



IAMPRIDEM

ON CATHOLICISM IN GERMANY

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on January 6, 1886.

To the Archbishops and Bishops of Prussia.

It has long been Our desire, venerable brothers, to speak to you about the situation of Catholicism in Germany. We wanted to show you in a special way how much paternal love and zeal We feel for you and your sons. At the same time We wanted to congratulate you, venerable brothers, for your truly enthusiastic apostolic care toward your flock. We understand particularly your efforts to prevent the Catholics in your care from straying from virtue, piety, and the way of salvation. We also wanted to express the consolation and joy We perceive in the good will which makes all the Catholics of Germany cling to you and renders them attentive to you. The discipline and the harmony which increase daily among them confirm this.

2. With this letter We want to do what We could not accomplish until now. We hope that with the help of Divine Providence, the day may soon dawn which will bring the joyous beginning of better times for religion and for the Church in Germany.

3. You are aware, venerable brothers, of how the mutual understanding which reigned so long between the Apostolic See and the kingdom of Prussia was thrown into sudden disorder by these laws, placing Catholic citizens in such great danger and distress. But this disaster which caused so much sorrow to Our predecessor Pius IX and to Us has offered God an opportunity. Thus the virtue of the pastors and faithful of Germany and their adherence to the faith of their fathers shine forth all the more. This virtue, this loyalty is so much more worthy of praise when strenuous efforts to protect the interests of the Church have preserved the respect and submission due to the Prince and the proper love of country. Catholics have thus shown their adversaries that they acted not for political considerations but solely from religious duty, which commands the preservation of the sacred and inviolate work of God. Thus, God, the supreme author and rewarder of all merit, has bestowed the fullest treasures of His goodness and grace on you, venerable brothers, and on all the people of your dioceses. His helping hand was ever

present, while the new laws diminished daily the number of priests among the Prussian faithful and left many parish churches without pastors. Those treacherous men who call themselves "old Catholics" spread new and perverse teachings and strove to attract to themselves unfortunate disciples deceived by fraud.

Nevertheless, We have seen with joy Our dear sons, the Catholics of Germany, hold firmly and fully to the faith of their fathers. The snares of the masters of deceit have never prevailed against them, for with Christian courage they have triumphed over danger. They attached themselves to the Church with a love so much the greater as they saw it the object of harsher trials.

4. Due to these events of great virtue and glory, the sorrow caused by these laws has been lifted from Us. From the bottom of Our heart, We have given praise and thanks to God, who has put such wonderful strength in the souls of His children. And, given the occasion, We have publicly honored your strength and that of your people with well-deserved praises. But Our apostolic ministry requires Us to preserve intact the state of the Church and to dispel anything which might disturb the inner life of its people. We must then use all Our authority and fervor to remove the difficulties of the present time. That is why We have spared no effort and overlooked no duty to abolish these laws which have caused the Church such long anguish and you so many labors. The desire which We have had to reestablish harmony and peace on a solid foundation is still great. We have thus informed the rulers that We are ready to comply with their desires insofar as the divine laws and the duty of conscience permit. Moreover, We have not hesitated to give clear proof of this intention. It is Our firm purpose to do everything which may contribute to reestablishing and strengthening harmony.

5. However, in order to realize Our hope, We must take special care to purge public law of all that is contrary to Catholic teaching in whatever pertains closely to the piety of the faithful. Likewise, whatever hampers the proper freedom of bishops in governing their churches by the divinely established norms and in training seminarians according to the prescriptions of canon law must be repealed. Though We are animated by a sincere desire for peace, We still may not dare do anything contrary to what has been divinely established and ordained. We are, if necessary, ready to endure the greatest hardships according to the example of Our predecessors, to defend these things.

6. As for you, venerable brothers, you are aware of the true nature of the Church, of the constitution which its divine founder gave it, and of the rights and duties associated with it. Nobody can subtract from or destroy these rights and duties. Certainly, the Church is a supernatural society and perfect in its order, as we have recently declared in Our encyclical "Immortale Dei." As its purpose is to bring its children to eternal happiness, it has received from God the means and aids to bring them into possession of the heavenly goods. It begins on earth and in the struggles of this life to construct an edifice which will have its final crowning and supreme splendor only in heaven. It is solely the Church's duty to make rules concerning its inner life, whose nature was determined by our Lord Jesus Christ, the restorer of our salvation. Christ ordered that this free and independent power belong to Peter and to his successors, and, under the authority of Peter, to the bishops in their respective churches. This episcopal power includes by its very

nature clerical discipline regarding the sacred ministry and the conduct of the priests, for the priests are attached to the bishop like the strings of a lyre.[1]

