

ON THE CLERGY IN ITALY

PIENI L'ANIMO

Encyclical of Pope Pius X promulgated on July 28, 1906.

To the Venerable Brethren, the Archbishops, and Bishops of Italy.

Venerable Brethren, Health and the Apostolic Blessing.

Our soul is fearful of the strict rendering that We shall one day be called upon to make to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Pastors, concerning the flock He entrusted to Our care. We pass each day with great solicitude in preserving as much as possible the faithful from the dangerous evils that afflict society at the present time. Therefore, We consider addressed to Us the words of the Prophet: "Cry, cease not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet." [1] Accordingly, sometimes by speech and sometimes by letter We constantly warn, beseech, and censure, arousing, above all, the zeal of Our Brethren in the Episcopate so that each one of them will exercise the most solicitous vigilance in that portion of the flock over which the Holy Spirit has placed him.

2. The cause which now moves Us to raise Our voice is of very serious importance. It demands all the attention of your mind and all the energy of your pastoral office to counteract the disorder which has already produced the most destructive effects. If this disorder is not radically removed with a firm hand, even more fatal consequences will be felt in the coming years. In fact, Venerable Brethren, We have letters, full of sadness and tears, from several of you, in which you deplore the spirit of insubordination and independence displayed here and there among the clergy. Most assuredly, a poisonous atmosphere corrupts men's minds to a great extent today, and the deadly effects are those which the Apostolic Saint Jude formerly described: "These men also defile the flesh, disregard authority, deride majesty." [2] That is to say, over and above the most degrading corruption of manners there is also an open contempt for authority and for those who exercise it. What overwhelms Us with grief, however, is the fact that this spirit should creep into the sanctuary even in the least degree, infecting those to whom the words of Ecclesiasticus should most fittingly be applied: "Their generation, obedience and love." [3] This unfortunate spirit is doing the damage especially among young priests, spreading among them new and reprehensible theories concerning the very nature of obedience. In order to recruit new members for this growing troop of rebels, what is even more serious is the fact that such maxims are being more or less secretly propagated among youths preparing for the priesthood within the enclosure of the seminaries.

3. We therefore consider it Our duty, Venerable Brethren, to appeal to your conscience to see that you do not spare any effort and with a firm hand and constant resolve you do not hesitate to destroy this evil seed which carries with it such destructive consequences. Never forget that the Holy Spirit has placed you to rule. Remember Saint Paul's command to Titus: "Rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise thee." [4] Be firm in demanding that obedience from your priests and clerics which is a matter of absolute obligation for all the faithful, and constitutes the most important part of the sacred duty of priests.

4. Take the proper means necessary for the diminution of these quarrelsome souls. Bear well in mind, Venerable Brethren, the Apostle's warning to Timothy: "Do not lay hands hastily upon anyone." [5] In fact, haste in admitting men to Sacred Orders naturally opens the way to a multiplication of people in the sanctuary who do not increase joy. We know that there are cities and dioceses where, far from there being any reason to lament the dearth of clergy, the clergy greatly exceed the needs of the faithful. Venerable Brethren, what reason is there for imposing hands so frequently? In those places where the lack of clergy is no sufficient reason for haste in so important a

matter and the clergy are more numerous than the requirements demand, nothing excuses from the most delicate caution and the greatest exactitude in selecting those who are to receive the sacerdotal honor. The eagerness of the aspirants is no excuse for haste. The priesthood that Jesus Christ instituted for the salvation of souls is by no means a human profession or office which anyone desiring it for any reason can say he has a right to receive. Therefore, let the Bishops call young men to sacred orders, not according to the desires or pretexts of the aspirants, but, as the Council of Trent prescribes, according to the needs of the dioceses. In this task they can select only those who are really suitable and dismiss those who have inclinations contrary to the priestly vocation. The most dangerous of these inclinations are a disregard for discipline and that pride of mind which fosters it.

5. In order that young men who display qualities suitable for the sacred ministry may not be lacking, Venerable Brethren, We wish to insist most earnestly on what We have already frequently pointed out. That is to say, you have a very serious obligation before God of guarding and fostering most solicitously the proper conduct of the seminaries. Your priests will be as you have trained them. The letter of December 8, 1902, which Our most prudent Predecessor addressed to you as a testament from his long Pontificate is very important.[6] We desire to add nothing new to it; We shall merely remind you of the rules it lays down. We especially recommend the immediate execution of Our orders, published through the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on the concentration of the seminaries especially for the study of philosophy and theology. In this way the great advantage resulting from the separation of the major and minor seminaries and the no less great advantage of the necessary instruction of the clergy will be secured.

