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The Early Growth of the Medieval Economy of Salvation in Latin Christianity

The last thirty years have seen a wealth of research on death, dying and the dead in Latin Christianity. Some scholars have focused on liturgy, ritual and the cult of the saints. Others have studied cemeteries, graves and epitaphs; relics and relic translations; visions of the afterlife; grants to religious communities for the care of the dead; or the records created to ensure that such care would be delivered, ideally in perpetuity. While research on this body of material has opened up rich and fascinating fields in the cultural history of Europe, it has not been brought together within a unifying framework. That is the object of this essay, which argues that all this varied human activity was bound together through a system of exchanges among the living, the dead, and the court of the living God – a 'medieval economy of salvation'. The multiplicity of connections within this system, the complexity of the exchanges involved, and the fact that the currency included tangible assets, like labour, land, and treasure, add up to something like an economy as we understand it today. But it was also very different, especially in the early and central Middle Ages, before the mercantile culture of Europe took off. Whatever practitioners of the economics of religion might think, the early medieval Church bears only a superficial resemblance to a modern multinational corporation.[1] The medieval economy of salvation deserves to be understood on its own terms as a peculiarly distinctive and dynamic product of the religious and social practices of people who adopted Latin Christianity as their religion but also adapted it to the needs of their families and communities.

Three historical watersheds will frame our discussion. The first, on either side of the year 400, defines the border between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The second watershed more traditionally divides the early from the later Middle Ages, before and after the year 1100. The third is the late medieval/early modern watershed defined by the reformations of the sixteenth century. While working within the historical parameters established by these three models, we will focus on the period between the first and second water-

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1 See Robert B. Ekelund, Robert D. Tollison, Gary Anderson, Robert F. Hébert, and Audrey B. Davidson, *Sacred Trust: The Medieval Church as an Economic Firm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Ekelund, Hébert, and Tollison, *The Marketplace of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006); see also Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'Introduction to the Economics of Religion', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 36 (1998), pp. 1465–96.

Three Watersheds in Latin Christianity

Late Antique	400	Early Medieval
Early Medieval	1100	Later Medieval
Late Medieval	1500	Early Modern

sheds, that is, the early and central Middle Ages, from the fifth century to the twelfth.

We will begin by defining the medieval economy of salvation more closely and briefly sketching its overall history. We will then turn to some recent findings in the history of late antique and early medieval Christianity that shed light on two important questions. First, when did the Latin Church begin to involve itself systematically in death, dying and the care of the dead? And second, when it came to such things, how different was the Church of, say, Alcuin of York from that of Ambrose of Milan? That should give some idea of the growth of the economy of salvation between the fourth and the ninth centuries. Finally, we will present the Benedictine Abbey of Cluny, at its height in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as the culminating expression of the early medieval economy of salvation, even as changing social, theological and economic conditions were beginning to call into question some of the system's most characteristic features.

1 The medieval economy of salvation

The early Church Fathers called God's management of his creation an 'economy'. The defining act of the 'divine economy' was the sacrifice of Jesus, an exchange of suffering and death for reconciliation between the creator and his human creations.[2] Ever since, Christians have been replaying, and extending the benefits of that primal act of exchange through the mass and the other sacraments. The Catholic Church still refers to such secondary manifestations of God's plan of salvation as the 'sacramental economy'.[3] By 'the medieval economy of salvation', I mean an elaboration of such notions and behaviours, peculiar to the Latin Middle Ages, which encompassed the transfer of large numbers of people and large amounts of goods, lands and incomes to religious

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2 M. R. E. Masterman, 'Economy, Divine', *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2nd ed., 15 vols (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2002), V, p. 58.

3 See paragraph 1076 of the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, on-line at http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s1.htm. Accessed October 9, 2010.

communities in exchange for masses, psalms, prayers and alms for the poor. Those goods were then offered to God for the salvation of souls in the afterlife, the souls of the donor and his family in particular. In the early Middle Ages, these exchanges operated within a predominantly gift-based economy, which was less directed toward the accumulation of wealth than the creation of social bonds and thus helped knit individuals and families into larger communities with mutual responsibilities to one another. The medieval economy of salvation was a subset of the larger gift economy. Within a Christian framework, such habits of exchange were increasingly put to the service of acquiring the most important commodity of all, the eternal salvation of one's family, which the gift to mankind from God of his own son made possible.

The growth of the economy of salvation in the early Middle Ages was fuelled by ambiguity in Christian teaching about the state and place of the soul between death and the final resurrection. Scripture was clear about the Last Judgement, but vague about what happened after death. This fostered belief in an interim state, of punishment to be sure, but also of purgation and preparation for paradise. At the same time, Church leaders expressed only minor opposition to the notion that the living could affect the state of souls in the afterlife. To the contrary, they offered ever-more elaborate services for the dead and dying, advertising them through popular accounts of dreams and visions that highlighted the positive effects of post-mortem intercession. Given all this, it should not be surprising that the small-scale agricultural societies of the early Middle Ages, who tended to view their dead as just 'another age group', would be interested in caring for souls after death.[4] Indeed, their demand for services was at least as important a factor in the early growth of the medieval economy of salvation as the supply provided by the clergy. Nevertheless, the economy of salvation remained more or less a clerical phenomenon until the Carolingian Reforms of the eighth and ninth centuries. The three centuries that followed the reigns of Charlemagne and his son, Louis the Pious, however, saw continuous growth in both the number of dead being memorialized by the living and the number of the living whose job it was to see to the welfare of the dead. Among these, the practitioners of reformed Benedictine monasticism were considered the best, and the monks of Cluny the best of all. Founded in 910, the Abbey of Cluny was heir to all of the impulses of the Carolingian reforms. And the early medieval economy of

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[4] Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall identify Natalie Zemon Davis as the ultimate source of this insight in recent scholarship; see *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* ed. by Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 6.

The Early to Later Medieval Watershed

950	1100	1250
Gift economy		Profit economy
Rural settings		Urban settings
Monks		Friars
Landlords		Merchants
Customary law		Codified law
Localized dissent		Organized dissent

salvation was the engine of Cluny's phenomenal growth, which peaked right at the watershed between the early and the later Middle Ages.

It is worth pausing to take a close look at that watershed. On the early medieval side, the economy of salvation was characterized by the circulation of wealth in the form of gifts made to rural monasteries. In the later Middle Ages, the increase in the number and size of towns and cities, and in trade and cash transactions, led to the disappearance of many features of the early medieval economy of salvation and the introduction of new ones. Grants of land and children to rural monasteries more or less disappeared, for example, as did the pre-eminence of monks in the exchange of spiritual goods. New agents, like the friars, brought the goods of the sacramental economy, including the new currency of indulgences, to the growing urban masses. Not everyone went along, though. Beginning around the year 1000, dissident voices questioned and even opposed some of the key features of the economy of salvation. In spite of being declared heretical, such complaints were regularly reiterated right up until the sixteenth century, when Protestants rejected almost every one of the essential features of the economy of salvation, from the miraculous nature of the Eucharist to the very notion that the living could do anything to affect the condition of souls in the afterlife.

