



Hraban Maur, *On honouring parents*. 834

translated by Richard Gilbert, Alex Traves, Charles West and Tianpeng Zhang,
with an introduction by Mayke de Jong

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Zusammenfassung: *Das Werk wurde 834 von Hraban Maur (oder Hrabanus Maurus oder Rabanus Maurus, ca. 780–856) geschrieben, der zu dieser Zeit Abt von Fulda war, und an Kaiser Ludwig den Frommen gerichtet. Sein konventioneller Titel „Über das Ehren der Eltern“ suggeriert, dass es sich um einen Traktat über den Gehorsam von Kindern gegenüber ihren Eltern handelt. Doch dieser Titel wurde dem Werk erst von seinem modernen Bearbeiter gegeben, basierend auf der Überschrift des ersten Kapitels. In Wahrheit verfolgt das Traktat gleichzeitig eine weiter wie enger gefasste Aufgabe: weiter, als dass es Themen wie Vergebung und Urteil ebenso wie kindlichen Gehorsam umfasst; und enger, weil es für einen spezifischen politischen Zweck verfasst wurde. Wir bieten hier eine vollständige englische Übersetzung, um das Werk zugänglicher zu machen, zusammen mit einer Einleitung für diejenigen, die mit dem Kontext und der Entstehungszeit des Werkes nicht vertraut sind.*

Abstract: *This work was written in 834 by Hraban Maur (or Hrabanus Maurus, or Rabanus Maurus, c. 780–856), at this point abbot of the monastery of Fulda, and addressed to Emperor Louis the Pious. Its conventional title ‘On honouring parents’ suggests that it is a treatise on the obedience that children owe to their parents. However, this title was provided by its modern editor, based on the heading of the first chapter, and the treatise’s remit in truth is both wider and narrower: wider, in that it encompasses topics such as forgiveness and judgement as well as filial obedience; and narrower, because it was written for a specific political purpose. We provide here a full English translation to make the work more accessible, together with an introduction for those unfamiliar with the context and period in which it was written.*

I. Introduction*

1. The rebellion of 833–834

When Louis the Pious (814–840), Charlemagne’s third son, succeeded as king and emperor, he was the only remaining heir.¹ His two brothers, Charles and Pippin, had pre-deceased their famous father. But whereas Charlemagne ran out of heirs, Louis would have no shortage of them. His wife and queen Irmingard had already borne him three healthy sons: Lothar in 797, Pippin in 799 and Louis in 806. For these three sons, Louis in 817 established an order of succession which favoured his eldest. Made co-emperor, Lothar was to succeed to the imperial title and the bulk of the Frankish realm, while his younger brothers would rule smaller kingdoms within the empire under Lothar’s authority. This was supposed to come into effect once Louis had died, but soon these solemn arrangements had to be infringed upon. In 818 Irmingard died, and a year later Louis married Judith, a daughter of an Alemannian aristocrat; in 823, Empress Judith gave birth to a new son and legitimate heir, who was given a name full of dynastic significance: Charles.

In the early 830s, Louis the Pious was confronted with two rebellions in rapid succession. There was much more to these revolts than mere dynastic conflict, but the familial constellation outlined above created a volatile context. On the one hand, there were the three older sons, now all established and married, with their own kingdoms and ambitions for their offspring, and on the other, there was Charles, a young child at the imperial court, with parents fiercely protective of his future position. All four of these royal households, the senior and the three junior ones, functioned as magnets for political factions, attracting their share of ‘loyal men’ (*fideles*), be they lay aristocrats or churchmen. No wonder, then, that Hraban opened the treatise translated below with a biblical compilation on the obedience owed by children to their parents, since,

* The introduction was written by Mayke de Jong, who also translated the verse introduction; the translation of the rest of the text was produced by the Medieval Latin Translation group at the University of Sheffield meeting (mostly online) between June 2020 and June 2021, co-ordinated by Charles West. For more detail about the text, see Mayke de Jong, Hraban Maur as mediator: De Honore Parentum (autumn 834) in: *Splendor Reginae. Passions, genre et famille. Mélanges en l’honneur de Régine Le Jan, sous la dir. de Laurent Jégou et al.*, Turnhout 2015, pp. 49–57, and the Geschichtsquellen website’s page about the text <https://www.geschichtsquellen.de/werk/2934>. We are very grateful to the Mittelalter editors, above all Evina Steinova who patiently offered advice on the translation (and saved us from a few slips), and Björn Gebert who provided invaluable editorial and formatting assistance. Any errors that remain are our own.

¹ Cf. Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious. 814–840*, Cambridge 2009; Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *Inventing the Carolingian empire. Politics and government. 800–840*, in: Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 154–222; Stuart Airlie, *Making and Unmaking the Carolingians. 751–888*, London 2021, pp. 121–161.

albeit to a different degree, Louis' three sons had become the focus of political opposition. Yet as the text unfolds, it becomes clear that Hraban's main aim was to delegitimise the take-over of imperial authority by the eldest son, Lothar, in 833, followed by a plea for reconciliation between father and son.

In 830, during the first revolt, Lothar had already played a leading role. He had been made a co-emperor and sole heir to the title in 817, and was crowned emperor by Pope Paschal I in Rome. Lothar's kingdom was Italy, but he was also the second at his father's imperial court; his being supplanted in this role in the summer of 829 triggered five years of political turbulence. The initial revolt in 830 soon fizzled out, but in June 833 in the Alsace, Lothar headed a military alliance between the three eldest sons. Rather than doing battle, Louis' troops voted with their feet and went over to the rebels' side. Proclaiming this desertion to be a divine judgment, Lothar assumed the leadership of the Frankish polity. This was formally confirmed at an assembly in Compiègne in early October, where the old emperor was charged with a series of serious accusations which made him unworthy of exercising the imperial 'ministry'. Shortly thereafter, as a public sinner who had offended God and his fellow men, Louis submitted to the imposition of public penance in Soissons, depositing his armour at the altar and donning the garb of a penitent. This act amounted to a deposition from the throne, for he was supposed to spend the rest of his life in a monastery, atoning for his sins.

As in 830, however, the alliance between the rebellious sons proved short-lived. By 1 February of 834, Louis was formally reconciled to the Church by yet other bishops, and re-invested with the so-called *cingulum militiae* (sword belt) that symbolised his rulership. Nevertheless, Lothar fought on for months, until in late August 834 in Blois he met his father as a supplicant, begging for mercy, a gesture that put an end to the fighting, but that left much business unfinished. After the humiliating encounter in Blois, Lothar was dismissed and sent back to his kingdom of Italy, yet a full reconciliation of the kind that meant regaining his position as co-emperor remained subject to negotiation. This was still ongoing in 839, and possibly remained so until Louis's death in the summer of 840. Then, the three remaining sons (Pippin had died) soon found themselves entangled in a vicious three years of 'fraternal war', with Louis and Charles fiercely contesting Lothar's claims to the imperial succession.

In 840 Hraban would support Lothar to the hilt, by dedicating biblical commentary to the legitimate son and heir. In other words, Hraban had no particular grudge against the eldest son. It is

likely that his treatise known as ‘On honouring parents’ was meant to pave the way towards forging a more substantial reconciliation between Lothar and his father in the aftermath of the submission in Blois in 834. Before broaching the topic of forgiveness, however, Hraban furnished Louis with a systematic invalidation of the accusations made by the rebels in 833.

2. Advice, admonition and consolation

Hraban’s assumption that the restored emperor required support in the form of a dossier of authoritative texts from Scripture and the church fathers is typical of the biblically oriented political culture of his day and age. Bishops and abbots controlled economic as well as spiritual resources: the vast landed wealth of religious communities and the efficacious prayers of their membership. By the early ninth century, Christian kings were perceived as protectors of such communities of prayers and, more in general, as responsible for the salvation of their people.² This meant that they and their ‘helpers’ – the ecclesiastical and lay leadership – were accountable to God: governing well was a duty and a ‘ministry’ (*ministerium*). Biblical kings such as David and Solomon became the most pervasive models of rulership, while churchmen likened their own role to the Old Testament prophets who had admonished and harangued rulers who had allowed their people to fall into sin.

