Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages

Edited by
James Muldoon

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3

"For Force Is Not of God"? Compulsion and Conversion from Yahweh to Charlemagne

Lawrence G. Duggan

The Hymnal of the Episcopal Church contains a hymn entitled "The Great Creator of the Worlds," the words of which are drawn from the anonymous *Epistle to Diognetus* of the second or early third century. The fifth verse of the hymn ends with the words, "For force is not of God."[1] Although actually the *Epistle* does not quite put it this way ("for compulsion is not God's way of working," according to one translation), the sentiment is the same: God does not force humankind to accept Him or to obey His will.[2] Yet by 785 the Frankish king Charlemagne stipulated for the Saxons a policy of forcible conversion to Christianity, with infractions punishable by death: "If there is anyone of the Saxon people lurking among them unbaptized, and if he scorns to come to baptism and wishes to absent himself and stay a pagan, let him die."[3] Even earlier, the reviser of the *Royal Frankish Annals* entered the following sentence under the year 775: "While the king spent the winter at the villa of Quierzy, he decided to attack the treacherous and treaty-breaking tribe of the Saxons and to persist in this war until they were either defeated and forced to accept the Christian religion or entirely exterminated."[4] How, when, and why did such a policy of conversion by compulsion to the religion of Yahweh come about after such a pacific one undertaken by the deity Himself? Was this a specifically "medieval" development, yet another perversion of "true" Christianity wrought during the long centuries of Germanic barbarism?

Surprisingly, one will search in vain in the literature to find an adequate treatment and explanation of these momentous developments. The relevant clauses of the "terror capitulary" of 785 have received surprisingly little attention, the dreadful royal decision of 775 even less. In his monumental *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Kenneth Scott Latourette noted that this was "the first but not the last instance in which acceptance of

baptism and of the Christian name was induced by a liberal application of the sword"—but then suggested without further elaboration that "[t]he methods employed in the conversion of the Saxons were so natural and logical an outgrowth of the policies of Charlemagne's predecessors that few seem to have been shocked."[5] It is easy and probably unfair to fault Latourette, given his ambitious attempt to cover the whole history of Christianity. It is harder to comprehend why Richard Sullivan, who devoted his scholarly energies to studying these kinds of issues in precisely this period, provides no toeholds to speak of in a half-dozen or so articles published over several decades.[6] In their detailed studies of the Franks and the Saxons, Albert Hauck and Heinrich Wiedemann offer many helpful clues, such as the particularly fierce opposition of the Saxons to Christianity, exacerbated by the participation of militant late Merovingian bishops in the military campaigns against the Saxons. Both scholars also underscore the events of 775–76 as a turning point, when the Saxons were decisively defeated; they submitted, many underwent baptism, and thereafter Charlemagne no longer viewed them as outsiders but as subjects of the Frankish kingdom. But neither Hauck nor Wiedemann addresses fully the fateful decision of 775 or the chilling decree issued at Paderborn; nor do most other scholars.[7]

Donald Bullough has argued that the reviser of the *Annals* assigned too early a date to Charlemagne's decision,[8] while the editor of the most recent edition of the *Annals* simply suppresses the passage without offering an adequate explanation for doing so.[9] This will not do for a number of reasons. Several other Carolingian sources corroborate the centrality of the events of 775–76. Although the poet Saxo (writing between 888 and 891) undoubtedly depended on the revised *Annals,*[10] the author of the annals of St. Gall perhaps did not, and he too connects the conversion and killing of the Saxons at that time.[11] Besides, the mass baptisms of the Saxons recorded for the following two years otherwise make little sense, especially in view of their previously implacable hostility to Christianity. In a different way, it does not matter whether the reviser is wrong about the date. What is telling is that he does give such an early date, provides no explanation for Charlemagne's new policy, and felt no inclination to disguise or minimize it, much less to pass over it in silence. Had the writer had any reason to feel embarrassed on his own or Charlemagne's behalf, he might well have done any of these things. If Einhard was indeed the reviser of the *Annals,* as scholars used to think, this argument is all the more compelling in view of both Einhard's intimate knowledge of Charlemagne and the artful way in which he crafted his life of the great king. Finally, Charlemagne is remembered in a similar way by the most important chronicler of the