2 Death, dying and the dead in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages

Turning back from the last of the three watersheds to the first, we can begin to investigate the early growth of the medieval economy in more detail. In a provocative study of Christian responses to death in Late Antiquity, published in 1994, Éric Rebillard argued that a strongly optimistic attitude toward death, which prevailed in the fourth century, was replaced in the fifth century by a

The Late Antique to Early Medieval Watershed

250	400	550
Baptismal theology		Penitential theology
Emphasis on salvation		Emphasis on sin
Death not to be feared		Death to be feared
Few if any death rituals		Increasing ritualization

profound pessimism.[5] Representative bishops of the earlier period, like Ambrose of Milan, urged their congregations to regard life as a kind of death and death as birth into real life. 'Death is not a terrible thing', Ambrose preached, 'only one's attitude toward death'.[6] Baptized Christians in good standing need have no fear of death, for their salvation was assured. According to Ambrose, only souls in despair would fear death. To Augustine, however, only the arrogant would fail to do so. Donatists, Manichees and Pelagians all believed that their purity or rigour guaranteed their salvation. So as not to fall into their errors, it was necessary to remember man's basic sinfulness and absolute dependence on God's inscrutable judgement and mercy, especially at death. According to Rebillard, clerical interest in the pastoral needs of the dying and the dead was a response to this fundamental shift in attitudes.[7]

Rebillard's work supports a growing consensus among scholars of Late Antiquity that the generations immediately before and after the year 400 mark a watershed in the history of Latin Christianity, which separates a religion centred on baptism and assured salvation from one centred on penance, sin and the uncertainty of heavenly grace.[8] Their conclusions are in accord with those of medievalists who have traced the surprisingly slow growth of Christian responses to death, dying and the dead over the course of the early Middle

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5 Éric Rebillard, *'In hora mortis': Évolution de la pastorale chrétienne de la mort au IVe et Ve siècles*, Bibliothèque des Écoles Français de Athènes et Rome, 283 (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994).

6 Ambrose, *De bono mortis*: PL 14.555A: *Non mors ipsa terribilis est, sed opinio de morte*. Although Rebillard does not look back beyond Ambrose, the last great representative of this strain, Cyprian's words to the persecuted in the third century certainly laid the groundwork for Ambrose's imperial triumphalism in the fourth. See, for example, Cyprian's *Liber de laude martyrii* (PL 4.788–804).

7 Rebillard, *'In hora mortis'*, pp. 169–224.

8 Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) is the touchstone, but see also the works of Ramsay McMullen, Peter Brown, Philip Rousseau, Kate Cooper, and others.

Ages.[9] They remain, however, at odds with two long-standing assumptions about ancient Christianity: that the Church had its own cemeteries as early as the end of the second century and that the systematic burial of the poor was the motivating factor behind their creation.

3 Catacombs and cemeteries

Since the groundbreaking work of the Catholic archaeologist Giovanni-Battista De Rossi in the nineteenth century, the Roman Church has believed that the so-called Catacomb of Callixtus was an exclusively Christian cemetery and that the Roman catacombs in general were the graveyards of Roman Christians. Recent philological research by Éric Rebillard, however, has shown that neither the Greek word *koimeterion* nor its Latin equivalent *coemeterium* denoted a communal burial ground. To the contrary, they referred to individual tombs, and at most their immediate surroundings.[10] There was, in fact, no ancient term at all for a cemetery in the modern sense of the word. Nor were there any 'cities of the dead'. The only ancient occurrence of the Greek word *necropolis* is a reference in Strabo's *Geography* to a suburb of Alexandria, a place with 'many gardens and graves and halting-places fitted out for the embalming of corpses', whose tombs and gardens were no doubt, like those everywhere else in the Roman Empire, privately owned.[11] Under this reading, the famous text assigning the future pope Callixtus 'to the cemetery', the *locus classicus* for the argument that the Church had its own cemeteries by the end of the second century, must have meant simply that he was to oversee the initial outfitting

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9 See, for example, Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*: *The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Bonnie Effros, *Caring for Body and Soul: Burial and the Afterlife in the Merovingian World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

10 Éric Rebillard, '*Koimeterion* et *coemeterium*: Tombe, tombe sainte, nécropole', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Antiquité*, 105 (1993), pp. 975–1001; 'Les *areae* carthaginoises (Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 3,1): cimetières communautaires ou enclos funéraires de chrétiens?', in *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Antiquité*, 108 (1996), pp. 175–89; 'L'Église de Rome et le développement des catacombes: à propos de l'origine des cimetières chrétiens', in *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Antiquité*, 109 (1997), pp. 741–63.

11 *The Geography of Strabo*, Eng. trans. by Horace Leonard Jones, 8 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917–32), 17. 1. 10. On private ownership of graves in ancient Rome, see J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 73–100.

of the so-called 'Crypt of the Popes', a single room owned by the Church in a rapidly growing catacomb on the Appian Way.[12]

This conclusion is supported by recent research on pre- and non-Christian burials in Rome by the archaeologist John Bodel, who argues that catacombs evolved out of late Republican and early Imperial *columbaria* and, like *columbaria*, served the whole population of the city. As inhumation replaced cremation as the dominant means of disposing of of dead bodies over the course of the second century, the characteristic niches of the *columbaria*, which had received the ashes of the dead, were enlarged to hold whole bodies, and the *columbaria* themselves, built both above and below ground, and sometimes both at once, were replaced by underground galleries carved directly into the easily-worked volcanic tufa around the city. Bodel's argument is based not just on archaeology, but also on demographics. If the catacombs were exclusively Christian, he asked, then where were non-Christians buried in the third and fourth centuries, when the catacombs were in regular use? There is no avoiding the conclusion. Since the catacombs comprise the largest repository of burial evidence for the period, they must have served the whole population of the city.[13] Except for 'the crypt of the popes', there were no places reserved exclusively for the burial of Christians overseen by the Roman Church. That is why we find Christians and pagans, and perhaps even Jews, sharing the same small catacomb on the Via Latina as late as the second half of the fourth century.[14] Families purchased individual rooms and had artists, no doubt supplied by the owner of the catacomb, decorate them with images from the appropriate religious tradition.

