

Epistle from an anonymous nobleman to Queen Ermengard

(ca. 840–843)

[ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH, *Epistolae* (Hannover, 1898–1899), 5:343–44, n° 27. I follow the translation of “*iustitia*” suggested by Janet L. Nelson, “The Search for Peace in a Time of War: The Carolingian Brüderkrieg, 840–843,” in Joahannes Fried, ed., *Träger und Instrumentarien des Friedens im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen, 1996), 102–4.]

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Janet Nelson has argued, by means of circumstantial evidence, that the author should be identified as Adalhard the Seneschal: See J. L. Nelson, “The Search for Peace in a Time of War: The Carolingian Brüderkrieg, 840–843,” 102–4; eadem, “Kings with Justice, Kings without Justice: An Early Medieval Paradox,” in *La Giustizia nell’alto Medioevo (Secolo IX–XI)*, *Settimane di studio*: 44, 2 (Spoleto, 1997), 805; eadem, *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992), 70 n. 77; eadem, “Charles le Chauve et les utilisations du savoir,” in D. Iogna-Prat, C. Jeudy, G. Lobrichon, eds., *L’École carolingienne d’Auxerre: De Murethach à Remi 830–908* (Paris, 1989), 44.

The letter survives solely in the tenth-century manuscript containing the letters of Einhard: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Lat. 11379, fol. 17r–17v. See John J. Contreni, “The *Laon Formulary* and the Cathedral School of Laon at the Beginning of the Tenth Century,” in idem, *Learning and Culture in Carolingian Europe: Letters, Numbers, Exegesis, and Manuscripts* (Farnham, 2011), X (= 1–13).

I received the letter of your sublimity having been conveyed to me, which seemed pleasantly filled with your kind of reports, and I read it over, and I decided to respond to a few things. You [Queen Ermengard] said that the unexpected report had reached you, namely that I was trying to disturb the

peace of the Church and to overthrow fraternal concord; and you ascribed this work to demons.

5 Demons, indeed, as is most obvious, take pleasure in dissension and the disturbing of good men, and are delighted by discord. And it is also true that whoever, stimulated by the zeal of malice, disturbs the peace-abiding Church by impious efforts, and desires the separation of true fraternity, is made a partner of demons, the collaboration of which may the mercy of the Lord deign me worthy of immunity from forever. For he who seeks only his own “rights” (*iustitia*) does not desire universal discord. And therefore
10 I do the work of demons not at all, since I seek not iniquity (*iniquitas*) but rather equity (*aequitas*) and “lawful rights” (*iustitia*). For if reason is considered, a man more certainly ought to be said and believed to be a partner of demons, who values iniquity (*iniquitas*) and renders injustice, and always puts forth discord to equity (*aequitas*), and never desists from this intention, just as he [the slanderer] is who incites your lord [Lothar] so that [Lothar] may take action in such a manner against me.

15 For if there were a memory of good deeds, and times past are remembered, you will discover me more frequently fighting for your lord [Lothar], so that he might have peace and concord, and thereby calling forth the malice of many [men] onto me, which became known in the time of blessed memory of the Lord Emperor [Louis the Pious], so that I incurred his [Louis the Pious’] offense because of [that slanderer], and nearly all the older men of the Franks were indignant against me. And after [Louis the
20 Pious’] death, how many times I brought myself forward for [Lothar’s] use, you can remember if you wish. For as far as I was concerned, I worked always for this, so that [the sons of Louis] might be made concordant among one another. And my lord [Charles] and his faithful men are still striving for [peace], and want to continue doing so, if only things are done correctly on [Lothar’s] side. But my reward for loving peace has been just the opposite: I who worked hard for others’ “rights” have lost my own, and
25 because I simply seek to attain them, I am called an imitator of demons. I am only human, like everyone else: I love those who do right by me, and I withdraw from those who do everything they can to oppose me. I have been zealous regarding their peace, so that I might be better off rather than worse off because of this. But therefore some people think I am unfaithful to your lord because I have not abandoned my lord, nor subjected myself to him [Lothar]. But if I were to [abandon my lord] just for the sake of some
30 fleeting material gain, I would thereafter never be acceptable either to him [Lothar] or to any right-thinking man.

As for the conflict between those kings: much as I hate to say this, they will remain at odds with each other as long as they pay attention to infantile advice. Maybe (though I hope not) they will be returned to a belated peace by the power and energy of those wise and strong foreign enemies, who surround us on all sides.

That which you added, [namely] that I had decided to go to a certain holy place and tried to take away from their “rights,” I do not sufficiently understand what you wish to say. For I do not remember that I ever did this, since through the clemency of the Lord and the mercy of my lord [Charles] I have such an abundance of things, that it is not necessary to remove anything unjustly from holy places. Therefore, you can believe so many injurious and certainly false things about me by those who you well believe, who ought to say true things to you.

But you said in addition that I had held your friendship, as long as you felt that my soul was benevolent towards you: you know, most graceful highness, that your friendship was always esteemed by me, but by that which I now offend [your friendship] I do not know. And although a certain unexpected and sudden change may have disturbed you, nevertheless, I will proceed with things once begun in the most willing faith. However, I implore earnestly your favor—that after repelling charges of tumultuous indignation from your soul and withdrawing from the adulations of false men, you throw open the beautiful and peaceful gate of your heart, and call me back within that most secure harbor by the customary gentleness of [your] mind from which I have been expelled, so that, without any anxiety of doubt, just as I was up to this time, I might continue to be your faithful man. For if I will have learned something good afterwards, then the more useful and faithful I will be to you, and the greater I will have advanced in the “study of wisdom.” Yet God alone knows by what purity of mind and with what devotion of the heart I was and am and desire always to be your faithful man.