



CONSTANTI HUNGARORUM

ON THE CHURCH IN HUNGARY

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on September 2, 1893.

To Our Venerable Brothers, the Primate, the Archbishops, Bishops and other Ordinaries, in Peace and Communion with the Holy See.

Venerable Brothers, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

The loyal affection and profound respect of the Hungarian people towards this Apostolic See have always evoked deep fatherly love from the Roman Pontiffs. We ourselves have frequently confirmed our personal esteem and loving care. Indeed, we did so seven years ago when Hungary celebrated the memory of an auspicious event. On that occasion we wrote to you recalling the ancestral faith of the Hungarians, their virtues, and their glorious deeds. We also counseled you on matters concerning the well-being of your people in times so hostile to the Catholic cause. For the same reason and for the same purpose, we feel constrained to write you again.

2. Certainly, because of the nature of the recent, disturbing events, Our concern demands that We earnestly exhort you and your clergy to fidelity, unity, and zeal in teaching and in admonishing opportunely your people. Other conditions among you present a new cause for anxiety to Us: We refer to the dangers that day by day are becoming a more serious threat to religion. To be sure, just as these dangers require our utmost concern and attention, they also urgently demand greater efforts from you. We are confident you will recompense fully Our counsel and expectations.

3. The general duty of Catholics to preserve the integrity of religion in their country in all vicissitudes, and to do so in a spirit of unity, becomes a serious obligation

during times of treacherous hostilities to Christian institutions. Indeed, not only is the interest of the highest good of all at stake, namely the eternal salvation of mankind, but also the protection and preservation of the very things that in civil society contribute most importantly to true peace and happiness. This was clearly the conviction of those eminent men, brilliant examples of moral fortitude, who were ready to sacrifice not only all their possessions, but their very lives for the sake of religion and the Church. Among these heroes, your Hungary has its share down the long course of your history. The fact that you have persevered steadfastly in the Catholic faith is the result of the firm determination of your people. They certainly understood perfectly that when religion is at stake, so is the glory of the name and the existence itself of their nation.

4. Their determination has nurtured generous and remarkable virtues. Even in the most critical times, their power has enabled the Hungarians to oppose the magnitude of danger with an equal magnitude of courage and constancy. Shielded, indeed, by these virtues, they resisted invincibly the repeated incursions of the Tartars and the fierce attacks of the Muslims. In this perilous struggle, they deserved all the help they received from foreign peoples, from rulers, and from the Roman pontiffs. Not only was the faith and sovereignty of the Hungarian people in jeopardy, but also the Catholic faith itself and the safety of the West. By the same means, Hungary escaped the tempests of more recent centuries that wrought such serious havoc among neighboring peoples, though even Hungary felt their violence and suffered no slight damages. Hungary, however, will survive if the Hungarians only remain loyal to their religion, learn their daily obligations, and fulfill them most faithfully.

5. Now let us turn to those matters closer to our concerns, which filled our heart with anguish when We saw them, moreover, written in the laws of Hungary. As We deplored on another occasion, "they are incompatible with the rights of the Church, restrict its capacity to act, and are detrimental to the profession of the Catholic faith." [1] There have been other evils these past years, either decreed or carried out by public authority, no less destructive to the Church and to the Catholic faith. Considering the direction in which your country is going, moreover, it is greatly to be feared that there is impending evil far more harmful to religion.

6. Consequently, be sure that you diligently do all that you can so that priests and laity understand exactly what they are allowed to do and what they must beware of lest they offend the precepts of natural and divine law. As the majority of you who have pastoral responsibility gave orders to await the judgment of the Holy See on these matters, it will be your urgent duty to exhort the same ministers of the sacred mysteries to consider it their religious duty not to depart in the least degree from the decision or regulations of the Holy See. It goes without saying, moreover, that what is forbidden for the clergy is by no means permitted the laity.

