

We have long and ardently desired an opportunity to address you with an apostolic letter. Just as We have addressed the bishops of many other nations, We desire to inform you of Our plans, which concern the prosperity of the Christian cause and the salvation of the Hungarian nation. These days present Us with an excellent opportunity, since Hungary is celebrating the liberation, two centuries ago, of Budapest. - That victory will stand out forever in the memory of the Hungarian people. It was granted to your ancestors, because of their strength and perseverance, to recapture their capital city, which for a century and a half had been occupied by their enemies. That the grace and memory of this divine blessing might remain, Pope Innocent XI justly decreed a celebration throughout all Christendom in honor of St. Stephen, the first of your apostolic kings, on the second day of September, the anniversary of this great event. Moreover it is well-known that the Apostolic See took a significant part in the almost spontaneous victory three years before over the same foe at Vienna. This victory, rightly attributed in great part to the apostolic efforts of Pope Innocent, began the decline of the influence of the Mohammedans in Europe. - Besides, even before that age and under similar circumstances, Our predecessors assisted the Hungarian forces with counsel, aid, money, and treaties. From Callistus III to Innocent XI, many Roman Pontiffs are recorded whose names deserve to be honored for their activity in such affairs. Let Clement VIII serve as an example. When Stregan and Vincentgraz were liberated from the domination of the Turks, the highest councils of the kingdom decreed that public thanks be given to him for he alone had come to their aid opportunely at a time when the situation was almost beyond hope. Therefore, just as the Apostolic See never failed the people of Hungary whenever they had to fight the enemies of religion and Christian morality, so now, when happy memories inspire the people, We gladly join you in sharing their joy. Taking into account the differing conditions of time, We desire to confirm the people in their profession of the Catholic faith and also to assist them in warding off common dangers. In this way We shall serve the public good.

Stephen

2. Hungary herself knows that no gift of God either to individuals or to nations is greater than to receive by His grace the Catholic faith, and having received it, to keep it with perseverance. This gift contains an abundance of other gifts by means of which individual persons receive both eternal happiness in heaven and greatness and prosperity for their state on earth. When Stephen first clearly grasped this truth, he asked God for nothing more vehemently, indeed he labored for nothing more energetically and consistently, than to obtain the Catholic faith for his whole kingdom and to establish it on a firm foundation from the very beginning. Therefore very early he began a change of studies and offices among the Roman bishops, the kings, and the people of Hungary which future ages did not abolish. Stephen founded and built a kingdom, but received his crown only from the Roman Pontiff, for he wanted to offer his kingdom to the Apostolic See. He established many Episcopal Sees, endowing munificently, and founding piously. Accompanying these many good works was the good pleasure and indulgence of the Apostolic See in many matters altogether singular. From his faith and piety, this holy king drew the light of counsel and the best norms for ruling his kingdom. He acquired his strength from diligence in prayer, by which he put down the evil plots of public enemies and returned as victor from the attacks of his foes. - Thus under the auspices of religion, your state was born. Under the same guardian and leader, you have come at quick march not only to maturity, but also to the strength of empire and the glory of your name. Hungary has kept holy and inviolate the faith received from her king and parent as an inheritance, and this despite the great difficulties of the times, when neighboring nations were drawn from the bosom of the Church by pernicious error. Faith, obedience and devotion to the Apostolic See have remained constant in kings, bishops, and all the people. In turn We see the predilection and paternal benevolence of the Roman Pontiffs for the Hungarian people confirmed by many testimonies. Today after many centuries and many events, the original intimate friendship remains, by the blessing of God. The virtues of your ancestors are by no means lacking in their descendants. There are many laudable and fruitful

labors of the episcopate: relief in calamities, zealous defense of the rights of the Church, and your constant and courageous determination to preserve the Catholic faith.

