



ETSI NOS

ON CONDITIONS IN ITALY

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on February 15, 1882.

To the Archbishops and Bishops and the Other Ordinaries of Italy.

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

Although the authority and extent of Our Apostolic duties cause Us to embrace the whole Christian Republic and each of the provinces which compose it with all the love and vigilance which is in Our power, it is Italy which, at the present moment, more especially attracts Our solicitude and Our thoughts. These thoughts and these solitudes extend far above mere temporal concerns, for it is the eternal salvation of souls which occupies Us and causes Us anxiety -- a business which demands all Our zeal, and obliges Us to concentrate it entirely on that object, in proportion as We see it exposed to greater and greater perils. If ever these perils were menacing in Italy they are surely so now, at a time when the condition of the Civil State itself disastrously imperils the freedom of religion. We are also still more affected by this since an intimate alliance unites Us to Italy, where God has placed the residence of His Vicar, the Chair of truth and the center of Catholic Unity. On other occasions We have urged the nations to take heed, and Christians individually to realize, what duties are incumbent on them in such baleful circumstances. Nevertheless the evils continue to increase and We desire, Venerable Brethren, to point them out and commend them to your diligent attention, in order that, having recognized the tendency of public affairs, you may with greater vigilance strengthen the minds of your flocks, and surround them with every help, for fear lest that most precious treasure, the Catholic faith, should be torn from them.

2. A pernicious sect, of which the founders and chiefs neither hide nor even mask

their desires, has established itself for some time back in Italy; after having declared war against Jesus Christ it is attempting to rob the people of their Christian institutions. As to the extent to which it has carried its audacity, it is the less necessary for Us to speak, Venerable Brethren, since the grave injuries and even ruin which morality and religion have to deplore lie patent before your eyes.

In the midst of the populations of Italy, which have always been so constant and steadfast in the faith of their fathers, the liberty of the Church is wounded on all sides; everyday efforts are redoubled in order to efface from the public institutions that Christian stamp and character which has always, and with good reason, been the seal of the glories of Italy. Religious houses suppressed, the goods of the Church confiscated, marriages contracted in despite of the laws and without the rites of the Church, the position of the religious authorities as to the education of the young utterly ignored -- in fine, a cruel and deplorable war without limit and without measure declared against the Apostolic See, a war on account of which the Church is weighed down by inexpressible suffering, and the Roman Pontiff finds himself reduced to extreme anguish. For, despoiled of his Civil Principedom, he has of necessity fallen into the hands of another Power.

3. More than this; Rome, the most august of Christian cities, is now a place laid open to all the enemies of the Church; profane novelties defile it; here and there, temples and schools devoted to heresy are to be found. It is even reported that this year it is about to receive the deputies and leaders of the sect which is most embittered against Catholicism, who have appointed this city as the place for their solemn meeting. The reasons which have determined their choice of such a meeting place are no secret; they desire by this outrageous provocation to glut the hatred which they nourish against the Church, and to bring their incendiary torches within reach of the Roman Pontificate by attacking it in its very seat.

4. The Church, without doubt, will in the end be triumphant and will baffle the impious conspiracies of men; but it is none the less admitted and certain that their designs aim at nothing less than the destruction of the whole system of the Church with its Head, and the abolition, if it were possible, of all religion.

5. For those who pretend to be friends of the honor of Italy to dream of such prospects would seem a thing incredible, for the ruin of the Catholic faith in Italy would dry up the source of the most precious of goods. If, in truth, the Christian religion has created for the nations the best guarantees for their prosperity, the sanctity of right and the guardianship of justice; if by her influence she has everywhere subdued headlong and hasty passions, she, the companion and protectress of all honesty, of all nobility, of all greatness; if she has everywhere summoned all classes and every member of society to meet in a lasting peace and in perfect harmony, Italy has received a richer share of these benefits than any other nation.

6. It is, in truth, the shame of too many persons that they dare to denounce the

Church as dangerous to public safety and prosperity, and to regard the Roman Pontificate as the enemy of the greatness of the name of Italy. But the records of the past give the lie to such slanders and to absurd calumnies of a similar kind. It is to the Church and the Roman Pontiffs that Italy especially owes gratitude for having spread her glories in all lands, for never having allowed her to succumb under the repeated incursions of having for generations preserved in many ways a lawful amount of just and proper liberty, and for having enriched her cities with numerous and immortal monuments of science and of art. In truth it is not the least glory of the Roman Pontiffs that they have maintained united in a common faith the various provinces of Italy, so different in customs and in genius, and have kept them from most disastrous disagreements. Frequently, in times of trouble and calamity, the welfare of the State would have been in peril, had not the Roman Pontificate saved it by exercise of its lifegiving power.

