litteris colendis*," 288. Emphasis in the original.

48 Wallach, "Charlemagne's *De litteris colendis*, 288–89, 294.

about the further spread of the document.⁴⁹ Even the dating of the *De litteris colendis* is not without controversy, something relevant for thinking about the document's relationship to the other pillars of Carolingian *renovatio* discussed above, the *Admonitio generalis*, and the Council of Frankfurt.⁵⁰ Thomas Martin dates the letter as having been produced between March of 789 and summer of 790, which interestingly puts it between the *Admonitio* and the Council of Frankfurt.⁵¹ This earlier dating is noteworthy for thinking about the call for scriptural knowledge and commentaries, more fulsomely articulated later in the Council of Frankfurt, hinted at in the earlier *Admonitio*, and made a bit clearer here.

In my view, early medieval letters were by nature of their composition and their reception more or less "public" documents, and I suspect it highly improbable for the court to issue a document in the king's name as "the bishoprics and monasteries have been entrusted to us for governance, with Christ's favor" and including its not-so-subtle warning to Baugulf to forward the letter if he wished to stay in the royal good graces, without Charlemagne having had the larger context of the kingdom in his mind.⁵² That said, it is possible to read *De litteris colendis* as a personal articulation of Charlemagne's desire to promote learning and biblical literacy that later became formulaic or generalized in the *Admonitio generalis*. Such a reading does not diminish the vital significance of recovering and producing better and more

49 Martin suggests that content alone does not justify assigning the letter legal authority, and as a capitulary it lacked any enforcement or obligation on the part of the recipient. Martin, "Bemerkungen zur 'Epistola de litteris colendis,'" 31:244–46, 254.

50 Relying on internal markers, Luitpold Wallach argued that Charlemagne sent the letter to Abbot Baugulf of Fulda between the years of 794–796, although some have suggested a date as early as 784, which would significantly prefigure the dissemination of the *Admonitio generalis*. Wallach, "Charlemagne's *De litteris colendis*," 292–94; on the earlier dating see: McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 240n114; also Fleckenstein, *Die Bildungsreform Karls des Großen als Verwirklichung der "norma rectitudinis"*. The early date seems less credible, given the fuller fleshing out of ideas only generally suggested in these earlier texts. Diem, "The Emergence of Monastic Schools," 34.

51 Martin also relies on internal markers, such as the fact that from 786–790 Angilram was the bishop of Metz, and received the letter; or Charlemagne's imperial coronation (the text refers only to *rex* and not *imperator*, and the post-800 documents usually named Charlemagne with both titles). Martin, "Bemerkungen zur 'Epistola de litteris colendis,'" 31:259–60, 266–70.

52 "ut episcopia et monasteria nobis Christo propitio ad gubernandum commissa." *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, 79.

accurate commentaries on the books of the Bible in the spirit of *correctio*, and a close reading of the text of *De litteris colendis* further reveals its ideals to match those of the other sources.

After establishing his authority, duty, and royal rights, Charlemagne's letter explained that, with the counsel of his advisors (presumably including Alcuin here), he finds that those religious under his rule should:

In the study of letters they ought to expend the effort of teaching upon those who, by the Lord's gift, are able to learn, according to each one's capacity—so that, just as the standard of the Rule orders moral conduct, so also persistence in teaching and learning may order and adorn the sequence of words.⁵³

This command prioritized Latin study, because it would make clerics and monks better writers, a prerequisite for producing the kinds of texts that the court desired. The opposite was proven in the letters that the court had received from monks, who were supposed to be praying for the salvation of king and realm, but whose writings showed their uncouthness. If that accusation was not bad enough, next came the most dire warning: "We began to fear that perhaps, just as there was less skill in writing, so too there might be much less wisdom in understanding the Holy Scriptures than there ought to have been."⁵⁴ As with the anxieties expressed in the Council of Frankfurt, the authors of this letter were gripped by fear of the consequences of the situation. For what could be more perilous: "although errors of words are dangerous, errors of sense are much more dangerous."⁵⁵

De litteris colendis goes a bit further in its recommended reading. Here, it is not the Fathers alone but also those acceptable pagan classical authors who could teach these monks how to think and write so that they could perform their tasks correctly.⁵⁶ What one reads, sees, and hears shapes the way that the mind perceives and processes information that has been encoded into a specific format, in this case Jerome's Vulgate, which bore the imprint of classical Latinity:

53 "in litterarum meditationibus eis qui donante Domino discere possunt secundum uniuscuiusque capacitatem docendi studium debeant impendere, qualiter sicut regularis norma honestatem morum, ita quoque docendi et discendi instantia ordinet et ornet seriem verborum." *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, p. 79, 11–14.

