



Review article:  
Parents and Children in  
the Early Middle Ages  
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**The Legacy of Paradise. Marriage, Motherhood and Women in Carolingian Edifying Literature.** By Katrien Heene. Frankfurt-am-Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris, Vienna: Peter Lang, 1997. 338 pp. £36. ISBN 3 631 30932 5.

**Dhuoda, Handbook for her Warrior Son. Liber Manualis.** Edited and translated by Marcelle Thiébaux. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. ix + 276 pp. £52.50. ISBN 0 521 40019 8.

**Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England.** By Sally Crawford. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999. xviii + 198 pp. £25. ISBN 0 7509 1918 3.

In the ninth century Paulinus of Aquileia described the horror of Hell in terms of inversion: 'Where there is no honour of *seniores*; or of king, nor is lord over slave/servant, nor mother loves her son or daughter, nor son honours his father'.<sup>1</sup> When, at the turn of the tenth century the English abbot Aelfric imagined heaven, he peopled it solely with adults. Those who had died as children would be resurrected as they would have been had they been fully grown.<sup>2</sup> We cannot be certain whether Dhuoda's heaven had children, but it certainly retained family ties and relationships and through them was firmly linked to the here and now. Those ancestors who had gone before were united in the afterlife with their descendants through the earthly inheritance they had left. Dutiful sons would be honoured in this world, would themselves live to enjoy the blessing of children and would go on to achieve eternal life.<sup>3</sup> In their pictures of the ideal, or inverted, world of the afterlife, Paulinus, Aelfric and Dhuoda offer insight into their views on this one, in these cases particularly on family, parenting and childhood. The problems of

<sup>1</sup> *Liber Exhortationis*, c. 49, *PL*, vol. 99, col. 253.

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies of Aelfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. Pope, EETS 259–60 2 vols. (London, 1967), I, pp. 432–3.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, Thiebaux's edn: Book 3, ch. 3, pp. 90–2; Book 3, ch. 8, p. 106; Book 8, chs. 13–15, pp. 204–6.

interpretation they pose and the questions they beg epitomise many of those faced by early medieval historians of these topics. How is Paulinus' proverbial mother love to be understood in the face of debates about affection in the medieval family and, more interestingly, in respect of the gendered division of parenting it suggests? What does Aelfric's comment tell us about Anglo-Saxon notions of childhood? Is Dhuoda's emphasis on parenting an essentially lay perspective, that of a lay women, or rather that of a ninth-century Carolingian author?

The history of parenting and childhood confronts us with a series of questions in which notions of the natural – here understood as the biological – and the socially constructed must be raised to the forefront of the historian's consciousness. We need to define childhood, to explore the relational nature of conceptions of childhood, motherhood and fatherhood. We must acknowledge the presence of other forms of parenting, such as pro-parenting and grandparenting, and utilise them in our quest to define both the limits and the interplay of the natural and the social. We must be drawn into the history of emotions, so central to the history and historiography of childhood and parenting, and face the epistemological problems which that history poses: what and how can we know? These problems are common to the historian of these topics in any period, as are the Grand Narratives of such pioneers as Ariès and Stone, which have set the dominant agendas.<sup>4</sup> The early medieval historian finds, in addition, that these embedded Grand Narratives have often failed to engage with the early medieval evidence, either subsuming these centuries into a generalised 'middle ages' or eliding them in a shift from Antiquity to Late Medieval/Early Modern in the quest to locate developments seen as harbingers of modernity. It is thus good to see, as in these three volumes, early medieval childhood and parenting being given due attention, and in ways which take seriously the questions central to this field of research.<sup>5</sup>

Parenting and childhood are not the most tractable topics in early medieval history. The problems of sources confront all three authors, not merely their paucity, tangential relevance, typicality and largely clerical origins, but also the vexed ones of the relationship between the ideal, with which so many accounts are concerned, and reality. The latter are least acute for Katrien Heene. Her focus is particularly on ideas about motherhood and their relationship to ideas about women

<sup>4</sup> P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. R. Baldick (London, 1962); L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (London, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> As subsequent references will make clear, they are not the first to tackle these problems. But special reference might be made to J.L. Nelson, 'Parents, Children and the Church in the earlier Middle Ages', in D. Wood (ed), *The Church and Childhood*, Studies in Church History 31 (Oxford, 1994), pp. 81–114, the best general account currently available, and to the numerous works of P. Riché, including his *Education et culture dans l'occident barbare VIe–VIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1962) and 'L'Enfant dans la société chrétienne aux XIe et XIIe siècles', *La Cristianità dei secoli XI e XII in occidente* (Milan, 1983), pp. 281–302.

