

2003

Review of Chazelle's "The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion"

Caitlin Corning

George Fox University, ccorning@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Corning, Caitlin, "Review of Chazelle's "The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion"" (2003). *Faculty Publications - Department of History, Politics, and International Studies*. Paper 48.
http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac/48

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of History, Politics, and International Studies at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Department of History, Politics, and International Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

CELIA CHAZELLE, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. xiv + 338. \$70.00.

Reviewed by Caitlin Corning, George Fox University

This book is a well-written, interdisciplinary study of the relationship between the theological controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries and the portrayals of the crucifixion produced during this same period. Chazelle does an excellent job of examining not only the broader background of these controversies and the differing positions of the major writers, but the developments in manuscript illumination and sculpture as well. The inclusion of thirty-three illustrations also strengthens this text.

The book is organized into eight chapters. After a short introduction, Chapter 2 provides a survey of how Christ's passion is portrayed in Carolingian literature including theological, liturgical, and poetic pieces. Then, Chazelle provides a sum-

mary of the disputes over Iconoclasm and Adoptionism and the role of the crucifixion in these debates from the Carolingian perspective. Chapter 3 focuses on four images from the Gellone Sacramentary and on seven from Hrabanus Maurus's *In honorem sanctae cruces*. These portrayals of Christ and the crucifixion are compared with the anti-Adoptionist writings of Alcuin and others discussed in Chapter 2. Chazelle believes that "these works . . . provide evidence that their designers expressly sought iconographic means to convey the doctrine not only that Jesus is God, but that he unites two complete natures in his one person" (79). Chapters 2 and 3 also discuss the tension among Carolingian writers with regard to the proper use of images.

The theological controversies of Charlemagne's reign involved the wider church: the Byzantine debates over icons and images and the Spanish support of Adoptionism. The theological disputes of the mid- to late-ninth century, however, were more internal Carolingian disputes. Chapters 4–7 of this book shift the focus of Chazelle's analysis to this later period, focusing specifically on predestination and interpretations of the Eucharist.

Chazelle comments that the earlier Carolingian writings tended to focus on Christ as the "divine savior king". Chapter 4 discusses "developments in the ninth century that were especially important in encouraging a shift away from this outlook: the growth of biblical and liturgical exegesis, and certain aspects of the liturgy's evolution" (142). Commentaries by Hrabanus, Christian of Stavelot, an anonymous scholar whose work was later incorporated into texts by Haimo of Auxerre, and Pascasius Radbertus are compared and contrasted to demonstrate the changing attitudes with regard to Christ's passion (142–54). Analyses of contemporary poetry and tracts on the Holy Week are also contained in this chapter. Chazelle believes that due to this new exegesis in the later Carolingian period, the focus on Christ transitions from the conquering king to the "significance of his death on the cross, isolated from his victory, in the divine remission of sins and reunion of the faithful with God" (164).

This new interest in Christ's death, Chazelle argues, helped to trigger the two major theological controversies of the later Carolingian period: predestination vs. universalism (chapter 5) and the correct interpretation of the Eucharist (chapter 6). Both chapters include a very clear analysis of the ideas of the major participants in the controversies and areas of agreement and dispute. Gottschalk of Orbais, Hrabanus, Hincmar of Rheims, John Scottus Eriugena, and Pascasius receive special attention.

Chapter 7 returns to the images of Christ's passion, this time concentrating on the period after AD 840. As with Chapter 3, Chazelle supports the theory that contemporary theological concerns directly influenced the production of art. She specifically examines the Utrecht Psalter's illustrations to Psalms 68, 88, 115, the Apostle's Creed, and the Canticle of Habbacuc. Significant space is given to an analysis of the illustration to Psalm 115. It appears to be unique in its eucharistic details, the fact that Christ is portrayed with his eyes closed, and the cross is the central point of the illustration (241–54). Next, the discussion moves to the Crucifixion miniature in the Drogo Sacramentary and the Crucifixion ivory of the Pericopes of Henry II (254–92). After attempting to date the Pericopes ivory,

Chazelle convincingly argues that its creation should be associated with Hincmar and his supporters (279–92).

There are many strengths to Chazelle's work. She expertly discusses theological issues in ways that are easy to follow and understand. The arguments throughout the text are clear and on point. Her wide-ranging knowledge of theology and art brings a interesting multi-disciplinary approach to this topic that yields a number of important new theories. By including thirty-three illustrations, the reader is able to more easily make the connections between the written and visual material.

I have only two minor complaints with regard to this book. First, while Latin quotes contained in the main text were translated, this was not consistently done in the footnotes. While scholars in Carolingian Europe should have no problem with the Latin, by translating the quotes contained within the footnotes, minor points would be understandable to a wider audience. Second, I believe that a map indicating the centers of production for the texts and images discussed might have shown additional connections and influences.

These small issues aside, I would highly recommend this book to Carolingian scholars. Chazelle expertly presents the differences between early and later Carolingian thought and the key developments of this period, disputing the more popularly believed notion that few new ideas were produced by the early medieval theologians. This is an important and intriguing book that presents not only new ideas regarding the relationship between Carolingian theology and culture but new ways to explore these issues.