reign of Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious—a learned soldier, Nithard, who also happened to be Charlemagne's grandson. Of Charlemagne's accomplishment he wrote: "Emperor Charles, deservedly called the Great by all peoples, converted the Saxons by much effort, as is known to everyone in Europe. He won them over from the vain adoration of idols to the true Christian religion of God."[12]

This view suggests that Charlemagne deserved all the credit, if one can call it that, for this initiative. Was Charlemagne capable of such a bold undertaking as to link conversion and killing in an unprecedented way as early as 775? Very likely, but in this paper I would like to explore the possibility that there was a long period of development leading up to Charlemagne's decision and that Charlemagne was simply pushing on to the next stage. I take my initial cue here from Erasmus of Rotterdam. Although he would probably have liked to assent heartily to the earlier proposition that these developments represented yet another perversion of true Christianity during the Dark Ages, he also formulated a more subtle and penetrating key to the solution of this puzzle in one sentence in his *Adage* of 1515, "Dulce bellum inexpertis [War is sweet to those who know nothing about it]": "Every bad thing either finds its way into human life by imperceptible degrees, or else insinuates itself under the pretext of the good."[13] Elsewhere in the same text he put it slightly differently: "The greatest evils have always found their way into the life of men under the semblance of good."[14] Although Erasmus was seeking to account for the long descent from the manifestly pacificistic teachings of Christ to the war-addicted Christian Europe of Pope Julius II, this observation has tremendous power and persuasiveness as an explanatory model of many historical phenomena. I shall argue that Erasmus was absolutely right in emphasizing "imperceptible degrees" in the slow linking of Christianity and force, and that, as often as not, "force" in the spread of Christianity came about as an inadvertent consequence of decisions taken in the pursuit of other "goods," especially divinely prescribed ones. Finally, we shall see that a good deal of pressure to apply force in spreading Christianity came from churchmen, especially bishops and including some popes.

To begin with, the appalling contrast between the tolerant ways of God and the intolerant ways of His creatures implied above is not quite so stark as it at first seems. Usually, when human beings have chosen a particular course of action and defend it in religious terms, they have received (or at least believe they have received) some kind of encouragement, justification, or even command from God or the gods. Although the Judaeo-Christian tradition has habitually emphasized that God endowed human beings with free will and holds us accountable for our deeds, He has not been

above applying a certain amount of pressure on humankind. In recent times, a less publicized dimension of the Judaeo-Christian Godhead is His intolerance. It is clearly recorded in the Decalogue that Yahweh will allow His People to worship no other gods; and in the rest of the Old Testament one story after another recounts what kinds of pressures and inducements He applied to His chosen people to believe in Him alone and to obey His Commandments. Again and again the Psalms assure the faithful of peace and prosperity; again and again these and the other books remind unbelievers and the recalcitrant that condign punishments await them if they do not submit. While Yahweh has so created us in His image that, strictly speaking, no one can be *made* to do something (as the list of striking "superhuman" acts of defiance in the history of our species attests), He has certainly offered many "incentives," positive and negative, to urge us toward compliance. "Force," in short, is not all of a piece and certainly not a diametrically polar opposite of "freedom." Just as freedom is not absolute, force is not without gradation. There is a continuum from one to the other. It was by the application of various levels of force, as well as by miracle and gifts, that Yahweh eventually converted His chosen people into exclusive monotheists obedient to His will. Furthermore, in certain books of the Old Testament, God is recorded as having led His people in righteous wars, even to the extent of ordering the priests into battle, setting precedents which would be invoked repeatedly by various kinds of later crusaders.[15] Finally, as Roland Bainton astutely observed, as the *one* true God, Yahweh inevitably was both bestower of peace *and* author of war, joining religion and violence in a novel and potentially ominous way.[16]

