

Fulbert of Chartres, On Feudal Obligations, 1020

Fulbert of Chartres (c. 960–1028) was one of the greatest scholars of his time. Thought to be of humble origins, Fulbert was able to receive an education alongside a future French king, Robert the Pious. It is unclear how he came by this education, but due to this and his connection to the king, he eventually became Bishop of Chartres, France, home to an important cathedral. Fulbert rebuilt the cathedral to greater glory after a massive fire (to which he refers in the text). Fulbert grew the school in Chartres into a significant center of learning.

Source: *Recueil des Hist. des Gaules et de la France*, trans. E. P. Cheyney in University of Pennsylvania Translations and Reprints (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1898), vol 4, no, 3, pp. 23–24.

Mutual Duties of Vassals and Lords

To William most glorious duke of the Aquitanians, bishop Fulbert the favor of his prayers.

Asked to write something concerning the form of fealty, I have noted briefly for you on the authority of the books the things which follow. He who swears fealty to his lord ought always to have these six things in memory; what is harmless, safe, honorable, useful, easy, practicable. Harmless, that is to say that he should not be injurious to his lord in his body; safe, that he should not be injurious to him in his secrets or in the defenses through which he is able to be secure; honorable, that he should not be injurious to him in his justice or in other matters that pertain to his honor; useful, that he should not be injurious to him in his possessions; easy or practicable, that that good which his lord is

able to do easily, he make not difficult, nor that which is practicable he make impossible to him.

However, that the faithful vassal should avoid these injuries is proper, but not for this does he deserve his holding; for it is not sufficient to abstain from evil, unless what is good is done also. It remains, therefore, that in the same six things mentioned above he should faithfully counsel and aid his lord, if he wishes to be looked upon as worthy of his benefice and to be safe concerning the fealty which he has sworn.

The lord also ought to act toward his faithful vassal reciprocally in all these things. And if he does not do this he will be justly considered guilty of bad faith, just as the former, if he should be detected in the avoidance of or the doing of or the consenting to them, would be perfidious and perjured.

I would have written to you at greater length, if I had not been occupied with many other things, including the rebuilding of our city and church which was lately entirely consumed in a great fire; from which loss though we could not for a while be diverted, yet by the hope of the comfort of God and of you we breathe again.

QUESTIONS

1. According to Fulbert, what qualities do feudal servants owe their lords and why?

How is this system mutually beneficial?

2. How might a feudal system benefit someone like the Bishop of Chartres?