



Affari Vos

Encyclical Of Pope Leo XIII On The Manitoba School Question

December 8, 1897

To the Archbishops, Bishops, and other Ordinaries in the Federated States of Canada in Grace and Communion with the Holy See.

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

1. We can scarcely address you, which we most willingly do from our heart, without remembering the mutual goodwill and that continuous interchange of good offices which have ever existed between the Apostolic See and the Canadian people. The love of the Catholic Church stood by the cradle of your State, and since the time when she received you into her maternal arms has never ceased to hold you in a close embrace, to foster you, and to load you with good things. The great works which that man of immortal memory, Francois de Montmorency Laval, wrought so successfully and so holily for the good of your country, of which your ancestors were witnesses, he accomplished through the support of the authority and favour of the Roman Pontiffs. And it was from no other source that the works of the Bishops who succeeded him, and who were men of such signal merits, took their origin and drew their hopes of success. In the same way, too, to go still further back, it was under the inspiration and on the initiative of the Apostolic See that noble bands of missionaries journeyed to your country, carrying along with the light of Christian wisdom a more elevated culture and the first seeds of civilization. And it was by these seeds, which were gradually ripened by the arduous labour of these men, that the Canadian people won a place on a level with the most civilized and most glorious nations and thus became, though late in the field, their rival.

2. All this it is pleasant for us to recall, and the more so because we see the fruits of it, and they are by no means small, still remaining. The greatest of all these fruits assuredly is that amongst the multitude of Catholics there is a love and an ardent zeal for that divine religion which your ancestors, in the first place from

France, then from Ireland, and others from elsewhere, so religiously professed themselves and transmitted inviolate to their children. And if those children faithfully preserve this precious heritage it is easy for us to understand how much praise is due to your vigilance and activity, Venerable Brethren, and to the zeal of your clergy; for all work assiduously with one heart and one soul for the preservation and progress of the Catholic faith, and, to render this tribute to the truth, without meeting any disfavour or obstacle on the part of the laws of the British Empire. Accordingly, when out of appreciation for your common merits, we some years ago conferred the honour of the Roman purple upon the Archbishop of Quebec, it was our desire not only to acknowledge his personal qualities, but also to render a solemn homage to all Catholics in the country.

3. As regards the education of the young, upon which rest the best hopes of religious and civil society, the Apostolic See has never ceased to work zealously in concert with you and your predecessors. Thus numerous institutions for the moral and scientific education of your children have been founded under the favour and protection of the Church. Amongst these the great University of Quebec, adorned and strengthened with all the dignity and rights which the Apostolic authority is accustomed to confer, assuredly occupies the place of honour, and stands as sufficient witness that the Apostolic See had had no greater desire or care than the formation of a race of citizens as distinguished by its intellectual culture as it is rendered commendable by its virtues. Wherefore, it is with the greatest solicitude, as you yourselves can easily understand, that we have followed the misfortunes which have lately marked the history of Catholic education in Manitoba. For it is our wish and it is our duty to endeavour by every means in our power to bring it about that no harm befall the faith and religion of so many thousands of souls, the salvation of which has been especially entrusted to us, in a State which received the first rudiments of Christian teaching as well as of civilization from the Catholic Church. And since very many expect a pronouncement from us upon this question, and look to us to point out what course they should pursue, we determined not to come to any conclusion upon the matter until our Delegate Apostolic had examined it upon the spot. Charged to make a careful survey of the situation and to report upon it to us, he has with fidelity and ability fulfilled the task we imposed upon him.

4. The question at issue is assuredly one of the highest and most serious importance. The decisions arrived at seven years ago on the school question by the Parliament of the province of Manitoba must be remembered. The Act of Union of the Confederation had secured to Catholics the right to be educated in the public schools according to their consciences; and yet this right the Parliament of Manitoba abolished by a contrary law. This is a noxious law. For our children cannot go for instruction to schools which either ignore or of set purpose combat the Catholic religion, or in which its teachings are despised and its fundamental principles repudiated. Wherever the Church has allowed this to be done, it has only been with pain and through necessity, at the same time surrounding her children with many safeguards which, nevertheless it has been too often recognized have

been insufficient to cope successfully with the danger attending it. Similarly it is necessary to avoid at all costs, as most dangerous, those schools in which all beliefs are welcomed and treated as equal, as if, in what regards God and divine things, it makes no difference whether one believes rightly or wrongly, and takes up with truth or error. You know well, Venerable Brethren, that every school of this kind has been condemned by the Church, because nothing can be more harmful or better calculated to ruin the integrity of the faith and to turn aside the tender minds of the young from the way of truth.

5. There is another point upon which those will agree with us who differ from us in everything else; it is not by means of a purely scientific education and with vague and superficial notions of morality that Catholic children will leave school such as the country desires and expects. Other serious and important teaching must be given to them if they are to turn out good Christians and upright and honest citizens; it is necessary that they should be formed on those principles which, deeply engraven on their consciences, they ought to follow and obey, because they naturally spring from their faith and religion. Without religion there can be no moral education deserving of the name, nor of any good, for the very nature and force of all duty comes from those special duties which bind man to God, who commands, forbids, and determines what is good and evil. And so, to be desirous that minds should be imbued with good and at the same time to leave them without religion is as senseless as to invite people to virtue after having taken away the foundations on which it rests. For the Catholic there is only one true religion, the Catholic religion; and, therefore, when it is a question of the teaching of morality or religion, he can neither accept nor recognize any which is not drawn from Catholic doctrine.