and marriage in the reforming pastoral literature of the Carolingian Renaissance. For her the ideal is the subject. Thiébaux has provided the Latin text – that of Riché<sup>6</sup> – and a facing English translation of Dhuoda's *Liber Manualis*, one of the most precious early medieval sources on parenting, and one of the few specifically concerned with its practice. Writing for and addressing her son, William, Dhuoda speaks to us through him, as a mother, and as a ninth-century, noble, Frankish one. Yet her testimony, too, comes shaped by the contemporary reforming 'mirror literature' and saturated in biblical allusions. She belongs, where Heene and Thiébaux like others have placed her, firmly in the ninth-century Frankish world. Ideal and reality were far from separable, at least at the literate, noble level. Sally Crawford widens the perspective, in every sense. She brings to bear the material evidence of archaeology in her study of the lived reality of childhood and parenting and has made interesting use of the linguistic evidence available in the Concordance of Old English.<sup>7</sup> Her sights range across English history pre-1066, though her most original and important evidence dates from the pagan and transitional conversion-age cemeteries at the beginning of that period. Her archaeological approach is a departure from most studies of these topics. She too, however, relies heavily on the written evidence, in particular hagiography, which is one of Heene's major sources. Laws, charters and chronicles are not central for any of these authors. There is thus, for example, little or no family reconstitution as a context for intra-family relationships, except in Thiébaux's introduction which has a useful consideration of Dhuoda's and Bernard of Septimania's kin. She is also the only one of the three to pay much attention to inheritance, that bond between, and divider of, parents and children. In all these respects Thiébaux accurately reflects the centrality of these concerns for Dhuoda herself. The chosen brief and subject matter also mean that none of these books is concerned in detail with pro-parenthood – i.e. the sharing, substitution and fulfilment of parental roles by people other than the biological parents – whether as an aspect of parenting or as insight into it.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Dhuoda, Manuel pour mon fils*, ed. P. Riché *et al.*, Sources chrétiennes 225 (Paris, 1975). Thiébaux's translation might be considered somewhat too 'feudal' – see e.g. pp. 88–9 where 'summam personam culmine ... senioratus' becomes 'person of high seignorial lordship' or pp. 106–7 where 'militantes' is 'doing knightly service'. The problems and questions raised by applying such a terminology to the ninth century at least require some comment.

<sup>7</sup> *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*, eds. R. Venezky and A. Di Paolo Healey (Ontario, Canada, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> For important studies of these see e.g. J.H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 1986); B. Jussen, *Adoption und Patenschaft im frühen Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 1991); L.M. Bitel, *Land of Women. Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca, NY, 1996); T.M. Charles Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 78–82; F. Kerlouégan, 'Essai sur la mise en nourriture et l'éducation dans les pays celtiques', *Etudes Celtiques* 12 (1968–71), pp. 101–46; P.A. Quinn, *Better than the Sons of Kings: Boys and Monks in the Early Middle Ages* (New York, Bern and Frankfurt am Main, 1989);

Nor do they mine the riches of areas other than ninth-century Francia and early England. The literatures and laws of Western Britain and of Icelandic society, arguably in many respects early medieval, have, for instance, a potential still not fully realised – not least for the extent to which they take us closer to lay practice. The geographical and temporal focus is, however, to be welcomed, above all because of the need for serious challenge to the insecurely based generalisations in the existing literature.

The history of medieval parenting and childhood may still be in its infancy, but in spite, if not because of that it does not want for broad narratives and paradigms. These have provided the framework for much of what has been written – and Crawford makes clear how little that is – on this early period. The works of Philippe Ariès and Lawrence Stone have undoubtedly been the most influential. Largely concerned with the early modern period and later, they have given us a Middle Ages generalised as a time of indifferent or detached parents situated in wider kin-groupings. Paradoxically this has been argued to allow the child greater freedom than the tightly controlled patriarchal family of the Reformation and later. It can also be taken to imply the lack of a strong concept of childhood. These widely debated and much questioned interpretations have shaped much of the writing about medieval childhood and parenting. Ariès and Stone did not engage with the early medieval evidence, and their respondents have been largely later medievalists whose necessary correctives may too readily become a basis for new generalisation across a thousand years. For the early Middle Ages in particular, there is another powerful story, one which structures, for example, a pioneering study of motherhood by Clarissa Atkinson.<sup>9</sup> In this account, the Ancient world and Old Testament Judaism were pro-family and placed a high valuation on motherhood. These attitudes were seriously questioned by Christianity. Its emphasis on virginity produced at best indifference and at worst negativity towards the family and parenting. As Augustine put it, 'the coming of Christ is not served by the begetting of children'.<sup>10</sup> The late Middle Ages then saw the emergence of the bourgeois family and a more positive evaluation, whilst

J. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY, 1995) and 'Old Norse Motherhood' in J.C. Parsons and B. Wheeler (eds.), *Medieval Mothering* (New York and London, 1996), pp. 201–22; S. Grundy, 'The Viking's Mother: Relations between Mothers and their Grown Sons in Icelandic Sagas', in Parsons and Wheeler, *Medieval Mothering*, pp. 223–37; A. Angenendt, 'Das geistliche Bündnis der Päpste mit der Karolingern (754–796)', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 100 (1980), pp. 1–94, esp. pp. 1–32, and A. Angenendt, 'Taufe und Politik im frühen Mittelalter', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 7 (1973), pp. 143–68.

