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Weiler, Björn

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tel: +44 1970 62 2400
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Clerical *admonitio*, letters of advice to kings, and episcopal self-fashioning, c. 1000 – c. 1200

Björn Weiler

Probably in late 1085, Abbot Walo of Metz wrote to a Bishop Wido (likely Udo of Hildesheim). As the prelate would be in the king's presence, he should warn the monarch about the numerous moral transgressions occurring at court. After all, those should excel in virtue who stood above others, whose duty it was to be a terror to evil men, so that they be corrected, and an example to good men, so that they not be corrupted. Therefore, Walo implored his correspondent not to cease in his efforts to admonish their king to seek his peace with God, and to end the turmoil that had recently befallen the Church.¹ I would like to take Walo's letter as starting point for exploring the practice of episcopal *admonitio*, of remonstrating with and exhorting rulers to abide by shared norms of appropriate conduct, as it manifested itself in letters outlining the duties and functions of kingship. I will suggest that the tradition was central to the self-representation of prelates across the high medieval west, and that it was more deeply engrained and widely practised than modern scholars have often recognised. Most importantly perhaps, remonstrating did not necessarily denote opposition towards a ruler. Instead, it demonstrated conformity with expectations about how prelates should act. Thus, Walo and others reinforced and engrained further still a way of thinking about the relationship between rulers and ruled that, far from questioning royal authority, was instead integral to its successful exercise.

¹ *Die Briefe des Abtes Walo von St. Arnulf vor Metz*, ed. Bernd Schütte (Hanover, 1995), no. 8.

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Admonitio

First, though, it will prove helpful to explore further the concept of *admonitio*, not the least perhaps because, while often invoked, it has rarely been defined.² It drew on a series of biblical, classical and patristic models, with the prophets of the Old Testament an obvious inspiration. The most famous exemplars include Samuel, who had crowned Saul as the first king of Israel, but who then chastised the ruler repeatedly for acting contrary to God's will (1 Samuel 15); Elijah, a steady source of reprimand to Ahab over his backing for the cult of Baal (1 Kings 17); and Isaiah, who forced penance upon Hezekiah (Isaiah 31:1-7). In each instance, prophets either relayed messages received directly from God or counselled the ruler on what a course of action pleasing to God would be. As a rule, their advice was both unwelcome and unsolicited. Still, they persisted because the king's failings would bring suffering upon his people. Prophets, in short, acted as fearless interpreters and enforcers of divine law, driven by a sense of duty towards their flock, and obedience towards God.

Likewise, the principle that remonstrating with those who transgressed was a duty, indeed a most solemn obligation, was rooted in both Biblical and patristic precedent. In Ezekiel 3:18, God had warned 'If I warn the wicked, saying, "You are under the penalty of death", but you fail to deliver the warning, they will die in their sins. And I will hold you responsible for their deaths.'³ By failing to upbraid and admonish, members of the Church endangered both their souls and those of their flock. Similar ideas were expressed

² My reading is broader than the one provided by Mayke de Jong, 'Admonitio and criticism of the Ruler at the court of Louis the Pious', in: *La culture du haut moyen âge, une question d'élites?*, ed. François Bougard, Régine Le Jan, and Rosamond McKitterick (Turnhout, 2009), 315-38; and Monika Suchan, 'Monition and advice as elements of politics', in: *Patterns of episcopal power: bishops in tenth and eleventh century Western Europe*, ed. Ludger Körntgen and Dominik Waßenhoven (Berlin, 2011), 39-50. See, though, for the Carolingian Church: Gerd Althoff, *Kontrolle der Macht. Formen und Regeln politischer Beratung im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2016), 39-89. A detailed, comparative study of *admonitio* would be highly desirable. In the meantime, the following may offer a preliminary sketch.

³ See also Leviticus 19:17; 1 Samuel 8:9; Ezekiel 33:6, 8, 12; 2 Thessalonians 3:15; Matthew 18:15.

in the *Regula Pastoralis*, the handbook on pastoral care by Pope Gregory I (d. 604), of which close to 100 manuscripts produced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries survive.⁴ To Gregory, pastoral care was a solemn duty: those capable of offering spiritual guidance, but who refused to do so, betrayed both their people and God.⁵ Even more important for our purposes is Gregory's account why moral admonition should be offered to the mighty. Those who held power over others, he explained, also were responsible for their moral conduct: 'For leaders ought to know that if they ever do anything wrong, they will deserve as many deaths as they engender among their subordinates.'⁶ That is, leaders would be held to account for the sins they commanded or allowed their subordinates to commit as if they had been their own. It was the duty of the spiritual rector, in turn, to guide, advice and, if needed, admonish the mighty.

Yet *admonitio* need not be confrontational. In fact, when Walo wrote to Wido, he likened the prelate's role to that of a physician who applied the medicine of divine wisdom. He should, however, proceed calmly and with charity, just as Orpheus had taken back Eurydice with the sweetness of his singing, and as David had appeased Saul with the playing of his lyre. The abbot certainly channelled biblical and patristic precedent. Yet the letter also points to a third pillar on which the concept of *admonitio* rested: friendship. Walo phrased his letter as emerging from the bonds of *amicitia* that tied him to Wido. Friendship, in turn, entailed the obligation to ensure that friends performed their duties. This is precisely what Walo did: as he would be unable to attend court, it fell to Wido to fulfil an obligation they both shared. The abbot's approach reflected both Classical and high medieval concepts of friendship, with Cicero's *De Amicitia* a foundational text. Not only did at least fifty copies survive from the twelfth century alone,⁷ but Ciceronian

⁴ Richard W. Clement, 'A handlist of manuscripts containing Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis*', *Manuscripta* 28 (1984), 33-44.

⁵ Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, ed. Floribert Rommel, trans. Charles Morel, intro., notes, and index by Bruno Judic, Sources chrétiennes 381-382, 2 vols. (Paris, 1992) i.5, i.144-8. See also Heinz Hürten, 'Gregor der Große und der mittelalterliche Episkopat', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 73 (1962), 16-40.

⁶ Gregory, *Regula*, iii.4, ii. pp. 282-90.

⁷ J.G.F. Powell, 'The manuscripts and text of Cicero's *Laelius de Amicitia*', *Classical Quarterly* 49 (1998), 506-18, at 507.

ideals – whether or not consciously understood a such – surface in contexts as diverse as cathedral schools, Parisian exegesis, and expositions on the monastic ideal.⁸ In particular, we should note Cicero’s emphasis on the admonitory function of friendship: ‘(...) in friendship let the influence of friends who are wise counsellors be paramount, and let that influence be employed in advising, not only with frankness, but, if the occasion demands, even with sternness, and let the advice be followed when given.’⁹ Yet remonstrance should also be given in a manner that ensured it be heeded; ‘(...) reason and care must be used, first, that advice be free from harshness, and second, that reproof be free from insult.’¹⁰ Friendship was the handmaiden of virtue. Remonstrating with friends was a solemn moral duty. At the same time, admonition had to be phrased so as to persuade. Insult and flattery were to be shunned in equal measure.¹¹

Admonitio thus embraced several overlapping features. At its heart was the moral obligation to offer advice. Prophets had to admonish kings, spiritual rectors their flock, and friends each other. If they failed to do so, if they allowed fear, a desire for worldly goods or a mistaken concern for the comfort of others to interfere with doing what was right, they would be as guilty as the sinner they had failed to counsel. Worse still, they would be held accountable both for their own transgressions, and those they had failed to warn against. Just as those in power should seek out wise counsel, and just as they should heed it once offered, so those equipped to provide such counsel should never hold back in

⁸ C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels. Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 900-1200* (Philadelphia, 1994), 193-5, 279-80; Brian McGuire, *Friendship and Community. The Monastic Experience, 350-1250* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1988), 296-338. For the early medieval reception and thus a possible route of transmission: Sita Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens im Früh- und Hochmittelalter: Autorität, Wissenkonzepte und Netzwerke von Gelehrten* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 2010), 171-81. For problems in tracing influence: Birger Munk Olsen, ‘Comment peut-on déterminer la popularité d’un texte au Moyen Âge? L’exemple des oeuvres classiques latines’, *Interfaces* 3 (2016), 13-27.

