



Rerum Orientalium

To Our Venerable Brethren the Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Local Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Health and Apostolic Benediction.

In order to promote the study of Oriental sciences and a more thorough knowledge of them among the faithful, and still more among priests, our Predecessors, during the past centuries, have applied themselves with an ardor of which no one can be ignorant who has even rapidly glanced at the annals of the Catholic Church. They well knew that the cause of many evils in the past, and especially of the deplorable dissension which has detached from the root of unity many churches once so flourishing, has resulted principally and almost fatally from mutual ignorance and contempt, and from the prejudices which followed on a long division among souls. They knew also that no remedy can be supplied until those impediments are removed. Hence, to touch but briefly on a few of the historical documents which, beginning from the time when the bonds of unity began to be relaxed, bear witness to the care and solicitude of the Roman Pontiffs in this respect, every one knows with what benevolence and veneration Adrian I received the two apostles of the Slavs, Cyril and Methodius, and how singularly he honored them; with what diligence he supported the Eighth Ecumenical Council, the fourth of Constantinople, to which he sent his legates, shortly after such a great portion of the flock of the Lord had been lamentably snatched away from the Roman Pontiff, the divinely-constituted Shepherd. Such sacred assemblies, convoked for the purpose of discussing Oriental affairs, were held one after another, as when at Bari, at the grave of St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, Anselm, Doctor of Aosta and Archbishop of Canterbury, moved the minds and hearts of all by his learning and the wonderful sanctity of his life; or again as at Lyons, to which those two luminaries of the Church, the angelic Doctor St. Thomas, and the seraphic St. Bonaventure, were summoned by Gregory X, and how the one died on the journey and the other in the midst of the great labors of the Council; or as at Ferrara and Florence, when the palm must certainly be awarded to those ornaments of the Christian East, soon to become Cardinals of the Roman Church, Bessarion of Nice,

and Isidore of Kieff; and when the truth of Catholic dogma, logically and methodically stated, and made to shine forth anew by the charity of Christ, seemed to pave the way for the reconciliation of Oriental Christians with the Supreme Pastor.

2. The few facts We have cited manifest the paternal affection and devotion of the Apostolic See towards Oriental nations, but, because more remarkable they also occur more rarely. Innumerable other acts concerning the Orient, Venerable Brethren, bear testimony to the benefits which the Roman Church wished to confer on the East. It was to this end especially that she sent her religious to spend their lives in the service of Oriental nations. Sustained by the authority of the Apostolic See, these heroic men, recruited chiefly from the religious families of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic, went forth to found houses and to create new provinces of their Order, not only in Palestine and Armenia, where they cultivated anew with great effort theology and other sciences that contributed to the profane and the religious civilization not only of those countries but also of other regions, but in other countries also where the Orientals subjected to the domination of the Turk or of the Tartar, and forcibly separated from Roman Unity, were deprived of access to every form of education, especially religious education.

3. These remarkable benefits and aims of the Apostolic See seemed to carry weight with the doctors of the University of Paris who, since the thirteenth century, following the wishes and aspirations of the Holy See, founded, as history teaches us, and incorporated with their University, an Oriental college, with which our predecessor John XX, a few years later, kept in touch through Hugo Bishop of Paris.[1] Equally remarkable also, as the documents of that time testify, were the efforts of Humbert de Romans, a very learned religious and Master General of the Order of Preachers. In his book "Of what it befits to treat in the coming Council of Lyons," he recommended point by point what was necessary in order to win the souls of the Orientals:[2] a knowledge of the Greek language, because the diversity of nations is joined in the unity of faith by means of various languages; an abundance of Greek books and a sufficient number of translations of the works of the West into the languages of the East. He also exhorted the Friars Preachers assembled in General Chapter at Milan to hold in high esteem the languages of the East, and to study them earnestly so as to be ready to go forth to those nations if it were God's Will.

4. Thus also in the Franciscan family, Roger Bacon, that scholar so dear to Our Predecessor, Clement IV, not only wrote learnedly on the Chaldean, Arab and Greek languages,[3] but also facilitated their study for others.

Following the above examples, Raymond Lulli, a man of singular learning and piety, urged with all the impetuosity of his nature, and obtained from Our Predecessors, Celestine V and Boniface VIII, favors which at the time were most unusual: that a Cardinal should be placed at the head of Oriental affairs and studies, and that Apostolic expeditions be sent to the Tartar, the Saracen, and

other infidels, as well as to bring the "schismatics" once more into the unity of the Church.