<sup>9</sup> C.W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali*, quoted in D. Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, MA, 1985) p. 23, in a valuable survey which includes much on parenting. Gillian Clark, like Herlihy and others, nuances the impact of Christianity. Whilst it placed a new value on children, parenting was now negatively identified with carnality and worldly values: see 'The Fathers and the Children', in Wood (ed.), *The Church and Childhood*, pp. 1–27.

the domestic revolution of the sixteenth century combined with the Reformation to instate the hierarchical family under its patriarch as a necessary and admired social structure. Late Antiquity and the early and high Middle Ages are run together in this tale, which leaps from the patristic age to the eve of the Reformation. These books, along with other recent work, have much to offer by way of nuancing, correcting and offering material for rethinking these analyses.

All these narratives demand consideration of definitions. What is childhood? Is there a clear notion of it in the societies studied? Is it, or the notions of it, unitary, or rather a cycle of stages from infancy to adolescence, and when does it, or its stages, begin and end? Childhood can be understood negatively. It is the period before adulthood, where the latter is defined as physical maturity and/or the age of full social participation and responsibility. Judging from their child burials, the early English had a notion of childhood defined as absence – of the artefacts which signified aspects of adult status. There were no grave-goods diagnostic of childhood itself. Aelfric still seems to see adulthood as the full human condition for which childhood is merely a preliminary. Childhood defined in this way is both precise and biological, ended by puberty, but also flexible and socially constructed. Sexual maturity need not bring with it all or any of the social status of adulthood. The latter may be deferred, denied, or acquired gradually. Childhood may thus end at different times in different places and for different groups of people – and not necessarily in a single tidy transition. This may be one of the reasons why early medieval authors are not consistent in their definition of the stages of childhood and youth.<sup>11</sup> Crawford's archaeological evidence is especially useful here. She argues for a single transition for girls, perhaps reflecting the importance of female sexual maturity and child-bearing in this procreation-obsessed society. For boys there may have been a longer transitional stage, falling between the ages of 12 and 20, during which their burial with weapons indicates a stage of military training. This would fit with Régine Le Jan's differentiation of a stage of noble boys' education – youth or adolescence – when they left their mothers to be reared by their fathers or by surrogate fathers in another noble household and thus in a more masculine way.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A. Hofmeister, 'Puer, Iuuenis, senex: Zum Verständnis der mittelalterlicher Altersbezeichnungen', in A. Brackmann (ed.), *Papsttum und Kaisertum. Forschungen zur politischen Geschichte und Geisteskultur des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1926), pp. 287–316 and J. de Ghellinck, 'Juuentus, gravitas, senectus', in *Studia Mediaevalia in Honour of R.J. Martin* (Bruges, 1948), pp. 39–59.

<sup>12</sup> R. Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc, VIIe – Xe siècle: Essai d'anthropologie sociale*, Publications de la Sorbonne (Paris, 1995), at e.g. p. 77 and ch. 10. See also her 'Apprentissages militaires, rites de passage et remises d'armes au haut moyen âge', in *Initiation, apprentissage, education au moyen âge*, Actes du 1er Colloque International de Montpellier de Novembre 1991 (Montpellier, 1993), pp. 211–32.

As Le Jan and Crawford realise, childhood, and perhaps especially the stage of youth, is crucial in the creation of gender identity. In Einhard's idealised picture, Charlemagne's children all began by learning the liberal arts together, and then the boys were separated from the girls, the former to learn riding and hunting (alongside other young noble males?), the latter to devote themselves to embroidery. The gender-neutrality of learning here is as significant as the sharp division of masculine and feminine pursuits. So too, perhaps, are ungendered and gendered stages of education and childhood. If childhood, or part of it, is pre-social, is it also pre-gender? Rob Meens' discussion of children in penitentials suggests how far a sexual identity, marked by the ability to commit sexual sins, differentiated infants and *pueri*.<sup>13</sup> Were the former, by implication, seen as ungendered? Dhuoda recognised that at the age of 15 William would wish, and should be exhorted, to act 'viriliter'. And as a ninth-century mother she offered him a construction of young masculinity, one which involved struggle, fighting and resistance, but also obedience to superiors and chastity.<sup>14</sup> The study of parenting cannot ignore the role of that practice in the transmission, and reformulation, of gender along with all other aspects of social identity.

The flexibility of childhood's definition, like the divisions which must be recognised within it, has many consequences, not least for the relations of parents and children. Those relations can never be generalised across childhood and in all circumstances: which parent, with which child(ren) at what stage(s) of social and/or biological development? The end of childhood and its implications for family ties has been of particular interest to medievalists. Deferred adulthood, associated with the timing and possibility of inheritance, has been seen as characteristic of the eleventh- and twelfth-century (French) nobility. It has been associated with particular economic circumstances and family changes, and is argued to have produced strained relations, especially between fathers and sons.<sup>15</sup> But such deferral, and the tensions to which it gives rise, are a feature of other times and places,<sup>16</sup> including Dhuoda's noble Francia. Dhuoda addressed her *Manual* to her son on the occasion of his fifteenth birthday, an age which Isidore and others had pinpointed as

<sup>13</sup> 'Children and Confession in the Early Middle Ages', in Wood (ed.), *The Church and Childhood*, pp. 53–65.