Yet the leadership of this recently established empire also measured itself by the demanding yardstick of its late antique Christian predecessor. This was the world of the church fathers, in which Bishop Ambrose of Milan browbeat Emperor Theodosius I into doing public penance for his political sins. The interpretation of what had happened in Milan in 392 was central to the debate on imperial penance after 833: did Louis’s Theodosius-like public humiliation enhance the Frankish emperor’s authority, or did it spell the beginning of the end of the Carolingian empire, given the emperor’s mildness and his dependence on churchmen? Many modern historians have argued it was the hallmark of Louis’ weakness, but most of their ninth-century

² Cf. Janet L. Nelson, Kingship and empire in the Carolingian world, in: *Carolingian Culture. Emulation and Innovation*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick, Cambridge 2008, pp. 52–87; Janet L. Nelson, The Frankish Kingdoms. 814–898: the West, in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History. Vol. 2, c.700–c.900*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick, Cambridge 1995, pp. 110–141; Mayke de Jong, Carolingian monasticism. The power of prayer, in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History. Vol. 2, c.700–c.900*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick, Cambridge 1995, pp. 622–653; Mayke de Jong, The Empire as ecclesia. Hrabanus Maurus and biblical historia for rulers, in: *Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes, Cambridge 2000, pp. 191–226; Gerda Heydemann, The People of God and the Law. Biblical models for Carolingian legislation. in: *Speculum* 95 (2020), pp. 89–131.

predecessors thought differently. Like Hraban, they tended to see Theodosius' penance as a sign of his power and greatness.³

To dismiss all this as 'clerical ideology' misses the crucial point, namely that Carolingian rulers and the top echelon of a court-connected lay elite shared in this biblically inspired literate culture. Being the recipient of sound 'advice' based on Scripture and its authoritative patristic interpretation enhanced one's status, even if it contained moral strictures or criticism. Such advice could take many different literary forms, but the best known are the so-called 'Mirrors of Princes', a genre that by the 820s also included advice to lay magnates and aristocrats.⁴ The nature of advice also varied. Some of it was cloaked in obsequious praise, but the author might also admonish or rebuke in an outspoken manner, casting themselves as fierce prophets of Israel, or justifying their critique with reference to the newly discovered principles of Roman rhetoric in general and the tradition of frank speech (*licentia*) in particular.⁵ The frequent use of such strategies of persuasion means that those deploying them could rely on the recipients' knowledge and understanding of what they were up to; the same holds true for biblical commentaries, or for the more modest and ad hoc biblical compilation of the kind Hraban assembled for Louis.

In 834 the abbot of Fulda had already established his reputation as an authoritative biblical scholar, yet most of his career as a biblical commentator still lay ahead of him.⁶ A substantial part of his exegesis was destined for contemporary rulers. His major commentary on the four books of Kings was intended for Louis in 829, but was first offered to the archchancellor Hilduin in order to test the waters. Hraban's consultation of a 'learned Hebrew' – in other words a Jew – created some controversy at the court before the work was formally accepted by the emperor during a visit to Fulda in 832. After Louis' death in 840, he dedicated more of such exegetical work to Lothar, to whom he pledged fidelity in 840, and to Louis the German, in whose kingdom Fulda ended up in 843. From the dedicatory letters that precede these texts, a competitive world emerges, in which biblical scholars earned their authority only after careful

³ Cf. Mayke de Jong, Power and humility in Carolingian society. The public penance of Louis the Pious, in: Early Medieval Europe 1 (1992), pp. 29–52; Mayke de Jong, The Penitential State (as in note 1), pp. 112–147. On Ambrose, see Irene van Renswoude, The Rhetoric of Free Speech in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, Cambridge 2019, pp. 87–108.

⁴ Cf. Rachel Stone, Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire, Cambridge 2011, pp. 27–68.

⁵ Cf. van Renswoude, The Rhetoric of Free Speech (as in note 3), pp. 180–205.

⁶ For a recent study of one of Hraban's commentaries, see Owen Phelan, The Carolingian renewal in early medieval Europe through Hrabanus Maurus's Commentary on Matthew, in: Traditio 75 (2020) pp. 143–175.

scrutiny in high places.⁷ That Hraban spent some of his formative years in Charlemagne's household did help, of course, and being Fulda's abbot presupposed a staunch loyalty to the ruling monarch; this was a monastery that already enjoyed royal protection under Charlemagne's father. But what if there were several monarchs at the same time who claimed this loyalty? This was the problem in 833–34 during the rebellion, and again in 840–843 when fraternal succession conflicts brought more insecurity. It mattered deeply, therefore, to which ruler one addressed biblical scholarship: this was a public gesture of support to the rightful king or emperor, who was by definition accountable to God for the well-being and salvation of his people. Hraban and other scholars offered biblical explication and instruction, either on royal request or of their own initiative, operating from a shared premise typical of Carolingian kingship: that a ruler worth his salt needed to know about the deeper meaning and true intention of divine law as it had been laid down in the Bible.

There is yet another genre, also a legacy of Christian late antiquity, that helped to shape Hraban's text: the so-called literature of consolation. The abbot's pupil Rudolf of Fulda characterised *De honore parentum* as a 'consolation letter after the disaster which hit him [Louis] because of his sons and magnates; in which it is shown by divine testimony that a wrong verdict cannot rightly condemn an innocent; in which he [Hraban] also, finally, exhorted him [Louis] to forgiveness of those who had committed crimes against him'.⁸ Rudolf's observation is entirely to the point: the central arguments of the work concentrate on the illegitimate nature of the public penance imposed on Louis, and on the forgiveness required to restore order. As such, it may have offered solace to the emperor; yet there is more to it, for in Hraban's day, consolation literature could serve as a way to express potentially controversial political views while rendering them less offensive. Presenting them as a form of succour took the worst edge off while leaving room for polemics against one's adversaries. A prime example of this approach are the two funeral orations (*epitaphia*) written by Paschasius Radbertus, monk and abbot of Corbie, for his two controversial predecessors, Adalhard (d. 826) and Wala (d. 836), cousins of Charlemagne and supporters of Lothar in the rebellion years.⁹ Radbertus also belonged to the court-connected world of Carolingian monasticism, yet his take on the matter differed from

⁷ Cf. Mayke de Jong, *The Empire as ecclesia* (as in note 2).

⁸ Rudolf of Fulda, *Miracula Sanctorum in Fuldenses ecclesias translatorum*, c. 15, in: MGH SS XV.1, ed. Georg Waitz, Hannover 1887, pp. 341.

⁹ Cf. Mayke de Jong, *Epitaph for an Era. Politics and Rhetoric in the Carolingian World*, Cambridge 2020, pp. 102–131; Mayke de Jong and Justin Lake, *Confronting crisis in the Carolingian empire. Paschasius Radbertus' funeral oration for Wala of Corbie*, Manchester 2020.

Hraban's. He blamed the old emperor for misunderstanding and maltreating his three older sons, and devoted two sophisticated literary works to restoring the reputation of Louis' opponents. On the other side of the political divide, Hraban produced a dossier of authoritative texts, succinctly framed by interjections of his own, but no less ambitious than some of the literary fireworks of his contemporaries. That his pupil Rudolf recognised it as a 'consolation letter' reveals the serious and partly controversial purpose of *De honore parentum*. Consolation was an inoffensive and unobtrusive way of signalling support of Louis, attacking those who had subjected him to a public penance in 833, and of preventing further conflict between the father and his still rebellious son.

Although Hraban's intervention did not restore immediate peace between father and son, it formed part of years of efforts to deal with the aftermath of the rebellions of the 830s. Hraban remained involved in this turbulent political arena, not least because *De honore parentum* seems to have enhanced his authority as a biblical expert. But there was more to it. By the autumn of 834, with a proven record of loyalty to the legitimate and much-troubled emperor, the abbot of Fulda definitively, and again, publicly, inserted himself into the inner circle of those who could now count themselves to be Louis' circle of trusted advisers. Soon Hraban wrote a much longer treatise for Louis, this time commissioned by the emperor himself, instructing his legitimate ruler on all the good and evil he would have to deal with in his realm.¹⁰ This massive compilation of biblical and patristic texts in 40 chapters was addressed to Louis the Pious. Its preface is still extant in a ninth-century manuscript and has been edited by Dümmler in the MGH. It refers back to *De honore parentum* and is tightly packed with biblical and patristic texts on the obedience owed by sons to their fathers and by the faithful (*fideles*) to their lord and ruler. The treatise only survives in a sixteenth-century edition and is therefore not easily accessible, which explains why it has not yet attracted the scholarly attention it deserves.

3. Structure and a short summary of the *De honore parentum*

Unlike the title of Hraban's work, invented as we mentioned by the modern editor, the division in twelve chapters and their headings (see below) are part of the single surviving manuscript.