5. But We specially wish to emphasize how, through the initiative of the same Raymond Lulli, a decree was formulated in the General Council of Vienne and promulgated by Our Predecessor Clement V, in which We seem to see foreshadowed Our own Oriental Institute. With the approbation of this sacred Council, We provide for the erection of schools for the study of the above-mentioned languages wherever the Roman Curia shall happen to reside, as also in Paris, Oxford, Bologna and Salamanca, and for the appointment of two Catholic professors with sufficient knowledge for each of the languages- Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Chaldaic-who shall direct those schools, and shall translate into Latin books written in the above languages, shall teach them to others, and shall pass on their knowledge through instruction; so that the young men by this means may with God's help produce the fruits hoped for by propagating the Faith among infidel nations.[4]

6. But since, among Oriental nations, on account of the confusion of the times, nearly all the possibilities of scientific study were destroyed and it was impossible to cultivate higher studies among students well qualified for them, you know, Venerable Brethren, that Our Predecessors also were careful that not only in the chief Universities of that age there should be Oriental centers of learning, but also in a special manner that seminaries should be opened in the heart of this mother city of Rome, easily accessible to students of those nations, whence after a careful education they should go forth prepared to fight the good fight. On that account monasteries and colleges were opened in Rome for the Greeks and the Ruthenians, and also houses were given to the Maronites and Armenians. We may see what gain for souls was achieved when we consider the liturgical and other works which the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda caused to be published in various Oriental languages, and the precious Oriental codices which the Vatican library diligently gathered together and religiously preserved.

7. Nor is this by any means all. As Our Predecessors realized that a more complete knowledge of things Oriental among Occidentals was of great importance to foster charity and mutual esteem, they strove with all their might to attain this end. Thus Gregory XVI, who, raised to the Supreme Pontificate in the very year he was about to begin his mission as legate at the court of Alexander I, studied Russian affairs with the greatest diligence; thus Pius IX, who before and after the Vatican Council earnestly recommended the publication of works on Oriental rites and traditions; thus Leo XIII, who showed so great a love and pastoral solicitude not only for the Copts and the Slavs, but for all the Orientals. Besides the new religious Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption, he encouraged also other Religious Orders to acquire or increase their knowledge of Eastern matters. He caused to be erected new colleges for the Orientals, in the Orient, as well as here in Rome. He praised most highly the University of the Society of Jesus at Beirut, which is even today in a most flourishing state and very dear to Us. Again Pius X

also, who, having founded the Pontifical Biblical Institute, kindled in the souls of many a new ardor for Oriental studies, and thereby reaped a rich harvest.

8. Our immediate Predecessor, Benedict XV, diligently emulating this paternal providence towards the Oriental nations, as a sacred inheritance accepted by Pius X, constituted a Congregation for the affairs of the Oriental Church, and decided to found in this City, the Head of Christendom, a "special center for higher Oriental studies," endowed with "all the scientific apparatus which modern erudition requires, and staffed with zealous teachers, thoroughly trained in all branches of study concerning the Orient,"[5] and empowered with the faculty of giving "the degree of Doctor in ecclesiastical sciences related to the Christian nations of the East." [6] This Institute was open not only to the Orientals (among whom are included those also who are separated from Catholic Unity), but also to the Latin priests who wished to become proficient in these branches, or who wished to minister to the Orientals. The greatest praise is to be given to these men, who worked diligently during a period of four years to initiate the first students of the Institute in Oriental sciences.

9. There was, however, this difficulty to a fitting development of the Institute, that, though near the Vatican, it was far from the center of the city. Therefore We, wishing to carry into effect what Benedict XV had in mind, had decreed, at the beginning of Our Pontificate, the transfer of the Oriental Institute to the Pontifical Biblical Institute, as being closely related to it in studies and purposes, the Institutes remaining distinct from one another. We intended to give the Oriental Institute an abode of its own as soon as possible. Moreover, with the intention of there never being a lack of men fitted to teach Oriental subjects, and thinking that We should reach this end more easily by confiding so important a charge to one religious family, by Our Letter of September 14, 1922,[7] We commanded the General of the Society of Jesus that, by his love towards the Holy See and his Vicar, and the obedience he owed to him, he should, in spite of all difficulties, under take the entire administration of the Institute, observing the following conditions: that the supreme direction of the Institute being reserved to Us and to Our successors, the General of the Society of Jesus should find men capable of filling the difficult offices of President and lecturers of the Institute; that henceforth, either directly or through the President, he should propose for Our approval and that of Our successors those whom he considered competent to lecture on the various subjects of the Institute; and that he should suggest all that might seem to conduce to the security and prosperity of the Institute.

10. Now, at the close of the sixth year since We, with the special guidance of God, made this decision, We may thank God most gratefully that an abundant harvest has resulted from Our labors. Although the number of students-as the nature of the Institute itself requires-has not been, nor ever will be, very great, still it has been sufficient to enable Us to rejoice when We realize that already an important group of men, rapidly increasing in numbers, will soon leave the shelter of this abode of learning, so formed in piety and learning that we have every hope that they may,

in the field which lies open before them, be of great assistance to the Oriental Churches.