4 The poor and the dead

As mentioned above, the persistence of the assumptions that the early Church had its own cemeteries and that the catacombs were exclusively Christian has

12 Rebillard, '*Koimeterion* et *coemeterium*', and idem, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, Eng. trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings and Jeanine Routier-Pucci, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 2–7.
13 John Bodel, 'From *Columbaria* to Catacombs: Collective Burial in Pagan and Christian Rome', in *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context: Studies of Roman, Jewish and Christian Burials*, ed. by Laurie Brink, O. P. and Deborah Green (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 177–242.
14 On the Via Latina catacomb, see Fabrizio Mancinelli, *The Catacombs of Rome and the Origins of Christianity* (Florence: Scala, c. 1981), pp. 33–38; and J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978).

depended in part on the belief that the Church developed a commitment to burying the poor early on in its history. Once again, however, Rebillard has convincingly argued that, while churchmen encouraged individual Christians and even Christian congregations to bury and pray for indigents and strangers, it was not because of a general commitment to burying the poor, but because strangers and the indigent did not have families who could see to those duties themselves.[15] This distinction is clear even in the works of St. Augustine. Behind the pronouncements in his letters and his seminal treatise *On the Care to be Given to the Dead* lies the unstated assumption that individual families would see to the burial and commemoration of their dead, just as they saw to other intimate matters, like birth, marriage, illness and death itself, none of which were overseen by priests.[16] Augustine prohibited Christians from eating and drinking at the tombs of the martyrs, for example, but allowed them to do so at their ancestral tombs, as long as they did not get drunk and engage in immoral behaviour, although he famously recommended that the money spent on such commemorative feasts be redirected to the poor as a way of bringing solace to the dead.[17]

Augustine's adult life spanned the watershed between late antique and early medieval Christianity, however, and, while he may not have urged the general burial of the poor, he took up their cause, even if primarily as a strategic move in a struggle over who would direct the cultural forces of the later empire, as Peter Brown has argued.[18] In Brown's argument, championing the cause of the poor in a world of ever increasing distance between the humble and the mighty gave bishops of the later fourth and early fifth centuries both a populist base and an excuse for their own rapidly accumulating wealth. Augustine's suggestion, in a letter written around the year 392, that Christians give the food and drink traditionally offered to the dead as alms was thus

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15 Éric Rebillard, 'Église et sépulture dans l'Antiquité tardive', *Annales HSS*, 54 (1999), pp. 1027–46; 'Les formes de l'assistance funéraire dans l'Empire romain et leur évolution dans l'Antiquité tardive', *Antiquité Tardive*, 7 (1999), pp. 269–82.

16 Frederick S. Paxton, 'Birth and Death', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity* vol. 3, *600–1100*, ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 386–87, 390.

17 *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi Epistulae*, ed. by Alois Goldbacher, 5 vols (Vienna: F. Temsky, 1895–1923), I, pp. 58–59; see also Rebillard, '*Nec deserere memorias suorum*: Augustine and the Family-based Commemoration of the Dead', *Augustinian Studies*, 36 (2005), pp. 99–111; and idem, 'The Cult of the Dead in Late Antiquity: Towards a New Definition of the Relation between the Living and the Dead', in *Acta ad Archaeologicum et Artium Historiam Perintentia*, 17 (2003), pp. 47–55.

18 Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

easily assimilated to the notion that the Church was the natural broker for such charitable acts.

My own research has shown how, fifty years later, the connection between the poor and the Church had tightened to the point that a church council at Vaison, in southeastern Gaul, presided over by Bishop Hilary of Arles, excommunicated anyone refusing to turn over deathbed offerings to the church 'as if they were murderers of the poor'.[19] The canon of Vaison gives evidence of two important developments. On the one hand, the dying were regularly making offerings to the Church to distribute to the poor. On the other hand, survivors were not always making good on their dead relative's vows. Even bishops could be at fault. Hilary praised his predecessor Honoratus, who succeeded a bishop who clung too tightly to the offerings of the dead (*oblationes defunctorum*), for assigning 'at last to worthy uses that which had been for so long piled up uselessly', so that 'they once again experienced the refreshments of the offerings that they had given'.[20]

These texts reveal the initial construction of one of the core networks of the medieval economy of salvation. Links were forged between offerings made in the name of the dead and the ecclesiastical authorities who would see to it that they brought refreshment to the poor, and, by extension, to the dead themselves. A bad bishop could impede the flow of offerings and the solace they brought and a good one could restore the system to its proper functioning. But something else was going on as well. By the early sixth century, Bishop Caesarius of Arles was equating gifts to the church with alms to the poor by urging his congregations to direct their charity as much to monks and nuns as to their impoverished neighbours. Although the poverty of monks was voluntary, they could still claim need. Moreover, because they were 'dead to the world', they could receive both alms for the poor and offerings for the dead.

Together, these new findings on burial, cemeteries and the relationship between the poor and the dead sweep away the last vestiges of the notion that Christian leaders were quick to translate the Gospel into new responses to death, burial and commemoration. They also allow us to add two more lines to the chart on the watershed of the year 400.

In spite of the rhetoric of the imperial Church, there was no concerted push in Late Antiquity to bring all forms of social behaviour within a thor-

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19 Frederick S. Paxton, '*Oblationes defunctorum*: The Poor and the Dead in Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West', in *Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference of Medieval Canon Law*, ed. by Kenneth Pennington, Stanley Chodorow and Keith H. Kendall (Città del Vaticano: Bioblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2001), pp. 245–67.
20 *Sermo de uita s. Honorati*, PL 50:1265.

The Late Antique to Early Medieval Watershed Revisited

250	400	550
Baptismal theology		Penitential theology
Emphasis on salvation		Emphasis on sin
Death not to be feared		Death to be feared
Few if any death rituals		Increasing ritualization
No Christian cemeteries		Exclusively Christian cemeteries
Little attention to the poor		The poor linked ritually to the dead

oughly Christian framework. That was the goal of the medieval, not the ancient Church, as medievalists have long suspected. And scholars of Late Antiquity have done a real service in revealing why it took so long. That said, the divisions on the above chart may not be as clear-cut as they appear. In particular, if we extend the investigation beyond the centuries immediately before and after the watershed, and direct our attention to the top three pairs on the chart, the picture becomes more complicated. This is best seen by considering the issue of Christian attitudes toward death itself.

5 Triumphant death and timor mortis

Anyone coming to the history of death and dying in medieval Europe through the work of Philippe Ariès would expect to see little difference in Christian attitudes toward death between the years 200 and 1100. The attitude toward death among early medieval people was, in fact, as old as humanity itself. Death was 'tame' or 'familiar'.[21] People did not fear death, but accepted it as a natural part of life. The death of any particular person was subsumed into the larger contexts of family, community, even species, and death and dying were met with simple rituals and emotional restraint. Change came only in the twelfth century when clerics started to highlight the significance of each individual's death. Fear and tension grew around the deathbed only in the later Middle Ages, as God's judgement came to seem more personal and more immediate.

Subsequent research has shown how oversimplified this picture is. There was no primordial attitude toward death as familiar and tame in the early

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21 Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Eng. trans. by Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); idem, *The Hour of our Death*, Eng. trans. by Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981), pp. 5–92.

