

LICET MULTA ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII ON CATHOLICS IN BELGIUM

Leo XIII

To Our Beloved Son Victor Augustus, Cardinal Deschamps, Primate of Belgium,
and to All the Other Belgian Bishops.

Dear Son and Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction!

During these last years the cause of Catholicism has undergone, in Belgium, multiplied trials. We have, however, found comfort and consolation in the tokens of persistent love and fidelity which Belgian Catholics have furnished us so abundantly whenever they have had an occasion. And, above all, what has strengthened us, and still gives us strength, is your signal attachment to our person, and the zeal which you exert in order that the Christian people confided to your care may persevere in the sincerity and unity of the Catholic Faith, and may progress each day in its love for the Church of Christ and his Vicar. It is pleasant for us to give special praise to your solicitude in encouraging by all the means possible a good education for the young, and in insuring to the children of the primary schools a religious education established on broad foundations. Your zeal is applied with equal watchfulness to all that tends to the advantage of Christian education in the Colleges and Institutes, as well as to the Catholic University of Louvain.

2. On the other hand, we cannot remain indifferent, or at peace, in presence of events which would seem to imperil amongst Belgians the good understanding between Catholic citizens, and to divide them into opposing camps. It would be superfluous to recall here the causes and occasions of these differences, and the encouragement they have met with where it ought least to have been expected. All these details, Dear Son and Venerable Brethren, you know better than any one; and you deplore them with us, knowing perfectly that at no other epoch could the necessity of assuring and maintaining union amongst Catholics be so great as at this moment, when the enemies of the name of Christianity rage on all sides against the Church in an unanimous attack.

3. Full of solicitude for this union, we point out the dangers which threaten it arising from certain controversies concerning public law; a subject which, amongst you, engenders a strong difference of feeling. These controversies have for their object the necessity or opportuneness of conforming to the prescriptions of Catholic doctrine the existing forms of government, based on what is commonly called modern law. Most assuredly we, more than any one, ought heartily to desire that human society should be governed in a Christian manner, and that the divine influence of Christ should penetrate and completely impregnate all orders of the State. From the commencement of our Pontificate we manifested, without delay, that such was our settled opinion; and that by public documents, and especially by the Encyclical Letters we published against the errors of Socialism, and, quite recently, upon the Civil Power. Nevertheless, all Catholics, if they wish to exert themselves profitably for the common good, should have before their eyes and faithfully imitate the prudent conduct which the Church herself adopts in matters of this nature: she maintains and defends in all their integrity the sacred doctrines and principles of right with inviolable firmness, and applies herself with all her power to regulating the institutions and the customs of public order, as well as the acts of private life, upon these same principles. Nevertheless, she observes in this the just measure of time and place; and, as commonly happens in human affairs, she is often constrained to tolerate at times evils that it would be almost impossible to prevent, without exposing herself to calamities and troubles still more disastrous.

4. Moreover, in polemical discussions, care should be taken not to overstep those just limits that justice and charity alike mark out, and not rashly to throw blame or suspicion upon men otherwise devoted to the doctrines of the Church; and, above all, upon those who in the Church itself are raised to dignity and power. We deplore that this has been done in your case, Dear Son, who, in your quality of archbishop, administer the diocese of Malines; and who, for your signal services to the Church, and for your zeal in defending Catholic doctrine, have been judged worthy by our Predecessor of blessed memory, Pius IX., to take a place in the College of most Eminent Cardinals. It is manifest that the facility with

which unfounded accusations are levelled vaguely against one's neighbour, does injury to the good name of others, and weakens the bonds of charity; and that it outrages those "whom the Holy Ghost has placed to govern the Church of God." For this reason do we desire with all our power, and hereby most seriously enjoin, that Catholics abstain from this conduct. Let it suffice to them to remember that it is to the Apostolic See and to the Roman Pontiff, to whom all have access, that has been confided the charge of defending everywhere Catholic truths, and of watching that no error whatsoever, capable of doing injury to the doctrine of faith and morals, or apparently in contradiction with it, be spread or propagated in the Church.

5. In what concerns yourselves, Dear Son and Venerable Brethren, use all your vigilance so that all men of science, and those, most especially, to whom you have confided the charge of teaching youth, be of one accord, and unanimous in all those questions upon which the teaching of the Holy See allows no freedom of opinion. And as to points left to the discussion of the learned, may their intellects, owing to your inspiration and your advice, be so exercised upon them that the divergences of opinion destroy not union of heart and concord of will. On this subject the Sovereign Pontiff, Benedict XIV., our immortal predecessor, has left in his Constitution *Sollicita ac provida*, certain rules for men of study, full of wisdom and authority. He has even proposed to them, as a model to imitate in this matter, St. Thomas Aquinas, whose moderation of language and maturity of style are maintained as well in the combat against adversaries, as in the exposition of doctrine and the proofs destined for its defence. We wish to renew to learned men the recommendations of our predecessor, and to point out to them this noble model, who will teach them not only the manner of carrying on controversy with opponents, but also the character of the doctrine to be held and developed in the cultivation of philosophy and theology. On many occasions, Dear Son and Venerable Brethren, we have expressed to you our earnest desire of seeing the wisdom of St. Thomas reinstated in Catholic schools, and everywhere treated with the highest consideration. We have likewise exhorted you to establish in the University of Louvain the teaching of higher philosophy in the spirit of St. Thomas. In this matter, as in all others, we have found you entirely ready to condescend to our wishes and to fulfill our will. Pursue then, with zeal, the task which has been begun, and watch with care that in this same University the fruitful sources of Christian philosophy, which spring from the works of St. Thomas, be open to students in a rich abundance, and applied to the profit of all other branches of instruction. In the execution of this design, if you have need of our aid or our counsels, they shall never be wanting to you.

6. In the meantime, we pray God, the Source of Wisdom, the Author of Peace, and the Friend of Charity, to accord you His favourable help in the present conjuncture, and we ask him for all an abundance of Heavenly gifts. As an augury of these graces, and as a sign of our special benevolence, we accord, with a loving heart, our Apostolic benediction to you, Dear Son and Venerable Brethren, to all your Clergy, and to the people confided to your charge.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, the 3rd of August, 1881, the fourth year of Our Pontificate.

LEO XIII

Copyright © Dicastery for Communication

Source: vatican.va