

Pope in Encyclical Urges Prayer and Penance to Combat Distress and Evils of World Crisis

Following is the full text of the encyclical of Pope Pius XI published in the New York Times, May 16, 1931.

ENCYCLICAL LETTER

Venerable brethren: health and apostolic benediction. I have invited you to the encyclical "Nova Impende" of Oct. 3 of last year, all members of the Catholic Church, indeed all men of good-will, to unite in a holy crusade of love and aid, in order to alleviate in some measure the terrible consequences of the economic crisis under which the human race is struggling. And truly wonderful was the unanimous enthusiasm with which the generosity and activity of all answered our appeal. But distress has increased, the numbers of the unemployed has grown, and the elements are making use of the fact for their propaganda; hence public order is threatened more and more and the peril of terrorism and anarchy hangs over society ever more ominously.

Such being the case, the same charity of Christ moves us to turn once again to you, venerable brethren, to the faithful in your charge, to the whole world, and to exhort all to unite and to resist with all their might the evils that are crushing humanity and the still graver evils that are threatening.

CHAPTER I

Distress Widespread

If we pass in review the long and wretched history of the world, as a sad heritage of sin, mark the stages of fallen man's earthly pilgrimage from the Flood on, it would be hard to find spiritual and material distress as deep as universal, as that which we are now experiencing; were the records complete that left in the Bible traces in the lives and miseries of peoples struck only one nation at a time.

Now on the contrary the whole of humanity is held bound by the financial and economic crisis, so fast that the more it struggles the harder appears the task of loosening its bonds.

There is no people, there is no State, no society or family which, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, is not a greater or less extent, does not feel the repercussion. Even those who seem to be insulated appear to have in their hands, together with enormous wealth, the destinies of the world, even those very few who with their speculations were and are in great part the cause of so much woe, are themselves quite often the victims because they left in their hands, dragging down with themselves into the abyss the fortunes of countless others; thus verifying in a terrible manner and before the whole world that the Holy Ghost had already proclaimed for every sinner in particular: "By what things man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented."

This deplorable state of things, venerable brethren, makes our pa-

ternal heart groan and makes us feel more and more deeply the need of adopting, in the measure of our infirmity, the sublime sentiment of the sacred heart of Jesus: "I have compassion on the multitude."

But still more deplorable is the root from which springs this condition of affairs, for, if what the Holy Ghost affirms through the mouth of St. Paul is ever true, much more it is true at present: "The desire of money is the root of all evils." Is it not that lust of earthly goods that the pagan poet called with righteous scorn "the accursed hunger for gold"? Is it not that sordid egotism which too often regulates the private relations of individuals and society; is it not, in fine, greed, whatever be its species and form, that has brought the world to a pass we all see and deplore?

Few Control Wealth

From greed arises mutual distrust that casts a blight on all human dealings; from greed arises hateful envy which makes a man consider the advantages of another as losses to himself; from greed arises narrow individualism which orders and controls everything to its own advantage without taking account of others, on the contrary cruelly trampling under foot all rights of others. Hence the disorder and inequality from which arises the accumulation of the wealth of nations in the hands of a small group of individuals who manage the market of the world at their own caprice, to the immense harm of the masses, as we showed last year in our encyclical letter "Quadragesimo Anno."

The right order of Christian charity does not disapprove of lawful love of country and a sentiment of justifiable nationalism; on the contrary, it controls, sanctifies and animates them. If, however, egotism, abusing this love of country and exaggerating this sentiment of nationalism, insinuates itself into the relations between people and people, there is no excess that will not be justified, and that which which nations individuals would be judged blameworthy by all is now considered lawful and praiseworthy if it is done in the name of this exaggerated nationalism.

Instead of the great law of love and human brotherhood, which embraces and holds in a single family all nations and peoples with one Father who is in Heaven, there enters hatred, driving all to destruction. In public life sacred principles, the guide of all social intercourse, are trampled upon; the solid foundations of right and honesty on which the State should rest are undermined.