Middle Ages. This was implicit in my work on early medieval death rituals, but it is worth making more explicit when even as sensitive a scholar as Caroline Walker Bynum could write that 'As the great historian Philippe Ariès has taught us, the medieval stress on personal death, 'my death', developed within an attitude that was far older, even pre-Christian: a sense that death is familiar and near, an expected part of life, an experience of which persons are often forewarned.'[22] Ariès' literary exemplars of 'tame' death, like the hero of *The Song of Roland*, died as they did not because their authors were in touch with age-old rhythms of pre-Christian culture, but because they had inherited a complex of ritualized gestures and utterances assembled over the preceding thousand years by Christian clerics, monks and nuns. That is supported by the research on late ancient Christianity reviewed above. One question remains, though. Did a brooding sense of sin and fear of death dominate Latin Christianity from the fifth century onwards? Peter Brown has explicitly taken up where Rebillard left off. Comparing early medieval views on sin with those held by the ancient Church and by Greek Christianity and Islam, he found that, by the seventh century, the Latin West had gone its own way, towards what he has called a 'peccatization of the world', defined by 'the reduction of all experience, of history, politics and the social order quite as much as the destiny of individual souls, to two universal explanatory principles, sin and repentance'.[23] Such conclusions might lead us to think that early medieval Christians were doomed to 'a *longue durée* of terror' in the face of death and the afterlife.[24] Were they?

In part, the answer lies in directions already noted by both Rebillard and Brown. That is, for every turn toward fear and the awareness of sin, there was a corresponding turn toward their amelioration. As the hour of death became more frightening, the Church offered more rituals to reassure and comfort the dying. As recognition of sin and the need for penance grew, so did the availability, variety, and precision of forms of confession and satisfaction, both in this life and the next. In fact, one could regard the early growth of the medieval economy of salvation as a sustained reaction to the new attitudes introduced by Augustine in the early fifth century. But something else happened

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22 'Death and Resurrection in the Middle Ages: Some Modern Implications', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 142 (1998), pp. 589–96, at p. 590.

23 Peter Brown, 'Vers la naissance du purgatoire. Amnistie et pénitence dans le christianisme occidental de l'Antiquité tardive au haut Moyen Âge', *Annales HSS*, 52 (1997), pp. 1247–61, p. 1260. But cf. Brown's, *The Rise of Western Christendom* 1st edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 148–66; and 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 248–66.

24 Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christendom, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 12.

as well. Remnants of ancient attitudes remained scattered about the textual and mental landscape. They had never really disappeared, and could be reintroduced into the discourse around death and dying when conditions changed. This occurred in two important ways in the ninth century.

The first was through the introduction of a death ritual known as the Roman *ordo in agenda defunctorum* into the growing body of rituals around death and burial in the Carolingian world. I have previously discussed the details of how this occurred, so will not go into them here, but I do want to make one argument.[25] I followed Damien Sicard in dating the Roman death ritual to the fifth century, if not earlier, but Rebillard rejected its antiquity on the grounds that any ritual with deathbed communion must postdate the changes he identified on the latter side of the late antique/early medieval watershed.[26] In so far as he meant communion as viaticum, the argument is strong. Rites of deathbed penance did become more regular and widespread between 500 and 700, as public penance diminished in use and private confession began to spread. Since the viaticum was always embedded in deathbed penance rituals, its use spread along with them. Such rituals may have emerged and spread because bishops saw it as their pastoral duty to extend aid to dying sinners, but ordinary Christians may have been equally responsible by demanding something to mitigate the fears that resulted from the new attitudes towards death being demonstrated by the clergy. Whatever the case, Rebillard is right that this sort of deathbed communion became more common in the early Middle Ages.

If we go along with him completely, however, we are faced with a dilemma. As Sicard first revealed, the Roman *ordo* is permeated with themes of optimism and confidence in salvation. It is a ritual of triumph over death and entry into the heavenly Jerusalem that is in perfect accord with Rebillard's description of the dominant attitude toward death before the fifth century. That is particularly true of its reference to deathbed communion, which is not referred to as a 'viaticum' but as an agent in the resurrection of the dead and an 'advocate and helper' at the court of the last judgement.[27]

Even if Rebillard is right – if the Roman *ordo* was written after the fifth century, at Rome or elsewhere – it would then attest to a counter-current to

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25 Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, pp. 37–44.

26 Cf. Damien Sicard, *La liturgie de la mort dans l'église latine des origines à la réforme carolingienne*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen, 63 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), pp. 1–257; and Rebillard, *In hora mortis*, pp. 226–27.

27 I myself confused the issue by referring to the deathbed communion in the Roman *ordo* as 'viaticum' (*Christianizing Death*, pp. 38–46) and remain grateful to Rebillard for making me aware of my mistake.

the one that is supposed to distinguish the spirituality of the early-medieval Latin Church from its late-ancient predecessor. In either case, the frame seems too stiff. Whether or not it is an authentic product of the period before the watershed (and given the well-known conservatism of the Roman Church, it is possible that the *ordo* was preserved, even if not practised, from the fourth to the eighth century), once it arrived in Francia, it was positioned to contribute a triumphant strain to the fully articulated ritual process that became the medieval Latin Christian death ritual by the later ninth century.

This happened because the Carolingian Church, however much it focused on sin and the need for penance, had a place for optimism in the face of death. While Rebillard did not make the claim, I would be willing to argue that the tone of those late fourth-century sermons on death and dying arose in part from the triumphant mood of a Church that had gone from a persecuted sect to one of the central institutions of the Roman Empire in just three generations. The Carolingians were in a similar position. The Franks were a 'New Israel' and Charles was a new King David. The Frankish Church marched from victory to victory along with the Frankish empire. It should not surprise us that the return of imperial ideologies brought with it the return of triumphant attitudes towards death.

The other way such attitudes entered the discourse around death and dying under the Carolingians is through the same sort of literature that Rebillard used so compellingly in his analysis of the late antique/early medieval watershed: scriptural commentary and exegetical sermons. The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews was not accepted as canonical in the West until the fifth century, so there are no Latin patristic commentaries on it. John Chrysostom, however, wrote a series of 34 Greek homilies on Hebrews, which were translated into Latin in the sixth century.[28] Because of its Greek origin and the late date of its translation, Rebillard did not discuss this text, but it represents the same attitude toward death apparent in the sermons of Chrysostom's north Italian contemporaries such as Ambrose of Milan.

