



Permoti Nos

Encyclical Of Pope Leo XIII On Social Conditions In Belgium

July 10, 1895

To the Bishops of Belgium.

1. As we experience a special friendship for your nation, and in response to the request of many of its citizens, We have directed particular attention to a serious matter for Belgian Catholics. You know well, of course, to what We are referring: the social question. The burning discussions of this question among them have troubled their minds to such an extent that it clearly calls for attention and alleviation from Us.
2. The question is intrinsically very difficult and, in your country, it is bound up with greater problems. Still, We have not refused to address it, and particularly considering that it is necessarily connected with religion and the duty of Our office. For in this area of instruction also it has pleased us to impart the teachings of Christian wisdom in a way suited to the age and its ways. And it is pleasant to recall that these statements have yielded significant benefits both for individuals and for states, and that these results grow greater than expected as the days go by. These good fruits have been produced among Belgian Catholics as well, for their promptness to give support to instructions of this kind was extraordinary; still, these fruits were not as great as were justly expected, considering the special character of the country and the people. The hindrance in this case is known well enough. For, while moved by good intentions, they insist wrongly on consulting others on these matters. As a result, the many benefits they seek do not occur, and furthermore, discord among the Catholics flourishes.
3. We find this disagreement among Belgian Catholics extremely hard to bear, novel as it is, and ill-omened. For prior to this, their mutual agreement always produced salutary effects. Their unity was, of course, clearly evident in the debate on the schools - to mention a recent occurrence. For on that occasion, Catholics of

every class were effectively bound together; it was mainly because of this that the affair turned out well, to the dignity of religion and the safety of the young.

4. And now, your flocks are on the point of incurring dangerous losses both individually and as a group because they are disunited and pursuing different objectives; you see how ripe the time is for laying a healing hand on these troubled events. We strongly support your efforts to restore and strengthen concord. The great reverence in which your faithful hold you indicates that you will be successful. To this end, We suggest that you gather together for a congress as soon as it can be arranged. By sharing your views at that congress, you will be able to study in fuller detail the extent of the question, and to consider better means of settling it.

5. This question cannot be regarded from one standpoint only. It is indeed concerned with external goods, but it is preeminently concerned with religion and morals. It is also directly connected with the civil constitution of the laws, so that in the last analysis, it has a broad reference to the rights and duties of all classes. Further more, when we apply the evangelical principles of justice and charity to this question and to the conduct of life, the manifold interests of private individuals are necessarily affected. And to these considerations must be added certain conditions of business and industry, of workers and owners which are specifically peculiar to Belgium.

6. These difficult problems, for which your judgment and attentiveness must find solutions, are of great importance and We shall not leave you without Our proposals in the present affair. In this way after the conclusion of the congress, it will be less laborious and less dangerous for you to decide, each one of you in your own diocese, on remedies and stabilizing action suited to the people and the districts. Still you should, with the help of suitable citizens, apply these measures in such a way that they may have a similar effect nationwide. The action undertaken by Catholics starting from the same points and traveling as far as possible along the same paths should be observed everywhere to be one and the same action. Consequently this action should be honest, vigorous, and productive. To facilitate this, Catholics must urgently wish for and pursue only those goals which are seen quite truly to lead to the common good, in preference to their own personal opinions and interests. This would ensure: 1) that religion excels in its own function and spreads its power, a power which brings safety to civil, domestic, and economic affairs as well, in a wonderful way; 2) that by uniting public authority and freedom in a Christian manner, the kingdom remains unharmed by sedition and protected by tranquility; 3) that the good institutions of the state, especially the schools of the young, are promoted and improved; 4) that commerce and crafts are improved, especially by the help of those societies, each with its own particular purpose, which abound in your country and which it is desirable to develop further with religion as leader and support. Nor is it a matter of small importance to ensure that 5) the supreme counsels of God be accepted with the modesty which is obviously their due. Since God has ordered that different classes

exist in the human race, but that among those classes an equality deriving from their friendly cooperation also exists, workers should in no way abandon their respect for and trust in their employers, and the employers should treat their workers with just kindness and prudent care.

7. These are the main constituents of the common good whose acquisition must be the goal of our efforts. From this good comes real alleviation to solace the condition of mortal life and from it too derives merits for heavenly life. If Catholics persist in loving with greater zeal the order taught by this Christian wisdom and in strengthening it by their example, the outcome which is hoped for will more readily come to pass. When this happens, those who strayed from the path, deceived either by wrong opinion or by false appearances, would on regaining their senses seek the protection and guidance of the Church. Surely no Catholic who truly loves his religion and his country will refuse to accept your decisions. They realize every improvement contributes to stability and leads to greater benefits if it is introduced gradually and moderately.

8. In the meantime, the present situation is so serious that a remedy for it should not be delayed. That remedy should begin with the calming of men's minds. Therefore, Venerable Brothers, address the Catholics in Our name and warn them to refrain completely from all controversy and argumentation on these issues, whether at meetings or in newspapers and similar publications. More especially, urge them to stop blaming each other, and not to anticipate the judgment of the lawful government. Then let them all with united brotherly minds strive with you to devote their greatest attention and effort to achieving their goal. The clergy should lead the way since it is especially characteristic of them to be wary in the face of novel opinions, to soothe and unite men's minds in the name of religion, and to recall the duties of Christian citizens.

9. We have long embraced the noble Belgian nation with Our special love and care, and Belgium in turn, enlivened by the ancestral religion, has offered Us many evidences of obedience and loving devotion. So there is little doubt that Our Catholic sons will receive and carry out religiously these exhortations and commands with a will equal to Our purpose in issuing them.

10. For they will certainly never allow their discord to lessen and destroy imprudently that public regard for their religion which their concord has long fostered and which many a country envies them.

11. Let them rather act in the closest concert in order to oppose all their plans and strength to the wickedness of Socialism, which very clearly will cause evils and great losses. For it is constantly and in every way exerting itself violently against religion and the state; it is striving every day to throw both divine and human laws into confusion and to destroy the good works of evangelical providence. Our voice has been raised often and vehemently against this great calamity, as the commands and warnings which We gave in the Letter *Rerum Novarum* sufficiently

testify. So to this purpose all good men should direct their minds to the exclusion of factional interests. They should uphold the sacred order of God and of their country without doubt, in their legitimate fight on behalf of Christian truth, justice, and charity. For it is from this order that public safety and happiness spring.

12. It is only right for Us to be willing to rest Our trust and expectation in these matters on your deliberation and ingenuity in particular. Therefore, while We beseech for you the ample helps of divine aid, We most lovingly impart to you yourselves and to the clergy and people of each one of you the Apostolic blessing.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, 10 July 1895, in the eighteenth year of Our pontificate.