54 "timere inciperemus, ne forte, sicut minor erat in scribendo prudentia, ita quoque et multo minor esset quam recte esse debuisset in sanctorum scripturarum ad intelligendum sapientia." *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, p. 79, lines 26–29.

55 "quamvis periculosi sint errores verborum, multo periculosiores sunt errores sensuum." *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, p. 79, line 30.

56 Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe," 110.

Now since in the sacred writings there are figures of speech, tropes, and other such devices inserted, there is no doubt that each person understands them spiritually all the more quickly, the more fully he has first been instructed in the discipline of letters.⁵⁷

The message of *De litteris colendis* was unambiguous. Those who were under the obligation or who desired to instruct others in spiritual things had to master Latin literature, an expectation setting this document alongside the *Admonitio* and the Council of Frankfurt in jumpstarting the Carolingian *renovatio* according to the demands of *correctio*.

That is the context within which Charlemagne confronted the dearth of commentaries from the years 500–750.⁵⁸ Commenting on the bible was political, because the exercise of exegesis allowed Carolingian clerics and theologians to interpret political facts and events “in light of the History of Salvation,” and even to use biblical examples to criticize their rulers.⁵⁹ Indeed, as Caroline Chevalier-Royet notes, “Carolingian scholars did not conceive of temporal rupture” regarding the biblical past, meaning that for them contemporary history was the working out of a divine plan initiated at creation, and proper studying was meant to help work toward that end.⁶⁰ As the eighth century waned, and the ninth century dawned, there was an explosion of interest in and composition of biblical commentaries, stimulated by the Carolingian reforms and heralded by the *Admonitio generalis*, the Council of Frankfurt of 794, and the *De litteris colendis*. Crucially, this scriptural exegesis—as both didactic example and practical lessons—helped shape Carolingian “public discourse” on questions like spiritual renewal, divine providence, and political purpose as much as did liturgy, morally instructive advice manuals, and the more programmatical texts mentioned here.⁶¹

57 “Cum autem in sacris paginis schemata, tropi et caetera his similia inserta inveniuntur, nulli dubium est, quod ea unusquisque legens tanto citius spiritualiter intelligit, quanto prius in litterarum magisterio plenius instructus fuerit.” *EDLC*, ed. Boretius, p. 79, lines 33–35.

58 Contreni, “Carolingian Biblical Culture,” 3.

59 Depreux, “Ambitions et limites des réformes culturelles à l’époque carolingienne,” 742.

60 Chevalier-Royet, “Saül et David, premiers rois oints,” 63–64.

61 Evans, *God and History in the Early Medieval*, 23–37.

Wigbod and Genesis at Charlemagne's Court

At the beginning of this wave, Charlemagne commissioned the first biblical commentary of his court, on Genesis by the courtier-theologian Wigbod.⁶² Genesis offered the Frankish ruler and other Carolingian elites models of authority and thought experiments in sovereignty that sought to relate people to plants, animals, and wider ecosystems. It also came first in the Bible. Yet if Genesis provided models of dominion, it also furnished the idiom that made such dominion intelligible, for Carolingian exegetes read in the creation narrative the promise of *renovatio* and the restoration of the divine image in man.

