



Traditi Humilitate

On His Program For The Pontificate

Encyclical Of Pope Pius VIII

May 24, 1829

To Our Venerable Brothers, Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, and Bishops.

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

According to the custom of Our ancestors, We are about to assume Our pontificate in the church of the Lateran. This office has been granted to Us, even though We are humble and unworthy. We open Our heart with joy to you, venerable brothers, whom God has given to Us as helpers in the conduct of so great an administration. We are pleased to let you know the intimate sentiments of Our will. We also think it helpful to communicate those things from which the Christian cause may benefit. For the duty of Our office is not only to feed, rule, and direct the lambs, namely the Christian people, but also the sheep, that is the clergy.

2. We rejoice and praise Christ, who raised up shepherds for the safekeeping of His flock. These shepherds vigilantly lead their flocks so as not to lose even one of those they have received from the Father. For We know well, venerable brothers, your unshakeable faith, your zeal for religion, your sanctity of life, and your singular prudence. Co-workers such as you make Us happy and confident. This pleasant situation encourages Us when We fear because of the great responsibility of Our office, and it refreshes and strengthens Us when We feel overwhelmed by so many serious concerns. We shall not detain you with a long sermon to remind you what things are required to perform sacred duties well, what the canons prescribe lest anyone depart from vigilance over his flock, and what attention ought to be given in preparing and accepting ministers. Rather We call upon God the Savior that He may protect you with His omnipresent divinity and bless your activities and endeavors with happy success.

3. Although God may console Us with you, We are nonetheless sad. This is due to the numberless errors and the teachings of perverse doctrines which, no longer secretly and clandestinely but openly and vigorously, attack the Catholic faith. You know how evil men have raised the standard of revolt against religion through

philosophy (of which they proclaim themselves doctors) and through empty fallacies devised according to natural reason. In the first place, the Roman See is assailed and the bonds of unity are, every day, being severed. The authority of the Church is weakened and the protectors of things sacred are snatched away and held in contempt. The holy precepts are despised, the celebration of divine offices is ridiculed, and the worship of God is cursed by the sinner.[1] All things which concern religion are relegated to the fables of old women and the superstitions of priests. Truly lions have roared in Israel.[2] With tears We say: "Truly they have conspired against the Lord and against His Christ." Truly the impious have said: "Raze it, raze it down to its foundations." [3]

4. Among these heresies belongs that foul contrivance of the sophists of this age who do not admit any difference among the different professions of faith and who think that the portal of eternal salvation opens for all from any religion. They, therefore, label with the stigma of levity and stupidity those who, having abandoned the religion which they learned, embrace another of any kind, even Catholicism. This is certainly a monstrous impiety which assigns the same praise and the mark of the just and upright man to truth and to error, to virtue and to vice, to goodness and to turpitude. Indeed this deadly idea concerning the lack of difference among religions is refuted even by the light of natural reason. We are assured of this because the various religions do not often agree among themselves. If one is true, the other must be false; there can be no society of darkness with light. Against these experienced sophists the people must be taught that the profession of the Catholic faith is uniquely true, as the apostle proclaims: one Lord, one faith, one baptism.[4] Jerome used to say it this way: he who eats the lamb outside this house will perish as did those during the flood who were not with Noah in the ark.[5] Indeed, no other name than the name of Jesus is given to men, by which they may be saved.[6] He who believes shall be saved; he who does not believe shall be condemned.[7]

5. We must also be wary of those who publish the Bible with new interpretations contrary to the Church's laws. They skillfully distort the meaning by their own interpretation. They print the Bibles in the vernacular and, absorbing an incredible expense, offer them free even to the uneducated. Furthermore, the Bibles are rarely without perverse little inserts to insure that the reader imbibes their lethal poison instead of the saving water of salvation. Long ago the Apostolic See warned about this serious hazard to the faith and drew up a list of the authors of these pernicious notions. The rules of this Index were published by the Council of Trent;[8] the ordinance required that translations of the Bible into the vernacular not be permitted without the approval of the Apostolic See and further required that they be published with commentaries from the Fathers. The sacred Synod of Trent had decreed[9] in order to restrain impudent characters, that no one, relying on his own prudence in matters of faith and of conduct which concerns Christian doctrine, might twist the sacred Scriptures to his own opinion, or to an opinion contrary to that of the Church or the popes. Though such machinations against the Catholic faith had been assailed long ago by these canonical proscriptions, Our

recent predecessors made a special effort to check these spreading evils.[10] With these arms may you too strive to fight the battles of the Lord which endanger the sacred teachings, lest this deadly virus spread in your flock.

6. When this corruption has been abolished, then eradicate those secret societies of factious men who, completely opposed to God and to princes, are wholly dedicated to bringing about the fall of the Church, the destruction of kingdoms, and disorder in the whole world. Having cast off the restraints of true religion, they prepare the way for shameful crimes. Indeed, because they concealed their societies, they aroused suspicion of their evil intent. Afterwards this evil intention broke forth, about to assail the sacred and the civil orders. Hence the supreme pontiffs, Our predecessors, Clement XII, Benedict XIV, Pius VII, Leo XII,[11] repeatedly condemned with anathema that kind of secret society. Our predecessors condemned them in apostolic letters; We confirm those commands and order that they be observed exactly. In this matter We shall be diligent lest the Church and the state suffer harm from the machinations of such sects. With your help We strenuously take up the mission of destroying the strongholds which the putrid impiety of evil men sets up.