Current Evils

3. When We recall these things, Our soul is filled with joy. To you and to the people of Hungary, We gladly pay the tribute of praise for things well done. - But We cannot remain silent. Everyone knows how inimical to virtue these times are and how the Church is attacked. We have much to fear amid such dangers, lest a shaken faith languish even where it has taken strong and deep roots. It is enough to recall rationalism and naturalism, those deadly sources of evil whose teachings are everywhere freely distributed. We must then add the many allurements to corruption: the opposition to or open defection from the Church by public officials, the bold obstinacy of secret societies, here and there a curriculum for the education of youth without regard for God. - And if ever, then surely now is the time to realize not only how appropriate, but entirely necessary the Catholic religion is for public safety and tranquility. Daily experience proves to what lengths they who fear no authority nor have ever restrained their passions will go to undermine the state. Indeed, everyone knows what they intend, what means they employ, and with what perseverance they labor. The mightiest empires and the most flourishing states are compelled to contend almost every hour with such societies of men, joined together in unity of intention and likeness of deeds. Thus, the public safety is always in danger. Against such audacity of evil men, a good plan has been perfected in some places, that the authority of magistrates and the force of laws be well prepared.

Effective Means of Restraining Socialism

4. Nevertheless to restrain the danger of socialism there is only one genuinely effective means, in the absence of which the fear of punishment has little weight to discourage offenders. It is that citizens should be thoroughly educated in religion, and restrained by respect for and love of the Church. For the Church as parent and teacher is the holy guardian of religion, moral integrity, and virtue. All who follow the precepts of the Gospel religiously and entirely are, by this very fact, far from the suspicion of socialism. For religion commands us to worship and fear God and to submit to and obey legitimate authority. It forbids anyone to act seditiously and demands for everyone the security of his possessions and rights. It furthermore commands those who have wealth to come graciously to the aid of the poor. Religion aids the needy with all the works of charity and consoles those who suffer loss, enkindling in them the hope of the greatest eternal blessings which will be in proportion to the labor endured and the length of that labor. Therefore those who rule the states will do nothing wiser and more opportune than to recognize that religion influences the people despite all obstacles and recalls them to virtue and uprightness of character through her teachings. To distrust the Church or hold it suspect is, in the first place, unjust, and in the second, profits no one except the enemies of civil discipline and those bent on destruction.

Keep Religion Flourishing

5. By the blessing of God great civil unrest and the gathering of fearsome mobs, which have occurred elsewhere, have been spared the people of Hungary. But threatening dangers force all of us to strive by daily zeal to assure that the name of religion flourishes there and that honor endures in its Christian institutions. - For this reason the Church should enjoy full and integral freedom in the whole kingdom of Hungary as it did in former times, and this for the common good. As for Us, We are most anxious that those things which conflict with the rights of the Church, diminish its liberty of action, and impede the profession of the faith be removed from the laws. To attain this end both We and you must constantly labor, as far as We legally can and as so many illustrious men have already done. Meanwhile, as long as these laws remain, it is your duty to see to it that they injure the common security as little as possible and to admonish the citizens what they have to do in this matter. We shall mention some statutes which seem more injurious than others.

6. To embrace religion is a most serious duty, which is not to be restricted by age. No age is unfit for the kingdom of God. As everyone knows this, so he ought to act without delay, for from the will to act is born the right to act for everyone, which cannot be violated without the greatest injury. Therefore, if pastors of souls are forced to make a choice in the matter, they must choose to endure the penalties prescribed by civil law rather than provoke the wrath of an avenging God.

Marriage

7. You must labor, venerable brothers, that Catholic teaching about the sanctity, oneness, and perpetuity of matrimony takes firm root in souls. Remind the faithful frequently that the marriage of Christians is subject solely to ecclesiastical authority. Remind them also what the Church thinks and teaches concerning so called civil marriage and with what mind and heart Catholic people should obey such laws. Further remind them that even for the gravest of reasons it is not permitted to enter into marriage with Christians who are not Catholics; those who do so without the authority and indulgence of the Church sin before God and the Church. Since these issues are so vital, all who have a concern in this matter should most diligently see to it, as far as they can, that no one sins here for any reason. For in this especially, obedience to the Church is necessarily bound to the public interest. This is the reason why the beginnings and best principles of civil life depend in great part on domestic society, so that the peace and prosperity of the state result in large part from marriage. Nor can marriage succeed except under the care of God and the Church. Deprived of such care and entered upon contrary to the will of God, matrimony is reduced to the service of various passions, is deprived of necessary heavenly aids, and is despoiled of that common life which is of greatest concern to man, i.e., religion. Of necessity it produces bitter fruit, to the great harm of the family and of the state. For this reason We must commend those Catholic men who, when the legislative assembly of Hungary was asked two years ago whether it would consider the marriage of Christians with Jews valid, rejected the proposal unanimously and freely and succeeded in having the old marriage law retained. Their vote received the approval of the vast majority of people from all parts of Hungary, proving with admirable testimony that the people thought and felt as they did. May there be Like consent and similar constancy whenever the Catholic cause is in controversy, for then victory will be at hand. At least civil life will be more vigorous and fruitful when languor and sloth have been banished, for these are the means by which the enemies of the Christian name certainly wish to stupefy all Catholic virtue.