⁹ Cicero, *De Amicitia*, transl. William Armistead Falconer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1946), xiii.44, pp. 156-7; xxv.91, pp. 198-9. I am grateful to Ryan Kemp for sharing his research on Cicero.

¹⁰ Cicero, *De Amicitia*, xxiv.89, pp. 196-7.

¹¹ Cicero, *De Amicitia*, xxv.91, pp. 198-9.

offering it. The principle was pervasive.¹² To paraphrase St Augustine: precisely because they were leaders, bishops were also meant to be servants of their people.¹³

This conceptual framework is essential for understanding the ideal type of the reprimanding cleric as it surfaced in Isidore of Seville,¹⁴ or the seventh-century *De xii Abusivis Saeculi* by Pseudo-Cyprianus, still read widely during the period under consideration.¹⁵ By the eleventh century, it had become deeply engrained in theoretical expositions on the episcopal office. Wulfstan of York's *Institutes of Polity* thus stressed the importance of taking sound advice from wise men,¹⁶ and repeatedly defined the bishop's role as warning and chiding those who transgressed.¹⁷ Comparable ideas were expressed in the *Sermo de informatione episcoporum* from the early eleventh century,¹⁸ or the *Institutions*, attributed to St Stephen of Hungary (d. 1035),¹⁹ and they permeated papal letters. In 1071 Pope Alexander II exhorted William the Conqueror to listen to Archbishop Lanfranc: God would call William to account and not only for his own actions, but also those of his people. For this reason, and so that he might be a model in

¹² Greta Austin, 'Jurisprudence in the service of pastoral care: The "Decretum" of Burchard of Worms', *Speculum* 79 (2004), 929-59; Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 76-85, 244-7.

¹³ St Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, ed. Bernard Dombart and Alphons Kalb, 2 vols., CCSL 47-8 (Turnhout, 1955), xix.19: ii, pp. 686-7.

¹⁴ He defined the office of bishop as that of an overseer (*speculator*), because 'he keeps watch and oversees the behaviour and lives of the people placed under him.' Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1962), vii.xii.12 (no pagination).

¹⁵ Pseudo-Cyprianus, *De xii Abusivis Saeculi*, ed. Siegmund Hellmann, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, Third Series 4 (1910) 1-62; on the text and its later reception: Hans Hubert Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian. *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* und sein Einfluß auf dem Kontinent, insbesondere auf die karolingischen Fürstenspiegel', in: *Die Iren und Europa im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Heinz Löwe, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1982), ii.568-617, at 604-7.

¹⁶ Renée Trilling, 'Sovereignty and Social Order: Archbishop Wulfstan and the Institutes of Polity', in: *The Bishop Reformed. Studies of Episcopal Power and Culture in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. John S. Ott and Anna Trumbore Jones (Aldershot, 2007), 58-85, at 73-8.

¹⁷ Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical". *Ein Werk Erzbischofs Wulfstans von York*, ed. and transl. Karl Jost (Bern, 1959), 63-4, 67-71.

¹⁸ PL 139, col. 169-78.

¹⁹ 'Libellus de institutione morum', ed. Joseph Balogh, in: *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, ed. Emeric Szenpétery, 2 vols. (Budapest, 1937-8), ii, 611-27, at 623.

regard to every virtue, William must heed the prelate's advice.²⁰ Like advice was directed at prelates. In 1163, Pope Alexander III thus reminded Bishop Gilbert Foliot of London that Gilbert had been raised to the see of England's chief city so as to provide good counsel to the king, to reprimand him when necessary, and generally to steer him toward the path of righteousness.²¹ It was the duty of kings to heed, and that of prelates to proffer wise and prudent counsel.

I am not, of course, the first to have noticed the ideal of episcopal *admonitio*. Yet so far it has been explored primarily in relation to the Carolingian Church,²² and mostly in the sense of criticism, chastisement and forthright reprimand.²³ This partly reflects the nature of the evidence: moments of crisis tend to be well documented. Equally, many narrative sources, especially episcopal *gesta* and *vitae*, paint a stark contrast between a protagonist resolutely standing up to kings, and his supine, submissive and subservient peers. A willingness to offer *admonitio* marked out a protagonist as upholding in exemplary fashion an ideal common to all bishops.²⁴ In this context, turning to a different genre of

²⁰ *The Letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson (Oxford, 1979), no. 7.

²¹ *Alexandri III Epistolae*, PL 196, no. 204.

²² Althoff, *Kontrolle der Macht*, 57-77; de Jong, 'Admonitio'; Monika Suchan, *Mahnen und Regieren: Die Metapher des Hirten im früheren Mittelalter* (Berlin and New York, 2015); eadem, 'Monition and advice'. For later periods, by contrast, research has centred on bishops as political and economic agents within a particular, often local, community: Timothy Reuter, 'A Europe of bishops. The age of Wulfstan of York and Burchard of Worms', in: *Patterns of Episcopal Power*, ed. Körntgen and Waßenhoven, 17-38; John S. Ott, *Bishops, authority, and community in northwestern Europe, c.1050-1150* (Cambridge, 2015).

²³ De Jong, 'Admonitio'; Suchan, 'Monition'. Ernst-Dieter Hehl, 'Der widerspenstige Bischof. Bischöfliche Zustimmung und bischöflicher Protest in der ottonischen Reichskirche', in: *Herrschaftsrepräsentation im ottonischen Sachsen*, ed. Gerd Althoff and Ernst Schubert (Sigmaringen, 1998), 295-344; Björn Weiler, 'Kings and bishops in England, c. 1066 – c. 1215', in: *Religion and Politics in the Middle Ages: England and Germany in Comparison*, ed. Ludger Körntgen and Dominik Waßenhoven (Berlin, 2013), 157-203. For the thirteenth century: Björn Weiler, *Kingship, Rebellion and Political Culture; England and Germany, c.1215-1250* (Harlow, 2007), 159-64; S.T. Ambler, *Bishops in the Political Community of England, 1213-1272* (Oxford, 2017).