¹⁰ Hrabani (Mauri) abbatis Fuldensis et archiepiscopis Moguntiacensis epistolae, ed. Ernst Dümmler, in: MGH Epp. 5, Berlin 1899, nr. 16, pp. 416–420, https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_epp_5/index.htm#page/416/mode/1up, provides the preface, edited from the manuscript Vienna ÖNB cod. 842 (s. IX) ff. 1–9. The treatise itself only survives in an editio princeps: Wolfgang Lazius, *Fragmenta quaedam Caroli Magini*. Antwerp 1560. The best discussion of the text is by Elizabeth Sears, *Louis the Pious as Miles Christi. The Dedicatory Image in Hrabanus Maurus's De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis*, in: *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. by Peter Godman and Roger Collins, Oxford 1990, pp. 605–28, here p. 622.

What follows is only meant to give a brief overview of the contents of the *De honore parentum*. The prefatory poem mentions the submission of sons to their father, a theme that is continued in the first two chapters. Following the customary order of biblical commentary, Old Testament texts come first, followed and framed by related ones from the New Testament; these biblical witnesses are then explicated and reinforced by authoritative commentary from the Christian tradition. In between, Hraban inserted his own voice, succinctly yet effectively appealing to potential friends, and wielding his biblical weapons against his enemies.

Ch. 1–2: Fathers and sons

The necessary submission of fathers and sons dominates in the first chapter, with much material taken from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The second chapter, on dishonouring one's parents, argues that biblical fathers preferred their younger sons. This is an implicit comparison between Lothar, the rebellious eldest son, and Louis the Pious himself, the dutiful and humble younger son who had obeyed and succeeded his father, and whose mildness and mercy were his hallmark. The focus then shifts to the mild and merciful leaders of the people of Israel, notably Moses and David, rulers with whom Louis the Pious had also been associated by Hraban's contemporaries. Already in these opening sections, a central theme of the treatise, the need for forgiveness, comes to the fore.

Ch. 3: Kings and subjects

In this chapter Hraban mounts an attack on the revolt of 833. Subjects who disobeyed their ruler would displease God. Old Testament history furnishes most of the ammunition, but it is supplemented by examples from Christian times, taken from the late antique writer Orosius. One of these examples was Emperor Theodosius I, featured not as a penitent but as a ruler who had defeated many tyrants.

Ch. 4–5: Paternal inheritance and greedy sons

Sons who stood to inherit should not expel their father and get their hands on the inheritance by fraudulent means. This is a clear reference to the co-emperor Lothar, who had claimed his rightful legacy before his time had come. Nothing so outrageous could be found in Scripture, which provides examples of obedient and humble sons, and even Roman co-emperors had bided their time until their father had died. A brief fifth chapter treats those who infringe on their duty towards kinsmen because of their avarice and cupidity. This argument is also aimed at Lothar's premature claims to his father's legacy.

Ch 6–8: The injustice of 833

In these three chapters Hrabán addresses the miscarriage of justice against the emperor in the autumn of 833. Ch. 6 offers Deuteronomy on the duties of judges and magistrates (Deut. 16:18–20), followed by a long series of passages from the Old Testament prophets denouncing those who dispensed justice fraudulently. Corruption is a persistent theme in Carolingian political discourse.¹¹ Here it is weaponised to discredit anyone, secular magnates as well as bishops, who had deemed Louis guilty of a long list of accusations summed up in the episcopal verdict (*Relatio Episcoporum*) of 833. A New Testament sequel (ch. 7) argues the same point, but with an even tighter focus on recent events. The verdict against Louis had been reckless (*temerarius*) and unjust. This rebuke was meant especially for the bishops who had passed the verdict on Louis; in the next chapter 8, *What should be thought about those administering secular judgments*, Hrabán tackled one of the key accusations against Louis, namely that he had committed ‘sacrilege and homicide’ in his suppression of various rebellions. Citing the council of Antioch, Hrabán maintained that it was a ruler’s duty to maintain divine law and to punish whoever persisted in throwing the Church into disorder (*qui ecclesiam conturbare... persisterit*). In 833, Louis had been accused of having created *perturbatio* rather than peace;¹² here, Hrabán threw this incrimination back into the rebels’ faces. Their actions constituted an unwarranted and dangerous break from tradition – in short, they themselves were guilty of throwing the Christian polity into disorder.

Ch. 9–10 Public confession versus excommunication

Hrabán’s central argument here is that someone who had publicly confessed to having sinned, but who had not been convicted of a grave crime, should not be punished by excommunication, a punishment that was the prerogative of bishops.¹³ Public admission of sin in God’s presence, as performed by Moses, David, Job, Jeremiah and Daniel, deserved the Lord’s forgiveness and mercy. By maintaining that the imperial penance of 833 had not been an excommunication meriting deposition, but an instance of voluntary self-humiliation, Hrabán struck at the rebellious bishops’ Achilles heel, for they too had been compelled to emphasise that Louis had ‘asked’ for penance, and had shed tears of contrition. This point was driven home in a brief tenth chapter about false *iustificatio* (Sir. 7:5), namely the bishops who, after the event, claimed

¹¹ Cf. Jan van Doren, *Cupiditate Ducti. Corruption in the Carolingian World* (PhD thesis), Princeton 2021.

¹² Cf. *Episcoporum de poenitentia, quam Hludowicus imperator professus est, relatio compendiensis* (= *Relatio Episcoporum*), ed. Alfred Boretius, in: *MGH Capitularia 2*, Hannover 1897, nr. 197, p. 53, ll. 14, 32, https://www.dmg.de/mgh_capit_2/index.htm#page/53/mode/1up.

¹³ Robert Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe, 600–1200*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 101–139.

they had done nothing wrong. Such men were like the arrogant and hard-hearted leaders of the people of Israel, whom Jeremiah rebuked for having accused him, claiming they were without sin, while, in fact, they had turned away from God.

Ch. 11–12: Penance and forgiveness

Here Hraban mustered all the force of biblical authority to salvage penance from the after-effects of its misuse in 833. There was a real risk that this road to salvation would be discredited, along with the authority of the bishops who had attempted to depose their emperor by means of public penance and excommunication. Hraban's best ammunition once more came from Ezekiel, the biblical book *par excellence* that supported the duty of bishops and other high-ranking churchmen to correct sinners. A key text (Ezek. 3:18) had been cited in the *Relatio* of 833 in order to defend the bishops' role in Louis' penance. They had seen themselves as the 'watchmen of Israel', a self-perception shared by Hraban.

This chapter on true penance leads up to the culmination of the entire treatise (ch. 12): the exhortation to Louis to forgive his enemies in general, and Lothar in particular. Suddenly, New Testament is cited in full force, and not just because here forgiveness and mercy are central themes. A crucial point is about to be made through the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:22–25). This eminent biblical example of paternal mercy was used in support of a fervent plea for the restoration of Lothar's position as eldest son and co-emperor: 'Receive, therefore, most mild father, your penitent son...?'

4. Manuscripts, edition and translation principles

There is only one surviving manuscript of the work: Paris BnF Lat. 2443, fols. 13v–29r,¹⁴ which dates from the decade or so following 834. The standard edition of the text is by Ernst Dümmler, MGH Epistolae 5, Berlin 1899, pp. 403–15.¹⁵

Our translation from the original Latin into English is based on this edition, including the identification of Hraban's sources and quotations, though we have added more paragraph divisions to help the reader, based on the sense of the text (the manuscript itself has no such divisions). We have drawn on the Douay-Rheims Bible for translating the biblical quotations. We have indicated existing English translations of Hraban's other sources to guide readers should they

¹⁴ Digitised manuscript at Gallica: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9078150z/fl16.item>.

¹⁵ Digitised version at DMGH: https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_epp_5/index.htm#page/403/mode/1up.

wish to find out more, and have consulted these translations in making our own. Hraban's biblical quotations are italicised and identified through in-line square brackets, to avoid cluttering the page (there are around a hundred of them); other quotations are in roman typeface within inverted commas, and identified through footnotes. Significant biblical allusions identified by Dümmler are noted in the footnotes. Quotations of more than three lines are indented. The translation leans more towards the literal than the idiomatic in the intention of preserving more of Hraban's way of thinking for readers, and to make cross-checking against the Latin easier.

II. Translation

The little work of Hraban Maur addressed to Emperor Louis, arranged in 12 chapters.

