

caritatis Nostrae ac caelestium gratiarum auspicem, vobis et clero ac populo cuique credito amantissime impertimus.

Datum Romae, apud Sanctum Petrum die XV. Aprilis MDCCCVC., Pontificatus Nostri anno secundo.

PIUS PP. X.

THE TEACHING OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF PIUS X., BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE POPE,
TO THE SACRED BISHOPS OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH ON
THE TEACHING OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

TO HIS VENERABLE BROTHERS, THE PATRIARCHS, PRIMATES,
ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS AND OTHER ORDINARIES HAVING
PEACE AND UNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE, PIUS P. P. X.
SENDS GREETING AND BENEDICTION.

Venerable Brothers:

IN THIS extremely distressing and difficult time the hidden designs of God have imposed on our slender strength the office of Supreme Pastor over the universal flock of Christ. The hardship is great because the enemy has long been prowling around the flock and with subtle cunning has endeavored to bring havoc upon it, succeeding to such an extent that more than ever what the Apostle wrote to the ancients of the Church of Ephesus seems to be realized: "I know that ravening wolves will enter among you, not sparing the flock." (Acts xx., 29.)

Those among us who are prompted by zeal for the glory of God and who seek for the reasons of the present decay of religion ascribe it to various causes, and each, according to his own views, adopts different methods in the endeavor to protect and restore the kingdom of God on earth. To us, Venerable Brethren, without rejecting the opinions of others, it seems we must agree with the judgment of those who attribute the remissness, or rather the intellectual debility of our times—a condition from which such grave evils arise—chiefly to ignorance of divine things. There seems in our days to be a recurrence of what God said by the mouth of the Prophet Osee: "There is no knowledge of God in the land. Cursing and lying and killing and theft have overflowed and blood hath touched blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth in it shall languish." (Osee iv., 1.)

In fact, in our age it is a common and alas! not an unjust complaint that there are a great many Christian people who are in the densest ignorance about what concerns their eternal salvation. Nor when we say Christian people do we refer to the humbler classes, who often may find an excuse for their ignorance in the fact that the hard rule of their harsh masters does not leave them the opportunity to attend to themselves or permit the disposal of their time; but we speak especially of those who are not lacking in intellectual culture, nay, who are often notably conspicuous for knowledge in profane science, but who in religious matters pass their lives in thoughtlessness and unconcern. It is difficult to explain in what dense darkness they are involved, and, what is worse, in what heedlessness they live. Of God, the Supreme Ruler and Author of all things, of the teaching of Christianity they have never a thought. They know nothing of the Incarnation; nothing of God's perfect renovation of the human race; nothing of grace, which is especially required for the attainment of things eternal; nothing of the august Sacrifice of the Mass, or of the sacraments by which we acquire and retain divine grace. Of the wickedness and foulness of sin they have no appreciation, and hence no care to avoid or to withdraw from it; and they arrive at the portals of death in such a condition that the priest, not to dispel all hope of salvation, is compelled to sum up and teach the very elements of religious truth, instead of devoting those last moments to fostering sentiments of love of God in the soul. Often it is not even that, and, as too frequently happens, the dying man in his reprehensible ignorance regards the ministrations of the priest as unnecessary, and persuades himself that he can enter on the dreadful road of eternity with a tranquil mind and face the anger of God, whom he has not thought it necessary to propitiate. Fittingly has it been said by our predecessor, Benedict XIV.: "We declare that the greater part of those who are damned have brought the calamity on themselves by ignorance of the mysteries of the faith, which they should have known and believed, in order to be united with the elect."

Hence, Venerable Brothers, why should we wonder that not only among savage peoples, but even in those nations which are still spoken of as Christian, there should be such a widespread and ever-increasing corruption of morals and depravity of life? The Apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians, said: "Fornication, and all uncleanness and covetousness, let it not be so much as named among you, as becomes saints; or obscenity or foolish talking." (Eph. *cv.*, 3.)

Now, the foundation of this holiness and purity of soul, which are to hold evil desires in check, is, as the Apostle declared, the

knowledge of divine things: "See, therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly, not as unwise, but as wise. Therefore become not unwise, but understanding what is the will of God." (Eph. cv., 15.)

And rightly so. For the will of man now scarcely retains even that love of right and justice which was implanted in the human heart by the Almighty Creator, and which was intended to lead to what is the true good, and not to what is only a shadow. Depraved by the primal fault and forgetful of God, its Maker, it directs everything to the cultivation of vanity and the pursuit of falsehood. Blinded by wicked desires, there is surely need of a guide to lead it in the ways of justice which have been unfortunately abandoned.

Of course the natural guide is the human mind, but if the mind has not its proper light, viz.: the knowledge of divine things, it will be the blind leading the blind, ending only in the ditch. The holy King David, praising God for the light of truth with which He had illumined the intellect, exclaimed: "The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us." And he signified what was to follow upon the possession of this gift of light when he added: "Thou hast given gladness in my heart" (Ps. iv., 7); to wit, that gladness with which the heart is dilated when it runs in the ways of God's commandments.