²⁴ Bernard F. Reilly, 'The "Historia Compostelana". The genesis and composition of a twelfth-century Spanish "Gesta"', *Speculum* 44 (1969), 78-85; Stephanie Haarländer, *Vitae episcoporum. Eine Quellengattung zwischen Hagiographie und Historiographie*,

sources – in our case letters – will prove useful. Letters pose their own methodological challenges (we will return to those). It certainly would be mistaken to assume that they show how *admonitio* was *really* practised. They do, however, suggest that it was more widely practised and more deeply engrained than narrative sources and current scholarship suggest. And they, far more so than chronicles, *gesta* and *vitae*, point to pastoral care and friendship as key components in the rhetoric of *admonitio*. They, furthermore, allow us to see more clearly how the network of expectations – the premise that remonstrating and offering moral advice was a duty central to the episcopal office – could be utilised by senders and recipients alike.

Letters

As a source, letters have further advantages: quite a few of them thus survive. In fact, the eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed a flourishing epistolary culture.²⁵ The ability to write letters, and to write them well, became a mark of education, distinguishing the merely Latinate from the truly literate. This resulted not only in an increasing production of letters, but also in detailed guides on how to compose them.²⁶ From this spring a number of methodological issues. Not every letter that survives was actually sent. Sometimes, still extant examples constituted rhetorical exercises, what might be termed mimetic fiction: the style and convention of letters were employed to display mastery of a particular genre, and to create a sense of verisimilitude. Texts were composed as if they

untersucht an Lebensbeschreibungen von Bischöfen des Regnum Teutonicum im Zeitalter der Ottonen und Salier (Stuttgart, 2000), 313-4, 323 n. 59, 327 n. 93; Weiler, ‘Bishops and kings’. See also: *Vita Annonis Minor. Die jüngere Annovita*, ed. Mauritius Mittler (Siegburg, 1975), caps. 4 and 5, pp. 14-17; *Die Wundergeschichten des Caesarius von Heisterbach*, ed. Alfons Hilka (vols. i. and iii. [ii. not published]; Bonn, 1933 and 1937), i.126.

²⁵ John van Engen, ‘Letters, schools and written culture in the eleventh and twelfth centuries’, in: *Dialektik und Rhetorik im früheren und hohen Mittelalter. Rezeption, Überlieferung und gesellschaftliche Wirkung antiker Gelehrsamkeit vornehmlich im 9. und 12. Jahrhundert*, ed. Johannes Fried (Munich, 1997), 97-132.

²⁶ Martin Camargo, ‘The *Ars dictaminis*, the formulary, and medieval epistolary practice’, in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia/SC, 2007), 67-87; idem, *Ars dictaminis, ars dictandi* (Turnhout, 1991).

had been letters.²⁷ Other letters presented stylistic exercises, illustrating how such documents were meant to be written.²⁸ Matters are complicated by the fact that the dividing line between fictional epistles and stylistic exercises on the one hand, and missives that had in fact been dispatched on the other, could be fluid. Actual letters may have been preserved, amended and revised, so as to be included in letter-writing manuals, while exemplars could have been used to fashion ones that were then indeed dispatched.²⁹ In the present context, fictional letters invoking the principle and employing the rhetoric of *admonitio* will prove all the more useful. After all, they testify to the concept's pervasiveness and normative force.

The importance of letters as a source is underscored by what we can surmise of their putative audience. As a rule, it extended well beyond the nominal addressee. Letters were normally read out loud, to audiences of varying sizes. Their content was in all likelihood cause for deliberation, at least within a recipient's inner circle as well as that of the sender.³⁰ Consequently, the persona adopted by an author constituted an act of self-representation, addressing a community of peers, listeners and readers. Letters communicated not only particular advice, but also a writer's command of style, as well as his willingness to provide counsel. They helped establish reputation and demonstrated

²⁷ Wim Verbaal, 'Epistolary voices and the fiction of history', in: *Medieval Letters: between fiction and document*, ed. Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli (Turnhout, 2015), 9-32.

²⁸ Giles Constable, 'Letter collections in the Middle Ages', in: *Kuriale Briefkultur im späteren Mittelalter: Gestaltung – Überlieferung – Rezeption*, ed. Tanja Broser, Andreas Fischer, and Matthias Thumser (Cologne, 2015), 35-54; Joel T. Rosenthal, 'Letters and letter collections', in: *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources: using sources to discover medieval Europe*, ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (London, 2012), 72-85.

²⁹ Walter Ysebaert, 'Medieval letters and letter collections as historical sources: methodological questions, reflections, and research perspectives (sixth to fifteenth centuries)', in: *Medieval Letters*, ed. Høgel and Bartoli, 33-62.

³⁰ Rolf Köhn, 'Dimensionen des Öffentlichen und Privaten in der mittelalterlichen Korrespondenz', *Das Öffentliche und Private in der Vormoderne*, ed. Gert Melville and Peter von Moos (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1998), 309-58; Christoph Egger, "'Littera patens, littera clausa, cedula interclusa": Beobachtungen zu Formen urkundlicher Mitteilungen im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert', in: *Wege zur Urkunde, Wege der Urkunde, Wege der Forschung: Beiträge zur europäischen Diplomatie des Mittelalters*, ed. Karel Hruza and Paul Herold (Cologne, 2005), 41-64; Pierre Chaplais, *English Diplomatic Practice in the Middle Ages* (London, 2003), 45-50.

status, but also signified compliance with of shared norms. For that to be accomplished, they needed not even reach their nominal recipient. Thus, letters do not necessarily reveal how relations between clergy and rulers unfolded in practice. But they do show how they were conceptualised. What, then, do letters of advice reveal about conventions and practices of counselling the king?

Letters of advice and clerical *admonitio*

A letter addressed to Henry II of England, penned c. 1167/8 by Peter of Blois on behalf of Archbishop Rotrou of Rouen, may serve to illustrate recurrent themes in epistolary advice. The archbishop outlined a programme of education for the king's namesake and heir. As the elder Henry was well versed in letters, careful in his administration of grave and serious matters, subtle and perceptive in judicial affairs, cautious in his commands, and prudent in his counsel, the bishops of the realm agreed that the king's eldest son should be educated in the same skills. After all, literature offered ample guidance on good governance. Equally, instruction needed to extend to matters of religion. For how could a king enforce the law of God if he did not know what the law was? The Old Testament had pointed out that the throne of a king who ruled people with equity, and the poor with wisdom, would persist in eternity. When asked by God what he desired most, King David had requested wisdom and knowledge, as these were what the Lord desired. On the other hand, as the examples of Saul and Jonathan demonstrated, if a ruler engaged in unjust and tyrannous acts, in trickery and oppression, kingship could pass outside his family. Kingship had been established to enforce the law of God. If, as Job had been told, kings listened to the voice of God, they would end their days peacefully, blessed and with glory. If, on the other hand, they failed to heed the word of God, they would die by the sword. Henry was exhorted to contemplate what happened to kings who were uneducated or illiterate: because of Saul's sins his people were killed; the sins of Jeroboam caused great suffering to his. Allusions from the histories of classical antiquity reinforced biblical lessons. While Alexander had conquered an empire, it passed not to his progeny, but to the satraps. The heirs of Julius Caesar were similarly chosen by adoption, not descent. That is, the inability to act in accordance with the laws of God meant that the

power to rule would pass to those more suitable. For all these reasons, Peter concluded, Henry was to educate his son in matters of literature.³¹

Peter's letter highlights the moral dimension of learning and advice. Knowledge and education were required for a ruler to be able to exercise his duties. Unless he acquired a sound command of letters, Henry's son would not be able to emulate his father's administrative abilities, wise judgement, and prudent counsel. In equal measure, the letter displayed its author's learning, exemplary grasp of Biblical and ancient history, and mastery of Latin. Yet these could not be ends in themselves. They served a higher purpose: to aid in the governance of the realm. That was a moral obligation which extended to Henry and his son as much as to Rotrou and his peers. Wisdom and knowledge were the most important royal virtues. But in order to acquire them, kings required a good understanding of letters. The bishops, in turn, felt called upon to expound to the king the pernicious consequences that would befall Henry's heir if their advice were not heeded. Dynasties would end and kings fail if they did not abide by the commands of divine law. It fell to the prelates of the realm, in turn, to explain both this requirement and how to meet it. Theirs was a truly Gregorian act of pastoral care.

