

# *Sapientiae Christianae*

Encyclical Of Pope Leo XIII

On Christians As Citizens

Pope Leo XIII

**Published by**  
**The Vatican**

*Taken from <http://www.vatican.va> on September 05, 2003.*

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This document was last generated on August 21, 2006.





Document text ·

To the Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, and Bishops of the Catholic world in Grace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

From day to day it becomes more and more evident how needful it is that the principles of Christian wisdom should ever be borne in mind, and that the life, the morals, and the institutions of nations should be wholly conformed to them. For, when these principles have been disregarded, evils so vast have accrued that no right-minded man can face the trials of the time being without grave anxiety or consider the future without alarm. Progress, not inconsiderable indeed, has been made towards securing the well-being of the body and of material things, but the material world, with the possession of wealth, power, and resources, although it may well procure comforts and increase the enjoyment of life, is incapable of satisfying our soul created for higher and more glorious things. To contemplate God, and to tend to Him, is the supreme law of the life of man. For we were created in the divine image and likeness, and are impelled, by our very nature, to the enjoyment of our Creator. But not by bodily motion or effort do we make advance toward God, but through acts of the soul, that is, through knowledge and love. For, indeed, God is the first and supreme truth, and the mind alone feeds on truth. God is perfect holiness and the sovereign good, to which only the will can desire and attain, when virtue is its guide.

But what applies to individual men applies equally to society — domestic alike and civil. Nature did not form society in order that man should seek in it his last end, but in order that in it and through it he should find suitable aids whereby to attain to his own perfection. If, then, a political government strives after external advantages only, and the achievement of a cultured and prosperous life; if, in administering public affairs, it is wont to put God aside, and show no solicitude for the upholding of moral law, it deflects woefully from its right course and from the injunctions of nature; nor should it be accounted as a society or a community of men, but only as the deceitful imitation or appearance of a society.

As to what We have called the goods of the soul, which consist chiefly in the practice of the true religion and in the unswerving observance of the Chris-

tian precepts, We see them daily losing esteem among men, either by reason of forgetfulness or disregard, in such wise that all that is gained for the well-being of the body seems to be lost for that of the soul. A striking proof of the lessening and weakening of the Christian faith is seen in the insults too often done to the Catholic Church, openly and publicly — insults, indeed, which an age cherishing religion would not have tolerated. For these reasons, an incredible multitude of men is in danger of not achieving salvation; and even nations and empires themselves cannot long remain unharmed, since, when Christian institutions and morality decline, the main foundation of human society goes together with them. Force alone will remain to preserve public tranquillity and order. But force is very feeble when the bulwark of religion has been removed, and, being more apt to beget slavery than obedience, it bears within itself the germs of ever-increasing troubles. The present century has encountered memorable disasters, and it is not certain that some equally terrible are not impending. The very times in which we live are warning us to seek remedies there where alone they are to be found — namely, by re-establishing in the family circle and throughout the whole range of society the doctrines and practices of the Christian religion. In this lies the sole means of freeing us from the ills now weighing us down, of forestalling the dangers now threatening the world. For the accomplishment of this end, venerable brethren, We must bring to bear all the activity and diligence that lie within Our power. Although we have already, under other circumstances, and whenever occasion required, treated of these matters, We deem it expedient in this letter to define more in detail the duties of the Catholics, inasmuch as these would, if strictly observed, wonderfully contribute to the good of the commonwealth. We have fallen upon times when a violent and well-nigh daily battle is being fought about matters of highest moment, a battle in which it is hard not to be sometimes deceived, not to go astray and, for many, not to lose heart. It behooves us, venerable brethren, to warn, instruct, and exhort each of the faithful with an earnestness befitting the occasion: that none may abandon the way of truth.'

It cannot be doubted that duties more numerous and of greater moment devolve on Catholics than upon such as are either not sufficiently enlightened in

1: Tobias 1:2.

relation to the Catholic faith, or who are entirely unacquainted with its doctrines. Considering that forthwith upon salvation being brought out for mankind, Jesus Christ laid upon His Apostles the injunction to “preach the Gospel to every creature,” He imposed, it is evident, upon all men the duty of learning thoroughly and believing what they were taught. This duty is intimately bound up with the gaining of eternal salvation: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be condemned.”<sup>2</sup> But the man who has embraced the Christian faith, as in duty bound, is by that very fact a subject of the Church as one of the children born of her, and becomes a member of that greatest and holiest body, which it is the special charge of the Roman Pontiff to rule with supreme power, under its invisible head, Jesus Christ.

Now, if the natural law enjoins us to love devotedly and to defend the country in which we had birth, and in which we were brought up, so that every good citizen hesitates not to face death for his native land, very much more is it the urgent duty of Christians to be ever quickened by like feelings toward the Church. For the Church is the holy City of the living God, born of God Himself, and by Him built up and established. Upon this earth, indeed, she accomplishes her pilgrimage, but by instructing and guiding men she summons them to eternal happiness. We are bound, then, to love dearly the country whence we have received the means of enjoyment this mortal life affords, but we have a much more urgent obligation to love, with ardent love, the Church to which we owe the life of the soul, a life that will endure forever. For fitting it is to prefer the good of the soul to the well-being of the body, inasmuch as duties toward God are of a far more hallowed character than those toward men.