- 1. About the honour owed to parents and the subjection of sons.*
- 2. About those who disdain their parents or elders by despising them.*
- 3. That honour and obedience to royal dignity should be shown by all, while the stubbornness of the arrogant is to be restrained by discipline.*
- 4. That it is not permitted to sons to expel their parents from their own inheritance and possessions, or to take anything from them through violence or deceit.*
- 5. That the wickedness of avarice and greed should be greatly detested.*
- 6. About respecting just judgements in all cases, and the respecting of persons.*
- 7. That reckless judgements should be altogether avoided.*
- 8. What should be thought about those administering secular judgements.*
- 9. That those who confess themselves generally to be sinners and yet are cannot be censured clearly by others are in no way to be judged or condemned.*
- 10. That false justification is no advantage, but very greatly disadvantages those abusing it.*
- 11. That divine piety bestows complete indulgence to the truly converted and to those doing penance for past sins.*
- 12. An exhortation for the forgiveness of wrongdoers.*

These twice six chapters I have put into writing for you, beloved Caesar;
These you may comprehend while you reread them;
Here you will find the teachings of divine law,
Which praise good and which reprove evil.
They bestow the palm of justice, they crown this with praise,
And scornfully, they drive all crime far away.

They embrace a humble mind and detest arrogance,
They faithfully recommend the norm and reject deviance.
Heavenly laws teach that children should submit to their fathers,
Not just to restrain them from evil, but to strive towards good.
May Christ, the victorious King, make you conquer the world,
And may He also award you the eternal gifts of peace.

1. About the honour owed to parents and the subjection of sons

Almighty God confirmed how pleasing the honouring of parents and the subjection of sons was to Him, He who first made sons to be born from their fathers, afterwards showing to people what was right by the edict of natural law, so that by the divine command they should be compelled to do what piety suggested through emotion.

For in Exodus, where the Lord issued the decalogue of the law to His people for them to observe it, after three commands which He first of all issued about His worship, He then added this about the bond of human society, saying: *Honour thy father and thy mother, that thou mayest be longlived upon the land which the Lord thy God will give thee* [Exod. 20:12]. And in Leviticus the same Lord commanded thus: *Thou shalt not calumniate thy neighbour, nor oppress him by violence. He that curseth his father, or mother, dying let him die: he hath cursed his father and mother, let his blood be upon him* [Lev. 19:13; 20:9].

Likewise, in Deuteronomy He says thus:

If a man has begotten a stubborn and impudent son, who will not hear the commandments of his father or mother, and being corrected, scorns obedience: they shall take him and bring him to the elders of his city, and to the gate of judgment, and shall say to them: 'This our son is impudent and stubborn, he disdaineth hearing our admonitions, he giveth himself to revelling, and to debauchery and banquetings: The people of the city shall strike him down with stones: and he shall die, that you may take away the evil out of the midst of you, and all Israel hearing it may be afraid' [Deut. 21:18–21].

Also in the same book, in which there is an instruction about the curses that should be announced through the Levites against sinners, thus it is read: *Cursed be he that honoureth not his father and mother: and all the people shall say: Amen* [Deut. 27:16].

Solomon thus also says in Proverbs: *My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: That grace may be added to thy head, and a chain of gold to thy neck* [Prov. 1:8–9]. *My son, keep the commandments of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother* [Prov. 6:20]. *A fool laugheth at the instruction of his father: but he that regardeth re-proofs shall become prudent* [Prov. 15:5]. *He that afflicteth his father and mother, is infamous and unhappy* [Prov. 19:26]. And elsewhere: *He that curseth his father, and mother, his lamp shall be put out in the midst of darkness, the inheritance gotten hastily in the beginning, in the end shall be without a blessing* [Prov. 20:20–21]. And in another place: *A faithful man shall be much praised: but he that maketh haste to be rich, shall not be innocent* [Prov. 28:20]. And a little after: *He that stealeth anything from his father, or from his mother: and saith, This is no sin, is the partner of a murderer* [Prov. 28:24]. *The eye that mocketh at his father, and that despiseth the labour of his mother in bearing him, let the ravens of the brooks pick it out, and the young eagles eat it* [Prov. 30:17].

Moreover, in the book of Joshua ben Sirach there is written the following:

He that honoureth his father shall have joy in his own children, and in the day of his prayer he shall be heard. He that honoureth his father shall enjoy a long life: and he that obeyeth the father, shall be a comfort to his mother. He that feareth the Lord, honoureth his parents, and will serve them as his masters that brought him into the world. Honour thy father, in work and word, and all patience, that a blessing may come upon thee from him, and his blessing may remain in the latter end. The father's blessing establisheth the houses of the children: but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation. Glory not in the dishonour of thy father: for his shame is no glory to thee. For the glory of a man is from the honour of his father, and a father without honour is the disgrace of the son. Son, support the old age of thy father, and grieve him not in his life; And if his understanding fail, have patience with him, and despise him not when thou art in thy strength: for the relieving of the father shall not be forgotten. For good shall be repaid to thee for the sin of thy mother. And in justice thou shalt be built up, and in the day of affliction thou shalt be remembered: and thy sins shall melt away as the ice in the fair warm weather. Of what an evil fame is he that forsaketh his father: and he is cursed of God that angereth his mother [Sir. 3:7–18].

And once more: *Honour thy father, and forget not the groanings of thy mother: Remember that thou hadst not been born but through them: and make a return to them as they have done for thee* [Sir. 7:29–30].

And in truth, the Lord speaks through Jeremiah to the house of the Rechabites, saying the following:

And Jeremias said to the house of the Rechabites: 'Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and have kept all his precepts, and have done all that he commanded you: Therefore thus saith the Lord of host the God of Israel: There shall not be wanting a man of the race of Jonadab the son of Rechab, standing before me for ever' [Jer. 35:18–19].

In Malachi too the Lord spoke thus: *The son honoureth the father, and the servant his master: if then I be a father, where is my honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?* [Mal. 1:6].

And hence the very Truth in the Gospel says to the Pharisees:

Why do you also transgress the commandment of God for your tradition? For God said: Honour thy father and mother: And: He that shall curse father or mother, let him die the death. But you say: Whosoever shall say to father or mother, The gift whatsoever proceedeth from me, shall profit thee. And he shall not honour his father or his mother: and you have made void the commandment of God for your tradition [Matt. 15:3–6].

And He also says to the Jews in another place: *I honour my Father, and you have dishonoured me* [John 8:49]. Also in another place, He says: *I came not to do my own will, but his that sent me, the Father's* [John 6:38]. Paul also says in his letter to the Ephesians: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is just. Honour thy father,¹⁶ which is the first commandment with a promise: That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest be long lived upon earth* [Eph. 6:1–3]. Also to the Colossians, he says: *Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing to the Lord* [Col. 3:20]. Peter also similarly admonishes in his letter, saying: *young men, be*

¹⁶ Hraban here omits 'and your mother'.

subject to the ancients. And do you all insinuate humility one to another, for God resisteth the proud, but to the humble he giveth grace [1 Pet. 5:5].

2. About those who disdain their parents or elders by despising them

These examples which are found in the divine books declare how displeasing the disgracing of parents is to God. For after the Flood, when Noah had planted the vines, made himself drunk with wine and lay naked in his tent, the middle one of his three sons, who laughed on seeing his father's nudity, suffered a deserved curse upon his offspring, while Noah's other sons, who covered their parent's indecent figure, were rewarded with their father's benediction forever.¹⁷ We read that inequality and savagery of manners of their offspring similarly displeased other patriarchs, and that gentleness pleased them.

And then we read about Ishmael, the first of Abraham's sons, that he was a wild man, and his hand was against all men, and all men's hands against him, and that he pitched his tents out of the region of all his brothers.¹⁸ However, it was through Isaac that the progeny was reckoned of the father, to whom the Lord gave benediction and established His covenant into an everlasting compact with him as well as his offspring after him, because he [i.e. Isaac] obeyed his father's will in all things. Two sons were born to him, namely Esau and Jacob, of whom the first one was red and hairy like a hide, and when grown up became a man of many talents and a farmer. His younger brother, however, remained a simple man and dwelt in tents. Hence his mother especially loved him, and onto him the fatherly benediction fully fell, while his elder brother lost the honour of the firstborn because of his greed for food. And similarly, the father Jacob loved above all his sons Joseph, his younger born son, whom Scripture testifies to have been the most gentle and righteous, and who nourished and fed his father and brothers with the most plentiful piety.¹⁹

Furthermore, are we not specifically told about the manners of Moses, who was constituted by God as the leader of the people of Israel, and who spoke with God as a man speaks to his friend, that he was a man who was the most mild beyond all men who have dwelled on the earth?²⁰ Since Joshua, the minister of Moses, was faithful and devoted and obedient to his lord in all

¹⁷ A reference to Gen. 9:20–22.

