317 King (*Rex*)

Since wisdom says, Prov. 9[:15]: “By me kings reign.” It can happen that some preside without wisdom, but without wisdom they do not reign. For as it is evident through the Philosopher, book 8 of the *Ethics*,[[1]](#endnote-1) and Seneca in the book *De Clemencia*,[[2]](#endnote-2) to Nero, he who presides to the utility of his subjects, a king is said to preside, the tyrant only for his own utility. About which matters Osee 8[:4]: “They have reigned, but not by me: they have been princes, and I knew not,” that is I did not approve. So Roboam son of Solomon ruled, 3 Kings. 12[:8], he did not lose the kingdom for the greater part.

Wherefore Chrysostom says, *Super Mattheum*, the first homily,[[3]](#endnote-3) that kings who please God, they reign richly and are prosperous. Who hold themselves evilly, quickly they pass and evilly finish, and God humiliates them before men. Wherefore here it is to be noted that today one goes according to his earthly appetite for honor, as formerly the first of the kings of Israel King Saul fled when he lamented at the kingdom of David. He permitted that Solomon might reign. He sought that Roboam might reign. He fought that he might reign over the lower orders and the beasts over the others, and the eagles over the birds,[[4]](#endnote-4) but it is otherwise among the earthly ones that are governed. For the superior celestial beings reigned over the inferior ones for their own utility. So those who preside on earthly matters and regulate by wisdom merit to be called celestial about which, Jer. 33[:12]. The king will reign and will be wise, who in truth preside for their own profit, Job 34[:30]: “Who makes a man that is a hypocrite to reign for the sins of the people.” Wherefore note what Isidore says, *Etymologiae,* book 9, c. 31,[[5]](#endnote-5) kings (*reges*) are from ruling (*regendo*) while they are doing so, just as a priest (*sacerdos*) is from sanctifying (*sanctificando*). However, he does not reign who does not correct. By doing so rightly he holds the name of king, in sinning he loses it. Wherefore according to this one in that place in ancient times there was a proverb: You will be a king if you do right, if you do not do right, you will not be a king.

¶ Again in that same place,[[6]](#endnote-6) royal virtues are two, justice and piety, but the second is praised more than the first by itself. Therefore,[[7]](#endnote-7) kings among the Greeks are called *basileis*, because like bases they support the people. Wherefore also bases in scriptures have crowns. For however much more one puts himself forth, so much greater a weight of labor he is burdened with. And it is to be known that just as in every operation naturally the members follow the head, and where the head enters the members follow. So according to Virgil,[[8]](#endnote-8) the entire world composes itself after the example of the king. Wherefore Eccle. 10[:17]: “Blessed is the land, whose king is noble.” And Matt. the second chapter [2:3]: “King Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”

¶ Again, it is to be noted that Nimrod is reported to have reigned first, Gen. 10[:10]. And that one acquired the kingdom through injustice and oppression. Wherefore it is truly spoken what Augustine says, *De civitate*, c. 4,[[9]](#endnote-9) because great kingdoms are nothing but thefts. And Wis. 6,[[10]](#endnote-10) a foolish king sitting on his throne is like a monkey on the roof. For the monkey although he is a small animal, however he seeks the whole building. So, the foolish king shakes his kingdom by conducting himself badly.

¶ Again, kings should have three qualities: fear because of power, honor because of dignity, and love because of goodness. Concerning the first, Jer. [10:7]: “Who shall fear you, O king of nations,” as if saying there is none who ought to fear. Kings are accustomed to being feared when they serve justice well. But no one served justice more fruitfully than our king God in punishing the first angel and first man by expelling them from their seats and places. Just as he himself did not spare his entourage and attendants, how could he spare his enemies, Isai. 32[:1]: “Behold a king shall reign, and princes shall rule in judgment,” as if saying, there will not be any one of his who assents to his judgment. But it is another thing when in the courts of the kingdoms of the world where sometimes their counselors hold back and temper their action. But not so concerning our king, because in judging he will be so terrifying that sinners wish to enter caves if they could, but now man can appeal to the court of mercy, but then not, Prov. 20[:28]: “Mercy and truth preserve the king.” But then that is verified of the Psal. [74:3]: “When I shall take a time, I will judge justices.”

