

**Valiant Longhaired Warriors:
Symbolizing the Christianity of Merovingian Gaul**

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we, the undersigned, recommend

that the candidate be awarded

Honors in History.

Frank Wood
Paul F. Hampton
John W. [Signature]

to my grandfather

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Introduction

Scholars of medieval history have long realized the key role Christianity played in the development of Europe. Not many, however, would suspect that hair played a role within Christianity by providing a clue into the religiosity of the era. Long hair indicates the different understanding of Christianity held by both the Merovingian kings and their clergy. Long hair meant different things to a Merovingian barbarian king and a Christian. It symbolized warrior values to medieval Gaul, among the first of the barbarian places to convert to Christianity. As the Germanic tribe leaders consolidated power, long hair came to represent the best warrior - the king. Thus, long hair identified the men of the Merovingian clan that ruled Gaul from the fifth through the eighth century CE.

At the same time, the apostle Paul and the church fathers had condemned the practice, claiming long hair was part of a larger problem. Long hair represented femininity, subversion of the natural hierarchy, and worldliness to early Christian writers. The actions of the Merovingian kings show that they never understood or never were fully aware of scriptural Christian concepts. These kings did not act traditionally Christian, and they did not cut their hair.

According to Christopher Dawson, "the rise of the new Western European culture is dominated by this sharp dualism between two cultures, two social traditions and two spiritual worlds - the war society of the barbarian kingdom with its cult of heroism and aggression and the peace society of the Christian Church."¹ Dawson, a prominent scholar of Christianity and the west, wrote half a century ago "the vital subject of the creative interaction of religion and culture in the life of Western society has been left out and almost forgotten."² Dawson and other scholars have

¹ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (New York: Sheed and Ward Inc 1950) 23.

² *Ibid.*, 13.

since filled the void. Now a large amount of work concerns the cultural conflict between Christian thought and traditional cultural ideas of a converted people.³

The conversion of pagan peoples to Christianity was a recurrent theme in European history from Late Antiquity through the Early and High Middle Ages. One of the predominant questions in the study of Christianity concerns the sincerity of the new converts' Christianity. Scholars have tried to probe this question several ways. Some attempted to understand the sincerity as represented through symbols. Others look at the actions of the witnesses and converts before, during, and after conversion.

The focus of conversion moved geographically over time. In *Christianizing the Roman Empire (AD 100-400)*, Ramsay MacMullen explains the process of conversion in the Roman Empire. Richard Fletcher traces the development over a longer period of time in his book *The Barbarian Conversion*. He claims that the Christians of the first through third centuries focused on converting Romans. According to Fletcher, even Augustine of Hippo found it difficult to dispense with the "ingrained cultural assumption" that Christianity was for Romans, not barbarians.⁴ This cultural assumption, however, appears to have died out, because between the fourth and fourteenth centuries the Romans began to convert the barbarians. Christianity was spreading north and the Franks under the Merovingians were the first of the barbarian tribes to convert.

³ Simon Burnell and Edward James, "The Archeology of Conversion on the Continent in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries," *St. Augustine and the Conversion of England* (United Kingdom: Sutton Publishing Limited 1999); Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc 1950); Richard A. Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion, from Paganism to Christianity* (New York: H. Holt and Company 1998); A.H.M Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company 1978); Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (AD 100-400)* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1984) JM Wallace-Hadrill, *The Longhaired Kings* (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd 1962).

⁴ Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion, from Paganism to Christianity* (New York: H. Holt and Company 1998) 228-229.

J.M. Wallace-Hadrill suggests that the Merovingians did not understand their new religion for several generations. "This was no total conversion, for it did not imply that the myths and rituals of ancestral heathen piety were to be swept aside. The barbarian is not aware of being offered a new way of life complete with a theology of its own; at most he sees it as an additional cult."⁵

Beyond these broad geographic lines, it is difficult to determine when Christianity reached a people first and when exactly they began to be Christian not pagan. The symbolism of long hair is useful in interpreting Merovingian conceptions of Christianity. Other authors use symbols to show the change from pagan to Christian. The problems with their results occur because they look for sincerity instead of different understandings of Christianity in conversion stories.

Gregory the Great spoke of Christian conversion and stair climbing to emphasize the slow but steady nature of the European takeover and Fletcher mentions "marriage may be taken as typical among the varied enterprise of 'rising by steps.'"⁶ Because marriage practices were slow to change from their pagan traditions, Fletcher suggested them as a good representative, or symbol, of the slow conversion of Europe. He fails to explore the idea beyond this brief statement.

Simon Barnell and Edward James, writing from an archeological perspective, mention that cemetery and grave structure may be symbolic of Germanic conversion. Barnell and James suggest that some claim this symbolism applies to the Merovingian/Frankish conversion. They quote the leading proponent of this idea, Bailey Young. "Is the disappearance of the traditional Merovingian cemetery around 700 the result of an evolution in the popular religious mentality? This would be a dangerous conclusion. It signifies rather that the long evolution of burial *ad sanctos* had borne

⁵ JM Wallace-Hadrill, *The Longhaired Kings* (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd 1962) 169.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

fruit, and that the Church was ready to assume the full responsibility which had hitherto belonged to the family." Barnell and James doubt this is responsible for the change in English burial practices in the seventh and eighth centuries and are skeptical of Young. "There is precious little evidence from the sixth and seventh centuries –one might almost say 'none'- that the church was at all concerned with how burial took place." If the church did not care, the change in burial practices could not indicate some change from pagan to Christian. They consider the change in burial practices symbolic but reject existing hypotheses.⁷

James and Barnell also discuss the symbolism of "grave goods" and their use as determinants of the diffusion of Christianity. Some symbols can be readily identified with pagan practices, such as Germanic shields with eagles' heads emblazoned on them. Others are clearly Christian. For example, gold foil crosses made locally rather than acquired by barter or token gift giving among tribes have been found in Merovingian graves. Though they caution against basing assumptions about Christianity solely on symbols from grave goods, Barnell and James suggest that the artifacts are a good indication that the Merovingians buried in the graves are Christians. They do not speculate on the sincerity of Christianity, however, because the symbols are inconclusive.⁸

Studies of symbolism to determine the sincerity of recent Christian converts are often unsuccessful. In some cases the lack of evidence causes critical problems. Other scholars have failed to expand on the symbolism they do discover. Another method of judging the Christianity of these people comes from looking at motivation – of both the missionaries and the converts.

The motivation of the missionaries is difficult to determine. "Early medieval missionaries were in general successful in persuading kings to declare themselves adherents of Christianity,"

⁷ Burnell and James. 83-106.

⁸ Ibid., 85-90.

remarks Fletcher on the conversion of what he calls “New Constantines.”⁹ Some examples suggest that early bishops benefited from convincing kings to nominally convert. For example, Avitus of Vienne had a hand in the conversion of at least two Germanic kings, Clovis of the Franks and Gundobad of the Visigoths. Avitus insisted that each of these kings publicly announce their conversion before their people.¹⁰ All of the other Germanic tribes that had converted at this time belonged to a heretic sect, primarily to Arianism. Clovis’s tribe was the first of the barbarian groups to convert to orthodox Christianity, clearly aiding the Catholic Church.

Beyond specific examples, it is difficult to generalize the motivations of the missionaries. Most acted solely out of faith and brotherly love. One example is Clotild, Clovis’s wife, who often coaxed the king to convert to Christianity. She received no personal benefit from conversion other than the satisfaction that her husband was Christian. Some, like Avitus, had larger concerns than the salvation of a single soul. The Catholic Church was losing ground to heresies and benefited when pagans claimed they believed in Christ. Perhaps the sincerity of the converts’ Christianity is more easily seen through their own personal stories.

The most information concerning specific personal conversions is about kings. Constantine and Clovis provide an interesting contrast because they had similar conversion experiences, though one was Roman and the other barbarian. Each king converted after victory on the battlefield, Clovis a century and a half after Constantine. Constantine was told in a dream to paint a Christian symbol on his soldier’s shields. He followed the instructions and won the battle.¹¹ Clovis saw his troops falling around him after praying to his own gods, and resorted to praying to the god his wife

⁹ Fletcher, 129.

¹⁰ Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* ed. by Louis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books 1982) 148-149.

¹¹ Jones, 79-80.

worshipped. He too, was victorious.¹² Constantine had enacted favorable legislation to the Christians before his conversion, and continued to do so afterward. He was not baptized, however, until twenty-five years after his conversion when he knew death was imminent. Clovis continued to ruthlessly attack and conquer many areas, murdering family members with a blow of his battle-axe. He had the support of the bishops and often embraced Christianity prior to battles.¹³

Both Clovis and Constantine were converted on the battlefield and neither showed much of a sign of change from previous actions. Constantine's actions had been favorable to Christians before his conversion. Clovis, though he stopped ridiculing his wife for her Christianity, continued in his violent ways. Conversion experiences, at least among the royalty, do not indicate a change of heart, and, as such, are not a good measure of the sincerity of Christianity.

Less is known about the conversion of the common people. Ramsay MacMullen attempts to show the progression of Roman conversion and uses the frequency of ritual pagan practices as one indication of the commoners' sincerity. Christian bishops felt that "ritual gives authority to belief; and Christianity must not be seen to need anything of that sort from the pagan past." They actively discouraged their new converts to participate in rituals, but "some ritual in and of itself was a thing enjoyable and important, which people were reluctant to give up."¹⁴ MacMullen draws from letters to describe the noisy and festive nature of ritual. "Before AD 312 it would have been easy to hear and see activities like this going on everywhere in the empire; by AD 400 or so, it was very rare." MacMullen admits that this may not be a good measure because evidence of pagan ritual would seem to imply that pagans were a small portion of the population. Other statistics

¹² Gregory of Tours, 143.

