On The Church In Portugal

Pergrata

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on September 14, 1886.

To the Bishops of Portugal.

Venerable Brethren, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

Your gratifying joint letter was received last month. It gave convincing evidence that you and your people are aware of Our most recent agreement with the kingdom of Portugal, and that you approve of it and expect that it will greatly benefit the common good. What was proposed to Us in all these negotiations was that the privileges which the Roman Pontiffs had given to your kings, who have supported the Catholic cause, might be preserved for the prestige of the empire, and at the same time that the Christian interests of the Indians be better provided for. We seem to have partly achieved this purpose, and We have confidence that We will achieve it all with the gift and the blessing of God. Therefore, considering this most desirable outcome, We look to the future not prophetically but with a firm hope that the Christian name in your Portugal will continue to flourish for the common good and grow greater from day to day.

2. We shall be the first to strive that the final outcome will fully justify Our hope. May God be propitious! Without doubt We shall find great assistance in the prudence and vigilance of your bishops, in the skillful support of the clergy, and in the good will of the Portuguese people. Indeed in a cause so noble and fruitful, the cooperation of all the men ruling the state will be at hand. We have no doubt that they will assist Us with their impartial wisdom, as We have recently had proof, and that they will continue to do so. And this the more because zeal for the Catholic faith and the tradition of Church service is not unusual in Portugal nor of recent origin, but is long-standing and renowned.

3. Though Portugal is located at the extremity of the Spanish peninsula and

hemmed in by narrow boundaries, your renowned kings, have nevertheless extended their empire into Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Thus Portugal yields to none of the more distinguished nations and even excels many. -- Where did they find the strength equal to the magnitude of their undertakings? If one is to judge them in truth, it was from their love of religion. For in their dangerous expeditions to barbarous nations, they were inspired, as can often be proven, to serve Christ before their own advantage or glory, to spread the Christian religion before extending their empire. Together with the visible image of the wounds of Jesus Christ, which was the popular flag of the nation, your ancestors had the holy cross on their galleys. In battle they were devout and confident that they would win noble victories whose glory would remain, not so much by arms as by the cross.-Their piety was particularly evident when the kings of Portugal diligently sought out apostolic men from other nations, men to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis Xavier. More than once these men were given the authority of Apostolic Nuncios by the Roman Pontiffs. It was most unusual and will forever accrue to the praise of your ancestors that their leaders brought the light of the Christian faith to the most remote peoples and so merited well of the Apostolic See.

4. Nor was there ever a time when Our predecessors failed to give evidence of gratitude to your nation. An excellent proof of this is the unusual insignia given to your kings. We often recall the great things that have been accomplished by a nation comparatively small, and exult to use the Portuguese as an example to illustrate the great power of religion and piety. At the same time We are deeply moved by feelings of admiration and benevolence. So let it be. Recently We showed Our paternal benevolence when We arbitrated in the controversy concerning the East India matter. We treated Portugal as liberally as the nature of Our office permitted. Since it is just for equals to receive and return good will, We expect much from the friendly government of that state. We are confident that they will not only use the greatest care in carrying out what was agreed upon, but that they will work together with Us and in consultation with you to repair the damage which the Church suffered there.

5. And the damage is significant, especially if We consider the condition of your clergy and of the religious orders, whose downfall has affected not only the Church but the state as well. We have seen a dearth of prudent and strenuous helpers, who would have labored to shape the habits of the people, to educate the youth, and to train the colonists themselves in a Christian way of life. Today especially with the great need for sacred missions in the interior of Africa, We feel this loss.

6. Now if We consider the sources of these evils, We conclude that the desire for impiety, which grew so greatly during the preceding century, was not primary, even though it penetrated your minds too as by the contagion of disease and by its presence gave rise to serious problems. Nevertheless those who maintain that greater harm was done by internal discord in the conduct of political parties and by the upheavals of seditious mobs seem close to the truth. For no force could extinguish and no means could shake the belief and the ancient faith in the Roman

Pontiff of the Portuguese people. In the very midst of the storms in your state, your people always held that concord with the Church is the great beginning on which Christian states ought to be ruled. For this reason the holy bond of religious unity not only remained unbroken, but by the authority and consent of the law, this bond afforded the foundation for political regulation. These consoling facts show that the Catholic cause can be easily strengthened with suitable remedies. Good seeds are still alive; when in constancy of mind and concord they have matured the will, they will produce an abundance of the desired fruit.