Moreover, if we would judge aright, the supernatural love for the Church and the natural love of our own country proceed from the same eternal principle, since God Himself is their Author and originating Cause. Consequently, it follows that between the duties they respectively enjoin, neither can come into collision with the other. We can, certainly, and should love ourselves, bear ourselves kindly toward our fellow men, nourish affection for the State and the governing powers; but at the same time we can and must cherish toward the Church a feeling of

2: Mark 16:16.

filial piety, and love God with the deepest love of which we are capable. The order of precedence of these duties is, however, at times, either under stress of public calamities, or through the perverse will of men, inverted. For, instances occur where the State seems to require from men as subjects one thing, and religion, from men as Christians, quite another; and this in reality without any other ground, than that the rulers of the State either hold the sacred power of the Church of no account, or endeavor to subject it to their own will. Hence arises a conflict, and an occasion, through such conflict, of virtue being put to the proof. The two powers are confronted and urge their behests in a contrary sense; to obey both is wholly impossible. No man can serve two masters,<sup>3</sup> for to please the one amounts to contemning the other.

As to which should be preferred no one ought to balance for an instant. It is a high crime indeed to withdraw allegiance from God in order to please men, an act of consummate wickedness to break the laws of Jesus Christ, in order to yield obedience to earthly rulers, or, under pretext of keeping the civil law, to ignore the rights of the Church; “we ought to obey God rather than men.”<sup>4</sup> This answer, which of old Peter and the other Apostles were used to give the civil authorities who enjoined unrighteous things, we must, in like circumstances, give always and without hesitation. No better citizen is there, whether in time of peace or war, than the Christian who is mindful of his duty; but such a one should be ready to suffer all things, even death itself, rather than abandon the cause of God or of the Church.

Hence, they who blame, and call by the name of sedition, this steadfastness of attitude in the choice of duty have not rightly apprehended the force and nature of true law. We are speaking of matters widely known, and which We have before now more than once fully explained. Law is of its very essence a mandate of right reason, proclaimed by a properly constituted authority, for the common good. But true and legitimate authority is void of sanction, unless it proceed from God, the supreme Ruler and Lord of all. The Almighty alone can commit power to a

3: Matt. 6:24.

4: Acts 5:29.

man over his fellow men;<sup>5</sup> nor may that be accounted as right reason which is in disaccord with truth and with divine reason; nor that held to be true good which is repugnant to the supreme and unchangeable good, or that wrests aside and draws away the wills of men from the charity of God.

Hallowed, therefore, in the minds of Christians is the very idea of public authority, in which they recognize some likeness and symbol as it were of the Divine Majesty, even when it is exercised by one unworthy. A just and due reverence to the laws abides in them, not from force and threats, but from a consciousness of duty; “for God hath not given us the spirit of fear.”<sup>6</sup>

But, if the laws of the State are manifestly at variance with the divine law, containing enactments hurtful to the Church, or conveying injunctions adverse to the duties imposed by religion, or if they violate in the person of the supreme Pontiff the authority of Jesus Christ, then, truly, to resist becomes a positive duty, to obey, a crime; a crime, moreover, combined with misdemeanor against the State itself, inasmuch as every offense leveled against religion is also a sin against the State. Here anew it becomes evident how unjust is the reproach of sedition; for the obedience due to rulers and legislators is not refused, but there is a deviation from their will in those precepts only which they have no power to enjoin. Commands that are issued adversely to the honor due to God, and hence are beyond the scope of justice, must be looked upon as anything rather than laws. You are fully aware, venerable brothers, that this is the very contention of the Apostle St. Paul, who, in writing to Titus, after reminding Christians that they are “to be subject to princes and powers, and to obey at a word,” at once adds: “And to be ready to every good work.”<sup>7</sup> Thereby he openly declares that, if laws of men contain injunctions contrary to the eternal law of God, it is right not to obey them. In like manner, the Prince of the Apostles gave this courageous and sublime answer to those who would have deprived him of the liberty of preaching the Gospel: “If it be just in

5: Note the extreme importance of this principle; it justifies the doctrine according to which the only conceivable foundation of political authority must be divine in origin.

6: 2 Tim. 1:7.

7: Titus 3:1.

the sight of God to hear you rather than God, judge ye, for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”<sup>8</sup>

Wherefore, to love both countries, that of earth below and that of heaven above, yet in such mode that the love of our heavenly surpass the love of our earthly home, and that human laws be never set above the divine law, is the essential duty of Christians, and the fountainhead, so to say, from which all other duties spring. The Redeemer of mankind of Himself has said: “For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth.”<sup>9</sup> In like manner: “I am come to cast fire upon earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?”<sup>10</sup> In the knowledge of this truth, which constitutes the highest perfection of the mind; in divine charity which, in like manner, completes the will, all Christian life and liberty abide. This noble patrimony of truth and charity entrusted by Jesus Christ to the Church she defends and maintains ever with untiring endeavor and watchfulness.

But with what bitterness and in how many guises war has been waged against the Church it would be ill-timed now to urge. From the fact that it has been vouchsafed to human reason to snatch from nature, through the investigations of science, many of her treasured secrets and to apply them befittingly to the divers requirements of life, men have become possessed with so arrogant a sense of their own powers as already to consider themselves able to banish from social life the authority and empire of God. Led away by this delusion, they make over to human nature the dominion of which they think God has been despoiled; from nature, they maintain, we must seek the principle and rule of all truth; from nature, they aver, alone spring, and to it should be referred, all the duties that religious feeling prompts. Hence, they deny all revelation from on high, and all fealty due to the Christian teaching of morals as well as all obedience to the Church, and they go so far as to deny her power of making laws and exercising every other kind of right, even disallowing the Church any place among the civil institutions of the commonweal. These men aspire unjustly, and with their might strive, to gain control over public affairs and lay hands on the rudder of the State, in order that the

8: Acts 4:19-20.