¹³ Ibid., 143-158.

¹⁴ MacMullen, 75.

show, however, that “pagans still made up a good half of the population,” apparently disproving this implication.¹⁵

Richard Fletcher comes up with a more decisive conclusion on the sincerity of early converts among the pagans. He quotes Protestant Pastor Martin Mazvydas’s lament in a letter written in the early sixteenth century to his patron Duke Albert of Brandenburg. “If I may be frank, they know the true Christian religion as much as infants in their cradles do.” Fletcher also supports his conclusion with quotation of French historian Jean Delumeau believed that “On the eve of the Reformation, the average westerner was but superficially Christianized.”¹⁶

Beyond shifting the focus from a traditional understanding of Christianity, this study contributes to this discussion in a new way because it focuses on hair as the symbol of the tradition of the Merovingians, which they did not give up upon adoption of Christianity. They continued growing their hair though it clearly conflicted with established Christian traditions, yet were not considered bad Christians by their clergy. None of the scholars on the conversion of Europe, however, have used long hair in their argument on the religiosity of the Merovingians. Though scholars of the Merovingians have long recognized the importance of long hair to the kings, they have failed to look at this symbolism within the context of the Bible and patristic writings.

Long hair provides a unique clue into the Merovingian understanding of Christianity in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. The Merovingian story uses both symbolism and conversion experiences to determine the Merovingian understanding of Christianity. Long hair was a symbol to both the Merovingians and the Christians, but of completely different ideas. The two met in the

¹⁵ Ibid., 84-85.

¹⁶ Fletcher, 510. Masvydas’s letter is translated in A. Musteikis, *The Reformation in Lithuania* (New York: East European Monographs 1988) appendix B 87-92.

conversion of Clovis. The results of this meeting reveal the cultural understanding of Christianity by both the clergy and the kings in Merovingian Gaul.

The problem with the above methods and conclusions is that they attempt to impose contemporary ideas of a good Christian on cultures of distant past. Realistically, it does not make sense that the majority of converts only accepted Christianity nominally. Looking instead for a different understanding of Christianity in past societies allows scholars to make sense of the actions of new converts. Only then do the methods of examining symbolism, conversion experiences, and actions before and after conversion illuminate the religiosity of a people.

Most studies of the Merovingians recognize that long hair denoted royal status; some explain why.¹⁷ They do not explore, however, this symbol in the context of the religiosity of the Merovingian kings and their subjects. Conrad Leyser, for example, examines the Rule of Cesarius that limited the length of hair on nuns, but ignores the significance of long hair on men.¹⁸ Katharine Fischer Drew, in her translation, suggests that cutting long hair signified adulthood, and adulthood meant harsher punishment at trial.¹⁹ They fail, however, to connect hair with the religiosity of the Merovingians.

Primary sources show clearly that long hair was deeply significant to Germanic and Christian traditions. The Law of the Salian Franks, for instance, a law that was written and codified under Clovis after he became a Christian, featured codification of hair length. The court punished

¹⁷ Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press 1988); H.G. Hummer, etc al., *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by Ian Wood (Rochester: The Boydell Press 1998); Edward James, *The Franks* (New York: Basil Blackwell 1988); Alexander Callander Murray, *After Rome's Fall* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press 1998); Wallace-Hadrill; Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* (New York: Longman Group 1994).

¹⁸ Conrad Leyser, "Long Haired Kings and Short Haired Nuns, Writing on the Body in Cesarius of Arles," *Papers presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies* (Leuvin 1993).

¹⁹ *The Laws of the Salian Franks*, trans. by Katharine Fischer Drew (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1991).

cutting the hair of a longhaired boy with the same severity as cutting off a man's thumb or nose, or stealing food-producing chattels. Clearly long hair on men had a particularly important place in Salic Law.

Tacitus commented on longhaired Germanic warriors in 98CE. Gregory of Tours in his *History of the Franks* characterized Clovis and his clan as longhaired kings. Written in the late sixth century, the history drew heavily on chronicles by Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus and Sulpicius Alexander of the late fourth century, which have been lost to us. There are other details from letters and other works from the late fifth and early sixth centuries, which attest to the importance of hair.²⁰ Long hair was a symbol of kingship because the the Germanic subjects recognized the king as a powerful warrior. In fact, the long hair of Merovingian kings characterized the entire dynasty, both before and after the conversion of Clovis.

The Christian belief that long hair contradicted nature originated with the apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor). In Corinth, long hair fashionably imitated ancient Greek philosophers. Paul, however, considered long hair to be a symbol of femininity and subordination. Patristic writings accepted and expanded Paul's opinion. Augustine used Paul in his letter "On the Work of Monks", in which he accused longhaired monks of false humility and iniquity.²¹ The letters of Jerome, a church father of the late fourth and early fifth century, also associated long hair with femininity.²² Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, in his letters, and the Greek father John Chrysostom,

²⁰ Orosius, *Vita Sancti Aniani*, letters by Sidonius Apollinaris, Letters and Homilies of St. Avitus, letter of St. Eugenius, *Passiones Martyrum in Africa*, *Vita Sancti Remigii episcopi Remensis*, *Vita Sancti Maxentii*. Works listed in Lewis Thorpe, "Introduction," *History of the Franks* (New York: Penguin Books 1974) 28. Not all are drawn from in the sections cited in this paper.

²¹ Augustine of Hippo, "Of the Work of Monks," *Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans 1956) 503-524.

²² St. Jerome, "Letter I to Innocentius," "Letter CVII to Laeta," *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, ed. by F.A. Wright (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons 1933).

in his fourth century homilies, deemed male long hair to be unnatural. These portrayals of femininity and false humility sharply contradicted the Germanic symbol of the most powerful male warrior.

By examining the primary literature, this paper proves that long hair was a symbol of the different understanding of Christianity by the Merovingians. Chapter One explains the Germanic culture that produced longhaired kings. It deals with Tacitus's observations about longhaired warriors and traces the development from long hair as symbol of warriors to a symbol of kingship through the work of Gregory of Tours. Tours shows how long hair represented valor to the Germanic people, which was extremely important to a culture centered on war.

The second chapter details the development of the Christian tradition on hair. The tradition stems completely from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, in which he condemns long hair on men. Several church fathers picked up this topic from Paul in the third and fourth centuries to complete the body of Christian thought on long hair by the time of the Germans. The warrior valor that long hair represented to the Germanic kings clashed with the femininity that Paul and the fathers saw symbolized in the longhaired Corinthian men.

The third chapter explicitly deals with the apparent contradiction between Merovingian actions and claims. Clovis and his descendants violently followed their warrior traditions, though they claimed to be Christian. The chapter shows how hair clarifies the idea that this evident inconsistency is actually symbolic of the different Merovingian understanding of Christianity.

Chapter One: Long Hair and Valor in Merovingian Gaul

Long hair in Merovingian Gaul developed in a culture devoted to warfare. Tacitus considered the Germanic people peculiarly warlike. The cultural focus on war led to the development of kings out of the warrior class, whom Tacitus had recorded as longhaired warriors in the first observations of the Germanic tribes around 98CE. As kings emerged as the best of the warrior class, long hair developed from an attribute of all warriors to a symbol of royal status.

Valor and affinity for war were key elements of Germanic society. Germanic culture depended upon warfare to survive. Thus, the people glorified the valor necessary to success in war. Tacitus highlighted many Germanic practices that demonstrate the importance of valor in all aspects of Germanic society.

Tacitus pointed out the German affinity for war early in his chronicle. He encapsulated the work ethic of Germanic men in a short phrase. To them, “it seems slothful and lazy to gain by sweat what one could win by blood.”²³ Germanic men preferred war to production as a means to gain wealth. The objective of war was to steal another tribe’s wealth. Tacitus commented on the generosity of the Germans, but also explained how they could afford to be so generous. “The wherewithal for generosity is obtained through wars and plunder.”²⁴

The desire to participate in war was greater even than kinship ties. “If the state in which they were born should be drowsing in long peace and leisure, many noble young men of their own accord seek those tribes which are then waging some war, since quiet is displeasing to the race.”²⁵ War was not only essential to the economy of the Germanic tribes, but men actively sought to participate in war. One reason was the importance of valor stressed by the Germanic society.

²³ Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. Herbert W. Benario (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, Ltd 1999) 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

Not surprisingly, the military venerated valor. Armies sang of brave men during war. “There is the report, too, that Hercules spent time among them and, when ready to go into battle, they sing of him as the bravest of all brave men.”²⁶ Armies wanted brave men. “It is shameful for the chieftain to be excelled in valor, shameful for the entourage not to match the valor of the chieftain.”²⁷ The lack of valor was cowardly and disgraceful to a warrior. Disgrace increased as the warrior occupied the position of a leader. The better a warrior was, the braver the tribe expected him to act.

The Germanic tribal authorities also contributed to the cultural importance of valor. When explaining punishments for certain crimes, Tacitus related, “Cowards and the unwarlike...they plunge in the mire of a swamp, with a basket put over them.” They used the basket because they were punishing “disgraceful acts [that] should be concealed.”²⁸ Men without bravery were considered disgraceful to the tribe. The shame was so great that leaders enacted the death penalty to remove cowards and to encourage valor in others.