7. Those who are at the head of the government and whose cooperation is so necessary to heal the wounds of the Church easily understand that, just as Portugal attained great glory from the strength and blessings of the Catholic religion, so too the Church provides the only speedy elimination of the causes of evil. The state must always be governed under the leadership and guidance of this same religion. If this is done wisely, then the government will conform to the genius, the character, and the will of the people. For the Catholic faith is the legitimate religion of Portugal. Therefore it is entirely fitting that it be defended by the protection of the law and the authority of the state officials, and that its safety, continuance, and honor be publicly assured. Let its freedom and action legitimately lie in the political as well as ecclesiastical Power. All should be convinced of what daily experience confirms, that far from opposing the civil power by invidious rivalry, the Church aids the safety of the citizens and public tranquillity.

8. On the other hand, those ecclesiastical authorities should realize that the rulers of the state can and ought to trust them; nor should the ecclesiastical rulers accept a cause, such as retaining laws, which the interests of the Church do not want retained. Suspicion and lack of trust often result from the rivalry of political parties. This you know well from experience. Surely the greatest duty of Catholic men and especially of clerics is never to support a cause or to offer an opinion if it conflicts with the faith of the Church or counteracts the preservation of its rights. Everyone may hold his own opinion in purely political matters and defend it honestly and legitimately, provided it is not contrary to religion or justice. Yet those, if there are any, who do not distinguish clearly between what is holy and what is merely civil, commit a pernicious error which lends the name of religion to a political party.

9. Therefore if prudence and moderation are used, not only will there be no room for suspicion, but that unity of Catholics which We so vehemently desire will be strengthened. If it was more difficult formerly to obtain this unity, the reason was perhaps too many, surely more than was reasonable, tenaciously clung to their opinions and never for any reason retreated from their partisan position. These positions, though they cannot be criticized if kept within bounds, nevertheless greatly impede the attainment of the unanimity so greatly desired.

10. Therefore cultivate a salutary union of minds, prudently removing any and all obstacles. You will succeed better by putting all your concerns together and acting not individually, but as a group, in matters of such great importance. In the first

place therefore it seems that you need timely communications and the selection of a group of councilors. That this will aptly achieve your purpose you can hardly deny, especially if you consider the norms proposed and prescribed by the Apostolic See to deal with such matters, i. e., Our Encyclical letters about the Christian regulation of the state.

11. For the rest We shall not mention in detail everything which requires suitable remedies, particularly since these matters are better understood by those of you whom the force of the difficulties especially oppresses. Nor shall We mention those matters that require action by the civil power in order that the Catholic cause may receive the just consideration it deserves. The government cannot doubt Our paternal interest nor your compliance with civil law; thus it is proper to trust that it will give full weight to Our and your good will. It will then strive to restore a Church afflicted with so many evils to its due degree of liberty and dignity. As for Us, as Our duty demands, We shall always be prepared to act in ecclesiastical affairs and to decide with common consent what is most appropriate. We are also prepared to gladly accept good and just conditions.

12. But there are some significant things which your diligence must cure one by one. The first matter is the shortage of priests caused by an insufficiency of seminaries. As a result neither the Christian instruction of the faithful nor the administration of the sacraments has received proper care. Now, however, by the blessing of divine Providence each diocese has its own seminary; where the seminaries have not yet been restored, We hope that they will be shortly. Here then is the means of supplying a body of priests, provided the learning of the candidates is such as reason demands. We entrust this matter to you, as We respect your prudence and wisdom. However lest you should lack Our advice in this matter, consider as addressed to yourselves what We have prescribed a short time ago to the bishops of Hungary:

