



Amantissimus

ON THE CARE OF THE CHURCHES

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS IX

APRIL 8, 1862

To the Bishops of the Eastern Churches.

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

Our most beloved Redeemer, Christ the Lord, willed as you well know, venerable brothers, to deliver all men from the captivity of the devil, free them from the yoke of sin, call them from darkness into his wonderful light and be their salvation. When he had blotted out the handwriting of the decree against us, fastening it to the cross, he formed and established the Catholic Church, won by his blood, as the one "Church of the living God,"[1] the one "kingdom of heaven,"[2] "the city set on a hill,"[3] "one flock,"[4] and "one body" steadfast and alive with "one Spirit,"[5] one faith, one hope, one love joined and firmly held together by the same bonds of sacraments, religion and doctrine. He further provided his Church with leaders whom he chose and called. In addition, he decreed that the Church will endure as long as the world, embrace all peoples and nations of the whole world, and that whoever accepts his divine religion and grace and perseveres to the end will attain the glory of eternal salvation.

2. To preserve forever in his Church the unity and doctrine of this faith, Christ chose one of his apostles, Peter, whom he appointed the Prince of his Apostles, his Vicar on earth, and impregnable foundation and head of his Church. Surpassing all others with every dignity of extraordinary authority, power and jurisdiction, he was to feed the Lord's flock, strengthen his brothers, rule and govern the universal Church. Christ not only desired that his Church remain as one and immaculate to the end of the world, and that its unity in faith, doctrine and form of government remain inviolate. He also willed that the fullness of dignity, power and jurisdiction, integrity and stability of faith given to Peter be handed down in its entirety to the Roman Pontiffs, the successors of this same Peter, who have been placed on this Chair of Peter in Rome, and to whom has been divinely committed the supreme care of the Lord's entire flock and the supreme rule of the Universal Church.

3. You above all, venerable brothers, have known how this dogma of our religion has been unanimously and unceasingly declared, defended and insisted upon in synods by the Fathers of the Church. Indeed, they have never stopped teaching that "God is one, Christ is one, the Church established upon Peter by the voice of the Lord is one;"[6] "the massive foundation of the great Christian state has been divinely built upon, as it were, this rock, this very firm stone;"[7] "this Chair, which is unique and the first of gifts, has always been designated and considered as the Chair of Peter;"[8] "shining forth throughout the world it maintains its primacy;"[9] "it is also the root and matrix whence sacerdotal unity has sprung;"[10] it is not only the head but also the mother and teacher of all the Churches;"[11] "it is the mother city of piety in which is the complete and perfect stability of the Christian religion"[12] "and in which the preeminence of the Apostolic Chair has always been unimpaired;"[13] "it rests upon that rock which the haughty gates of hell shall never overcome;"[14] "for it the Apostles poured out their entire teaching with blood;"[15] "from it the rights of the venerable communion are extended to all;"[16] "all obedience and honor must be given to it."[17] "He who deserts the Church will vainly believe that he is in the Church;"[18] "whoever eats of the lamb and is not a member of the Church, has profaned;"[19] "Peter, who lives and presides in his own Chair, proffers the truth of faith to those seeking it;"[20] "Peter, who lives up to this time and always lives, exercises jurisdiction in his successors;"[21] "he himself has spoken through Leo;"[22] "the Roman Pontiff, who holds Primacy in the entire world, is the Successor of Blessed Peter the Prince of the Apostles and the true Vicar of Christ, the head of the whole Church, and is the visible Father and Teacher of all Christians."[23] There are other, almost countless, proofs drawn from the most trustworthy witnesses which clearly and openly testify with great faith, exactitude, respect and obedience that all who want to belong to the true and only Church of Christ must honor and obey this Apostolic See and Roman Pontiff.