No one seems to have done much with the Latin translation of Chrysostom's homilies until Alcuin of York (d. 804) used them as the basis for his own commentary on Paul's letter to the Hebrews.[29] Commenting on chapter 2, verses 14 and 15, where Paul discusses Jesus's deliverance of those whom the devil kept in bondage through fear of death, Chrysostom had asked his audi-

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28 The original text of the 34 Homilies and its Latin translations is in the *Patrologia Graeca* 63.9–456; there is an English translation in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York, 1899; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. XIV, 365–522.
29 *Vita Alcuini*, PL 100.103C; the commentary is in PL 100.1031–84.

ence: 'Why are you afraid when that which you fear has been already destroyed? Death is no longer terrible, but trodden underfoot …' Alcuin departed from his model at just this point, writing instead:

> Death is no longer terrible, but desirable, like the end of labour and the beginning of rest. Why does Paul talk of 'those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage'? Because they had been servants of death; because they feared death. They had not yet been released from fear of death, by whose laws they were held. Now, however, the saints, who have passed through the struggle and conquered death, laugh at it, as they pass into the kingdom.[30]

Alcuin's treatment goes well beyond Chrysostom's in its triumphant acclamation of Christ's salvation. He does not pretend that death itself is easy, it is still an *agon,* a struggle, but he assures his readers that death's power is laughable to those who have passed beyond it. When Alcuin's pupil, Hrabanus Maurus, made his own commentary on Hebrews, he retained more of Chrysostom's original text, at least in some places, but followed Alcuin exactly here.[31] Hrabanus' student Walafrid Strabo did not write a commentary on Hebrews, but there may be an echo of Alcuin in his gloss to the end of verse 3 of Psalm 131, 'I will not enter my house or get into my bed' when he notes that 'to the right of the Father, where the bed is, there is rest and the end of labours'.[32]

Alcuin also addressed the question raised by Christ's agony in the Garden, which had been so important to patristic discussions of the fear of death.[33] In his commentary on Hebrews 5, verse 7, 'In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death', Alcuin asserted that Paul did not mean that Christ feared death. His prayers and supplications were poured out not from fear of death but for our salvation.[34] Hrabanus once again followed Alcuin exactly, as did Sedulius Scottus, a little later in the ninth century.[35]

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30 PL 100.1042BC (Alcuin's additions are in boldface): Quare tremitis, quare timetis eam quae jam condemnata est? Jam terribilis non est, sed optabilis, quasi laborum finis et requiei initium. Cur ait: *Timore mortis per totam vitam obnoxii erant servituti*? Servi quidem omnes fuerant mortis, quia mortem timebant; necdum erant soluti a timore mortis, cujus legibus tenebantur. Nunc itaque sancti derident eam, qui agone transacto et morte devicta ad regnum transituri sunt; cf. PG 63.265–66.

31 PL 112.711–752.

32 PL 113.1050D: ascendero etc., ad dexterum Patris, ubi lectus, id est requies et finis laborum. In the tenth century, Atto of Vercelli once again copied Alcuin: PL 134.727–834.

33 Rebillard, *In hora mortis*, pp. 70–78.

34 PL 100.1054D: Beatus Paulus hic dicit preces eum et supplicationes fundere, non timore mortis, sed nostrae causa salutis.

35 Cf. PL 112.743D–744A; and PL 103.258B: *Et lacrymis*. Pro nostra salute, non timore mortis profusis.

While Latin Christians may have emphasized sin or salvation at particular times and places, over the long term they avoided too much emphasis on the one, because it could lead to despair, or the other, because it could lessen the importance of divine judgement and individual responsibility. To argue that death was not feared for the first 400 or so years of Christian history is, in the end, as misleading as to the argument that fear of death dominated the medieval mind. On the one hand, the ancient Church hardly ignored sin or fear of judgement. The penitential system that emerged in the second and third centuries was so strict that it had to be scrapped once the majority of the population converted. On the other hand, while fifth-century clerics may have put the accent on sin in a way earlier Christians had not, they nevertheless joined in a chorus whose themes had already been laid down. The triumphant optimism of the imperial Church may indeed have been followed by a period where the stress shifted to pessimism. During the Carolingian period, however, a new balance was struck, which fostered the continued growth of the medieval economy of salvation.

6 The community of the living and the dead

The reception and spread of triumphant attitudes toward death is not the only example of a countervailing response to the heightened sense of sin and uncertainty identified by historians of the watershed between the late antique and early medieval Church in the Latin West. The most important was the rise of the cult of the saints, who acted as powerful, and powerfully present, patrons of individuals and families, both natural and monastic. The resistance of saints' relics to decomposition and their power to cure the sick acted both as proof of the resurrection and as a powerful antidote to the deeply human fear of disintegration in the face of death.[36] The cult of the saints was also responsible for the dissolution of the strict boundaries that had always divided the living and the dead in Mediterranean antiquity, and their eventual coming together as one community of the faithful both in heaven and on earth. In the ancient Mediterranean world, burials were prohibited within city walls, which led to a characteristic feature of the landscape, where graves and catacombs lined the roads to and from the city, a situation that persisted right to the end of the imperial period. In the newly Christianized and predominantly rural lands of the north, relics of saints and the desire for their patronage attracted

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36 Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 59–114.

the bodies of the dead to the churches and churchyard cemeteries of the emerging parish system. First in the form of saints' relics, and then later in the form of the bodies of those who wished to be buried near them, the dead slowly but surely came to rest in the midst of villages, towns and cities. Essentially complete by the year 1100, this process caused a clean break with antiquity and reconfigured the landscape of Christendom. From that time on, the dead resided at the heart of even the most urban of communities.

The space of Christian society, however, only encompassed those who lived and died in good standing. Burials were organized according to a moral scale, with the holiest of the dead at the centre and others around them in proportion to their own claims to holiness: saints, bishops, abbots, monks, and pious (and wealthy) lay men and women.[37] Those not in good standing, like suicides, murderers, the excommunicated, and heretics, were relegated to unconsecrated ground away from both living and dead Christians. Research on Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, for example, has revealed the widespread presence of execution sites along parish boundaries, often in conjunction with ancient barrows.[38]

Once the dead were buried, attention turned to commemorative practices that were designed to usher their souls into the community of the blessed in paradise. From the seventh century onwards, under the influence of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, whose fourth book detailed the benefits of the mass to souls in the afterlife, monk-priests and clerics began to participate directly in the economy of salvation by offering private masses for the dead. They also developed more commemorative rituals for members of their religious *familiae*, lasting for seven and thirty days after a death, and yearly on anniversaries, which became characteristic features of medieval monastic commemorations.[39] Then, around 761, a group of Carolingian churchmen officially committed themselves to mutual commemoration after death, creating the first formal confraternity of prayer. Not long afterwards, monastic congregations began to make similar arrangements with other houses, and in 805, a Bavarian council included alms for the poor among their contractual obligations, a move that

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37 Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 113–32.

38 Andrew Reynolds, 'The Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Execution Sites and Cemeteries', in *Death and Burial in Medieval Europe: Papers of the 'Medieval Europe Brugge 1997' Conference*, vol. 2, ed. by Guy de Boe and Frans Verhaege, IAP rapporten, 2 (Brugge: Zellik, 1997), pp. 33–41.