7. In other respects, to remove the source of many evils, it is of utmost importance that pastors never cease to admonish their flocks to refrain as far as possible from

entering into mixed marriages. Let the faithful correctly understand and resolutely remember that it is their duty to regard with horror such marriages, which the Church has always detested. They are to be abhorred for the reason which we emphasized in another letter, "They offer the opportunity for a forbidden sharing and participation in sacred things; they create a danger to the religion of the Catholic partner; they are an impediment to the virtuous education of children and very often cause them to become accustomed to viewing all religions as equal because they have lost the power of discriminating between the true and the false." [2]

8. There are, however, as We have warned you, still greater dangers threatening the ancestral faith of the Hungarians. The enemies of the Catholic faith are by no means concealing their intention to strive with all their most harmful weapons to accomplish the daily deterioration of the Church and the Catholic faith. We, therefore, exhort you, more urgently than ever before, to spare neither effort nor labor to ward off such peril from your flock and from your native land. It must be your primary care that all your people, strengthened by your authority and example, undertake with courage and zeal the cause of religion and always defend it firmly. Very often it happens, indeed, and we shall speak frankly, that some Catholics at the very time when they should be protecting and vindicating the rights of the Church, led by a certain appearance of human prudence, either turn away from the issue or prove themselves too timid or too submissive. It is obvious that this procedure opens the way to grave danger especially if it involves those in authority or those most influential in shaping public opinion. More than the fact that they are unfaithful to the just duty owed their office, they very often cause scandal and prevent the harmony that results in unity of thought and action. Nothing, of course, could be more welcome to the enemies of the Catholic faith than this apathy or disagreement of Catholics. All too often, by avoiding bold arguments, they allow the enemy to effect greater injustices with ease.

9. In all matters, certainly, be prudent and moderate; the Church itself in defense of the truth intends to follow a responsible mode of action. Nothing, however, is so contradictory to the laws of true prudence than to allow religion to be harassed with impunity and to endanger the moral welfare of the people.

10. Experience has truly proven that the annual meetings of Catholic men, in which under episcopal leadership common directives are discussed concerning Catholic affairs and the increase of pious activity, are wonderfully effective in strengthening unity and in arousing the zealous ingenuity of Catholics. We, therefore, ardently desire that these meetings be held. Nor do We have any doubt that they will greatly contribute to the success of your goals.

11. It is fitting, too, that you be diligently aware that only men of religious orthodoxy and proven virtue be elected to the legislative assemblies, men who pursue objectives tenaciously, always ready to defend the Church and the Catholic cause. You see, moreover, that the opponents of the Church by means of

periodicals and books are intent upon spreading their venom and the perverse opinions of others, corrupting morality and seducing the multitude. Therefore, your people should use every means to counteract their writings with writings equal to the greatness of the struggle and providing remedies appropriate to the evils.

12. Above all, We wish you to direct your zeal and devotion towards the education of children and adolescents. It is not Our intention to repeat now what We have already written in the same letter that We mentioned in the beginning of this one. We cannot, however, refrain from touching briefly upon certain serious matters. In respect to primary schools, you must insist that pastors and others who are in charge of souls be constantly vigilant in their behalf and consider it their most important duty to teach sacred doctrine to children. This special service should be undertaken by themselves and valued as a sacred trust. It is certain that a wholesome and pious education in childhood ensures in great measure not only the preservation of the family, but of the state itself. Nor should you spare any industry or ingenuity to help these schools increase and develop successfully. It would be most appropriate to appoint in each diocese supervisors of schools for both the diocese and the deaneries. The bishops could confer with them annually on the condition of the schools as well as on other matters pertaining to faith, morals, and the care of souls. If it should be necessary to build new schools in answer to local needs or enlarge those already established, we are fully confident that your liberality and likewise that of all Catholics will be prompt and generous.

13. Regarding high schools and graduate schools, care should be taken that the good, planted like seeds in the minds and hearts of children, be not sadly destroyed in their adolescence. See that dangers of that kind be removed or diminished. Most especially, your pastoral concern should avail in selecting learned and virtuous teachers of religion and in removing those causes that too often hinder fruitful results.