4. Now, truly, a multiplicity of holy things, a variety of legitimate rites, obviously in no way oppose the unity of the Catholic Church; rather, indeed, such diversity greatly enhances the dignity of the Church itself. Not one, moreover, of you, venerable brothers, is unaware that there are some who are striving to deceive and lead into error the unguarded, especially, and the inexperienced by maligning this Holy See as if the Holy See itself upon receiving the separated Orientals into the Catholic faith required them to abandon their own rite and embrace that of the Latin Church. That this is false and far from truth is clearly shown by the many constitutions and apostolic letters of our Predecessors. They not only consistently declared to the Orientals that such a condition was never intended, but also professed that it was wholly their desire that the rites of the Eastern Churches, into which no error against the Catholic Church or against moral integrity had crept, would be completely preserved.

5. Not only past, but recent acts of our departed Predecessors clearly agree with such repeated and definite declarations of our Predecessors. It can never be said that this Apostolic See has ever enjoined upon the bishops, ecclesiastics, or the

Oriental peoples, who have returned to the Catholic faith, to change their legitimate rites. In fact, the universal City of Constantinople recently saw how our venerable brother Miletus, archbishop of Dramea, to our deepest comfort and the joy of all good men, returned to the bosom of the Catholic Church with his own rite and solemn ceremonies, and how a great throng of people solemnly processed after the event. Hence, venerable brothers, with solicitude incessantly impress upon your diocesan clergy the need to be zealous at every opportunity and by every means to expose and refute the calumny by which evil men lead the inexperienced into error and attempt to incite envy and hatred against this Holy See.

6. Ever since we have been placed on this Chair of Peter by the hidden plan of divine providence and have thus been elevated to the supreme rule of the universal Church, we have striven to fulfill the duties of our apostolic ministry as the daily direction and solicitude for the Churches demand of us. Because we depend utterly on divine help, we do not fear the many nefarious and sacrilegious destructions, attempts and attacks by which in these disturbed times the enemies of the Catholic religion endeavor to undermine its foundations, if that were ever possible. No, indeed, the spiritual good and salvation of all people are our constant concern.

7. For indeed the charity of Christ compels us, and nothing could be more pleasing than to undertake most willingly all the cares, labors, deliberations necessary to hasten all people into the unity of faith, the growth in the knowledge of God and the recognition of our Lord, Jesus Christ "who is the way and the truth and the life: the way certainly of a holy life, the truth of divine doctrine, and the life of everlasting happiness." [24]

8. Nor are you unknowing, venerable brothers, with what singular love and assiduous zeal from the very beginning of our supreme Pontificate, we have devoted our paternal care to that chosen portion of the Lord's flock committed to your vigilance. From our most recent letter, published on the 7th of last January, you are able more and more to understand how strongly we feel about the good and prosperity of the Oriental Churches.

9. With this same letter, we have set up a special Congregation as part of the Propagation of the Faith and of great assistance to it -- almost overwhelmed as it is with constant and very serious services. This new department so excellently administers work from the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith as it takes care to manage expeditiously the affairs of the Oriental Churches. We are sustained by the hope that our solicitude and counsel will spiritually profit the Oriental peoples. We are in complete confidence, furthermore, that the new special department so recently established by us will never in any way swerve from the purpose intended: that in handling your affairs, there will be a steady progress in every way possible toward Catholic unity; an increase in the success of your Churches; the protection of the integrity of your legitimate rites; greater spiritual

happiness for all the faithful.

10. That this Congregation may conscientiously carry out the duty we entrusted to it and direct its zeal and efforts toward the greater prosperity of your Churches, it is extremely necessary that it thoroughly understand the spiritual needs of the Oriental peoples. Since, venerable brothers, you fully know the condition and state of the flock entrusted to you, in your wisdom you will properly understand how important it is that you inform us as soon as possible of all that concerns your Churches and your flocks. It is, likewise, essential that you send us an accurate report on the status of your dioceses in which you carefully explain whatever pertains to the dioceses themselves that we may attentively provide for the necessities of the faithful residing in them.