¹⁸ A reference to Gen. 16:12.

¹⁹ A reference to Gen. 47:12.

²⁰ A reference to Num. 12:3.

things, having been chosen by divine judgment he took the leadership of the people of Israel after Moses, and carried it on to the end successfully.²¹ Thus too David, the youngest amongst his brothers, was most pleasing to God and reached the pinnacle of the kingdom, since he kept utmost humility, patience and gentleness in his habits.²²

About this it is written in the Psalms: *O Lord, remember David and all his gentleness* [Ps. 131:1]. We also read in the book of the Maccabees: *David by his mercy obtained the throne of an everlasting kingdom* [1 Macc. 2:57]. Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael, while persisting in their faith, were liberated from the flames.²³ Daniel, in his innocence, was rescued from the mouth of the lions and, having been raised to honours, became celebrated throughout the kingdoms. Thus clearly all who have trusted in God and were patiently waiting for His help were by no means forsaken by Him.

3. That honour and obedience to royal dignity should be shown by all, while the stubbornness of the arrogant is to be restrained by discipline

Divine Scripture shows both in its commandments and by examples that honour is to be offered by subjects to royal dignity, and that the stubbornness of subjects displeases God.

For in Exodus is written: *Thou shalt not speak ill of the gods, and the prince of thy people thou shalt not curse* [Exod. 22:28]. And in Deuteronomy:

But he that will be proud, and refuse to obey the commandment of the priest, who ministereth at that time to the Lord thy God, and the decree of the judge, that man shall die, and thou shalt take away the evil from Israel, and all the people hearing it shall fear, that no one afterwards swell with pride [Deut. 17:12–13].

The prophet Samuel too praised obedience in the book of Kings, saying: *For obedience is better than sacrifices: and to hearken rather than to offer the fat of rams. Because it is like the sin of witchcraft, to rebel: and like the crime of idolatry, to refuse to obey* [1 Sam. 15:22–23]. Hence it is written in Proverbs: *My son, fear the Lord and the king: and have nothing to do with detractors. For their destruction shall rise suddenly: and who knoweth the ruin of both?* [Prov.

²¹ A reference to Deut. 34:9.

²² A reference to 1 Kings 17:14.

²³ A reference to Dan. 6:23.

24:21–22]. And also: *They that act wickedly are abominable to the king: for the throne is established by justice. Just lips are the delight of kings: he that speaketh right things shall be loved* [Prov. 16:12–13].

Finally, in the Gospel not only did the parents of Jesus pay the tax to the earthly king, but also the Lord paid the tribute for Himself to the emperor, and He also instructed others to do the same thing, saying: *Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's* [Matt. 22:21]. And thus the writings of the Apostles teach us to give obedience to our superiors. For Peter writes in his letter, saying: *Be ye subject therefore to every human creature for God's sake: whether it be to the king as excelling; Or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of the good* [1 Pet. 2:13-14]. And somewhat after, he says: *Fear God. Honour the king* [1 Pet. 2:17]. And hence the Instructor of the Gentiles [i.e. Paul] writing to the Romans says:

Be ye subject to all the higher powers: for there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist, purchase to themselves damnation. For princes are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good: and thou shalt have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to thee, for good. But if thou do that which is evil, fear: for he beareth not the sword in vain. For he is God's minister: an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil. Wherefore be subject of necessity, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For therefore also you pay tribute. For they are the ministers of God, serving unto this purpose. Render therefore to all men their dues. Tribute, to whom tribute is due: custom, to whom custom: fear, to whom fear: honour, to whom honour [Rom. 13:1–7].

How displeasing to the Lord is pride and sedition against one's rulers is shown in the deeds of Nimrod, who first exercised tyranny, and about whom is it written that he was a strong hunter before the Lord.²⁴ [It is also shown] in [the history of] those who tried to build the tower as a sign of their pride: God confused their language and destroyed their works, so that they were dispersed from each other in all the lands of the whole world.²⁵ [It is likewise shown] in the deeds of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who lifted themselves up and rose against Moses, the

²⁴ A reference to Gen. 10:9.

²⁵ A reference to Gen. 11:7–8.

leader of the people of God. God condemned them with a judgement never heard before: the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up them and all that belonged to them, so that they descended alive to hell.²⁶ David, dreading their fall and ruin, dared not raise his hand against King Saul even after he was anointed king, but responded to those men trying to persuade him to strike and kill Saul in the desert of Engaddi or in the desert of Ziph as if he were delivered to him, stating: *The Lord be merciful unto me, that I may do no such thing to my master the Lord's anointed, as to lay my hand upon him, because he is the Lord's anointed* [1 Sam. 24:7]. And he also said: *who shall put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and shall be guiltless? As the Lord liveth, unless the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go down to battle and perish: The Lord be merciful unto me, that I extend not my hand upon the Lord's anointed* [1 Sam. 26:9–11]. Hence he ordered that young man to be killed, who was applauding himself as if had killed Saul, saying to him: *Why were you not afraid to extend your hand so that you killed the Lord's anointed* [2 Sam. 1:14]. *Let your blood be upon your head. For your own mouth has spoken against you, saying: 'I have killed the Lord's anointed'* [2 Sam. 1:16]. For that reason, the Lord delivered David and protected him from all his enemies, and surrendered those who were ensnaring his soul into his power. He also subjugated his son Absalom, who in his lofty pride stirred up sedition against his father, and likewise Sheba son of Bichri, so that all the wicked who scheme against their lords may know that the integrity of the just is stronger than the cunning of the malicious.

Although ancient history reveals that this was done in the old days, there is no lack of examples of this kind from Christian times.²⁷ For the tyrants who raised themselves up against their legitimate lords with a sudden insolence did not escape unpunished, but condemned by the just judgement of God, they paid a fitting penalty. In evidence of this are the most famous wars of the most glorious and faithful Emperor Theodosius, which he waged against the usurper Maximus, who had murdered his lord Gratian and expelled the latter's brother Valentinian from his kingdom. Theodosius, 'whose military strength was lesser in all aspects of comparison and only superseded [Maximus] in faith', besieged Maximus, 'engaged and killed him, without trickery and without controversy'.²⁸ Similarly, [evidence is provided by Theodosius's wars] against the

²⁶ A reference to Num. 16:2.

²⁷ For the historical references that follow, Hraban paraphrases Orosius's Seven Books of History against the Pagans, translated by A. T. Fear (Translated Texts for Historians 54), Liverpool 2010, Book 7, chs. 35f., on the Roman emperor Theodosius I, his son Arcadius and brother Honorius. Orosius wrote his work in the early fifth century, and dedicated it to Augustine of Hippo. It was a popular work in Carolingian Francia.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 388. Emperor Theodosius I's campaign against Maximus took place in 388.

most dangerous usurpers Arbogast and Eugenius, who had gathered together a multitude of both Romans and barbarians for the invasion of the realm and the overthrow of its ruler. The most Christian emperor, trusting the power of God rather than the faith of man, overcame them more with prayers than with arms. For it was Theodosius whom the divinely conferred miracles openly favoured, so that a whirlwind hurtled down at the enemy at the crucial moment, turning the spears they had thrown back upon them, beating their shields, and heavily lashing their faces and chests. Consequently, 'Eugenius was captured and killed, while Arbogast killed himself by his own hand'.²⁹

Thus too in the times of Arcadius, the son of the said emperor Theodosius, and of his son Theodosius the younger, the count Gildo, noting the tender age of the younger Theodosius, tried to usurp a kingdom for himself. Against him was sent his brother Mascezil, who while incensed by the recent loss of his sons, whom his brother Gildo 'had trapped by cunning and killed',³⁰ trusted more in divine assistance than in his own powers. Mascezil 'brought with him several holy servants of God moved by his pleas; and spending day and night with them in prayer, fasting and psalms, he earned victory without a fight and retribution without slaughter'.³¹ In this manner, then, he had assembled in his camp five thousand soldiers against an enemy of seventy thousand, when the saint bishop Ambrose of Milan seemed to appear to him through a dream and by making certain indications predicted his victory. Thus encouraged, Mascezil marched towards the surrounding enemy; 'and when he addressed faithful proposals of peace to those who stood closest, he struck with his sword the arm of a certain standard bearer who was insolently resisting him and rousing the others to battle. By wounding him and making him unable to use his arm, he thus forced the man to lower his falling standard. Seeing this, the rest of the cohorts assumed that the surrender of the troops ahead of them was taking place, and rushed to surrender their standards to Mascezil. The assembled barbarians, of whom Gildo had brought a great multitude to battle, abandoned by the defection of the soldiers, scattered in all directions. Gildo himself attempted to flee by commandeering a ship and sailing away out to sea, but then he was called back to Africa. After a few days, however, he died from strangulation.'³² Indeed, similar cases to these are found to have happened in the times of other emperors

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 391f. The battle of the River Frigidus took place in 394.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 394.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 395. This battle took place in 398.

or kings. But it is not necessary to repeat more examples before those well-learned and sufficiently knowledgeable in all things. Let these few cases brought up suffice as a reminder.

