

AFFLICTISQUE ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS XI ON THE PERSECUTION OF THE

Pius XI

In speaking to the Sacred College of Cardinals at the Consistory of last December, We pointed out that there existed no hope or possibility of relief from the sad and unjust conditions under which the Catholic religion exists today in Mexico except it be by a "special act of Divine Mercy." You, Venerable Brothers, did not delay to make your own and approve Our convictions and Our wishes in this regard, made known to you on so many occasions, for by every means within your power you urged all the faithful committed to your pastoral care to implore by instant prayers the Divine Founder of the Church that He bring some relief from the heavy burden of these great evils.

2. We designedly use the words "the heavy burden of these great evils" for certain of Our children, deserters from the army of Jesus Christ and enemies of the Common Father of all, have ordered and are continuing up to the present hour a cruel persecution against their own brethren, Our most beloved children of Mexico. If in the first centuries of our era and at other periods in history Christians were treated in a more barbarous fashion than now, certainly in no place or at no time has it happened before that a small group of men has so outraged the rights of God and of the Church as they are now doing in Mexico, and this without the slightest regard for the past glories of their country, with no feelings of pity for their fellow-citizens. They have also done away with the liberties of the majority and in such a clever way that they have been able to clothe their lawless actions with the semblance of legality.

3. Naturally, We do not wish that either you or the faithful should fail to receive from Us a solemn testimonial of Our gratitude for the prayers which, according to Our intention were poured forth in private and at public functions. It is most important, too, that these prayers which have been so powerful an aid to Us should be continued, and even increased, with renewed fervor. It is assuredly not in the power of man to control the course of events or of history, nor can he direct them as he may desire to the welfare of society by changing either the minds or hearts of his fellow-men. Such action, however, is well within the power of God, for He without doubt can put an end, if He so desires, to persecutions of this kind. Nor must you conclude, Venerable Brothers, that all your prayers have been in vain simply because the Mexican Government, impelled by its fanatical hatred of religion, continued to enforce more harshly and violently from day to day its unjust laws. The truth is that the clergy and the great majority of the faithful have been so strengthened in their longsuffering resistance to these laws by such an abundant shower of divine grace that they have been enabled thereby to give a glorious example of heroism. They have justly merited, too, that We, in a solemn document executed by Our Apostolic authority, should make known this fortitude to the whole Catholic world.

4. Last month on the occasion of the beatification of many martyrs of the French Revolution, spontaneously the Catholics of Mexico came to Our thoughts, for they, like those martyrs, have remained firm in their resolution to resist in all patience the unreasonable behests and commands of their persecutors rather than cut themselves off from the unity of the Church or refuse obedience to this Apostolic See. Marvelous indeed is the glory of the Divine Spouse of Christ who, through the course of the centuries, can depend, without fail, upon a brave and generous offspring ever ready to suffer prisons, stripes, and even death itself for the holy liberty of the Church!

5. It is scarcely necessary, Venerable Brothers, to go back very far in order to narrate the sad calamities which have fallen upon the Church of Mexico. It is sufficient to recall that the frequent revolutions of modern times have ended in the majority of cases in trials for the Church and persecutions of religion. Both in 1914 and in 1915 men who seemed veritably inspired by the barbarism of former days persecuted the clergy, both secular and regular, and the sisters. They rose up against holy places and every object used in divine worship and so ferocious were they that no injury, no ignominy, no violence was too great to satisfy their persecuting mania.

6. Referring now to certain notorious facts concerning which We have already raised Our voice in solemn protest and which even the daily press recorded at great length, there is no need to take up much space in telling you of certain

deplorable events which occurred even in the very recent past with reference to Our Apostolic Delegates to Mexico. Without the slightest regard for justice, for solemn promises given, or for humanity itself, one of these Apostolic Delegates was driven out of the country; another, who because of illness had left the Republic for a short time, was forbidden to return, and the third was also treated in a most unfriendly manner and forced to leave. Surely there is no one who cannot understand that such acts as these, committed against illustrious personages who were both ready and willing to bring about peace, must be construed as a great affront to their dignity as Archbishops, to the high office which they filled, and particularly to Our authority which they represented.