9: John 18:37.

10: Luke 12:49.

legislation may the more easily be adapted to these principles, and the morals of the people influenced in accordance with them. Whence it comes to pass that in many countries Catholicism is either openly assailed or else secretly interfered with, full impunity being granted to the most pernicious doctrines, while the public profession of Christian truth is shackled oftentimes with manifold constraints.

Under such evil circumstances therefore, each one is bound in conscience to watch over himself, taking all means possible to preserve the faith inviolate in the depths of his soul, avoiding all risks, and arming himself on all occasions, especially against the various specious sophisms rife among non-believers. In order to safeguard this virtue of faith in its integrity, We declare it to be very profitable and consistent with the requirements of the time, that each one, according to the measure of his capacity and intelligence, should make a deep study of Christian doctrine, and imbue his mind with as perfect a knowledge as may be of those matters that are interwoven with religion and lie within the range of reason. And as it is necessary that faith should not only abide untarnished in the soul, but should grow with ever painstaking increase, the suppliant and humble entreaty of the apostles ought constantly to be addressed to God: "Increase our faith."<sup>11</sup>

But in this same matter, touching Christian faith, there are other duties whose exact and religious observance, necessary at all times in the interests of eternal salvation, become more especially so in these our days. Amid such reckless and widespread folly of opinion, it is, as We have said, the office of the Church to undertake the defense of truth and uproot errors from the mind, and this charge has to be at all times sacredly observed by her, seeing that the honor of God and the salvation of men are confided to her keeping. But, when necessity compels, not those only who are invested with power of rule are bound to safeguard the integrity of faith, but, as St. Thomas maintains: "Each one is under obligation to show forth his faith, either to instruct and encourage others of the faithful, or to repel the attacks of unbelievers."<sup>12</sup> To recoil before an enemy, or to keep silence when from all sides such clamors are raised against truth, is the part of a man either devoid of character or who entertains doubt as to the truth of what he professes

11: Luke 17:5.

12: Summa theologiae, IIa-IIae, qu. iii, art. 2, ad 2m.

to believe. In both cases such mode of behaving is base and is insulting to God, and both are incompatible with the salvation of mankind. This kind of conduct is profitable only to the enemies of the faith, for nothing emboldens the wicked so greatly as the lack of courage on the part of the good. Moreover, want of vigor on the part of Christians is so much the more blameworthy, as not seldom little would be needed on their part to bring to naught false charges and refute erroneous opinions, and by always exerting themselves more strenuously they might reckon upon being successful. After all, no one can be prevented from putting forth that strength of soul which is the characteristic of true Christians, and very frequently by such display of courage our enemies lose heart and their designs are thwarted. Christians are, moreover, born for combat, whereof the greater the vehemence, the more assured, God aiding, the triumph: "Have confidence; I have overcome the world."<sup>13</sup> Nor is there any ground for alleging that Jesus Christ, the Guardian and Champion of the Church, needs not in any manner the help of men. Power certainly is not wanting to Him, but in His loving kindness He would assign to us a share in obtaining and applying the fruits of salvation procured through His grace.

The chief elements of this duty consist in professing openly and unflinchingly the Catholic doctrine, and in propagating it to the utmost of our power. For, as is often said, with the greatest truth, there is nothing so hurtful to Christian wisdom as that it should not be known, since it possesses, when loyally received, inherent power to drive away error. So soon as Catholic truth is apprehended by a simple and unprejudiced soul, reason yields assent. Now, faith, as a virtue, is a great boon of divine grace and goodness; nevertheless, the objects themselves to which faith is to be applied are scarcely known in any other way than through the hearing. "How shall they believe Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? Faith then cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."<sup>14</sup> Since, then, faith is necessary for salvation, it follows that the word of Christ must be preached. The office, indeed, of preaching, that is, of teaching, lies by divine right in the province of the pastors, namely, of the bishops whom "the Holy Spirit has placed to rule the Church of God."<sup>15</sup> It belongs, above all, to the

13: John 16:33.

14: Rom. 10:14, 17.

15: Acts 20:28.

Roman Pontiff, vicar of Jesus Christ, established as head of the universal Church, teacher of all that pertains to morals and faith.

No one, however, must entertain the notion that private individuals are prevented from taking some active part in this duty of teaching, especially those on whom God has bestowed gifts of mind with the strong wish of rendering themselves useful. These, so often as circumstances demand, may take upon themselves, not, indeed, the office of the pastor, but the task of communicating to others what they have themselves received, becoming, as it were, living echoes of their masters in the faith. Such co-operation on the part of the laity has seemed to the Fathers of the Vatican Council so opportune and fruitful of good that they thought well to invite it. "All faithful Christians, but those chiefly who are in a prominent position, or engaged in teaching, we entreat, by the compassion of Jesus Christ, and enjoin by the authority of the same God and Saviour, that they bring aid to ward off and eliminate these errors from holy Church, and contribute their zealous help in spreading abroad the light of undefiled faith."<sup>16</sup> Let each one, therefore, bear in mind that he both can and should, so far as may be, preach the Catholic faith by the authority of his example, and by open and constant profession of the obligations it imposes. In respect, consequently, to the duties that bind us to God and the Church, it should be borne earnestly in mind that in propagating Christian truth and warding off errors the zeal of the laity should, as far as possible, be brought actively into play.

