

## The 858 Quierzy letter

In the late summer of 858, King Louis ‘the German’ of East Francia invaded the kingdom of his younger brother Charles ‘the Bald’ of West Francia, in a bid to reverse the terms of the Treaty of Verdun that had divided the realm of their grandfather Charlemagne. Sweeping aside all resistance, Louis marched through Ponthion, Châlons, Sens and reached as far Orléans. He then invited the bishops of West Francia to a council at Reims, near his winter base at the palace of Attigny, where a few weeks later he issued a charter dated to the first year of his rule in West Francia.<sup>1</sup>

The bishops however met for discussions at the nearby palace of Quierzy. Refusing Louis’s invitation, they instead sent him an extended letter that offered some frank advice. The king, they warned, should examine his conscience and be wary of his counsellors, bearing in mind the fate of his father Emperor Louis the Pious; he should work for peace and to defeat the Vikings, rather than bringing about disruption; he should protect the church; he should organise his court as a model for everyone; he should appoint suitable counts and *missi*; he should manage his royal estates and their residents effectively. The letter was a collective one, in the name of all the bishops concerned, but in large part it was probably written by Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, drawing on the decisions of recent Frankish councils. The bishops’s refusal to join Louis doubtless played a role in the king’s retreat east early in 859. Later, however, Hincmar told Charles the Bald, the king of West Francia, that the letter had been written as much for him as for Louis.

This provisional translation has been prepared by Charles West, with the assistance of Richard Gilbert, Robert Heffron and Harry Mawdsley who attended a regular Latin translation class based on this text at the University of Sheffield, as part of a long-term initiative with Rachel Stone to make more of Hincmar’s work available in translation. It draws on Jinty Nelson’s unpublished partial translation which she kindly made available, and has benefited greatly from her suggestions (any errors that remain are CW’s). It is based on the edition in *Die Konzilien der karolingischen Teilreiche 843-859*, ed. Wilfried Hartmann, MGH Concilia III (Hannover, 1984), pp. 408-427. Hyperlinks are provided to this MGH edition to ease comparison with the original Latin. Suggestions for improvement are welcome.

The text is preserved in a number of manuscripts, of which much the earliest is Paris BnF lat. 5095, where it is ff. 130-137 ([link to the manuscript on Gallica](#)). The account of Bishop Eucherius’s vision of Charles Martel in chapter 7 is also transmitted independently in a further eleven manuscripts.

---

<sup>1</sup> This charter, no. 94 in the standard MGH edition, is available in French translation with commentary in S. Glansdorff, *Diplômes de Louis le Germanique (817-876)* (Limoges, 2009), pp. 241-8. For general context, see J.L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992), pp. 187-91, and E. Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire. Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817-876* (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 250-262.



Paris BnF. lat.5095, fols.129v-130

CW, February 2018

\*\*\*

TRANSLATION

[MGH] The chapters that follow were sent by the bishops of the provinces of Reims and Rouen from the palace of Quierzy, where they were meeting, to King Louis at the palace of Attigny, via Archbishop Wenilo of Rouen and Bishop Erchenrad of Châlons, in the year of the Lord 858, in the month of November.<sup>2</sup>

To the glorious king Louis, we bishops of the provinces of Reims and Rouen who could be present send greetings.

**Chapter 1.** *[The bishops send their apologies for the meeting]*

Some of us have the letters of Your Dominion, in which you ordered that we should meet you on the VII Kalends of December [25 November] at Reims, so that you might discuss with us and with your other faithful followers the restoration of the holy Church and the state and wellbeing [*salus*] of the Christian people.<sup>3</sup> But we were not able to come to the meeting, on account of the inconvenience and the shortness of time, and the unsuitability of the place, and – which is more grievous – because of the confusion and disorder that has arisen.

<sup>2</sup> The Paris manuscript has a slightly differently-worded version of this preface.

<sup>3</sup> These letters do not survive.

And according to the divine laws (which with your brothers you told us that you would observe), it makes good sense that just as archbishops should not dare to do anything without the agreement of the suffragan bishops, so neither should suffragan bishops act without the agreement or order of archbishops, except about matters that concern their own dioceses. And, in such a short time, we were unable to arrange letters for the archbishops concerning an assembly.

Therefore let Your Excellence know that Our Humility has not disregarded your command, but as has been said long before us, ‘whoever orders the impossible makes himself ridiculous’.<sup>4</sup>

**Chapter 2.** [*The bishops emphasise that their advice comes from God*]

But we could have more justly and reasonably have had a discussion about the restoration of the holy Church of God, and about the state and wellbeing [*salus*] of the Christian people – which discussion you now say you want to have with us – if with concern for heavenly matters you had wished to obey our advice – or rather God’s advice, recommendations and entreaties. For we did not write, command and say our own thoughts, but rather what we found in the holy pages, spoken by Love, which is God, and what we found to be innate in nature.

Those things which have been and are being done, contrary to what we have written, advised and said, are known even by the less wise to be a disease of the natural law and a vice. In this regard, let any sensible person come to his senses, [MGH] and understand how greatly God is offended when a sin is committed intentionally in such great and open matters. About this it is written, *They descend alive into hell* [Ps. 54: 16], that is they slip knowingly into sin. Such things happen by divine permission in the suffering world on account of our shared sins, that is sins of the pastors and of the flock, on account of the delicts of the king and the kingdom. For as is written, *These things are sent through wicked angels. The Lord will make a way in the path of His anger* [Ps 77:49]. But, as Truth protests, this will not take place without incurring an avenging anger, nor without the staff of the Lord’s wrath. Thus we have read, thus we have heard, thus we have seen and certainly will soon see. For although we are sinners, we are penitent and have strong faith in divine mercy, and have received the sacred ministry by the working of the Holy Spirit, without which we cannot administer the sacraments. And we know what was truthfully said to us by Truth: *it is not you who speaks, but the spirit of your father, who speaks in you* [Matt. 10:20].