7. Unquestionably the events just cited are grave and deplorable. But the examples of despotic power which We will now pass in review, Venerable Brothers, are beyond all compare, contrary to the rights of the Church, and most injurious as well to the Catholics of Mexico.

8. In the first place, let us examine the law of 1917, known as the "Political Constitution" of the federated republic of Mexico. For our present purposes it is sufficient to point out that after declaring the separation of Church and State the Constitution refuses to recognize in the Church, as if she were an individual devoid of any civil status, all her existing rights and interdicts to her the acquisition of any rights whatsoever in the future. The civil authority is given the right to interfere in matters of divine worship and in the external discipline of the Church. Priests are put on the level of professional men and of laborers but with this important difference, that they must be not only Mexicans by birth and cannot exceed a certain number specified by law, but are at the same time deprived of all civil and political rights. They are thus placed in the same class with criminals and the insane. Moreover, priests not only must inform the civil authorities but also a commission of ten citizens whenever they take possession of a church or are transferred to another mission. The vows of religious, religious orders, and religious congregations are outlawed in Mexico. Public divine worship is forbidden unless it take place within the confines of a church and is carried on under the watchful eye of the Government. All church buildings have been declared the property of the state. Episcopal residences, diocesan offices, seminaries, religious houses, hospitals, and all charitable institutions have been taken away from the Church and handed over to the state. As a matter of fact, the Church can no longer own property of any kind. Everything that it possessed at the period when this law was passed has now become the property of the state. Every citizen, moreover, has the right to denounce before the law any person whom he thinks is holding in his own name property for the Church. All that is required in order to make such action legal is a mere presumption of guilt. Priests are not allowed by law to inherit property of any kind except it be from persons closely related to them by blood. With reference to marriage, the power of the Church is not recognized. Every marriage between Catholics is considered valid if contracted validly according to the prescriptions of the civil code.

9. Education has been declared free, but with these important restrictions: both priests and religious are forbidden to open or to conduct elementary schools. It is not permitted to teach children their religion even in a private school. Diplomas or degrees conferred by private schools under control of the Church possess no legal value and are not recognized by the state. Certainly, Venerable Brothers, the men who originated, approved, and gave their sanction to such a law either are totally ignorant of what rights pertain jure divino to the Church as a perfect society, established as the ordinary means of salvation for mankind by Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer and King, to which He gave the full liberty of fulfilling her mission on earth (such ignorance seems incredible today after twenty centuries of Christianity and especially in a Catholic nation and among men who have been baptized, unless in their pride and foolishness they believe themselves able to undermine and destroy the "House of the Lord which has been solidly constructed and strongly built on the living rock") or they have been motivated by an insane hatred to attempt anything within their power in order to harm the Church. How was it possible for the Archbishops and Bishops of Mexico to remain silent in the face of such odious laws?

10. Immediately after their publication the hierarchy of Mexico protested in kind but firm terms against these laws, protests which Our Immediate Predecessor ratified, which were approved as well by the whole hierarchies of other countries, as well as by a great majority of individual bishops from all over the world, and which finally were confirmed even by Us in a letter of consolation of the date of the second of February, 1926, which We addressed to the Bishops of

Mexico. The Bishops hoped that those in charge of the Government, after the first outburst of hatred, would have appreciated the damage and danger which would accrue to the vast majority of the people from the enforcement of those articles of the Constitution restrictive of the liberty of the Church and that, therefore, out of a desire to preserve peace they would not insist on enforcing these articles to the letter, or would enforce them only up to a certain point, thus leaving open the possibility of a *modus vivendi*, at least for the time being.

11. In spite of the extreme patience exhibited in these circumstances by both the clergy and laity, an attitude which was the result of the Bishops' exhorting them to moderation in all things, every hope of a return to peace and tranquillity was dissipated, and this as a direct result of the law promulgated by the President of the Republic on the second of July, 1926, by virtue of which practically no liberty at all was left the Church. As a matter of fact, the Church was barely allowed to exist. The exercise of the sacred ministry was hedged about by the severest penalties as if it were a crime worthy of capital punishment. It is difficult, Venerable Brothers, to express in language how such perversion of civil authority grieves Us. For whosoever reveres, as all must, God the Creator and Our Beloved Redeemer, whosoever will obey the laws of Holy Mother Church, such a man, We repeat, such a man is looked on as a malefactor, as guilty of a crime; such a man is considered fit only to be deprived of all civil rights; such a man can be thrown into prison along with other criminals. With what justice can We apply to the authors of these enormities the words which Jesus Christ spoke to the leaders of the Jews: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." (Luke xxii, 53)