Another observation by Tacitus proved that Germanic men internalized this disgrace. “To have abandoned one’s shield is the greatest crime.” It was not acceptable to flee battle and forget weapons to save oneself. He continued, “nor is it right for one so disgraced to be present at religious ceremonies or to enter the council.” Germanic social norms banned a male from participating in leadership activities if he had exhibited cowardice. Finally, “many who have survived wars have

²⁵ Ibid., 29.

²⁶ Ibid., 17.

²⁷ Ibid., 27.

²⁸ Ibid., 25-27.

ended their disgrace by hanging themselves.”²⁹ Society stressed valor to the point that survival in a war in which one’s comrades fell was grounds for suicide.

Germanic society stressed valor and devotion to warfare. Within this cultural focus of warfare, long hair distinguished warriors and chieftains. Tacitus first noted the significance of hair amongst the “violent and strong peoples” of Northern Europe.³⁰ The Suebi tribe had an interesting tradition; “they pull their bristling hair back and often tie it on the very top of the head; the chieftains have it even more intricately arranged.”³¹ Hair already identified warrior and rank; Suebi chieftains clearly had a distinctive hairstyle that allowed the chronicler to pick them out of the battle lines. The best warriors, the chieftains, already used hair to distinguish their rank in war in the first century CE.

Long hair changed from a characteristic of all warriors to a symbol of Germanic royalty by the end of the fifth century. The change can be traced through the writings of Tacitus and Gregory of Tours. Kings already ruled the tribes that Tacitus described in the first century. Chieftains, who already distinguished themselves from common warriors by their different hairstyles, became kings. The Germanic people “pick their kings on the basis of noble birth”³² and chieftains were of noble birth. “Particularly eminent birth or the great achievements of their fathers win the rank of chieftain even for very young men.”³³ Chieftains came from the nobility making them part of the pool of potential kings.

²⁹ Ibid., 21.

³⁰ Ibid., 51.

³¹ Ibid., 47.

³² Ibid., 21.

³³ Ibid., 27.

One could not become a chieftain simply based on noble blood. The people chose “their generals on the basis of bravery.”³⁴ Warriors became chieftains because of extraordinary valor. Even the young nobles that were immediately made chieftains “attach themselves to other more mature men who have reputations of long standing.”³⁵ Nobility was not the only characteristic of a king, because even children of nobility submitted themselves to the authority of a chieftain with greater experience. The community that chose the king from the nobles, which included cheiftains, was culturally immersed in the importance of war. Thus, they tended to choose successful warriors as their kings.

Over time, successful chieftains became kings, thus long hair indicated rank and royalty. Writing in the fifth century, Gregory of Tours picked up the thread of the development of kingship from warriors in his *History of the Franks*. “Valentinus does not name their first king but says that they were ruled by war leaders.”³⁶ Following the documents of later chroniclers from the end of the fourth century, Gregory noted that Sculpus Alexander recorded “a short parlay with Marcomer and Sunno, the royal leaders of the Franks” at a time the Franks were ruled by war leaders. “When he says ‘regales’ or royal leaders, it is not clear if they were kings or if they merely exercised a kingly function.”³⁷ From his commentary, it was clear that Gregory understood that the kings had developed from the war leaders, but was not sure if the transition was complete at the time Sculpus Alexander was writing.

However, though the leading Franks now achieved Gregory’s designation as kings, there were several kings for the different clans within the Franks. They “set up in each county district

³⁴ Ibid., 21.

³⁵ Ibid., 27.

³⁶ Gregory of Tours, 120.

³⁷ Ibid., 122.

and each city longhaired kings chosen from the foremost and most noble family from their race."³⁸
By this point Gregory recognized Germanic kings by their telltale long hair.

A specific example of the transition from chieftain to king occurred in Clovis's own family. The distinction between Clovis and his father is clear. Possessions from Childeric's tomb were not the belongings of a king, but those of a successful warrior that had worked for Rome. The treasure consisted of magnificent war gear, the severed head of his war-horse, and many coins. It also consisted of a signet ring bearing Childeric's name and showing him with hair reaching below his shoulders.³⁹ No evidence exists that Childeric was more than a spectacularly successful longhaired war leader. His son, Clovis, was king. He conquered and became king of a much larger territory. Later, Roman Emperor Anastasius officially recognized Clovis as Consul or Augustus.⁴⁰

Gregory of Tours provided several examples of the longhaired kings reducing their number through cutting hair or murder. Fewer kings meant fewer men in authority and increased the power of the few that remained. Winners kept their hair long because they were successful warriors. Two examples from Gregory of Tours deal specifically with cutting hair to acquire power. In both of these cases, the murderer kills royalty within his own family. This was common, because Germanic tradition divided the kingdom among the sons. This created a strong incentive for the ambitious son to attack his brothers and accumulate a powerful kingdom.

Cutting long hair to depose kings occurred in war with the Salian Franks. Because Clovis wanted to take over their land, he ordered their king, Chararic, to be ordained as a priest and he

³⁸ Ibid., 129.

³⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, 162.

⁴⁰ Gregory of Tours, 154.

made his son a deacon. This was probably to justify the cutting of the hair in the tonsure.⁴¹ The deposed king “burst into tears. His son is said to have exclaimed ‘these leaves have been cut from wood, which is still green and not lacking in sap. They will soon grow again and be larger than ever, and may the man who has done this deed perish equally quickly.’”⁴² Clovis understood that the boy threatened to let his hair grow again and kill Clovis to take back the kingdom. Clovis killed them both.⁴³

Lothar, Clovis’s son, repeated his father’s actions. He and his brother Childeric were concerned that his mother favored his nephews too much. In debating what course of action to take, they wondered, “Ought we to cut off their hair and so reduce them to the status of ordinary citizens?” They sent an emissary to her with a sword and scissors and gave her the following choice. “Do you wish them to live with their hair cut short? Or would you prefer to see them killed?” “She answered: ‘If they are not to ascend the throne, I would rather see them dead than with their hair cut short.’”⁴⁴

Both of these examples have a surprising twist. In the first, a powerful king bursts into tears and a son threatens murder at the threat of having their hair cut short. In the second, a loving grandmother preferred to have her grandsons killed than shorn. Because long hair signified valor and success, the humiliation a king would have to endure if shorn was great. Apparently, it was great enough that death was a more favorable alternative. This is not surprising given the origin of the significance of long hair. Tacitus had documented warriors who committed suicide because they did not exhibit adequate valor. Similarly, the cultural focus on warfare caused the kings who

⁴¹ The tonsure is the haircut of a monk, often cut short with a circle shaved on the top back of the head.

⁴² Ibid., 156.

⁴³ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 181.

had their long hair, the sign of a victorious warrior, removed to cry with humiliation and grandmothers to wish for a more honorable death of their grandsons.

Cutting a person's hair dishonored him because he was of the royal family and yet given the appearance of a commoner. It was equivalent of simultaneously stripping a king of his crown and valor.⁴⁵ Salic Law, developed by Clovis between 507 and 511 CE, incorporated this emphasis upon long hair even though it did not specifically connect long hair with kingship.⁴⁶ The Salic law prescribed monetary payment as punishment in a variety of circumstances. One of the more peculiar crimes in this brief list was cutting the hair of a longhaired boy without permission. If one cut a longhaired boy's hair without the consent of his relatives he must pay forty-five solidi. If one cut the hair of a free girl he must pay forty-five solidi. Other forty-five solidi crimes were cutting off a man's thumb or nose, harboring his slave, and stealing a boat or hawk. Clearly hair was important, because the punishment of its shearing was equivalent to mutilation and depriving one of one's food producing chattels.

Katharine Fischer Drew, translator of Salic Law, suggested that hair was cut at the age of twelve to signify adulthood. If a boy's hair was cut earlier, he appeared as an adult and could be tried with harsher punishments. However, Drew did not consider another possible interpretation. Due to Gregory's emphasis that the kings had long hair, it seems odd not to consider that the longhaired boys were parts of the royal family. The law clearly differentiated between a free boy under twelve and a longhaired boy. "He who kills a free boy less than twelve years old up to the end of his twelfth year...shall be liable to pay...600 solidi."⁴⁷ Another passage reads "he who kills

⁴⁵ All commoner males presumably had long hair, because Lothar claimed cutting the hair of his relatives would reduce them to the status of commoners.

⁴⁶ Drew, 59-127.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 86.

a longhaired boy...shall be liable to pay...600 solidi.”⁴⁸ Only two laws separate these in the structure of the code, so one is not simply a restatement of the other. The fine is the same for killing a longhaired boy and a boy under twelve, but the boys are not the same as Drew suggests.⁴⁹

That kings prized their long hair is evident in Germanic practice and in the Salic Law. These longhaired kings still wore the symbol of valor developed from the ancient Germanic focus on war. Several stories from Gregory of Tours emphasize that longhaired kings continued to act as war-leaders, consistent with the physical symbol of a successful warrior. One story especially demonstrates Clovis’s role as a general.