Catholic Education of Youth

8. Nor will less profit accrue to the state if the education of youth is wisely and rightly provided for from the beginning. Such are the times and customs that too many people with too much effort strive to keep studious youth away from the vigilance of the Church and the salutary virtue of religion. Schools called neuter, mixed, and lay are popular and sought out here and there, doubtless with the intention that the students grow up ignorant of all things holy and of all religious concerns. Since this evil is more widespread and greater than its remedies, we see a progeny growing up uninterested in spiritual goods, without religion and often impious. Keep so great a calamity out of Hungary with all your energy! The education of youth from childhood in Christian habits and Christian wisdom is today of the greatest possible concern not only to the Church, but also to the state. All who are truly wise understand this. That is why We see many Catholic men in many places who are deeply concerned about the proper upbringing of youth, devoting special and constant effort to this matter, undismayed by the greatness of the labor or by the cost. We also know of many in Hungary who are working toward the same goal with similar proposals. Permit Us nevertheless to rouse your episcopal zeal even more. - In this grave situation, We desire that in the public education of youth, that part be reserved to the Church which has been divinely assigned to it. All We can do is to exhort you to deal vigorously with this matter. Meanwhile continue to admonish fathers again and again not to permit their children to study and learn so as to threaten injury to their Catholic faith. At the same time see to it that the schools which are under your or the clergy's direction be commendable for their soundness of doctrine and the uprightness of their teachers. This is to be understood not only of primary schools, but also of those of higher learning.

Centers of Study

9. With God-fearing generosity, and especially with the liberal contributions of your kings and bishops, many noble institutions devoted to the study of letters have been established. The memory of Cardinal Pazmany, Archbishop of Esztergom, is still alive among you, not only as the founder of the Catholic University at Budapest, but also as its generous patron. It is inspiring to recall that he undertook so great a work out of the pure and sincere motive of advancing the Catholic religion. King Ferdinand II confirmed this when he said of its purpose that the truth of the Catholic religion would remain unshaken where it flourished; where weakened, it would be strengthened, and divine

worship would be propagated everywhere. We realize how diligently you have labored to ensure that these excellent centers of study retain their original nature, the kind that their founders intended, namely that they remain Catholic Institutions. Their household, administration, and faculty are entirely under the control of the Church and the bishops. Therefore We exhort you to continue to encourage this noble and excellent venture. And you will succeed because of the goodness of the Apostolic King and the prudent men in charge of the government; also, what has been given to non-Catholic communities will not be denied to the Catholic Church. - If the tenor of the times demands that some new institutions are to be founded or old ones expanded, We have no doubt that you will imitate the example of your fathers and their devotion to religion. In fact We have received reports that you are already planning a school for the training of teachers; this is an excellent plan, one worthy of your wisdom and virtue. That you may accomplish it quickly with the Lord's help is Our prayer and exhortation.

Education of Priests

10. If the education of all youth in general contributes a great deal to the true welfare of the state, this is much more true of the education of those aiming at ordination. To this matter you must give special attention; it should occupy the greater portion of your vigils and labors, since the youths destined for orders are the hope and, as it were, the incomplete form of future priests. You surely know how much the reputation of the Church and the eternal salvation of her people depend on priests. - In the education of clerics, two elements are absolutely necessary: learning for the development of the mind and virtue for the perfection of the spirit. To the ordinary humanistic subjects in which youths are educated must be added Sacred and Canonical studies. Care must be taken that their content is sound and everywhere pure, in full harmony with the documents of the Church and eloquent, so that the priest may be able to exhort . . . even those who contradict. - Holiness of life, without which knowledge puffs up and does not edify, consists not only in good and honorable habits, but also in that group of sacerdotal virtues which makes good priests exemplars of Jesus Christ, the eternal High Priest. For this purpose there are sacred seminaries. You have some for youths preparing for the priesthood and others for the education of seminarians, all of them well-founded. Choose teachers and spiritual directors for these institutions thoughtfully. They should be men of sound doctrine and good morals, men to whom you can confidently entrust a matter of such great importance. Choose rectors and spiritual guides who are outstanding in prudence, counsel, and experience. The common life and discipline should be so arranged by your authority that not only will the students never offend against piety, but that there will be an abundance of all aids which nourish piety. The students should thus be encouraged to make daily progress in acquiring the sacerdotal virtues. Your industrious and diligent labors in the education of priests will bear much desirable fruit, making your episcopal office easier to administer and producing a richer profit for all.