Profiting by so much economic distress and so much moral disorder, the enemies of all social order, be they called Communists or any other name, boldly set about breaking through every restraint. This is the most deadly evil of our times, for they destroy every bond of law, human and divine; they engage openly and in secret in a relentless struggle against religion and against God himself; they carry out the diabolical program of wrenching from the hearts of all, even of children, all religious and patriotic feelings. They know that when once belief in God has been taken from the heart of mankind they will be entirely free to work out their will.

Pope Names Week of Prayer



POPE PIUS XI

Thus we see today what was never before seen in history, the satanic banner of war against God and against religion brazenly unfurled to the winds in the midst of all peoples and in all parts of the earth. Polluted and closed are the sources of those ancient traditions which, based on faith in God and fidelity to His law, secured the true progress of nations.

There were never lacking, true men nor men who denied God, but they were relatively few, isolated and individual, and they did not care to too openly their impious mind as the inspired saint appears to suggest, when he exclaims: "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." The impious, the atheist, lost in the crowd, denies God, his creator but in the secret of his heart.

Atheism Among Masses

Today, on the contrary, atheism has already spread through large masses of the people. Well or not, it works its way even into the common schools; it appears in theaters; in order to spread it makes use of its own cinema films, of the gramophone and the radio, with its own printing presses it prints books lots in every language; it promotes special exhibitions and public parades; it has formed its own political parties and its own economic and military systems.

The organized and militant atheism works untiringly by means of agitators, with conferences and projections, with every means of propaganda, secret and open; among all classes, in every street, in every hall, it secures for this nefarious activity the moral support of its own universities, and holds fast the unwary with the mighty bonds of its organizing power.

At the sight of so much activity placed at the service of so wicked a cause there comes spontaneously to our mind and to our lips the mournful lament of Christ: "The children of this world are wiser in their covetousness than the children of light." The leaders of this campaign of atheism, turning to account the present economic crises, inquire with diabolic reasoning into the cause of this universal misery. The holy cross of our Lord, symbol of humility and poverty, is joined together with the symbols of modern individualism, as though religion were allied with those dark powers which produce such evils among men.

Thus they strive, and not without effect, to combine war against God with their struggle for their daily bread, with their desire to have the best of their own, suitable wages and decent dwelling—in fine, a condition of life befitting human beings.

Believers Under Attack

The most legitimate and necessary desires, just as the most brutal instincts, everything serves their religious program, as if the order established by God stood in contradiction with the welfare of mankind and were not, on the contrary, its only sure safeguard; as if human forces by means of modern mechanical power could combat the divine forces and introduce a new and better ordering of things.

Now it is a lamentable fact that millions of men, under the impression that they are struggling for existence, grasp at such theories to the utter subversion of truth, and fight against God and religion. Nor are these assaults directed only against the Catholic religion, but against all who still recognize God as creator of heaven and earth and as absolute Lord of all things. And the secret societies, always ready to support war against God and the Church, no matter who wages it, do not fail to infuse ever more this insane hatred which can give neither peace nor happiness to any class of society but will certainly bring all nations to disaster.

the question of the existence of God, that they thought had been ruled out once and for all and are ever constrained to take up again its discussion.

In the name of the Lord, therefore, we conjure individuals and nations, in the face of such problems and in the throes of a conflict of such vital interest for mankind, to put aside that narrow individualism and base egotism that blinds even the most clear-sighted, that withers up all noble initiative as soon as it is no longer confined to a limited circle of petty and particular interests.

Let them all unite together even at the cost of heavy sacrifices to save themselves and mankind. In such a union of minds and forces they naturally ought to be the first who are proud of the Christian name, mindful of the glorious tradition of the apostolic time when "the heart and one soul." But let all those who also loyally and heartily concur who still believe in God and adore Him, in order to ward off from mankind the great danger that threatens all, let them all unite together.

Make Use of Lawful Means

We are aware, venerable brethren, that in this battle for the defense of religion we must make use of all law, that in this battle for the defense of religion we must make use of all law, that in this battle for the defense of religion we must make use of all law.

CHAPTER II

Faith Advances

We know very well, venerable brethren, that vain are all these efforts, and that in the hour He has established God will arise and His enemies shall be scattered. We know that "the gates of hell shall not prevail." We know that our Divine Redeemer, as was foretold of Him, shall sit at the right hand of the Father and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked, and for those unhappy beings who are above all things will be the hour in which they fall into the hands of the living God.