4. That it is not permitted to sons to expel their parents from their own inheritance and possessions, or to take anything from them through violence or deceit

Nor should this be passed over, that it is not fitting for sons, even if they are understood to be future heirs, to drive their parents out of their *honores* and possessions, since this is approved and consented to by neither divine authority nor the example of the holy fathers. We read therefore that King David ordered to Zadok the priest and to Nathan the prophet that they should ordain and anoint his son Solomon as king over Israel, and that he placed him upon his throne. But we do not find written anywhere that Solomon was strengthened in his kingdom except after his father's death. For then Scripture says: *So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David, And Solomon sat upon the throne of his father David, and his kingdom was strengthened exceedingly* [1 Kings 2:10-12].

In this way, other kings were always said to have succeeded to the kingdom of their fathers only after their father died, even though some of these had pre-selected their sons to have their share of the kingdom. Thus Emperor Constantine made his three sons, namely Constantinus, Constantius and Constans, Caesars in various parts of the world, and Theodosius wished Arcadius and Honorius to be sharers in his realm [*regnum*]. All of these, nevertheless, remained subjected and subordinated to their fathers until the end of their fathers' lives.

For no law, whether divine or else human, praises sons who eject their parents from their residences and possessions by plunder or fraud. But rather it teaches and commands that they should hope to deserve a future inheritance from their fathers with reverence, humility and fitting obedience. For our Lord taught this to His disciples in the Gospel, saying: *whosoever will be greater, shall be your minister. And whosoever will be first among you, shall be the servant of all* [Mark 10:43–44]. And so that he might demonstrate this with his example, he added that: *the Son of man also is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a redemption for many* [Mark 10:45]. And elsewhere: *the disciple is not above the master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord* [Matt. 10:24–25]. And the Apostle especially commended the humility of Christ to us, saying:

For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient to the Father, unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names: That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father [Phil. 2:5–11].

5. That the wickedness of avarice and greed should be greatly detested

How detestable to God is he who through avarice and greed for earthly things neglects the law of kinship [*ius propinquitatis*] the prophet Habakkuk shows, saying: *Woe to him that giveth drink to his friend, and presenteth his gall, and maketh him drunk, that he may behold his nakedness. Thou art filled with shame instead of glory [Hab. 2:15–16].* And again: *Woe to him that gathereth together an evil covetousness to his house, that his nest may be on high, and thinketh he may be delivered out of the hand of evil. Thou hast devised confusion to thy house, thou hast cut off many people, and thy soul hath sinned [Hab. 2:9–10].* And again: *Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and prepareth a city by iniquity [Hab. 2:12].* And here it is said through Solomon: *A man, that maketh haste to be rich, and envieth others, is ignorant that poverty shall come upon him [Prov. 28:22].* And it is also written in Ecclesiastes: *But nothing is more wicked than the covetous man, and There is not a more wicked thing than to love money. For such a one setteth even his own soul to sale: because while he liveth he hath cast away his bowels [Sir. 10:9].*

6. About respecting just judgements in all cases, and the respecting of persons

But that just judgements should be maintained in all cases, the Lord shows in Deuteronomy, saying:

Thou shalt appoint judges and magistrates in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God shall give thee, in all thy tribes: that they may judge with just judgment, and not go aside to either part. Thou shalt not accept person nor gifts: for gifts blind the eyes of the wise, and change the words of the just. Thou shalt follow justly after that which is just: that thou mayst live and possess the land, which the Lord thy God shall give thee [Deut. 16:18-20].

Hence it is also said by the prophet Zechariah: *Fear not. These then are the things, which you shall do: Speak ye truth every one to his neighbour: judge ye truth and judgment of peace in your gates. And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his friend: and love not a false oath: for all these are the things that I hate, saith the Lord [Zech. 8:15–17].* And again: *Judge, he says, ye true judgment, and shew ye mercy and compassion every man to his brother. And oppress not the widow, and the fatherless, and the stranger, and the poor: and let not a man devise evil in his heart against his brother [Zech. 7:9–10].* Hence it is also said by Jeremiah: *Judge ye judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is oppressed by violence out of the hand of the oppressor: lest my indignation go forth like a fire, and be kindled, and there be none to quench it, because of the evil of your ways [Jer. 21:12].*

And in contrast the Lord shows how detestable fraud in judgement is, saying through Isaiah: *Woe to them that make wicked laws: and when they write, write injustice, To oppress the poor in judgment, and do violence to the cause of the humble of my people [Isa. 10:1–2].* And again: *Woe to you that call evil good, and good evil: that put darkness for light, and light for darkness: that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Woe to you that are wise in your own eyes, and prudent in your own conceits [Isa. 5:20–21].* And elsewhere: *Woe to you that are deep of heart, to hide your counsel from the Lord: and their works are in the dark, and they say: Who seeth us, and who knoweth us? This thought of yours is perverse [Isa. 29:15–16].* And so that He might show that solace comes quickly from God to those trusting in Him, He adds:

And the meek shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor men shall rejoice in the Holy Ones of Israel. For he that did prevail hath failed, the scorner is consumed, and they are all cut off that watched for iniquity: That made men sin by word, and supplanted him that reproveth them in the gate, and declined in vain from the just [Isa. 29:19–21].

Again, the Lord speaks about unjust judgment and false judges through Ezekiel, saying:

Woe to them that sew cushions under every elbow: and make pillows for the heads of persons of every age to catch souls: and when they caught the souls of my people, they gave life to their souls. And they violated me among my people, for a handful of barley, and a piece of bread, to kill souls which should not die, and to save souls alive which should not live, telling lies to my people that believe lies [Ezek. 13:18–19].

And again:

Because with lies you have made the heart of the just to mourn, whom I have not made sorrowful: and have strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his evil way, and live. Therefore you shall not see vain things, nor divine divinations any more, and I will deliver my people out of your hand: and you shall know that I am the Lord [Ezek. 13:22–23].

Hence it is also written in the Proverbs: *He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, both are abominable before God [Prov. 17:15].*

7. That reckless judgements should be altogether avoided

The very Truth shows in the Gospel that reckless judgement should be avoided, saying: *Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Judge not, and you shall not be judged [Luke 6:37]. For with what judgment you judge, it shall be judged about you [Matt. 7:2].* Hence also Paul says: *Judge not before the time; until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise from God [1 Cor. 4:5].* And again:

But thou, he says, why judgest thou thy brother? or why dost thou despise thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written: As I live, saith the Lord God, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to the Lord. Therefore every one of us shall render account to God for himself. Let us not therefore judge one another any more. But judge this rather, that you put not a stumbling block or a scandal in your brother's way [Rom. 14:10–13].

Thus the Lord himself in the Gospel, when the scribes and Pharisees brought before Him a woman taken in adultery, did not rush to pronounce a judgment against her, but first, leaning down, wrote on the ground with his finger, so that he might teach us to maintain the rules of discretion in all things and doing nothing recklessly.³³ So when there is something to be settled in court, the judge ought first to think about the motives and the deed, and thus turn to the precepts of the divine books. For it is not fitting for him to undertake anything without the

³³ A reference to John 8:3.

backing of divine testimonies or the example of the holy fathers, who, informed by the spirit of God, did what they knew would be pleasing to God. But he who would behave differently earns himself damnation, as the Apostle undeniably says: *For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself* [Rom. 2:1].