**Chapter 3.** [*The bishops remind Louis that he has not listened to their advice before*]

And although Your Dominance knows very well those things which we say have been written, advised and said – yet it is not irrelevant if we recall them now to your memory. You have sufficiently

---

<sup>4</sup> The origin of this proverb is unknown, but Hincmar of Reims quoted it on other occasions too: e.g. PL 124 1072.

heard those things which are fitting to salvation [*salus*], firstly through the venerable bishop Hildegard [of Meaux] in writing and in speech, secondly through the honourable bishop Aeneas [of Paris] in letters and speech, again through Aeneas orally, then through Hincmar and Wenilo archbishops of Reims and Rouen, and again through those people with the others whom you summoned. This was when we asked, as we did before, that your brother [Charles] and all his faithful followers might come before you and your faithful followers at a suitable time and place for reasonable discussions, so that what had been done badly might, with your counsel and aid and with God's help, be emended [*emendata*]. We fear greatly for those who do not obey all of that which was said, as it is said: *if they keep my word, they will keep yours* [John 15:20], and the rest of the Lord's admonition.

And if these things have not been heard, then it can be supposed that neither will those things be heard that you say you wish to seek and to hear from us now. It seems to some people that, just as the Lord wanted to signal something different when he cursed the fig-tree because he wanted a fig, although the Gospels say it was not the season for figs, so in a similar way they might have been able to infer some different sense in a meeting so hasty and inconvenient, not taking into account the sincerity of Your Domination, about which we wish to imply nothing against innocence [*puritas*].<sup>5</sup> And because the blessed Peter warns every bishop that he must be prepared himself to [give] an account to the satisfaction of all [who are] asking him, we are faithfully giving to Your Dominance such counsel as we now perceive to be timely.

**Chapter 4.** [*The bishops call on Louis to examine his conscience, comparing the situation with the rebellions against Louis the Pious*] [\[MGH\]](#)

Firstly, look into your arrival into this kingdom in [your] heart of hearts, before the eyes of the Lord, to Whom according to the Psalms *the thoughts of man are confessed* [Ps 75:11], and weigh up the scales of justice. And whatever your encouragers and advisers and flatterers are saying to you, *return to your heart* [Is. 46:8]. And whatever you can find and say to justify and recommend your arrival, examine your conscience: and judge whether you wish to keep doing those things which you are doing.

And place before your mind's eye that hour – of which you can be certain, since in no way can you escape it – when your soul will depart your body, and will leave behind the whole world and all power and all riches and the body itself, and will go forth naked and desolate, without the help of a wife or children, and without the support and company of your retinue [*drudores*] and vassals [*vassi*], and will leave unfinished whatever it thought about and decided to arrange: for as Scripture says, *In that day all their thoughts will pass away* [Ps 145:4]. And your soul will see and feel all its sins, watching as devils constrain and compel it. And whatever it thought, spoke and did against love and

---

<sup>5</sup> Here the bishops are implying that Louis had a hidden intention in summoning the bishops to Reims – perhaps a plan to compel them to crown him as king?

the faith owed on this earth, and has not made up for in the worthy fruits of penance, it will have before its eyes for ever, and will wish to escape, and will not be able to. For it is certain that devils come to all men when they leave their body, both to the just and to sinners; and [the devil] even also came to Christ himself, in whom he found nothing [of] his, as it is written: *The prince of this world comes, and has nothing in me* [John 14:30]. And truly believe us, o king who we wish always to be good and Christian, that this hour is not far away, but near enough to you, and nearer than is hoped.

Therefore do not let those things that you see seduce you. In the time indeed of your father [Louis the Pious], we saw things begun and initiated by some people which we see in this time to be brought about by those who do this, and they will be completed by others. And just as they laugh now when they obtain from you what they want in the moment of their desire, so they will laugh when the hour of your death comes to you, and they will ask how they might hold through anyone else what they obtained from you. And it is possible that some are asking this while you are still alive. And unless they do worthy penance, they too will go miserably to that hour of their death, just as those went who abandoned your father with your brother [Lothar]. For just as they organised sedition against paternal reverence, so these are inciting you against fraternal love, in the name of peace and the state of the church and the salvation [*salus*] and unity of the people. And the poison was hiding under the honey.

[MGH] And the word of the psalmist was fulfilled in those, and is being fulfilled in these: *Those who speak peace with their neighbour, but have evil in their hearts* [Ps 27:3], and the rest which follows. And what they received in this world is well known, and what they will receive in the next world will be known in full in the Judgement. And seeing their fate [of the rebels against Louis], these [Louis's followers] should have feared their deeds, and they should act as if the Lord looks down at them, He who looks down and protects the small and the humble; and so *once the wicked man is beaten*, as it is written, *the child will be wiser* [Prov. 19:25]. And they will understand that the Lord will neither spurn nor forget his people [*plebs*] in the end; since *it is because of the misery of the needy and the groans of the poor that I will now arise* [Ps 12:1], said the Lord. Besides, just as then He said to them, so now the Lord says to these: *I was silent, but can it be that I will always be silent? I will shout out as if giving birth* [Isaiah 42.14]; *my hour has not yet come* [John 2.4], but now *it is your hour, when darkness reigns* [Luke 22.53]; and *if you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes, because the days will come upon you* [Luke 19.42ff].

Invite yourself, we beseech you, to such a place where you are able to concentrate, to read the homily of St Gregory on the reading of the Gospel: *Jesus, seeing the city, wept over it* [Luke 19.41]. We beseech you, lord, that you may have before your mind's eye that day when your soul will receive back its own body along with all other men, and you will come before the face of the eternal Judge in the sight of all angels and men; in which day, just as St Paul said, the Lord will judge everyone, not through another's testimony but through everyone's hidden thoughts that either accuse or defend

them, when everyone receives their own body, according to his deeds, whether good or bad. And at that time, the words that we have written will not be despised by those who now hold them in contempt, when without doubt they will be repeated as evidence in that terrible Judgement. And none of those people will help you then. If they continue in this fashion, doing such things as we hear about and experience and lament, they will not even be able to help themselves, but will go into the eternal fire, while the just, who now suffer unjustly, will go into the life eternal.