39 E. Freistedt, *Altchristliche Totengedächtnistage und ihre Beziehung zum Jenseitsglauben und Totenkultus der Antike*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen, 24 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1928). pp. 4–35; McLaughlin, *Consorting*, pp. 50–54.

brought the poor into the centre of the early medieval economy of salvation.[40] Over the course of the following three centuries, Benedictine houses of men and women made the commemoration of the dead, and the care of the poor in their name, central aspects of their communal lives. The poor remained as anonymous, ubiquitous, and oppressed as they had ever been, of course. They were unlikely to be remembered as individuals or prayed for after their own deaths, except in the most general way. But they were not entirely forgotten. And their inclusion in the economy of salvation had real results. Ulrich of Cluny reported that in the late eleventh century as many as 17,000 paupers received meals each year at the great Burgundian abbey in the name of the dead.[41] There is also good evidence that the standard of living of the men and women who worked the estates of the Cluniacs in the eleventh century was as high as that of the monks themselves.[42]

Carolingian monks also introduced the regular performance of the office of the dead and began to allow laymen and women to take vows at the end of life, so as to die in the monastic infirmary, be buried in the community's cemetery, and benefit from proximity to those who spent their days and night praying for the faithful departed. Finally, they set down the names of those for whom they owed masses, prayers and alms in new sorts of books, known as *libri vitae* or *libri memoriales*, some of which grew to include as many as 40,000 entries by the twelfth century.[43] They may have acted as much out of anxiety as out of confidence in the face of death, but, whatever their motivations, their actions, like the actions of the saints, bound together the community of the living and the dead in an increasingly complex exchange of material and spiritual goods.

7 Cluny and the early medieval economy of salvation

The Benedictine monastery of Cluny was the most perfect expression of the early medieval economy of salvation. This is apparent even in its foundation charter. Duke William I of Aquitaine (875–918), Cluny's founder, was the

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40 MGH LL 3 *Concilia* 2.233.

41 PL 149.753.

42 Joachim Wollasch, *Cluny 'Licht der Welt': Aufstieg und Niedergang der klösterlichen Gemeinschaft* (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 1996), pp. 113–19.

43 Nicholas Huyghebaert and Jean-Loup Lemaître, *Les documents nécrologiques*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1972).

grandson of the extraordinary Dhuoda, whose famous manual for her eldest son (William's uncle) testifies to the importance of prayer for the dead among the Carolingian aristocracy in the mid-ninth century.[44] William may never have seen Dhuoda's book, but he certainly shared its central conceptions, the most important of which was the obligation to pray for those who gave life and land. William must also have shared in the conceptions behind the many visions of the afterlife that circulated in his lifetime. Not long before he founded Cluny, for example, the Carolingian emperor Charles the Fat was reported to have had a dream vision of the afterlife, where he met his father, Louis the German, standing in a boiling cask up to his thighs. Louis said to him, 'If you, and my faithful bishops and abbots, and the whole ecclesiastical order will quickly assist me with Masses, prayers and psalms, and alms and vigils, I will shortly be released from the punishment of the boiling water'.[45] William of Aquitaine's charter for Cluny was a hedge against a similar fate.[46]

As the charter tells us, after considering the biblical proverb that 'the riches of a man are the redemption of his soul', William decided both that he should 'reserve' some of his wealth for that purpose and that there was no better use for it than by 'making friends with God's poor' – by whom he meant reformed monks. Although the property being granted represented only 'a bit' (*aliquantulum*) of the duke's vast resources, it was enough to provide the new community with a solid foundation in the region's agricultural economy. With the means of life so provided, the monks were to fill the church at Cluny with 'prayers, petitions and exhortations' to help William obtain 'the reward of the righteous'. They were also directed to pray for William's king, parents, wife, family, faithful servants, and all right-believing Christians; and to engage daily in 'works of mercy toward the poor, the needy, strangers and pilgrims'.

The transactional character of the foundation charter of Cluny is no accident. The transfer of property and power in return for spiritual services it

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44 Dhuoda, *Handbook for William: A Carolingian Woman's Counsel for Her Son*, translated and with an introduction by Carol Neel (Lincoln, Nebraska: The University of Nebraska Press, 1991); reprinted with an Afterword by Carol Neel (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

45 Eileen Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell* (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 131–32; cf. Paul Edward Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 233–37.

46 The charter is in A. Bruel, *Recueil des chartes de l'abbaye de Cluny* (Paris, 1876; repr. Impr. Nationale, 1974), pp. 124–28 (no. 112); and H. Atsma and J. Vezin, with the collaboration of S. Barret, *Les plus anciens documents originaux de l'abbaye de Cluny*, vol. 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), pp. 33–42 (no. 4). There is an English translation in Patrick Geary, *Readings in Medieval History*, 2nd ed. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1997), pp. 304–6. Its dating clause is ambiguous, but it was signed on September 11 in either 909 or 910.

records derives from the combined dynamics of the early medieval gift economy and the economy of salvation. The first assured that most exchanges involved reciprocal obligations of a personal nature, and the second insisted that the transfer of wealth to the poor in this world (both monks, who chose their poverty, and the involuntary poor, to whom the monks were to provide food and other forms of care) was the primary means of bringing aid to souls in the afterlife.

For all its clarity over the importance of prayer and almsgiving for the dead at Cluny, the foundation charter makes no mention of rituals around death itself or when and how often the monks were to perform the intercessory activities they owed to William. Moreover, since no liturgical sources survive from the first century of Cluny's existence, there is no way to know. It is safe to assume, however, that members of the community were prepared for death through anointing with oil, deathbed confession and communion as viaticum, since those were standard features of later ninth- and tenth-century monastic death rituals in the Carolingian realms.[47] It is also likely that the early Cluniacs commemorated their dead brothers and lay benefactors with alms, prayers and psalms on the anniversary of their deaths and, in a more general way, at regular masses for the dead and at the offices of vespers, matins and lauds of the dead.[48]

The earliest specific information on death rituals at Cluny comes from the mid-eleventh-century *Liber tramitis*, an Italian version of the customs of Cluny under Abbot Odilo (994–1049). Comparison of the *Liber tramitis* with the later customaries of Ulrich and Bernard of Cluny suggests that, around the year 1000, the Cluniacs began a concentrated and long-term intensification of their commitment to the care of the dying and the dead, which produced their own highly distinctive death rituals and brought them to the height of their fame as intercessors for suffering souls.[49] Sometime in the 1020s, Odilo reconfirmed

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47 Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, pp. 169–200.