6. Justice and reason then demand that the school shall supply our scholars not only with a scientific system of instruction but also a body of moral teaching which, as we have said, is in harmony with the principles of their religion, without which, far from being of use, education can be nothing but harmful. From this comes the necessity of having Catholic masters and reading books and text books approved by the Bishops, of being free to regulate the school in a manner which shall be in full accord with the profession of the Catholic faith as well as with all the duties which flow from it. Furthermore, it is the inherent right of a father's position to see in what institutions his children shall be educated, and what masters shall teach them moral precepts. When, therefore, Catholics demand, as it is their duty to demand and work, that the teaching given by schoolmasters shall be in harmony with the religion of their children, they are contending justly. And nothing could be more unjust than to compel them to choose an alternative, or to allow the children to grow up in ignorance or to throw them amid an environment which constitutes a manifest danger for the supreme interests of their souls. These principles of judgment and action which are based upon truth and justice, and which form the safeguards of public as well as private interests, it is unlawful to call in question or in any way to abandon. And so, when the new legislation came to strike Catholic education in the Province of Manitoba, it was your duty, Venerable Brethren,

publicly to protest against injustice and the blow that had been dealt; and the way in which you fulfilled this duty has furnished a striking proof of your individual vigilance and of your true episcopal zeal. Although upon this point each one of you finds sufficient approbation in the witness of his own conscience, know nevertheless that we also join with it our assent and approval. For the things that you have sought and still seek to preserve and defend are most holy.

7. Moreover the hardships of the law in question themselves plainly proved that there was need of complete union if any opportune remedy of the evil was to be found. So good was the Catholic cause that all fair and honest citizens without distinction of party ought to have taken common counsel and acted in concert to defend it. Unfortunately, however, and to the great detriment of the cause, just the contrary was done. And what is still more deplorable, Catholic Canadians themselves were unable to act in concert in the defence of interests which so closely touch the common good, and the importance and moment of which ought to have silenced the interest of political parties, which are on quite a lower plane of importance.

8. We are not ignorant that something has been done to amend the law. The men who are at the head of the Federal Government and of the Government of the Province have already taken certain measures to diminish the grievances of which the Catholics of Manitoba rightly persist in complaining. We have no reason to doubt that these measures have been inspired by a love of fair dealing and by a good intention. But we cannot conceal the truth. The law made to remedy the evil is defective, imperfect, insufficient. Catholics demand, and have the right to demand, much more. Besides, the arrangements made may fail of their effect, owing to the variations in local circumstances; enough has not yet been done in Manitoba for the Catholic education of our children. The claims of justice demand that this question should be considered from every point of view, that those unchangeable and sacred principles which we have enunciated above should be protected and secured. This is what must be aimed at, and this the end which must be pursued with zeal and prudence. But there must not be discord; there must be union of mind and harmony of action. As the object does not impose a line of conduct determinate and exclusive, but, on the contrary, admits of several, as is usual in such matters, it follows that there may be on the line to be followed a certain number of opinions equally good and acceptable. Let none, then, lose sight of the value of moderation, gentleness, and brotherly love. Let none forget the respect due to his neighbour, but let all, weighing the circumstances, determine what is best to be done and act together after having taken counsel with you.

9. As to what regards particularly the Catholics of Manitoba, we have confidence that, God helping, they will one day obtain full satisfaction. This confidence is founded, above all, on the goodness of their cause; next, on the justice and wisdom of those who govern; and, lastly, on the good will of all upright Canadians. In the meantime, until they succeed in their claims, let them not refuse partial satisfaction. This is why, wherever the law or administration or the good

dispositions of the people offer some means of lessening the evil and of warding off some of the dangers, it is absolutely expedient and advantageous that they should make use of them and derive all the benefit possible from them. Wherever, on the contrary, there is no other remedy we exhort and conjure them to use a generous liberality. They can do nothing better for themselves or more calculated to redound to the welfare of their country than to contribute, as far as their means will allow, towards the maintenance of their own schools.

10. There is still another point which calls for your united attention. Under your authority, and with the help of those who direct your schools, a complete course of studies ought to be carefully devised. Special care should be taken that those who are employed as teachers should be abundantly provided with all the qualities, natural and acquired, which are requisite for their profession. It is only right that Catholic schools, both in their educational methods and in the standard of their teaching, should be able to compete with the best. From the standpoint of intellectual culture and progress, the design conceived by the Canadian provinces for the development of public instruction, for the raising of the standard of education, and making it daily more and more refined and perfect, must assuredly be allowed to be honourable and noble. And there is no class of study, no progress in human knowledge, which cannot fully harmonize with Catholic doctrine and teaching.

11. Towards the explanation and defence of all that we have written those Catholics can very largely contribute whose work is on the public - and especially on the daily - press. Let them then remember their duty. Let them religiously and courageously defend what is true and right, the interests of the Church and of the State, and in such a way that they do not outstep the bonds of decorum, avoiding all personalities, and exceeding in nothing. Let them respect and religiously defer to the authority of the Bishops and all other legitimate authority. The more difficult the times and the more threatening the danger of division, the more they ought to strive to show the necessity of that unity of thought and action without which there is little or no chance of ever obtaining that which is the object of our common hopes.

12. As a pledge of heavenly grace and a token of Our paternal affection receive the Apostolic Benediction which We lovingly impart in the Lord to you all, Venerable Brothers, to your clergy, and to the flocks entrusted to your care. Given at St. Peter's, Rome, on the 8th day of December, 1897, in the twentieth year of Our pontificate.