Whosoever considers this will perceive how true it is that Christian truth, more perfectly than the mere powers of nature, shows us the nature of God and His infinite perfections.

Why should it not be so? Christian truth bids us revere Almighty God by faith, which is an act of the mind; by hope, which is an act of the will; by charity, which is an act of the heart, and thus it subjects the whole man to its Supreme Author and Ruler. In the same way the doctrine of Jesus Christ unfolds for us the true nobility of human nature, inasmuch as it reveals man as the son of the Heavenly Father, after whose likeness he is made, and holds out to him an eternal and glorious reward. But from this very dignity with which man is invested and from the knowledge of it, Christ wishes us to learn that we should love one another and live as behooves the sons of light, "not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chamberings and impurities, not in contention and envy." (Rom. xiii., 13.)

He likewise enjoins upon us to cast all our care upon God, knowing that He will provide for us. He bids us give to the poor, to do good to those who hate us, to place the eternal advantage of our soul above the fleeting pleasures of this world. And, not to speak of all these things in detail, does not the teaching of Christ appeal to and command the proud to cultivate that humility of

soul which is the origin of true glory? "Whoever, therefore, shall humble himself he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven." (Matth. xvii., 4.) It teaches us that prudence of the spirit which wards off the prudence of the flesh; that justice which gives each his own; that fortitude which makes us ready to bear all things, and with resolute heart to suffer for God and our eternal happiness. Finally it teaches that temperance by which we even love poverty for the sake of the kingdom of God, nay, by which we "glory in the cross of Christ, despising the shame." Hence it follows that not only does Christian teaching illumine the mind and enable it to attain the truth, but it inflames the will and enkindles that ardor which makes us aspire to God and unite ourselves with Him by the exercise of every virtue.

It is not our purpose to assert that depravity of the heart is inconsistent with knowledge of religious truth. Would that facts did not prove the contrary! But we say that where the mind is enveloped in the dark clouds of ignorance, there cannot be either rectitude or morality. For although a man with eyes open can turn away from the right path, the blind man is constantly in danger of going wrong. Moreover, whereas if the light of faith is not wholly extinct, there is always a hope of reformation; depravity of morals, united with ignorance of the truth, leaves scarcely any remedy and leaves the road open that leads to ruin.

Since therefore so many and such serious evils result from ignorance, and since, on the other hand, there is such need of and such helpfulness in religious instruction, it is in vain for any one to hope to fulfill his duty unless he knows what that duty is. Upon whom the task devolves to do away with this fatal ignorance and to impart to men's minds the knowledge which it is so necessary to possess, let us now stop to consider.

On whom it devolves, Venerable Brothers, admits of no doubt; for this most important duty regards all who are charged with the care of souls. They are bound by the precept of Christ to know and feed the flock intrusted to them. But to feed is, first of all, to teach: "I will give you"—thus God promised by Jeremias—"pastors according to my own heart, and they shall feed you with knowledge and doctrine." (Jerem. iii., 15.) Wherefore Paul the Apostle said, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel" (Cor. i., 17), indicating that the first duty of those who in any degree are set over the government of the Church is the instruction of the faithful in sacred things.

We deem it superfluous to dwell at greater length in praising such instruction, or showing its value in the eyes of God. No doubt the pity we manifest in relieving the wants of the poor is most accept-

able to God; but who will question that the care and labor by which we procure, not transient benefits for the body, but eternal for souls by teaching and warning them, are far more acceptable. Nothing, certainly, can be more desirable, nothing more pleasing to Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of immortal souls, who said of Himself by Isaias, "He hath sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor." (St. Luke iv., 18.)

It is important, Venerable Brothers, to emphasize and urge this in a particular manner, that no weightier duty is appointed unto priests, and by no stricter obligations are they bound. In a priest holiness of life must be accompanied by knowledge: "The lips of the priest shall keep knowledge" (Mal. ii., 7); and the Church strongly insists upon it for those who are about to enter the sacred ministry. Wherefore does she so insist? Because the Christian people expect from them the knowledge of the Divine law, and God chooses them to impart it: "They shall seek the law at his mouth; because he is the Angel of the Lord of hosts." (Mal. ii., 7.) On this account the Bishop at ordination thus addresses the candidates for the priesthood: "Let your doctrine be the spiritual medicine of the people of God; let them be provident helpers of our order; that, meditating upon the law day and night, they may believe what they read, and teach what they have believed." (Pontif Rom.) If these words apply to all priests, what must be the thought of those who, having official rank and power, are charged with the government of souls by virtue of their priestly dignity and, as it were by a sacred contract! They are the pastors and doctors whom Christ hath given that the faithful be no longer children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the wickedness of men; but by doing the truth in charity, they may in all things grow up in Him who is the Head, even Christ. (Ephes. iv., 14-15.)