The faithful would not, however, so completely and advantageously satisfy these duties as is fitting they should were they to enter the field as isolated champions of the faith. Jesus Christ, indeed, has clearly intimated that the hostility and hatred of men, which He first and foremost experienced, would be shown in like degree toward the work founded by Him, so that many would be barred from profiting by the salvation for which all are indebted to His loving kindness. Wherefore, He willed not only to train disciples in His doctrine, but to unite them into one society, and closely conjoin them in one body, "which is the Church,"<sup>17</sup> whereof He would be the head. The life of Jesus Christ pervades, therefore, the

16: Constitution Dei Filius, at end.

17: Col. 1:24.

entire framework of this body, cherishes and nourishes its every member, uniting each with each, and making all work together to the same end, albeit the action of each be not the same.<sup>18</sup> Hence it follows that not only is the Church a perfect society far excelling every other, but it is enjoined by her Founder that for the salvation of mankind she is to contend “as an army drawn up in battle array.”<sup>19</sup> The organization and constitution of Christian society can in no wise be changed, neither can any one of its members live as he may choose, nor elect that mode of fighting which best pleases him. For, in effect, he scatters and gathers not who gathers not with the Church and with Jesus Christ, and all who fight not jointly with him and with the Church are in very truth contending against God.<sup>20</sup>

To bring about such a union of minds and uniformity of action — not without reason so greatly feared by the enemies of Catholicism — the main point is that a perfect harmony of opinion should prevail; in which intent we find Paul the Apostle exhorting the Corinthians with earnest zeal and solemn weight of words: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you: but that you be perfectly in the same mind, and in the same judgment.”<sup>21</sup>

The wisdom of this precept is readily apprehended. In truth, thought is the principle of action, and hence there cannot exist agreement of will, or similarity of action, if people all think differently one from the other.

In the case of those who profess to take reason as their sole guide, there would hardly be found, if, indeed, there ever could be found, unity of doctrine. Indeed, the art of knowing things as they really are is exceedingly difficult; moreover, the mind of man is by nature feeble and drawn this way and that by a variety of opinions, and not seldom led astray by impressions coming from without; and, furthermore, the influence of the passions oftentimes takes away, or certainly at least diminishes, the capacity for grasping the truth. On this account, in controlling State affairs means are often used to keep those together by force who cannot agree in their way of thinking.

18: Cf. Rom. 12:4-5.

19: Cant. 6:9.

20: Cf. Luke 11:22.

21: 1 Cor. 1:10.

It happens far otherwise with Christians; they receive their rule of faith from the Church, by whose authority and under whose guidance they are conscious that they have beyond question attained to truth. Consequently, as the Church is one, because Jesus Christ is one, so throughout the whole Christian world there is, and ought to be, but one doctrine: “One Lord, one faith;”<sup>22</sup> “but having the same spirit of faith,”<sup>23</sup> they possess the saving principle whence proceed spontaneously one and the same will in all, and one and the same tenor of action.

Now, as the Apostle Paul urges, this unanimity ought to be perfect. Christian faith reposes not on human but on divine authority, for what God has revealed “we believe not on account of the intrinsic evidence of the truth perceived by the natural light of our reason, but on account of the authority of God revealing, who cannot be deceived nor Himself deceive.”<sup>24</sup> It follows as a consequence that whatever things are manifestly revealed by God we must receive with a similar and equal assent. To refuse to believe any one of them is equivalent to rejecting them all, for those at once destroy the very groundwork of faith who deny that God has spoken to men, or who bring into doubt His infinite truth and wisdom. To determine, however, which are the doctrines divinely revealed belongs to the teaching Church, to whom God has entrusted the safekeeping and interpretation of His utterances. But the supreme teacher in the Church is the Roman Pontiff. Union of minds, therefore, requires, together with a perfect accord in the one faith, complete submission and obedience of will to the Church and to the Roman Pontiff, as to God Himself. This obedience should, however, be perfect, because it is enjoined by faith itself, and has this in common with faith, that it cannot be given in shreds; nay, were it not absolute and perfect in every particular, it might wear the name of obedience, but its essence would disappear. Christian usage attaches such value to this perfection of obedience that it has been, and will ever be, accounted the distinguishing mark by which we are able to recognize Catholics. Admirably does the following passage from St. Thomas Aquinas set before us the right view: “The formal object of faith is primary truth, as it is shown forth in the holy Scriptures, and in the teaching of the Church, which proceeds from the

22: Eph. 4:5.

23: 2 Cor. 4:13.

24: Constitution Dei Filius, cap. 3.

fountainhead of truth. It follows, therefore, that he who does not adhere, as to an infallible divine rule, to the teaching of the Church, which proceeds from the primary truth manifested in the holy Scriptures, possesses not the habit of faith; but matters of faith he holds otherwise than true faith. Now, it is evident that he who clings to the doctrines of the Church as to an infallible rule yields his assent to everything the Church teaches; but otherwise, if with reference to what the Church teaches he holds what he likes but does not hold what he does not like, he adheres not to the teaching of the Church as to an infallible rule, but to his own will.”<sup>25</sup>

“The faith of the whole Church should be one, according to the precept (1 Cor. 1:10): “Let all speak the same thing, and let there be no schisms among you“; and this cannot be observed save on condition that questions which arise touching faith should be determined by him who presides over the whole Church, whose sentence must consequently be accepted without wavering. And hence to the sole authority of the supreme Pontiff does it pertain to publish a new revision of the symbol, as also to decree all other matters that concern the universal Church.”<sup>26</sup>

In defining the limits of the obedience owed to the pastors of souls, but most of all to the authority of the Roman Pontiff, it must not be supposed that it is only to be yielded in relation to dogmas of which the obstinate denial cannot be disjoined from the crime of heresy. Nay, further, it is not enough sincerely and firmly to assent to doctrines which, though not defined by any solemn pronouncement of the Church, are by her proposed to belief, as divinely revealed, in her common and universal teaching, and which the Vatican Council declared are to be believed “with Catholic and divine faith.”<sup>27</sup> But this likewise must be reckoned amongst the duties of Christians, that they allow themselves to be ruled and directed by the authority and leadership of bishops, and, above all, of the apostolic see. And how fitting it is that this should be so any one can easily perceive. For the things contained in the divine oracles have reference to God in part, and in part to man, and to whatever is necessary for the attainment of his eternal salvation.