Few comparable examples survive, perhaps reflecting how counselling the king often worked in practice. By their status alone, bishops and abbots had frequent access to a ruler's inner circle, and it was there that advice would normally be given. Hence Walo's letter to Wido, with which this article opened. Similarly, when, in the summer of 1175, Arnulf of Lisieux hoped to end his absence from court, he wrote to King Henry II of England about the need for, and the nature of, good counsel.³² It is rare to find correspondence between leading clerical advisors and their kings, unless (and we will

³¹ Peter of Blois, *Opera Omnia*, ed. J.A. Giles, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1846-7), i, no. 67 [PL 207, cols. 210-3, which simply reprints the Giles text]. On Henry the Young King's education: Matthew Strickland, 'On the instruction of a prince: the upbringing of Henry, the Young King', *Henry II. New Interpretations*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (Woodbridge, 2007), 184-214; idem, *Henry the Young King 1155-1183* (New Haven, CT, 2016), 62-3. On Peter: John D. Cotts, *The Clerical Dilemma. Peter of Blois and Literate Culture in the Twelfth Century* (Washington/DC, 2009), 176-83.

³² *The Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux*, ed. Frank Barlow (London, 1939), no. 106.

return to this point) relations had broken down. Representative examples of what letters normally looked like are provided in the so-called *Briefbuch*, compiled by Abbot Wibald of Stavelot and Corvey, chancellor under King Conrad III of Germany (1138-52) and during the early years of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1152-90).³³ Probably designed for use by the imperial chancery, it includes materials as diverse as correspondence between Conrad and Manuel Komnenos, missives relating to the affairs of Stavelot and Corvey, and records of truces, interspersed with reports on diplomatic and political missions. In April 1148, for instance, Wibald reported to Conrad's son, King Henry, on a recent council at Reims. Details, Wibald explained, would be conveyed by the royal notary, but the king was strongly advised to heed the pope's decision in the matter of the abbacy of Fulda. He should, furthermore, not proceed to Lotharingia, Swabia or Saxony, unless called upon to do so by the princes.³⁴ The following year, Wibald explained to Conrad III that the difficult political situation in Lotharingia prevented him from attending court. He did, however, praise the king for being mindful of his duties: to oppress the oppressors, and to protect children, widows and the Church. The letter ended with complaints about the bishop of Minden and a request for royal intervention.³⁵ Finally, in late 1150, Wibald corresponded with Conrad about a mission to Rome (and took the opportunity to complain about the deprivations inflicted upon his abbeys by the bishop of Liège).³⁶ Wibald's *Briefbuch* may be an especially rich source, but the basic pattern evident there surfaces elsewhere. In fact, the most common type of letter was one where a prelate explained why he might not be able to attend court, where he announced his imminent arrival, or that emissaries would verbally consult with the king.³⁷ Few

³³ On Wibald: Martina Hartmann, *Studien zu den Briefen Abt Wibalds von Stablo und Corvey sowie zur Briefliteratur in der frühen Stauferzeit* (Hanover, 2011); Hartmut Hoffmann, 'Das Briefbuch Wibalds von Stablo', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 63 (2007), 41-70.

³⁴ *Das Briefbuch Abt Wibald von Stablo und Corvey*, ed. Martina Hartmann nach Vorarbeiten von Heinz Zatschek und Timothy Reuter, 3 vols. (Hanover, 2012), no. 63.

³⁵ *Wibald Briefbuch*, no. 160.

³⁶ *Wibald Briefbuch*, no. 275.

³⁷ Suger, *Oeuvres*, ed. and transl. Françoise Gasparri, 2 vols. (Paris, 2001), ii, no. 26; *The Letters and Poems of Fulbert of Chartres*, ed. and transl. Frederick Behrends (Oxford, 1976), nos. 99-101; *Lettres D'Etienne de Tournai*, no. 293.

epistles like Peter's survive because, most of the time, there was neither need nor opportunity for them.

However, when advice was offered, it seems to have been given almost irrespective of the matter in hand. When Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, wrote to the king of Jerusalem in 1147/8, his missive's main purpose was to announce the imminent departure of Drogo, precentor of Nevers, to the Holy Land. Peter prefaced this with a lengthy account of the relationship between God and king: God had called upon the king to be the ruler of the city of Jerusalem, to be a lord to its citizens, a protector to its Church, and an enemy to its foes. Peter repeated that God – who was called king of Israel by patriarchs, prophets and angels, even by Jews and pagans – had granted the king the power to rule over the city so as to be a rod of righteousness to his realm, to love justice and hate iniquity, and to be an enemy to the enemies of the Cross. Peter prayed that, just as the priests would defeat the devil every day, so would the king triumph over his foes.³⁸

There is little to suggest that Peter had any particular flaws in mind that necessitated this rehearsing of royal duties. Rather, his letter echoed conventions that also surface, for instance, in a letter that Innocent III sent to Richard I of England in May 1198, explaining the significance of four golden rings with which he presented the king. Roundness, Innocent stated, denoted eternity, and was to remind the king of his duty to 'advance from the temporal to the eternal'; the number four indicated the equipoise of mind that a ruler was to maintain, 'which should neither be depressed by adversity nor elated by success', but it also stood for the virtues a king should exercise: justice, courage, prudence, and temperance. Gold, in turn, signified wisdom, without which other virtues could not be practised. Of the stones, which adorned these rings, the emerald symbolised faith; the sapphire hope; the garnet charity; and the topaz the practice of good works.³⁹

³⁸ *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, ed. Giles Constable, 2 vols. (Cambridge/MA, 1967), no. 82. See also no. 44 (to Sigurd of Norway).

³⁹ *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III Concerning England (1198-1216)*, ed. and transl. C.R. Cheney and W.H. Semple (London, 1953), no. 1. See, for other papal examples: *Paschalis II Pontificis Romani Epistolae et Privilegia*, PL 163, no. 497; *Innocentii II*

Neither Peter nor Innocent wrote these lines as reprimand. They employed an exposition of royal duties as a matter of course, as a conventional opening in their correspondence with kings. Yet they also fashioned an ideal image of both royal lordship and clerical demeanour.