12. The most recent law which has been promulgated as merely an interpretation of the Constitution is as a matter of fact much worse than the original law itself and makes the enforcement of the Constitution much more severe, if not almost intolerable. The President of the Republic and the members of his ministry have insisted with such ferocity on the enforcement of these laws that they do not permit the governors of the different states of the Confederation, the civil authorities, or the military commanders to mitigate in the least the rigors of the persecution of the Catholic Church. Insult, too, is added to persecution. Wicked men have tried to place the Church in a bad light before the people; some, for example, uttering the most brazen lies in public assemblies. But when a Catholic tries to answer them, he is prevented from speaking by catcalls and personal insults hurled at his head. Others use hostile newspapers in order to obscure the truth and to malign "Catholic Action."

13. If, at the beginning of the persecution, Catholics were able to make a defense of their religion in the public press by means of articles which made clear the truth and answered the lies and errors of their enemies, it is now no longer permitted these citizens, who love their country just as much as other citizens do, to raise their voices in protest. As a matter of fact, they are not even allowed to express their sorrow over the injuries done to the Faith of their fathers and to the liberty of divine worship. We, however, moved profoundly as We are by the consciousness of the duties imposed upon Us by our Apostolic office, will cry out to heaven, Venerable Brothers, so that the whole Catholic world may hear from the lips of the Common Father of all the story of the insane tyranny of the enemies of the Church, on the one hand, and on the other that of the heroic virtue and constancy of the bishops, priests, religious congregations, and laity of Mexico.

14. All foreign priests and religious men have been expelled from the country. Schools for the religious education of boys and girls have been closed, either because they are known publicly under a religious name or because they happen to possess a statue or some other religious object. Many seminaries likewise, schools, insane asylums, convents, institutions connected with churches have been closed. In practically all the states of the Republic the number of priests who may exercise the sacred ministry has been limited and fixed at the barest minimum. Even these latter are not allowed to exercise their sacred office unless they have beforehand registered with the civil authorities and have obtained permission from them so to function. In certain sections of the country restrictions have been placed on the ministry of priests which, if they were not so sad, would be laughable in the extreme. For example, certain regulations demand that priests must be of an age fixed by law, that they must be civilly married, and they are not allowed to baptize except with flowing water. In one of the states of the Confederation it has been decreed that only one bishop is permitted to live within the territory of said state, by reason of which law two other bishops were constrained to exile themselves from their dioceses. Moreover, because of circumstances imposed upon them by law, some bishops have had to leave

their diocese, others have been forced to appear before the courts, several were arrested, and practically all the others live from day to day in imminent danger of being arrested.

15. Again, every Mexican citizen who is engaged in the education of children or of youth, or holds any public office whatsoever, has been ordered to make known publicly whether he accepts the policies of the President and approves of the war which is now being waged on the Catholic Church. The majority of these same individuals were forced, under threat of losing their positions, to take part, together with the army and laboring men, in a parade sponsored by the Regional Confederation of the Workingmen of Mexico, a socialist organization. This parade took place in Mexico City and in other towns of the Republic on the same day. It was followed by impious speeches to the populace. The whole procedure was organized to obtain, by means of these public outcries and the applause of those who took part in it, and by heaping all kinds of abuse on the Church, popular approval of the acts of the President.

16. But the cruel exercise of arbitrary power on the part of the enemies of the Church has not stopped at these acts. Both men and women who defended the rights of the Church and the cause of religion, either in speeches or by distributing leaflets and pamphlets, were hurried before the courts and sent to prison. Again, whole colleges of canons were rushed off to jail, the aged being carried there in their beds. Priests and laymen have been cruelly put to death in the very streets or in the public squares which front the churches. May God grant that the responsible authors of so many grave crimes return soon to their better selves and throw themselves in sorrow and with true contrition on the divine mercy; We are convinced that this is the noble revenge on their murderers which Our children who have been so unjustly put to death are now asking from God.