25: Summa theologiae, IIa-IIae, q. v, art. 3.

26: Ibid., q. i, arc. 10.

27: Vatican Council, Constit. de fide catholica, cap. 3, De fide. Cf. H. Denziger, Enchiridion Symbolorum 11 ed., Freiburg i. Br., 1911), p. 476.

Now, both these, that is to say, what we are bound to believe and what we are obliged to do, are laid down, as we have stated, by the Church using her divine right, and in the Church by the supreme Pontiff. Wherefore it belongs to the Pope to judge authoritatively what things the sacred oracles contain, as well as what doctrines are in harmony, and what in disagreement, with them; and also, for the same reason, to show forth what things are to be accepted as right, and what to be rejected as worthless; what it is necessary to do and what to avoid doing, in order to attain eternal salvation. For, otherwise, there would be no sure interpreter of the commands of God, nor would there be any safe guide showing man the way he should live.

In addition to what has been laid down, it is necessary to enter more fully into the nature of the Church. She is not an association of Christians brought together by chance, but is a divinely established and admirably constituted society, having for its direct and proximate purpose to lead the world to peace and holiness. And since the Church alone has, through the grace of God, received the means necessary to realize such end, she has her fixed laws, special spheres of action, and a certain method, fixed and conformable to her nature, of governing Christian peoples. But the exercise of such governing power is difficult, and leaves room for numberless conflicts, inasmuch as the Church rules peoples scattered through every portion of the earth, differing in race and customs, who, living under the sway of the laws of their respective countries, owe obedience alike to the civil and religious authorities. The duties enjoined are incumbent on the same persons, as already stated, and between them there exists neither contradiction nor confusion; for some of these duties have relation to the prosperity of the State, others refer to the general good of the Church, and both have as their object to train men to perfection.

The tracing out of these rights and duties being thus set forth, it is plainly evident that the governing powers are wholly free to carry out the business of the State; and this not only not against the wish of the Church, but manifestly with her co-operation, inasmuch as she strongly urges to the practice of piety, which implies right feeling towards God, and by that very fact inspires a right-mindedness toward the rulers in the State. The spiritual power, however, has a far loftier purpose,

the Church directing her aim to govern the minds of men in the defending of the “kingdom of God, and His justice,”<sup>28</sup> a task she is wholly bent upon accomplishing.

No one can, however, without risk to faith, foster any doubt as to the Church alone having been invested with such power of governing souls as to exclude altogether the civil authority. In truth, it was not to Caesar but to Peter that Jesus Christ entrusted the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. From this doctrine touching the relations of politics and religion originate important consequences which we cannot pass over in silence.

A notable difference exists between every kind of civil rule and that of the kingdom of Christ. If this latter bear a certain likeness and character to a civil kingdom, it is distinguished from it by its origin, principle, and essence. The Church, therefore, possesses the right to exist and to protect herself by institutions and laws in accordance with her nature. And since she not only is a perfect society in herself, but superior to every other society of human growth, she resolutely refuses, promoted alike by right and by duty, to link herself to any mere party and to subject herself to the fleeting exigencies of politics. On like grounds, the Church, the guardian always of her own right and most observant of that of others, holds that it is not her province to decide which is the best amongst many diverse forms of government and the civil institutions of Christian States, and amid the various kinds of State rule she does not disapprove of any, provided the respect due to religion and the observance of good morals be upheld. By such standard of conduct should the thoughts and mode of acting of every Catholic be directed.

There is no doubt that in the sphere of politics ample matter may exist for legitimate difference of opinion, and that, the single reserve being made of the rights of justice and truth, all may strive to bring into actual working the ideas believed likely to be more conducive than others to the general welfare. But to attempt to involve the Church in party strife, and seek to bring her support to bear against those who take opposite views is only worthy of partisans. Religion should, on the contrary, be accounted by every one as holy and inviolate; nay, in the public order itself of States-which cannot be severed from the laws influencing morals and from religious duties-it is always urgent, and indeed the main preoccupation,

28: Matt. 6:33.

to take thought how best to consult the interests of Catholicism. Wherever these appear by reason of the efforts of adversaries to be in danger, all differences of opinion among Catholics should forthwith cease, so that, like thoughts and counsels prevailing, they may hasten to the aid of religion, the general and supreme good, to which all else should be referred. We think it well to treat this matter somewhat more in detail.

The Church alike and the State, doubtless, both possess individual sovereignty; hence, in the carrying out of public affairs, neither obeys the other within the limits to which each is restricted by its constitution. It does not hence follow, however, that Church and State are in any manner severed, and still less antagonistic, Nature, in fact, has given us not only physical existence, but moral life likewise. Hence, from the tranquillity of public order, which is the immediate purpose of civil society, man expects to derive his well-being, and still more the sheltering care necessary to his moral life, which consists exclusively in the knowledge and practice of virtue. He wishes, moreover, at the same time, as in duty bound, to find in the Church the aids necessary to his religious perfection, in the knowledge and practice of the true religion; of that religion which is the queen of virtues, because in binding these to God it completes them all and perfects them. Therefore, they who are engaged in framing constitutions and in enacting laws should bear in mind the moral and religious nature of man, and take care to help him, but in a right and orderly way, to gain perfection, neither enjoining nor forbidding anything save what is reasonably consistent with civil as well as with religious requirements. On this very account, the Church cannot stand by, indifferent as to the import and significance of laws enacted by the State; not insofar, indeed, as they refer to the State, but in so far as, passing beyond their due limits, they trench upon the rights of the Church.