**Chapter 5.** [*The bishops call on Louis to help improve the situation, not worsen it*]

We have heard so many so cruel and abominable things have happened in the dioceses on the routes through which you came, some of which we have experienced and some of which we fear to experience, and we lament with those who have experienced and are seeing them. These things are worse than the calamity and misery that we suffer from the pagans [*pagani*: Vikings], since they are carried out by Christians against Christians, by kin against kin [*parentes*], by a Christian king against a Christian king, by a brother against a brother, against all divine and human laws.

The Church, already afflicted by pagans, proclaims against these things *And they have added wounds to my grief* [Ps 68:27]; and all of us have patiently supported peace, and it has not come. And we sought good things, and behold – disorder. So prohibit, restrain and calm these things, because your palace ought to be sacred, not sacrilegious. [MGH] For the palace of the king is so called on account of the rational people residing there, and not on account of walls or bricks that are incapable of feeling. And the king is so called from ‘ruling’, so that under God he rules with God both the good in the purity of heart, truth of lips, and firmness of stability – and he sets the wicked right from their wickedness, and guides them in righteousness. And if you have to come to emend those things that have been done badly, then you ought not to bring with you the worse things that we have seen to be done by Christians against Christians. And if you have come to make peace, then you should obtain peace peacefully from the Author of peace.

And if you have to come to dispel discord and to restore charity, then you should show that which Christ taught through Paul. For he says, *Love is not ambitious, it does not act wrongly, it does not seek its own things, it does not rejoice in iniquity, it rejoices in truth* [1 Cor. 13:4], truth which works through love and not through power or excessive greed. As it was written; *without any love, even if he has surrendered his body to be burned, it can do no good* [1 Cor 13.3]. The Lord gave a sign to all people, that they may know if someone is a Christian and if he will enter the Kingdom of God or not, saying: *in this, all men will learn that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another* [John 13:35]. For they who in the beginning of the faith were called disciples are now called Christians. And love itself is the wedding garment, and they who do not possess it at the heavenly wedding banquet in the future Judgement will be thrown into the outer darkness and into the eternal fire, and there they shall weep and gnash their teeth.

**Chapter 6.** [*The bishops call for Louis to take on the Vikings*]

Let that love stir you up against the pagans [Vikings]. Although some who used to have and still have generous *honores* were not at that time thus moved to a proper sense of obligation [*pietas*] that they should accompany us against the pagans – and if they had done it and had unanimously had wished it, inflamed by righteous zeal, the pagans could with God’s help have been expelled or destroyed<sup>6</sup> – now with whatever motivation, the holy Church may be liberated from the pagans’ domination through your command, and the kingdom which is being ransomed from them may be rescued from the undue tribute.

[MGH] And may those who have fled from the pagans find a peaceful refuge when they come to those regions you are staying in, rather than such depredation that the inhabitants cannot live, let alone offer support to those who have fled. For now, as our sins demand, it is coming to pass what was formerly said through the prophet: *He will flee from the face of the lion and will run into a bear* [Amos 5:19], and when he enters a house and leans against the wall, a snake will bite him. And when they flee iron weapons, *they shall run into a bronze bow* [Job 20:24]. For in every region, the wretched – alas! – find affliction.

**Chapter 7.** [*The bishops call on Louis to protect the church, and give the example of Charles Martel as a warning*]

And if you seek to restore the church of God, just as you wrote to us, then guard the privileges due to bishops and to the churches entrusted to them, as is divinely constituted. Take care to preserve the rights and immunities and the honour of these churches, as your grandfather and your father kept them. And what your brother, our lord [Charles], who received part of the kingdom by paternal gift and with the mutual undertakings of you and your faithful men, has done for the cult and honour of the churches, you should similarly maintain.

And cherish the rectors and pastors of the church as fathers and vicars of Christ, just as the Holy Scripture orders, saying: *Treat the priests of God as holy, and lower your head to great men* [Eccl. 7:31]. And obey their spiritual counsel, as the Scripture says again: *Ask your father and he will tell you, ask your elders, and they will say to you* [Deut 32:7]; and similarly: *Ask my priests my law; and the Lord through the prophet Malachi: The lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they should seek the law from his mouth, because he is the messenger of the Lord’s flock* [Malach 2:7]. And do not trouble them at an unsuitable and unfavourable time,<sup>7</sup> but allow them to carry out the sacred ministry,

---

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps a reference to Charles’s unsuccessful siege of the Vikings at Oissel in July/August 858, recorded in the Annals of St-Bertin, tr. J.L. Nelson, pp. 87-8.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. note 5.

to which they were appointed, for the salvation [*salus*] of the people; and do not stir up those subject to them in domestic care, and do not permit them to dishonour or oppress the bishops.

Make sure that the fitting honour and owed rights, which the canons and the capitularies of your grandfather and father decreed, are preserved for the priests. Command that bishops shall have the peaceful freedom [*libertas*] to travel through their diocese, preaching, confirming and correcting. Ensure that, if the bishops order it, the *missus* of the realm, that is the officer of a count, goes with other people to compel incestuous freemen to come to the bishops' court, if they are not willing to come through the admonition of priests. Establish an officer for this purpose [*constitutum ministerio*] through whom, if a bishop tells you about some ecclesiastical necessity for which his messenger has come, he may obtain what he reasonably seeks in your palace, just as the count of the palace acts in the matters of the realm.<sup>8</sup> Make sure that they are able in peace to have comprovincial synods with other bishops, and specific synods with priests. Do not allow church properties and goods [*res et facultates*], which are the offerings of the faithful, the price of sins, and the stipends of the male and female servants of God, to be plundered and separated from the churches<sup>9</sup> – but instead bravely resist and defend, as a Christian king and *alumnus* of the church.

