

The bishops of Lotharingia write to the bishops of West Francia

Edition: [https://www.dmg.de/mgh_conc_4/index.htm#page/\(198\)/mode/1up](https://www.dmg.de/mgh_conc_4/index.htm#page/(198)/mode/1up)

Manuscript: Rome, Bibliotheca Vallicelliana I 76, fol. 25v (a copy of Adventius of Metz's letterbook)

The letter is undated but it is often interpreted as a response to the alliance between his uncles which was confirmed in February 865; some historians have preferred a slightly later date, seeing it as a response to another meeting between Louis and Charles in 867. But since the letter does not refer to Louis at all, only Charles, neither of these datings are definitive, and it is safest simply to place the letter in the latter part of Lothar's reign.

Draft translation by Charles West, Jan 2021.

To the most holy and venerable brothers in Christ, the fellow bishops dwelling in the kingdom of the most outstanding ruler Charles, the unanimous council of bishops dwelling in the kingdom of the glorious king Lothar sends greetings and plentiful blessings in the grace of our Saviour.

Your venerable Fraternity knows how in recent years, commotions of both inward and external discord have grown in this kingdom, and the whole state of our republic [*res publica*] and all peace and safety have fallen almost into ruin. Everywhere grieving and calamity, everywhere destruction and ravaging, murder and arson and innumerable kinds of wickedness grow up, on account of dissension and most unjust ambition, and on account of certain whisperers and inventors of wickednesses, burning with the flames of greed and the spurs of jealousy.

But the Lord has taken pity on the urgent prayers of pious devotion addressed to Him, and on the groaning prayers of those who are suffering. And He has converted the shadows of affliction into the light as it were of an adopted serenity. What should we repay to the Lord for such a beneficence of mercy if not worthy thanks, beseeching His inestimable clemency that He will not permit the peace and concord He has allowed to flower a little in His people to dry up, so that He may lead His chosen people through this transitory peace to the joys of eternal peace? We should pray even that the enemies of peace and those who attack Christian concord and security may turn back from the traps of the devil, and recognise the path of peace, and hold firmly to it.

We have heard that there are some in your regions who are trying to persuade your ruler that he should in some way acquire the kingdom of our king, and should expel our ruler from his inherited kingdom, as if he is despised and abandoned by his people. In this way, perfidious and malign people wanted to pretend about your king Charles that even his bishops wished to desert him and to expel him from the kingdom. But 'the vain voice lied to itself' [Ps.26:12]. For the outstanding ruler was aided by the Omnipotent and helped by faithful followers, and not only did he not lose his kingdom but he repelled his enemies by the judgement of God, and made them flee, full of confusion.¹

We declare that we are and wish to remain loyal to our king, to whom we promised constant loyalty when he was raised to kingship from his father's hand. He has indeed erred because of weakness and youth, which often happens to men of his age, and he desires to improve all this with the best advice, as we trust. And we would prefer to keep and have him as our ruler, once he is corrected and guided, than to lose or desert him. And if there are some people who are deceived by fraud or disloyalty or greed, and who are thinking about or planning harm to their lord, it is not fitting for you 'be yoked with the unfaithful' [2 Cor. 6:14]. Are all the statutes, agreements and oaths between the rulers which have been confirmed so many times to be treated as nothing? May it not be, may it not be that we should give such great offence before God and His saints and before the whole catholic church, that we should give such joy to the angels of Satan.

¹ This is a reference to 858, when the kingdom of Charles was invaded by Louis the German.

We cannot therefore break the oaths of faith and of the Christian sacrament taken to our lord and king, lest we shall pay an eternal penalty with the world. Especially since this king, seduced for a while by the instability of adolescence and the cunning of men, is now turned to better things, and hurries with the Lord's aid to mould himself wholly according to episcopal decrees and healthy advice, and the counsel of good men. So, having hope in divine mercy because of the auspice of such devotion, and knowing very well what He can implement in this young man who is now working to wish well [*bene velle*], we unanimously admonish the reverence of Your Sanctity and beseech in agreement that you should with all your authority notify and correct those who are trying to sow scandals and the seeds of discord in the people of God. Remember, lord brothers, how we were once ready to go forth with you against all evils, and to swiftly carry out whatever you wished to begin.

We do not wish it to be hidden to your Presence that whoever is an inciter of wickednesses, whoever is a sower of discord, whoever is a disrupter of ecclesiastical concord, whoever finally tries to perturb the little peace preserved by the Lord's piety in these parts of the kingdom: he will be subjected to the terrible shame of anathema and will be 'wrapped in the robes of confusion' [Ps. 108], and 'his days will be shortened' [Ps. 88], and he will not escape eternal woe, unless he very quickly amends himself with worthy satisfaction.

It seems good to us, most loved brothers, that we should in no way hide all of this nor be silent. Rather, relying on the inseparable and ineluctable sacerdotal authority through which we received the power of binding and releasing from the greatest priest the lord Christ, we should anticipate the wicked intentions of certain people, and should resist their wicked wishes and evil efforts with all our power, so that they should find nothing at all in us other than one heart and one mind. Thus the wicked men will realise that they are less able to carry out the evils which they are preparing, because they recognise that we are not favouring them in any illicit business. Alas! Why does the wretched boldness of men, since it is not punished immediately, raise up against itself the dispositions and orders of the Almighty, nor realise that all power in heaven and on earth comes from Him and through Him and in Him, whose pre-knowledge and pre-destination allows no mortal nor even the whole world to change?²

And now, dearest ones, we all unanimously and most devotedly beseech the clemency of the Most High for the peace of the church and for the inviolate concord of our kings, that the most noble rulers should not be deceived by the advice of evil-wishers. May it not happen that they should stray from the mutual association and love and from the bond of kinship, as a result of which evils would grow far and wide, indeed everywhere. But with God's mercy, let there be a peaceful concord between them, and let what is harmful vanish, and all good things follow. May He deign to bestow this, Who lives and reigns in the Trinity as the almighty God, for ever and ever, Amen.

² A reference to the pre-destination debates.