From God has the duty been assigned to the Church not only to interpose resistance, if at any time the State rule should run counter to religion, but, further, to make a strong endeavor that the power of the Gospel may pervade the law and institutions of the nations. And inasmuch as the destiny of the State depends mainly on the disposition of those who are at the head of affairs, it follows that the Church cannot give countenance or favor to those whom she knows to be imbued

with a spirit of hostility to her; who refuse openly to respect her rights; who make it their aim and purpose to tear asunder the alliance that should, by the very nature of things, connect the interests of religion with those of the State. On the contrary, she is (as she is bound to be) the upholder of those who are themselves imbued with the right way of thinking as to the relations between Church and State, and who strive to make them work in perfect accord for the common good. These precepts contain the abiding principle by which every Catholic should shape his conduct in regard to public life. In short, where the Church does not forbid taking part in public affairs, it is fit and proper to give support to men of acknowledged worth, and who pledge themselves to deserve well in the Catholic cause, and on no account may it be allowed to prefer to them any such individuals as are hostile to religion.

Whence it appears how urgent is the duty to maintain perfect union of minds, especially at these our times, when the Christian name is assailed with designs so concerted and subtle. All who have it at heart to attach themselves earnestly to the Church, which is “the pillar and ground of the truth,”<sup>29</sup> will easily steer clear of masters who are “lying and promising them liberty, when they themselves are slaves of corruption.”<sup>30</sup> Nay, more, having made themselves sharers in the divine virtue which resides in the Church, they will triumph over the craft of their adversaries by wisdom, and over their violence by courage. This is not now the time and place to inquire whether and how far the inertness and internal dissensions of Catholics have contributed to the present condition of things; but it is certain at least that the perverse-minded would exhibit less boldness, and would not have brought about such an accumulation of ills, if the faith “which worketh by charity”<sup>31</sup> had been generally more energetic and lively in the souls of men, and had there not been so universal a drifting away from the divinely established rule of morality throughout Christianity. May at least the lessons afforded by the memory of the past have the good result of leading to a wiser mode of acting in the future.

As to those who mean to take part in public affairs, they should avoid with the very utmost care two criminal excesses: so-called prudence and false courage.

29: 1 Tim. 3:15.

30: 2 Peter 2:1, 19.

31: Gal. 5:6.

Some there are, indeed, who maintain that it is not opportune boldly to attack evil-doing in its might and when in the ascendant, lest, as they say, opposition should exasperate minds already hostile. These make it a matter of guesswork as to whether they are for the Church or against her, since on the one hand they give themselves out as professing the Catholic faith, and yet wish that the Church should allow certain opinions, at variance with her teaching, to be spread abroad with impunity. They moan over the loss of faith and the perversion of morals, yet trouble themselves not to bring any remedy; nay, not seldom, even add to the intensity of the mischief through too much forbearance or harmful dissembling. These same individuals would not have any one entertain a doubt as to their good will towards the holy see; yet they have always a something by way of reproach against the supreme Pontiff.

The prudence of men of this cast is of that kind which is termed by the Apostle Paul "wisdom of the flesh" and "death" of the soul, because it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be."<sup>32</sup> Nothing is less calculated to emend such ills than prudence of this kind. For the enemies of the Church have for their object—and they hesitate not to proclaim it, and many among them boast of it—to destroy outright, if possible, the Catholic religion, which alone the true religion. With such a purpose in and they shrink from nothing, for they are fully conscious that the more faint-hearted those who withstand them become, the more easy will it be to work out their wicked will. Therefore, they who cherish the "prudence of the flesh" and who pretend to be unaware that every Christian ought to be a valiant soldier of Christ; they who would faro obtain the rewards owing to conquerors, while they are leading the lives of cowards, untouched in the fight, are so far from thwarting the onward march of the evil-disposed that, on the contrary, they even help it forward.

On the other hand, not a few, impelled by a false zeal, or—what is more blame-worthy still—affecting sentiments which their conduct belies, take upon themselves to act a part which does not belong to them. They would faine see the Church's mode of action influenced by their ideas and their judgment to such an extent that everything done otherwise they take ill or accept with repugnance. Some, yet

32: Cf. Rom. 8:6-7.

again, expend their energies in fruitless contention, being worthy of blame equally with the former. To act in such manner is not to follow lawful authority but to forestall it, and, unauthorized, assume the duties of the spiritual rulers, to the great detriment of the order which God established in His Church to be observed forever, and which He does not permit to be violated with impunity by any one, whoever he may be.

