



On Seminaries For Native Clergy

Ad Extremas

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on June 24, 1893.

To Our Venerable Brothers, the Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops and other Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Holy See.

Venerable Brothers, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

The Orient, courageously and successfully explored by the Portuguese, is coveted by many today for its lucrative trade. We, however, have a more noble purpose in mind. We reflect upon those immense regions of the Indies where for many centuries men of the Gospel have expended their labor. Our thoughts turn first of all to the blessed Apostle Thomas who is rightly called the founder of preaching the Gospel to the Hindus. Then, there is Francis Xavier, who long afterwards dedicated himself zealously to the same praiseworthy calling. Through his extraordinary perseverance, he converted hundreds of thousands of Hindus from the myths and vile superstitions of the Brahmans to the true religion. In the footsteps of this holy man followed numerous priests, secular and religious, who with the authority and permission of the Holy See strove untiringly to preserve and promote the Christian mysteries and institutions introduced by Thomas and renewed by Xavier. To this day, they are continuing these noble efforts; nevertheless, in the vast reaches of the earth, many are still deprived of the truth, miserably imprisoned in the darkness of superstition! How very great a field, especially in the north, lies yet uncultivated to receive the seed of the Gospel!

2. Pondering these needs, We place our trust in Our Savior who alone knows the exact circumstance and time to bestow his light; he is wont to direct the mind and hearts of men by divine inspiration. But, assuredly, We ought to exert every possible effort to convert such a great part of the world. We have been searching for possible ways of better organizing and expanding Christianity in the East Indies, we have decided upon certain measures to help achieve Our goal.

3. First of all, to be sure, with respect to the "patronato" of the Portuguese people in the East Indies, We have concluded a formal pact with the most faithful king of Portugal and Algerve. This agreement has removed the causes of dissensions, which had disrupted Christians for so long a time. These communities have been under obedience to apostolic vicars and prefects. We have decided to form them into dioceses with their own bishops to be administered by ordinary right. Therefore, by the apostolic letter, "Humanae salutis," given on the first of September, 1886, a new hierarchy has been instituted in those regions, consisting of eight church provinces, namely, Goa as the patriarchal see, Agra, Bombay, Verapoly, Calcutta, Madras, Pondichery and Colombo. Furthermore, through the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, We will do whatever will be fruitful there for salvation and for the increase of faith and piety.

4. The preservation of the Christian faith among the Hindus will be precarious and its propagation uncertain as long as there is not a native clergy properly trained for priestly duties, not only to be of assistance to foreign priests, but also to be in rightful charge of the administration of the Christian Church in their cities. Tradition tells us that Frances Xavier maintained this same opinion. They say that he used to assert that the Christian cause in India could never have firm roots without the continuing dedication of a pious and zealous clergy native to India. It is clearly evident that he had a keen understanding of the issue. Certainly the work of the missionaries coming from Europe is beset with many obstacles. Most especially, indeed, is their unfamiliarity with the vernacular, which is very difficult to learn. There is also the remoteness of institutions and customs which remain unfamiliar even after a long period of time. Hence, the European clergy is forced to live there as in a strange land. Since a foreign clergy, therefore, has difficulty in winning the hearts of the people, it is plain that the work of a native clergy would be far more fruitful. From experience, they know the nature and customs of their people; they know when to speak and when to keep silent. In fine, they live among Hindus as Hindus without causing any suspicion and it is, indeed, difficult to say how important this is especially in times of crisis.

5. Then, again, it is necessary to realize that the number of missionaries abroad is far from adequate to serve the existing Christian communities. This deficiency is plainly evident from the mission statistics. The missionaries in India keep on imploring the Sacred Congregation for more preachers of the Gospel. Now, if there are not enough foreign priests to care for souls, what will happen in the future when the number of Christians will have multiplied? Nor, indeed, is there any reason to hope that the number of missionaries will increase proportionately. Consequently, if we want to be concerned for the salvation of India and the establishment of Christianity in that immense region on a firm foundation, we will have to select candidates from the native people, who after careful training will assume priestly functions and duties.