Force also appears in the life of Jesus, if in subtler forms. Having been commanded by His Father to undergo death, He sweated blood out of fear; but His Father would not relent. Jesus in turn imposed a series of commandments on His followers, culminating in the "great commission" with which Matthew's Gospel ends: "Go therefore and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20). This was not an option but a requirement, one which Jehovah's Witnesses and other evangelicals continue to discharge, however much it may unsettle tasteful mainline Christians. Finally, Jesus held out the threat of hellfire more often than most modern Christians care to notice—a form of pressure buttressed by repeated warnings that while many were called, few would be chosen.

While Jesus did not specify the means His disciples were to employ in spreading the Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles and other documents reveal that they took a leaf from His book and through example, preaching, and

the performance of miracles gradually persuaded others to follow Him. The preaching was not always mellifluous, however, nor were the miracles always healing ones. Like Jesus, His disciples often upbraided others and threatened them with punishments, especially if they refused to undergo conversion of life and moral reformation. Those still outside the fold could be persuaded by negative as well as positive miracles—by acts of destruction demonstrating that their idols had no power. Even if these deeds did not compel acceptance, they embodied applications of force designed to persuade unbelievers to come over to right belief and the one true faith.

A truly decisive step was taken in the fourth century, when the Emperor Constantine (306–37) was inspired to adopt Christianity. The prayers of his mother Helena notwithstanding, what moved him was the sign he was given on the eve of the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312. The context was crucial, for he was assured by a heavenly voice of victory that if he affixed the letters "Chi Rho" (the first two letters of "Christ" in Greek, the so-called "Labarum") to the shields of his soldiers, "In this sign you will conquer." Religion was now associated in a fateful way not only with the realm of politics but with the ultimate realm of force, the battlefield.[17]

As for forcing Christianity upon his subjects, Constantine had some understandable reservations, dictated partly by his traditional, nonexclusivist polytheism but partly also by prudence in the face of inevitable opposition. Even so, he openly espoused and promoted Christianity, his stance culminating in the dedication of the new, Christian capital of Constantinople in 330; and those who wished to gain and remain in imperial favor and enjoy its largesse knew what they had to do to succeed in the new regime. Nevertheless, neither he nor his successors for several generations made any attempt to impose their new religion on their subjects as a whole.

It was St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan (374–92), who changed all that. In a dramatic confrontation with Symmachus, advocate of the old Roman religion, Ambrose argued for the suppression of paganism and the establishment of Christianity as the sole official religion of the empire. Since Ambrose was able to cite the first commandment of the Decalogue in support of his arguments, the Emperor Gratian agreed and in 382 moved seriously against the pagan establishment in the direction of making Christianity the only imperial religion. This process eventually led to a decree in 416 barring all pagans from imperial service.[18] The result was that, from a legal point of view, Christianity was no longer a matter of choice for the citizens and subjects of the empire. They were effectively forced to accept it. It is important to stress, however, that the emperors probably did not view it that way, but rather as a matter of their own obedience to divine command as well as of the exercise of their responsibility to assuage the

divine powers and keep them on the side of the empire. "Forcible conversion" may have been the de facto consequence but was probably not the intention behind imperial decisions producing that effect.

Once the established Christian Church had at its potential disposal the coercive power of the state, the temptation was bound to arise to use that power to settle disputes within the Church. It was only a question of when and whether the impulse would come from the emperors in their role of peace givers or from the bishops out of their concern that right religion prevail, since on right belief depended the salvation of human beings. (The assertion that outside the Church there is no salvation derives from this period, not from the popes of the High Middle Ages.)[19] Rightly or wrongly, much of the credit or blame is assigned to St. Augustine (354–430), who in his long and frustrating struggle with the Donatists in Africa eventually called upon the secular authorities to apply pressures to the Donatists for their own good and as a form of paternal correction.[20] In fact, on this as on so many other matters, Augustine was taking his cue from Ambrose.[21]

