



On Boycotting In Ireland

Saepe Nos

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on June 24, 1888.

To Our Venerable Brethren, the Bishops of Ireland

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

From this supreme dignity of the Apostolic office, We have frequently directed Our solicitude and Our thoughts to your Catholic people; and Our feelings have been more than once recorded in published documents, from which all may clearly learn what are Our dispositions towards Ireland. They are sufficiently attested by the provisions which, under Our direction, the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda made in former years respecting Ireland, and also by the letters which on more than one occasion We addressed to Our Venerable Brother, Cardinal M'Cabe, Archbishop of Dublin. Once again, they have been attested by the address which We recently delivered to a not inconsiderable number of Catholics belonging to your nation, from whom we received, not only congratulations and heartfelt wishes for Our preservation, but also expressions of gratitude on account of Our benevolent dispositions, clearly discerned by them, towards the Irish people. Furthermore, within these past few months, when it was resolved to build a church in this city in honor of St. Patrick, the great Apostle of the Irish, We most warmly encouraged the undertaking, and We shall substantially aid it within the limits of Our resources.

2. Now this, Our paternal affection, remaining, as it does, unaltered, We cannot disguise that tidings which have recently come to Us from Ireland have deeply pained and grieved Us. We have learned that an untoward excitement has suddenly arisen because the Sacred Congregation, whose office it is to vindicate the authority of the Church against those who resist it, has decreed that those methods of warfare known as Boycotting and the Plan of Campaign, which had

begun to be employed by many, may not lawfully be used. And what is more to be deplored, there are not a few who have come forward and summoned the people to excited meetings, where inconsiderate and dangerous opinions are set in circulation, the authority of the Decree not being spared. For not only is the real scope of this Decree grievously perverted by means of forced interpretations, but, furthermore, it is even denied that obedience is due to the Decree, as if it were not the true and proper office of the Church to decide what is right and what is wrong in human actions.

3. Such a manner of acting is but little in harmony with the profession of the Christian religion, which assuredly brings in its train the virtues of moderation, respect, and obedience to legitimate authority. Besides, in a good cause, it is not fitting to seem in some sense to imitate those who in the pursuit of an unlawful end seek to attain it by disorderly effort.

4. Such line of action, too, is the more painful to Us inasmuch as We had carefully inquired into the case, so that We might obtain full and reliable knowledge of the state of your affairs, and of the causes of popular discontent. Our sources of information are trustworthy; we investigated the matter in personal interview with yourselves; further, last year we sent to you as legate a man of tried prudence and discretion, with the commission to use the greatest diligence in ascertaining the truth, and to make a faithful report to Us. For this very act of watchful care the thanks of the Irish people have been publicly given to Us. Can it therefore be asserted without rashness that We have given judgment in a case with which We were not sufficiently acquainted -- the more so as We have condemned things which fair minded men, not mixed up in your struggle, and thus bringing a calmer judgment to the consideration of the case, unite in condemning?

5. There is also a suspicion not less unjust to Us, namely, that the cause of Ireland appeals but feebly to Us, and that the present condition of her people gives Us little care. Now, on the contrary, We yield to no one in the intensity of Our feeling for the condition of the Irish people, and We have no more earnest desire than to see them at length in the enjoyment of that peace and prosperity which they have so well deserved. We have never opposed their struggling for a better state of things, but can it be regarded as admissible that in the carrying on of that struggle a way should be thrown open which might lead to evil deeds. Rather, indeed, for the very reason that, under the influence of passion and political partisanship, things lawful and unlawful are to be found mingled in the same cause, it has been Our constant effort to mark off what was right from what was wrong, and to withhold Catholics from everything not sanctioned by the Christian rules of morals.

6. On this account We gave to the Irish people timely counsels, to be mindful of their obligations as Catholics, and to take part in nothing at variance with natural right or forbidden by the Divine law. Hence the recent Decree ought not to have come upon them unexpectedly; all the more as you yourselves, Venerable Brethren, assembled in Dublin in the year 1881 bade the clergy and people to

beware of everything contrary to public order or to charity -- such as refusing to discharge just obligations; preventing others from discharging theirs; inflicting injury on anyone either in person or property; violently resisting the law or those engaged in the discharge of public duties; joining in secret societies and the like. These injunctions, most just in themselves and given most seasonably, were praised and approved by Us.

7. Nevertheless, as the people were being carried away by ever-increasing vehemence in the pursuit of the object of their desires, and as there were not wanting those who daily fanned the flame, We perceived that something more definite was needed than the general precepts of justice and charity which We had previously given. Our duty forbade us to suffer that so many Catholics, whose salvation must be Our first care, should pursue a hazardous and unsafe course leading rather to disorder than to the relief of distress.

8. Let matters, then, be viewed in their true light, and let Ireland read in this Decree Our love for herself and Our desire to promote the prosperity she hopes for; since nothing is so harmful to a cause, however just, as recourse to violence and injustice in its defense.

9. These instructions which We address to you, Venerable Brethren, you will convey to the Irish people. We feel confident that, united in due conformity of views and of purpose, and sustained not only by your own, but also by Our authority, you will accomplish much -- and chiefly this, that the true estimate of things shall not continue to be obscured by passion, and most especially that those who have urged on the people to excitement may come to regret the rashness with which they have acted. Since there are many who seem to seek out means of escaping from even the plainest obligations, take all necessary steps that no room be left for doubt as to the force of this Decree. Let it be understood by all that the entire method of action, whose employment We have forbidden, is forbidden as altogether unlawful.

10. Let your people seek to advance their lawful interests by lawful means, and most especially, as is becoming in Christians, without prejudice to justice or to obedience to the Apostolic See, virtues in which Ireland has in all times found comfort and strength.

11. In the meantime, Venerable Brethren, as a pledge of heavenly favors, and in testimony of Our affection, We most lovingly in the Lord bestow on you, and on the clergy and people of Ireland, the Apostolic Benediction.

Given at St. Peter's, Rome, the 24th day of June, in the year 1888, the eleventh year of Our Pontificate.