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Review of *The Dawn of the Middle Ages: The Birth of Western Christianity: Religious Life of the Laity in Carolingian Europe (750-900)*, French, by J. Chelini and P. Riche

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wish that the author had considered in greater detail the interesting question of who were the "very high level" figures who masterminded the deed.

FREDERICK SUPPE, Ball State University

JEAN CHÉLINI, *L'aube du moyen âge: Naissance de la chrétienté occidentale. La vie religieuse des laïcs dans l'Europe carolingienne (750-900)*. Preface by Pierre Riché. Afterword by Georges Duby. Paris: Picard, 1991. Paper. Pp. 548; 15 black-and-white plates, tables. F 350.

Some, who, like this reviewer, work with seventh- and eighth-century texts, may wonder how appropriate the title of this book is. Others may wonder about the appropriateness of the subtitle, *Naissance de la chrétienté occidentale*, since the book does little with intellectual or institutional history. But all will agree that this is a brilliant, well-documented account of the social and spiritual life of Carolingian Europe. While many familiar names such as Charles the Bald and Hincmar of Rheims pass through its pages, the emphasis falls upon the effects of Christianity on the daily life of people of all social classes and groupings.

Chélini considers unity of the empire to have been the fundamental problem facing Charlemagne and his successors. The empire consisted of many diverse ethnic and religious groups, including several who had only recently been brought under Frankish rule. This in turn meant the daily lives of the people were a *mélange* of customs and traditions, many of which contradicted one another. The ensuing tensions were considerable and had the potential to split both state and society. The Carolingian monarchs and aristocracy needed a principle of unity, and Christianity provided it.

Because of its length and scope, this is a demanding book, but it is an effective counterpoise to those histories of the Carolingian period that see Christianity's unifying powers in terms of intellectual life, such as the predestinationist controversy, or political life, such as the capitularies or the Donation of Constantine. Chélini's populist approach demonstrates that Christianity won over the hearts and minds of early-medieval people by dealing with their everyday problems, and as people began to consider the Christian approach to be the preferred one or even the only one, Christianity became the unifying force the emperors were looking for. (Incidentally this is not unrelated to the more specifically political themes; as the Carolingians moved away from the traditional Germanic notions of government to Romanized ones, the widespread acceptance of the "Roman" religion made this departure more acceptable.)

Of necessity, Chélini must often rely upon accounts of Christianity given by the nobility or the higher clergy, but he has mined from those sources a wealth of information. Basically he follows the Carolingian Christian from womb to tomb, starting with baptism and concluding with funeral rites. Along the journey he considers such topics as religious education, chastity, marriage, and the economy of salvation (liturgical and religious practices, sacraments). These researches enable him to delve into topics of lesser interest to the Carolingians but of considerable interest to the modern reader, such as the status of women and of Jews, who are treated with pagans as "les exclus du Peuple Chrétien" (pp. 111-31). We also see how theological questions such as the real presence of Christ in the eucharist affected daily worship (pp. 293-99).

One point that the author drives home regularly is the survival of pagan traditions and customs among the Christianized population. It has long been known that pagan notions affected the celebration of holidays (pp. 353-59), but Chélini demonstrates how persistent were pagan attitudes toward marriage. This was most evident in the changing status of women (pp. 206-16). Their status improved in Christian society largely because

of the Christian veneration of the family. Priests inveighed against such practices as adultery, divorce, and infanticide (pp. 221–40), and since a woman's primary role in both pagan and Christian society was to be a wife (and, presumably, a mother), the increasing respect for the sanctity of familial life and motherhood guaranteed a stronger role for women. No neotraditionalist, Chélini makes it clear that women still suffered considerable inequities in this period (pp. 214–17), but his main point is sound—that by raising the status of women from what it had been in pagan society, Christianity won the allegiance of a sizable portion of the Carolingian population.

One must also credit the author for his balanced judgment, for example, in concluding that belief in purgatory did exist in Carolingian times (pp. 460–62). He lists an extensive bibliography of secondary sources, and he routinely addresses the concerns of other scholars, such as Jacques Le Goff (p. 460), but, in general, his conclusions derive from primary sources. Indeed, this volume offers many points of entry for those wishing to follow the author's lead.

This balanced judgment is evident also in his treatment of popular tales, especially those with miraculous elements. The reader is spared the pseudoliberal embarrassment at the credulity of early-medieval people, who are allowed to be themselves; the reader is also spared the trite reductionism of "explaining" the miraculous. Yet the author is not uncritical of abuses: "Les clercs eux-mêmes donnèrent l'exemple d'un goût excessif pour les reliques" (p. 321).

The great Carolingian effort at Christianization had mixed results. "Les diverses lois nationales barbares subsistèrent dans l'Empire et les royaumes qui en furent issus, même si certaines, comme la loi des Bavarois, avaient été profondément christianisées" (p. 495). "L'indocilité aux leçons de l'Eglise se retrouvait aussi au bas de l'échelle sociale. Vagabonds, pauvresses, pèlerins professionnels et exhibitionnistes, vivaient d'aumônes dans le désordre des mœurs, la violence et les rapines" (p. 498).

But, in the long run, Christianity did win over the populace. These are the opening lines of Chélini's description of "les grandes fêtes": "A l'appel de la cloche, les familles partent vers l'église. Tous se sont lavés et portent leurs habits les plus convenables. Ils entrent en se bousculant dans la nef et s'installent debout sans ordre au fur et à mesure des arrivées. Le sanctuaire est illuminé par des cierges qui éclairent les peintures. Le Christ en majesté trône au-dessus de l'autel et les scènes de sa vie voisinent avec les effigies des saints protecteurs sur les murs de la nef" (p. 503).

As more and more American colleges teach less and less European history, culture, and literature, any knowledge of the Middle Ages will become a relic of the past. This book's length and language make it unsuitable for the American classroom, but one might hope that something like this will eventually be available to our students. In the meantime, this is a fine resource for the scholar, and one deserving wide use.

JOSEPH F. KELLY, John Carroll University

PAOLO CHIESA, *Le versioni latine della "Passio Sanctae Febroniae": Storia, metodo, modelli di due traduzioni agiografiche altomedievali*. (Biblioteca di Medioevo Latino, 2.) Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1990. Paper. Pp. xvii, 400.

This volume offers an admirable and highly instructive study of the early evidence for the West's veneration of the popular Mesopotamian martyr Febronia, who achieved widespread cultus, not only in the Greek and Latin churches, but also among the Syrians, Armenians, Georgians, and Copts. Her story, in much abbreviated form, runs as follows.

To persecute the Christians in Palmyra and Mesopotamia, the emperor Diocletian entrusted a military force to a young man named Lysimachus and to his stern uncle