11. It will comfort us greatly if each of you, venerable brothers, in assiduously reporting all the affairs of your respective diocese, will indicate the number of the faithful in the diocese; the number of ecclesiastics who minister to the faithful; the procedure for attending to the same faithful not only in regard to faith but also to discipline of morals; the doctrine with which the clergy is instructed; the education of the clergy; the means and method of instructing the people in our most holy religion and in moral integrity; the plan whereby the same people are inspired and daily educated into greater piety and moral integrity. We also desire to know exactly the condition of your schools and how many youth customarily attend them. Since, venerable brothers, you well know that all hope of both sacred and public affairs depends on the right, salutary and religious education of children, it is of particular concern that from their tender years they attend Catholic schools where, diligently learning the truth of our religion and commandments, they will escape the danger of having their sensitive minds tainted with evil principles.

12. If you need books, do not hesitate to make it known and at the same time inform us of the books you consider most appropriate to provide dogma for the clergy, promote the education of the people, refute the teachings of those who are not Catholic, and foster the piety of the faithful. Most importantly, when we hear from you that in some places liturgical and ritual books are being used into which either some error has crept or a change has been arbitrarily introduced, it will be your duty to mention which books these are and if at any time they have been approved by the Holy See. Specify, too, if in your judgment they contain errors to be corrected or abuses to be abolished. We especially desire to learn from you, moreover, what progress holy catholic unity has made in your dioceses, what obstacles have hindered it, and what propitious means will remove such impediments so that unity itself may daily advance and increase.

13. Truly, venerable brothers, you see with how much love and earnestness we have been mindful of your Eastern Churches and how ardently we hope that among the Eastern people our most blessed faith, religion and piety will take hold, thrive and flourish. We are certain that you will devote all your energy and thought to protecting and propagating our religion and to caring for the salvation of your

flock.

14. Hostile men in these lamentable times never stop planting thorns in the Lord's field, first with destructive and ephemeral books and then with monstrous and depraved suppositions plainly opposed to Catholic faith and dogma. Consequently, you rightly understand how you must labor and ever be on your guard to keep the faithful from those poisonous pastures, to urge them on to eternal salvation, and to imbue them in greater measure with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

15. In order that you may more readily attain this goal, constantly inspire the zeal of guardians of souls that in the conscientious performance of their duty, they may untiringly announce the good news of the Gospel to the wise and the foolish. Urge them to help the Christian people by every good and holy work. Exhort them to give instruction, especially to boys and those inexperienced in the proofs of the Catholic Faith so that they may be guided in moral discipline. Always admonish your diocesan priests that, seriously reflecting upon the ministry they received in the Lord, they take care to fulfill it fervently. In such a way they give Christian people an example of all virtues, are attentive to prayer, perfectly cultivate sacred studies, and exert all their power to win the everlasting salvation of the faithful.

16. Then, too, that you may always have at hand diligent and industrious workers in cultivating the vineyard of the Lord, spare no effort, venerable brothers, that the most excellent teachers train young clerics in piety from the very beginning. May these be formed in a true ecclesiastical spirit and very carefully instructed, primarily in Sacred Scripture and the sacred sciences, against any danger of error. To be sure, we are by no means ignorant, venerable brothers, of the many difficulties you have been exposed to in the exercise of your episcopal ministry. Take comfort in the Lord, however, and recalling the powerful memory of his virtue, be ambassadors for Christ, who gave up his life for his sheep and left us an example that we may follow in his footsteps.

17. Everyone knows how much service and honor the families of monks have been to the Catholic Church in the East. By the integrity of their lives, the gravity of their conduct, and the fame of their religious discipline, they were striving to present models of good works to the faithful, to teach youth, to perfect themselves in Scripture and studies, and to work zealously for their bishops in beneficial service. In the distressing instability of conditions and times, these holy families, valuable to the Christian and civil state alike, have been deviating, in some places, from the discipline of their own Order or have become completely extinct. Since it would certainly be a great benefit to our religion if these holy families, especially where they have died out, might be restored and shine again among the Eastern nations in their pristine glory, we earnestly ask that you express to us your feelings on this matter and how the renewal of these holy families might be achieved.