8. What should be thought about those administering secular judgements

And so, following on from this, some people think it should be asked about secular judges; whether when they punish the guilty according to the law, or pass a death sentence, they are guilty of the crime of homicide or not. It is plain to see what the holy fathers would have made of this. For in the decrees of Pope Innocent is written the following:

‘A question has also been raised about those who continue to wield power after they have been baptised, whether they can pass a capital sentence or merely order torture. We read nothing laid down about them by the fathers. They recalled that these powers had been handed down from God, and that the sword had been permitted for vengeance upon the guilty, and the minister of God was called to carry out this kind of revenge. How, therefore, would they have condemned a deed, which they would have seen as allowed by the Lord, its enforcer? So let us maintain an opinion on them as it has been preserved till now, lest we be seen to overturn the order or to go against the authority of the Lord. But all their deeds will be recorded for them to give account.’³⁴

And on this Saint Augustine too:

‘He who follows the orders of a commander does not himself kill, just as a sword is an aid to its user. And therefore those who have waged war at God’s command, or who, carrying the weight of a public office/assuming the office of a secular power, have punished the wicked with death according to His laws, that is the most just form of authority, in no way act contrary to the commandment, which orders: *Do not kill* [Exod. 20:13]. Abraham, too, was not only not guilty of the crime of cruelty, but was even commended in the name of piety when he wished to kill his son not wickedly but out of

³⁴ Pope Innocent I, Letter to Exsuperius of Toulouse (JK 293), edited in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 20, col. 495–502. In the absence of any recent English translation, see Geoffrey Dunn, *Episcopal Crisis Management in Late Antique Gaul. The Example of Exsuperius of Toulouse*, in: *Antichthon* 48 (2014), pp. 126–143. The letter was written around 405.

obedience. It is also rightly asked whether it should be assumed to be on God's order that Jephthah killed his daughter when she ran to her father, after he had vowed that he would sacrifice to God whatever he first met returning from victory in battle. And Samson can only be excused for crushing himself with his enemies by tearing down their house, if that Spirit, which was performing miracles through him, had secretly ordered this. Thus, with the exceptions of those whom the just law in general or God the very font of justice in particular commands to be killed, whoever kills a man, himself or someone else, is implicated in the crime of homicide'.³⁵

The blessed Ambrose likewise explains the opinion of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, when he instructs [them] to be subject to the worldly powers, speaking thus:

'He is subject to the [worldly] power, who from fear of God himself avoids what it forbids. *Therefore he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist, purchase to themselves damnation* [Rom. 13:2]. It is clear that everyone will be either pardoned or condemned according to their deeds. Indeed, those who hear the law and commit sin are without excuse. *For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil* [Rom. 13:3]. He calls rulers those kings, who are appointed for ruling life and to prohibit wrongs, having the likeness of God, so that the rest of the people should be under one man. *Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good: and thou shalt have praise from the same* [Rom. 13:3]. The praise then arises from the power, when someone is found innocent. *For he is God's minister to thee, for good* [Rom. 13:4]. Therefore, it is obvious that the rulers are established, lest evil happens. *But if thou do that which is evil, fear: for he beareth not the sword in vain* [Rom. 13:4]. Meaning: he threatens so that if he is despised, he will punish. *For he is God's minister: an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil* [Rom. 13:4]. Since God ordered the Last Judgment and wishes no one to perish, he ordained the rulers in this world to be like teachers to the people by instilling fear, lest the latter incur the punishment of the Last Judgement. *Wherefore be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience's sake* [Rom. 13:5]. He rightly says that they should be subject, not only because of wrath, that is present retribution (for wrath produces vengeance), but also because of the Last Judgement, because even if they escaped from the former, the punishment awaits them

³⁵ Saint Augustine, *City of God*. Books I-VII, translated by Demetrius B. Zema and Gerald Walsh, Washington DC 1950, book I, ch. 21, pp. 53–54.

in the latter, when they will be punished, accused by their own conscience. *For therefore also you pay tribute. For they are the ministers of God, serving unto this purpose* [Rom.13:6]. He therefore says that tributes or what are called *fiscalia* are handed over so they might demonstrate subjection. Through this the people may know that they are not free but act under the power, which is from God, for [they are subjected] to their ruler who acts on behalf of God, [as to God], as the prophet Daniel says: *The kingdom is God's, and He will give it to whom He chooses* [Dan. 4:14]. And the Lord likewise says: *Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's* [Matt. 22:21]. They are therefore to be subjected to Caesar as they are to God, and the proof of this subjection is that they pay tribute to him.³⁶

For this reason too, we do not find that the holy fathers chastised the emperors, kings and judges of this world either by synodal decree or by episcopal judgement for this kind of business, in either the age of the Law nor even under the Grace of the New Testament, when they suppressed a rebellion with force or punished the guilty with capital sentence. For it is necessary that those who do not obey the divine command should be compelled by sharper punishment, so that God's law may obtain the force of its justice, and the harassment of the wicked may not prevail in subverting it, as it was ruled by the council of Antioch, so that 'he who continues to disturb or stir up the Church shall be suppressed as a traitor by secular powers'.³⁷

9. That those who confess themselves generally to be sinners and yet are cannot be censured clearly by others are in no way to be judged or condemned

Since we broached the subject of the quality of the judgements, it is now to be asked whether someone who confesses to have sinned in a general manner, and yet cannot be convicted for having publicly erred in any specific serious offense, should be punished with sacerdotal excommunication or not.³⁸ For we find that many people, not only amongst the persons of no importance and commoners, but also amongst the holy men, declared themselves to be sinners

³⁶ In fact Ambrosiaster, Commentary on Paul's Letters to the Romans, ch. 13, translated by Theodore S. de Bruyn, in: Ambrosiaster's Commentary on the Pauline Epistles. Romans. Writings from the Greco-Roman World, translated with notes by Theodore S. de Bruyn, with an introduction by Theodore S. De Bruyn, Stephen A. Cooper, and David G. Hunter, Atlanta 2017, pp. 234–236 (slightly abbreviated). Ambrosiaster's work often circulated under the name of Ambrose, hence Hraban's mistaken attribution.

³⁷ Council of Antioch 341, canon 5, in: The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church. Their Canons and Dogmatic Decrees..., ed. by Henry R. Percival, New York 1900 (A Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series XIV), p. 110.

³⁸ Hraban draws a distinction here between generic acknowledgements of human sinfulness, and specific sinful acts that have an impact not on individuals or the family of the offender, but on wider human society (by Roman standards the *res publica*). Hraban's point is that Louis's public confession of his sins in 833 did not merit excommunication, but rather praise.

before God and were thenceforth more deserving of the mercy and grace of the Lord than of His displeasure.

For Moses, praying for the people to the Lord, says:

The Lord is patient and full of mercy, taking away iniquity and wickedness, and leaving no man clear, who visitest the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Forgive, I beseech thee, the sins of this people, according to the greatness of thy mercy. And the Lord said: I have forgiven according to thy word [Num. 14:18–20].

Hence also the psalmist says to the Lord: *I have acknowledged my sin to thee, and my injustice I have not concealed. I said I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord: and thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin [Ps. 31:5].* And likewise: *I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me. To thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before thee: that thou mayst be justified in thy words and mayst overcome when thou art judged. For behold I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me [Ps. 50:5–7]. Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight no man living shall be justified [Ps. 142:2].*

Hence also Job said: *Who can make him clean that is conceived of unclean seed? is it not thou who only art [Job 14:4]?* And again: *The stars are not pure in God's sight, How much less man that is rottenness and the son of man who is a worm [Job 25:5–6]?* Thus, also, it is said through Isaiah: *behold thou art angry, and we have sinned: in them we have been always, and we shall be saved. And we are all become as one unclean, and all our justices as the rag of a menstruous woman [Isa. 64:5–6].* Hence it is also said through Jeremiah: *I know, O Lord, that the way of a man is not his: neither is it in a man to walk, and to direct his steps [Jer. 10:23].* And again: *We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, the iniquities of our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. Give us not to be a reproach, for thy name's sake, and do not disgrace us [Jer. 14:20–21].*

Hence also Daniel said in his prayer:

we have sinned, we have committed iniquity, O Lord, against all thy justice: let thy wrath and thy indignation be turned away, I beseech thee, from thy city Jerusalem, and from

thy holy mountain. For by reason of our sins, and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem, and thy people are a reproach to all that are round about us [Dan. 9:15–16].

For it is not for our justifications that we present our prayers before thy face, but for the multitude of thy tender mercies [Dan. 9:18]. And a little after: Now while I was yet speaking, and praying, and confessing my sins, and the sins of my people of Israel, behold the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, flying swiftly touched me at the time of the evening sacrifice and he instructed me, and spoke to me [Dan. 9:20–22].