<sup>14</sup> See Thiébaux's edn, pp. 140, 90, 68 and 142–4 respectively.

<sup>15</sup> G. Duby, 'Dans la France du Nord-Ouest au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Les "jeunes" dans la société aristocratique', *Annales, ESC*, 19 (1964), pp. 835–46, and cf. R.V. Turner, 'The Children of Anglo-Norman Nobility and Their Upbringing', *Medieval Prosopography*, 11.2 (1990), pp. 17–52, at pp. 41–2 and W.M. Aird, 'Frustrated Masculinity: the Relationship between William the Conqueror and his Eldest Son', in D.M. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London, 1999), p. 39–55.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Nelson, 'Parents, Children and the Church', p. 100, and cf. her 'Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity c. 900', in Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, pp. 121–42 and Aird, 'Frustrated Masculinity'.

significant. William had made, or was about to make, a transition to the world of the court where he would be in the company of other young men (*commilitones*) and his mother provided him – and them – with guidance. Yet the full realization of adult manhood, marked by inheritance and marriage, was not an immediate option for him. Dhuoda's overriding message is of obedience, honour and loyalty to his father, what Riché saw as a 'religion of paternity', and is echoed in Paulinus of Aquileia's vision of Hell. This may be a message generally pertinent to the problems of controlling young men in groups, which also existed in, for instance, early Ireland if not England.<sup>17</sup> It may characterise noble society through much of the early Middle Ages. But it may also be a pressing problem of periods in which adulthood in its full realisation had to be deferred; periods like the ninth century, when external loot and the opportunity for young men to establish themselves were increasingly restricted. For Dhuoda and Paulinus, writing against the backdrop of bitter Carolingian family divisions between father and sons, it was certainly an acute contemporary issue.

If there is room for debate over childhood's end, there is surely none over its beginning – birth. But biology operates within society, and, like society, childhood and parenting – even birth and infancy – have a history. Dhuoda did not know what her younger son was called. He had been taken from her before baptism, and thus before he received a name and social identity. Giving physical life to children is not necessarily the same as giving them that identity. In many societies a child is scarcely human until social birth has occurred. In ancient Rome, for example, a child was lifted up by its father to denote acceptance, and there is evidence in Iceland that some formal public acceptance of a child by the father was necessary to secure its membership of social groupings.<sup>18</sup> Christians underwent a second social birth in baptism – not only into spiritual life, but also into Christian society. Christian parents who gave birth to children also had a duty, clearly defined by the ninth century if not before, to ensure baptism. Failure to do so may have produced social anxiety. Crawford discusses a number of child-burials which date to the transitional period after conversion. The treatment of the bodies suggests fear of these children as potentially malevolent revenants who must be kept in the grave: she speculates that they may be the burials of the unbaptised. The importance of social birth, whether secular or Christian, underlines how far parents and parenting operate in a wider context including kin and clientage. Baptism created, called on and reinforced other ties through godparenthood. Choice of godparents,

<sup>17</sup> See K.R. McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclops, Diberge and Fianna: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 12 (1986), pp. 1–22, and cf. Crawford's interesting English comparisons from, for example, Bede: *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 162–3.

<sup>18</sup> Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, p. 82.

as of foster parents, formed part of parental strategies. Parenting is turned out towards social networks as well as in on to the child itself. With oblation using the child in familial spiritual and religious plans, the relationship between early medieval parents and children can appear bleak. Yet historians are, on the whole, resisting a return to the Ariès and Stone views.<sup>19</sup>

Each of these books refutes Ariès and Stone implicitly or explicitly. Maternal love was, for example, a touchstone for some of Heene's Carolingian authors, including Paulinus. The author of the Carolingian *Life of Liutbirga* considered the love for her children of the woman who had borne them (*genitrix*) to far exceed that of a foster mother or similar surrogate who reared them (*nutrix*). The saint behaved to her foster children as a biological mother.<sup>20</sup> Dhuoda leaves us in no doubt of her concern for her children, including the small baby son from whom she has been separated. Her grief at separation from a tiny baby seems to speak to enduring aspects of the human condition. Even love and concern, however, require historicisation. Physical motherhood is not unmediated experience. Dhuoda's language of bodily mothering, of milk and feeding, had long since been appropriated by St Paul; she speaks it as a Christian and not merely as a mother.<sup>21</sup> Some early Irish texts would have disagreed with Liutbirga's hagiographer on the relative merits of biology and fostering, seeing the latter as the more selfless ideal.<sup>22</sup> Jenny Jochens notes how the sagas tend to speak of proud or grieving fathers whilst mothers often appear as callous or indifferent.<sup>23</sup> Any reading of these Irish or Icelandic texts should, of course, be aware of their problems. How far, for example, do the Irish sources stress fostering precisely because it is a more complicated and problematic bond? It is nonetheless clear that early medieval motherhood should still be a subject of enquiry and not taken as a universal, biological given.