Even petitions were cloaked in or at least accompanied by detailed explanations of a king's duties.⁴⁰ In 1188-90, Stephen of Tournai prefaced a request to King Knut VI of Denmark for funds to buy lead for the roof of his church with a lengthy exposition on the royal duty to show largesse.⁴¹ When Peter the Venerable wrote to Roger II of Sicily, he explained that Christ truly reigned through Roger. Who, after all, would not rejoice at the fact that Roger brought peace to his people, installed firm peace within the Church, and protected his people against wayfarers and robbers?⁴² In a second letter, Peter extolled the king's many virtues: Sicily, Calabria and Apulia had been transformed from a haven of Saracens, a wellspring of criminals and a den of thieves into the abode of peace, the sanctuary of tranquillity, the peaceful and happy kingdom of a second Solomon.⁴³ Still, just protecting the Church was not enough: it must also experience a ruler's largesse. Peter therefore urged Roger to keep his peace with the pope,⁴⁴ and to surpass his royal peers in the patronage of monasteries.⁴⁵ Peter never explicitly petitioned the king, though that there were no Cluniac houses in the kingdom of Sicily may suggest an ulterior motive.⁴⁶ Even so, he employed a familiar role as instructor and teacher, reminding Roger of his duties, and exhorting him to exercise them with due diligence.

The rhetorical stance extended to letters best described as panegyrics. That sent by Bern of Reichenau in late 1044/early 1045 to Emperor Henry III may suffice by way of

Pontificis Romani Epistolae et Privilegia, PL 179, no. 250; *Briefbuch Wibald*, no. 374.

Papal communication with kings will require a study of its own.

⁴⁰ On petitions see Claudia Garnier, *Die Kultur der Bitte. Herrschaft und Kommunikation im mittelalterlichen Reich* (Darmstadt, 2008).

⁴¹ *Lettres d'Etienne de Tournai*, no. 181.

⁴² *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, no. 90.

⁴³ *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, no. 131.

⁴⁴ *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, no. 90.

⁴⁵ *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, no. 131.

⁴⁶ G.A. Loud, *The Latin Church in Norman Italy* (Cambridge, 2007), 483-4.

example. Christ had offered his peace to the world, and in his day that peace shone forth in the reign and the heart (that is, the inner disposition) of the emperor. Throughout Henry's realm, peace and justice were united in brotherly love. Intrigues, strife and theft had disappeared. Bern stressed the importance of inner disposition and divine inspiration in Henry's success: he had been able to create so peaceful a realm because he kept Christ in his heart, but the peace he had created would have been impossible to achieve without divine blessing. Recounting how Henry had brought slaughter and devastation upon the Hungarians and their pseudo-king, Bern drew parallels from the Old Testament: like Hezekiah, Peter, the rightful king of Hungary, had humbly beseeched the Lord and the Virgin for aid, and they had granted his request by sending Henry to act like a second David. The emperor, Bern continued, was justly compared to David, as David's name meant 'strong and desirable'. It was with strength that he had defeated Goliath, and it was David's moral stature that made him so admirable a model to follow: he was humble, mild and of a benevolent disposition. David also foreshadowed the words of Christ by loving his enemies (as he had done with Saul). Henry similarly showed not only justice, but also compassion and grace when he came to Peter's assistance. Bern concluded by asking the emperor to be merciful, remain an ardent devotee of justice, listen to the prayers and sermons of monks, treat Abbess Hirmingart in Zürich with honour, and add this letter to the collection of his writings already in the emperor's possession.⁴⁷ That is, the extensive praise of Henry III's actions was also an exhortation to continue emulating David, and to take heed of the instruction provided by the prayers and sermons of Bern's brethren. It was only through their counsel that Henry could maintain the inner disposition that had brought him earthly glory and that would ensure his eternal salvation.

In all this, clerics rarely claimed explicit superiority over their correspondents. When they did, they appear to have done so mostly because relations between author and addressee had broken down, or because the failing in question was so severe that conventions no longer applied. Most of Thomas Becket's letters to Henry II of England had thus been

⁴⁷ *Die Briefe des Abtes Bern von Reichenau*, ed. Franz-Josef Schmale (Stuttgart, 1961), no. 27. On Bern: Dieter Blume, *Bern von Reichenau (1008-1048): Abt, Gelehrter, Biograph. Ein Lebensbild mit Werkverzeichnis* (Ostfildern, 2008).

penned after relations had deteriorated.⁴⁸ Similarly, among the few surviving missives by Suger of St-Denis to King Louis of France, one was sent while Louis was on crusade, and another to warn him against attacking the count of Anjou without first seeking the advice of his prelates.⁴⁹ Much also depended on the public a writer sought to address. In Becket's case, we may assume that the audience for his letters extended to both the English clerical elite, who were to be shamed into following his example, and to Becket's entourage, reassuring them of their patron's moral fervour. Similar motivations may have been at play in the stern language employed by Ivo of Chartres when he criticised his king's adulterous behaviour,⁵⁰ or when Cardinal Peter Damian wrote to the young King (the future Emperor) Henry IV in 1064/5: Henry should note the fate of kings failing to perform their duties. Saul had lost his kingdom, and Belshazzar his throne; Assyrians, Greeks and Persians had similarly forfeited their right to rule because their kings had ceased to fulfil their obligations as rulers. The king should therefore dismiss wicked advisors, and hasten to Rome.⁵¹

Though unusually explicit, these examples still point to a tension inherent in most letters. Ultimately, providing counsel established a hierarchical relationship – between those providing and those being deemed in need of advice. Handling the relationship required care and circumspection. When asked to act as the emperor's tutor in Greek, even Gerbert of Aurillac, soon to become Pope Sylvester II, went to considerable lengths to stress his correspondent's moral and intellectual superiority.⁵² In this context, Walo's letter to Wido becomes important. Like a physician, Wido's role was to administer the medicine

⁴⁸ *The Correspondence of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1162-1170*, ed. and transl. Anne Duggan, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2000), nos. 68, 74, 82. Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket* (London, 2004), 105-110, 116-7.

⁴⁹ Suger, *Oeuvres*, ii, nos. 6, 17.

⁵⁰ Yves de Chartres, *Correspondance I*, ed. Jean Leclercq (Paris, 1949), nos. 5, 9, 15, 22, 28, 47, 56.

⁵¹ *Die Briefe des Peter Damian*, ed. Kurt Reindel, 4 vols. (Hanover, 1983-93), iii, no. 120.

⁵² Gerbert d'Aurillac, *Correspondance*, ed. P. Riché and J.P. Callu, 2 vols. (Paris, 1993), ii, no. 187. See, for similar examples, *Lettres d'Etienne de Tournai*, nos. 40 (informing the king of Hungary of the death of a Hungarian monk), 293 (to Louis, eldest son of the king of France, about the palfrey demanded by the prince); *Letters Peter the Venerable*, no. 44.

of divine wisdom. He should do so calmly and with charity, just as Orpheus had escaped the Underworld with the sweetness of his singing, and as David appeased Saul with the playing of his lyre. While it was part of a prelate's duty to admonish the king, reprimand could not be an end in itself. Admonition had to be delivered so as to persuade and change the sinner's behaviour. Adopting a stern demeanour without also displaying patience and humility was ineffective, self-aggrandising and morally suspect.⁵³ That is, Walo's advice followed precisely the model outlined by Cicero and Gregory the Great.