Clovis and his men met to distribute booty after a victory. Though general practice was to divide the treasure by taking turns, Clovis asked his men to “grant me that ewer, over and above my normal share.” All of the men save one deferred to the power of the king, but that one “raised his battle-axe and struck the ewer. ‘You shall have none of this booty,’ he shouted, ‘except your fair share.’” Clovis hid his anger, but later took his revenge. He ordered his troops to line up for inspection on the parade ground. When Clovis came upon the man who had struck the ewer, the king admonished his soldier for the state of his weapons, and threw his battle-axe to the ground. “As the soldier bent forward to pick up his weapon, King Clovis raised his own battle-axe in the air and split his [the soldier’s] skull with it.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁹ Another possibility is that Drew and I are both correct in our interpretations. The boys did not cut their hair until they were twelve, but the royal boys were never shorn. This would explain the relatively low price placed on long hair compared to the expected penalty if it solely indicated royal status. It is also consistent with other places in the law that state that a boy began to shave his beard when he came of age (a tradition also found in Tacitus). However, the last Merovingian king was documented as having a flowing beard.

⁵⁰ Gregory of Tours, 140.

This example from Gregory of Tours reveals a continuation of the practices of Tacitus's warriors that stemmed from cultural focus on war. Clovis and his troops continued to make war to acquire wealth instead of producing it, thus war was an essential means to replenish royal coffers and served as payment to the army. Clovis also distinctly appears as a general. He lined up his troops for inspection. He also did not want to murder the offending man outright, and used the excuse that the soldier neglected to care for his weapons as reason to kill the man. Not only was Clovis avenging the right as a general to command his troops, he used the cultural stress on warfare to legitimize a murder.

Germanic people recognized long hair as a symbol of warriors and later kings. Long hair represented warriors in the first century, and Germanic people lived in a society where war led to power and wealth. The importance of war led to glorification of valor. Kings elected in this society tended to be warrior chieftains, and their long hair distinguished the chieftains. As the chieftains fought to gain more power, they cut the hair of their defeated foes. The kings that emerged were the best warriors and continued to fulfil that role. Thus, long hair developed as a symbol of kingship in a society focused on warfare.

Chapter 2: Christian Condemnation of Long Hair

Christian thought on hair also began in the first century by Paul in scriptures written only forty years after Tacitus, but developed in a different environment. Though the Old Testament commented frequently on the long hair of men, Paul's letter to the Corinthians defined the position of the church on longhaired men that, elaborated in patristic writings, lasted through the time of Clovis.⁵¹ Paul was the original source of Christian views about long hair on men. He considered long hair an insult to God and Christ because it subverted the natural hierarchy of the cosmos.

Paul clarified the position of the church on long hair in his letters because of the situation in Corinth. Corinth was a teeming cosmopolitan city in the first century CE, the ideal place for the apostle Paul to establish a church to reach the Gentiles. "Of all the congregations founded by his apostolic service," wrote one scholar of Christianity, "none posed so many problems as the Corinthians."⁵² The congregation of this early church consisted of the first converts to Christianity in a city that, in the eyes of Christians, frequently lapsed into pagan immorality. The letter to the Corinthians from Paul explained the crisis in the Corinthian church, including the wearing of long hair by men. Paul solved the crisis by ordering the assembly according to the natural hierarchy.

Corinth was the largest city in Greece, "a city of many religious traditions which differed significantly from Rome and its sycophants. The Egyptian gods and Judaism, for instance, established an early foothold in Roman Corinth, which was the major hub of trading activity with

⁵¹ There is little evidence that the Church Fathers looked to the Old Testament in concerns about longhaired men. Though the reader may initially consider stories of long haired men, especially that of Samson, as relevant to this topic, a thorough search of the referenced to hair in the Old Testament reveals no clear definition of long hair as good or bad; it often contradicts itself. The opinion of the church fathers, elaborated later in this paper is that longhaired saints of the Old Testament needed the covering because they were fallen, but after redemption through Christ a covering was no longer needed.

Finally, the reader may be tempted to see some connection between the long hair of Samson and the long hair of the Germanic kings. There is no evidence of connection, and as shown earlier the long hair on kings developed from quite different origins and were a tradition among the tribes before they knew of the Old Testament. Samson's had long hair because he was a nazirite: Clovis had long hair because he was a king.

⁵² Ralph P. Martin, *1,2 Corinthians* (Dallas: Word Publishing 1998) 21.

the east. Nevertheless, ...the local manifestation of the imperial cult must have played a dominant role in the life of the upper social strata."⁵³ Paul founded the church in Corinth among these other religions, drawing some of his members from their midst.

Corinth was not only a highly commercial city of diverse religions; it also was notorious in the ancient world for its immorality. Corinth was "proud of its reputation as the pleasure palace of the ancient world."⁵⁴ According to Strabo, who visited the city shortly after its reconstruction, this 'pleasure palace' employed over one thousand prostitutes serving at the temple of Aphrodite on the mountain overlooking the city. In a city of six hundred thousand, the proportion of prostitutes to the rest of the population is incredible, and it is clear that Strabo was impressed, although the precise number could have been an exaggeration.⁵⁵

Sexual immorality was only one of the many moral problems in early Corinth. Indeed, one historian notes, the verb in the Greek lexicon meaning 'to indulge one's appetites to the full' was 'to Corinthianize.'⁵⁶ When writing to the Romans from Corinth, Paul described the problems he found in Corinth. The people, he claimed, should have known God from his existence in creation, and yet they did not honor or praise him. Instead, they became idolaters who, as Paul saw it, had completely given up their bodies to lust. (1 Cor 1: 18-24). This selfish indulgence and corruption was clear to Paul.

They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, and malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who practice such things

⁵³ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 20.

deserve to die – yet they do not only do them but even applaud others who practice them. (1 Cor 1: 28-32).

The assembly at Corinth worried Paul. “I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (1 Cor 11: 3). The Corinthian assembly frequently asserted that “all things are lawful”(1 Cor 6: 12, 10: 23), a phrase Paul frequently repeated in his argument against it. Paul saw the Corinthians as especially susceptible to sin because of their environment. He wrote his first letter to the Corinthians responding to reports he heard of their lapses. The Corinthians were quarreling, sexually immoral and accepting of sexual immorality, eating food dedicated to idols, and some of the men were growing their hair long.

In the last chapters of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul focused on the solution to many of the problems, such as long hair on men, that he had condemned in the early part of the letter. Order was the answer to the problems of Corinth. The Corinthians basic misunderstanding was that they did not grasp the hierarchy of the universe. According to T. Lynn Stott in her dissertation on Paul’s rhetoric, Paul “delineates appropriate hierarchies and established protocols for the balance, structure, and organization of the spiritual body that the Corinthians are to be.”⁵⁷

Paul applied his concept of hierarchy to many subjects. For example, Paul constructed a hierarchy for spiritual gifts and one for man’s role in redemption, which outlined to the Corinthians their proper role as Christians. Paul believed that the Corinthians had to understand the appropriate order to redress their lapses into immorality and comprehend the appropriate Christian’s role, and gave several examples in his letter. Paul’s concern with longhaired men stemmed from his belief that they violated this cosmic hierarchy in terms of God, male and female interaction.

⁵⁷ T. Lynn Stott, *Symbolic Healing and the Body at Corinth: An Anthropological Analysis of Paul’s Rhetoric* (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University: Nashville 1998) 296.

One of the first hierarchies to appear in Corinthians concerned spiritual gifts. Then, though he enumerated many diverse talents and encouraged the Corinthians to “strive for the greater gifts,” he promised to “show [them] a still more excellent way”(1 Cor 12:31). Paul has delineated a hierarchy within spiritual gifts, and then placed the general category of spiritual gift in a greater hierarchy. He ranked spiritual attitudes above gifts in chapter thirteen. “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love”(1 Cor 13:13). He wanted the Corinthians to strive for love more than for the spiritual gifts, because it ranked above them in the hierarchy. Love was more important than speaking in tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and sacrifice. It was the one necessary attitude of a church (1 Cor 13: 1-3).

Paul knew that love was essential to the success of the Corinthian church, more so than spiritual gifts, and even faith and hope. That is why he gave it the highest place in the hierarchy. Love answered specific problems in the Corinthian church. “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude”(1 Cor 13: 4-5). The Corinthians had problems with impatience and arrogance, as Paul pointed out earlier in the letter. “But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant”(1 Cor 4: 18). He continued, love “does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful”(1 cor 13:6). The quarreling among factions in the Corinthian assembly that Paul criticized in the first chapter of the letter would be solved should the Corinthians love. “It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth”(1 Cor 13:7). One of the Corinthians was living with his father’s wife and had bragged about it among the congregation, who had not condemned him (1 Cor 5:1-8).

Paul assigned rank and order to spiritual gifts and attitudes according to their usefulness to the Corinthian assembly. Thus, because love was the answer to many of the problems at Corinth, it received the highest rank. However, the Corinthians did not understand the hierarchy, and were

confusing the importance of spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues with the greater gift of love. Paul recognized that the Corinthians worked for what they considered important, and thus he delineated a hierarchy in his letter to show them what they should have been working for.

Stott related “the maintenance of balance and order, including proper hierarchical structures, is essential to his effort to restore the body of Christ to its naturally healthy state.”⁵⁸ It is not surprising then, that though his text centered on the importance of love, he also delineated other hierarchies to answer specific situations. For example, Paul delineated marital status in order of importance. Women and men should strive to be virgins, but if their desires did not permit this, marriage was vastly superior to sexual immorality (1 Cor 7).

He also explained the hierarchy of the physical and spiritual natures. Because the Corinthians did not understand that the physical must exist and then pass away before the spiritual redemption completely occurred, they considered themselves saved at baptism.⁵⁹ Paul recognized that many of the acts of immorality occurred because these people believed they were saved eternally at the moment of baptism, and thus he explained the proper order was first physical, then spiritual salvation. “But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15: 23).