And this unshakable confidence in the final triumph of God and the Church is, through the infinite goodness of the Lord, strengthened for us every day by the constant sight of the generous enthusiasm for God on the part of countless souls in every quarter of the world and in all classes of society.

It is indeed a powerful breathing of the Holy Spirit which is now passing over all the earth drawing especially the souls of the young to the highest Christian ideals, raising them above all human respect, rendering them ready for the holiest traditions, the most heroic; a divine breath that stirs all hearts, even in spite of the temptations, and causes them to feel an inward impulse, a real thirst for God, to be forgiven by those who dare not confess it.

It is also true that our invitation to the laity to take part in the promotion of the hierarchy in the ranks of Catholic action has been everywhere received with docility and generosity. In the cities and in the country the number is continuously increasing of those who with all their strength devote themselves to the promotion of Christian principles and to their practical application in public life while they themselves strive to confirm their words with the example of their upright lives.

But none the less, confronted with so much impiety, such destruction of all the holiest traditions, such slaughter of immortal souls, secret offenses against the Divine Majesty, we cannot, venerable brethren, refrain from pouring out the bitter grief of our soul, we cannot refrain from raising our voice, and with all the energy of our apostolic heart, taking the defense of the downtrodden rights of God and of the most sacred sentiments of the human heart that has absolute need of God; and this all the more since these hostile forces impeded by the spirit of evil, do not content themselves with mere clamor, but unite all their strength in order to carry out at the first opportunity their nefarious designs.

Woe to mankind if God, thus spurred by His creatures, allows in His justice free course to this devastating flood and uses it as a scourge to chastise the world. It is necessary, therefore, venerable brethren, that without faltering we "get up a wall for the house of Israel," that we likewise unite all our forces in one solid, compact line against the battalions of evil enemies of God no less than of the human race. Nor is this a conflict there is really question of the fundamental problem of the universe and of the most important decision proposed to man's free will. For God or against God, this once more is the alternative that shall decide the destinies of all mankind. In politics, in finance, in morals, in the science and arts, in the State, in civil and domestic society, in the East and in the West, everywhere this question confronts us as the deciding factor because of the consequences that flow from it.

Thus even the advocates of an altogether materialistic conception of the world always see rising before them

economic dangers to life, physical, and therefore, those who through the excessive production of manufactured articles have fallen into unemployment and poverty made their minds to give the proper time to prayer, there is no doubt that work and production would soon return to reasonable limits and that the conflict which now divides humanity into two great camps struggling for transient interests would be changed into a noble and peaceful contest for goods heavenly and eternal.

In like manner will the way be opened to the peace we long for, as St. Paul beautifully remarks in the passage where he joins the precept of prayer to holy desires for the peace and salvation of all men: "I desire, therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men; for kings and all that are high station, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all plenty and chastity. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth."

Implores Peace For Men

Let peace be implored for all men, but especially for those who in human society have the grave responsibilities of government; for how could they give peace to their people, if they have it not themselves? It is prayer precisely that, according to the Apostle, will bring the gift of peace; prayer that is addressed to the Heavenly Father who is the Father of all men; prayer, that is the common expression of family love, of that love which binds us to our country and continent.

Men who in every nation pray to the same God for peace on earth, need not be at the same time bearers of discord among peoples; men who turn in prayer to the Divine Majesty cannot foment that nationalistic imperialism which of each people makes its own god; men who look to the "God of Peace and of Love," who turn to Him through the mediation of Christ, who is "our peace," will know no rest until finally that peace which the world cannot give comes down from the river of every good gift, an "amen" goes up from every heart, "Peace be to you," was the Easter greeting of our Lord to His Apostles and first disciples; and this blessed greeting from those first times until our day has never been absent from the sacred liturgy of the Church and today more than ever it should comfort and refresh, animate and oppress human hearts.

CHAPTER III

Penance Needed

But to prayer we must also join penance, the spirit of penance and the practice of Christian penance. Thus our Divine Master teaches us, whose first preaching was precisely penance: "Jesus began to preach, to say, do penance." The same is the teaching of all Christian tradition, of the whole history of the Church.