6. Let the seminaries be jealously guarded in order that a proper atmosphere will be maintained. Let them always be destined exclusively for preparing youths, not for civil careers, but for the noble vocation of being ministers of Christ. Let philosophy, theology, and the related sciences, especially Sacred Scripture, be studied along the lines of pontifical directives: according to the teaching of Saint Thomas which Our venerable Predecessor so often recommended, and We Ourselves recommended in the Apostolic Letter of January 23, 1904.[7] Therefore, let the Bishops exercise the most prudent vigilance towards the professors' teachings. Let them recall those who run after certain dangerous novelties to their sense of duty. If they do not profit from these warnings, let them be removed – cost what it may – from their teaching position. Young clerics are forbidden to frequent the universities unless the Bishops think there are very good reasons and necessary precautions have been taken. Seminarians are absolutely forbidden to take part in external activities. Accordingly. We forbid them to read newspapers and periodicals, excepting, in the case of the latter, those with solid principles and which the Bishop deems suitable for their study. Let discipline continue to be fostered with renewed vigor and vigilance. Finally, in every seminary there must be a spiritual director. He is to be a man of extraordinary prudence and experienced in the ways of Christian perfection. With untiring zeal he must train the young men in solid piety, the primary foundation of the spiritual life. Venerable Brethren, if these rules are conscientiously and religiously followed they will be your sure guarantee of seeing a clergy growing up around you which will be your joy and your crown.

7. If these instructions are not observed, the problem of insubordination and independence which We now lament will be even more aggravated by some of the younger clergy and cause even more harm. This is especially so since those who are subject to this reprobate spirit are not lacking, and, abusing the sacred office of preaching, they are its outspoken promoters and apostles, to the detriment and scandal of the faithful.

8. On July 31, 1894, Our Predecessor, through the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, called the Bishops' attention to this very serious problem.[8] The regulations and norms set up in that Pontifical document We now affirm and renew, commanding the Bishops to form their conscience according to it, lest the words of the Prophet Nahum might be applied to any of them: Thy shepherds have slumbered.[9] No one can have the faculty of preaching unless he first be

approved of in life, knowledge and morals.[10] Priests of other dioceses should not be allowed to preach unless they have testimonial letters from their own Bishop. Let the subject of their sermons be that which the Divine Savior indicated when He said: Preach the gospel[11] . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.[12] Or, according to the Council of Trent, announcing to them the vices they should avoid and the virtues they should follow in order to escape eternal punishment and attain heavenly glory.[13] Therefore, let those arguments better suited to journalistic campaigns and lecture halls be completely banished from the holy place. Let moral preaching be preferred to sermons which are, to say the least, fruitless. Let the preacher speak not in the persuasive words of wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.[14] The principal source, therefore, from which preaching will derive its strength will be the Sacred Scriptures, understood not according to the private judgment of minds very frequently blinded by passions, but according to the traditions of the Church and the interpretations of the holy Fathers and Councils.

9. According to these rules, Venerable Brethren, you should judge those to whom you will entrust the ministry of the divine word. Whenever you find any of them departing from these rules, being more concerned with their own interests than those of Jesus Christ and more anxious for worldly applause than the welfare of souls, warn and correct them. If that proves insufficient, be firm in removing them from an office for which they have proven themselves unworthy. You should be especially diligent in employing this vigilance and severity since the ministry of preaching belongs in a special way to you, and is one of the chief functions of the Episcopal Office. Whoever outside your rank preaches, he does so only in your name and in your place. It follows, therefore, that you are always responsible before God for the way in which the bread of the divine word is distributed to the faithful. In order to remove all responsibility from Our shoulders, We notice and command all Ordinaries to discontinue or suspend, after charitable warnings, any preacher, be he secular or regular, and even if it be during a course of sermons, who does not completely obey the regulations laid down in the above-mentioned Instruction of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Better by far would it be if the faithful were satisfied with the simple homilies and explanations of the Catechism their parish priests offer them than to attend sermons that do more harm than good.

10. Another field where the junior clergy find a wide scope and great stimulus for maintaining and advocating exemption from every bond of legitimate authority is the so-called Popular Christian Action. This action, Venerable Brethren, is not in itself reprehensible, nor by its nature does it lead to contempt of authority. Many, however, misunderstanding its nature, have voluntarily abandoned the rules laid down for its promotion by Our Predecessor of immortal memory.