17. We think it well at this point, Venerable Brothers, to review for you in a few words how the bishops, priests, and faithful of Mexico have organized resistance and "set up a wall for the House of Israel, to stand in battle." (Ezech. xiii, 5)

18. There cannot be the slightest doubt of the fact that the Mexican hierarchy have unitedly used every means within their power to defend the liberty and good name of the Church. In the first place, they indited a joint pastoral letter to their people in which they proved beyond cavil that the clergy had always acted toward the rulers of the Republic motivated by a love for peace, with prudence and in all patience; that they had even suffered, in a spirit of almost too much tolerance, laws which were unjust; they admonished the faithful, outlining the divine constitution of the Church, that they, too, must always persevere in their religion, in such a way that they shall "obey God rather than men" (Acts v, 19) on every occasion when anyone tries to impose on them laws which are no less contrary to the very idea of law and do not merit the name of law, as they are inimical to the constitution and existence itself of the Church.

19. When the President of the Republic had promulgated his untimely and unjust decree of interpretation of the Constitution, by means of another joint pastoral letter the Bishops protested and pointed out that to accept such a law was nothing less than to desert the Church and hand her over a slave to the civil authorities. Even if this had been done, it was apparent to all that such an act would neither satisfy her persecutors nor stop them in the pursuit of their nefarious intentions. The Bishops in such circumstances preferred to put an end to public religious functions. Therefore, they ordered the complete suspension of every act of public worship which cannot take place without the presence of the clergy, in all the churches of their diocese, beginning the last day of July, on which day the law in question went into effect. Moreover, since the civil authorities had ordered that all the churches must be turned over to the care of laymen, chosen by the mayors of the different municipalities, and could not be held in any manner whatsoever by those who were named or designated for such an office by the bishops or priests, which act transferred the possessions of the churches from the ecclesiastical authority to that of the state, the Bishops practically everywhere interdicted the faithful from accepting a place on such committees bestowed on them by the Government and even from entering a church which was no longer under the control of the Church. In some dioceses, due to difference of time and place, other arrangements were made.

20. In spite of all this, do not think, Venerable Brothers, that the Mexican hierarchy lost any opportunity or occasion by means of which they might do their part in calming popular feelings and bringing about concord despite the fact that they distrusted, or it would be better perhaps to say despaired of, a happy outcome to all these troubles. It is sufficient to

recall in this context that the Bishops of Mexico City, who act in the capacity of procurators for their colleagues, wrote a very courteous and respectful letter to the President of the Republic in the interests of the Bishops of Huejutla, who had been arrested in a most outrageous manner and with a great display of armed force, and had been ordered taken to the city of Pachuca. The President replied to this letter by means of a hateful angry screed, a fact now become notorious. Again, when it happened that certain personages, lovers of peace, had spontaneously intervened so as to bring about a conversation between the President and the Archbishop of Morelia and the Bishop of Tabasco, the parties in question talked together for a long time and on many subjects, but with no results. Again, the Bishops debated whether they should ask the House of Representatives for the abrogation of those laws which were against the rights of the Church or if they should continue, as before, their so-called passive resistance to these laws. As a matter of fact, there existed many good reasons which seemed to them to render useless the presentation of such a petition to Congress. However, they did present the petition, which was written by Catholics quite capable of doing so because of their knowledge of law, every word of which was, moreover, weighed by the Bishops themselves with the utmost care. To this petition of the hierarchy there was added, due to the zealous efforts of the members of the Federation for the Defense of Religious Liberty, about which organization We shall have something to say later on in this letter, a great number of signatures of citizens, both men and women.

21. The Bishops had not been wrong in their anticipations of what would take place. Congress rejected the proposed petition almost unanimously, only one voting in favor of it, and the reason they alleged for this act was that the Bishops had been deprived of juridical personality, since they had already appealed in this matter to the Pope and therefore they had proven themselves unwilling to acknowledge the laws of Mexico. Such being the facts, what remained for the Bishops to do if not to decide that, until these unjust laws had been repealed, neither they nor the faithful would change in the slightest the policy which they had adopted? The civil authorities of Mexico, abusing both their power and the really remarkable patience of the people, are now in a position to menace the clergy and the Mexican people with even more severe punishments than those already inflicted. But how are we to overcome and conquer men of this type who are committed to the use of every type of infamy, unless we are willing, as they insist, to conclude an agreement with them which cannot but injure the sacred cause of the liberty of the Church?