Another sub-hierarchy in the text directly involves longhaired men. Because Paul constructed the other hierarchies to address specific problems found in Corinth, the existence of this hierarchy suggests that men frequently grew out their hair and Paul could not tolerate it. According to Stott, “Paul is disturbed by the apparent failure on the part of some of the Corinthians

⁵⁸ Stott, 305.

⁵⁹ Martin, 30-31.

to demonstrate the appropriate signs of the male/female part of the hierarchy.”⁶⁰ Paul delineated the hierarchy clearly to the Corinthians in chapter eleven of his letter. “I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ.” The hierarchy was clear, with God at the head followed by Christ, man, and woman (1 Cor 11: 1-8). Longhaired men threatened the hierarchy.

The Corinthians were not following the symbolism Paul incorporated in the hierarchy. The men prayed with their heads covered, and Paul claimed that “Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head.” The accusation was harsh, because Paul had just stated that Christ was the head of man. Any man with something on his head while involved in spiritual acts disgraced Christ, “for a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God.” Paul further specified his complaint; men were not simply praying with their heads covered in cloth, but actually growing their hair long as coverings. “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him?” (1 Cor 11: 1-8).

Stott clarified Paul’s meaning of nature in the passage. “Nature is a culturally constructed category. What is deemed natural by Paul and other Greco-Roman writers are generally those ideas and signs, which duplicate and uphold cultural and cosmic presuppositions of hierarchy and order.”⁶¹ Paul constructed the natural hierarchy in this case specifically as God first, then Christ, man and woman. This construction, as Stott pointed out, was neither new nor distinctly Christian. “Paul, in creating the perfect spiritual body in the assembly, offers as its basis a structure much like that outlined in the *Timaeus* – one headed by the creator God, followed by the lesser deity, then by

⁶⁰ Stott, 298.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 300 footnote.

man, then by woman.”⁶² Paul’s hierarchy was prevalent in the Greco-Roman society at the time, and therefore he considered it natural. “Man is ‘naturally’ dominant in both Greek and Jewish cultural understandings, so he must distinguish himself from woman.”⁶³

Paul’s discussion of nature clearly involved gender roles, and the symbols of those roles. Man was naturally superior, according to Paul, and thus he must distinguish himself from the subservient woman. According to Stott, ““Paul clearly sees the subordination of woman as essential to social order in the Corinthian assembly”⁶⁴ because it was consistent with the hierarchy. The rules concerning woman’s long hair were exactly the opposite of man’s; she subverted the hierarchy if she cut her hair off. “Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head,” and according to Paul, her head is the man (1 Cor 11: 1-6). She should not disgrace man for the same reason man should not disgrace God; “for a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man.” He continued, “if a woman has long hair, it is her glory. For her hair is given to her for a covering” (1 Cor 11: 7-15).

The Church fathers of the late fourth and early fifth centuries seized upon and exploited the main points in Paul’s passage to the Corinthians concerning long hair. Following the pattern Paul established in his hierarchy, the fathers believed hair length should represent one’s position in the cosmic hierarchy. The patristic writings elaborated on the values Paul attributed to long and built on each other to form the body of Christian thought on the long hair of men.

Bishop Ambrose initially resumed the topic of long hair on men. Ambrose (340-397AD) was made the Bishop of Milan in 374 by popular demand. He addressed long hair in a letter to the

⁶² Ibid., 297.

⁶³ Ibid., 300 footnote.

layman Iraneus. In his letter, Ambrose continued the discussion of long hair as feminine and also introduced long hair as a symbol of worldliness.

Ambrose explained that physical appearance should represent gender. Because the sexes were different, they should appear differently. In his letter to Iraneaus, he wrote of men who desired to grow out their hair, “If you investigate the matter well, what nature herself abhors must be unsuitable, for why do you want to seem not a man when you were born one?”⁶⁵ Ambrose was concerned that men who desired to appear feminine might also acquire female habits and actions. “I think it refers not so much to clothing as to manners and to our habits and actions, since one act is becoming to a man, another to a woman.”⁶⁶ He believed that a person wearing clothing or hairstyles traditionally associated with the opposite sex was deliberately trying to appear as a member of that sex. “Moreover, in men and women there are different customs, different complexion, different gestures, gait and strength, different qualities of voice.”⁶⁷ Male and female were differentiated in many ways, and appearance was one important factor. Gender was correlated with a specific role, complete with the appropriate appearance, which included hair length.

Long hair was one symbol of appearance that represented gendered actions. Non-traditional hair length confused the traditional appearance of men and women, thus confusing gender roles. “It is to be expected that chastity will be lost where the distinction of the sexes is not observed, and where nature lays down definite instruction, as the Apostle says: ‘Does it become a woman to pray to God uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear his hair long is

⁶⁴ Ibid p. 300.

⁶⁵ Ambrose, “Letter to Iranaeus,” *The Fathers of the Church vol. 26*, trans. Sister Mary Melchior Beyenka (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc. 1954) 436-437.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 435 – 436.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 435 – 436.

degrading; but for a woman to wear her hair long is a glory to her?"⁶⁸ Ambrose then assigned roles to the sexes based on their hairstyles. "How unsightly it is for a man to act like a woman! Let those who curl their hair like women also conceive and bear children. The one sex is veiled; the other engages in war."⁶⁹ Both of the actions named and represented by hair according to Ambrose, childbearing and war, were distinctly associated with gender.

Ambrose turned to the natural world for his next examples of complementary gender roles and appearance. "At the same time let us note that it is seemly to live in accordance with nature, and to pass our time in accordance with it, and that whatever is contrary to nature is shameful."⁷⁰ Ambrose cited specific instances in the natural world that illustrated his point.

In the animals of the rest of creation, too, the form, strength, and roar of the lion and lioness, of bull and heifer, are different. Among deer, also, the stag and hind differ as much in sex as in appearance, so that one can distinguish them from a distance. Between birds and men there is even closer comparison regarding their clothing, for their natural covering distinguished the sex in them. The peacock is very beautiful, but his mate does not have feathers so variegated in color. Pheasants also have different colors to mark the distinction of sex. The same is true of chickens.⁷¹

According to Ambrose, the differentiation of appearance was natural because it was consistent with the natural world. By enumerating animals that were differentiated in gender through their appearance, Ambrose suggested that those who were changing their appearance should look to the natural world for evidence of appropriate behavior.

Ambrose then shifted from a gender discussion to one of traditions. He continued, "there is an excuse for those who follow their native customs, barbarous as they are, the Persians, the Goths,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 436-437.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 437.

⁷⁰ Ambrose, "Duties of the Clergy Book I," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans 1956) 37.

⁷¹ Ambrose "Letter to Iranaeus," 435 – 436.

the Armenians. But nature is greater than one's land."⁷² He explicitly recognized the fact that some people had long hair consistent with their traditions. However, he clearly stated that nature is more important than native cultural practices. God created a system in which male and female were differentiated naturally, according to Ambrose's interpretation of Paul. Though some cultures claimed that men traditionally grew long hair, Ambrose discarded this excuse because God created all cultures.

Ambrose's final argument against long hair on men was that concern with hair reflected worldliness. "What shall we say of those who consider it a sign of luxury to have in their service slaves wearing curls and ornaments, while they themselves have long beards and the slaves have streaming hair?"⁷³ In an age that considered asceticism and rejection of the world the most holy form of Christianity, concern with appearance showed concern with the world. Ambrose believed that long hair on men was a symbol of worldliness and vanity.

The Greek father John Chrysostom, or "Golden Mouth," continued the discussion. Chrysostom (347-407 AD) was a deacon, presbyter and preacher in Antioch before he was given an episcopate in Constantinople. In his late fourth century homilies on the Corinthians, he addressed Paul's passage on long hair. Because Chrysostom was commenting on the Corinthians, his analysis of the meaning of long hair closely followed Paul's. Chrysostom continued Ambrose's discussion of long hair as a means of differentiating the sexes. He added, however, that long hair is an indication of women's submission to men.

According to Chrysostom, long hair was a symbol of gender, and thus established the position one filled in God's hierarchy. He made this clear in his *Homilies* through a parable. "Not

⁷² Ibid., 436.

⁷³ Ibid., 436.

only' so he [Paul] speaks, 'because he hath Christ to be his head ought he not to cover the head, but also because he rules over the woman.'" Chrysostom blatantly followed Paul's hierarchy, establishing the male authority directly over the female and Christ above the male. "For the ruler when he comes before the king ought to have the symbol of his rule. As therefore no ruler without military girdle and cloak would venture to appear before him that hath the diadem: so neither do thou without the symbols of thy rule, (one of which is not being covered,) pray before God."⁷⁴ Chrysostom completed his analogy emphasizing the absurdity of male long hair. "Thou doest the same as if having recovered a diadem, thou shouldst cast the diadem from thy head, and instead of it take a slave's garment."⁷⁵

Chrysostom identified long hair with the female, and should a male assume this appearance he was casting down his right as a man. That right was the ability to pray to God as a man, who occupied a place fundamentally closer to God in the hierarchy than a woman did. The symbol of man's dominance over woman was short hair, and the symbol of her submission was long hair. Chrysostom equated male long hair with a man's refusal to assume his place in the divine order. By assuming the appearance of a female, a male rejected his position of authority for the lowest position of submission.

