



On Religious Union

Pastoralis

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on June 25, 1891.

To Our Beloved Sons, Joseph Sebastian, S.R.E. Cardinal Netto, Patriarch of Lisbon, Americo S.R.E. Cardinal Dos Santos Silva, Bishop of Oporto; and to Our Venerable Brethren Antony, Archbishop of Braga, and to the other Archbishops and Bishops of Portugal.

Beloved Sons, Venerable Brethren: Health and the Apostolic Benediction.

The noble Congress lately held at Braga, the news of which a very welcome letter on the part of those who were present conveyed to Us at its completion, has given another proof of the Pastoral watchfulness wherewith you devote your efforts to the preservation and strengthening of religion. In reading that letter We were delighted both with the solicitous zeal of the Bishop of the diocese where the Congress was received -- one who was the chief founder of the movement, and presided over it to successful issues--and with the piety and energy of the Bishops who were associated with him or had sent worthy representatives to the Congress, and with the notable gathering of men chosen carefully from the clergy and laity, pre-eminent in learning, virtue, and authority. "That Congress was the more gratifying to Us on account of the admirable unanimity of principle in the determination of such decisions as would most powerfully work for the prosperity of the Church and the progress of Catholicity. Nor will We conceal that, beside the resolutions which were opportunely carried by unanimous consent as peculiarly appropriate to the time and the place, those propositions which expressed the devoted sentiment and zeal of the members towards the Apostolic See, to the effect that due honor should ever be paid to its dignity, and that no title of its majesty or its rights should be reft from it, brought to Us no little comfort.

2. We are indeed of good hope that the resolutions which were agreed upon at that Congress, so long as they are observed with care and perseverance, will effect a

plentiful harvest of fruitfulness; but We and Ourselves compelled to observe that a rich field still remains that demands your labor and your industry. Wherefore, although quite recently We addressed you by letter on the Catholic position and its needs in Portugal, and of the course to be pursued for their most convenient accomplishment, nevertheless We are induced to add to that letter some words which We hold fitting to communicate to you, lest, since an occasion for writing to you has occurred, We should seem to be wanting in duty.

3. You must be aware, beloved sons, Venerable Brethren, of the truth which was perfectly appreciated at the Congress of Braga, that it has come to pass that the faith itself is among many in danger, and that every effort must be made, that, through ignorance or indifference, it should not fall and fail from souls, but rather that it should take deep root in hearts and should bring forth in good works and the practice of virtue a glad and plentiful sweetness of perfect fruits. Strife must be made against the attempts of the enemies of truth, lest the evil stain which drops from their bad example and their widely disseminated teaching should spread more and more. Many wounds are to be healed which the dishonest toil of such men, and the unhappiness of the times, have struck in the flocks committed to your care, many ruins are to be built up, many hardships still oppress the souls of the faithful, which -- though haply it is impossible to destroy them -- may at least be lightened.

4. These needs which, as We have said, demand your care and your industry, will be more fully and more suitably attended to if day by day the concord between the Bishops is strengthened, and if their work is made more cooperative in remedying the needs of clergy and laity, in taking counsel and in making such decisions as shall seem to align best with the common good, both for the particular requirements of separate dioceses, and for those that reach farther and rise higher, with which the prosperity and the weal of the whole people are associated. The convenience of a stricter bond of union between the Bishops did not escape the prudence of those who met at Braga. Wherefore those resolutions of that great Congress were the most gratifying to Us which recommended the founding of such a bond, through which the faithful look for ampler and lasting benefits from those rulers who are their directors and their guides.

5. Now to achieve this permanent and perfect union nothing is more effective than the custom already practiced in other countries, that besides the Congresses at which the laity assist (such as the Congress of Braga) there should be every year special meetings of the Bishops, a custom which you have at heart, and which We greatly desire to see introduced among you, since the benefits accruing by its means to religion are made evident by the manifold and constant testimony of experience. For from the habit of such Congresses there first follows, as we have said, a notable unanimity and compactness of strength, which of itself is potent to bring great designs to successful issues; moreover, the hearts of the Bishops are more keenly moved to action, confidence is confirmed, and minds are enlightened by common counsel and the light of wisdom shining from one to another. In

