



On Episcopal Reunions In Austria

In Ipso

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on March 3, 1891.

To the Bishops of Austria,

At the very beginning of our Pontificate, as We reviewed the entire Catholic world, We found much cause for joy in the many and various good works in which the bishops, the secular and religious clergy, and the faithful are constantly engaged. Nevertheless, it grieves Us to think that the enemies of the Church, joined in most wicked conspiracy, scheme to weaken and even, if possible, utterly wipe out that wondrous edifice which God Himself has erected as a refuge for the human race. This combat ardently waged against the Church far and wide, although carried on in different ways for different places, has one established plan: to remove all traces of religion from families, schools, laws, and institutions; to deprive the Church itself of its means of action and that singular virtue it possesses for the common good; and to infiltrate every vein, as it were, of domestic and civil society with the most dangerous poison of their errors. And so these adversaries have left nothing untried; their license has been boundless. In number and with violence, they have assailed the rights, liberty and dignity of the Church; the bishops and all ranks of the clergy; and especially the authority of the Roman Pontiff as well as the Pontiff himself. As a result of these attacks on the Catholic name, grave ills have befallen nations. The enemies extend their perverse views ever more widely, and the immorality and rebellion which accompany such views sweep away souls with the result that greater dangers daily threaten states and governments. Nor was any other result to be expected. Religion is the strongest bulwark of the state. It can, by proper warning and salutary prohibition, hold people fast to their obligations. But when religion is weakened, or worse still, tossed aside, then straightaway the foundations of society waver and are destroyed.

2. These evils We have openly denounced at every opportunity. In Our communications, We have pointed out to those in authority how closely the

interests of religion and the state are intertwined, while at the same time exhorting the faithful to properly cherish and diligently fulfill the teachings of the Church. But Our special appeal has been directed to Our venerable brother bishops, whom the Holy Spirit has set up as leaders in the Church and has imbued with the abundant light of His grace. We urge them to keep watch as sentinels in all parts of the world so that they might know both what remedies are to be applied in the present circumstances and what snares are to be avoided in the case of each individual nation. Thus they should be Our best helpers in Our efforts to obtain the salvation of Catholic nations. And, indeed, We owe abundant thanks to God for the admirable unanimity and concern with which the entire body of bishops has responded to Our exhortation; they use their talents and devotion to defend the Catholic faith and preserve human society. They recall it to the virtues consonant with that faith, away from the greatest ills, thus bringing it to true prosperity.

3. In this so noble rivalry of pastoral zeal the Austrian bishops have distinguished themselves and deserve much praise. We know how diligently you toil to eradicate from the German speaking peoples any trace of evil and to foster in them the seeds of Christian life. Indeed, We recently learned that you collectively sent a letter to the faithful of your dioceses; this proves the most profound union of your wills when there is question of defending Catholic interests. Accordingly, that this unanimity might flourish in the future and that your efforts might proceed in the same pathway to the same determined end, it would be opportune for the bishops to hold annual conferences among themselves; these may be the source of a fruitful union of minds and action. Meetings like these already flourish in many places and have already produced happy results. For, by this means the bishops have had a greater abundance of counsel made available to them. In addition, their resolution of spirit has been strengthened, their zeal for things of religion has been aroused, and no small number of decisions have been carried out which are helpful for the Catholic enterprise. Moreover, such agreement has not only increased the respect and immense gratitude of their people toward them, but has also encouraged lay people, even of other nations, to deliberate equally harmoniously on how they might best undertake the defense of religion, as well as the state, in its present affliction.

4. Indeed, from these assemblies and exhortations on the part of bishops, Catholics have been inspired to hold and attend similar assemblies on the national, provincial, or local level, an undertaking of the greatest foresight. For, if evil men, strong in numbers and acumen unite here and there and conspire together to treacherously deprive Catholics of the gift of faith and its attendant advantages, surely it is right and necessary that Catholics should utilize their zeal and abilities to resist. In such gatherings, they can more freely and firmly undertake the profession of their faith and repel the enemy attacks upon it.

5. Moreover, there will be important subjects for the assembled bishops to discuss. In these calamitous and trying times, We judge that above all efforts should be made to unite the hierarchy with Christian families to effect a more perfect union.

Then the faithful may adhere to their bishops with all good will and reverence, and in a special manner may bravely profess their fidelity, obedience, and filial piety toward the bishop of the universal church. For, surely, to support the view that the Roman Pontiff should not be subject to any human power, but remain completely free, is the sacred obligation not of any one nation, but of the whole Catholic world. Therefore the bishops with united minds and efforts should see to it that the zeal of the faithful be aroused for this most just cause and that they urge its speedy accomplishment.

6. In these same assemblies the bishops can conveniently communicate with one another if some more complex problems have arisen in their local churches; also they can discuss certain matters in common letters or decrees, if it seems useful. Likewise the care for the formation and education of the clergy, which is the greatest and most salutary concern for a bishop, will occupy its place in these discussions: how the discipline of life in seminaries may conform to the norms of the Council of Trent; by what principal means piety and noble qualities may be inculcated in the seminarians; how they can be encouraged to excel in higher learning; and what methods the clergy can use to save souls.

7. As for the faithful, who are exposed to such dangers and snares, propose various aids which they can themselves apply: sermons on divine subjects; catechetical instruction suitable for different persons, ages, and places, pious sodalities of many kinds, which the Church recommends; the proper observation of the religious feasts; those institutes or works which will preserve the faithful, especially young people, from corruption and will encourage frequent reception of the sacraments; finally, books, newspapers, and similar publications which will advance the faith and safeguard morals.

8. It is very important that you encourage Catholic writers and editors so that they may develop and extend publications in a more effective way. Excellent writings of this sort, which are published regularly, have everywhere greatly helped both religion and the state, either because they support and advance them directly or because in recanting the damaging writings of the adversaries, they restrain their improper contagion. In the Austrian empire their value is immense, since the enemies of the Church publish their writings regularly. With their abundant means, they disseminate their publications easily and widely. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to match for writing in equal number, and thus be able to blunt their weapons, detect their evil designs, check their malice, and promote the cause of duty and virtue. Accordingly, it will be helpful if each region has its own newspapers -- champions, as it were, of the altar and hearth -- that conform to the prudence and direction of the bishop. Moreover, the clergy should benignly favor them and offer them the assistance of their learning; Catholics should support them well.

9. In addition, another matter which is close to your hearts must be safeguarded. In fact, you have already sent a joint letter to the faithful. It is the cause of

workers, who sorely need the support of religion both for the honorable accomplishment of their labors and for the alleviation of their sufferings. Their cause is closely connected with the social question; the more difficulties it encounters, the more pressing is its need for attention. If the bishops direct their attention to this question, if they see to it that justice and charity influence all classes of society and are deeply imprinted in souls, if by their authority and activity they come to the aid of the lowly condition of workers, they will have deserved well of the Church and society alike.

10. These and other important questions will be the subjects for deliberation at the annual conferences of bishops which We wish to introduce. We are fully persuaded that all the bishops of Austria will carry out these Our wishes, which a holy zeal for religion and the most benevolent charity toward your Catholic people inspire.

11. Meanwhile, as a presage of divine graces and in testimony of Our paternal good wishes, dear sons, and venerable brethren, We impart to you most affectionately in the Lord and to the whole Austrian nation the Apostolic Blessing.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, 3 March 1891, in the 14th year of Our Pontificate.