Carolingian authors understood becoming Christian not as a single moment but as an ongoing process of interior transformation; their exegesis presupposed the same structure: an initial conversion and an enduring work of reform directed toward spiritual perfection. The sacrificial act of Christ restores corrupted creation, yet at the same time inaugurates a new act of creation. Thus, *renovatio* does not return humanity to a primordial state; it moves humanity forward toward a better, eschatological condition.⁶³ As Kristina Mitalaitė demonstrates, Carolingian commentators reinforced this eschatological orientation. They framed *reformatio* as daily renewal, situating moral transformation within a trajectory toward resurrection. In this vision, everyday reform participates in a divine plan whose fulfilment lies outside time and beyond history. Carolingian reflection on Genesis and Pauline renewal did not primarily concern administrative reform. It articulated a framework in which the restoration of the divine image structured human nature, temporality, and destiny. Reform was first interior, then eschatological, but it prompted institutional goals like better and more accurate biblical texts and commentaries on them.⁶⁴ When Carolingian thinkers and writers like Wigbod then deliberately engaged with inherited classical and patristic traditions, they reinterpreted them through the prism of Christian theology.⁶⁵ This intellectual approach allowed Charlemagne's advisors and scholars to frame his ecological governance as fulfilling ancient Christian promises to restore harmony and order to nature. In other words,

⁶² Fox, "Alcuin the Exegete," 39–40.

⁶³ Mitalaitė, "Reformatio and correctio in Carolingian Theology and Orthodoxy," 208–12.

⁶⁴ Mitalaitė, "Reformatio and correctio in Carolingian Theology and Orthodoxy," 213.

⁶⁵ Dorofeeva, *Reading Nature in the Early Middle Ages*, 14–15.

the cultural choices made by Carolingian thinkers regarding which texts to preserve and how to present them directly influenced their conceptions of political and ecological sovereignty.

Real deficiencies in knowledge fettered the first Carolingian biblical scholars, who were “unprepared to confront the patristic direction directly,” and instead knew mostly excerpts or abridged snippets from Augustine and Jerome.⁶⁶ While Carolingian scholars indeed turned to Church Fathers like Augustine as foundational authorities, they rarely encountered such writings directly, instead accessing them through excerpts, sermons, and often through intermediaries like Caesarius of Arles, Gregory the Great, or Bede. This indirect reception meant that Augustine’s presence was frequently symbolic, representing broader orthodoxy and consensus among patristic authors rather than sustained engagement with his complete texts. Consequently, Augustine served as both an authoritative resource and a rhetorical tool, invoked by Carolingian intellectuals not just to recover lost knowledge, but to promote social and ecclesiastical unity in alignment with Charlemagne’s broader goals of *renovatio* and *correctio*.⁶⁷

So when Charlemagne called for his spiritual advisors to prepare new commentaries, their first task was to connect the brain trust of his court to the body of texts from the patristic era. They were aided in this recovery by the Hiberno-Latin exegetical boom of the eighth century, whose example was carried across the English Channel by Alcuin, a Northumbrian trained in the study of Bedan works by Archbishop Egbert of York, who in 734 had corresponded with Bede himself.⁶⁸ Although Alcuin was summoned to the Frankish court by Charlemagne, he was in effect an intellectual insurgent, “transplanted to the kingdoms of the Franks,” where he applied the considerable training in reading, teaching, and administration that he had acquired at York to the reforms initiated by the Frankish king. One consequence of “harness[ing] the quiet pursuit of religious life and wisdom to broad social reform” was that it “forced Carolingian leaders to think about schooling and how it might be used to achieve their goals.”⁶⁹ This development would eventually lead to deploying prominent court intellectuals to monasteries,⁷⁰ effectively exporting the religious and administrative goals of the rulers

66 Contreni, “The Patristic Legacy to c. 1000,” 87, 88–89.

67 Timmermann, “An Authority among Authorities,” 534–36, 540–46.

68 Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede*, 21–22.

69 Contreni, “The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe,” 106.

70 Diem, “The Emergence of Monastic Schools,” 30.

to monastic schools, which would (at Luxeuil and Auxerre) produce some of the most innovative Carolingian commentaries on Genesis. Monasteries became centres of book production and training, linked to the “cause of Carolingian *renovatio* and *correctio*.”⁷¹ But like the Bible itself these efforts had their own genesis.

