Abstract: This paper focuses on political and civic dimensions of the Carolingian *renovatio*, particularly on attempts to work out a conception of Christian kingship and a public moral/spiritual order (in systematic engagements with the capital vices) to sustain the construction of a Christian empire. Drawing especially on the work of Alcuin of York, I explore how Carolingian thinkers confronting the issues of governing an expanding territory beset by pagan resistance and hostility appropriate and employ patristic-era political thought, most importantly from Augustine of Hippo. I consider the ways in which Carolingian treatments of sin build on systematizations by Gregory the Great and others, and the ways in which adaptations of theoretical and theological constructs inherited from Christian thinkers—constructs that often represent responses to hegemonic Greco-Roman traditions concerned with right rule, the best life, and the just polity—reveal a negotiation of pressing political realities that earlier Christian thinkers did not face.

As early architects of Christendom, the Carolingians took their building materials from diverse sources, but especially from storehouses of social-theological reflection erected by an earlier generation of Christians confronting the late-antique clash of cultures between a politically ascendant community of believers in Jesus as the resurrected Messiah and the contracting imperial world of an aristocratic, pagan Rome. Among the most important of these storehouses was Augustine’s mammoth apologetic of the Christian faith against its pagan detractors, *De civitate Dei contra paganos*—a favorite work of Charlemagne, and in fact the only one named by Einhard, his official biographer.¹

Augustine’s tome, almost fifteen years in the making (413–427), documents tectonic movements in the metaphysical firmament of the