His sentiments were widely shared. They certainly underpinned Peter's advice to Henry II. Similarly, when Bruno of Querfurt wrote to Emperor Henry II in 1007, he recounted his endeavours in converting the people of central Europe and Scandinavia. Bruno thanked the emperor for his support, and ended the letter by asking for imperial backing in his imminent mission to Prussia. In between, however, Bruno chided the king for his treatment of Boleslaw I, the Christian ruler of Poland. Though Bruno repeatedly stressed his loyalty to Henry II, he was nonetheless concerned: '(...) Beware, O king, if you want to do everything with power and never with mercy, which the good man loves, lest by chance Jesus, who now helps you, should laugh at you in mockery. (...) My hero, you will not be a soft king, which is harmful, but a just and active rector, which is pleasing, if this alone is added, namely that you also be merciful and not always reconcile a people and make them acceptable to yourself with power, but also do so with mercy. You will appear to acquire a people more by gifts than by war, and you, who now have a war in three regions, would then not even have it in one.'⁵⁴ Bruno's pose of humility and loyalty exalted the king, while at the same time echoing a shared language of outlining royal

⁵³ *The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot*, ed. Adrian Morey and C.N.L. Brooke (Cambridge, 1967), no. 170. Adrian Morey and C.N.L. Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot and his Letters* (Cambridge, 1965), 166-87.

⁵⁴ 'Brunonis Querfurtensis epistola ad Henricum regem', in: *Monumenta Polonia Historica. Nova Series* iv, ed. Jadwiga Karwasinski (Warsaw, 1973), 97-106. English translation by William North, https://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/mars/assets/Bruno_of_Querfurt_Letter_to_Henry_II_f_or_MARS_website.pdf (accessed 12 November 2016). On the text see also: Ian N. Wood, 'Shoes and a fish dinner: the troubled thoughts of Brun of Querfurt', in: *Ego Trouble. Authors and their Identities in the early Middle Ages*, eds. Richard Corradini, Matthew Gillis, Rosamond McKitterick and Irene van Renswoude (Vienna, 2010), 249-58.

duties. A like approach was chosen around 1085 by Bishop Anselm of Lucca when he urged William I of England to come to the aid of the Roman Church. Anselm stressed that William owed his power not merely to his own deserts, but to the divine will. He also encouraged the king to be a generous patron of the Church, a defender of widows and orphans, someone who tempered the rigour of justice with mercy, showed the true humility of good manners, and who was not swayed by the vain glories of the world. Anselm did not, however, berate William. Rather, he reminded the king that he had been given his power for a reason: to come to the defence of his beleaguered mother, the Church.⁵⁵ William was meant to heed Anselm's counsel not for fear of shame, but because doing so would be the natural course of action for a ruler as great as the Conqueror.

Offering counsel also meant demonstrating status. That an individual was sought out for his counsel was a mark of standing, as was the fact that he could be assumed to be of sufficient repute that even unsolicited counsel was heeded. Equally, given the link between *admonitio* and friendship, being close enough to a ruler, or of such fame, that one's advice would be listened to and welcome, or even solicited, marked out as especially reputable the one providing such counsel. The phenomenon was most pronounced where foreign rulers were concerned, not least perhaps because offering advice across Christendom was something that normally only popes did.⁵⁶ In fact, letters often seem to have been deemed worth preserving precisely because they addressed either kings or those who exercised quasi-royal authority in their domains.⁵⁷ Letters to

⁵⁵ 'Die Hildesheimer Briefsammlung', in: *Briefsammlungen der Zeit Heinrichs IV.*, ed. Carl Erdmann and Norbert Fickermann (Hanover, 1977), no. 1.

⁵⁶ Julian Haseldine, 'Friends, friendship and networks in the letters of Bernard of Clairvaux', *Citeaux* 57 (2006), 243-80; John van Engen, 'Letters and the Public Persona of Hildegard', in: *Hildegard von Bingen in ihrem historischen Umfeld*, ed. Alfred Haverkamp (Mainz, 2000), 375-418.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, for Gregory VII: *Das Register Gregors VII.*, ed. Erich Caspar, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1920), iv.11 (Robert of Flanders); vii.11 (Wratislaw of Bohemia); viii.16 (Raymond and Bertrand of Saint Gilles); viii.18 (Ebolus of Roucy); ix.9 (Theobald of Blois); ix.25 (Roger I of Sicily). See also: *Paschalis II Epistolae*, PL 163, no. 88; *Innocentii II Epistolae*, PL 179, no. 399; *Eugenii III Epistolae*, PL 180, nos. 28, 563; *Alexandri III Epistolae*, no. 505. Given that we are dealing with a record being kept by

kings and king-like rulers carried with them a prestige far greater than those addressed to mere counts and dukes. Moreover, most extant letters to noble recipients either dealt with an especially grievous injustice or were directed at those of royal descent, who were frequently reminded that their ancestry laid upon them the same obligations met in so exemplary a fashion by their forebears.⁵⁸ These letters also eschewed the praise that prevailed even when criticism of a king was voiced. Instead, they simply demanded a particular course of action. God, in these instances, appeared not as the source of princely power, but as putative avenger of secular injustice.⁵⁹

Simultaneously, distance enabled prelates to perform their admonitory function more freely. The letters sent in 1073/4 by Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury to King Guthric of Dublin and King Toirrdelbach Ua Briain of Munster were as much concerned with praising them for their virtue, justice and valour, as with counselling them about the need to reform Irish marriage customs, and with establishing a claim to ecclesiastical oversight not only over the Irish Church, but over the wider political scene.⁶⁰ Moreover, much as these missives were steeped in rhetoric of praise and admiration, they also adopted a tone of moral superiority, based on the kings' need for moral instruction, and the archbishop's ability to provide it. Lanfranc's letter thus provides a useful reminder that offering advice and admonition was as much a moral obligation as being willing to invite or accept such remonstrations. If anyone could expect to be heard by Guthric and Toirrdelbach, it was Lanfranc. Failing to act would have meant not only that he had been amiss in exercising the most basic of pastoral duties, but also that he was unable or unwilling to use the

senders rather than recipients, this also rules out the possibility that the vagaries of institutional memory and longevity explain this pattern.

⁵⁸ Suger, *Ouvres*, ii, no. 16; *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, ed. and transl. Julian Haseldine (Oxford, 2001), no. 71; *Liber Epistularum Guidonis de Basochis*, ed. Herbert Adolfsson (Stockholm, 1969), no. 16.

⁵⁹ Fulbert of Chartres, *Letters*, no. 72; Yves de Chartres, *Correspondance*, no. 49; *Geoffrey de Vendôme: Oeuvres*, ed. and transl. Geneviève Giordanengo (Turnhout, 1996), nos. 4, 57, 86, 130, 141.

⁶⁰ *Letters of Lanfranc*, nos. 9 and 10. See also: Martin Brett, 'Canterbury's perspective on church reform and Ireland, 1070-1115', in: *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century: Reform and Renewal*, ed. Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (Dublin, 2006), 13-35.

weight of his office to ensure the moral well-being of his flock. He would be held accountable for their transgressions as if they had been his own.