The ease with which motherhood slips towards biological determinism is one reason why study of it alone cannot be enough. 'Mother' has no meaning apart from 'father' and 'child'.<sup>24</sup> Heene is well aware of this; without fathers we cannot be certain whether we have 'mothers' or 'parents', and her questions are consequently directed at parenting as well as motherhood. Both Heene and Crawford argue for caring fathers,

<sup>19</sup> Though see the sober and sobering analysis and comments of Janet Nelson, 'Parents, Children and the Church'.

<sup>20</sup> *Das Leben de Liutbirg*, ed. O. Menzel (Leipzig, 1937), ch. 9, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Galatians 4.19 and I Corinthians 3, 1–2.

<sup>22</sup> See Bitel, *Land of Women*, pp. 86, 100–1 – and note her comments about the clerical origins of some of these ideas.

<sup>23</sup> J. Jochens, 'Old Norse Motherhood', in Parsons and Wheeler (eds.), *Medieval Mothering*, pp. 201–22, at p. 202 – on mothers, however, compare Grundy, 'The Viking's mother', in the same volume.

<sup>24</sup> Parsons and Wheeler (eds.), *Medieval Mothering*, Introduction, p. x.



using saints' Lives and examining which parent brought children to be healed. It is a sign of the extent to which much of the current research has been driven by feminism and the blossoming of women's history that fathers are still relatively ignored in the literature, perhaps nowhere more so than in the early Middle Ages. The collected volume arising from a major French research initiative on the study of fathers and fatherhood originally began with the Renaissance and Reformation. Reissued in 2000, its authors felt impelled to include a new chapter on medieval fathering, but its coverage of the early period is still scant.<sup>25</sup> In the absence of intensive research, the history of fatherhood is stalked by looming stereotypes: the all-powerful father of Roman *patria potestas*; the severe protestant patriarch, monarch in his own household. Heene especially recognizes how far classical scholarship is taking apart such monolithic images.<sup>26</sup> Yet she still employs one herself in arguing for a severe, authoritarian 'protestant' father in the Carolingian texts.<sup>27</sup>

What little we know does not suggest that early medieval fatherhood will be easy to categorise. One of the tenderest visual images of Anglo-Saxon parenting is not that of mother and child, but of God the Father and Son.<sup>28</sup> Yet Paulinus makes the relationship of father and son one of authority and obedience, and it is certainly the latter which Dhuoda wishes to enjoin on William. The possibility that both spoke to a particular ninth-century noble Frankish situation has already been raised. Authority is of course consistent with affection and pride – both widely attested paternal feelings. Einhard's aging Charlemagne was deeply moved at the death of his sons and daughter, and his feelings for his children drove him to tears. One proud philo-progenitive Icelandic father arrived at the Thing with fourteen of his sons.<sup>29</sup> Was there a perceived difference between maternal and paternal love? The *Regula Magistri* distinguished them: the former reasoned, rational, dutiful (*mensurata pietas*), the latter indiscriminating in love

<sup>25</sup> J. Delumeau and D. Roche (eds.), *Histoire des Pères et Paternité* (first published Paris, 1990, reissued 2000). A new chapter in the second edition by D. Lett, significantly entitled 'Tendres souverains', is largely concerned with the later Middle Ages. The other new chapter, on new parental and family forms and fatherhood, indicates how far the study of parenting has been driven recently by awareness of contemporary changes. See also the recent careful study of Peter Damian and eleventh-century fatherhood by M. McLaughlin, 'Secular and Spiritual Fatherhood in the Eleventh Century', in J. Murray (ed.), *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West* (New York and London, 1999), pp. 25–43.

<sup>26</sup> As in e.g. S. Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London, 1988) at pp. 26–8 and 233–6, and more recently in *The Roman Family* (Baltimore, 1997). B.D. Shaw, 'The Family in late Antiquity: the Experience of Augustine', *Past and Present*, 115 (1987), pp. 3–51 has much which is important on fatherhood as on parenting more generally.

<sup>27</sup> At e.g. p. 165.

<sup>28</sup> B.L. Harley MS 603, fol. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. O. Holder-Egger *et al.*, MGH SRG (Hanover, 1911), ch. 19 – and Hrutr Heyolfson in Laxdaela Saga, quoted in J. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, p. 81.

(*caritas aequaliter*).<sup>30</sup> Greek thought about gender still seems to echo here. But both attributes are to be united in the person of the male father/abbot. Christianity could and did question gender as other social divisions: witness the images of Christ as a mother hen, or of Paul feeding with maternal milk. Still those divisions recur. Paulinus wrote of maternal warmth and paternal correction. When authors mention mothers and fathers, they regularly divide feelings and responses between them though not always in identical ways. When Egill killed his playmate, his father anxiously assessed the likely social implications and the probability of feud, while his mother proudly planned to equip his now proven prowess with a Viking warship.<sup>31</sup> The polarity of the gender system made mothers and fathers useful to express such contradictory implications of action. Here they also articulate ambivalence towards the construction of young masculinity – underlining the role of parenting in such construction, if not also in its questioning. The saga-writer is not simply describing fatherhood and motherhood, even in a specific case. He is also arguably using them to think with. ‘Thinking with motherhood/parenting’ relies on the range of meanings given practices provided, but adapts, selects and redefines in the process. Such appropriations are never simple; the reading of texts cannot be straightforward. Caroline Walker Bynum, for example, has discussed how twelfth-century clerics used motherhood to express a nurturing, affectionate aspect of their identity.<sup>32</sup> Bynum’s abbots thought about motherhood in a context of Christian anxiety about authority and power, inevitably purging it of any traces of precisely those elements. The result is far from a picture of twelfth-century motherhood, nor should we see the sagas as a transparent window on to Icelandic parenting. Individual parents may not have shared out feelings and reactions in such differentiated, and consistently differentiated, fashion.