In the last quarter of the eighth century Charlemagne commissioned the first official biblical commentary of his reign, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, an encyclopedic work that gathered in one text the most important and authoritative words of the Church Fathers on the first eight books of the Old Testament. The request was no small task, for as noted above much exegetical knowledge and scholarship had been lost or forgotten in the decades between the death of Isidore of Seville in 636 and the ascent to power of the Carolingians in the mid-eighth century. Early medieval biblical commentaries circulated primarily in epitomes, *florilegia*, and handbooks.⁷² This fact was not lost on Charlemagne, who placed the production of new commentaries and recovery of ancient learning among the highest priorities of his court. It is fitting that, when seeking to recover Christian textual knowledge, the theologians and scholars closest to the king looked first to the beginning.

How God ordained the creation of the universe and set Adam, before the Fall, to govern its inhabitants, edified a Frankish king engaged in an effort to centralize power and legitimate an expansive authority. Carolingian exegesis grappled with subjects of consequence to the Frankish ruler’s authority: salvation and renewal.⁷³ The new perspective on Genesis was characterized by a firm reliance on the authority of patristic authors, with little (if any) alteration to their words, so that the information necessary to instruct a reader in the correct ways to read the biblical text could be gathered in one place. To complete this task, Charlemagne appointed the courtier-theologian, Wigbod (fl. 780–800), about whom little is known compared to contemporaries such as Alcuin or Theodulf of Orléans (ca. 750/760–821), but whose influence reverberates throughout Carolingian exegesis.⁷⁴ Wigbod assembled his

⁷¹ de Jong, “From Scholastici to Scioli,” 46.

⁷² Gorman, “The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod,” 8.

⁷³ Evans, *God and History in the Early Medieval West*, 36–37.

⁷⁴ Leonardi refers to Wigbod’s “new method,” which involved comprehensive commentary on each and every verse of a book, using direct quotations from Church Fathers. Alcuin, Claudius of Turin, and Hrabanus Maurus followed this model in their commentaries. Leonardi, “Aspects of Old Testament Interpretation in the Church,” 189.

massive commentary on the first eight books of the Bible, of which *Quaestiones in Genesim* forms a part, from the works of several Church Fathers, primarily mediated through Augustinian and Isidorean texts.⁷⁵

Scholars have rightly focused on Wigbod's *Quaestiones* as an important milestone in Carolingian exegesis, but I argue that we should also be considering another of Wigbod's works known as *Explanatio sex dierum* (Commentary on the Six Days [of Creation]) in a similar light.⁷⁶ For if *Quaestiones in Octateuch* represents the "official" exegetical view of Charlemagne's court, how that commentary developed is worth knowing. Some have characterized the early Carolingian exegetes like Wigbod as mere compilers of patristic writings, and Bullough famously castigated Wigbod's *Quaestiones in Octateuch* as a "substantial piece of 'scissors-and-paste' exegesis," suggesting that there was little value in studying an assemblage of undigested texts and quotations.⁷⁷ But reading *Explanatio sex dierum* allows us to reconstruct how Wigbod compiled the Genesis portion of his massive commentary—it was a sort of "rough draft" of the longer work. And since nowadays medieval compiling and editing are often seen as original reconsiderations of their sources Wigbod's "derivative" texts merit careful analysis. Indeed, a close reading of Wigbod's *Explanatio sex dierum* opens a window onto his understanding of the issues in the Genesis text that will illuminate his purpose in assembling *Quaestiones in Octateuch* and its role in Charlemagne's court.

Michael Gorman calls *Explanatio sex dierum* a "commentary on" Augustine's literal commentary on Genesis.⁷⁸ Hence a close reading of *Explanatio sex dierum* can show the development of Wigbod's thinking regarding the selection and arrangement of Augustine's sources and materials. Unlike in *Quaestiones in Octateuch*, which is truly a catena of assembled sources

75 Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 178–80.

76 *Explanatio sex dierum* appears in the *Patrologia Latina* (PL 93:207–34) attributed to Pseudo-Bede under the title of *De sex dierum creatione*, but is now identified with Wigbod's authorship, ca. 780–800. Henceforth I refer to this text as Wigbod, *Explanatio sex dierum*, ed. Migne (hereafter, *ESD*). See: Gorman, "The Epitome of Wigbod's Commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels," 7; Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 178.

77 Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal*, 14.