7. And its influence will not be less beneficial in the future if the malice of men does not interfere and hinder its efficacy or stifle its liberty. This beneficial force, which is peculiar to Catholic institutions, because it flows from them as a natural consequence, is unchangeable and unceasing. Even as, for the salvation of souls, the Catholic religion embraces all countries without any limitations of time or space, so does it always and everywhere stand forth and present itself as the true friend of the civil power.

8. These great advantages are being lost, and are being followed by grave evils; for the enemies of Christian wisdom, be their rival pretensions what they may, are leading society to its ruin. Nothing can be more efficacious than their doctrines in the way of kindling in men's minds the flames of violence and of stirring up the most pernicious passions. In the sphere of science they are repudiating the heavenly lights of faith; and when once this torch is put out, the mind of men is usually carried away by errors, no longer sees the truth, and begins quietly to sink into the lowest depths of a base and shameful materialism. In the sphere of morals they are disdainfully rejecting the eternal and unchangeable reasoning, and are despising God -- the sovereign Legislator and supreme Avenger and when once these foundations are torn away no sufficient authority remains for law, and the regulation of life merely depends upon the good pleasure and free will of man. In society, the liberty without limit which they preach and pursue engenders license, and this license is very soon followed by the overthrow of order, the most fatal scourge of the public welfare. Of a truth, it is impossible to see society in a more pitiable or miserable state than in those places where such men and such doctrines as we have been describing have gained the upper hand even for a moment. Unless recent examples had furnished evidence it would have been difficult to believe that men, in a transport of furious and criminal boldness, could even have cast themselves into excesses of such a kind, and while retaining as if in mockery the name of liberty, could have given themselves over to "saturnalia" of conflagrations and murders. If Italy has not, up to the present time, experienced a similar reign of terror, we must attribute it first to the especial protection of God; but the fact must be also recognized -- to explain this preservation -- that the

people of Italy -- the immense majority of whom are still faithful to the Catholic religion -- have never been able to be subdued by the vicious and shameful doctrines We have denounced. And it must be confessed that if the ramparts erected by religion begin to give way, Italy also will fall into the same abyss, in which the greatest and most flourishing nations have in past times lain prostrate as victims. Similar doctrines involve similar consequences, and since the germs are infected with the same poisons, it cannot be but that they should produce the same fruits.

9. Moreover Italy would perhaps have to pay yet more dearly for her apostasy, because in her case perfidy and impiety would be aggravated by ingratitude. It is not by chance or human caprice that Italy has from the first been a sharer in the salvation won by JESUS CHRIST, and has contained within her bosom the Chair of Peter, and enjoyed throughout a long course of ages the incomparable and divine benefits of which the Catholic religion is the natural source. She ought then greatly to fear for herself the judgment threatened by the Apostle Paul to ungrateful nations: "The earth that drinketh in the rain which cometh often upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is tilled, receiveth blessing from God. But that which bringeth forth thorns and briars is reprobate, and very near unto a curse, whose end is to be burnt."¹

10. May God avert so terrible a misfortune! May all give a serious consideration to the evils by which in part we are afflicted, and with which in part we are threatened by those who, devoted to the interests of political sects, not of the public, have sworn to wage a war to the death against the Church. Unhappy men, if they were wise, if they had a true love for their country, far from distrusting the Church, and striving, under the influence of injurious suspicions, to deprive her of her necessary liberty, they would do all in their power to defend and protect her, and would first of all make provision for the re-establishment of the Roman Pontiff in the possession of his rights. In fact the more injurious the war against the Apostolic See is to the Church, the more fatal it is in the cause of Italy. We have elsewhere expressed this thought: "Say that the State in Italy can never prosper nor become stable and tranquil unless provision be made for the dignity of the Roman See and the liberty of the Supreme Pontiff, as every consideration of right requires."

11. And, therefore, as We have nothing more at heart than the safety of Christian interests, and deeply moved as We are by the peril in which the people of Italy now stands, We exhort you, Venerable Brethren, more earnestly than ever to unite your care and loving efforts to Ours, that a remedy for so many evils may be found.

12. And first endeavor to make your people understand of what value the Catholic Faith is to them, and how they ought to defend it at every cost. But, since the enemies and assailants of the Catholic name employ a thousand devices and a thousand feints to seduce those who are not on their guard, it is of the first importance to unmask and drag into the light of day their secret machinations, so

that Catholics, having their eyes opened to the real aims of these men, may feel their own courage redoubled, and may resolve openly and intrepidly to defend the Church, the Roman Pontiff, and their own salvation.

13. Up to the present time, whether through unfamiliarity with the new state of things, or through an imperfect understanding of the extent of the danger, the courage of many from whom much might have been expected, does not seem to have displayed itself with all the activity and vigor required for the defense of so great a cause.