Force reached a new level of conspicuousness in this period in less obvious ways as well. Adult baptism, previously freely chosen, gave way to infant baptism, the rite of passage into the empire as well as the Church. In a rather different way, although within the Christian community from the later second century cultural pressures prompted more ardent Christians, clerical and lay, to observe chastity even within marriage, the imposition of the requirement of celibacy on various parts of the clerical world from the later fourth century onward moved from the realm of freely chosen option to binding obligation—at least in law. Finally, the appearance of the practice of oblation in the monastic world around the same time signified the triumph of a major force of traditional secular society in Christianity—parental decisions governing the fate of children offered as living sacrifices to God, now twice-blessed as innovative forms of the *imitatio Christi*.[22]

This raises the question of the policy of the newly Christianized Romans with respect to the polytheists beyond and now within their borders. While the connection between politics and religion forged by Constantine was a relatively new one to Christians, it was not so to the Romans or most other peoples of antiquity, for whom the declaration, conduct, and conclusion of war had long been associated with religious rites and even with acceptance of the religion of the conqueror by the conquered as part of the peacemaking process. For the polytheists of antiquity, this was an easy and logical step. They had been shown in battle the power of the victor's deity or deities, who therefore deserved worship, but without necessarily requiring repudiation of the gods of old. Thus, when the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred defeated the Danes at Edington in 878, "the enemy

gave him preliminary hostages and great oaths that they would leave his kingdom, and promised also that their king should receive baptism, and they kept their promise. Three weeks later King Guthrum with thirty of the men who were the most important in the army came [to Alfred] at Aller, which is near Athelney, and the king stood sponsor to him at his baptism there."[23] Nor was it even necessary to have been defeated for polytheists to offer to become Christians. In his *History of the Goths* Jordanes tells us that, out of fear of the Huns, the Visigoths in the 370s negotiated with the Emperor Valens, stipulating that "if he would give them part of Thrace or Moesia to keep, they would submit themselves to his laws and commands. That he might have greater confidence in them, they promised to become Christians, if he would give them teachers who spoke their language. When Valens learned this, he gladly and promptly granted what he had himself intended to ask."[24]

Not all polytheists came over to Christianity quite this readily. Like Constantine, Clovis (ca. 466–511), king of the Franks, required a sign of God's power, even though Clovis, like Constantine, had a Christian female member of his house praying for him. "Nothing could persuade him to accept Christianity," Gregory of Tours tells us, until his troops were being annihilated in battle by the Alamanni in 496. In desperation, Clovis called upon the name of Christ, promising to be baptized if only Christ would grant him victory over his enemies. Even though Jesus obliged, thereby reaffirming the link between religion and the realm of force, Clovis apparently still held back. When Bishop Remigius of Rheims urged him to undergo baptism, Clovis announced, "There remains one obstacle. The people under my command will not agree to forsake their gods. I will go and put to them what you have just said to me." But "God in his power had preceded" Clovis and miraculously converted the hearts of his people before he could address them. What exactly would have happened if God had not intervened is not at all clear.[25]

Gregory of Tours tells a similar story a few pages later, however, which is full of relevant significance. King Gundobad, an Arian, came to realize the error of his beliefs and sought out the bishop of Vienne to be anointed in secret. The bishop upbraided him for his cowardice and cited Christ himself: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him I will confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32–33). The bishop also accused Gundobad of being afraid of his people and marshaled a variety of further arguments: "Do you not realize that it is better that the people should accept your belief, rather than that you, a king, should pander to their every whim? You are the leader of your people; your people is not there to lord it over you. When you go to war, you yourself march at the

head of the squadrons of your army and they follow where you lead. It is therefore preferable that they should learn the truth under your direction, rather than that they should continue in their errors."[26] King Gundobad nevertheless refused to take such a step. He would not give in to a bishop who had tried to persuade him with nearly every conceivable argument not only to confess his faith before his people but to lead his people to the true Trinitarian faith.

