

## On the division of the Empire (to Louis the Pious) Agobard of Lyons

Trans. by W. North from the edition of L. Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis Opera Omnia* (= Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, 52), (Turnholt: Brepols, 1981), pp.245-50. Scholars have offered three possible dates of composition: 829, 831, and 833. The editor favors, albeit slightly, the argument for 829 made by Egon Boshof.<sup>1</sup>

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To his most glorious lord emperor Louis, his little servant Agobard.

Since any faithful person owes the sincerity of fidelity to every faithful person, there is no doubt that all who are faithfully subject to divine disposition should maintain their fidelity (*fides*) in particular to the faithful prelate to whom the republic has been committed to be governed, just as the Apostle teaches when he says: *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers*,<sup>2</sup> — although one should not, of course, act unfaithfully in regard to anyone. Hence, another apostle also says: *Be subject to every human creature for God's sake*<sup>3</sup> and we are taught to pray *for all men, for kings and for those who have been raised on high, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in complete piety*,<sup>4</sup> and in another place it is said: *Therefore you should be subject, not only because of anger, but also for the sake of conscience*.<sup>5</sup>

(II) Since this is the way things stand and everyone ought to be faithful to you, how can someone be faithful to you, if, upon seeing and understanding the danger you are in, he does not exert himself as much as he can to warn and make it known to you, if the opportunity or means are not utterly denied him? I call upon almighty God, who is the examiner of hearts and loins (*renes*), [to attest] that there is no other reason for which I presume to write these things, except that I suffer more than I can say over the dangers that seem to loom over you, and especially over your soul. For by however much the soul is a more excellent substance than the body, by so much should we treat the care of the soul with more excellent concern than that of the body, just as the Lord

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<sup>1</sup>*Erzbischof Agobard von Lyon. Leben und Werk* (= Kölner Historische Abhandlungen 17), Köln 1969, pp. 203-204.

<sup>2</sup>Romans 13:1.

<sup>3</sup>I Peter 2:13.

<sup>4</sup>I Timothy 2: 1-2.

<sup>5</sup>Romans 13:5.

teaches in the Gospels, as you well know.<sup>6</sup>

(III) Now then, amidst the attrition and commotion, the agitation and affliction of the land and those inhabiting it in this present year, there is no man who could count how many evils have arisen. And this, despite the fact that no cause demands, no necessity requires that the struggles that we are having should fittingly happen thus. For if you had wished it, you might have led a tranquil and quiet life with your sons no less than your father and uncle did. May almighty and merciful God who lives within your heart be present, may that patience in which you surpass all other men, be present, that you deign to hear and weigh what I shall suggest with tranquility.

(IV) At the time when you made your son a share in your title, you started all this by thus asking your public: *Should a man put off what pertains to the stability of the kingdom and the strength of rule or not?* When everyone answered that what is useful and necessary should not be deferred but rather hastened, you immediately revealed to all what you had discussed with only a few and said that, because of the fragility of life and the uncertainty of death, you wanted, while you were still able, to impose the title of emperor on the one of your three sons in whom you were able to recognize the will of God in one way or another. In order to know this, you commanded that all fast for three days, that priests offer sacrifices to almighty God who is sweet and mild and very merciful to all who invoke Him, and that everyone give alms more generously than usual for this three day period, so that almighty God, who rules with the utmost kindness the hearts of those hoping in Him, might pour His will into your heart and not allow your will to incline towards any other than upon [the son] who was pleasing to Him.

And thus you carried out everything that should have been done in such a situation, with such faith, with such hope, that no one would doubt that this was infused and inspired in you by God. You assigned parts of your kingdom to the rest of your sons but—in order that the kingdom might be one and not three—you set [the son] whom you made the sharer in your title, over the others. And then you ordered these actions to be written down and, once written, to be signed and corroborated. Then, you sent [the son] who had been made consort in your title to Rome, your deeds to be approved and confirmed by the highest pontiff. Then you ordered all to swear that they would all follow and preserve such an election and division. No one considered this oath irrelevant or worthy of scorn but rather timely and legitimate, since it seemed to pertain to peace and concord. And over the course of time, whenever and wherever imperial letters were sent, they contained the names of both emperors.