14. But now that We have learned by experience in what times We live, nothing could be more fatal than to endure in cowardly inertness the malice of the wicked which never tires, and to leave the field open to them to persecute the Church to the full satisfaction of their hate.

15. More prudent than the children of light, they have been daring in their enterprises; inferior in numbers, but superior in cunning and in riches, they have soon succeeded in lighting up amongst us a great conflagration of evils. May all the friends of Catholicity now, at least, understand that it is time to make some daring effort, and to rouse themselves at any cost from a languid carelessness, for one is never more easily overcome than in the sleep of cowardly security. Let them behold how the noble courage of their ancestors knew no fear and no repose; how by their indefatigable labors, and at the price of their blood, the Catholic Faith has grown and spread in the world.

16. Do you then, Venerable Brethren, awaken the sleeping, stimulate the hesitating; by your example and your authority train them all to fulfill with constancy and courage the duties which are the Christian life in action. And in order to maintain and develop this revived courage, means must be taken to promote the growth, multiplication, harmony, and fruitfulness of Associations the principal object of which should be to preserve and excite zeal for the Christian faith and other virtues. Such are the associations of young men and of workmen; such are the committees organized by Catholics, and meeting periodically; such are the institutions destined to relieve poverty, to protect the sanctification of festival days, to instruct the children of the poor, and several others of the same kind. And since it is of supreme importance to Christian interests that the Roman Pontiff should be, and should be clearly seen to be, free from all danger, from all vexations, and from all hindrance in the government of the Church, it is necessary, to attain this end, that action should be taken, petitions, and every possible means within the limits of the law should be adopted, and that none should rest until We have restored to Us, in reality and not in appearance only, that liberty on which, not only the welfare of the Church, but the prosperity of Italy and the peace of Christian nations depend by a necessary connection.

17. Then it is of very great importance that writings of a healthy character should be published and circulated far and wide. Those who, with a deadly hatred, dissent

from the Church, are wont to contend by means of publications, and to make use of these as the arms best adapted for inflicting injury. Hence a most evil deluge of books, hence the turbulent and wicked journals whose malevolent attacks neither the laws avail to bridle, nor modesty to restrain. Whatsoever in these latter years has been wrought by sedition and mobs, that they maintain to have been lawfully done; they dissimulate or corrupt the truth; they pursue the Church and the Supreme Pontiff with daily maledictions and false accusations; nor are there any opinions so absurd and pestiferous that they are not eager every where to disseminate them. The violence of this so great evil, which is daily spreading wider, must be diligently arrested; you must severely and gravely lead the people to be carefully on their guard, and to be willing most religiously to exercise a prudent choice in their reading. Moreover, writings must be opposed by writings, so that the same art which can effect most for the destruction, may in turn be applied to the salvation and benefit of mankind, and remedies be supplied from that source whence evil poisons are now obtained. And to this end it is to be wished that, at any rate in every province, there should be established some method of publicly demonstrating what and how great are the duties of all Christians towards the Church, by frequent, and, as far as possible, daily publications with this object. But in the first place, let there be kept in sight the conspicuous deserts of the Catholic religion in regard to all nations; let it be verbally explained how its influence, both in private and public affairs, is most benign and salutary; let it be shown of how great importance it is that the Church should promptly be established in that place of dignity in the State, which both its Divine grandeur and the public advantage of the nations absolutely required. For these reasons it is necessary that those who have devoted themselves to writing should observe further that they all keep the same end in view, that they should clearly ascertain what is most expedient and carry it out; they omit none of those things the knowledge of which seems useful and desirable; that, with gravity and moderation of speech, they reprove errors and vices; in such a way, however, that their reproof may be without bitterness, and with respect for the individuals; lastly that they use a plain and clear manner of speech, which the multitude can easily understand. But let all other persons, who truly and "ex animo" desire that religion and society, defended by human intellect and literature, should flourish, let them study by their liberality to guard and protect these productions of literature and intellect; and let everyone, in proportion to his income, support them by his money and influence. For to those who devote themselves to writing we ought by all means to bring helps of this kind; without which their industry will either have no results, or uncertain and miserable ones. -- And in all these things if any inconvenience falls upon our friends, if there is any conflict to be sustained, let them still dare to be brave, since to the Christian there can be no cause for endurance or labor more just than that of not suffering religion to be attacked by the wicked. For the Church has not brought forth or educated her sons with this idea, that, when time and necessity compel, she should expect no assistance from them, but rather that they should all prefer the salvation of souls and the well-being of religion to their own ease and their own private interests.