13. "In the education of clerics two elements are essential: learning for the development of the mind and virtue for the perfection of the soul. To the humanistic curriculum by which youths are educated must be added sacred and canonical studies. Care must be taken that their content is sound, entirely pure, and in full harmony with the documents of the Church; today especially the style must be forceful and eloquent, so that he may be able to exhort . . . and to refute those who contradict. -- Holiness of life without which knowledge puffs up and does not edify, consists not only in good and honorable habits, but also in that body of sacerdotal virtues which makes good priests exemplars of Jesus Christ the eternal High Priest.... In these institutions take care that the men appointed as teachers be men of sound doctrine and good morals, men to whom you can entrust a matter of such great importance. Choose rectors and spiritual directors who are outstanding for prudence, counsel, and experience. The common life and discipline should be so arranged by your authority that the students will never offend against piety; furthermore there should be an abundance of all aids which nourish piety, so that the seminarians may make daily progress in acquiring the virtues proper to the

sacerdotal state."

14. Moreover your vigilance for your priests must be great and even singular, so that the smaller the number of workers, the greater their zeal in cultivating the vineyard of the Lord. The words of the Gospel, the harvest is indeed great, seem to apply literally to you, since the people of Portugal have always loved religious instruction; they receive it eagerly when they perceive in the priests, their teachers, the embellishments of virtue and the reputation for learning. It is marvelous how fruitful the future work of the clergy will be in instructing the people, but especially the youth, when that work is crowned with dignity and zeal. Good example is the best means of cultivating in men the love of virtue. For this reason let all priests take care not only that nothing is noted in them which is at variance with their office and the rules of their state, but also that the holiness of their lives and morals may shine forth, like a lamp on a lampstand, giving light to all in the house.

15. A third problem which should engage your continuous care concerns the printed material that is published either daily or at stated intervals. You know the times, venerable brethren: on the one hand men are consumed with an insatiable passion for reading; on the other an enormous amount of bad literature is freely disseminated. Given these facts it is impossible to estimate how much harm is done to good morals, what destruction daily threatens the integrity of religion. Therefore by exhortation, by admonition. by every possible means continue to call men back from such fountains of corruption and lead them to salutary waters. It will be a great help if by your initiative and leadership daily papers are published, under the patronage of truth, virtue, and religion, to offset these poisonous evils. Now an admonition for authors who by an honest and holy determination combine the love of writing with a love and zeal for the Catholic cause. If they really want their works to be fruitful and worthy of praise, let them remember what is required of those who engage in controversy for a good cause. In writing they must exercise the greatest care to be moderate and prudent, but above all loving. Love is the mother and companion of all the other virtues. You can see that fickle suspicion and rash accusations are detrimental indeed to fraternal love. From this you can understand the injustice of those who, in favoring one political party, do not hesitate in matters of religion to accuse others of unorthodoxy. They do this only because they belong to another party, as though orthodox Catholic faith is necessarily the prerogative of this or that political party.

16. We commend all which We have either warned against or commanded to your authority, which all whom you govern must respect and accept. This applies especially to priests who are, subject to you in their private and public lives, whether they are engaged in the duties of the sacred ministry or in teaching in the schools. They never cease to be under the authority of the bishops. And just as they are obliged to lead others to the beauty of virtue by their example, so too must they lead others to obedience and the submission due to episcopal authority.

17. That everything may proceed prosperously according to Our desire, We ask for heavenly assistance. First of all let us approach that perennial font of divine grace, the holy Heart of our Savior Jesus Christ, devotion to whom is both primary and ancient with you. We implore the patronage of the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, under whose special guardianship the kingdom of Portugal boasts to be. Finally we ask for the intercession of St. Elizabeth, the most holy of royal and saintly women, and of all the holy martyrs who in the first days of the Church established or propagated Christianity in Portugal.

18. Meanwhile, as proof of Our good will and as a promise of heavenly gifts, We grant you. your clergy, and all your people most affectionately Our Apostolic Blessing in the Lord.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, September 14, 1886, in the ninth year of Our Pontificate.