7. The priestly order, heir of such a sublime ministry, renews itself from age to age without changing. Those who are called to this order must thus follow by their sincerity of doctrine and innocence of life, in the footsteps of the first sowers of the faith, whom Christ Himself chose. The right and duty to teach young people whom God calls to become His ministers and the dispensers of His mysteries falls to the bishops alone. The people are to take their religious training from those to whom it was said, "teach all nations." If this is so, how much greater is the obligation imposed on bishops to give the nourishment of sound doctrine as they see fit to these ministers, who will be the salt of the earth and will take the place of Jesus Christ among men? This duty is not the only one incumbent on the bishops; in addition, they must look after the welfare of the seminarians. They should initiate them quickly into the practices of a firm piety, a piety whose absence would leave them unworthy of the priesthood and incapable of fulfilling its duties.

8. You know very well from theory and practice the difficulties and prolonged labors which this instruction of seminarians requires. Those who have chosen God as their inheritance should show themselves to the Christian people as living models of virtue and self restraint, according to the teaching of the Prince of the Apostles. Under the authority of the bishops and the instruction of appointed teachers, they should learn to dominate their passions, to despise the things of this world, and to seek heavenly goods. Fortified by heavenly thoughts and inflamed by heavenly love, they will remain chaste and pure amidst the corruption of this world. They must also become quickly accustomed to constantly and fearlessly explaining and defending Catholic truth, which the world despises and pursues with an implacable hatred. The times demand a vigorous struggle to preserve the cause of the Church. What could we expect, then, if our ministers were not prepared long in advance by religious training and love to faithfully support their bishops, to listen to their words, and to endure boldly the harshest difficulties for the name of Jesus Christ? Seminaries and other institutions of sacred learning give the seminarians, far from the bustle of daily concerns, the qualities required to fulfill the apostolic ministry properly. Their education also teaches them to endure joyously all the inconveniences of life and all those types of work necessary to save souls. Under the vigilance and protection of the bishops and the priests delegated by them by virtue of their long experience in sacred studies, the students will learn to equitably measure their strengths and to recognize what they are capable of. The pastors can test the abilities and character of each one, in order to judge wisely who is worthy of the honor of the priesthood and to dissuade those who are unworthy. But what salutary fruits can be obtained if the pastors do not have full liberty to remove obstacles and to use the means appropriate to that end? On this subject, since your nation counts among its distinctions the glory of the military, We can draw an analogy. Would the heads of government permit young men placed in military institutions to have any other teachers than those who excel in this art? Do we not choose appropriate military men to teach army discipline, the use of arms, and the military spirit?

9. The Church's concern for its seminaries is therefore easy to understand. From

the earliest years of the Church, the popes and the Catholic bishops took special care to establish centers for candidates to the priesthood. Here, either by themselves or with the help of suitable teachers (sometimes taken from the priests of the cathedral church), they taught the humanities, theology, and above all the conduct suitable to their vocation. The houses which the bishops and monks opened to receive clerics are celebrated up to this day. Among them shines the memory of the Lateran Patriarchate; from here, as from a fortress of wisdom and virtue, illustrious popes and bishops appeared, men remarkable for their holiness and for their teaching. The careful and diligent teaching of clerics seemed very important and necessary even from the beginning of the sixth century. The Council of Toledo, speaking about "those whom their parents forced to enter the clerical state as children," commands "that after having received tonsure or being ordained lector, they must be educated in the Church under the vigilance of the bishop." Thus we see why we must strive to organize and govern the seminaries of your dioceses according to the rules established by the fathers of the Council of Trent. That is also why in the previous agreements between the popes and the secular authorities from different periods, the Apostolic See -- especially watched over the preservation of seminaries and reserved to the bishops the right to govern them, to the exclusion of all other powers. Among other documents, we have a clear example in the apostolic letter beginning "De salute animarum." Pius VII published this encyclical on July 18, 1821, after reaching an agreement with the king of Prussia concerning a new delimitation of dioceses.