18. We are thoroughly convinced that you, venerable brothers, will not only most happily and willingly satisfy these our desires and requests, but also that you will

promptly reveal any other concerns that you think should be mentioned for the greater welfare in these regions of our most holy religion -- and not only of the clergy, but also of the faithful.

19. From the Encyclical Letter of the Cardinal Prefect of the Council of Our Congregation, you will know how pleasing it will be to us to enjoy your presence next Pentecost when We, God willing, will celebrate the solemn canonization of many saints. On that occasion, if the circumstances of your dioceses permit, we shall be able to see you, greet you lovingly, and receive from you the reports of your dioceses.

20. Meanwhile, venerable brothers, continue to fulfill your ministry with ever greater ardor and effort. In all earnestness, provide for the salvation of your faithful, both admonishing and exhorting them to persevere more firmly in the profession of the Catholic Religion; to observe religiously all the commandments of God and of his holy Church; to walk worthily, pleasing to God and fruitful in every good work.

21. In accordance with your customary kindness, receive with paternal affection those who, to our very great joy, return to the bosom of the Church: expend all your care that they be nourished more fervently with the words of faith. Strengthened thus through the spiritual gift of grace, may they rein steadfast in their holy calling and ardently walk with constancy in the path of the Lord, following closely the way that leads to life. On behalf of your admirable religion, never forsake all goodness, patience, learning, gentleness and mildness as you try to gain for Christ the pitiful errant: lead them back into his one sheepfold and restore them to the hope of their eternal inheritance.

22. In the critical difficulties that beset your episcopal office in these worst of times, trust in the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, keeping ever before you that those who teach many unto justice will shine as the stars for all eternity. Finally, venerable brothers, we want you to be sure of the special benevolence with which we wait upon you in the Lord. In the meantime, by no means do we omit in every prayer to beg humbly and earnestly that God propitiously pour forth upon you the richest gifts of his goodness: that they may also descend abundantly upon the chosen flock committed to your vigilance.

23. As a witness of all that we have said and as a pledge of our most disposed will toward you, we affectionately bestow upon you our Apostolic Blessing from the depth of our heart, venerable brothers, and upon all the clergy and the faithful laity committed to your care. Given at Rome at St. Peter's, 8 April, 1862. In the sixteenth year of our Pontificate.

References:

1. I Tm 3.15.
2. Mt. 13.45 passim.

3. Mt. 5.14.
4. Jn 10.16.
5. Eph 4.4 passim.
6. St. Cyprian, epistle 40.
7. St. Cyril of Alexandria, in Ioan., Lib. II, c. 42.
8. St. Optatus of Milevis, 2 cont. Parmen., bk. 2, chap. 2.
9. Council of Nicea II, Act. 2.
10. St. Cyprian, epistles 15 and 55.
11. Pelagius 11, epistle I to the Oriental bishops, and the Council of Trent, session 7 on baptism, can. 3.
12. Synodal letter from John of Constantinople to Pope Hormisdas; also Sozomen, Ecclesiastical History, book 3, chapter 8.
13. St. Augustine, epistle 62.
14. St. Augustine, in psalm contra part. Donat.
15. Tertullian, de praescript., 36.8.
16. St. Ambrose, epistle 12 to Damasus.
17. Council of Ephesus, Act. 4.
18. St. Cyprian, de unit, Ecclesiae.
19. St. Jerome, epistle 15 to Damasus.
20. St. Peter Chrysologus, epistle to Eutyches.
21. Council of Ephesus.
22. Council of Chalcedon, Act. 2.
23. Council of Florence in its decree union. Graecorum.
24. St. Leo, sermon 2 on the resurrection of the Lord.