



Cum Primum

On Civil Obedience

Encyclical Of Pope Gregory XVI

June 9, 1832

To All Archbishops and Bishops Dwelling in the Kingdom of Poland.

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

When the first report of the calamities, which so seriously devastated your flourishing kingdom reached our ears, We learned simultaneously that they had been caused by some fabricators of deceit and lies. Under the pretext of religion, and revolting against the legitimate authority of the princes, they filled their fatherland, which they loosed from due obedience to authority, with mourning. We shed abundant tears at the feet of God, grieving over the harsh evil with which some of our flock was afflicted. Afterward We humbly prayed that God would enable your provinces, agitated by so many and so serious dissensions, to be restored to peace and to the rule of legitimate authority.

2. We were immediately eager to send an encyclical letter to you that you might understand that We too were oppressed by the weight of your troubles. We hoped to add some solace and strength to your pastoral solicitude by which you might apply yourselves with new and more ardent zeal to propagating sounder doctrines and to persuading your precious followers, both in the clergy and among the laity. That letter never reached you because of the troubles of the times; therefore, now that God has restored quiet and tranquility, We again open our heart to you. We hope to kindle your zeal and solicitude as much as We can with the help of God, so that you may diligently protect your flock from the true causes of your past troubles. Watch earnestly lest deceitful men and the promoters of novelties continue to spread erroneous doctrines and false dogmas in your flock. Using the pretext of the common good, as is their custom, they take advantage of the credulity of those who are naive and rash, so that they may have them as blind servants and supporters in disturbing the peace of the kingdom and in overturning the order of society.

3. Surely the fraud of these would-be teachers must be uncovered in clear words

for the good and the instruction of the faithful. The fallacy of their thought must be refuted courageously everywhere with the words of divine scripture and the testimony of Church tradition. From these most pure fountains (from which the Catholic clergy ought to draw the plan of their lives and the material for their sermons to the people) We are taught most clearly that the obedience which men are obliged to render to the authorities established by God is an absolute precept which no one can violate, except if by chance something is commanded which runs counter to the laws of God or of the Church. "Let everyone" says the Apostle, "be subject to higher authorities, for there exists no authority except from God, and those who exist have been appointed by God. Therefore he who resists the authority resists the ordination of God . . . wherefore you must needs be subject not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience sake" (Rom 13.1,2,5). Similarly St. Peter (1 Pt 2.13) teaches all the faithful: "Be subject to every human creature for God's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to the governors sent through him . . ." for (he says) such is the will of God, that by doing good you would silence the ignorance of foolish men." By observing these admonitions the first Christians, even during the persecutions, deserved well of the Roman emperors themselves and of the security of the state. "Christian soldiers," says St. Augustine, "served an infidel emperor: when it came to the subject of Christ, they recognized no one except Him who is in heaven. They distinguished between the eternal Lord and the temporal lord, but also were subject to the temporal lord because of the eternal Lord" (St. Aug. On Ps 124).

4. The holy Fathers have always taught this doctrine. The Catholic Church has taught it and continues to teach it. Having been taught it, the first Christians lived and acted in such a manner that, although the crime of cowardice and desertion had contaminated the pagan army, it never contaminated the Christians. On this point Tertullian reports: "Concerning the majesty of the emperor, we Christians are brought into ill repute. Nevertheless, no Christians will be found among men like Albinus or Niger or Cassius. But among these very peoples, who recently had sworn by their gods, who had offered sacrifices for the safety of emperor and state, and who frequently condemned the Christians, enemies of the state have been found. No Christian is an enemy, certainly not of the emperor. Since we know that the emperor is appointed by God, it is necessary that he be loved and revered, and that we wish him well." We understand that you know these things. We do not intend to say them as if we might be afraid that you would not propagate and disseminate sounder doctrine concerning the obedience which subjects must have for their legitimate prince. Nonetheless We have said them so that you may easily understand that We desire all clerics of your kingdom to shine forth in purity of doctrine, in splendor of knowledge, and in sanctity of life, that they may appear in the eyes and the judgment of all without blemish. In this manner, We hope everything will proceed more happily. Your emperor will act kindly toward you; at no time will he deny his patronage for the good of the Catholic religion and he will always listen patiently to your requests. Those who are wise will follow you with richly deserved praise, and those who are opposed will fear you, but will have nothing evil to say of Us. Meanwhile raising our hands to heaven, We pray God for

you that he may enrich and fill each one of you more and more every day with an abundance of heavenly virtues. Having you always in our heart, We exhort you to complete our joy. Sharing the same love, may you also think alike, unanimously perceiving the same things. May all of you proclaim, as is fitting, sound doctrine and sound words; preserve that which was entrusted to you and stand as one, united in the spirit, working together for the faith. Finally pray to God for us without ceasing. We impart most lovingly the Apostolic Benediction to you and to the flock committed to you as a pledge of paternal charity.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, June 9, 1832, the second year of Our Pontificate.