Honor, then, to those who shrink not from entering the arena as often as need calls, believing and being convinced that the violence of injustice will be brought to an end and finally give way to the sanctity of right and religion! They truly seem invested with the dignity of time-honored virtue, since they are struggling to defend religion, and chiefly against the faction banded together to attack Christianity with extreme daring and without tiring, and to pursue with incessant hostility the sovereign Pontiff, fallen into their power. But men of this high character maintain without wavering the love of obedience, nor are they wont to undertake anything upon their own authority. Now, since a like resolve to obey, combined with constancy and sturdy courage, is needful, so that whatever trials the pressure of events may bring about, they may be "deficient in nothing,"<sup>33</sup> We greatly desire to fix deep in the minds of each one that which Paul calls the "wisdom of the spirit,"<sup>34</sup> for in controlling human actions this wisdom follows the excellent rule of moderation, with the happy result that no one either timidly despairs through lack of courage or presumes overmuch from want of prudence. There is, however, a difference between the political prudence that relates to the general good and that which concerns the good of individuals. This latter is shown forth in the case of private persons who obey the prompting of right reason in the direction of their own conduct; while the former is the characteristic of those who are set over others, and chiefly of rulers of the State, whose duty it is to exercise the power of command, so that the political prudence of private individuals would seem to consist wholly in carrying out faithfully the orders issued by lawful authority.<sup>35</sup>

33: James 1:4.

34: Rom. 8:6.

35: "Prudence proceeds from reason, and to reason it specially pertains to guide and govern. Whence it follows that, in so much as any one takes part in the control and government of affairs, in so far ought he to be gifted with reason and prudence. But it is evident that the subject, so far as subject, and the servant ought neither to control nor govern,

The like disposition and the same order should prevail in the Christian society by so much the more that the political prudence of the Pontiff embraces diverse and multiform things, for it is his charge not only to rule the Church, but generally so to regulate the actions of Christian citizens that these may be in apt conformity to their hope of gaining eternal salvation. Whence it is clear that, in addition to the complete accordance of thought and deed, the faithful should follow the practical political wisdom of the ecclesiastical authority. Now, the administration of Christian affairs immediately under the Roman Pontiff appertains to the bishops, who, although they attain not to the summit of pontifical power, are nevertheless truly princes in the ecclesiastical hierarchy; and as each one of them administers a particular church, they are “as master-workers...in the spiritual edifice,”<sup>36</sup> and they have members of the clergy to share their duties and carry out their decisions. Every one has to regulate his mode of conduct according to this constitution of the Church, which it is not in the power of any man to change. Consequently, just as in the exercise of their episcopal authority the bishops ought to be united with the apostolic see so should the members of the clergy and the laity live in close union with their bishops. Among the prelates, indeed, one or other there may be affording scope to criticism either in regard to personal conduct or in reference to opinions by him entertained about points of doctrine; but no private person may arrogate to himself the office of judge which Christ our Lord has bestowed on that one alone whom He placed in charge of His lambs and of His sheep. Let every one bear in mind that most wise teaching of Gregory the Great: “Subjects should be admonished not rashly to judge their prelates, even if they chance to see them acting in a blameworthy manner, lest, justly reproving what is wrong, they be led by pride into greater wrong. They are to be warned against the danger of setting themselves up in audacious opposition to the superiors whose shortcomings they

but rather to be controlled and governed. Prudence, then, is not the special virtue of the servant, so far as servant, nor of the subject, so far as subject. But because any man, on account of his character of a reasonable being, may have some share in the government on account of the rational choice which he exercises, it is fitting that in such proportion he should possess the virtue of prudence. Whence it manifestly results that prudence exists in the ruler as the art of building exists in the architect, whereas prudence exists in the subject as the art of building exists in the hand of the workman employed in the construction.” *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. xlvii, art. 12, Answer. St. Thomas Aquinas refers to Aristotle, *Ethic. Nic.*, Bk. VI, 8, 1141b 21-29.

36: Thomas Aquinas *Quaest. Quodl.*, 1, G. 7, art. 2, Answer.

may notice. Should, therefore, the superiors really have committed grievous sins, their inferiors, penetrated with the fear of God, ought not to refuse them respectful submission. The actions of superiors should not be smitten by the sword of the word, even when they are rightly judged to have deserved censure.”<sup>37</sup>

However, all endeavors will avail but little unless our life be regulated conformably with the discipline of the Christian virtues. Let us call to mind what holy Scripture records concerning the Jewish nation: “As long as they sinned not in the sight of their God, it was well with them: for their God hateth iniquity. And even...when they had revolted from the way that God had given them to walk therein, they were destroyed in battles by many nations.”<sup>38</sup> Now, the nation of the Jews bore an inchoate semblance to the Christian people, and the vicissitudes of their history in olden times have often foreshadowed the truth that was to come, saving that God in His goodness has enriched and loaded us with far greater benefits, and on this account the sins of Christians are much greater, and bear the stamp of more shameful and criminal ingratitude.

The Church, it is certain, at no time and in no particular is deserted by God; hence, there is no reason why she should be alarmed at the wickedness of men; but in the case of nations falling away from Christian virtue there is not a like ground of assurance, “for sin maketh nations miserable.”<sup>39</sup> If every bygone age has experienced the force of this truth, wherefore should not our own? There are, in truth, very many signs which proclaim that just punishments are already menacing, and the condition of modern States tends to confirm this belief, since we perceive many of them in sad plight from intestine disorders, and not one entirely exempt. But, should those leagued together in wickedness hurry onward in the road they have boldly chosen, should they increase in influence and power in proportion as they make headway in their evil purposes and crafty schemes, there will be ground to fear lest the very foundations nature has laid for States to rest upon be utterly destroyed. Nor can such misgivings be removed by any mere human effort, especially as a vast number of men, having rejected the Christian faith, are on that account justly incurring the penalty of their pride, since blinded by their passions

37: Regina pastorales, Part 3, cap. 4 (PL 77, 55).

38: Judith 5:21-22.

39: Prov. 14:34.

they search in vain for truth, laying hold on the false for the true, and thinking themselves wise when they call “evil good, and good evil,” and “put darkness in the place of light, and light in the place of darkness.”<sup>40</sup> It is therefore necessary that God come to the rescue, and that, mindful of His mercy, He turn an eye of compassion on human society.