11. And now, while praising with all Our hearts the local Ordinaries and Heads of Religious Orders, who, making Our wishes their own, have sent to Rome, from divers nations and countries, their priests to be formed in Oriental sciences, We at the same time exhort all Religious Heads of groups scattered far and wide upon the earth, that, following such an example, they neglect not to send to this Our Oriental Institute those students whom they may consider suitable and who may feel an attraction for such studies. Let us recall to your memories, Venerable Brethren, what we recently declared in Our Encyclical *Mortalium animos*. Who is there who does not know how often a kind of unity among Christians, completely foreign to the mind of Christ the Founder of the Church, is contemplated; and who has not heard of those most important discussions, carried on especially in the greater part of Europe and of America on the most important subject of the Orientals, whether united to the Roman Church or separated from her? But, though the students from Our seminaries, having acquired, as they should, a knowledge of Protestant errors and fallacies of later date, are able to recognize and promptly to refute them, they are not, however, trained, at least generally speaking, in that particular branch of learning which would enable them to pass a sure judgment on matters pertaining to Oriental sciences and customs, and to the liturgy which is to be preserved with all reverence within the Catholic unity. For this a very special and accurate study is required.

12. Therefore, since We cannot in any way neglect all that could help to bring about that most desirable reunion of such a remarkable portion of the flock of Jesus Christ to His true Church, or to show the greatest charity towards those who, in their different rites, closely adhere with their minds and their hearts to the Roman Church and the Vicar of Christ, we earnestly exhort you, Venerable Brethren, that each one choose among his priests at least one who, being well trained in these branches of learning, shall be able to instruct seminarists in them when opportunities arise. We are not ignorant of the fact that it belongs in a peculiar manner to Catholic Universities to institute a special faculty of Oriental sciences. With Our initiative and Our help, We are glad that this work has already begun in Paris, Louvain, Lille. Of late, also, in several other seats of theological learning, chairs of Oriental sciences have been founded at the expense of the civil government, with the consent of and by the encouragement of the local Ordinaries. Nevertheless, it ought not to be too difficult to find a Professor in each of the theological seminaries who, together with history, liturgy, or canon law, will be able to teach the elements of Oriental sciences. And when the minds and hearts of the students shall thus be turned towards Eastern teaching and rites, no small gain should result. Not only will the Orientals thus derive benefit, but also the students themselves will have a better knowledge of Catholic theology and Latin discipline, and will conceive a greater love for the true Spouse of Christ, whose beauty, on account of the variety of rites, will shine forth the more.

13. Having considered all the advantages to Christianity that would follow from such training of young men, We have considered it part of Our duty to spare no labors, not only to ensure the life of the Institute which from the outset We confirmed, but also to facilitate its success by new developments. Hence, as soon as it was possible to Us, We wished to assign to it an abode of its own, spending for the purchase and establishing of the house of St. Anthony, near St. Mary Major on the Esquiline, the funds bequeathed to Us by the liberality of a benevolent prelate as also those offered Us by a devout citizen of the United States; We hope and pray that their reward in Heaven may be exceeding great. Nor should We pass over in silence the fact that funds reached Us from Spain, sufficient to furnish and to endow a larger and more beautiful library. May these examples of liberality encourage others, for, after an experience of many years as Librarian of the Ambrosian and the Vatican Library, We realize how important it is to furnish this library with all necessary material, so that not only the Doctors, but also the students, should be enabled to acquire knowledge concerning the Orient from sources often hidden or unknown, but yet extremely rich, and to turn them to public service. Undeterred by difficulties (though We foresee these will be numerous and great), We shall strive, as far as in Us lies, to procure all things that appertain to the countries of the Orient, to their customs, to their languages and to their rites; and We shall be very grateful to any who, through filial love for the Vicar of Christ, shall help Us to attain this end, whether by giving funds, or books, or codices, or paintings, or anything of the kind relating to the Christian East.

14. And thus We hope that the Oriental nations, seeing with their own eyes the monuments of the piety, the learning, and the arts of their ancestors, shall be taught how true, eternal orthodoxy was held in honor in the Roman Church and with what sacredness it is preserved, defended and propagated. May We not hope, that moved by such strong arguments (especially if over the mutual intercourse between scholars Christian charity shall preside) the greater number of Orientals, striving to regain their ancient glories, and putting aside prejudice, will desire to return to that Christian unity maintained by a full profession of faith, such as befits the true followers of Christ, united in One flock under One Shepherd?