Concerning that property consecrated to God, which the free men serving the church have through the disposition of the rector of those churches, the successors of the apostles established this arrangement: so that just as the offering of the faithful grew, and the wickedness of the unfaithful grew even more, so the armed forces [*militia*] of the kingdom might be augmented through the dispensation of the church to resist the wickedness of evil men, so the churches may have defence and peace, and Christendom [*christianitas*] may have tranquillity.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, just as the goods and properties from which the clerics have a livelihood are under the consecration of immunity, so too are those goods and properties from which vassals owe military service; and they ought to be defended with equal protection by royal power for the requirements of churches.

For indeed, the prince Charles [Martel], father of king Pippin, was the first among all the kings and princes of the Franks to separate and distinguish the goods of the churches from the churches: because of this alone, he is certainly doomed forever. [MGH] For the holy bishop Eucherius of Orléans, who rests in the monastery of St Trond, whilst kneeling in prayer was seized and taken to another world, and amongst other things that the Lord showed him, he saw Charles being tortured in deepest hell.<sup>11</sup> When Eucherius asked the angel leading him about it, the angel replied that by the judgement of the saints, who will judge in the future judgement with the Lord, and whose property he took and divided up: before that judgement, he [Charles] was condemned in soul and body to eternal punishment, and

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Hincmar's comments in *De Ordine Palatii*, ed. Gross and Schieffer 1980, ch. 20.

<sup>9</sup> A quotation from Julianus Pomerius, a Late Antique author often cited in Frankish councils.

<sup>10</sup> Here *christianitas* seems to have a territorial meaning – 'Christendom'. Elsewhere in this text however it seems more to mean the ensemble of Christian practices ('Christianity').

<sup>11</sup> Bishop Eucherius died around 738.



he receives penalties for not just his own sins but also for the sins of all those who gave their goods and properties in the honour and love of the Lord to the places of the saints for the lighting of the divine cult and for the sustenance of the servants of Christ and the poor, for the redemption of their souls. When Eucherius returned to himself, he summoned holy Boniface and Fulrad, abbot of the monastery of St-Denis and the high chaplain of King Pippin. He explained what he had seen to them, and gave as proof that they should go to Charles's tomb, and if they did not find his body there, they should believe that what he said was true. And they went to the aforementioned monastery where Charles's body was buried, and they uncovered and looked at his tomb and suddenly a dragon emerged, and the whole interior of the tomb was found to be blackened, as if it had been burned. We ourselves saw people who lived up to our time [MGH] and who were involved in this matter, and they attested truthfully in person to us what they had heard and seen.

Once aware of this, his son Pippin brought together a synod at Lestinnes,<sup>12</sup> of which George the legate of the apostolic see was in charge along with Saint Boniface – and we have [the records of] that synod – and he took care to return as much as he could of those churches' properties that his father had taken to the churches. And since he did not prevail in restoring all the properties to the churches from which they had been taken, on account of the conflict which he was having with Waifar the prince of Aquitaine, Pippin thereafter asked for *precaria* grants to be made by the bishops and decided that ninths and tenths [of the revenues] were given to the restoration of the roofing, and with regards to each *casata* twelve pence were given to the church from which the properties were [held as] benefices, as it is recorded in the book of the capitularies of the king, until these properties could be returned to the church.<sup>13</sup>

And the lord emperor Charles, till now, established a decree in the royal name, that neither he nor his sons nor any of his successors would attempt to do things of these kinds. He confirmed this with his own hand, of which [confirmations] we have very many, and there is an excerpted chapter in the book of his capitularies which anyone who has that book and wishes to read it will be able to find.<sup>14</sup>

[MGH]. We have this account in writing, and some of us have also heard the emperor Louis your father talk about this in person.

And the holy canons, written by the Holy Spirit, reckon those who plunder ecclesiastical property and unduly usurp for themselves ecclesiastical estates to be similar to Judas, the betrayer of Christ. And the saints in heaven, who reign with God in heaven and glitter with miracles on earth, will exclude them from the threshold of the Church and from the heavenly kingdom, like murderers of the poor. About these sacrilegious people, there is a prediction in the prophecy of the psalmist, who said *My*

---

<sup>12</sup> Council of Lestinnes, 743, MGH Concilia I, pp. 5-7, summoned by the Mayor of the Palace Carlomann.

<sup>13</sup> This text is strangely not in Ansegis's collection of capitularies, but rather in the collection of Benedict Levita, I.3

<sup>14</sup> Probably a reference to Ansegis I:77, ed. Schmitz, *Die Kapitulariensammlung des Ansegis*, pp. 475-6 (MGH).

*God, send them whirling this way and that, like leaves, like straws before the wind. See how the fire burns up the forest, how its flames scorch the mountain-side! So let the fury of thy onset rout them, thy fury dismay them. Fill their faces with shame [Ps 82:13-17].*

**Chapter 8.** [*The bishops call on Louis to support the monasteries, and remind him of his previous pledges*]

Restore the religious monasteries to their deserved privileges, especially those of canons and monks and nuns which from ancient times have been under a male or female leader in religious clothing, when your parents held the primacy of the kingdom and even when Saint Remigius with God's help converted the Franks to the Lord and when he baptised their king. These are the monasteries that your brother, our lord – partly on account of his youth, partly from weakness, and partly from some people's cunning suggestion and even from the necessity of threats, since those petitioners said that unless he gave them these holy places, they would fall away from him and, deserted by them, he would lose his kingdom through you (as now transpires) or through your brother [Lothar I] – has committed to such people.