Hence, We renew the urgent entreaty We have already made, to redouble zeal and perseverance, when addressing humble supplications to our merciful God, so that the virtues whereby a Christian life is perfected may be reawakened. It is, however, urgent before all, that charity, which is the main foundation of the Christian life, and apart from which the other virtues exist not or remain barren, should be quickened and maintained. Therefore is it that the Apostle Paul, after having exhorted the Colossians to flee all vice and cultivate all virtue, adds: “Above all things, have charity, which is the bond of perfection.”<sup>41</sup> Yea, truly, charity is the bond of perfection, for it binds intimately to God those whom it has embraced and with loving tenderness, causes them to draw their life from God, to act with God, to refer all to God. Howbeit, the love of God should not be severed from the love of our neighbour, since men have a share in the infinite goodness of God and bear in themselves the impress of His image and likeness. “This commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God, love also his brother.”<sup>42</sup> “If any man say I love God, and he hateth his brother, he is a liar.”<sup>43</sup> And this commandment concerning charity its divine proclaimer styled new, not in the sense that a previous law, or even nature itself, had not enjoined that men should love one another, but because the Christian precept of loving each other in that manner was truly new, and quite unheard of in the memory of man. For, that love with which Jesus Christ is beloved by His Father and with which He Himself loves men, He obtained for His disciples and followers that they might be of one heart and of one mind in Him by charity, as He Himself and His Father are one by their nature.

No one is unaware how deeply and from the very beginning the import of that precept has been implanted in the breast of Christians, and what abundant

40: Isa. 5:20.

41: Col. 3:14.

42: I John 4:21.

43: I John 4:20.

fruits of concord, mutual benevolence, piety, patience, and fortitude it has produced. Why, then, should we not devote ourselves to imitate the examples set by our fathers? The very times in which we live should afford sufficient motives for the practice of charity. Since impious men are bent on giving fresh impulse to their hatred against Jesus Christ, Christians should be quickened anew in piety; and charity, which is the inspirer of lofty deeds, should be imbued with new life. Let dissensions therefore, if there be any, wholly cease; let those strifes which waste the strength of those engaged in the fight, without any advantage resulting to religion, be scattered to the winds; let all minds be united in faith and all hearts in charity, so that, as it behooves, life may be spent in the practice of the love of God and the love of men.

This is a suitable moment for us to exhort especially heads of families to govern their households according to these precepts, and to be solicitous without failing for the right training of their children. The family may be regarded as the cradle of civil society, and it is in great measure within the circle of family life that the destiny of the States is fostered. Whence it is that they who would break away from Christian discipline are working to corrupt family life, and to destroy it utterly, root and branch. From such an unholy purpose they allow not themselves to be turned aside by the reflection that it cannot, even in any degree, be carried out without inflicting cruel outrage on the parents. These hold from nature their right of training the children to whom they have given birth, with the obligation super-added of shaping and directing the education of their little ones to the end for which God vouch-safed the privilege of transmitting the gift of life. It is, then, incumbent on parents to strain every nerve to ward off such an outrage, and to strive manfully to have and to hold exclusive authority to direct the education of their offspring, as is fitting, in a Christian manner, and first and foremost to keep them away from schools where there is risk of their drinking in the poison of impiety. Where the right education of youth is concerned, no amount of trouble or labor can be undertaken, how great soever, but that even greater still may not be called for. In this regard, indeed, there are to be found in many countries Catholics worthy of general admiration, who incur considerable outlay and bestow much zeal in founding schools for the education of youth. It

is highly desirable that such noble example may be generously followed, where time and circumstances demand, yet all should be intimately persuaded that the minds of children are most influenced by the training they receive at home. If in their early years they find within the walls of their homes the rule of an upright life and the discipline of Christian virtues, the future welfare of society will in great measure be guaranteed.

And now We seem to have touched upon those matters which Catholics ought chiefly nowadays to follow, or mainly to avoid. It rests with you, venerable brothers, to take measures that Our voice may reach everywhere, and that one and all may understand how urgent it is to reduce to practice the teachings set forth in this Our letter. The observance of these duties cannot be troublesome or onerous, for the yoke of Jesus Christ is sweet, and His burden is light. If anything, however, appear too difficult of accomplishment, you will afford aid by the authority of your example, so that each one of the faithful may make more strenuous endeavor, and display a soul unconquered by difficulties. Bring it home to their minds, as We have Ourselves oftentimes conveyed the warning, that matters of the highest moment and worthy of all honor are at stake, for the safeguarding of which every most toilsome effort should be readily endured; and that a sublime reward is in store for the labors of a Christian life. On the other hand, to refrain from doing battle for Jesus Christ amounts to fighting against Him; He Himself assures us "He will deny before His Father in heaven those who shall have refused to confess Him on earth."<sup>44</sup> As for Ourselves and you all, never assuredly, so long as life lasts, shall We allow Our authority, Our counsels, and Our solicitude to be in any wise lacking in the conflict. Nor is it to be doubted but that especial aid of the great God will be vouchsafed, so long as the struggle endures, to the flock alike and to the pastors. Sustained by this confidence, as a pledge of heavenly gifts, and of Our loving kindness in the Lord to you, venerable brothers, to your clergy and to all your people, We accord the apostolic benediction.

Given at St. Peter's in Rome, the tenth day of January, 1890, the twelfth year of Our pontificate.

44: Luke 9:26.

## LEO XIII



## *Notes*