22. The clergy have imitated the truly wonderful example of constancy given them by the Bishops and have themselves in turn given no less brilliant an example of fortitude through all the tedious changes of the great conflict. This example of extraordinary virtue on their part has been a great comfort to Us. We have made it known to the whole Catholic world and We praise them because "they are worthy." (Apoc. iii, 4) And in this special context, when We recall that every imaginable artifice was employed, that all the power and vexatious tactics of our adversaries had but one purpose, to alienate both the clergy and people from their allegiance to the hierarchy and to this Apostolic See, and that despite all this only one or two priests, from among the four thousand, betrayed in a shameful manner their holy office, it certainly seems to Us that there is nothing which We cannot hope for from the Mexican clergy.

23. As a matter of fact, We behold these priests standing shoulder to shoulder, obedient and respectful to the commands of their prelates despite the fact that to obey means in the majority of cases serious dangers for themselves, for they must live from their holy office, and since they are poor and do not themselves possess anything and the Church cannot support them, they are obliged to live bravely in poverty and in misery; they must say Mass in private; they must do all within their power to provide for the spiritual needs of their flocks, to keep alive and increase the flame of piety in those round about them; moreover, by their example, counsels and exhortations, they must lift the thoughts of their fellow citizens to the highest ideals and strengthen their wills so that they, too, will persevere in their passive resistance. Is it any wonder, then, that the wrath and blind hatred of our enemies are directed principally and before all else against the priesthood? The clergy, on their side, have not hesitated to go to prison when ordered, and even to face death itself with serenity and courage. We have heard recently of something which surpasses anything as yet perpetrated under the guise of these wicked laws, and which, as a matter of fact, sounds the very depths of wickedness, for We have learned that certain priests were suddenly set upon while celebrating Mass in their own homes or in the homes of friends, that the Blessed Eucharist was outraged in the basest manner, and the priests themselves carried off to prison.

24. Nor can We praise enough the courageous faithful of Mexico who have understood only too well how important it is for them that a Catholic nation in matters so serious and holy as the worship of God, the liberty of the Church, and the eternal salvation of souls should not depend upon the arbitrary will and audacious acts of a few men, but should be governed under the mercy of God only by laws which are just, which are conformable to natural, divine, and ecclesiastical law.

25. A word of very special praise is due those Catholic organizations, which during all these trying times have stood like soldiers side to side with the clergy. The members of these organizations, to the limit of their power, not only have made provisions to maintain and assist their clergy financially, they also watch over and take care of the churches, teach catechism to the children, and like sentinels stand guard to warn the clergy when their ministrations are needed so that no one may be deprived of the help of the priest. What We have just written is true of all these organizations. We wish, however, to say a word in particular about the principal organizations, so that each may know that it is highly approved and even praised by the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

26. First of all We mention the Knights of Columbus, an organization which is found in all the states of the Republic and which fortunately is made up of active and industrious members who, because of their practical lives and open profession of the Faith, as well as by their zeal in assisting the Church, have brought great honor upon themselves. This organization promotes two types of activities which are needed now more than ever. In the first place, the National Sodality of Fathers of Families, the program of which is to give a Catholic education to their own children, to protect the rights of Christian parents with regard to education, and in cases where children attend the public schools to provide for them a sound and complete training in their religion. Secondly, the Federation for the Defense of Religious Liberty, which was recently organized when it became clear as the noonday sun that the Church was menaced by a veritable ocean of troubles. This Federation soon spread to all parts of the Republic. Its members attempted, working in harmony and with assiduity, to organize and instruct Catholics so that they would be able to present a united invincible front to the enemy.

