

FAITH AND POLITICS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL SOCIETY:  
CHARLEMAGNE AND THE FRUSTRATING FAILURE  
OF AN ECCLESIOLOGICAL PROJECT

It has been demonstrated extensively that the Carolingian Empire not only visualised the material and organisational powers inherent in early medieval society, but also generated an out-of-the-ordinary political ideology. Considering themselves to be commissioned by God to lead a new Israel into an earthly version of the kingdom of heaven, the Carolingians were intimately aware of the thin margin between everyday politics and the conception of a greater plan for Christianity. Thus, ecclesiology presented itself in a particularly visual form, merging with many aspects of politics and culture.

Among the few extant sources dealing with these objectives are the Capitularia <sup>(1)</sup>. They comprise a vast body of stylistically and

(1) The first and thus far only attempt at a complete edition by Boretius, with a second volume in collaboration with Krause, received much criticism because of its somewhat unsteady critical methods (A. BORETIUS [ed.], *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Legum Sectio II. Capitularia Regum Francorum. Tomus I*, Hannoverae, 1883, and ID. & V. KRAUSE [eds.], *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Legum Sectio II. Capitularia Regum Francorum. Tomus II*, Hannoverae, 1897. In the following footnotes the first volume will be referred to as MGH, I). A first step toward a new edition can be found in Hubert Mordek's impressive tome on the extant manuscripts of the Capitularia, in which texts, discovered since 1897, are reproduced (*Bibliotheca capitularium regum Francorum manuscripta. Überlieferung und Traditionszusammenhang der fränkischen Herrscherelasse*, München, 1995). Major corrections in dating the Capitularia can be found in F. L. GANSHOF, *Wat waren de Capitularia?*, Brussel, 1955, p. 105-121 (where he summarises his previous articles on the matter) and C. DE CLERCQ, *La législation religieuse franque de Clovis à Charlemagne. Étude sur les actes de conciles et les capitulaires, les statuts diocésains et les règles monastiques (507-814)*, Louvain and Paris, 1936, p. 379-381. The thin margin between conciliary canons and royal or imperial legislation has led some historians to hypercritical conclusions (see P.W. FINSTERWALDER, *Quellenkritische Untersuchungen zu den Capitularien Karls des Großen*, in *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 58 [1938], p. 419-434, who dismisses all but six of the texts attributed up to that point to Charlemagne as not originating from the latter's reign. An update on this problem has been presented in C. DE CLERCQ, *o.c.*, p. 157-158 and G. SCHMITZ, *Die Waffe der Fälschung zum*