14. For the rest, We appreciate your concerted efforts to maintain the seats of highest studies under the authority of the Church and bishops in accord with the will of their founders. We, nevertheless, exhort you to continue to fulfill this obligation. It would certainly not be equitable to deny Catholics that which is granted adversaries of the Catholic cause. It is of common interest, moreover, that what our predecessors established so piously and wisely should never be used to the detriment of the Church and Catholic faith, but for the protection and defense of both and hence, for the continuous good of the state itself.

15. Finally, these recommendations also apply to seminarians and priests. You should expend even greater effort on them that they may be worthy of the priesthood and that they may manifest virtue fitting the times. For this reason, the sacred seminaries justly claim the greater part of your attention. Direct them in the best way possible and provide them with all that is necessary so that through the dedication of selected teachers, seminarians will be trained in the morals and virtues required by their order and, moreover, in all the beauty and glory of

doctrine, both human and divine.

16. For your clergy, the times require a very particular unanimity in your guidance, concern and love in admonishing and exhorting them, and extraordinary firmness in defending ecclesiastical discipline. In turn, all priests should have strong faith in their bishops, accept their directives, and support their undertakings. In their sacred duties and their pastoral work, they should always be ready and zealous, guided by love.

Because, moreover, priests set an example, they should be living models of virtue and constancy. They should be cautious, however, not to get too involved in civilian or political affairs, and let them often recall this passage from St. Paul, "No one serving as God's soldier entangles himself in worldly affairs, that he may please him whose approval he has secured." [3]

17. To be sure, as St. Gregory the Great admonishes, it is not right to abandon foresight in external matters in one's anxiety for spiritual matters. Explicitly, when it is a question of defending religion or promoting the common good, the latter is not to be disregarded. A priest must be cautious not to overstep his dignity and deportment lest he seem more concerned for human than heavenly affairs. Most aptly the same Gregory the Great says, "Therefore, worldly occupations are sometimes to be tolerated out of compassion, never however to be pursued out of love; lest they, by burdening the mind of the lover, overwhelm him and make him sink under their weight from heaven into the depths." [4]

We also desire that you counsel pastors to take conscientious care of church property and manage it most carefully. Where any negligence has crept in, apply the most suitable remedy.

18. We firmly believe, moreover, that this is the opportune time for the clergy to revive the sodalities and confraternities of the laity to their former honor and glory. Surely, this is a work redounding no less to the well-being of the sodalities than to the universal good of religion. Not to mention other advantages, these sodalities can help you and your clergy not only by carefully cultivating in the people piety and a Christian way of life, but also of strengthening that salutary harmony of mind and heart that we strive for so ardently.

19. Finally, in everything pertaining to the protection and defense of our ancestral religion and faith, to the growth of Catholic institutions, or even to the discipline of clergy, hold periodic conferences so that in common discernment you will recognize those matters which are especially compelling and timely.

20. We hope that all the Catholics in Hungary will realize the dangerous turn of affairs in their country and will find courage and strength in our solicitude and good will. We hope, too, that on their part they will most conscientiously obey our counsel and admonitions.

21. May God be graciously present to you, venerable brothers, and likewise to the clergy and the Catholic people working with you in one accord so untiringly for the sake of religion, and may He happily bless your initiatives. Nor indeed, may there be lacking in a cause so holy and just the favorable assistance of your sovereign, we mean your apostle and king who, already from the beginning of his reign, gave your people abundant proof of his benevolence.

22. Direct your ardent prayers with Us to God, venerable brothers, that all may proceed successfully according to our desires. Above all, implore the patronage of the most blessed mother of God; then, too, beseech your faithful apostle, St. Stephen, to look favorably upon his Hungary and preserve holy and inviolate the benefits of a holy religion.

23. As a token of heavenly favors and as a witness of Our paternal good will, We lovingly impart Our Apostolic Blessing to you, venerable brothers, to the clergy and all your people.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, 2 September 1893, the sixteenth year of Our Pontificate.

ENDNOTES

- 1. Encyclical letter "Quod multum," 22 August 1886.
- 2. Encyclical letter "Arcanum," 10 February 1880.
- 3. 2 Tm 2.4.
- 4. "Reg. Pastor.," chap. 7, p. 2.