A hundred years later, according to Bede, a somewhat similar episode took place in Anglo-Saxon England. There King Ethelbert of Kent (560–616) had graciously received monks, led by Augustine and sent by Pope Gregory I, and had allowed them to proselytize. Ethelbert initially declined to "forsake those beliefs which I and the whole English race have held so long."[27] Eventually, however,

> the king, as well as others, believed and was baptized, being attracted by the pure life of the saints and by their most precious promises, whose truth they confirmed by performing many miracles. Every day more and more began to flock to hear the Word, to forsake their heathen worship, and, through faith, to join the unity of Christ's holy Church. It is related that the king, although he rejoiced at their conversion and faith, compelled no one to accept Christianity; though none the less he showed greater affection for believers since they were his fellow-citizens in the kingdom of heaven. But he had learned from his teachers and guides in the way of salvation that the service of Christ was voluntary and ought not to be compulsory.[28]

When Pope Gregory heard of this outlook, he was evidently not at all pleased. He sent to Ethelbert both gifts and a long letter in which he exhorted the king to

> hasten to extend the Christian faith among the people who are subject to you. Increase your righteous zeal for their conversion; *suppress the worship of idols; overthrow their buildings and shrines;* strengthen the morals of your subjects by outstanding purity of life, by exhorting them, terrifying, enticing, and correcting them, and by showing them an example of good works; so that you may be rewarded in heaven by the One whose Name and knowledge you have spread upon the earth. For He whose honor you seek and maintain among the nations will also make your glorious name still more glorious even to posterity.[29]

Although Gregory clearly stressed here reliance on the traditional tactics of persuasion, he also in passing encouraged the king to employ calculated violence against the shrines and worship of the traditional gods. Gregory modified this position in a far more famous letter meant to provide Augustine, by now Archbishop of Canterbury, with advice about missionary tactics: "tell him what I have decided after long deliberation about the English people, namely that the idol temples of that race should by no means be destroyed, but only the idols in them. Take holy water and sprinkle it in these shrines, build altars and place relics in them. For if the shrines are well built, it is essential that they should be changed from the worship of devils to the service of the true God."[30] Gregory then went on to dispense the advice which seems largely to have shaped the missionary policy of the western, Latin church for the next thousand years: be flexible, adapt when possible, insisting only on observance of the essentials. Whether Gregory was here retreating from the counsel given to Ethelbert or modifying it in light of the recipient—a bishop, not a king—is unclear.

What is astonishing is that a bit over a century later the Anglo-Saxon monk Boniface (680–754), working on the Continent among the Germanic peoples and destined to be remembered as the "Apostle to the Germans," followed Pope Gregory's advice to King Ethelbert, not to Archbishop Augustine. Both before and after his consecration as bishop by the pope, Boniface destroyed sacred trees and shrines during his missions among the Frisians, while the Hessians watched him begin to cut down the mighty Oak of Jupiter at Geismar.[31] According to Boniface's biographer, God miraculously completed this task, causing many of the Hessians who had been cursing Boniface "to believe and bless the Lord."[32]

It is not surprising, therefore, that but a few decades later Charlemagne (771–814) also heeded the advice sent to Ethelbert. The *Royal Frankish Annals* recounts Charlemagne's first expedition against the Saxons 772 in this fashion:

> From Worms he marched first into Saxony. Capturing the castle of Eresburg, he proceeded as far as the Irminsul, destroyed this idol and carried away the gold and silver which he found. . . . The glorious king wished to remain there two or three days in order to destroy the temple completely, but they had no water. Suddenly at noon, through the grace of God, while the army rested and nobody knew what was happening, so much water poured forth in a stream that the whole army had enough. Then the great king came to the River Weser. Here he held a parley with the Saxons, obtained twelve hostages, and returned to Francia.[33]