78 Gorman, "The Epitome of Wigbod's Commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels," 8. A note on terminology: although this word originally derives from two Greek words (*hexa* and *hemer*, to make *hexaameron*—meaning the six days), most of the early medieval Latin commentators seem to have used the latinized form *hexameron* unless referring to a specific title of a work. I follow their convention in this chapter.

listed by name and quoted verbatim, in the *Explanatio sex dierum* Wigbod attempted to synthesize disparate patristic ideas into a coherent argument. It proved plausible enough that certain phrases from this text appear verbatim in subsequent Carolingian commentaries, attesting to this text's circulation and influence.⁷⁹ Most of Wigbod's knowledge of Augustine's literal commentary comes from *florilegia* and a seventh-century Irish epitome called *Exhymeron*, which is no longer extant, so it is impossible to know exactly which parts of Augustine's work Wigbod had actually read.⁸⁰ This knowledge must be inferred from context, usage, and, occasionally, omission. In his *Explanatio*, Wigbod offered a sense of the nature of authority and sovereignty that is drawn from the Genesis narrative and the distinctions between pre- and postlapsarian bodies.

Wigbod's reframing of the creation narrative did not occur in a vacuum. Like other courtier-theologians associated with Charlemagne, Wigbod had to fit into the setting of the Frankish royal court. He was successful enough to emerge as a key figure in Charlemagne's exegetical program during the last twenty years of the eighth century. Though less well known than Alcuin and Theodulf of Orléans (both of whose literary output also happens to have survived better), for Wigbod to have been commissioned with the task of producing Charlemagne's first official biblical commentary means he stood out among the other influential intellectuals at the court.⁸¹ In sum, the court circles are a key context for understanding Wigbod's biblical commentaries.

Scholars have grappled with Wigbod's curriculum, and he has been confused with at least two other men of similar name. For example, in 1967 C. W. Jones opined that "Of Wigbod nothing is known."⁸² Ernst Dümmler, an editor of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, cast Wigbod as an old, fat warrior at

79 Many passages were lifted verbatim by both Claudius of Turin (fl. 810–827) and Hrabanus Maurus (ca. 780–856) in their Genesis commentaries. This is interesting, because Gorman argues that Claudius was the first Carolingian exegete to attempt a combination of the literal and the allegorical interpretations of Genesis, writing, "The aim of Claudius was original: to produce a complete commentary on the entire book of Genesis, discussing in turn nearly every statement and element in the narrative." Gorman, "The Commentary on Genesis of Claudius of Turin and Biblical Studies under Louis the Pious," 317. However, as we see in *Explanatio sex dierum*, Wigbod was already thinking along these lines.

80 Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 178–80.

81 Munzi, "Compilazione e riuso in età carolingia," 202.

82 Bede, *Libri quatuor in Principium Genesis*, ed. Jones, iii.

Charlemagne's court whose glory days lay behind him—famously the butt of one of Theodulf's jokes—the same Widbod whom the Astronomer's *vita* of Louis the Pious records as having been appointed *comes* of Périgueux, in Aquitaine, by the king.⁸³ Wigbod was likely neither of these individuals. In his preface to the works of Avitus of Vienne, Rudolf Peiper, another *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* editor, suggested that Wigbod might have been the same person as Rigbod, the abbot of Lorsch from 784–804 and the archbishop of Trier from 791–804, a tantalizing possibility given the connections of the manuscripts of Wigbod's commentary on Genesis to the Lorsch library and the church at Trier.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, linguistic analysis of the two names seems to dispel this possibility.⁸⁵

Wigbod was nevertheless connected to both locations. At least two versions of Wigbod's enormous commentary were held at Lorsch, as were copies of every work that he used in the text. With the exception of Charlemagne's presentation copy that remained at St. Maximin in Trier, all other extant versions of the commentary came from Lorsch.⁸⁶ Among diplomatic records, there is strong circumstantial evidence that Wigbod (alongside Alcuin) was the *abbas presbyter* whom Charlemagne sent in 786 to

83 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 51. For Theodulf's poem, see: Theodulf, *Carmina*, ed. Dümmler, p. 488, line 205n7 (hereafter, *Carm.*). For the joke, see: Kershaw, "Laughter after Babel's Fall," 201. The reference in the Astronomer's *vita* is: *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*, ed. Tremp, 292.