For the same brother of yours, having been warned by the inspiration of God, and the refutations of the bishops, and also by the Apostolic See, had corrected to a certain degree what he has wrongly done; he often has asked, groaning, how he can emend those things that are still not corrected. Far from it may it be that you, who have come here for the restoration of the holy Church, should either worsen those things that he has emended and so offend just as he offended – or that you permit to be unemended that which he has not yet been able to emend. [MGH] As we are your witnesses, you have often warned your brothers about these matters, and in every summit [*annuntiatio*] which you have communally held, you have argued about it very eagerly: just as with your brothers you accepted the capitularies (which we have) at the place by Thionville which is called Yutz,<sup>15</sup> and which you confirmed with your own hand in a cyrograph at Meerssen.<sup>16</sup> If perhaps anyone should act against this, you will therefore not be immune if you do not take care to observe that which you swore and confirmed, with the Lord as witness – far from it! It helps none to criticise other people's wicked deeds unless he beware his own, as Paul demonstrates saying, *Do you think, o man, that you will escape the judgement of God, you who do what you point out?* [Romans 2:3].

**Chapter 9.** [*More about monasteries*]

Firmly and resolutely order the leaders [*rectores*] of the monasteries, to whom you have committed the monasteries, that they carefully and responsibly arrange that, according to the *ordo* and the habit and the sex in which the residents are constituted, the male and female servants of the Lord should

---

<sup>15</sup> A reference to the meeting of the three Carolingian kings at Yutz/Thionville in 844: MGH Concilia III, [pp. 29-35](#).

<sup>16</sup> A reference to the meeting of the three Carolingian kings at Meerssen in 847: MGH Capitularia II, [pp. 69-72](#).

live according to the appropriate *ordo*, and have the necessary stipend in food and clothing and everything else, and that they provide housing and servants as is fitting, as religious leaders in clothing and manner of life. Let them in no way disregard the reception of guests and paupers. And we shall not state that unsuitable people and such things that are not befitting to religion should not be introduced into the monasteries, since we are not unaware that the religious leaders ought to take up the foresight and care that is owed.

**Chapter 10.** [*About guest houses for pilgrims*]

Maintain the hostels of the pilgrims like those of the Scots [Irish], which were constructed and established in the time of your predecessor kings, so that they are kept to what they were assigned to do, and are regulated and guarded by God-fearing leaders, lest they are ruined. And command the leaders of the monasteries and the guest houses, that is hotels: that as the canonical authority teaches and the capitularies of your father and your grandfather command, that they should be subject to their own bishops, and that they should rule the monasteries and hospitals committed to them with the bishops' counsel, because the bishops will want to bestow fatherly concern to them, according to their ministry.

[MGH] And since in frequent announcements you, along with your brothers, have often granted the appropriate law and justice to each in their order, let ecclesiastics and religious men and women of the habit and pilgrims and the poor [*pauperes*], in whom Christ is specially received, know that your grant is always still there.

**Chapter 11.** [*The bishops remind Louis of his responsibilities*]

And since you wish, as you wrote to us, to discuss the condition and salvation of the Christian people, start first of all with yourself, you who ought to correct others, as is written, *Doctor, heal thyself* [Luke 4:23]. And the hand which tries to clean others' dirt ought itself to be clean from dirt. And whatever you ought to correct in others, no one should be able rightly to reprehend in you. For as many people that you are raised over in the pinnacle of the realm, for so many you will serve their behaviour, and like a lamp placed on a candlestick to demonstrate an example of goodness, since the eyes of all rest upon you.<sup>17</sup> As many people as you destroy by your bad example, people who ought to have been built up in goodness by you, under so many it will be necessary for you to be tormented in the future world in punishment.

For this reason, it is right that you, who are king and are called lord, with raised heart, should always admire Him, from whom, that is to say from the King of kings and the Lord of lords, you have borrowed the name of king and lord. And, just as He *set out the globe of the earth with justice* [Wisdom 9:3], and to this end, as it is said in the Book of Wisdom, created man so that he should act

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. a similar argument in Hincmar's *De Divortio*, Appendix Responsio 1, tr. Stone and West, p. 284.

similarly: so if you wish to rule with Him, imitate Him, because *whoever claims to abide in Christ ought to walk in the same way in which he walked* [1 John 2:6], who said *you must be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect* [Matt 5:48].

And if you say: “How can I be perfect, when in another part of Scripture it says: if he who does not offend in word is a perfect man, he who does not sin in malice or greed does not fall from perfection?” *The just man falls seven times and rises again; the impious slide into evil* [Prov. 24:16], but *the just man, when he falls, will not be harmed, for the Lord catches him in his hand* [Ps 36:24]. However it may be, in truth no-one can better point out to someone that he is sinning from the will of his greed or from the necessity of his frailty than his own conscience, which cannot deceive the eyes of its watcher.

Therefore, it is necessary for you to live, judge and act, even in secret, as if you were always in public; for often someone will praise you in words whilst in his heart he bitterly blames you; and often those things about you that he praises to you, he will judge to be blameworthy in front of others.<sup>18</sup> Thus with the help of God you will be able to live, judge and act as we say, if private affection does not incite you; if the greed for glory, riches, possessions and power does not inflame you; if you do not lend more trust to another’s tongue than to your own conscience; [MGH] if the maggot of flattery does not gnaw at you; if the envy of another’s happiness does not burn you; if the neglect of the soul and love of the flesh does not vex you; if you believe Christ died not for himself, that is to say not for his necessity, but for us so that we who were dead may live. And you, O king, may take care to live more for the purposes of His salvation than in your own desires, if you know that you will die and you believe that you will render account to God for your own deeds, and that what you have worthily received [at the Day of Judgement], you will have without end or any change.

## **Chapter 12.** [*Advice on how to run his court and kingdom*]

Nourish, rule and arrange your domestic household [*domum domesticam*] in such a way that when the people of the kingdom assemble before you, they may see in you and in your retainers how soberly, how justly, how piously, and with how much humility and chastity, they ought to nourish, arrange and govern their household too; for, as a certain wise man once said, the family will be safe according the habits of its master. And that is why the king’s household is called a school, that is a *disciplina*; not so much because there are scholars like others there, that is disciplined and well-corrected people, but rather it is called a school, by which we mean *disciplina*, that is *correctio*, because they correct others in behaviour, progress, in word and deed, and in the preservation of all goodness.

