

Agobard of Lyons – Liber Apologeticus, pt. 2

(second half of 833)

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Translated by

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VII. Just as the truth is not only in words but in deeds (as the Apostle reveals, saying “*Doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ*” [Ephes. 4:15]; and again the Apostle [says], “*My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth*” [1 John 3:18]; and again, “*If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth*” [1 John 1:6]), so too is falsehood not only in words but also in deeds—just as the Lord tells in the Apocalypse, saying “*There shall not enter into it (no doubt that heavenly city) any thing defiled or that worketh abomination or maketh a lie*” (Apoc. 21:27). And a little later, “*Every one that loveth and maketh a lie*” (Apoc. 22:15). And concerning the contriver of all evils the Lord says in the Gospel, “*He was a murderer from the beginning: and he stood not in the truth*” (John 8:44).

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Therefore, if that truth (of which we also sing in the Psalms, “*Thou art near, O Lord: and all thy ways are truth*” [Ps. (G) 118:151]) possessed the minds of all men, certainly a world of concord and peace would abide without leaders and princes. But now since he [i.e., the devil], who does not stand in truth, desists not at all from acting against truth, and does not cease to sow seeds of scandals with idle men, finding hearts well suited to his own, [hearts] that foster and nourish what he has sown, he [therefore] abounds in the evil of commotion, which threw into disorder by a mad furor the quiet of peace and unity. On account of which, one should be watchful with care, and act wisely in word and deed against corruptors of truth and peace, so that they may be either restrained or subdued.

VIII. Therefore, the disorder of this time and this region, which by the remarkable sweetness and pleasantness of omnipotent God was stilled without conflict of arms, should not be recalled slowly, but ought to set alight quickly the hearts of the faithful to the praise of God, and to offer grace, and

to deliver cares to the cleverness of caution.

25 That disorder and disturbance had a beginning or origin of such a kind, [that] it should not be kept completely secret. Therefore, when the most Christian and pious lord emperor Louis had lost the companionship of his good wife [Ermengard], [who was] agreeable to him in faith and manners, it was necessary that he take another [wife] to himself, who would be an aide to him in the direction and governance of the palace and the realm. But by a secret judgment of God such [a woman] was taken who, even if in the initial years, weighed down by the power and virtue of her husband and lord, was kept subdued, nevertheless over the course of time such [a wife] was found who was able to be a storm of great waves and a bountiful treasure of disorder. She beset, saddened, and threw into confusion not only the common folk and the general populace, but also princes, indeed even the most elegant sons of the emperor, even those possessing followers and governors of kingdoms, and nearly beat them down and killed them. And when they saw these things—by which the status and honor of the realm, the tranquility of peace, and the calm of the people was cared for—increasing in such a way that the palace was being dishonored, the renown of the kingdom darkened, and the name of those ruling reduced to disgrace, [the sons] began to lament and murmur and grieve and bewail. When these things [were happening], the spirits of honorable men and sons of the king were aroused, and, since the conspiracy was growing, agreeing in [their] deliberations, each came from his own realm to meet together, and uniting at the palace, they drove out the ministers of the crime, and they removed the queen [Judith], who was the cause of every evil, from the house and honor of the kingdom and they placed [her] in forced exile. Thereupon, as if the father had now been freed from the trap of ruin, they rejoiced that they had fulfilled what was written: “*Cast out the scoffer, and contention shall go out with him, and quarrels and reproaches shall cease*” (Prov. 22:10). When the sons had completed this blameless deed most deserving of all praise, they returned to their own [realms], their father having been restored to his honor and glory.

IX. When these things had transpired, the Enemy of all good and Author of all evil, who had not abandoned the hearts he had possessed, worked to renew and revive His evil. The queen—who, when she had changed the royal attire, was thought to abide in the attire of a nun, just as the *ordo* requires and the rectitude of judgment teaches—was returned to the palace and resumed [her position] as [her husband’s] consort, as though a legitimate wife, which she was not at all now able to be. And so, with her foully and shamefully occupying the royal summit, the previous evil grew and multiplied. About which what ought a good son do? Feign ignorance? Remain silent? Do nothing? It was not pleasing to that Sleepless Eye [of God Who] guarded His Israel, but [it] roused the spirit of the sons of the king, and they convened again for the purpose of extirpating the restored root of evils. For they feared that it might happen to their father, what Holy Scripture states concerning a certain king, saying “*Now, there was not such another as Achab, who was sold to do evil in the sight of the Lord: for his wife, Jezabel, set him on, and he became abominable*” (3 Kings 21:25–26).

60 X. But perhaps some man of a different will may strive to lay aside as inconvenient these words of Holy
Scripture [above], by which it follows: *“insomuch that he followed the idols of the Amorrhites”* (2 Kings
21:26). He will know, whoever he is, that the aptness [of those words] in that place cannot be taken
away, since in the time of Law to the old [people, just as] in the time of Grace to the new people,
idols and icons signify all errors. For that *ordo* of these words ought to be understood thusly: one is
65 made accursed by various desires and enticements, so that one even rushes openly to the cult of
idols. But whoever wishes to understand this otherwise, let him consider how it is contrary to the
Apostle, who said *“And covetousness, which is the service of idols”* (Col. 3:5), and [having considered
this] he may [then] see how truly it was said [by the Apostle]: *“Desire is the root of all evils; which some
coveting have erred from the faith”* (1 Tim. 6:10). Therefore, if desire causes one to err from the faith,
70 and [if] covetousness is the service of idols, then what evil remains that is not born from the root of
desire? On account of which it ought to be faithfully considered [that] all desires for riches, fame and
worldly honor, and mastery [over others] are not very far from the veneration of idols.