27. No less deserving of the Church and the fatherland as the Knights of Columbus have been and still are, We mention two other organizations, each of which has, following its own program, a special relation to what is known as "Catholic Social Action." One is the Catholic Society of Mexican Youth, and the other, the Union of Catholic Women of Mexico. These two sodalities, over and above the work which is special to each of them, promote and do all they can to have others promote the activities of the above-mentioned Federation for the Defense of Religious Liberty. Without going into details about their work, with pleasure We desire to call to your attention, Venerable Brothers, but a single fact, namely, that all the members of these organizations, both men and women, are so brave that, instead of fleeing danger, they go out in search of it, and even rejoice when it falls to their share to suffer persecution from the enemies of the Church. What a beautiful spectacle this, that is thus given to the world, to angels, and to men! How worthy of eternal praise are such deeds! As a matter of fact, as We have pointed out above, many individuals, members either of the Knights of Columbus, or officers of the Federation, of the Union of Catholic Women of Mexico, or of the Society of Mexican Youth, have been taken to prison handcuffed, through the public streets, surrounded by armed soldiers, locked up in foul jails, harshly treated, and punished with prison sentences or fines. Moreover, Venerable Brothers, and in narrating this We can scarcely keep back Our tears, some of these young men and boys have gladly met death, the rosary in their hands and the name of Christ King on their lips. Young girls, too, who were imprisoned, were criminally outraged, and these acts were deliberately made public in order to intimidate other young women and to cause them the more easily to fail in their duty toward the Church.

28. No one, surely, Venerable Brothers, can hazard a prediction or foresee in imagination the hour when the good God will bring to an end such calamities. We do know this much: The day will come when the Church of Mexico will have respite from this veritable tempest of hatred, for the reason that, according to the words of God "there is no wisdom, there is no prudence, there is no counsel against the Lord" (Prov. xxi, 30) and "the gates of hell shall not prevail" (Matt. xvi, 18) against the Spotless Bride of Christ.

29. The Church which, from the day of Pentecost, has been destined here below to a never-ending life, which went forth

from the upper chamber into the world endowed with the gifts and inspirations of the Holy Spirit, what has been her mission during the last twenty centuries and in every country of the world if not, after the example of her Divine Founder, "to go about doing good"? (Acts x, 38) Certainly this work of the Church should have gained for her the love of all men; unfortunately the very contrary has happened as her Divine Master Himself predicted (Matt. x, 17, 25) would be the case. At times the bark of Peter, favored by the winds, goes happily forward; at other times it appears to be swallowed up by the waves and on the point of being lost. Has not this ship always aboard the Divine Pilot who knows when to calm the angry waves and the winds? And who is it but Christ Himself Who alone is all-powerful, who brings it about that every persecution which is launched against the faithful should react to the lasting benefit of the Church? As St. Hilary writes, "it is a prerogative of the Church that she is the vanquisher when she is persecuted, that she captures our intellects when her doctrines are questioned, that she conquers all at the very moment when she is abandoned by all." (St. Hilary of Poitiers De Trinitate, Bk. VII, No. 4)

30. If those men who now in Mexico persecute their brothers and fellowcitizens for no other reason than that these latter are guilty of keeping the laws of God, would only recall to memory and consider dispassionately the vicissitudes of their country as history reveals them to us, they must recognize and publicly confess that whatever there is of progress, of civilization, of the good and the beautiful, in their country is due solely to the Catholic Church. In fact every man knows that after the introduction of Christianity into Mexico, the priests and religious especially, who are now being persecuted with such cruelty by an ungrateful government, worked without rest and despite all the obstacles placed in their way, on the one hand by the colonists who were moved by greed for gold and on the other by the natives who were still barbarians, to promote greatly in those vast regions both the splendor of the worship of God and the benefits of the Catholic religion, works and institutions of charity, schools and colleges for the education of the people and their instruction in letters, the sciences, both sacred and profane, in the arts and the crafts.

31. One thing more remains for Us to do, Venerable Brothers, namely, to pray and implore Our Lady of Guadalupe, heavenly patroness of the Mexican people, that she pardon all these injuries and especially those which have been committed against her, that she ask of God that peace and concord may return to her people. And if, in the hidden designs of God that day which We so greatly desire is far distant, may she in the meantime console her faithful children of Mexico and strengthen them in their resolve to maintain their liberty by the profession of their Faith.

32. In the meanwhile, as an augury of the grace of God and as proof of Our fatherly love, We bestow from Our heart on you, Venerable Brothers, and especially on those bishops who rule the Church of Mexico, on all your clergy and your people, the Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the eighteenth day of November, in the year 1926, the fifth of Our Pontificate.

PIUS XI

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