84 *Prooemium*, ed. Peiper, lviii.

85 Gorman cites two separate letters on the subject that he received from Donald Bullough and Bernhard Bischoff. As stated by Gorman, Bullough concluded that "Wigbod and Ricbod cannot be alternative forms of the same name and thus the two men cannot be the same person." Bullough wrote that "The first elements [of the name: Ric(h) vs. Uuig] are quite distinct in etymology and in significance, but also in pronunciation! The initial sounds represented by *R* and by *Uu* being in the eighth/ninth centuries totally different. [Old High German] *R* is really a guttural, hence the spellings in *HR* (Hrabanus, Hruadgoz, etc.). *Uu* is a spirant or labial : and when, in Romance regions, it phonetically 'moves back', it becomes of course a palatal –*Uuido* > Guido or Gui, *Wilhelm* > Guillaume. There is therefore no realistic possibility of confusion between the two names. Indeed, as I read the Lorsch catalogue, the compiler/scribe knew perfectly well that the commentator was not the same person as his former abbot." Donald Bullough to Michael Gorman, March 25, 1994, as cited in Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 61n65. On the same question Bischoff wrote, "I write—Wigbod, because I cannot believe that an attempt at identification with Ricbod is methodologically sound." Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 61n66.

86 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 61–62.

accompany papal delegations to English synods in Mercia and Northumbria.⁸⁷ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill noted Charlemagne's confidence in Wigbod's diplomatic capabilities, describing him as the king's "official observer" representing "a kind of Frankish supervisory interest" at the courts of Offa and Ælfwald in the two early English kingdoms.⁸⁸ Moreover, Gorman speculates that Wigbod may have gained considerable influence with Charlemagne, and used his commentaries "to curry royal favour" at the Frankish court.⁸⁹ In the 780s therefore Wigbod was Alcuin's equal among Charlemagne's most important courtiers and advisors.

Wigbod came to the attention of his most vociferous modern champion, Michael Gorman, through the discovery of a lost colophon, which had been attached to one version of Wigbod's commentary but not the full edition.⁹⁰ In 1719 Edmund Martène transcribed what may have been the actual presentation copy of Wigbod's commentary, but any attribution to Wigbod was lost.⁹¹ Gorman takes to task several of the modern historians whose brief studies of Wigbod failed to wonder "how many Wigbods or Wibods (or Widbods) were active in Charlemagne's service."⁹² Gorman's response to this question satisfactorily proposes two figures: Wigbod the diplomat and theologian, and the layperson Wibod the unlucky target of Theodulf's scorn who eventually became the *comes* in Périgueux.⁹³ Although circumstantial evidence points toward this conclusion, it remains somewhat tentative.

More certain is the former Wigbod's importance to Charlemagne's court in the late eighth century, as is his authorship of six works of biblical exegesis, including *Explanatio sex dierum*.⁹⁴ The structure, content, and arguments

87 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 52.

88 Wallace-Hadrill, "Charlemagne and England," 158.

89 Gorman, "The Epitome of Wigbod's Commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels," 6.

90 The eighteenth-century scholar Edmund Martène knew of the official commentary and its dedication to Charlemagne, but the manuscript he transcribed contained only Wigbod's commentary on the first three chapters of Genesis. This is the version that Migne attributed to Wigbod and included in volume 96 of the *PL*. The full, exhaustive commentary on the Octateuch appears in volume 93 of the *PL*, wrongly attributed to Pseudo-Bede. See: Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 175.

91 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 62.

92 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 51–59.