addition to this, by these Conferences, the way is in a manner prepared both for diocesan and for provincial Synods, and for the meeting of the National Council, for the holding of which We rejoice to know that you are anxious, since Our long experience of the advantage to be gained therefrom strongly approves of it, and the prescriptions of the sacred canons commend it in a marked manner. Moreover, from the Annual Congresses of Bishops, of which We speak, this great benefit also flows, that the laity, moved to greater zeal by new impulses, resolve to walk in the paths set for them, themselves to hold meetings, to join in council, and by a union of strength to strive for the common cause of religion, and in obedience to their pastors to perform sedulously those duties which they accept from their teachings and exhortations. Nor in your annual assemblies will you find that there is lack of matter whereunto to devote your zeal and your energy. For beyond the special business of the separate dioceses, which can more easily be furthered under the light of a shared experience, the ordering of those works which are most effective for rousing the zeal of the priesthood already laboring in the Lord's vineyard, and for the education of students who will one day have to shine in the house of God with the light of solid wisdom, with the merit of a true ecclesiastical spirit, with every sacerdotal virtue--this will afford a large field of work to your prudence and your common deliberations. Another matter which will require your fatherly watchfulness will be the diligent inquiry into the means of best filling the mind of the people with the rudiments of faith, of directing their morals, of circulating writings which sow the seed of true faith and make for virtue, of setting a-foot works which shall pour out the benefits of charity and of securing that those already founded shall be confirmed in new strength. Finally, a very important subject of your debates will consist in the opportunity afforded to you of founding and affiliating religious societies in Portugal, the interests of which We rejoiced to see that all who met at Braea had deeply at heart. For these sodalities not only contribute as it were auxiliary forces to the clergy who follow in your dioceses the sacred army of Christ, but also -- this is of crucial importance -- they will supply apostolic men for the work of the holy missions in countries subject to the dominion of Portugal in lands beyond the seas. The fulfillment of this function will work both for the prosperity of Christ's kingdom on earth, and for the glory and honor of the Portuguese name. In truth your rulers and your ancestry have obtained a deathless glory in that they carried to the vast regions discovered by them the light of gospel truth, together with a higher civilization, under the favor and assistance of the Apostolic See. But that the strength and glory of these noble beginnings may still remain and may never fail from that ancient stability and splendor, there is need that they be upheld by the unwavering care and support of eminent men, who filled with the Divine Spirit and ever vigilant against the hostile attacks of heretics, shall devote all their zeal, all their energy, that the benefits which have flowed out of Portugal into these countries may, so far from waning, flourish with the infusion of a fresh strength. It will be the duty of such men to effect that they who already believe in God may be increased in faith; that they whose faith is strong may practice the ideals of honorable living, religious worship, diligence in duty's fulfillment; lastly, that they who still lie in darkness may be brought to the knowledge of the true God and to the light of the Gospel.

6. Now the religious associations whose members, in the judgment of prudent men (to which the experience of all time testifies) have fulfilled this ministry of salvation no less gladly than laboriously, will be able to supply many men burning with holy zeal. For the rule and discipline of the societies to which they belong, as well as the virtue of each trained in constant exercise, is likeliest to produce men efficient before all others for such work as this.

7. We are indeed persuaded that the Portuguese Government lending a favorable hearing to your counsels, and judging at their highest value those benefits which come before all others, will of its own accord abolish all the obstacles that block the way to the liberty of those societies, and will lend its aid to further your endeavors which are directed to this end, that the Catholic religion may flourish and grow strong with its ancestral glory, in Portugal and in all the lands subjected to her sway.

8. We are the more easily persuaded of this, inasmuch as none can be ignorant, since it is known fully to you, what are Our desires and prayers in this matter. Moreover, while they are connected with the good of religion, they no less work for the solid prosperity of the Portuguese nation. For this gift, this possession, was granted to the Church by her Divine Founder, that she should be in the common society of men a bond of peace and the guardian of salvation. Wherefore the Church in no way weakens the power of those who rule the State, rather she supports and strengthens it, in conferring on the laws that spring from this power the sanction of religion, in reckoning among the obligations laid upon mankind by God a due reverence for authority, in warning citizens to refrain from sedition and all disturbance in the State, in teaching all to practice virtue, and conscientiously to fulfill the duties that belong to their condition in life. Therefore is the Church the pinnacle of morality, and by her salutary discipline she trains citizens to be upright, honorable, patriotic, faithful and very steadfast to duty, to be such men in fine as stand for an immovable foundation in the public ordering of the State, and as give to it an unconquerable strength for the achievement of every noble and high ideal. Therefore is it to the State's high advantage to leave to the Church that liberty of action which she demands of right, and to prepare a friendly path where she may be able to touch far lands with her beneficial powers, and to employ all the gifts of her endowment for the common good.

9. Now although this doctrine is applicable to all nations, most specially does it affect the Portuguese, among whom the influence of the Catholic religion in training the character and disposition of men, in fostering the studies of science, letters, and arts, in kindling the soul to every civic and military virtue, has been so great, even so that she seems as it were the mother and nurse given from on High to bring forth and train whatever gentleness, dignity, and glory shone out in that race.

10. On this subject We have treated more fully in the recorded Encyclical letter which lately We addressed to you; what is important to recall at present is that the

power of religion should suffer no darkening, because those doctrines which the Church, under God, teaches, are restrained by no limits of time and place, but are bound up with the salvation and comfort of all people. This is the reason why those high benefits and strong safeguards, which she brought of old time to your noble nation, she is still ready to bring for the advancement of your prosperity and your fame. And particularly at this unhappy time, when weakness of spirit so abounds that the highest principles upon which the order and tranquillity of human society depend are boldly attacked, nay are brought even to totter, none can be ignorant how necessary is the observance of religion and those holy counsels and teachings which religion enforces.

11. It is the unanimous agreement of all principled and honorable men, that there is no remedy more efficacious and potent against the evils by which Our age is oppressed, and against the perils in store, than the Catholic doctrine, if it be received whole and incorrupt, and if mankind walk in that way of life which its practice demands.

12. Wherefore We do not doubt, beloved sons, Venerable Brethren, that you will, with your well-known pastoral zeal, hasten with strength and constancy of spirit to set your hands to the work we have commended to you. Thus will it be your high praise and just congratulation that in your labors you were able to deserve most nobly of the religion which you uphold so well, and of your country and your race, for whom you, no less than Ourselves, greatly desire an unbroken tranquillity and a lease of perfect prosperity.

13. Meantime, praying God to fill you with His good gifts and graciously to favor your designs, We grant lovingly in the Lord the Apostolic Benediction, in witness of Our fatherly affection, to you and to the clergy and faithful entrusted to your care.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, June 25, 1891, in the 14th year of Our Pontificate.