---

<sup>18</sup> See N. Staubach, “‘Quasi semper in publico’. Öffentlichkeit als Funktions- und Kommunikationsraum karolingischer Königsherrschaft”, in G. Melville and P. Moos, eds, *Das Öffentliche und Private in der Vormoderne* (Cologne, 1998), 577-618.

And unless you are supported by the God of virtues, you will be like a peg which is not secured, and you will fall, and those hanging from you will slip. So therefore, as God taught when he was being tempted to render to those constituted under power, what is of Caesar to Caesar and what is of God to God – likewise you, who are under God and above men, render to God what is of God, and like a just Caesar, render to the subjects what belongs to them. Render to God a pure and immaculate faith and a most sincere observance regarding priests, the privileges of the churches, the holy places, ecclesiastical men and women, the defence of the Church and of *christianitas*, the equity and justice of the Christian people, the support, peace and consolation of all the needy, as we set out above. Render to God a daily payment in daily prayer, in just and assiduous alms. Give to Him your devotion in holy gifts and profuse tears according to the size and number of your daily sins. Render to your subjects judgement with mercy, justice with equity. Take care to exalt the humble and God-fearing, and to subdue and humiliate the proud. Try to be more loved than feared by the good. Take care that the wicked fear to do evil things, if not on account of God then for fear of you. Let not a lying tongue, a full hand or unearned subservience be worth more to you than truth, equity and sincerity, knowing that it is written *he who draws his hand back from every gift will inhabit the heavens* [Isaiah 33:15]. This must be understood aptly: [\[MGH\]](#) the gift is no different from the spoken favour, from the hand's donation, or from the subjection of unearned subservience.

Appoint officers of the palace who know, love and fear God; who take the greatest care that the needy coming to the palace run to see you, their father and consoler when you pass through them, and do not – which we do not wish to say – flee whilst groaning and cursing. Appoint counts and officers of the *res publica* who do not love gifts, who hate avarice, who detest pride; who neither oppress nor dishonour the men of the country [*pagenses*]; who in no way devastate their harvests, vineyards, meadows and woods; who do not seize or plunder their cattle or pigs or whatever they have, nor take it away through violence and trickery; who do things that are of God and fitting to *christianitas*, by the counsel of the bishops; who hold courts not to acquire profit, but so that the houses of God and the orphans and people may have justice; who take more care to bring the litigants to peace, with justice preserved, than to commit them [to legal action] so that they can have some profit from it. But if they cannot placate them, then, as is just, let them make a just judgement with great care, knowing that it is written *I shall judge you, o man, for what is good* [Micha 6:8], that is doing justice and judgment, and *for walking carefully with your God*. So that what pleases Him also pleases you and you carry it out, but what is displeasing to Him is displeasing also to you, and you do not carry it out.

But if you do such a thing through frailty, do not stubbornly or obstinately persevere in your wicked deed, but at once pull back your foot as if from a hot iron, and tread in the path of the Lord's will. And, as it written that there are paths which seem good to men and lead to the abyss, do as Scripture orders you as a man: ask for the right path and walk in it. For as it is said in the Gospels, the path that leads to perdition is broad, and many go through it; and the path that leads to life is narrow and strait,

and few come upon it. Since you are a man, listen to the prophet and pray with him: *Set before me for a law the way of thy justifications, O Lord: and I will always seek after it* [Ps 118:33] and *Lead me into the path of thy commandments* [Ps 118: 29], and *Remove from me the way of iniquity: and out of thy law have mercy on me*. For as the prophet Jeremiah says, *The path is not man's, nor is it man who decides where to walk and direct his steps – but his steps are guided by the Lord, who directs his way*. [Jer. 10:23]

Let those counts similarly, as far as they can, appoint as their officers those who similarly fear God and love justice, and who, when they see their lords acting kindly and affably to their countrymen [*pagenses*], [MGH] attempt according to their measure to imitate them in all goodness and justice.

### **Chapter 13** [*The bishops call on Louis to help bring the excommunicated to penitence*]

Call back to the path of justice and law those men and powers of the world who amongst these seditions flee the yoke of the law and the justice of equity, and who do deeds for which they have deserved ecclesiastical and episcopal excommunication. And order or compel that they humbly go to their bishops, as is required of them. And advise or with royal power command that they either do satisfaction to the churches against which they have sinned, with owed and necessary humility, or that they humbly and truthfully explain themselves, so that they can be absolved by the Lord through the episcopal ministry.

And if perhaps you or someone else from their company and association is infected by and condemned for communicating with them, let whoever it is re-examine himself and do penance. For by the witness of sacred authority, none can be absolved from his own sins who is damnably weighted down by external sins, as the holy prophet David showed when he prayed to the Lord and said, *Cleanse me from my hidden sins, Lord, and spare your servant from those of others* [Ps 18:13].

### **Chapter 14.** [*Advice on managing royal estates*]<sup>19</sup>

And finally, appoint stewards [*iudices*] of the royal estates who are not greedy, and who neither love avarice nor usury nor carry it out; nor let them give royal money or their own as loans, nor let their subordinates be usurers – all these things you should hate and flee even more than your officers do. And do not let the stewards oppress royal servants [*servi*], nor demand more from them than they used to give in the time of your father, nor afflict them with carrying duties at inconvenient times. Nor let them condemn free tenants [*coloni*] through deceit or tricks or unsuitable loans. For if through such deeds or others you acquire a weight of silver or gold in the treasure chest, greater and heavier will be the weight of sin which you will have on your conscience and soul.

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. D. Campbell, 'The Capitulary de Villis, the Brevium Exempla and the Carolingian court at Aachen', *Early Medieval Europe* 18 (2010), pp. 243-64.