Dhuoda’s conception of motherhood owes as much to Carolingian construction as to biological determination. Seeing herself as an educator of her children, she adopts a central parental role which Heene’s Carolingian social engineers were co-opting. She seems sometimes inspired by the reformers’ more gender-neutral view of parenting. She casts herself as a ‘genitrix’ to Bernard’s ‘genitor’, and it is this which gives her authority to speak.<sup>33</sup> And she makes extraordinary claims to spiritual as well as physical parenthood. Here she may be distancing

<sup>30</sup> *Le Règle du Maître*, ed. and trans. A. de Vogüé, Sources chrétiennes, 105–7 (Paris, 1964), I, 2.30–31, p. 358.

<sup>31</sup> Discussed by Grundy, ‘The Viking’s Mother’, pp. 232–3.

<sup>32</sup> C.W. Bynum, ‘Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing’, in her *Jesus as Mother, Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA, 1982), pp. 110–69.

<sup>33</sup> *Liber Manualis*, ed. Thiébaux, p. 48, and for the direct parallel with Bernard as ‘genitor’, p. 50.

herself from carnality; but she may also be asserting a claim to the functions recently stressed for godparents.

Pro-parenting is among the best studied areas of early medieval parenting.<sup>34</sup> As a social institution pro-parenthood underlines the complex and constructed nature of parenting. The latter involves biological birth, the primary source of social identity; nurturing/feeding, i.e. physical rearing; education/tutorship in moral and technical skills; and, finally, sponsorship in the assumption of adult status. These roles are separable and can all, with the exception of birth, be the basis for pro-parenting relations. In the form of fostering, pro-parenthood was central, for instance, to both Western British and Icelandic societies.<sup>35</sup> It was, in Crawford's view, pervasive in early English society, though its full treatment is still awaited. As a combination of tutorship and sponsoring it was a feature of the aristocratic society so well studied by Le Jan.

For Europe as a whole, pro-parenthood in the form of godparenthood has been fruitfully analysed in the important works by Jussen and Lynch. The Carolingian period was a key stage in the development of godparenthood. It became an instrument of Carolingian efforts at social reformation. Godparenthood, like other forms of pro-parenthood, did not necessarily weaken parenthood. It could serve to defuse its tensions and link the small familial unit out to wider kin.<sup>36</sup> Dhuoda refers to Theoderic, William's uncle and godfather who had left him lands. This is a particularly interesting case since pro-parenthood can be seen as an uncomplicated relationship precisely because it does not involve inheritance and its tensions. More attention needs to be paid to the link between the practice of fostering/pro-parenthood and the transitional stage of youth, for high-status boys at least. Following the lead of Jussen, we need to explore the extent to which the ideas about godparenthood and about fostering interacted, or even, as Charles Edwards has suggested for Western British societies, substituted for each other.<sup>37</sup>

If Dhuoda's Manual shows the influence of ideas about godparenthood on parenting, she was also open to what might appear an unlikely source for motherhood, namely the Rule of Benedict. Dhuoda 'captures ... for herself' the role of father/abbot in the monastic family model.<sup>38</sup> Monasticism should be included in any history of early

<sup>34</sup> On pro-parenthood in general see E. Goody, 'Forms of Pro-Parenthood: the Sharing and Substitution on Parental Roles', in J. Goody (ed.), *Kinship* (London, 1971), pp. 331–45.

<sup>35</sup> See note 8, p. 259.

<sup>36</sup> See comments of Nelson, 'Parents, Children and the Church', pp. 100–1.

<sup>37</sup> And note Thomas Charles Edwards' argument that in Celtic societies spiritual kinship had to compete with fosterage, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> M.A. Claussen, 'Fathers of Power and Mothers of Authority: Dhuoda and the *Liber Manualis*', *French Historical Studies*, 19 (1996), pp. 785–809, at p. 797.

