

COMPERTUM ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII ON UNITY AMONG THE GREEK

Leo XIII

Everybody knows very well, venerable brothers, that at the beginning of Our pontificate, We gave Our affectionate attention to the Christian peoples of the East. In addition, in several acts which We published, especially in the constitution *Orientalium*, We have made many timely declarations designed to bind these peoples more closely to the See of Peter and to encourage the reconciliation of dissidents. We have since found other occasions to show effectively Our good will toward Eastern Catholics. Nothing has been more precious, more sacred to Us than arousing the ardor and the richness of faith in those who are in communion with the Apostolic See so that they strive to achieve the same glory and excellence by imitating the example of their ancestors.

Previous Assistance for the Antiochene Greek Melchites

2. Among all the Eastern churches, We bestow, and have always bestowed, a special affection on the illustrious nation and patriarchate of the Greek Melchites of Antioch. To recall only a few brief items, you know very well that, in the year 1882, We founded a seminary for the Greek Melchites in the city of Jerusalem and placed the White Fathers in charge. In addition at Our own expense, We see to the education of many young men of the same Greek Melchite nation at the college of St. Athanasius in Rome that they may draw Catholic truth right from its very source and become accustomed by its presence to honor and love the center of unity which God has placed in the Apostolic See. Finally in 1894, as can be seen in the same constitution *Orientalium*, We conferred on the Greek Melchite patriarch jurisdiction over all the faithful of the same rite who live within the borders of the Turkish empire.

3. We are glad to state that the religious exertion of your Order has kept pace with the paternal good will which We have shown toward the Greek Melchite nation both by the zeal which you show in fulfilling your ministry, called on as you are to bear a portion of Our cares, and by the diligence with which you provide for the well-being of the flock entrusted to your care. But even though the commemoration of all those matters involves the praise of your Order, We cannot, however, hide the sadness We felt when We learned that certain minor disagreements had recently risen among you. With the favor and the help of God's grace, We have been able to appease such a disagreement. For when you came to Rome last month and complied with Our exhortations with a laudable docility, peace and harmony were immediately restored.

Three Recommendations to Ensure Harmony

4. Now to consolidate this agreement, We think We should make three statements in particular in this letter.

I. Concerning the rights, privileges, duties, and prerogatives of the patriarch, We wish that nothing be taken away from them nor be decreased; but at the same time, We strongly ask Our venerable brother, the patriarch of Antioch, to show a fitting respect for and to embrace with fraternal charity the bishops of his nation "whom the Holy Spirit has placed in charge of the Church of God," in conformity with the precept of St. Peter, the prince of the apostles: "Be not as masters among your people, but from the heart become an example for the flock." (1 Pr 5.3) That is also what the beautiful words of St. Bernard express: "May love accomplish more than power."

II. We also remind all the bishops of the same nation that they owe homage and deference to the patriarch We have praised. They should show him the submission that is due him as their legitimate superior. If some controversy arises between them, they should humbly submit it first of all to the judgment of the patriarch. If it turns out that the question cannot be resolved, it should be respectfully referred to the Holy See.

III. To prevent future contestations of rights, it would be most effective to convene a plenary Council. That is why, as We have already recommended to you on other occasions, We prescribe it for you now by this letter. The Council should be convened as soon as possible. The following matters should be discussed: the rights of the patriarch and of the bishops; the correct administration of the faithful; the discipline of the clergy, monastic orders, and other religious

institutions; the needs of missions; the beauty of divine worship; the sacred liturgy; and other related matters which should be considered with prudent care to ensure the greater glory of God and to increase the honor of the Greek Melchite church. As the other Eastern churches have drawn great profit from the meeting of their national council in arranging their affairs and in restoring ecclesiastical discipline, so We can rightly promise magnificent results for your church from the composition and promulgation of written laws.

Concluding Exhortation

5. Now, before bringing this letter to a close, We urge and beseech you from the bottom of Our heart that, linked more closely by the bonds of charity as each day passes, "You strive with all humility and gentleness to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." None of you is unaware of how much harmony of spirit, heart, and opinion affects the good of the whole Church and assists in the reconciliation of dissidents. For this reason, venerable brothers, We have the certain hope that you will destroy the seeds of dissension at their roots, deferring with gladness to these paternal admonitions, to these desires, to these demands which We formulate and thus complete Our joy and acquit yourselves of all aspects of your solemn duty for the perfection of the saints in the building up of the body of Christ. Be assured that Our fixed intention is to give every assistance which can contribute to the greater good of the Greek Melchite Church.

Meanwhile, in the humility of Our heart, We pray and beseech God to generously bestow His heavenly gifts on you. As a sign of divine protection and as a testimony of the great love We have for you in the Lord, We very affectionately bestow Our apostolic blessing on you, venerable brothers, on all your clergy, and on all the Greek Melchite faithful laity.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's on the 21st of July 1900, the twenty-third year of Our Pontificate.

LEO XIII

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