Assistance for Priests

11. But it is necessary that your paternal care extend further, namely to the assistance of priests in the exercise of their duties. Skillfully and sweetly, as becomes your love, see to it that they are not exposed to worldly temptations and that they are not led by selfish desires or concern for secular affairs. See to it that they excel in virtue, providing an example of deeds well-done. Further, see to it that they never fail in their devotion to prayer and that they approach the sacred mysteries spotlessly. When supported and strengthened by these defenses, they will gladly fulfill their daily sacred duties and fittingly turn to the studious cultivation of the spirits of their people, especially by the ministry of word and sacraments. - But to renew the strength of soul which human weakness does not allow to flourish constantly, nothing seems more effective than that they retire from time to time to meditation, devoting all of their time solely to God and themselves. This is the custom in other places and has proven very successful. Furthermore you will easily and spontaneously get to know the talents and the habits of individual priests as you go about administering your dioceses. You will also learn what you have to do by way of prohibition in this matter, and what evils have to be eradicated. To do this and to save ecclesiastical discipline from violation, you must use the just severity of canon law where necessary. All must understand that both the priesthood and the various grades of dignity are no more than a reward for useful labors. For this reason they are reserved for those who have served the Church, who have labored in the care of souls, and who are distinguished for their learning and the holiness of their lives.

Concern for the Faithful

12. When the clergy is distinguished by these virtues, the people will profit in no small measure, since they love the Church, are very devoted to the ancestral religion, and easily and willingly submit to the directives of their pastors. - However you must never fail to make sure that the integrity of Catholic doctrine is preserved in the people and that Evangelical discipline is retained in their actions, life and character. Let frequent sacred retreats for the care of souls be undertaken. To direct this work, choose men of tried virtue, animated by the spirit of Christ, and inflamed with love of neighbor. - Well-written pamphlets to guard against errors or to extirpate them should be widely disseminated. They must be in accord with the truth and encourage virtue. Some societies have already taken up this laudable proposal, with fruitful results. We wish therefore that their number increase and that their success continue from day to day. - Another thing We wish all of you to do, but especially those of you who excel in learning, dignity, and authority, is that in both private and public life, you be solicitous for the good name of religion. Let the cause of the Church be more vigorously prosecuted under your leadership. Let all present and future institutions founded to promote the Catholic cause be willingly aided and increased. - In like manner you must oppose certain false opinions, perversely proposed to safeguard each one's dignity, but which are entirely contrary to the precepts and faith of Christian customs and which open the door to many pernicious and criminal acts. - Finally you must assiduously and vehemently oppose improper organizations, particularly those which We have mentioned in our encyclicals to other places, whose contagion must be averted by every means. In this matter, We desire that you exercise care in proportion to their number, power, and resources.

13. Urged by Our love, this is what We have to prescribe for you, venerable brethren, and which We trust will be accepted by the whole nation of Hungary with prompt obedience. - The fact that your forefathers triumphed so magnificently over bitter foes at Budapest was not solely due to their warlike fortitude, but also to the strength of religion. Just as in the beginning religion gave birth to the strength and authority of a great empire, so it also promises for the future prosperity at home and glory abroad. All of these things, whether they are for your honor or for your advantage, We desire for you, and We pray that you obtain them with the assistance and under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God. The kingdom of Hungary has been consecrated to her and received its name from her. For the same reason We earnestly ask the aid of St. Stephen, who has blessed your kingdom with every kind of gift for its glory and growth. We have the certain hope that he will look down from heaven and guard you with his strong patronage.

14. Relying on this hope, venerable brothers, We impart to you individually, to the clergy, and to all your people, as a sign of heavenly gifts and a proof of Our paternal good will, Our apostolic benediction.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, August 22, 1886, in the ninth year of Our pontificate.

LEO XIII

Copyright © Dicastery for Communication

Source: vatican.va