

REPUTANTIUBUS

on the Language Question in Bohemia

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII

August 20, 1901

To Our Venerable Brothers Theodore, Archbishop of Olomouc, and the Archbishops and Bishops of Bohemia and Moravia.

1. As We reflect often on the condition of your churches, it seems to Us that at this moment nearly everywhere everything is full of fear, full of concern. However, this situation is more serious in your case because, while Catholicism is exposed to the hatred and cunning of external enemies, domestic issues also divide it. For while heretics both openly and covertly endeavor to spread error among the faithful, seeds of discord grow daily among Catholics themselves—the surest means to hinder strength and break down constancy.
2. Surely the strongest grounds for dissension, especially in Bohemia, are to be found in the languages which each person, according to his origin, employs. For it is implanted by nature that everyone wishes to preserve the language inherited from his ancestors.
3. To be sure, We have decided to refrain from settling this controversy. Indeed one cannot find fault with the preservation of one's ancestral tongue, if it is kept within defined limits. However, what is valid for other private rights, must be held to apply here also: namely, that the common good of the nation must not suffer from their preservation. It is, therefore, the task of those who are in charge of the state to preserve intact the rights of individuals, in such a way that the common good of the nation be secured and allowed to flourish.
4. As far as We are concerned, Our duty admonishes Us to take constant care that religion, which is the chief good of souls and the source of all other goods, not be endangered by controversies of this nature.
5. Therefore we earnestly exhort your faithful, although of various regions and tongues, to preserve that far more excellent kinship which is born from the communion of faith and common sacraments. For whoever are baptized in Christ, have one Lord and one faith; they are one body and one spirit, insofar as they are called to one hope. It would be truly disgraceful that those who are bound together by so many holy ties and are seeking the same city in heaven should be torn apart by earthly reasons, rivaling with one another, as the Apostle says, and hating one another. Therefore, that kinship of souls which comes from Christ must constantly be inculcated in the faithful and all partiality must be eradicated. "For greater indeed is the paternity of Christ than that of blood: for the fraternity of blood touches the likeness only of the body; the fraternity of Christ, however, conveys unanimity of heart and spirit, as is written: One was the heart and one the spirit of the multitude of believers . "[1]
6. In this matter the holy clergy should surpass in example all others. Indeed, it is at variance with their office to mingle in such dissensions. If they should reside in places inhabited by people of different races or languages, unless they abstain from any appearance of contention, they may easily incur hatred and dislike from both sides. Nothing could be more detrimental to the exercise

of their sacred function than this. The faithful, to be sure, should recognize in fact and practice that the ministers of the Church are concerned only with the eternal affairs of souls and do not seek what is theirs, but only what is Christ's.

7. If, then, it is well known to all alike that the disciples of Christ are recognized by the love that they have for one another, the holy clergy must observe this same love mutually among themselves far more. For not only are they thought, and deservedly so, to have drunk much more deeply from the charity of Christ, but also because each one of them, in addressing the faithful, ought to be able to use the words of the Apostle, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." [2]

8. We can easily admit that this is very difficult in practice, unless the elements of discord are erased from their souls at an early time when they, who aspire to the clerical state, are formed in our seminaries. Therefore, you must diligently see to it that the students in seminaries early learn to love one another in a fraternal love and from a genuine heart, as those born not from a corruptible seed but an incorruptible one through the word of the living God. [3] Should arguments break out, restrain them strongly and do not allow them to persist in any way; thus those who are destined for the clergy, if they cannot be of one language because of different places of origin, still may certainly be of one heart and one spirit.

9. From this union of wills, indeed, which must be conspicuous in the clerical order, as we have already intimated, this advantage among others will follow: that the ministers of the sacraments will more efficaciously warn the faithful not to exceed the limits in preserving and vindicating the rights proper to each race, or by excessive partisanship not to do violence to justice and overlook the common advantages of the state. For we think that this, according to the circumstances of your various regions, should be the principal task of priests, to exhort the faithful, in season and out, to love one another; they should warn them constantly that he is not worthy of the name of Christian who does not fulfill in spirit and action the new command given by Christ that we love one another as He has loved us.

10. Certainly, he does not fulfill it, who thinks that charity pertains only to those who are related in tongue or race. For if, as Christ says, you love those who love you, do not the publicans do so? and if you salute your brothers only, do not the pagans do so? [4] For to be sure a characteristic of Christian charity is that it extends equally to all; for, as the Apostle warns, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for there is the same Lord of all, rich to all who invoke him. [5]

11. May God, who is Love, kindly grant that all be united in their thoughts and in their convictions, thinking the same and having no contention; grant that in humility they may think each other better than themselves, each not looking to his own interests, but to those of others.

12. May the Apostolic blessing, which we grant most lovingly in the Lord, to you, Venerable Brothers, and the faithful committed to each of you, be a token of this and also of Our benevolence.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, 20 August 1901, in the 24th year of Our Pontificate.

ENDNOTES

1. St. Maximus, among the sermons of St. Augustine, 100.

2. Phil 3.17.

3. Pt 1.22 f.
4. Mt 5.46 f.
5. Rom 10.12.
6. Phil 2.4.