XI. Therefore, we say these things so that we may show that good and bad men of the ancients are aptly
75 aligned with good and bad men who err among the new populace. And though Ahab was himself
stirred up by his wife, erred in faith, and by her authorship committed that crime concerning the
death of Naboth the Israelite, nevertheless he, having been rebuked by the prophet Heli but not
corrected, was compelled to do penance, by which act of penance he postponed the evils that were
imminent, but did not eliminate them (Cf. 3 Kings 21:27–29). If this is weighed properly, it is clearly
80 evident how much evil wives may harm their husbands. Alas! It is fitting that he [namely, Jehu] whom
the Lord raised up to the position of king for the purpose of punishing the house of Ahab and his
deceptive wife, was not promised eternal life, because he did not desist from the sins of Jeroboam.
Since [Jehu] zealously carried out the vengeance of the Lord concerning Jezebel and the house of
Ahab whom she stirred up, it was granted to [Jehu] that his sons might reign after him up to the
85 fourth generation (Cf. 4 Kings 9–10).

Moreover, because the blessed and holy priest Joiada ordered the most impious Athalia to be
killed, and placed Joas on the throne of his father [Athalia], and purged Jerusalem of foul and impure
persons (Cf. 4 Kings 11), Divine Scripture adorns him with praise, saying: *“But Joiada grew old and was
full of days, and died when he was a hundred and thirty years old. And they buried him in the city of David
among the kings, because he had done good to Israel, and to his house”* (2 Par. 24:15–16). Behold, that
90 pious priest [Joiada] was rewarded with both temporal and eternal repayment, but, alas, [Joas] only
temporal.

XII. Moreover, we may see what happened to Samson, whom the Apostle lists in the catalogue of just
95 men (Cf. Hebr. 11:32). For he loved a woman not in love with him, a woman who obeyed his

enemies more than [she obeyed] the kind man loving her. And since that just man [Samson] trusted in his unfaithful wife, thereupon he lost the light of his eyes and the rule of the race of the Israelites. It was fitting that later his former virtue be restored to him, and [that he] complete his ignominious life with a glorious death, since he was not denied eternal life. Nevertheless, he did not recover [his] former authority (Judg. 16).

Thus, it was therefore deigned that the former lord emperor [Louis] weigh piously, so that he, who, having been deceived by his wife, lost the earthly and temporal kingdom, may not lose the heavenly and eternal kingdom. Let him give way by divine judgments, since nothing on this earth happens without a reason (Cf. Job 5:6). Let him swear and give what is due (Cf. Ps. 75:12) to the terrible Lord God, *“even to him who taketh away the spirit of princes”* (Ps. [G] 75:12–13). For it is said of good kings, *“I have always feared God as waves swelling over me”* (Job 31:23). The blessed Job said these things, [Job] who did not consent to his wife, who was trying to deceive him, but confuted [her] with stern invective, saying, *“Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women”* (Job 2:10). And in another place he says of the Lord, *“With him is strength and wisdom: he knoweth both the deceivers, and him that is deceived”* (Job 12:16), and *“He looseth the belt of kings, and girdeth their loins with a cord”* (Job 12:18), and again, *“He changeth the heart of the princes of the people of the earth, and deceiveth them that they walk in vain where there is no way”* (Job 12:24), which might have happened to the blessed Job, if he had listened willingly to the advice of his wife. Therefore the Lord is terrible, not only to the people of the earth but also to those princes of the people. A certain proud king, having been humbled, was [once] compelled to confess this, saying, *“I blessed the most High, and I praised and glorified him that liveth for ever: for his power is an everlasting power, and his kingdom is to all generations. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing before him: for he doth according to his will, as well with the powers of heaven, as among the inhabitants of the earth: and there is none that can resist his hand, and say to him: ‘Why hast thou done it?’”* (Dan. 4:31–32) And a little later, *“Therefore I, Nabuchodonosor, do now praise, and magnify, and glorify the King of heaven: because all his works are true, and his ways judgments, and them that walk in pride he is able to abase”* (Dan. 4:34).

XIII. Therefore, not in any way do we say these things so that we may compare our former lord emperor to impious and unfaithful kings. But, since he allowed himself to be deceived by an evil woman, that which is written happened to him, *“He that troubleth his own house, shall inherit the winds”* (Prov. 11:29). By which trouble and possession of winds were perpetrated countless perjuries and immense depredations with homicides, adulteries, and incests. For all these sins it is necessary that the most religious former emperor return to his heart and do penance, humbling himself beneath the powerful hand of God (Cf. I Peter 5:6), for Whom it is not impossible to bestow to him [Louis] the exaltation of eternal life, since the exaltation of temporal life is now not fitting for him whose home and mind have been thrown into disorder. By divine dispensation and judgment [Louis] gave way to another, and gave his place not to some enemy or outsider, but to his dearest son. On account of which, with

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every delight and exultation of his heart he ought to render incessantly the greatest acts of thanks to the greatest, omnipotent God, since, just as he always desired, an enemy conqueror did not succeed him in the kingdom, but a loving son.

Therefore, let all together, the raucous and the peaceful, now hear the prophet saying, “*Let all the earth keep silence before him*” (Hab. 2:20; cf. Zach. 2:13), and the psalmist, “*Let all the earth fear the Lord, and let all the inhabitants of the world be in awe of him. For he spoke and they were made*” (Ps. [G] 32:8–9), et cetera.

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