

On Injustices to Matfred Agobard of Lyon

Translated by W.L. North from Agobardi Lugdunensis Opera Omnia, ed. L. Van Aacker (=CCCM, 52). (Turnholt, 1981), pp.225-227.

To Matfred, the most outstanding and illustrious of men, Agobard [sends] life and eternal salvation in Christ our Lord and Savior, who gives us life.

I beseech your most excellent brilliance that it deign to listen with patience and clemency to what a faithful servant suggests. For as God, who examines hearts and loins, is my witness, I speak with no other intent than for the sake of the increase of your prosperity, present and future. Omnipotent, eternal, and merciful God, with Whom there is no past, present or future but rather all the volumes of the ages, which are turned in the world of time-bound mortals, remain present to His eyes outside of time — God chose you before the world was established to be a servant (minister) of emperor and empire in these dangerous times of ours. He has honored and enriched you more than the rest not only externally, but also internally with prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, which, according to Scripture, are more useful than anything else. He has also placed you in the side of the one ruling the totality of affairs so that you might support him in the administration of equity and share in the reward of blessedness. Now then, what could more befit your most devoted intention than that you, with all your effort and mental strength, stand wisely vigilant in the administration of affairs so that iniquity is oppressed, fraud and treachery are destroyed, depravity is laid waste, cruelty is crushed, justice is raised up, humility is consoled, faith is strengthened, and the Church is made tranquil?

Your prudence should know that in the regions on which we border, impiety has become so secure that almost no one may be found who loves justice and retreats from injustice, unless it is someone whose mind has been touched and whose will has been guided by divine inspiration. As a result, it is considered an act of grace whenever the vestiges of goodness are spied. In many people the fear of the king and the laws has grown silent, so that many at present think that no one should be feared, supposing to themselves and saying in their hearts: *If a complaint about me comes to the palace, the case will be referred to the causadici. There I shall find many relatives and friends, through whom it shall undoubtedly come to pass that I shall not incur the king's offense. For a secret gift shall extinguish the rage and with these others placed in the way, he who is to be feared, shall not see our foolishness.* On such occasions, noble sir, almost everything has befallen our

wretched age that the most blessed martyr Cyprian gloried that the Christians had, in fact, escaped in his own time, but which, he lamented with a very sad and mournful voice, burned even hotter among the pagans. Thus, he said:

Amidst the laws themselves crimes are committed, amidst rights there are sins, innocence is not even preserved where it is defended. — Amidst all this, who shall help? A patron? But he shall prevaricate and deceive. The judge? But he sells his sentence. The one who sits to avenge crimes allows [this] and he becomes a "hanging" judge so that the innocent man accused perishes. — No one is fearful of the laws, of the quaestor and the judge there is no fear. What can be bought, no one fears to allow. — Laws consented to sins, and what is public began to be allowed. What decency, what integrity of affairs can there be, when there is no one who condemns the wicked and only those who are condemned come to you?¹

And it is not without risk that I can say that many such people think that you are a wall between the emperor and themselves and that they are defended by you from correction. Strive rather, o most outstanding of men, to be a wall to the increase of happiness, a wall which defeats the harmful, protects the innocent, befits God, disagrees with the enemy, and accumulates a heavenly repayment.

Although our intention shines forth clearly enough from the preceding words, you may know without a doubt that I am not lamenting [the outcome] of my own complaint. Rather your kindness should recognize that I could not say all this against our count, Bertmund, who indeed holds his county very well ordered regarding judgments. This is because he set up a man in his place to carry out these matters who not only acts strenuously out of love and fear of his own lord but also — and this is more laudable and sublime — for the love of God and for the love of His equity and justice. Yet it seems to us that all this has never been done with diligence and attention.

We are also saying all of this because of the fidelity that we owe under God to the lord emperor and for the sake of your eternal blessedness and the attainment of happiness in the present life. For, as you yourself well know, the great familiarity which God has allowed you obtain in the king's eyes, shall be reckoned to you as a great spiritual talent by the almighty Lord himself, and we desire you to deserve rightly to hear from the Lord at His judgment: *Well done, good servant, because you were faithful regarding a few etc.*, and that you escape that harsh and irrevocable reproach: *You wicked*

¹ Cyprian, Ad Donatum X.

*and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and I gather where I have not scattered, etc.*²

Now, I ought not name the people who need much emendation, lest this seem like an accusation — this is not a part of my office. But I do want you to be watchful, as a most zealous servant of God and the emperor's agreeable helper, so that when you are found worthy and faithful by both lords, you may rightly deserve to receive recompense from both.

² Matthew 25: 23; 25: 26.