¶ Second, a king is to be honored because of dignity. If earthly kings, who are moderately dignified relatively, are commanded to be honored among us, 1 Pet. 2[:17]: “Honor the king.” However much more the king of kings and the lord of lords. We honor this one if we serve his precepts. Earthly men fear to stir up the statues of the kings, especially when a penalty is appointed for all the good ones or the mutilation of a member. But the statues of Christ are paid little attention which threaten under penalty of body and soul, Deut. 8[:11]: “Take heed, and beware lest at any time thou forget the Lord,” etc. Dan. 6[:15]: “No decree which the king has made, may be altered.”

¶ Again, we honor the king by offering precious gifts, as is evident for the three Magi, Matt. 2[:1]. But something small or nothing they give to God, hardly slices of bread and cheese, but from the soul perhaps less, because they give their youth to sin, but the dung of old age. Hardly do they give their lame sons to God or the monastery. When however, it is said, 1 Kings 9[:20]: “And for whom shall be all the best things of Israel? Shall they not be for you,” that is, the king.

¶ Third, the king is to be loved because of goodness, but the greatest goodness shines in Christ the king, who exercised forbearance when we are humiliated. Foolish is the thief if by humiliating himself he can escape unless he does this, 3 Kings 20{:31]: “we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful: so, let us put sackcloth on our loins,” etc.

1. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 8.10 1160a36-1160b11 (Barnes 2:1834): The deviation from monarchy is tyrany; for both are forms of one-man rule, but there is the greatest difference between them; the tyrant looks to his own advantage, the king to that of his subjects. For a man is not a king unless he is sufficient to himself and excels his subjects in all good things; and such a man needs nothing further; therefore he will not look to his own interests but to those of his subjects; for a king who is not like that would be a mere titular king. Now tyranny is the very contrary of this; the tyrant pursues his own good. And it is clearer in the case of tyranny that it is the worst deviation-form; but it is the contrary of the best that is worst. Monarchy passes over into tyranny; for tyranny is the evil form of one-man rule and the bad king becomes a tyrant. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Seneca, *De Clementia* 11.4 (LCL 214: 390-391): Quid interest inter tyrannum ac regem (species enim ipsa fortunae ac licentia par est), nisi quod tyranni in voluptatem saeviunt, reges non nisi ex causa ac necessitate?

What difference is there between a tyrant and a king (for they are alike in the mere outward show of fortune and extent of power), except that tyrants are cruel to serve their pleasure, kings only for a reason and by necessity? [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* homilia 1 ex cap. 1 (PG 56:629): Hoc autem in fine notandum est, quod quicumque regum placuerunt Deo, diutius regnaverunt, et inimicos eorum humiliavit Deus sub manibus eorum: quotquot autem maligne gesserunt, velociter et a regno et a vita cum amara morte praecisi sunt, et humiliavit eo Deus sub inimics eorum. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 10.3.6 (LCL 353:294-295): Ex his quas novimus aquilae maximus honos, maxima et vis.

Of the birds known to us the eagle is the most honourable and also the strongest. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Isidore, *Etymologiarum* 9.3.4 (PL 82:342): Reges a regendo vocati, sicut enim sacerdos a sanctificando, ita et rex a regendo; non autem regit, qui non corrigit. Recte igitur faciendo regis nomen tenetur, peccando amittitur. Unde et apud veteres [Col.0342B] tale erat proverbium. Rex eris si recte facies, si non facias, non eris. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Isidore, Etymologiarum 9.3.5 (PL 82:342): Regiae virtutes praecipuae duae, justitia et pietas, plus autem in regibus laudatur pietas; nam justitia per se severa est. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Isidore, Etymologiarum 9.3.18 (PL 82:344): Reges autem ob hanc causam apud Graecos Βασιλεῖς vocantur, quod tanquam bases populum sustinent; unde et bases coronas habent. Quanto enim quisque magis praeponitur, tanto amplius pondere laborum gravatur. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Virgil, cf. Claudian, *Panegyric on the Fourth Consulship of the Emperor Honorius* 296-302 (LCL 135:308-309): cum viderit ipsum auctorem parere sibi. componitur orbis regis ad exemplum, nec sic inflectere sensus humanos edicta valent quam vita regentis: mobile mutatur semper cum principe vulgus.

when it has seen their author obedient to his own laws. The world shapes itself after its ruler’s pattern, nor can edicts sway men’s minds so much as their monarch’s life; the unstable crowd ever changes along with the prince. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 4.4 (PL 41:115): Remota itaque justitia, quid sunt regna, nisi magna latrocinia? quia et ipsa latrocinia quid sunt, nisi parva regna? [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Sapientia 6, cf. Bernard, *De consideratione ad Eugenium* 2.7.15 (PL 182:750): Simia in tecto, rex fatuus in solio sedens. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)