7. We want you to know of another secret society organized not so long ago for the corruption of young people who are taught in the gymnasia and the lycea. Its cunning purpose is to engage evil teachers to lead the students along the paths of Baal by teaching them un-Christian doctrines. The perpetrators know well that the students' minds and morals are molded by the precepts of the teachers. Its influence is already so persuasive that all fear of religion has been lost, all discipline of morals has been abandoned, the sanctity of pure doctrine has been contested, and the rights of the sacred and of the civil powers have been trampled upon. Nor are they ashamed of any disgraceful crime or error. We can truly say with Leo the Great that for them "Law is prevarication; religion, the devil; sacrifice, disgrace." [12] Drive these evils from your dioceses. Strive to assign not only learned, but also good men to train our youth.

8. Also watch the seminaries more diligently. The fathers of Trent made you responsible for their administration.[13] From them must come forth men well instructed both in Christian and ecclesiastical discipline and in the principles of sound doctrine. Such men may then distinguish themselves for their piety and their teaching. Thus, their ministry will be a witness, even to those outside the Church and they will be able to refute those who have strayed from the path of justice. Be very careful in choosing the seminarians since the salvation of the people principally depends on good pastors. Nothing contributes more to the ruin of souls than impious, weak, or uninformed clerics.

9. The heretics have disseminated pestilential books everywhere, by which the teachings of the impious spread, much as a cancer.[14] To counteract this most deadly pest, spare no labor. Be admonished by the words of Pius VII: "May they consider only that kind of food to be healthy to which the voice and authority of

Peter has sent them. May they choose such food and nourish themselves with it. May they judge that food from which Peter's voice calls them away to be entirely harmful and pestiferous. May they quickly shrink away from it, and never permit themselves to be caught by its appearance and perverted by its allurements. "[15]

10. We also want you to imbue your flock with reverence for the sanctity of marriage so that they may never do anything to detract from the dignity of this sacrament. They should do nothing that might be unbecoming to this spotless union nor anything that might cause doubt about the perpetuity of the bond of matrimony. This goal will be accomplished if the Christian people are accurately taught that the sacrament of matrimony ought to be governed not so much by human law as by divine law and that it ought to be counted among sacred, not earthly, concerns. Thus, it is wholly subject to the Church. Formerly marriage had no other purpose than that of bringing children into the world. But now it has been raised to the dignity of a sacrament by Christ the Lord and enriched with heavenly gifts. Now its purpose is not so much to generate offspring as to educate children for God and for religion. This increases the number of worshippers of the true divinity. It is agreed that the union of marriage signifies the perpetual and sublime union of Christ with His Church; as a result, the close union of husband and wife is a sacrament, that is, a sacred sign of the immortal love of Christ for His spouse. Therefore, teach the people what is sanctioned and what is condemned by the rules of the Church and the decrees of the Councils.[16] Also explain those things which pertain to the essence of the sacrament. Then they will be able to accomplish those things and will not dare to attempt what the Church detests. We ask this earnestly of you because of your love of religion.

11. You know now what causes Our present grief. There are also other things, no less serious, which it would take too long to recount here, but which you know well. Shall We hold back Our voice when the Christian cause is in such great need? Shall We be restrained by human arguments? Shall We suffer in silence the rending of the seamless robe of Christ the Savior, which even the soldiers who crucified Him did not dare to rend? Let it never happen that We be found lacking in zealous pastoral care for Our flock, beset as it is by serious dangers. We know you will do even more than We ask, and that you will cherish, augment, and defend the faith by means of teachings, counsel, work, and zeal.

12. With many ardent prayers We ask that, with God restoring the penitence of Israel, holy religion may flourish everywhere. We also ask that the true happiness of the people may continue undisturbed, and that God may always protect the pastor of His earthly flock and nourish him. May the powerful princes of the nations, with their generous spirits, favor Our cares and endeavors. With God's help, may they continue vigorously to promote the prosperity and safety of the Church, which is afflicted by so many evils.

13. Let us ask these things humbly of Mary, the holy Mother of God. We confess that she alone has overcome all heresies and We salute her with gratitude on this

day, the anniversary of Our predecessor, Pius VII's, restoration to the city of Rome after he had suffered many adversities. Let us ask these things of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and of his coapostle Paul. With Christ's consent, may these two apostles grant that We, firmly established on the rock of the Church's confession, suffer no disturbing circumstances. From Christ Himself We humbly ask the gifts of grace, peace, and joy for you and for the flock entrusted to you. As a pledge of Our affection We lovingly impart the apostolic benediction.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, May 24, 1829, the first year of Our pontificate.

1. Wis 1.32.
2. Jer 2.25.
3. Ps 136.7.
4. Eph 4.5.
5. Epistle to Damasus, the 37th pope.
6. Acts 4.12.
7. Mk 16.16.
8. Rule 4 of the Index, and the addition to same from the decree of the Index of 13 June 1737.
9. Session 4 on the decree concerning holy books.
10. Read, among other things, the apostolic letters of Pius VII to the archbishops of Gnesen (1 June 1816) and Mohilev (3 September 1816).
11. Clement XII, constitution In eminenti; Benedict XIV, constitution Providas; Pius VII, Constitution Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo; Leo XII, constitution Quo graviora.
12. In sermon 5 on fasting of the tenth month, chap. 4.
13. Session 25, chap. 18, on reform.
14. 2 Tm 2.17.
15. In the encyclical letter to all bishops published in Venice.
16. Read the Roman catechism for parish priests on matrimony.