See how the law-giver, offering humble prayers for his sinful people, and beseeching the just judge to mercy through his intervention, earned indulgence for sinners. Thus, too, the king and psalmist [David] professes himself conceived in iniquity and born in misdeeds, and declares he has acknowledged his sins. For this reason, indeed, he did not lose his kingdom, but on the contrary he truly earned pardon, and permanently secured the throne of the kingdom for himself and for his descendants.³⁹ The prophets too proclaimed themselves to have sinned and committed iniquities along with the people, and they swiftly earned the right to be heeded by the Lord, and obtained an intervention of the angels.⁴⁰

Who would have dared to say that a humble confession was the just cause of a condemnation, especially since Wisdom plainly says: *He that hideth his sins, shall not prosper: but he that shall confess, and forsake them, shall obtain mercy [Prov. 28:13].* For the very Truth in a Gospel parable judged more favourably the tax collector humbly begging pardon for his sins than the Pharisee, vaunting in his own justness. The Apostle John, too, writes in his letter, saying thus: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity [1 John 1:8–9].*

10. That false justification is no advantage, but very greatly disadvantages those abusing it

What should be thought about false justification, he [i.e. Apostle John] shows by immediately adding: *If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us [1 John 1:10].* Thus it is also written in Ecclesiasticus, *Justify not thyself before God, for he knoweth*

³⁹ A reference to Ps. 50:7.

⁴⁰ A reference to Daniel 10.

the heart: and desire not to appear wise before the king [Sir. 7:5]. For this reason, too, the Lord reproves the arrogant and those hard in heart through Jeremiah, saying:

Why dost thou endeavour to shew thy way good to seek my love, thou who has also taught thy malices to be thy ways. And thou hast said: I am without sin and am innocent: and therefore let thy anger be turned away from me. Behold, I will contend with thee in judgment, because thou hast said: I have not sinned. And thou hast said: I am without sin and am innocent: and therefore let thy anger be turned away from me. Behold, I will contend with thee in judgment, because thou hast said: I have not sinned. How exceeding base art thou become, going the same ways over again! The Lord hath destroyed thy trust, thou shalt have nothing prosperous [Jer. 2:33, 35–37].

11. That divine piety bestows complete indulgence to the truly converted and to those doing penance for past sins

How merciful the Lord is to those who truly turn themselves to him through confession and penance and hope in his mercy, He declares through the prophet Ezekiel, saying:

The justice of the just shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all my commandments, and do judgment, and justice, living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done: in his justice which he hath wrought, he shall live. Is it my will that a sinner should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should be converted from his ways, and live [Ezek. 18:20–23]? Be converted, and do penance for all your iniquities: and iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed, and make to yourselves a new heart, and a new spirit: and why will you die, O house of Israel? For I desire not the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God, return ye and live [Ezek. 18:30–32].

And in another place:

The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness: and the just shall not be able to live in his justice, in what day soever he shall sin. Yea, if I shall say to the just that he shall surely live, and he, trusting in his

justice, commit iniquity: all his justices shall be forgotten, and in his iniquity, which he hath committed, in the same shall he die. And if I shall say to the wicked: Thou shalt surely die: and he do penance for his sin, and do judgment and justice. And if that wicked man restore the pledge, and render what he had robbed, and walk in the commandments of life, and do no unjust thing: he shall surely live, and shall not die. None of his sins, which he hath committed, shall be imputed to him: he hath done judgment and justice, he shall surely live [Ezek. 33:12–16].

So the heretical Novatians strive in vain to shut the door of heavenly piety on penitents, knowing nothing of the bosom of divine mercy.⁴¹ For not only the writings of the prophets but also the majesty of the Gospels instruct us that, if anyone does worthy penance for sins they have committed, they earn indulgence for their sins before a most clement judge. Thus, not only did the voice of the Forerunner of the Lord [i.e. John the Baptist] first ring out to proclaim the baptism of penance in remission of sins, but even the very Truth began ministry, as Matthew bears witness, by saying this about how penitence should be done: *Do penance: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* [Matt. 3:2], and elsewhere: *Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you* [Matt. 11:28] For truly, the kingdom of heaven does approach the penitent, because their sins are wiped clean, and eternal justice is on its way; and all those who come to our Saviour with pious intent are relieved of the burden of their sins, and they will gain the sustenance of eternal nourishment in the blessing of the heavenly kingdom.

12. An exhortation for the forgiveness of wrongdoers

May you, most holy emperor, reading this work and similar writings, spurn false judgments and know that you are able to merit entrance into the kingdom of heaven through proper faith and good deeds. Nor let the wicked vanity of evildoers frighten you, but instead let the evangelical truth strengthen you, and trust in all things in your king and judge, who gave you a kingdom on earth, and has promised you a kingdom in future life, if you do good. And therefore if any scheming of the wicked harm you in this arena of war and this vale full of tears and toil, then do not make much of it, but thank in everything your saviour and defender the Lord Christ, who puts to death and brings back to life, and who punishes every son whom He wants, and castigates every son He receives.

⁴¹ Novatian was a late antique cleric judged to be a heretic for his refusal to allow those Christians who had succumbed to Roman pressure to sacrifice to the gods to be readmitted to the Church. For Hraban this heresy is still alive in his own day, hence the present tense.

And may you be mindful of these words of the divine law, where it is written: *Seek not revenge, nor be mindful of the injury of thy citizens. Thou shalt love thy friend as thyself. I am the Lord. Keep ye my laws* [Lev. 19:18–19]. And may the wise wife in [the book] of Kings [i.e. Abigail] speak to you along with King David, who restrained David from the slaughter of the foolhardy Nabal, saying thus:

Forgive the iniquity of thy handmaid: for the Lord will surely make for my lord a faithful house, because thou, my lord, fightest the battles of the Lord: let not evil therefore be found in thee all the days of thy life. For if a man at any time shall rise, and persecute thee, and seek thy life, the soul of my lord shall be kept, as in the bundle of the living, with the Lord thy God: but the souls of thy enemies shall be whirled, as with the violence and whirling of a sling. And when the Lord shall have done to thee, my lord, all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have made thee prince over Israel, this shall not be an occasion of grief to thee, and a scruple of heart to my lord, that thou hast shed innocent blood, or hast revenged thyself [1 Sam. 25:28–31].

Thus also the Apostle speaks to the Romans in a similar way, saying:

Be not wise in your own conceits. To no man rendering evil for evil. Providing good things, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as is in you, have peace with all men. Revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved; but give place unto wrath, for it is written: Revenge is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. But if thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him to drink. For, doing this, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good [Rom. 12:16–21].

On the same subject, the Lord also said in the Gospel to Peter, when the latter asked how often he should forgive the brother who offended against him, not seven times, but till seventy times seven times;⁴² and He said to His disciples in another place: *Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given to you: good measure and pressed down and shaken together and running over shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again* [Luke 6:37–38]. And also: *It is said, when you shall*

⁴² A reference to Matt. 18:22.

stand to pray, forgive, if you have aught against any man; that your Father also, who is in heaven, may forgive you your sins [Mark 11:25–26]. And in order to console His own chosen who are enduring the difficulties in the world, He says in another place:

Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you [Matt. 5:10–12].

In your patience you shall possess your souls [Luke 21:19]. *He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved* [Matt. 10:22].

The innocent Lamb of God, who removed the sins of the world and who like a sheep led to slaughter did not open His mouth, taught us to do as much with His words, when after He had been tested, mocked, whipped, struck with blows, spat at, crowned with thorns and finally nailed to a cross, He pleaded on behalf of his persecutors, saying: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* [Luke 23:34]. It is no wonder, then, if an earthly and vulnerable man is going through hard times, when a heavenly and sinless man suffered so much to redeem us from sin with His blood, and guide and comfort us with His example of patient endurance.

So accept, mildest of fathers, your son's [i.e. Lothar's] repentance, that you may become the imitator of that most merciful Father, who rushed forward to receive his prodigal son with great kindness, after he had thrown away his whole fortune on harlots in foreign lands and finally came home begging forgiveness. He not only forgave him his sins, but, in truth, even gave him his finest gown, put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet, and, finally, throwing a magnificent feast, celebrated with him joyfully dancing and singing. For if you will be his imitator, you will without doubt come to possess an eternal kingdom along with him forever.

I, your worthless little man, do not repeat this matter for your Dignity as though I were a know-it-all, but rather I recall it to your memory, most serene lord, as your faithful servant, so that you may consider (even though many people have in recent times unjustly wounded you, some through malice, others through fear, and some through weakness) what is most pleasing to God and in full concordance with His holy testimonies, and carry this out with pious intent. I believe

that my God will never abandon you in adversity or in prosperity, but that He will rather permit that you, fortified by His defence and protected from the attacks of all your enemies, may happily reach the rewards of eternal life.

All hyperlinks have been verified on 5 January, 2022.