Though Ambrose had strictly emphasized the difference between male and female, Chrysostom placed more emphasis on Paul's idea that long hair was a symbol of female subjection. He explained that "being covered is a mark of subjection...man is not compelled to do this because he is the image of his Lord." He derived this concept directly from Corinthians, where Paul

⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on First Corinthians," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans 1956) 153.

⁷⁵Ibid., 153.

“instructs us that man is made in the image and after the likeness of God. ‘A man,’ he said ‘ought not to wear long hair, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God.’”⁷⁶

Chrysostom placed long hair in a category he called the “symbols of her subjection,”⁷⁷ which represented woman’s role. He explained “it follows that being covered is a mark of subjection and authority, for it induces her to look down and be ashamed and preserve entire her proper virtue. For the virtue and honor of the governed is to abide in his obedience.”⁷⁸ A woman’s honor was in her long hair, because it was honorable to fulfil one’s position in the hierarchy. Because her position was below man’s position, she must submit and obey him. Her long hair was a symbol of that obedience, and her willingness to assume her proper role.

Chrysostom did not claim credit for his knowledge of the appropriate role of long hair. He did not give Paul credit either. Chrysostom claimed that his arguments and Paul’s stemmed from nature. Men who grew long hair argued with nature. “Add now, I pray, thine own part also, that thou mayest not seem to subvert the very laws of nature; a proof of most insolent rashness; to buffet not only with us but with nature also.”⁷⁹

Jerome (341-420) was the next of the church fathers to contribute to the discussion. Jerome, an ascetic Christian father who lived from the middle of the fourth to the middle of the fifth centuries, translated the Latin Vulgate Bible and wrote many letters clarifying spiritual matters for friends. He showed evidence that Paul’s identification of long hair as fundamentally female carries into the Christian community of the late fourth century, helped by the reiteration in the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 152-153.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 154.

previous and contemporary works of Ambrose and Chrysostom. He also continued Ambrose's previous discussion of long hair as a symbol of worldliness that Chrysostom had neglected.

Jerome's letters serve to illustrate how fundamentally hair length represented sex. In one, he wrote of a woman attempting to flee town. To disguise herself, she "had her hair cut short, and in company with some virgins was sent to a lonely house in the country. There for a little time she put on men's clothes until the scars formed over her wounds."⁸⁰ One of the essential steps this woman took to appear like a man was to cut off her hair. The casual reference to hair cutting reveals cultural norms in a Christian society. Men had short hair and women had long hair.

Jerome was the first of the church fathers to mention the Old Testament references to longhaired men. He approved of long hair in the past as he says Samuel "inspired veneration with his long hair."⁸¹ He accepted long hair in the past on nazirite men because it was a symbol of their consecration to God. However, many other passages reveal Jerome's disgust with contemporaneous longhaired men because of the characteristics he attributed to them. The longhaired men he saw in his present culture did not have long hair for the same reasons as the Old Testament saints.

"Avoid men also, when you see them loaded with chains and wearing their hair long, contrary to the apostle's precept, not to speak of beard like those of goats, black cloaks and bare feet braving the cold. All these things are tokens of the devil."⁸² The devil was the prince of the world according to the Bible. Jerome, as had Ambrose before him, considered long hair as a fundamental symbol of the worldliness of men. Long hair revealed a concern about earthly things that was also prevalent in action towards women, according to Jerome. He almost always

⁸⁰ Jerome, 17.

⁸¹ Ibid., 345.

described men who flirted with young women as “young fops with long hair.”⁸³ Obviously ‘fops’ was not an endearing term, but Jerome further condemned the actions of these men. “Certain persons have devoted the whole of their energies and life to the single object of knowing the names, houses, and characters of married ladies.”⁸⁴ In short, Jerome identified sexually immoral and vain men by their long hair.

Augustine of Hippo was the last, and probably the most influential of the church fathers to discuss long hair on men. Augustine (354 - 430 AD) became a priest and finally bishop of Hippo in North Africa. In his “Work of Monks,” Augustine responded to his friend’s complaint that monks were growing their hair long. Augustine built on the work of Ambrose and Chrysostom to construct reasoning behind the approval of longhair in the Old Testament but condemnation in the New Testament. Augustine also added to the discussion of long hair as indicative of worldliness by Ambrose and Jerome.

Augustine’s most important contribution to the Christian discussion of hair was the clarification of the difference between Old Testament longhaired saints and the decrees of Paul. “That namely, which was signified in the veil interposed between the face of Moses and the beholding of the people of Israel, that same was also signified in those times by the long hair of the saints.”⁸⁵ Augustine referred to the Old Testament scriptures, when long hair distinguished the nazirites, a people consecrated to God. As Samson explained, “A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a nazirite to God from my mother’s womb.” But after Christ redeemed man,

⁸²Ibid., 34.

⁸³Ibid., 385. Also 389, 477.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁵ Augustine, 523.

Augustine considered long hair as a “screen of simulated humility,”⁸⁶ because man was no longer had reason to be ashamed.

Long hair was a violation of the natural state of man, because it represented a different and lower position in the hierarchy than the one God had assigned to him through redemption. After man fell and before Christ, he was ashamed before God and needed long hair. Once redeemed through Christ, man was restored to his position as the image of God, and no longer needed the symbol of humility that long hair represented.⁸⁷ Woman, however, was not created explicitly in the image of God, and thus she still needed the covering.

Augustine also considered longhaired men worldly because they were more concerned with appearance than scripture. In an attempt to appear like the longhaired saints from the Old Testament, they ignored the decrees of the Apostle. Those decrees stated that longhaired men did not represent the image of God but affronted Christ. Augustine spoke harshly of those that grew their hair long because “those persons, hawking about a venal hypocrisy, fear lest shorn sanctity be held cheaper than longhaired; because forsooth he who sees them shall call to mind...Samuel and the rest who did not cut off their hair.”⁸⁸ At least some of the men expected their long hair to give them the appearance of piety. Augustine made it clear in no uncertain terms that they were insulting their savior in exchange for worldly salvation.

Even if longhaired men did not grow their hair to imitate the saints, Augustine considered the vanity of hair absurd. Christian focus on the spiritual instead of the worldly condemned any focus on the physical world. Augustine ranked hair in importance even below the rest of the body.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 523.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 523.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 523.

“Aren’t the hairs of your head certainly of less value than your other members?”⁸⁹ As Augustine said, “What is cheaper, more despicable, more lowly in your body than the hairs of your head?”⁹⁰

Augustine contributed to the discussion of hair in two major areas. He clarified the symbol in terms of Old and New Testament meanings in the framework of Paul’s hierarchy. He also discussed hair as a symbol of worldliness, as had Ambrose and Jerome. He particularly saw long hair on men as symbolic of vanity and false humility.

There were two main streams of thought in the continuing discussion of long hair by the church fathers. One stream that grew each time it was addressed was hair as a differentiation of gender. Ambrose discussed long hair as a differentiating factor of appearance that represents the different roles of male and female. Nowhere did he indicate that females were submissive to males. Chrysostom, however, stratified gender roles. He added that not only were the sexes different, but woman was submissive to man and man was closer to God. Long hair still indicated gender, but the ramifications for assuming the opposite sex’s appearance were more serious. Longhaired men are not only appearing female; they are refusing to occupy their God-given role. Augustine finished this line of thought by carrying it even further. Long hair was still indicative of gender, but gender as a part of the natural hierarchy including God. In addition to the previous associations with longhaired men, men who grew their hair insulted their savior.

Another stream of discussion was the worldliness of longhaired men. It did not grow like the gender discussion, but remained consistent from Ambrose in the latter half of the fourth century through Augustine in the fifth. Long hair on men represented vanity, sexual immorality, and false humility according to the church fathers.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 523.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 523.

From Ambrose to Augustine, the church fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries resumed Paul's discussion of long hair on men. The body of literature on long hair basically ended with Augustine, but through Corinthians and the writings of these church fathers long hair became a Christian symbol as well. In the end, long hair symbolized subversion of God's hierarchy and worldliness in several forms. Long hair on men, at the end of the Christian discussion, was condemned.

Chapter 3: Christianity in Action – Keeping Long Hair

Long hair symbolized femininity, subversion and worldliness to Christians. To the Germanic peoples, it symbolized valor and success in war. Clovis's Christian queen and local clergy made it clear that ancestral traditions and Christianity could not co-exist, and that, at baptism, one must be exchanged for the other. The turning point came in 496 CE when Bishop Remigius of Rheims publicly baptized Clovis, the king of the Franks. With his baptism, the conflicting traditions concerning long hair collided.