48 For a continental example of a tenth-century monastic death ritual, see Julian Montgomery Hendrix, 'Liturgy for the Dead and the Confraternity of Reichenau and St. Gall, 800–950', doctoral dissertation, King's College Cambridge, 2007; for the British Isles, see *Regularis concordia Anglicae nationis*, ed. by Thomas Symons and Sigrid Spath, CCM 7.3 (Siegburg: Schmitt, 1984), pp. 69–14; and *Aelfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, ed. and trans. Christopher A. Jones, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 24 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

49 *Liber tramitis aevi Odilonis abbatis*, ed. Peter Dinter (Siegburg: Schmitt, 1980); Frederick S. Paxton, 'Death by Customary at Eleventh-Century Cluny', in *From Dead of Night to End of Day: The Medieval Customs of Cluny/Du cœur de la nuit à la fin du jour: Les coutumes clunisiennes au Moyen Âge*, ed. by Susan Boynton & Isabelle Cochelin, Disciplina monastica, 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 297–318; and Paxton, *The Death Ritual at Cluny in the Central Middle Ages*, *Disciplina monastica*, 9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

and extended Cluny's responsibility for the salvation of all Christians when he established the Feast of All Souls (November 2). After his death, hagiographical accounts advertised his responsibility for initiating the feast and the success of his monks in aiding suffering souls with their prayers, masses, and care of the poor.[50] A monastic chronicler of the period wrote how masses for the dead at Cluny could literally snatch souls from the jaws of the demons below.[51] Under Odilo and his three successors, the abbey of Cluny received the greatest number of gifts, and buried and commemorated the most monks and laity, of any church in Christendom.[52]

When the early growth of the medieval economy of salvation peaked, like Cluny itself, in the later eleventh and twelfth centuries, the social, institutional and cultural changes that mark the watershed between the early and later Middle Ages were already calling into question some of its essential features. Around the year 1000, just as the Cluniac movement was hitting its stride, voices began to be raised in the Latin West against the power of priests and the cult of the saints.[53] By the later eleventh and early twelfth century, critics had begun to reject the whole notion that the living could bring succour to the dead. Henry of Le Mans allegedly taught that 'No good work helps the dead, for as soon as men die they either are utterly damned or are saved,' and Peter of Bruys scorned 'the sacrificial offerings, prayers, charities, and the rest of the good works done by the faithful who live, on behalf of the faithful who are dead.'[54] The tide was even turning within the Benedictine tradition itself. The Cluniac abbot Peter the Venerable (1122–56) had to respond not just to the relentless internal logic of the medieval economy of salvation by limiting its growth, but also to Cistercian criticisms of the use of gold and other luxury objects around the deathbed. He also vigorously defended the importance of commemoration of the dead, both from the Cistercians, who thought it took

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50 *Iotsald von Saint-Claude, Vita des Abtes Odilo von Cluny*, ed. Johannes Staub, MGH SRG 68 (Hannover: Hansche, 1999), pp. 218–20, 293–94.

51 Radulfus Glaber/Raoul Glaber, *Rudolfi Glabri historiarum libri quinque/ Rodulfus Glaber, The Five Books of the Histories*, V.13, ed. and trans. by John France (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), pp. 234–37.

52 Dominique Iogna-Prat, 'Des morts très spéciaux aux morts ordinaires: la pastorale funéraire clunisienne (XIe–XIIe siècles)', *Médiévales*, 31 (1996), pp. 79–91; 'Les morts dans la comptabilité des Clunisiens de l'an Mil', in *Religion et culture autour de l'an mil: Royaume capétien et Lotharingie*, ed. by Dominique Iogna-Prat and Jean-Charles Picard (Paris: Picard, 1990), pp. 55–69; Dietrich Poeck, 'Laienbegräbnisse in Cluny', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 14 (1980), pp. 68–179.

53 Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 76, 85.

54 Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies*, pp. 117, 121.

up to much time away from private prayer and contemplation, and from more radical critics like Peter of Bruys and Henry of Le Mans. Unfortunately, his defensive posture put Cluny at odds not just with Cistercians and heretics, but also with Muslims and Jews, who were being increasingly viewed as threats to the very existence of the Latin Church.[55] Moreover, as the gift economy of the early Middle Ages gave way to a growing profit economy, new ways to contract for care of the dead emerged, subtly but irrevocably changing the system at whose heart Cluny lay.[56] One of the most important, the granting of indulgences, helped spark the dismantling of the medieval economy of salvation in the Protestant Reformation. In spite of all this, the products of the early growth of the medieval economy of salvation were significant and lasting. By the twelfth century, Latin Christian death rituals had become standardized and most ordinary Christians sought confession and other sacraments before death, burial in consecrated ground, and liturgical commemoration by religious specialists afterwards. The Christian dead everywhere shared the same space as the living and the living believed that their dead family members expected and deserved their help in the afterlife. In spite of critics, changing economic realities and the fact that the Cluniacs had seen their day, the medieval economy of salvation was there to stay.

8 Later reflections on the conference papers (26 May 2011)

When Stefan Reif invited me to this conference I expected to learn more about medieval Ashkenazi responses to death than anyone would from my thoughts on the overall development of such things in Latin Christendom. I was not disappointed. Scholars of medieval Christianity have made impressive advances in this field, but in almost total ignorance of corresponding work in Jewish Studies. As the wide-ranging papers showed, closing that gap will be well worth the trouble.

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55 Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure: Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaïsme et à l'islam* (Paris: Aubier, 2000), pp. 103–52; Eng. trans. by Graham R. Edwards, *Order and Exclusion. Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000–1150)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
56 Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, Eng. trans. by Teresa Lavender Fagan, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 123–38; Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

While the development of Christian death rituals was a slow process, barely under way as late as the fourth and fifth centuries CE, the corresponding development in Judaism was even slower, in large part because of the continuing power of the notion that death brought ritual impurity, a notion whose banishment was itself a major marker of Christianity's divergence from its Judaic roots. That said, the common stock of biblical texts that Christians and Jews shared, along with belief in the resurrection of the dead and doctrinal ambiguity about the state and location of the soul between death and final judgement, provided ample openings for cultural interchange over the long run. Once Ashkenazi communities had established themselves in north-western Europe in the central Middle Ages, these and other factors, such as the tension between popular religion and orthodoxy that is endemic in monotheism, and the common experience of the Black Death, led to a surprising amount of convergence. Thus, by the later Middle Ages, similarities may have come to outweigh differences, at least with regard to the importance of graves and cemeteries as markers of communal and individual identity, memorial practices and belief in ghosts. Not surprisingly, the cultural drift was toward Christian practice, but not at the expense of elements that marked Ashkenazi beliefs and practices as distinctively Jewish. They could always claim, if they thought about it at all, that whatever they appropriated from the dominant culture had been theirs to begin with, and their responses to death were too deeply marked by the memories of those murdered or forced into suicide by Christians to be mistaken as anything else.

In the first presentation of the day, Yitzhak Lifshitz argued that *Av ha-raḥamim*, a 'memory poem' about the Crusader massacres of 1096, became a lasting feature of Jewish death rituals, right down to the present, in part through the *loss of memory* of its original context, namely, remembering the names of the dead. Abraham Gross then situated *Av ha-raḥamim* within the genre of poems (*piyyuṭim*) commemorating the *Tatnu*, as the massacres came to be called, arguing that the *piyyuṭim* were themselves part of a larger 'memory system' that was 'unique to the event and to those killed'. In so doing, he helped explain the phenomenon observed by Dr Lifshitz. A poem or prayer could not become part of a liturgical ritual if it mentioned specific people, for that would obstruct the 'ritualization of emotion' that is at the heart of communal liturgies. Many *piyyuṭim* named names, for that was in part their point – to memorialize the martyrs of 1096. *Av ha-raḥamim*, which did not name names, was thus perfectly suited for general use.