In the great calamities, in the great tribulations of Christianity, when the need of God's help was most pressing, the faithful, either spontaneously, or more often following the lead and exhortations of their holy pastors, have always taken in hand the two most mighty weapons of spiritual life—prayer and penance.

By that sacred instinct by which unconsciously, as it were, the Christian people is guided when not led astray by the sowers of tares, and which is none other than that "mind of Christ" of which the Apostle speaks, the faithful have always felt immediately in such cases the need of purifying their souls from sin with contrition of heart, with the sacrament of reconciliation and of appealing divine justice with external works of penance as well.

Prayer Unites With God

And what object could be more worthy of our prayer and more in keeping with the adorable person of Him who is the only mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ, that to beseech Him to preserve on earth faith in one God, living and true? Such prayer bears already in itself a part of its answer; for in the very act of prayer a man unites himself with God and, so to speak, keeps alive on earth the idea of God. The man who prays, merited by his humble posture, professes before the world his faith in the Creator and Lord of all things; joined with others in prayer he recognizes that not only the individual but human society as a whole has over it a supreme and absolute Lord.

What a spectacle, for Heaven and earth is not the church in prayer! For centuries without interruption, from midnight to midnight, is repeated on earth the divine patmos of the inspired canticles; there is no hour of the day that is not hallowed by its special liturgy; there is no stage of life, great or small, that has not its part in the thanksgiving, praise, supplication and reparation of the common-payer of the-miracles of Christ, which the church, thus prayer of itself assures the presence of God among men, according to the promise of the Divine Redeemer: "Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

In addition, prayer will remove the fundamental cause of present-day difficulties which we have mentioned above; that is, the insatiable greed for earthly goods. The man who prays looks above to the goods of Heaven whereon he meditates and which he desires; his whole being is plunged in the contemplation of the marvelous order established by God, which knows not the frenzy of success and does not lose itself in futile competitions of ever-increasing speed; and thus automatically, as it were, will be re-established that equilibrium between work and rest, whose entire absence from society today is responsible for

with many lost in great part the power of rousing enthusiasm of heart and heroism of sacrifices.

In other times they were able to inspire such feelings, for they appeared in the eyes of men of faith as sealed with a divine mark in likeness of Christ and His saints. But nowadays there are some who would put aside external mortifications as things of the past without mentioning the modern "autonomous man" who despises penance as bearing the mark of servitude.

As a fact the notion of the need of penance and expiation is lost in proportion as belief in God is weakened and the idea of an original sin and of a first rebellion of man against God becomes confused and disappears.

Upholding Ideas Pastoral Duty

But we on the other hand, venerable brethren, have the duty of the pastoral office of bearing aloft these names and ideas and of preserving them in their true meaning, in their genuine dignity, and still more in their practical and necessary application to Christian life. To this we add the very defense of God and religion, which we sustain, since penance is of its nature a recognition, and re-establishment of the moral order in the world that is founded on the eternal law that is of the living God.

He who finds satisfaction in God for sin recognizes therein the sanctity of the highest principles of morality, their internal binding power, the need of a sanction against their violation.

Certainly one of the most dangerous errors of our age is the claim to create a morality from scratch, thus removing all solid basis for any legislation, thus removing all solid basis for any legislation. This intellectual error might, perhaps, have passed unnoticed and appeared less dangerous when it was confined to a very few and belief in God was still the common heritage of mankind and was tacitly presumed even in the case of those who no longer professed it openly. But today, when atheism is spreading through the masses of the people, the practical consequences of such an error become dreadfully tangible, and realities of the saddest kind make their appearance in the world.

In place of moral laws which disappear together with the loss of faith in God, brute force is imposed rampantly on every right. The dignity, fidelity and honesty of conduct and mutual intercourse extolled so much even by the orators and poets of paganism now give place to speculations in one's own affairs as in those of others without reference to conscience.

In fact, how can any contract be maintained and what value can any treaty have in which every guarantee of conscience is lacking? And how can there be talk of guarantees of conscience when all faith in God and all fear of God has vanished? To take away this basis and with it all moral law falls and there is no remedy left to stop the gradual but inevitable destruction of peoples, families, the State civilization itself.

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