6. Thirdly, we must not overlook an eventuality, even though at the present time it is improbable. Such critical conditions could arise in Europe or Asia that would

compel foreign priests to leave the Indies. In that event, how could religion survive without a native clergy: with no one to administer the sacraments, no one to teach the law of God? The history of the Chinese, Japanese, and Ethiopians speaks clearly enough about this hazard. More than once, the Christians in Japan and China had to suffer from hatred and calamity. The hostile people in power exiled and executed alien priests, but spared the native. Because they were completely familiar with the language and customs of their native land and were sustained by friends and relatives, they were allowed not only to remain unharmed in their country, but also to administer the sacraments freely, and perform pastoral duties in all the provinces. On the contrary, the Ethiopia, where Christians already numbered 200,000, a sudden storm of persecution completely destroyed the fruits of long labor because there was no native clergy when the European missionaries were killed or expelled.

7. Finally, there must be respect for antiquity; whatever we see advantageously established in times past must be religiously preserved. Now, it was the practice of the Apostles first to instruct the multitude in Christian precepts, then to select several from the people and initiate them into the sacred mysteries and even elevate them to the episcopacy. This example was followed afterwards by the Roman pontiffs. Their custom has always been to direct missionaries to exert every means to select a native clergy wherever the Christian community grew sufficiently large. To take care, therefore, of the preservation and propagation of the Catholic religion among the Hindus, a Hindu clergy has to be formed that could administer the sacraments and govern the Christian people properly, no matter how menacing the times.

8. For that reason, the prefects of the Congregation of the Indies, with the advice and approval of the Holy See, have founded seminaries for priests wherever possible. The Synods, moreover, of Colombo, Bangalore and Allahabad, held at the beginning of 1887, have decreed that every diocese should have its own seminary for the training of a native clergy; if any of the suffragan bishops do not have the financial means to do so, they are to have their seminarians trained in the metropolitan seminary at their own expense. The bishops are making every effort to implement these beneficial decrees, but their most admirable willingness is hindered by lack of funds and by the want of qualified priests to supervise instruction and direct discipline judiciously. Hence, there are hardly any seminaries where candidates are able to complete a prescribed course of studies -- and this is at a time when the civil government and Protestants, in large numbers, are sparing no expense nor effort to offer young men a judicious and refined education.

9. It is evident, therefore, how opportune it is and how consistent with the public good to erect in the East Indies some seminaries where the native youth, the hope of the Church, are educated in all the refinements of doctrine and also in those virtues essential for the pious and wholesome exercise of sacred functions. As the reasons for dissensions have been removed by the pact agreed upon, and as the diocesan administration had been erected by the hierarchy of the Church, we

would seem to have attained our goals if we could provide a sound basis for the training of the clergy. For, as We have said, once seminaries for the clergy have been founded, qualified priests in great numbers would come forth, and in spreading the truth of the Gospel, would skillfully utilize the important resources of their studies.

10. For such a noble and beneficial work, it is fitting that Europeans make some financial contribution, especially because We alone are not able to manage the vast cost of such an enterprise. It is the mark of Christians to cherish all mankind as brothers wherever they are, and to exclude no one from their love, particularly in matters upon which the eternal salvation of their neighbor depends. We, therefore, earnestly request that you will fully support our undertaking. Be sure that the role of Christianity in such remote regions becomes well known. Make your people understand that something must be done for the Hindus. May they who believe that works of mercy are the most perfect investment especially realize this need.

11. We are convinced that we have not appealed in vain to the generosity of your people. If the contributions should exceed the expenditures for the seminaries which we have mentioned above, we shall take care that the remaining funds will be used beneficially and conscientiously on other projects.

12. In token of heavenly favors, and as a witness of Our good will, most lovingly in the Lord, We bestow upon you, venerable brothers, upon your clergy and your people the Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the 24th day of June, in the year 1893, the sixteenth year of Our pontificate.