15. While We hope and pray to God that this most happy day may finally dawn upon the Christian world, it will perhaps be useful, Venerable Brethren, to indicate briefly how Our Oriental Institute, uniting with us to carry out Our desires, shall work to attain this end. The Professors are engaged in two different sorts of studies, of which some are contained, as it were, within the walls of the Institute, while others have a wider sphere, by means of the publication of documents relating to the Christian East, whether unedited, or forgotten in the days in which we live.

16. As to the education of the students, besides the dogmatic theology of the dissidents, the explanation of the Oriental Fathers, and of all that appertains to Oriental studies, whether of history, liturgy, archaeology, or other sacred branches of learning, and the languages of various nations, we recall with special

gratification how We have been enabled to add to the Byzantine Institutions a chair of Islamic Institutions, a thing hitherto unheard of in Roman centers of learning. By a special favor of Divine Providence, We have been able to place at the head of this Department a man who, born a Turk, and after many years of study, having by God's help professed the Catholic religion and been ordained to the priesthood, seemed capable of teaching those among his compatriots who were to be destined to the sacred ministry how to present, as well to scholars as to the ignorant, the cause of the One Individual God, and of the Gospel law.

17. Nor are the publications of the Oriental Institute for the propagation of the Catholic religion and the achievement of true union among Christians of less importance. The greater number of these volumes, called *Orientalia Christiana*, were written during the past few years by Professors of the Institute; the rest, under its auspices, by other experts on Oriental questions. These either deal with both the ancient and modern conditions of the Eastern nations generally unknown to Westerners, or else cast a new light upon the religious history of the East by means of documents hitherto unknown; or describe the relations of Oriental monks, and even Patriarchs, with this Apostolic See, and the solicitude of the Roman Pontiffs in defending their rights and property; or compare the theology of the dissidents regarding the sacraments or even the nature of the Church herself with the Catholic Truth; or again make a study of ancient codices. In a word, there is nothing which relates to sacred sciences, or has any connection with Oriental civilization (as for instance the remains of Greek culture in Southern Italy) which does not appeal to the diligence of these scholars.

18. Who then, considering the great extent of these labors, undertaken chiefly for the benefit of Orientals, does not trust Jesus Christ the most merciful Redeemer of men, taking pity upon the sad fate of so many, long astray from the right road, will complete what We have begun, and guide His flock into the One Fold, ruled over by the One Shepherd? A special reason for this hope is that among those nations a very great part of Revelation has been religiously preserved, sincere service is rendered to Christ Our Lord, great piety and love are shown towards His sinless Mother, and devout use made of the Sacraments. Therefore, since God in His mercy has willed that men, and especially priests, should as His instruments cooperate in the work of Redemption, what is there left to Us, Venerable Brethren, but once more to supplicate, yea to compel you not only to agree in mind and in heart with Our designs, but also to labor that the longed-for day may soon dawn, when We shall all welcome back, not only a few, but the vast majority of the Greeks, of the Slavs, of the Roumanians, and of the Eastern nations, hitherto separated, to their former communion with the Roman Church. And as we meditate upon what We have already begun to do, and what We hope to bring to perfection, so as to hasten this joyful day, it seems to Us that We may compare Ourselves to the Father of the family whom Christ Our Lord describes as calling the guests invited to His supper "that they should come, for now all things are ready" (Luke xiv, 17). Applying these words to Our own case, We earnestly entreat you, Venerable Brethren, that you add your efforts to ours, for this most important end

of promoting Oriental studies. So that, after the removal of all obstacles, under the auspices of the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, and of the Holy Fathers and Doctors of East and West, We may receive into the House of the Father those brethren and sons of Ours, so long separated from Us, but once more united in bonds of a charity based upon the solid foundation of truth and the full profession of the Christian religion.

And in order that these Our desires and enterprises may be most happily realized, as an earnest of heavenly gifts and as a token of Our paternal affection, We most lovingly impart the apostolic benediction to you, Venerable Brethren, and to all the flock committed to your care.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, September 8, 1928, in the seventh year of Our Pontificate.

ENDNOTES

- 1. Denifle-Chatelain, Chartul, Univ. Paris, t. II, n. 857.
- 2. Mansi, t. xxiv, ed. 128.
- 3. Opus maius, pars tertia.
- 4. Denifle-Chatelain, Chartul, Univ. Paris, t. ii. n. 695.
- 5. Benedict XV, Motu proprio *Orientis catholici*, Oct. 15, 1917. Acta Ap. Sedis IX (1917), n. 11, pp. 531-533.
- 6. Benedict XV, Litterae Apostolicae *Quod Nobis*, Sept. 25, 1920 (Acta Apost. Sedis XII (1920), n. 11, pp. 440-441.
- 7. Letter *Decessor Noster* (Acta Apost. Sed. XIV (1922), n. 15, pp. 545-546.