medieval parenting and childhood, even in questions of gender and parenting.<sup>39</sup> Monastic houses dominated the production of much of the surviving source material. Their communal forms were themselves modelled on, just as they provided a model for, the family, and the practice of child oblation made some monks surrogate parents. Early monasticism had drawn on late antique notions in its casting of the abbot as father. A monastic rule like that of Benedict provided the blueprint for precisely that shaping and disciplining which are central parental functions. It is to monastic sources that we can turn for evidence of sophistication in thinking about children and their psychology, for clear indications of notions of childhood and for some of the few, as so often retrospective, autobiographical reminiscences of it. Both the Rule of Benedict, and especially the later commentaries on it, like those of Paul the Deacon, or the monastic plan of St Gall, show a remarkable engagement with the psychology of children. They were seen as malleable and as possessing special qualities. They needed and received punishment, often harsh, but also required kindly and different treatment, whether in the daily round or in diet. They were persuaded and rewarded with delicacies and kindness. By c.1100 Anselm took to task those monastic masters who treated children brutally. He accused them of rearing beasts from men, revealing his understanding of the link between childhood treatment and adult character. The late eleventh and early twelfth centuries produced a number of autobiographical insights into childhood, from Guibert of Nogent's extensive commentary on his birth, his mother and his feelings about her to Orderic Vitalis' painful account of his oblation, with both father and child weeping at their separation. If, and that is a very debatable 'if', such autobiographical reflection is to be taken as an awareness of individuality, the late eleventh century did not see its sudden birth. As with Duby's views about youth, alleged twelfth-century change once again demands that similar questions be asked of earlier periods. Already in the ninth century Walahfrid Strabo had told of his feelings not only for the cohort of young men with whom he grew up, but particularly for the masters and surrogate parents who reared him. These autobiographical sources tie the history of childhood into other histories, like those of the self and of consciousness.

Such connections make parenting and childhood peculiarly susceptible to psychohistory and the importation of Freudian and other arguably modern interpretative frames. These have inevitably played a

<sup>39</sup> On this see M. de Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden, New York, Cologne, 1996); P.A. Quinn, *Better than the Sons of Kings*; and N. Gradowicz-Pancer, 'Papa, maman, l'abbé et moi: *Conversio morum* et pathologie familiale d'après les sources hagiographiques du haut Moyen Âge', *Le Moyen Âge*, 102 (1996), pp. 7–25.

central role in attempts to understand Guibert.<sup>40</sup> And they have also suggested to some a gendered reading of the history of oblation and of monastic development itself. Heene, for example, speculates that the dual parenting by monastic surrogates who united masculine and feminine characteristics may have been critical to the low profile of ninth-century misogyny. On a Freudian reading, monks reared in this way would have been arrested in pre-pubertal development, in which the love of parent/child remained the ideal and where women were not a pressing problem.<sup>41</sup> If so, the adult entrants of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, who had experienced full adult sexual development, were a problem and a complication. They produced new forms of spirituality as well as marital mystical eroticism and ultimately ended the practice of child oblation. Whether or not all this is tenable is as debatable as so much else in the alleged transformations of the twelfth century. It should, however, remind us again of the need to consider parenting and gender formation as closely connected themes. It should also make us wary about how we use monastic sources for child/parent relations, not least because they are the products of people who did not experience the normal unfolding of those relationships over a life-cycle.<sup>42</sup>

Much certainly remains to be done. The quest for affection within medieval families should not, for example, exclude study of their internal differences. Families, like parents, children and the bond between them, have their own life-cycles, which change the nature of relationships over time: which parent, which child(ren), which stage not only of child development but of familial cycle. Inheritance plays a critical role here. Crawford's primary focus on early childhood may have led to a side-stepping of inheritance and other factors which complicate the parent/child bond. Yet inheritance had its impact even on early childhood; witness Charlemagne's fears for his grandchildren *vis-à-vis* their predatory uncles in his 806 division. (And, incidentally, if parenting is understudied, grandparenting is still a virtual blank on the historical map.<sup>43</sup>)

<sup>40</sup> See J.F. Benton's introduction *Self and Society in Medieval France: the Memoirs of Guibert de Nogent* (1970, reprinted Toronto, 1984) and N.F. Partner, 'The Family Romance of Guibert de Nogent: His Story/Her Story', in Parsons and Wheeler (eds.), *Medieval Mothering*, pp. 359–79.

<sup>41</sup> Heene, *Legacy of Paradise*, pp. 272–8, and Quinn, *Better than the Sons of Kings*, especially chs. 5 and 6.

<sup>42</sup> As M. McLaughlin points out, 'Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries', in L. de Mause (ed.), *The History of Childhood* (New York, 1974), pp. 101–81 at p. 110.

<sup>43</sup> Note the typical exception, for the later Middle Ages, of Joel Rosenthal, 'Looking for Grandmother: the Pastons and Their Counterparts in Late Medieval England', in Parsons and Wheeler (eds.), *Medieval Mothering*, pp. 259–77. The careers of Brunhild, the Empress Adelaide and the Ottonian Queen Mathilda, let alone Charlemagne himself, would bear some reassessment from this angle. Given the extent to which the recent study of parenthood, rooted in motherhood, has followed the life-cycles of academics who came to intellectual maturity under the influence of second-wave feminism, we may be due for an expansion of grandparenthood research over the next decade.