Clovis's actions after baptism certainly did not seem traditionally Christian. There are several examples of Clovis's immoral behavior documented by Gregory of Tours. One illustration from the chronicle demonstrates Clovis's ruthlessness. He broke at least three of the Ten Commandments on a single occasion, murdering, lying, and stealing to acquire secular power. In one example, Clovis arranged the murder of his brother, the King of the Ripuarian Franks, by the king's son, Chloderic. Clovis incited the son, "Your father is old and he is lame in one leg. If he were to die, his kingdom would come to you of right, and my alliance would come with it." Chloderic killed his father and offered to show Clovis's envoys his newly acquired treasure as a token of goodwill. The envoys slyly told Chloderic to reach in and show them how much treasure was in the chest. "As he leaned forward to do this, one of the Franks raised his hand and split Chloderic's skull with an axe." To further heighten the insult, Clovis blatantly lied to their people about his involvement in the murders. "While I was out sailing on the River Scheldt," said he, "Chloderic, the son of your king, my brother, was busy plotting against his father and putting it out that I wanted him killed...I take no responsibility for what has happened. It is not for me to shed

the blood of one of my fellow kings.” Clovis then persuaded the people that they should submit themselves to him, and “in this way he took over both the kingship and the treasure of Sigibert.”⁹¹

There are several other examples from Gregory of theft and murder by Clovis. Another example of theft occurred when Clovis marched against Chararic, the father in the father-son couple he planned to have tonsured. Clovis ruthlessly killed the king to acquire his kingdom. “When they were dead he took possession of their kingdom, their treasure, and their people.”⁹²

Clovis murdered when convenient and most frequently to consolidate power. He did not even refrain from the murder of family members. The brothers Ricchar and Ragnachar, relatives of Clovis, fought jointly against him. In battle, Ricchar abandoned his brother. “Ragnachar witnessed the defeat of his own troops and prepared to slip away in flight. He...was brought before Clovis. His brother Ricchar was dragged in with him.” Clovis “raised his hand and split Ragnachar’s skull...he killed Ricchar with a second blow of his axe.”⁹³

Although he claimed to be Christian, Clovis’s actions clearly were not traditionally Christian. He ruthlessly lied and murdered to steal his other family members’ land and treasure on many occasions. There is no evidence that the bishops asked him to cease these actions, and Clovis clearly disregarded scriptural commands. There is at least one area, however, where Clovis directly violated a specific promise the bishops required him to make at baptism. Clovis knew that an essential part of his conversion required surrendering his ancestral traditions, including his ancestral gods. There was a choice involved in conversion, made clear to Clovis from the beginning. He could not simply add the Christian god to his own pantheon. Before he converted, at least two Christians close to Clovis insisted on this fact. As Clotild, his Queen, attempted to

⁹¹ Gregory of Tours, 156.

⁹² Ibid., 156.

convert him, she told him that his present gods “were certainly not worthy of being called divine. You ought instead to worship Him who created at a word.”⁹⁴ Bishop Remigius, who had close contact with Clotild, “began to urge [Clovis] to believe in the true God, Maker of heaven and earth, and to forsake his idols.”⁹⁵ This clearly required a complete transition from pantheism to belief in the one Christian God.

Bishop Remigius reinforced this theoretical surrender of ancestral beliefs before the people at the time of Clovis’s baptism. “The holy man of God addressed him in these pregnant words: ‘Bow your head in meekness, Sicamber. Worship what you have burnt, burn what you have been wont to worship.’”⁹⁶ The Sicambri were the tribe that the Merovingians claimed to be descended from, and Remigius used this term as a reminder of the tribal traditions Clovis has promised to give up. Clovis was baptized, and his people promised to “give up worshipping our mortal gods, pious king, and we are prepared to follow the immortal god.”⁹⁷

Clovis confessed in front of his people only because of Bishop Avitus’s insistence. One of Clovis’s greatest fears about public confession had been the rejection by his people because he selected Christianity over their ancestral beliefs. Gregory recorded a similar fear that Bishop Avitus also encountered from another Germanic king, Clovis’s father-in-law. The bishop chastised Gundobad for not confessing Christianity before his people, citing many scriptures that taught public confession. “You are a king and you need not fear to be taken in charge by anyone: yet you are afraid of your subjects and you do not dare to confess in public your belief in the Creator of all

⁹³ Ibid., 157.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 142.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 143.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 144.

things.”⁹⁸ Avitus continued, “Do you not realize 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.”⁹⁹ Avitus felt that the confession was inherent in being a leader. The position of a ruler required him to be bold enough to confess his beliefs; refusal to do so defied God’s requests, “for God is not mocked, nor can he love the man who for an earthly kingdom refuses to confess him before all the world.”¹⁰⁰ Avitus emphasized to Gundobad that a fundamental part of a ruler’s Christianity was the confession before his people, providing them a clear example of Christianity.

Bishop Avitus wrote to encourage the king after his baptism and confirmed that the bishops believed Clovis had surrendered his ancestral beliefs. Avitus broadened the transition to include the entire ancestral belief system, not only cultural idols of the past. After Clovis was baptized, the bishop praised him for choosing Christianity over his ancient beliefs. He said that others’ response, “when their bishops and friends exhort them to adhere to the True Faith, are accustomed to oppose the traditions of their race and respect for their ancestral cult; thus they culpably prefer a false shame to their salvation.”¹⁰¹ Many rulers converted, realized that their new Christian religion involved denial of ancestral beliefs, and hid their conversion from their subjects. Clovis, however, chose to confess and be baptized in public once his subjects had confirmed “we are prepared to follow the immortal God about whom Remigius preaches.”¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Gregory of Tours, 148.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁰¹ Avitus of Vienne, “Bishop Avitus to Clovis”, *Readings in Medieval History*, ed. by Patrick Geary (New York: Broadview Press 1989) 157-158.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 157 – 158.

Avitus fully believed that Clovis had surrendered his ancestral gods at baptism. The bishop commended Clovis for rejecting the beliefs of his parents, because many before him persisted in believing in their ancestral cults rather than convert to Christianity. Along with his birthright, Clovis had inherited a strong system of beliefs and rituals. “Of all your ancient genealogy you have chosen to keep only your own nobility.”¹⁰³ Clovis chose only his inherited kingship, discarding to ancestral beliefs.

The ancestral Germanic traditions Clovis surrendered presumably included long hair on kings. It was a tradition with origins four hundred years earlier in the tribes of Tacitus, and it violated scripture and patristic writings. Canons of the Synod of Elvira indicate that longhaired men created problems for Christians in Germanic areas. The sixty-seventh canon of the council held around 309 AD in Spain stated that “it is forbidden for a woman, whether baptized or a catechumen, to have anything to do with long-haired men or hairdressers; any who do this shall be kept from communion.”¹⁰⁴ Communion was one of the seven sacraments that a Christian needed to practice, and denial was serious. The Spanish clergy obviously did not approve of longhaired men. Clovis’s surrendered ancestral traditions were those of the Merovingians, and present day scholars recognize the single determining tradition of the Merovingians as the long hair of their kings.¹⁰⁵

After he became a Christian, Clovis not only maintained his long hair, he codified the law threatening severe punishment for cutting the hair of a longhaired boy. “The Merovingian kings had not ceased to be barbarians by becoming Christians.”¹⁰⁶ Salic law provides excellent evidence

¹⁰³ Ibid., 158.

¹⁰⁴ Samuel Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality: The Emergence of Canon Law at the Synod of Elvira* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1972) 134.

¹⁰⁵ Geary; James, *The Franks*; Wallace-Hadrill; Wood.

¹⁰⁶ Dawson, 32.

that Clovis's descendants continued to follow ancestral, not Christian, traditions. A portion of the translation of Salic law explains how the kings passed along the laws. Basically, each king revised the laws and then passed them on to his descendants. The section of the law that heavily penalized the cutting of a longhaired boy's hair, however, remained intact. The kings from Clovis through Childeric all signed the law containing that section, although in the sixth and seventh centuries substantial revisions were made in other parts of the law. Even Childebert, who first inserted laws on the Christian traditions during his reign in the early eighth century, left the section concerning long hair in the law unchanged.¹⁰⁷

Physical evidence also reveals the continuing importance of long hair. For example, the ring from the reign of Childeric found in his tomb showed the king with long hair.¹⁰⁸ Continuing the tradition, the extant seals of the later Merovingians such as Theuderic III (675-690 AD), Clovis III (690-694 AD), Childebert III (694 – 711 AD) and Childeric II (662–675 AD) exhibited the kings with their long hair.¹⁰⁹ Clovis III and Childebert III were the sons of Theuderic II and Childeric the II was his brother. Even baby Clovis III, who died at the age of four, was depicted with long hair to appear royal. Thus, the seals provide another source proving that two centuries after the conversion of Clovis, the Merovingian kings still exhibited their long hair as a symbol of kingship.

All of the kings from Clovis until Childeric III wore their hair long despite the patristic writings and scripture. Einhard, a dwarf who spent twenty-three years in Charlemagne's service, described the overthrow of the last Merovingian king in his biography of Charlemagne, the greatest king of the subsequent Carolingian dynasty. "The Merovingian dynasty, from which the Franks are

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰⁸ James, *The Franks*, 62.

accustomed to choose their kings, is thought to have lasted down to King Childeric III, who was deposed on the order of Stephen II, the Pope of Rome. His hair was cut short and he was shut up in a monastery.”¹⁰⁹ Childeric III was deposed in the early eighth century, over two hundred years after Clovis was converted. By this time, the Carolingians had taken control in all but name, and all that was left to Childeric “was that, content with his royal title, he should sit on the throne, with his hair long and his beard flowing.”¹¹⁰ In short, the king had only the appearance of power: his long hair. Even that was denied him, however, because when deposed, he was shorn and placed in a monastery, similar to the way Clovis and his sons removed the threat of power by placing the threat in a monastery.

Further significance of the representations on seals and the shearing of Childeric lie in the traditions upheld by the common folk. Though all of Clovis’s subjects had agreed in the public conversion to give up their ancestral beliefs for Christianity, evidently their promises had no more depth than their king’s. The people continued to recognize the king by his long hair, and the symbol continued to be put on the seals because it was a recognizable feature of the ruler. Childeric’s downfall proved that the people still assumed the man with the power had long hair. Though Childeric was completely devoid of power, the Carolingians still felt the necessity of cutting his hair.