93 Gorman, "Wigbod and Biblical Studies under Charlemagne," 60.

94 Gorman, "The Epitome of Wigbod's Commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels," 8–9. These are: The *Recapitulatio de paradiso*, an early effort treating Genesis;

of this relatively unknown text must be laid out clearly before applying its teachings to Carolingian political culture. The structure of *Explanatio sex dierum* largely follows the narrative of the first three chapters of Genesis, and is organized by “day” of creation, followed by lengthy sections on the episodes leading up to and following the Fall. Thus, the text really covered everything from the moments before creation to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. It follows, then, that the list of days included the seventh, as the biblical narrative also did, despite the six-day premise of the text given at the outset. Each “day” begins with an excerpt from the Genesis text, followed by a historical interpretation of how the given verse reflects or was fulfilled in a different biblical passage; thus, for example, Genesis 1:1 prefigured John 1:1, and so forth.⁹⁵ These scriptural resonances usually echo the Psalms, Proverbs, the Gospels, or a Pauline text, and serve to illustrate the point that the creation narrative is the origin of a story in which Christ’s incarnation is the climax, with everything having come before and after inflected by that event. Then comes a literal explanation or clarification (sometimes as a *quaestiones et responsiones* dialogue) or investigation into the mechanics of the operation discussed, usually within the discussion of the “day,” and at other instances in separate subsections such as “*De creatione lucis*” or “*De creatione hominum*.” Last appear multiple smaller bunches of text grouped under headings as recapitulations, which reiterate or further explicate the points given above.

As one might expect from a commentary on Augustine’s literal commentary, the focus of Wigbod’s attention is the literal and historical, but unlike Augustine he does deploy allegorical and anagogical interpretations to nuance or show relevance in the historical meaning of a given passage. The anagogical sense in patristic exegesis refers to the eschatological interpretation of Scripture that anticipates the final consummation of all things in Christ’s return. Henri de Lubac distinguishes between two types of anagogical senses: one objective and doctrinal, focused on the end times, and the other subjective and mystical, concerned with individual contemplation. Ultimately, the anagogical sense unites doctrinal and mystical insights, completing the spiritual interpretation of Scripture alongside the allegorical

a compilation on Genesis, which is a series of excerpts from other works; the *Explanatio sex dierum* (the subject of this chapter); the official court commentary on the Octateuch; a commentary on the Gospels; and an epitome of his commentaries on Genesis and the Gospels.

95 For my reading of historical exegesis, see: Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:41–82.

and tropological senses.⁹⁶ In Wigbod's text these instances are usually sign-posted quite clearly with phrases like "*in allegoria*" or "*haec secundum anagogen*," showing a deliberate attempt at lacing these three exegetical approaches into one framework. These interpretive choices shape the selection, arrangement, and even the length of a given passage.

The first "day," stretched across four columns of Migne's edition, received a long treatment because it offered the ideal venue for connecting the creation of the universe to the incarnation of Christ. The second, third, and fourth "days," which deal with separating the earth from the waters, the gathering of waters, and the division of the heavens into light and dark, respectively, received comparatively shorter shrift, about a column each of Migne's text. This is also true for the seventh, the day of rest. The fifth "day" merited two columns of text, primarily because here Wigbod began to weave literal and historical explanations with scientific theories about natural phenomena. So, for example, he expounded on the qualities of water, which produced watery creatures, and in the next breath speculated that demonic or emotional disturbances correlate with inclement weather. The sixth "day," which saw the creation of the man, received two and a half columns of text, which are predominantly taken up by a lengthy discussion of this work. Following the seventh "day" there occurs a three and a half-column recap of the six days, highlighting a theological history of humans and morality vis-à-vis their relationships with different kinds of animals. Adhering to the Genesis narrative, Wigbod then spent the remaining twelve columns on subsections: the ascent of the waters and the irrigation of the earth, the planting of Paradise, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the division of the river of Paradise, the warning of the tree, the creation of the woman, the cunning of the serpent, the snake's suggestions to the woman, the agreement of the woman and of the man, the voice of reproach and calling, the man's excuse, the curses of the serpent, the woman, and the man, the mortal raiment, and the expulsion from Paradise. All told, the story of the Fall takes up the entire last third of the text.⁹⁷

96 Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 44.

97 A note on terminology: I refer to "the man" and "the woman" where the primary sources use *homo* and *mulier*, and reserve Adam or Eve for when the text explicitly names them. For the bulk of both the Genesis narrative and commentaries on it, these individuals are identified by their sex and not by name. Naming is an act of sovereignty, and it is important to discussions of authority and expectations. Additionally, I render *homo* as "the man," but when it occurs in the plural or with a descriptor (e.g. *hominum* or *humanum genus*) I render it as humankind when the context clearly applies it to all people.