18. But your chief cares and thoughts, Venerable Brethren, must have for their object the due appointment of fitting ministers of God. For if it be the office of Bishops to use very much labor and zeal in properly training the whole of their youth, they ought to spend themselves far more on the clerics who are growing up as the hope of the Church, and are to be some day sharers in the most sacred duties. Indeed, grave reasons, common to all times, demand in priests many and great graces; but this time in which we live demands that they should be even more and greater. In truth the defense of the Catholic Faith, in which the industry of priests ought specially to be employed, and which is in these days so very necessary, demands no common nor ordinary learning, but that which is recondite and varies; which embraces not only sacred, but even philosophical studies, and is rich in the treatment of physical and historical discoveries. For the error which has to be eradicated is multiform, and saps all the foundations of Christian wisdom; and very often a battle has to be waged with adversaries well prepared, pertinacious in disputing, who astutely draw confirmation from every kind of science. Similarly, since in these days there is great and far extended corruption of morals, there is need in priests of singular excellence of virtue and constancy. They can by no means avoid associating with men; by the very duties of their office, indeed, they are compelled to have intimate relations with the people; and that in the midst of cities where there is hardly any lust that has not permitted and unbridled license. From which it follows that virtue in the clergy ought at this time to be strong enough peacefully to guard itself, and both conquer all the blandishments of desire and securely overcome dangerous examples. Besides a paucity of clerics has everywhere followed the laws which have been enacted to the injury of the Church, so plainly, that it is necessary for those who by the grace of God are being trained to Holy Orders, to give double attention, and by increased diligence, zeal, and devotion to compensate for the sparse supply. And, indeed, they cannot do this advantageously unless they possess a soul resolute of purpose, mortified, incorrupt, ardent with charity, ever prompt and quick in undertaking labors for the salvation of men. But for such tasks a long and diligent preparation must be made; for one is not accustomed to such great things easily and quickly. And they indeed will pass their time in the priesthood holily and purely, who have exercised themselves in this way from their youth, and have so advanced in discipline that they seem not so much to have been instructed to those virtues, of which We have spoken, as to have been born to them.

19. For these reasons, Venerable Brethren, the Seminaries of clerics demand a very great portion of your zeal, care, and vigilance.

20. As to virtue and morals, it does not escape your wisdom with what precepts and instruction the youth of clerics must be surrounded. In graver studies Our Encyclical Letters, "Aeterni Patris," have pointed out the best way and course. But since in such a condition of mental activity many things have been wisely and usefully discovered, which it is not fitting to ignore especially when wicked men are accustomed to turn, as new weapons, against divinely revealed truths, every addition of this kind which the day brings -- take care, Venerable Brethren, as far

as lies in your power, that the young clerics be not only better instructed in natural sciences, but also properly educated in those arts which have connection with the interpretation or authority of the Sacred Scriptures. Of this surely we are not ignorant, that many things are needful for perfection in the highest studies, the means for which in the religious seminaries of Italy hostile laws are taking away or diminishing. But in this also the time demands that by their bounty and munificence Our children should strive to merit well of the Catholic religion. The pious and beneficent goodwill of our ancestors had admirably provided for necessities of this kind; and this the Church had been able by prudence and economy to accomplish, so that she had no necessity whatever to recommend to the charity of her children the care and preservation of sacred property. But her legitimate and sacred patrimony, which the attacks of former ages had spared, the tempest of our times has dissipated; so that there is again a reason why those who love the Catholic name should be induced to renew the liberality of their ancestors. Illustrious indeed are the proofs of munificence on the part of Frenchmen, Belgians, and others in a cause not very dissimilar from this munificence most worthy the admiration not only of contemporaries, but also of posterity. Nor do We doubt but that the Italian people, moved by the consideration of their common circumstances, will, in proportion to their means, act so as to show themselves worthy of their father, and will imitate the example of their brethren.

21. In these things, of which We have spoken, We have the greatest hope of consolation and security. But since in all designs, and especially in those which are undertaken for the sake of public safety, it is necessary to add always to human instruments the aid of Almighty God, in Whose power are the wills of individual men no less than the course and fortunes of Empires, therefore we must invoke God by instant prayers, and beseech Him to look upon Italy, which has been enriched and increased by so many of His benefits, and, having taken away every suspicion of peril, ever to preserve in her the Catholic Faith, which is the chief good. For this self-same reason let us devoutly implore the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the great Mother of God, the prompter and helper of good counsels, together with her most holy spouse Joseph, the guardian and patron of Christian nations. And with like care we must beseech the great Apostles, Peter and Paul, to guard safely in the Italian people the fruit of their labor, and to keep holy and inviolate amongst their latest posterity the Catholic name which they begot for our fathers with their own blood.

22. Confiding in the celestial patronage of all these, as a pledge of divine favors, and a proof of Our particular good will, We most lovingly in the Lord bestow on you all, Venerable Brethren, and on the flocks committed to your care, the Apostolic Benediction.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the 15th day of February, in the year of Our Lord 1882, and of Our Pontificate the fourth.

ENDNOTES:

- 1. Heb. vi. 7, 8.