11. You are aware that We are referring to the Instruction on Popular Christian Action which, by command of Leo XIII, the Sacred Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs issued on January 27, 1902, and which was sent to each one of you to carry out in your dioceses.[15] For Our part, We maintain and, with the fullness of Our power, We renew these instructions with each and every one of their regulations. Similarly We confirm and renew all the orders We issued in the *motu proprio* of December 18, 1903, on Popular Christian Action[16] along with the Circular Letter dated July 28, 1904, of Our beloved son, the Cardinal Secretary of State.[17]

12. Concerning the founding and directing of newspapers and periodicals, the clergy must faithfully follow Article 42 of the Apostolic Constitution *Officiorum*, namely, Clerics are forbidden to direct newspapers or periodicals without the previous consent of the Ordinaries.[18] Similarly, without the previous consent of the Ordinary, no cleric can publish any kind of writing, be it concerned with a religious, moral, or merely technical subject. Before the founding of circles and societies their rules and constitutions must be examined and approved by the Ordinary. No priest or cleric can lecture on Popular Christian Action or any other subject without the permission of the Ordinary of the place. Language which might inspire aversion for the higher classes is, and can only be regarded as, altogether contrary to the true spirit of Christian charity. Likewise, all terms smacking of an unhealthy novelty in Catholic publications are condemnable, such as those deriding the piety of the

faithful, or pointing out a new orientation of the Christian life, new directions of the Church, new aspirations of the modern soul, a new social vocation of the clergy, or a new Christian civilization.

13. While it is a very praiseworthy thing for the clergy, and especially the younger clergy, to go to the people, nevertheless, they must proceed in this matter with due obedience to authority and the commands of their ecclesiastical superiors. In devoting themselves according to this submission to the cause of Popular Christian Action, their noble duty must be to rescue the children of the people from ignorance of spiritual and eternal things, encouraging them by their kindness to live honestly and virtuously; to strengthen adults in the faith, fortifying them in the practice of the Christian life by removing all contrary influences; to foster among the Catholic laity those institutions which are really instrumental in improving the moral and material welfare of the masses; and above all, to defend the principles of evangelical justice and charity, applying equally to everyone the rights and duties of civil society. . . . Let them, moreover, be ever mindful that even among the people the priest should inviolately preserve his novel character as a minister of God, being placed at the head of his brethren for their salvation.[19] In devoting himself to the people should he do anything contrary to the dignity of the priesthood or ecclesiastical duties or discipline, he must be rebuked.[20]

14. Moreover, Venerable Brethren, in order to erect an effective bulwark against this extravagance of thought and extension of the spirit of independence, by Our authority, We absolutely forbid all clerics and priests to give their names in the future to any society that does not have Episcopal approbation. In a very special manner, under penalty of exclusion from Sacred Orders for clerics and suspension ipso facto a divinis for priests, We forbid them to become members of the National Democratic League, whose program was issued from Roma-Torrette on October 20, 1905. Its statutes were published the same year by the Provisional Committee of Bologna without the name of their author.

15. Being concerned about the present state of the Italian clergy and the importance of the subject, the solicitude of Our Apostolic Office demanded Us to issue these directives. We must now once again arouse your zeal, Venerable Brethren, in order that these arrangements and regulations will be quickly and fully carried out in your dioceses. Prevent the evil where fortunately it has not yet appeared. Suppress it immediately where it is beginning to spring up. Wipe it out with a firm and resolute hand where unfortunately it has already ripened. Making this a matter of conscience for you, We pray that God will fill you with the spirit of prudence and necessary firmness. For that reason, from the bottom of Our heart, We impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Saint Peter's, Rome, on July 28, 1906, the third year of Our Pontificate.

PIUS X

1. Is. 58: 1.
2. Jude 8.
3. Ecclus. 3:1.
4. Titus 2:15.
5. I Tim. 5:22.
6. Cf. ASS, 35:257 ff.
7. Cf. ASS, 36:467 ff.
8. Cf. ASS, 27:162 ff.
9. Nahum 3:18.
10. Council of Trent, Sess. V, c. 2, De Reform.
11. Mark 16:15.

12. Matt. 28:20.
13. Loc. cit.
14. I Cor. 2:4.
15. Cf. ASS, 34:401 ff.
16. Cf. ASS, 36:339 ff.
17. Cf. ASS, 37:19 ff.
18. January 25, 1897. Cf. ASS, 30:39 ff.
19. St. Gregory the Great, Pastoral Care, 2:7.
20. Encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII, Fin dal principio, December 8, 1902. Cf. ASS, 35:257 ff.