Why Charlemagne attacked the temple at Irminsul is not illuminated by the official *Annals* at this point or by reference to earlier entries. Charle-

magne's father Pepin had conducted retaliatory raids against Saxon tribes for their incursions into Frankish lands, but the most recent had been in 758, and none of them had evidently involved religion.[34] And while Charles's determination to destroy the temple was aided by God's miraculous provision of water to his parched soldiers, the terse terms of the truce allude to religion in no way. It may well be that, aside from the tempting store of immense riches at the shrine, Charles simply wanted to conduct frightening psychological warfare.[35] Hauck, in fact, rightly calls this simply a *Verwüstungszug*.[36]

Although the entries for the next two years indicate that God was on the side of the Franks in the deadly struggle with the Saxons, there is still nothing to prepare us for the opening words of the entry for 775 in the revised version of the *Annals*. Was there something that had happened in the interim? In 774 Charlemagne went to Rome and met with Pope Hadrian I (772–95). Although one German scholar long ago suggested that the pope may have exhorted the young king to do his utmost to convert the Saxons, he also had to admit that no evidence corroborated this speculation, and certainly there is none in the *Liber Pontificalis*.[37] In 773, however, Abbot Eanwulf wrote to Charlemagne a letter in which he quoted at length, but without acknowledgement, from Gregory the Great's letter to Ethelbert, urging him to "hasten to extend the Christian faith among the people who are subject to you . . . suppress the worship of idols; overthrow their buildings and shrines; strengthen the morals of your subjects by outstanding purity of life, by exhorting them, terrifying, enticing, and correcting them."[38] It is essential to note here the ambiguous legacy of Gregory the Great. Although he had authorized destruction of things, Charlemagne was now preparing for the killing of people. On the other hand, Gregory had legitimized, even commanded, forms of destruction in the name of right religion.

Other clerics, however, had sanctioned killing and contributed to the formation of that moral universe in which Charlemagne grew up. As the heir of several centuries of Christian contempt for the body, Augustine of Hippo put it this way: "What is it about war, after all, that is blameworthy? Is it that people who will someday die anyway are killed in order that the victors might live in peace? That kind of objection is appropriate to a timid man, not a religious one. What rightly deserves censure in war is the desire to do harm, cruel vengeance, a disposition that remains unappeased and implacable, a savage spirit of rebellion, a lust for domination and other such things."[39] Three hundred years later Bede (+735), who died only a few years before Charlemagne was born, wrote about Augustine of Canterbury's confrontation with the Celtic Christians of Britain. Having failed to convince them of the errors of their ways in the dating of Easter and other practices, "Augustine, the man of God, warned them with threats that, if they refused to accept peace from their brethren, they would have to accept war from their enemies; and if they would not preach the way of life to the English nation, they would one day suffer the vengeance of death at their hands. This, through the workings of divine judgment, came to pass in every particular as he had foretold." It was King Ethelfrith who brought this about at the battle of Caerlegion or Chester, where, in Bede's words, he "made a great slaughter of that nation of heretics" and "wicked host," including twelve hundred monks and priests who were there praying for Celtic victory. "Thus the prophecy of the holy Bishop Augustine was fulfilled, although he had long been translated to the heavenly kingdom, namely that those heretics would also suffer the vengeance of temporal death because they had despised the offer of everlasting salvation."[40]

If the monk Bede could set down such sentiments in writing about the slaughter of Christian "heretics," monks, and priests, why should Charlemagne—a layman born to be a king and raised to be a killer for the sake of law and order—have flinched at the thought of exterminating heathen Saxons if they did not submit to his will and be baptized? Perhaps Charlemagne, but certainly the men of the royal court who later recorded his great deeds, would have preferred that he monopolize all the honors for introducing this new policy. Whether Yahweh, Jesus, Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Remigius of Rheims, Gregory the Great, Augustine of Canterbury, Bede, Boniface, or Eanwulf would have been willing to acknowledge any role in contributing to this outcome is open to speculation; but, as in his *Praise of Folly, Dulce bellum inexpertis,* and other writings, Erasmus would have had no reservation whatever about assigning a high degree of responsibility to men of intelligence and faith for encouraging and justifying the result.