Providing counsel highlighted the standing of the person giving it. Conversely, seeking out, rather than merely tolerating, advice provided a means for rulers to demonstrate compliance with abstract moral norms. Kings were meant to surround themselves with morally upright clerics. That they did not always do so, made it all the more important that they showed willingness to heed those they did allow into their presence. We thus find frequent references in narrative sources to clerics being held in high esteem, and being promoted or listened to because of their moral counsel.⁶¹ We have also seen that such advice would normally have been provided in person. This makes letters like the one sent by Bishop Oliba of Vic to King Sancho of Navarre in May 1023 all the more significant.⁶²

Oliba emphasised that he met the king's wish to have the royal gaze directed towards useful lessons from the laws and prophets and other divine scriptures.⁶³ Most of those lessons concerned sexual matters: the degrees of interrelationship within which marriage was prohibited in the Old Testament, the damnation heaped on lust and fornication in the New Testament, and canon law provisions against incest. Oliba urged the king to shun temptation, and thus avoid the everlasting punishment awaiting those who succumbed to

⁶¹ Walter Daniel, *Vita Ailredi Abbatis Rievall'*. *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, ed. and transl. Maurice Powicke (London, 1950; repr. Oxford 1978), 3-4; *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, ed. M. Cl. Gertz, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1908-12), 15; Lampert von Hersfeld, *Das Leben des Heiligen Lullus*, ed. and trans. Michael Fleck (Marburg, 2007), 50-3; Gerhard von Augsburg, *Vita Sancti Uodalrici. Die älteste Lebensbeschreibung des heiligen Ulrich*, ed. and trans. Walter Berschin and Angelika Häse (Heidelberg, 1993), 157-9.

⁶² *Diplomatari i Escrits Literaris de l'Abbat i Bisbe Oliba*, ed. Eduard Junyent i Subirà and Anscari M. Mundó (Barcelona, 1992), 327-31. I am grateful to Adam Kosto for this reference. On Oliba: José Enrique Ruiz-Domènec, 'El abad Oliba: un hombre de paz en tiempos de guerra', *Ante el Milenario del Reinado de Sancho el Mayor. Un rey Navarro para España y Europa*, (Pamplona, 2004), 173-96; Jeffrey A. Bowman, 'Councils, memory and mills: the early development of the Peace of God in Catalonia', *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999), 99-129. See also *Briefe des Abtes Bern*, no. 26.

⁶³ *Diplomatari i Escrits*, 328.

carnal desires. Neither peace nor justice would spring from an uncanonical marriage, or from one entered into lustfully. Moreover, by doing right Sancho would gain divine protection, and overcome his foes. Oliba concluded by pointing out that, in ancient times, rightful laws had been promulgated and canons been instituted by the holy fathers. Now, by contrast, the king's lands were barren. Three evils in particular were prevalent: incestuous marriages, drunkenness, and auguries. The bishop therefore requested the king as his lord, and admonished him as a father would a son, to end these abuses. Sancho should not allow evil men to violate just laws and holy canons, but protect widows and orphans, and dispose justly of the affairs of the people that had been given into his care. Oliba, meanwhile, would pray daily for the king's salvation, and come to Sancho's service whenever asked to do so.⁶⁴

Oliba gave the king precisely what he claimed that Sancho had wanted: a meditation on moral reform, embedded in remonstrance, admonition, and a call on the king to mend both his ways and those of his people. As such, the bishop conformed to a general pattern of how written advice was delivered to kings. That he did so explicitly at Sancho's behest, makes his all the more important a piece of evidence. It certainly suggests that a clerical pose of reprimand was not only tolerated, but at times even embraced by rulers. Of course, it helped that Oliba followed the same path as outlined by Walo and Cicero. He mixed remonstrance with consolation: by doing God's bidding, Sancho would not only ensure his own salvation, but also gain divine backing in taking on those resisting his efforts. The bishop's protestations of loyalty, and a willingness to come to the king's aid, may have served a similar function. Still, admonishing rulers was what leading clerics did, and what wise and prudent monarchs encouraged them to do.

Conclusion

The ideal of clerical (and, especially, episcopal) *admonitio* was invoked almost as a matter of course by letter writers across Europe. This comes as no surprise. *Admonitio* was, after all, deeply rooted in Biblical, Classical and patristic precedent. When Peter of

⁶⁴ *Diplomatari i Escrits*, 327-31.

Blois exhorted Henry II about ensuring that his son be trained in the laws of God as well as those of men, or when Bruno of Querfurt implored Emperor Henry to cease seeking to conquer the Poles, both engaged in pastoral care: they warned the mighty of the consequences they would face if they failed to pursue a course pleasing to God. Yet in their protestations of loyalty, and in their praise for the monarch, they also abided by the rules of friendship: their proximity to the ruler, respectively as head of the Norman Church and a frequent recipient of imperial largesse, obliged them to exhort and remonstrate, should the need arise. Likewise, when Lanfranc warned the kings of Munster and Dublin about their people's marriage customs, or when Oliba exhorted King Sancho to end incest, auguries and drunkenness, they obeyed a moral imperative rooted in both the Old Testament and Gregory's concept of the spiritual rector. If they merely stood by while their flock risked God's wrath in both this world and the next, they would be as guilty as the sinners they had failed to admonish and warn.

In most cases, furthermore, rehearsing the duties of kingship highlighted both the status of a letter's recipient, and the moral probity of its sender. By and large, only kings were worthy of such admonition, and only clerics of good repute would offer it. Equally, *admonitio* underscored a monarch's religious fervour: he would follow in the footsteps David and Hezekiah, not those of Saul and Ahab. Of course, this also required that remonstration be delivered in the manner recommended by Cicero and Walo. Humour and irony, playfulness and courtliness, even praise and flattery were essential not only for remonstration to be heeded, but also for it to be possible.⁶⁵ There was nothing

⁶⁵ See, for especially striking examples, *Vita Meinweri episcopi Patherbrunensis – Das Leben Bischof Meinwerks von Paderborn*, ed. and transl. Guido M. Berndt (Munich, 2009), 83-7; Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis. The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, eds. and trans. Decima L. Douie and David Hugh Farmer, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1961-85), i.112-9, ii.99-103. See generally: Gerd Althoff and Christel Meier, *Ironie im Mittelalter. Hermeneutik – Dichtung – Politik* (Darmstadt, 2011); Katrin Beyer, 'Wit and irony - rhetorical strategies and their performance in political and learned communication in England (c. 1066-1259)', in: *Networks of Learning. Perspectives on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c. 1000-1200*, ed. Sita Steckel, Niels Gaul, and Michael Grünbart (Berlin, 2015); eadem, *Witz und Ironie in der politischen Kultur Englands im Hochmittelalter: Interaktionen und Imaginationen* (Stuttgart, 2012).

controversial about *admonitio*, because – in the majority of cases – it referred to fundamental principles, not concrete grievances.