Reference has been made to the work of historians of the eleventh and twelfth centuries who have highlighted inter-generational tensions. Less has been done on the earlier period, though there has been important work on the Carolingian family, by, for example, Jinty Nelson and Rudolf Schieffer. This has explored not only divisions within families, but also the different relations of fathers with sons and with daughters, the complication of those by gender expectations and adolescent reactions to them, and the impact of the new stages in the family which remarriage and grandparenthood bring.<sup>44</sup> We need more, not least to test the narrative of eleventh-century change.<sup>45</sup>

Rethinking the old narratives will only be possible as new research is done. It is as well, however, to identify what seems to be an emerging new story and keep it, too, under scrutiny. There is already good reason to reject a straightforward route from Antiquity to the Reformation, from, for example, the Roman *paterfamilias* to the bourgeois father.<sup>46</sup> Heene's work is an important contribution to the growing literature which implies the inadequacy of this unilinear history of family and parenting and which focuses attention in particular on the ninth century. Toubert has argued for the high valuation which Carolingian Reformers placed on marriage.<sup>47</sup> He has also seen the Carolingian encouragement of infant baptism as part of a reforming struggle to encourage parents to accept children and deter abandonment.<sup>48</sup> Heene agrees with and amplifies the former, whilst taking issue with the latter argument. She examines the interlinked notions of motherhood and women, arguing for the revaluation of gender-neutral parenting in the ninth century, as part of Toubert's pastoral of marriage. The muting of

<sup>44</sup> E.g. J.L. Nelson, 'La famille de Charlemagne', *Byzantion*, 61(1991), pp. 194–212, reprinted in her *Rulers and Ruling Families in Early Medieval Europe* (Aldershot, 1999); *eadem*, 'Women at the Court of Charlemagne, a Case of Monstrous Regiment', in J.C. Parsons (ed.), *Medieval Queenship* (New York, 1993), pp. 43–61; *eadem* 'Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity'; R. Schieffer, 'Väter und Söhne im Karolingerhause', in *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Regnum Francorum*, Beihefte der Francia 22 (Sigmaringen, 1994), pp. 149–64.

<sup>45</sup> As long as that narrative itself remains debatable it is as well to be wary about sweeping links between it and childhood and parenting, as in Duby, 'Dans la France du Nord-Ouest ...', and J.K. Beitscher, "As the twig is bent ..." Children and Their Parents in an Aristocratic Society', *Journal of Medieval History*, 2 (1976), pp. 181–91. For a review of recent work and the need for scepticism about alleged changes now, see P. Stafford, 'La Mutation familiale: a Suitable Case for Caution', in J. Hill and M. Swan (eds.), *The Community, the Family and the Saint. Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 103–25.

<sup>46</sup> Parsons and Wheeler (eds.), *Medieval Mothering*, Introduction, p. x, questions whether we can pinpoint the moment of transition, implicitly accepting both constructions.

<sup>47</sup> P. Toubert, 'La théorie du mariage chez les moralistes carolingiens', in *Il Matrimonio nella società altomedievale*, *Settimane* 24 (1977), pp. 233–85. Cf. also the arguments, in many respects parallel to Heene, of I. van't Spijker, 'Family Ties: Mothers and Virgins in the Ninth Century', in A. Mulder-Bakker (ed.), *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages* (New York and London, 1995), pp. 165–90.

<sup>48</sup> P. Toubert, 'Le moment carolingien [VIIIe–Xe siècles]', in A. Burguière and C. Klapisch-Zuber, (eds.), *Histoire de la famille I: mondes lointains, mondes anciens* (Paris, 1986), pp. 333–59.

Christianity's misogynous messages in turn soft-pedalled misogyny, though it did not result in a celebration of the feminine. Motherhood, in Heene's view, was valued, but as parenting, not for its gender-specific aspects. For her the central issue for Carolingian reformers, striving to mould a Christian society, was education not baptism, parenting as formation and nurturing not simply physical and social begetting. But in both Toubert and Heene the parallels between the ninth and sixteenth centuries are clear. Similar attempts at the creation of a Godly society using comparable familial tools had the same implications. Taken alongside the suggestions of Nelson and others about acute tension between fathers and sons, a ninth-century patriarch has emerged, Heene's 'Protestant father'. Ninth-century reform through royally led social engineering may look in some respects like its sixteenth-century successor; it also appears as different in its implications for family, marriage, parents and children from eleventh- and twelfth-century reforming movements with their renewed celebration of virginity. The ninth century, of course, is not the early Middle Ages. The tender, affective maternity which Corbet saw in Ottonian female saints' lives demands its own attention.<sup>49</sup> The powerful Carolingian synthesis, and its historians, should, as ever, inspire not generalisation but further questions about the rest of Europe.

Childhood and parenting are a crux where biology and construction meet. As materialist explanations wrestle with the tide of post-modernist idealism, they should be a central concern of historians. These books are thus a welcome addition to the literature. It is no denigration of them to observe that the history of early medieval parenting is still in its adolescence if not its infancy.

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<sup>49</sup> P. Corbet, *Les Saints ottoniens: sainteté dynastique, sainteté royale et sainteté féminine autour de l'an mil*, Beihefte der Francia 15 (Sigmaringen, 1986).