Notes

1. *The Hymnal 1982 According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985), no. 489.

2. "The So-called Letter to Diognetus," in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. and trans. C. C. Richardson et al., Library of Christian Classics 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 219. On the authorship and date of the letter, see 206–10.

3. H. R. Loyn and John Percival, trans., *The Reign of Charlemagne: Documents on Carolingian Government and Administration* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 52.

4. Friedrich Kurze, ed., *Annales regni Francorum,* in *Monumenta Germaniae*

Historica, Scriptores in usum scholarum 6 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1895; reprint 1950), 41: "Cum rex in villa Carisiaco hiemaret, consilium iniit, ut perfidam et foedifragam Saxonum gentem bello adgrederetur et eo usque perseveraret, dum aut victi christianae religioni subicerentur aut omnino tollerentur." The translation used is that in *Carolingian Chronicles,* trans. Bernhard Scholz with Barbara Rogers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), 51.

5. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity,* 7 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937–45), 2:105–6.

6. These have now been gathered in Richard E. Sullivan, *Christian Missionary Activity in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994).

7. Albert Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1896–1920), 2:360–418; Heinrich Wiedemann, *Die Sachsenbekehrung,* Missionswissenschaftliche Studien 5 (Münster i.W.: Verlag Missionshaus Hiltrup, 1932), 36, 45–49, and *Karl der Grosse, Widukind und die Sachsenbekehrung* (Münster i.W.: Aschendorff, 1949), 15, 19. As for other scholars, see, for example, Sigurd Abel and Bernhard Simson, *Jahrbücher des fränkischen Reiches unter Karl dem Grossen* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1866–83), 1:175; Louis Halphen, "La conquête de la Saxe," in *Etudes critiques sur l'histoire de Charlemagne,* ed. Halphen (Paris: F. C. Alcan, 1921), 145–218, esp. 149, and *Charlemagne et l'empire carolingien* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1947; reprint, 1995), 63–70; Heinrich Fichtenau, *The Carolingian Empire,* trans. Peter Munz (New York: Blackwell, 1964), 21–22; Walther Lammers, ed., *Die Eingliederung der Sachsen in das Frankenreich,* Wege der Forschung 185 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970); Friedrich Prinz, *Grundlagen und Anfänge, Deutschland bis 1056* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1985), 95–96; P. D. King, *Charlemagne: Translated Sources* (Lancaster: P. D. King, 1987), 44–45; Rudolf Schieffer, *Die Karolinger* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1992), 76–77; Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe,* trans. M. I. Allen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 103. Curiously, there is no chapter at all on the conquest of the Saxons in the five-volume *Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben,* ed. Wolfgang Braunfels et al. (Düsseldorf: Verlag L. Schwann, 1965).

8. Donald Bullough, *The Age of Charlemagne* (New York: Putnam, 1980), 51.

9. Reinhold Rau, ed. and trans., *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968–87), 1:3, 31.

10. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini aevi Carolini,* pt. 1, vol. 4, ed. P. von Winterfeld (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1899; reprint, 1978), 11 (lib. 1, ll.177–88). On this author and his dates, see Peter Godman, ed. and trans., *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 342n.62.

11. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores,* 1, ed. G. H. Pertz (1826; reprint, Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1963), 63: "in ipso anno [775] perrexit Karolus super Saxones, et plurimos ex ipsis ad baptismi gratiam perduxit, et multos pluriores interfecit."

12. Nithard, "Histories," 4.2, in *Carolingian Chronicles,* 166–67. For other instances of contemporary praise of the forcible conversion of the Saxons, see Richard E. Sullivan, "Carolingian Missionary Theories," *Catholic Historical Review* 42 (1956–57): 277–78.

13. *Erasmus on His Times: A Shortened Version of the "Adages" of Erasmus,* trans. M. M. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 123.