Let the stewards develop your estates with modest buildings [*casticia*], so that there should be the necessary decency and the *familia* should not be unduly burdened; let them work and farm the lands and vineyards at the appropriate time with the sollicitude that is owed. Let them preserve and distribute the products with faithful discretion; let them make the appropriate and necessary foodstuffs; let them guard the woods which provide foraging; let them defend and farm the meadows which provide grazing. [MGH] In this way it will be not be necessary for you for whatever reason and on whomsoever's advice to travel through the possessions of bishops, abbots, abbesses or counts, nor to demand more hospitality than reason requires, or to burden the church's poor [*pauperes*] and the farmers [*mansuarii*] of your faithful men by demanding carting and travelling duties contrary to what is owed, or to pile up sin on your soul through consuming these unowed resources.

Nor should you strive to demand more from the counts and your faithful men from what they take from the Franks than was the law and custom in the time of your father. You should rather have enough so that you can live with your domestic household [*cortis*] and receive legates coming to your palace, and as is written, enough so that you can give the necessary to those suffering from just labours. For the king ought to be generous, and what is given ought not to have been acquired from injustice or inequity.

The stewards, however, should discipline the free tenants [*coloni*] of the estates, so that they do not oppress the ecclesiastical men or the poorer Franks, or other servants by means of royal privilege, and so that they do not devastate the woods or those of others which are in their vicinity. For a just king, who should seek justice, should not have impious or unjust officers or tenants [*coloni*]; but he should demonstrate to everyone a worthy model in himself and in his [followers]. Because if he himself loves God, all good men will love him, and, if he himself fears God, all evil men will fear him. And the king as well as his officers should perform good deeds through love of God, and should teach everyone else to perform good deeds, and they should shun evil through fear of God, and should instruct everyone else to shun evil. Appoint envoys [*missi*] of such a kind throughout the kingdom, who know how counts and other officers of the state [*res publica*] administer justice and judgement to the people, and just as they are placed over the counts, so they should surpass them in knowledge, justice and truth.<sup>20</sup>

**Chapter 15.** [*The bishops again warn Louis of the fate of those who attack the Lord's anointed, though declare that unlike some secular advisors, they are chiefly interested in peace*]

So, because you have shown through your letters that you wish to discuss with us 'the restoration of the holy Church and the state and welfare of the Christian people', we have taken care to reply to your

---

<sup>20</sup> Charles the Bald seems to have taken Hincmar's advice, issuing in 860 detailed instructions to the *missi* or royal emissaries in his kingdom at the Capitulary of Koblenz travelling throughout his kingdom: MGH *Capitularia* II, pp. [269-270](#).

Domination in writing, though we cannot come into your presence on account of the inclemency of the weather and the inconvenience of the time, and because it is nearly Christmas. In the meantime, do what you can with those faithful to you in our absence.

And when a time comes which is more suitable and appointed by the sacred canons, and if the infestation of the pagans and the excessive confusion of most wretched uproar, looting and pillaging allows us, if God wills, to celebrate a synod with the lords, brothers, and co-provincial archbishops and co-bishops, [MGH] we shall discuss the remaining issues with them as with masters and fathers, and we shall strive to give to your lordship the counsel that is owed. And if God decrees that the solidity and safety of the church and the kingdom will come together and prosper in your hands, then we shall take care to act under the rightful regime of your service as seems to suit divine dispositions, with our archbishops and co-bishops.<sup>21</sup> For God, to Whom things are possible that men judge impossible, is capable of turning a less good start into a perfectly good end.

If your Wisdom judges it appropriate to speak and discuss with the neighbouring king [Lothar II]<sup>22</sup> and his faithful men, while our lord, that is your brother, has left this part of the kingdom, it is all the more fitting for us to await the canonical time so that we may speak with our brothers and co-provincial archbishops and bishops, since a general matter looms over the whole of the cis-Alpine church.<sup>23</sup>

And it is especially necessary for us to speak with those archbishops and bishops who, with the consent and will of the people of this kingdom, anointed our lord your brother as a king with the sacred chrism by divine gift, and whom the holy apostolic seat, our mother, took care in apostolic writings to honour and to confirm as the king.<sup>24</sup> Read the Book of Kings, and you will see with what reverence the holy Samuel, whose place in the church we hold though unworthy, thought it appropriate to treat Saul, who had been accused and cast out by the Lord. And pay attention to how serious David considered it was to lay hands on the Lord's anointed, though he was elected and anointed in his place by the Lord [1 Kings 24]. Even though Saul was not only from another family but from another tribe, and David recognised that he [Saul] was rejected and he [David] was elected by the Lord – still David took no forceful action against Saul, but gave him great assistance and devoted service. And he did not attempt to take his kingdom from him by war, nor to seize it by a trick. And although he had many advising and assisting him in this direction, he accepted no gold to attempt it, even though he had very often experienced many persecutions and death threats from him. Moreover, you know well what he ordered about the person who, although he was lying, claimed that

---

<sup>21</sup> Here the bishops hold out the possibility of coming over to Louis's rule.

<sup>22</sup> King Lothar II indeed visited Louis while he was at Attigny, and made an agreement with him, the details of which have not survived – see the Annals of St-Bertin, tr. Nelson, p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hincmar's calls for a general synod of the Frankish church in *De Divortio*, Response 3 and Appendix Responsio 1, tr. Stone and West, p. 122 and p. 284.

<sup>24</sup> This seems to be a reference to papal letters to Charles the Bald that have not survived.



he had laid hands on the Lord's anointed. If there is anyone who does not know, we shall tell him: he ordered him to be killed by the sword.

Thus, if anyone faithlessly and contumaciously lays a hand on any of the Lord's anointed, he despises Christ the lord of the anointed, and without doubt he will perish in his soul by the hostility of the spiritual sword. [MGH] We say this not to seek to pile up inflated arguments against your Domination, but so that we may more clearly show what should be revered in your brother by us, for the quality of our ministry and with the faith and benevolence that is owed.