If *Explanatio sex dierum* was a commentary on Augustine, it must be read alongside Augustine's works on Genesis. Although it is not entirely clear which sources Wigbod knew, as Gorman shows, the material contained within the encyclopedic commentary proved Wigbod was aware of several Augustinian (or misattributed) Genesis commentaries, and we know from Einhard that Charlemagne preferred the works of Augustine, especially *De civitate Dei* (The City of God), to other books.⁹⁸ There is also the fact that Wigbod had connections with the abbey of Lorsch, whose library contained many works by Augustine.⁹⁹ These two factors make quite likely Wigbod's access to the most substantial reserves of patristic sources in Frankish lands at that time. It also follows that if a rephrasing or reworking of Augustine's text reflects a clear choice by Wigbod, an omission merits similar attention. This is not an argument from silence, because there are clear instances where he seems to have had access to a particular passage yet chooses to emphasize some ideas at the expense of others. Furthermore, Wigbod drew on much more than Augustine's commentary alone, and explaining what and how he used these other sources illuminates the text's purpose, and the role of commentaries in shaping Carolingian ecological sovereignty.

Conclusion

The contribution of Carolingian exegetes like Wigbod to early medieval environmental thought derived from their reading of past authorities. Yet the texts deliberately selected and deployed patristic voices to new effect, thus reconstituting and making them different. The commenters compiled exegesis precisely because the Church Fathers' work was authoritative and recovery of correct texts was at the heart of the Carolingian cultural program.

98 These are: *De civitate Dei contra Paganos*, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, and *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*. The misattributed texts included the *Exhymeron*, which was a seventh-century Irish epitome and *Dialogus quaestionum LXV*, a florilegium of *quaestiones*, both of which stemmed from Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*, and were thought by Wigbod to have been authored by Augustine himself. Gorman, "The Encyclopedic Commentary on Genesis Prepared for Charlemagne by Wigbod," 178; Bischoff, *Manuscripts and Libraries in the Age of Charlemagne*, trans. Gorman, 56–57.

99 See my above discussion of the connections linking Wigbod and Lorsch. Michael Fox goes so far as to assert that Wigbod compiled his encyclopedic commentary at Lorsch, though he does not provide any specific evidence beyond speculation. Fox, "Alcuin the Exegete," 39. For the library catalogue of Lorsch, see: Häse, *Mittelalterliche Bücherverzeichnisse aus Kloster Lorsch*, 136–67. For Augustine's works at Lorsch, see: Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de Saint Augustin*.

Writing on the creation story was a venerable tradition and practice of Christian intellectuals stretching backward to the beginnings of Christianity, and Carolingian exegetes' efforts put their texts in this line as much as their deference to the Carolingian *renovatio* put them in another one.

Commenters like Wigbod did not recycle patristic thought just because Augustine or Isidore of Seville proposed something. Though trees, animals, and humans would be central to any writing on the Hebrew creation narrative, I suggest that those components of God's universe had special resonance for both authors and readers in late 700s Francia. In the case of Wigbod, who lived and worked in the lower Rhineland and travelled extensively in the early English kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria, a tree meant something profoundly different from what it might mean to a writer in the Mediterranean littoral, the home environment of both Augustine and Isidore. At the court of Charlemagne, men like Wigbod assembled commentaries that made sense to north Europeans and that served the purposes of a polity engaged in constructing a new Christian empire.

Carolingian exegetes were embedded in the ethos and rhetoric of *correctio* inaugurated by the *Admonitio generalis* and *De litteris colendi*. They reveal that the Carolingians' considerations of the natural world and their articulation of authority and exercise of sovereignty were based on their understandings of Genesis. Indeed, the Carolingians' legislation program was steeped in "eschatological finality," and was inseparable from their aims of imposing universal Christian empire on early medieval European peoples and environments as they prepared for the end.¹⁰⁰ Recovering from Wigbod's Genesis commentary his notions of Carolingian ecological sovereignty based on the control and supervision of nature is the subject of the next chapter.

100 Depreux, "Ambitions et limites des réformes culturelles à l'époque carolingienne," 732–33.