14. Ibid., 113.

15. See, most recently, Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), with a rich bibliography on this complex issue.

16. Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 47.

17. For useful recent introductions, with extensive bibliography, see the entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), and *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity,* ed. E. Ferguson et al. (New York: Garland Publishers, 1990), s.v. "Constantine the Great," "Labarum," and "Milvian Bridge, Battle of the."

18. For a brief synopsis, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 701–4.

19. See ibid., 346–48, 354–57, 653–57.

20. Of the large body of literature on this subject, see, for example, Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983), 141–49, and Peter Brown, "St Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion," *Journal of Roman Studies* 54 (1964):107–16.

21. See Swift, *Early Fathers,* 106, and, more fully, idem. "St. Ambrose on Violence and War," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 101 (1970): 533–43.

22. See M.-P. Deroux, *Les origines de l'oblature bénédictine,* Les éditions de la Revue Mabillon 1 (Vienne: Abbaye de Saint Martin de Ligugé, 1927).

23. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* rev., trans., and ed. D. Whitelock et al. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 49, s.a. 878.

24. Charles C. Mierow, trans., *The Gothic History of Jordanes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), chap. 25, p. 88.

25. Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks,* trans. L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), 2.29–31, pp. 141–45.

26. Ibid., 2.34, pp. 148–49.

27. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1.25, p. 75.

28. Ibid., 1.26, pp. 77–79.

29. Ibid., 1.32, pp. 112–13. The Latin of the words which I have italicized is "idolorum cultus insequere; fanorum aedificia euerte."

30. Ibid., 1.30, pp. 106–7. Scholars habitually treat the letter to Mellitus (and Augustine) at length while ignoring that to Ethelbert. For a typical instance, see

Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 75–77. One of the few who have discussed the differences is Wiedemann, *Karl der Grosse,* 32n.30.

31. Willibald, "Life of St Boniface," chaps. 5 and 8, in *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1954), 41, 55.

32. Ibid., chap. 6, 45–46. Interestingly, in the numerous letters sent by Pope Gregory II (715–31) and Bishop Daniel of Winchester, Boniface did not receive advice to destroy idols (*The Letters of St Boniface,* trans. E. Emerton [New York: W. W. Norton, 1940], 32–33, 42–56). *After* the incident of the Oak of Jupiter, however, it may be that Pope Gregory III wrote to him in 740 or 741, approving of Boniface's action and urging him to deal in similar fashion with other sacred trees: "Ceterum dilectissime arbores illas, quas incole colunt, monemus, ut succidantur, sicut subvertisti arborem, que Jovis appellabatur, que ab incolis venerabatur" (Klemens Honselmann, "Der Brief Gregors III. an Bonifatius über die Sachsenmission," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 76 [1957]:83–84, reprint in Lammers, *Eingliederung der Sachsen,* 307–8). The authenticity of this letter, however, has long been doubted and continues to be: Franz Flaskamp, "Der Bonifatiusbrief von Herford: Ein angebliches Zeugnis zur Sachsenmission," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 44 (1962): 315–34 (reprint in Lammers, *Eingliederung der Sachsen,* 365–88). In any event, Boniface is not recorded as having been exhorted before the fact by any contemporary prelate to undertake such destructive measures.

33. *Carolingian Chronicles,* 48–49.

34. Ibid., s.a. 743, 744, 747, 753, 758, pp. 38–39, 42.

35. Riché, *The Carolingians,* 103, offers no specific explanation for this choice of target.

36. Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte,* 2:371.

37. W. Kentzler, "Karl des Grossen Sachsenzüge, 772–775," *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte* 11 (1871):88–89.

38. *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae,* ed. E. Dümmler, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolarum tomus III Merowingici et Karolini aevi* (Munich: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1978), 409, no. 120.

39. *Questions on the Heptateuch* 6.10, quoted in Swift, *Early Fathers,* 120. On the matter of the flesh and Christianity, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

40. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History,* II.2, 140–43.