We must not and we do not wish to think of you as such a person that you wish to expand your kingdom at the cost of your soul, or that you wish to accept us for the assistance of the ecclesiastical regime and ruling, with such shame that we should be without the priesthood. For we shall be deprived of that priesthood if we hurry to hand over ourselves and our churches to you, against God and against the authority of reason. For the churches committed to us by God are not like benefices and royal property of that sort, that someone can give or take them without consideration and according to whim. For all that belongs to the church is consecrated to God. And whoever cheats the church of something, or takes it away, knows that he has committed sacrilege according to the holy Scripture. And we the bishops consecrated to the Lord are not such men that like secular men, we should commend ourselves in vassalage to anyone. But we commend ourselves and our churches to the defence and to the assistance of the rule in the ecclesiastical regime. Nor should we have to carry out any oath-swearing, which the evangelical and apostolic and canonical authority forbids us to do. It is abominable that any hand anointed by sacred oil, which makes the flesh and sacrament of the blood of Christ from bread and a mixture of wine and water through prayer and the sign of the cross, whatever it may have done before ordination, should after ordination to the bishopric expiate a secular sacrament.

And the tongue of a bishop, which through the grace of God is made the key of heaven, becomes wicked when, just like a secular person, the bishop swears an oath in the name of the Lord upon a holy object, and by the invocation of the saints. Unless perhaps (may it not happen) a scandal to his church should occur against him; and then he should act with moderation, just as, with the Lord guiding, the leaders of the church decreed by synodal discussion. And if at any time the oaths, having been demanded and performed by the bishops, are against God and ecclesiastical regulations, which by the Holy Ghost's dictation were confirmed by the blood of Christ, then they are declared invalid by the pages of the Holy Scripture, and thereafter those who are demanding and performing [the oaths] require the medicine of salutary penance.

So wait patiently, my lord, like a Christian prince and a son of the church, and honour the churches and the holy rectors, [MGH] so that He might honour you who said *He who listens to you, listens to*

*me; and he who rejects you, rejects me* [Luke 10:16], and *I will honour those who honour me* [cf: John 12:26];<sup>25</sup> and *those who condemn me will be unworthy* [1 Kings 2:30], and *he who touches you touches the pupil of my eye* [Zach 2:8], and, in the psalm: *Do not touch my anointed ones, nor malign my prophets, for they who are maligne – that is, who do evil things – shall be cast out, while those who sustain the lord shall inherit the land themselves* [Ps 104:15] – that is, the kingdom of God. And when the time and place comes, as we said above, we shall speak with our brothers, and, whatever we shall discern by the righteous dispositions of the Lord, no doubt we shall act accordingly.

And there is no reasonable cause which should provoke you against what we are asking for. For we are not the kind of men who, once we have understood the Lord's will, would wish or feel we ought to answer back in any way, or ought to stir up, nourish or hold on to fights and quarrels or seditions, which the common people call wars [*werras*]. For the Lord wished to appoint [us] as preachers and advocates of peace, and appointed [us] to bewail and cure our sins, and those sins [of those] committed to us, and indeed of the whole people. And he ordered us to be at war with vices and to have peace with our brothers. We want and seek peace and tranquillity, not quarrels and war. For as the Apostle says, *We do not have fleshly weapons but spiritual ones and power in God, by which our feet are shod in the preparation of the Gospel of peace, bearing the breastplate of justice and the shield of salvation, girding our loins in truth, carrying the shield of faith and the sword of the holy spirit* [Eph 6:14]. For *we struggle not against flesh and blood, but against the princes and powers, against the leaders of darkness [contra spiritualia nequitiae in caelestibus]* [Eph 6:12]. And we fight not for the earthly king but for the heavenly king, for the salvation of ourselves and of the earthly king and of the whole people committed to us. Our office is to harm nobody, to act faithlessly against no-one, and to wish to be of use to everyone.

Nevertheless, our lord king, do not hear those speaking against God and your soul, who perhaps say to you “Don't worry, king, about what those felons and ignoble people tell you. Do what we tell you, since your ancestors held the kingdom with our ancestors, not with theirs”. But we beg your Dominion that you listen rather [to us], if you are a Christian king, as by the grace of God you are, and if you trust in Him and wish to reign through Him, through whom as it is written, *kings rule* [Prov. 8:15], and to whom belongs the kingdom, indeed the orb of the world and its plenitude. For that God who came in the flesh, and who alone could be both king and priest, when he ascended into heaven divided his kingdom, that is the Church, [MGH] between the pontifical authority and the royal power for its guidance. And he did not choose the wealthy and the noble for this, but the poor and the fishermen, and as is written, *he chose the ignoble and the despicable of the world, so that he might bring down the mighty* [1 Cor.1:27]. And it may be that the people who say these things to you, if perhaps they speak to you fearing God less than is necessary, are those with whose ancestors the devil, who is according to Scripture the king over all the sons of pride, disturbed the kingdom of

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Nelson, *Frankish World*, p. 161, n. 39.

Christ, which is the church, and now keeps those ancestors in his kingdom, which is hell, and will keep them with him forever.

Know for certain that Christ the King of kings conquered, expanded and ruled his kingdom with our ancestors, that is with the apostles. And through us and with us – may it not be for our judgement that we say this! – the same lord Jesus Christ every day conquers, expands and governs that Church which is his kingdom. As is said by the Lord of the Church through the prophet: *Your sons are born for your fathers* [Ps 44:17], that is, He created bishops for you in the place of apostles, who rule and teach you. With this Church committed to us by God, o Christian lord king, as you ordered in your letters, we will take care to stir up and alert the Lord, the great helmsman on the boat of the holy church floating on this sea, that is the shipwrecking world, who is sleeping for our common sins, and to pray for you. So that as He may quickly wake for His own ineffable piety, and command the winds and waves, that is the diabolical storms and the disturbances of secular men, and some little tranquillity may return, by the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong the power and the honour and the glory and the rule, for ever and ever, Amen.