10. Therefore, may the bishops have the full and entire right to train in the seminaries the peaceful army of Jesus Christ. May they be free to choose officials according to their own judgment for the clerical hierarchy, and may they place priests in various posts to fulfill their pastoral duties without obstacles.

11. From what We have just said, venerable brothers, you see the truth and justice in Our demands for ecclesiastical freedom. The Church lives and acts by this freedom, in order to arrive at the happy and lasting agreement so long and ardently desired by both powers. We are confident that the secular authorities will be fair to Us and grant what We ask, based on holy laws.

12. Our demands are not the kind which will diminish the dignity or power of the secular authorities. Rather there may result some substantial and solid advantages for the public welfare. In effect, venerable brothers, what you and your assistants teach concerning civil responsibility comes down to this: every person should be subject to higher powers "not only for fear of punishment, but also because of his conscience." [2] We should bear public duties happily, abstaining from plots and conspiracies. We should show fraternal love to each other and fulfill faithfully our duties to society. If the number of your assistants were to increase, at the same time the number of those who propagate these useful teachings would increase. It would simultaneously become easier to furnish good priests to parishes so long deprived of their pastors. Catholics ask this with all their hearts.

13. As you know, venerable brothers, there are many seeds of public disorder in the midst of human society. They are like fires scattered here and there, fires which threaten a terrible conflagration. First among them is the worker question, which preoccupies civil authorities. They search for ways to face the imminent

dangers, to block the way for sectarians who seek at every occasion to profit from public disorder. They also try to block reforms which work for the great detriment of the state. It is amazing how human society can profit from the work of the Church's ministers in these cases. We have been able to observe this in the conflagrations and catastrophes which have afflicted past times. In effect, the priests have almost daily contact with the lower classes by virtue of their ministry. They are accustomed to conversing familiarly and intimately with them and know thoroughly the labors and the sorrows of the people from this class. They see clearly their wounded hearts; drawing suitable aids and arguments from religious sources, they are able to give consolation and remedies to the weak in spirit. They thus lessen the present evils, revive broken strength, and restrain minds hurtling toward seditious plots.

14. No less serious or useful is the work which Catholic missionaries, animated by the spirit which the Church inspires in them, bring to distant, uncivilized countries. Several European rulers have in our time begun to establish colonies there. The German government also seeks to establish colonies, increase its possessions, and open new avenues to commerce and industry. What will make its reputation among the nations is its effort to civilize the savage tribes. But to conciliate the minds and to win the confidence of these uncivilized nations, they should teach them the salutary precepts of religion right from the beginning. They should bring them to understand the true notion of what is just and honest. Finally they should explain what it means to be children of God, for they too have been called to this, thanks to the merits of Our Savior. This is what the popes had in mind when they sent so many missionaries to barbarian nations. This is certainly not the affair of armies, nor of civil magistrates, nor of conquerors, although they may certainly reap abundant fruit for it. Rather, as history attests, it is the task of those men who go forth from the camp of the Church, embracing the labors and dangers of missionary expeditions. These men do not fear to travel among barbarian nations as messengers and interpreters of God, ready to pour out their blood and their lives for the salvation of their brothers.

15. Thinking about all these things, We hope that Our wishes will soon be realized through the grace and favor of God. As for you, venerable brothers, continue to ask God for this in ceaseless prayer. Since your minds are far from human ambitions and thoughts, but are fired solely by zeal for God's glory and love of the Church, you will with the grace of God obtain the reward which your constancy merits.

16. Union of mind and heart has always been a great impetus to the success of every enterprise. Maintain at all costs the holy bond of love among yourselves. We also want to remind you, venerable brothers, that the troubles which you endure are not peculiar to each diocese. Rather, they are matters for the whole Church. As you know, these concerns were transferred to this Apostolic See, for the supreme power to govern the Church and the center of Catholic unity have been established here. Always turn your eyes toward Rome. Be assured that We want to use all Our efforts to end the struggles which flourish in your country, according to your wishes and those of your faithful.

17. Finally, We beseech the father of mercies to consider your labors and sorrows and to grant all your wishes. With the deepest Christian love. We give to you,

venerable brothers, to all your clergy, and to the faithful entrusted to your care, Our apostolic blessing, as a witness of Our special love for you and as a pledge of heavenly help and consolation .

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on the sixth day of January, 1886, in the eighth year of Our pontificate.

ENDNOTES:

1. Ignat. M., epistle to the Ephesians, chap. 15.
2. Rom 13.5.