But later, because your will has changed, the statutes have been overturned, his

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Matthew 10:28.

name has been omitted from the letters, and in all things the contrary has been attempted, although God has not said to you either through His own voice or an angel or through a prophet: *I regret that I established him thus,*<sup>7</sup> as He spoke to Samuel about Saul. Even now you do not know how it has been decided in the secret counsels of God, and yet, behold, without any reason and counsel, you repudiate without God the one whom you elected with God, and you reprove a proven matter without awaiting the issue of the will of the One, whose will you sought in electing. Your prudence is not unaware: God should be followed, not preceded. For whoever wishes to precede [God], attempts what is not from the faith, as the Lord himself says: *You shall not tempt the Lord thy God.*<sup>8</sup>

(V) My lord, I pray your most benign piety attend [to what I say], lest you receive these words with contempt. Rather, enter into the chapel of your mind with God and speak with Him through the mediation of the piety of your faith; then you shall find that you have said to God —not in words but in deeds— *Lord, we have humbly entreated and begged the countenance of your consideration that, by your illumination and governance we might choose someone to share in the imperial title, but because we have not done well with you, we have found counsel better without you.* God forbid! God forbid! May God keep you from repudiating the inspiration of God and from considering the carnal things of men to be the wills of wise men so much that you are led into error and brought down. I beg your clemency to consider with the prudence conferred upon you by God how the blessed Apostle Jacob rebukes those who propose that they are going to do something on the impulse of their own minds without the prospect of divine permission, when he says: *Behold, you who say now: Today or tomorrow we shall go to that city and we shall spend a year there, trading and making a profit. Yet you do not even know what tomorrow shall bring. Indeed, what is your life? It is but vapor that appears for a time and then shall disappear. What you ought to say is: "If the Lord wishes and we shall live, we shall do this and that."*<sup>9</sup> Beware of men who follow their own spirit, because the faith does not belong to all.

(VI) *The Lord knows who are His,*<sup>10</sup> and whichever of us is His, we enjoy some bit of the light of truth, and just as the truth shines, so we sincerely love you and faithfully desire your eternal happiness. We therefore lament that such great evils, such wicked deeds, have been perpetrated this year because of this situation, and we truly fear lest the wrath of God be aroused against you. For we remember your most ardent religion and always recognized it in the assiduity of your prayers, as it chanted in psalms,

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<sup>7</sup> I Kings 15:11.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 4:7.

<sup>9</sup> James 4:13-15.

<sup>10</sup> II Timothy 2:19.

hymns and spiritual canticles and sang unto God with a pure heart, in the contrition of the heart, in the compunction of a placid mind, in the concern for acts of mercy, and in the vigor for all good things. And therefore, as we said, it seems that we should fear lest it become lukewarm and grow cold, and we should wish that it grow hot and increase, persevering until the end so that eternal salvation may follow.

(VII) And because we mentioned earlier that legitimate and fitting oath, it seems to me that I should not conceal from your excellency the fact that there is now great grumbling among men because of these diverse and contradictory oaths, and not only grumbling but also sadness and slander against you. This deeply displeases me. Their grumbling seems to [me] to pertain to what Jerome says in his exposition of Jeremiah in that passage where the prophet says: *And you shall swear: The Lord lives in truth and in judgment and in justice.*<sup>11</sup> Then the aforementioned doctor says: *It should be noted that swearing oaths has these companions: truth, judgment, and justice. If these are missing, it shall in no way be an oath but perjury.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 4:2.

<sup>12</sup>Jerome, Commentary on Jeremiah I, 69