By the beginning of the eighth century the Germanic people still recognized long hair as a characteristic of kingship, but at the end of the fifth they had promised to relinquish their ancestral traditions for those of Christianity. In the case of long hair, the Germanic people continued to follow their ancestral traditions.

¹⁰⁹ Wallace-Hadrill, 246.

¹¹⁰ Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*. ed. by Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books 1969) 55.

The continued practices concerning long hair reveal Clovis and his people's direct violation of their promise to surrender ancestral traditions in at least one area. This could suggest that Clovis and the generations after him who continued to recognize long hair as a symbol of the king were false Christians because they clung to an ancestral tradition. This interpretation is not consistent with the opinions of contemporaneous Christian authorities. Clovis considered himself a Christian. Gregory of Tours documented Clovis's actions and Avitus was bishop of a local parish, so the two were aware of Clovis's disobedience and immorality. However, they both spoke highly of Clovis and his dedication to Christianity. The reason for this lies in the cultural focus on warfare that had made long hair a symbol in the first place. Clovis clearly believed that he was a Christian, even though his perception was colored by the society he lived in, a society that held steadfastly to its dedication to war.

Clovis's conversion experience shows the king's connection of war and Christianity at the time of adoption. Through a miraculous experience, Clovis was finally convinced to convert on the battlefield facing the Alamanni. "When the two armies met on the battlefield there was great slaughter and the troops of Clovis were rapidly being annihilated."¹¹² Desperate for help, Clovis gave in and called upon his wife's God. "If you will give me victory over my enemies...I will believe in you and I will be baptized in your name." At the conclusion of his prayer, "the Alamanni turned their backs and began to run away."¹¹³ Clovis prayed as an act of desperation, and promised to convert if granted victory by calling upon the name of Christ. Once the Christian God aided him, Clovis lived up to his promise and began believing.

¹¹¹ Ibid (p. 55).

¹¹² Gregory of Tours, 143.

¹¹³ Ibid., 143.

Following this experience, Clovis's wife Clotild recognized her opportunity. She immediately called Bishop Remigius of Rheims to convince Clovis to carry through on his promise of baptism. The king agreed only if his people would convert as well. "More than three thousand of his army were baptized at the same time," and to make it more of a public event, "the public squares were draped with colored cloths, the churches were adorned with white hangings."¹¹⁴ Clotild's perseverance finally paid off. Clovis became Christian.

The battlefield conversion of Clovis seems utterly self-serving. Clovis had frequently rejected Christianity, even after his wife claimed that her faith saved their son. He adopted Christianity, however, simply because its God granted him victory. In actuality, Clovis still focused on the Germanic issue of victory in battle; even public baptism was focused on the military aspect of society. Thus, not only does the experience point out the convenience of Clovis's conversion, it reveals that the value associated with long hair-prowess in war- was still at the forefront of Germanic culture. The love of war was present in Clovis's understanding of what it meant to be a good Christian.

Clovis connected Christianity with success in war in other ways as well. The king justified attacks by claiming that the foe was heretical. "I find it hard to go on seeing these Arians occupy a part of Gaul," said Clovis to his ministers. "With God's help, let us invade them. When we have beaten them, we will take over their territory." On his way to battle with Alaric, Clovis prayed for victory. "If You are on my side and if You have decreed that this people of unbelievers, who have always been hostile to You, are to be delivered into my hands, deign to show me a propitious sign." He again requested a sign so that he could "know [God would] support [His] servant Clovis" and

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 144.

“that God might deign to indicate a ford by which he might make the crossing.”¹¹⁵ He received a sign and successfully crossed the ford. During the battle, “the Goths fled, as they were prone to do, and Clovis was the victor, for God was on his side.” Clovis associated success in war, which his long hair represented, with Christianity. Thus, he combined the two, making cutting his hair unnecessary.

Clovis had good reason to believe he was a Christian. From their praise, Frankish clergy seemed to consider him as such, with Avitus lavishing praise on him in letters. He praised Clovis’s willingness to forge ahead and lead his people to Christianity. “Your ancestors have prepared a great destiny for you; you willed to prepare better things.” Avitus glorified Clovis’s contribution to Christianity. “Your sphere also burns with its own brilliance, and, in the person of a king, the light of a rising sun shines over the Western lands.”¹¹⁶

Even Gregory’s descriptions reveal his perspective on the Christianity of the king. At one battle site “the Lord showed [Clovis] such favor that the city walls collapsed of their own weight as he looked at them.”¹¹⁷ Another of Gregory’s comments provided insight into the reason the clergy considered Clovis a good Christian. “Day in and day out God submitted the enemies of Clovis to his dominion and increased his power, for he walked before Him with an upright heart and did what was pleasing in His sight.”¹¹⁸ With the Church’s positive reinforcement, Clovis must have felt justified in combining the two divergent Christian and Germanic ideas and his belief in his own virtue as a Christian.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 152.

¹¹⁶ Avitus, 158.

¹¹⁷ Gregory of Tours., 154.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 156.

Submission of enemies was as important to the Catholic Church as it was to Clovis. The Church was not united in the time of Clovis. It needed successful warriors, for it was battling the heresy of Arianism that the nearby Germanic tribes of the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths had converted to. Thus Clovis's conversion to Orthodoxy was extremely significant to the Church. "While we committed these questions to eternity and trusted that the truth of each man's belief would appear at the Future Judgement, the ray of truth has shown forth even among present shadows." Avitus wrote this passage to Clovis in a letter praising him for his baptism.¹¹⁹ Avitus posed Clovis as the man who judged that orthodox Christianity was valid. However, the choice was not only Clovis's, because he was found through divine intervention answering the prayers of the Orthodox Catholic Church.¹²⁰ Clovis chose the truth when he converted to Orthodoxy, and that choice was actually a result of divine intervention, positioning Clovis as the tool of God intended to aid the Catholic Church.

Avitus considered Clovis the tool who would use his warrior prowess to defeat heretical peoples. He regarded the Frankish people as "once captive, now freed by you [Clovis]."¹²¹ Clovis's conversion and public confession showed Avitus that the king "willed [his] race to derive from [him] all of the glories, which adorn high birth."¹²² The fundamental tie between high birth and converting one's people were evident, as Clovis "opened the way of [his] descendants to a heavenly reign"¹²³ through public conversion. He exhorted Clovis, now that "God, thanks to you, will make

¹¹⁹ Avitus of Vienne, 157.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 158.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 158.

of your people His own possession,” to persuade other Germanic tribes to Christianity.¹²⁴ To Avitus, and so to Clovis, the responsibility of the converted ruler was to lead his subjects and then the subjects of others, to Christianity.

Bishop Avitus of Vienne understood the importance of war to the king and the Catholic Church. He promised Clovis victory in battles that were launched to convert other nations. “Do not fear to send them envoys and to plead with them for the cause of God, who has done so much for your cause. So that the other pagan peoples, at first being subject to your empire for the sake of religion, while they still seem to have another ruler, may be distinguished by their race rather than by their prince.”¹²⁵ Avitus induced Clovis to spread religion through battle. Avitus’s use of a traditional Germanic value, one symbolized by long hair, appealed to Clovis’s cultural values instead of his responsibility as a Christian. Victory in battle was important to the king, first in persuading him to convert and then inducing him to conquer pagan peoples. It also, however, benefited the Catholic Church because a larger portion of the population would serve an orthodox Christian master, which meant more tithes, more power, and more saved souls.

The Merovingian culture revolved around warfare, and long hair symbolized prowess in war. The bishops needed strong warriors to make war on the heretical tribes that threatened their power. Christianity seemed to provide the assurance of victory that the Merovingians wanted. Thus, the focus on Christian warfare dominated the understanding of Christianity by both the bishops and the kings in Merovingian Gaul. So, despite the obvious contradictions between the Christian and Germanic interpretations of long hair, neither an argument nor a discussion took place.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 158.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 158.

Conclusion

Merovingian kings grew long hair as a symbol of their prowess in war. Because of the cultural focus on valor and the importance of war, warriors, in turn, became kings; long hair was a symbol of the valor of the best warrior, the king. In a larger sense, the long hair of the kings represented a culture focused on war. When the Carolingians cut the hair of the last Merovingian, they ushered out the era of warrior kings and instituted precursors of some of the more modern governmental services such as education and coinage.

The traditions of long hair play into the interpretation of Merovingian understandings of Christianity. Scripture and patristic writings condemned long hair on men, but the bishops that were contemporaries of the Merovingians considered Clovis a good Christian. Scripture did not seem to play a large part in Clovis's Christianity. Clovis did not follow even the Ten Commandments after conversion, much less the instructions in Corinthians or patristic writings concerning longhaired men, yet the bishops did not have a problem with this.

The lack of conflict between the two traditions indicates that the Merovingian understanding of Christianity on the part of both clergy and laity depended much more on the warlike society that had fostered the tradition of long hair than on scholarly Christian writings. Though he promised to surrender his ancestral beliefs, the Merovingian cultural focus on warfare was understood and encouraged by the local clergy. This focus on war was central to the Merovingian understanding of Christianity. Clovis never considered cutting his long hair when he became a Christian because Christianity assured victory, and a victorious warrior had long hair. Long hair was a symbol of success in wars, something the bishops encouraged. To Clovis, his long hair symbolized valor and God promoted valor, thus God must look favorably on longhaired men.

Given the Merovingian view of Christianity, there was more reason to keep than to cut their long hair.

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