More importantly still, the rhetoric of *admonitio* may have provided the means with which to formulate norms of ideal clerical and royal conduct. But it could do so only because the premise was accepted or even embraced by secular rulers. They were, after all, the ones who appointed Lanfranc, Oliba and Rotrou to their sees, and who extended their patronage to Stephen of Tournai, Bern of Reichenau, and Bruno of Querfurt. The rhetoric was a pervasive, and could be employed as freely as it was, because, in all likelihood, *admonitio* was not only what a prelate's peers and entourage expected him to offer, but also the laymen he addressed. We do, of course, face the problem of finding out what precisely kings did in fact think about the matter. Still, when, in the spring of 1152, Frederick Barbarossa announced his election as king of the Romans to Pope Eugene III, he invoked familiar principles: kingship was a duty entrusted by God, and involved adorning one's realm with good morals and laws as much as defending it with arms. The king also recounted the promises made during his coronation: he would show concern for the honour of the Roman Church, offer protection to all its members, and justice to widows and orphans and the people at large. And he would always heed the advice of his prelates.⁶⁶ That the norms invoked were also deeply engrained in the coronation liturgy,⁶⁷ and that they were referenced even in the few surviving letters to kings by lay communities and princes,⁶⁸ only helps to reinforce the basic point: one of the reasons why *admonitio* caused so little offence was that, in rehearsing abstract principles of royal power, most of these letters simply reiterated norms and ideals that were wholly uncontroversial.

⁶⁶ *Wibald Briefbuch*, no. 349. Of course, Frederick's chancery echoed the papal rhetoric of good kingship. See, for instance, *Calixti II Epistolae*, PL 163, nos. 146, 156; *Paschali II Epistolae*, PL 163, no. 497; *Honorii II Epistolae*, PL 166, no. 68; *Innocentii II Epistolae*, PL 179, nos. 250, 416, 432; *Eugenii III Epistolae*, PL 180, no. 254; *Alexandri III Epistolae*, PL 196, nos. 29, 204, 1424, 1447; *Epistolae Pontificum Romanorum Ineditae*, ed. Samuel Loewenfeld (Leipzig, 1885), no. 421.

⁶⁷ The literature is vast. A good overview is provided by *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. Janos M. Bak (Berkeley, 1992).

⁶⁸ *Wibald Briefbuch*, nos. 197-9 (citizens of Rome to Conrad III), 314-5 (claimants to the Danish royal throne to Conrad III).

This did not, of course, mean that *admonitio* was practised in identical fashion across the Latin west, or even within just one realm, or that it could not be used to offer criticism of a king. There were profound differences, for instance, in how and over what issues English and German bishops remonstrated with their rulers.⁶⁹ Even in the sample discussed here, the differences between Bern of Reichenau (or, for that matter Oliba of Vic) and Peter of Blois cannot be explained by chronological distance, institutional background or educational context alone. Rather, they also point to distinct regnal cultures of advice. Even then, though, Bishop Gilbert Foliot of London, one of Thomas Becket's most outspoken critics, reprimanded the archbishop not because Thomas reproached the king, but because of how he did it.⁷⁰ Furthermore, many of the ideals espoused lacked specificity. Their concrete meaning had to be negotiated, and each interpretation reflected the needs and challenges of a given moment, and of a particular constellation of individuals, internal and external pressures, intellectual, cultural and social factors, and so on. How and how far abstract principles were to be translated into concrete political action, remained historically contingent. When, in 1166, Thomas Becket invoked Ezekiel and Gregory the Great to chastise Henry II, and when he warned of the fate that had befallen those kings of Israel who failed to heed the warnings of God's prophets,⁷¹ then the context of his writing conveyed a far sharper criticism of the king than Peter of Blois' letter about the requirements for the education of Henry's heir, sent just a few years later, and drawing on much the same imagery. Yet both Thomas and Peter operated within and employed the conventions of a shared framework of episcopal *admonitio*. What matters is therefore not that *admonitio* could differ over time or between regions and individuals, but that it was deeply engrained, universally accepted, and widely practised.⁷²

⁶⁹ This will be treated in far greater detail in Ryan Kemp's forthcoming study on the subject. Until then, see Weiler, 'Bishops and kings', 173-9.

⁷⁰ *Letters Gilbert Foliot*, no. 170. Morey and Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot*, 166-87.

⁷¹ *Correspondence Becket*, no. 68. My reading follows Timothy Reuter, 'Velle sibi fieri in forma hac: symbolic acts in the Becket dispute', in his *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, ed. Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge, 2006), 167-190.

⁷² It was this norm, in turn, that enabled Henry II to embrace the cult of Becket with such ease: Kay B. Slocum, 'Angevin marriage diplomacy and the early dissemination of the

This has more far-reaching implications. Most significantly perhaps, it has become abundantly clear that admonition was not by definition anti-royal. This is worth keeping in mind when engaging, for instance, with works of Biblical exegesis, where, as Philippe Buc has shown, we can find an increasing emphasis from the later twelfth century on questions of oversight, and the inherent sinfulness of the royal office.⁷³ The same goes for the reimagining in historical writing of an idealised past, when royal power was guided and overseen by a ruler's leading subjects;⁷⁴ or the attempts by prelates like Adolph of Cologne and Augustine of Nidaros either to enshrine metropolitan oversight of royal actions, or to derive from it a heightened role in choosing the king.⁷⁵ This is not to deny that something new had been proposed in each instance. There was a big difference between offering moral admonition, and deriving from one's admonitory duties the right to oversee day-to-day royal governance. Equally, historical contingency mattered. In Norway, the fact that Magnus Erlingsson was under age, and that he was the first claimant to the throne not himself the son of a king, required additional means of legitimation. Enshrining archiepiscopal *admonitio* in a formal royal charter may well have been a means to that particular end. Likewise, the shift in Biblical exegesis, or the refashioning of an idealised past, reflect broader shifts towards an accountability of office, rather than an accountability of virtue, so representative of the later twelfth century.⁷⁶ But then we will only be able to appreciate the true level of innovation, to distinguish the merely commonplace from the truly radical, and to appreciate why the

cult of Thomas Becket', *Medieval Perspectives* 14 (1999), 214-28; *The Cult of Thomas Becket in the Plantagenet World*, ed. Paul Webster and Marie-Pierre Gelin (Woodbridge, 2016), especially the essays by Bowie, Cerda and Webster.

⁷³ Philippe Buc, *L'Ambiguïté du Livre. Prince, pouvoir, et people dans les commentaires de la Bible au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1994), 246-59.

⁷⁴ Björn Weiler, 'Tales of first kings and the culture of kingship in the west, c. 1050-1200', *Viator* 46:2 (2015), 101-28, at 124-8.

⁷⁵ Franz-Reiner Erkens, *Der Erzbischof von Köln und die deutsche Königswahl* (Siegburg 1987), 17-40; *Latinske Dokument til Norsk Historie fram til År 1204*, ed. Eirik Vandvik (Oslo, 1959), nos. 9-10.

⁷⁶ As proposed by Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century. Power, lordship, and the origins of European government* (Princeton, 2009), which does, however, downplay precisely the established cultural framework and the particular role of the clergy that this article has highlighted.

seemingly revolutionary came to pass without much turmoil and debate, if we keep in mind the well-established, pervasive, and multi-faceted legacy of episcopal *admonitio*, and its centrality to the office and self-representation of prelates, that this article has sought to highlight.