The papers by Shmuel Shepkaru and Lucia Raspe were similarly revealing. Professor Shepkaru showed that another response to the *Tatnu* was a shift in notions of the afterlife. The belief that the martyrs of 1096 were already enjoy-

ing the fruits of resurrection in heaven may or may not have been influenced by the Christian cult of the saints, which originated in devotion to Christians martyred by the Roman state, but the emergence of a cult of martyrs among Ashkenazi Jews seems to have opened up space for ritual elaboration and cultural convergence that had not previously been possible. The long-term consequences are apparent in Raspe's work [not published in this volume], which reveals that reverence for the dead, as marked by visits to the graves of righteous men, both evoked controversy and bound together Jewish communities in Bavaria and the Rhineland in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Her observation that the Jewish cemetery in Regensburg contained not only a mass grave for victims of the *Tatnu*, but also the grave of one Amran, whom the community believed to be Emmeran, the patron saint of the city, suggests either a bid for a place in a common culture or a kind of thumbing of the nose to the Christian community.

Avriel Bar-Levav's survey of changing attitudes towards death in medieval Ashkenaz highlighted the Jewish notion that, since death is a punishment for sin, the dead were seen as impure and marginal, to be kept separate from the living. Nevertheless, over time, the belief in a connection between physical remains and individual souls led to the practice of visiting graves and their placement in cemeteries according to the reputation for piety or learning of the person buried there. Dr Bar-Levav's own research suggests that the emergence of 'burial societies' in Spain in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the ritual books that they generated, reflects the influence of Christian confraternities and deathbed rituals. Andreas Lehnardt took the discussion further by focusing on the recitation of the *qaddish* on the anniversary (*yahrzeit*) of the death of one's parents. The development of the practice, from its origin in the rabbinic *yahrzeit* fast to its medieval development as part of the general reaction to the *Tatnu*, and to the burgeoning practice of memorial masses for the dead among Christians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, shows how the later medieval economy of salvation appealed to urban populations of both faiths before and after the Black Death. Yechiel Schur returned to that theme in his survey of learned discussions of the resurrection of the dead in the thirteenth century, which reflects exactly the kinds of concerns about disintegration and ghosts that Caroline Walker Bynum and Jean Claude-Schmitt have uncovered in the works of contemporary Christian writers and theologians.

While these results display the convergence of practice across the religious divide, Jeffrey Woolf looked at a striking example of how they diverged. Woolf reported that, while ritual impurity of the dead was a minor concern among medieval Ashkenazim, they transferred the notion of impurity from the dead

to the Christian land that surrounded their cemeteries, the sacred space they had carved out for the graves of the righteous. Similarly, Peter Lehnardt and Ruth Langer showed how one particular poem, the *ṣidduq ha-din*, a song of praise and faith in God's mercy and in the resurrection of the dead, spread from the Land of Israel to medieval Ashkenaz, where it was assimilated to emerging death rituals in different ways all over Europe. Chana Friedman argued that the mourning rite of 'turning the bed' developed out of a talmudic resistance to popular and persistent cultural practices; Adiel Kadari reported on the practice of placing Torah scrolls on the biers of the dead; and Nati Barak presented evidence of a growing tendency after the Black Death to ask for personal items to be included in one's grave.

The essays on epitaphs and tombstones, which I read during the preparation of this volume, deepened my sense of the similarities and differences of the two communities in a number of important ways. The matter-of-fact tone of Natanja Hüttenmeister, Andreas Lehnhardt and Avraham Reiner in their reports on the discovery of new gravestones from the medieval cemeteries of Mainz and Würzburg heightened, if anything, the emotional impact of the crimes perpetrated upon the Jewish communities of those cities from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries that they record, especially the almost total obliteration of the Jews of Würzburg in the so-called Rindfleisch Massacres of 1298. The state of the evidence is in fact directly related to those disasters, for most of the gravestones had either been buried or reused in buildings erected after the destruction of the communal cemeteries. Epitaphs on tombstones from Mainz provide poignant testimonies of otherwise unrecorded pogroms. Others from Würzburg show how a convert could bring the biblical image of 'the bosom of Abraham' from a Christian back into a Jewish cultural context, how tombstones located the dead in relation to Jewish sages, and how the living struggled to remember properly those killed or driven to suicide by their Christian neighbours.

Epitaphs from the cemeteries of more fortunate communities in central and northern Italy and Istanbul during the early modern period (sixteenth–nineteenth centuries), on the other hand, reveal the depth of artistry that could be brought to bear on the ordinary facts of human mortality by drawing on the rich cultural heritage of Torah, Mishna, Kabbala and medieval Ashkenazi and Sefardi poetry. David Malkiel traces the literary history of the rhymed and metered epitaph from its introduction in the early sixteenth century, flowering between 1550 and 1650, decadence and decline between 1750 and 1830 and replacement thereafter by totally new forms that signaled the assimilation of the Jews of Padua into the emergent nation-state of Italy. Mauro Perani introduces the corpus of Italian Jewish epitaphs as a historical source base and

makes an impassioned plea for its preservation. Minna Rozen, then, shows how the presence of a similar corpus, not just of epitaphs but of tombstones and their location, can be used to zero in on subsets of a wider population. Her detailed investigation of the tombstones of a group of seventeenth-century Istanbul Jews with the common surname 'Roman' reveals not only tombstone designs that drew on the model of Muslim prayer rugs, but also the Hebrew rhymed and metered epitaph at its height. In the hands of the Romani, who were as often as not poets themselves and composed the epitaphs on the tombs of their loved ones, the representation of grief at the loss of an only daughter, not yet married, or of a wife who died in childbirth, achieves, at times, in a 'truly original' Hebrew, a truly original expression of human loss.

The cumulative effect of all of these fascinating papers is to challenge the notion that there is any point in studying medieval and early modern Christians or Jews (or Muslims for that matter, as Minna Rozen's contribution shows) in isolation from one another. Investigating phenomena like death, dying and the presence of the dead is always a good subject for comparative history, but there is more at stake here. In this case, the objects of comparison are different religious communities that lived in the same cities for centuries. However troubled their relations, their shared descent from Abraham made cultural transmission and some measure of a common, trans-communal culture possible. Studying their responses to death and dying and their relations with the dead makes strikingly clear how much understanding the one more deeply can enhance our understanding of the other. Shedding light on the common culture that they shared from all sides will provide a richer sense of life and death, not just in Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities, but in medieval and early modern Europe and the Dar al-Islam as a whole.