Wherefore the holy Council of Trent, considering the pastors of souls, declared that their first and chief duty was to teach the faithful of Christ. Hence it commands them to explain the truths of religion to the people at least on Sundays and more solemn festivals, and every day, or certainly three times a week, in the sacred seasons of Advent and Lent. Nor is this all, for it adds that parish priests are bound, at least on these same Sundays and festivals, either personally or by others, to instruct the children in the truths of faith, and to train them in obedience to God and their parents. When, moreover, the sacraments are to be administered, it orders that those who are to receive them be instructed in plain and simple language regarding their effects.

These prescriptions of the holy Synod Benedict XIV., our predecessor, thus summarized and defined more distinctly in his Con-

stitution *Etsi minime*: "Two duties particularly are imposed by the Council of Trent on the guardians of souls: one, that they should speak to the people about Divine things on festival days; the other that they should instruct children and all less intelligent persons in the rudiments of faith and of the Divine Law." Rightly, indeed, does the prudent Pontiff distinguish the twofold office: of delivering an address—which is usually called an explanation of the Gospel—and of teaching Christian doctrine. For there may not be wanting some who, for the sake of lessening labor, may persuade themselves that the homily may take the place of catechism—a mistake evident to all who reflect. The sermon on the Gospel is addressed to those who have been already imbued with the elements of the faith. It may be called the bread distributed to grown people. Catechetical teaching, on the contrary, is the milk which the Apostle Peter wished the people to desire without guile. That is to say, the office of the catechist consists in taking up for explanation a truth pertaining to faith or morals, and making it clear from every point of view. And since the purpose of teaching should be amendment of life, the catechist must institute a comparison between what God commands to be done and what men do in point of fact; then, making timely use of examples drawn from the Sacred Scriptures, ecclesiastical history, or the lives of the saints, he must persuade his hearers, and point out to them clearly how they are to set their conduct in order; finally, let him exhort all present to abhor and fly vice and to pursue a virtuous life.

We understand, indeed, that such a duty as this of teaching Christian doctrine is unattractive to not a few as not being generally held in high estimation, nor perhaps likely to attract popular praise. But for our part, we consider that such an opinion is founded rather on thoughtlessness than truth. Sacred orators, who, from a sincere desire of glorifying God, justify and defend the faith, or proclaim the glories of the saints, are certainly to be praised. But this work supposes a preceding one; that, namely, of the catechist; which, if it has been omitted, the foundations on which to build the house have not been laid. Too often do the most ornate discourses, which receive the loud applause of crowded assemblages, serve only to tickle men's ears, without at all moving their hearts. Catechetical instruction, on the other hand, although unpretentious and simple, is that word to which God Himself witnesseth by *Isaias*: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and return no more thither, but soak the earth and water it, and make it to spring and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be, which shall go forth from my mouth: it shall not return to me void, but it shall do whatsoever I please, and shall

prosper in the things for which I sent it." (Isa. lv., 10-11.) A like opinion should we form of those priests who laboriously write books in defense of the truths of religion: They are certainly worthy of much praise. But how many persons will study these volumes and draw profit from them commensurate with the author's labor and desires? Whereas, the explanation of Christian doctrine, if it be duly given, is never fruitless for the hearers.

It will further inflame the zeal of the ministers of God to recall the enormous and constantly increasing number of persons who either know nothing at all of religion, or who have only such a knowledge of God and of the Christian faith that, in the midst of the light of Catholic truth, they lead the lives of idolaters. How many, alas! there are, not children merely, but adults, who, even at an advanced age, are entirely unacquainted with the principal mysteries of the faith; who, when they hear the name of Christ, ask "Who is He that I may believe in Him?" (St. John ix., 36.) Hence it is that they foment hatred between men; they form criminal associations; they engage in dishonest business; they usuriously seize the property of others, and consider these and similar things no crime. Hence, ignoring the law of Christ, which condemns not only unclean deeds, but thoughts also and desires, although refraining perhaps, for one reason or another, from obscene pleasures, they reject no sinful thought. There being no religion in their hearts, their sins are multiplied beyond the hairs of their heads. These things, in truth, it is well to remember, occur not merely among the rude and wretched, but also, and perhaps more frequently, among persons of loftier station, and amongst those whom science inflates, who, in the conceit of vain learning, deem religion a thing to be laughed at and "blaspheme whatever things they know not." (St. Jude i., 10.)

Now if a harvest is vainly expected from ground which has received no seed, how shall we look for good morals in a generation which has not received Christian instruction? Wherefore, we justly conclude that since faith has so languished that in many persons it seems to be dying, the duty of catechetical instruction must have been negligently performed or altogether omitted. It is but a false excuse to pretend that faith is a gratuitous gift conferred on each one in baptism. All who are baptized in Christ do indeed receive the habit of faith; but this divinest seed does not "grow up and shoot out great branches" (St. Mark iv., 32) by its own innate power. As there is in man from birth the faculty of understanding, which needs the mother's promptings to develop into efficiency, so it does not happen otherwise to the Christian, who, born anew of water and the Holy Ghost, is imbued with faith.

He needs Christian formation, that faith may be fostered and may increase and bear fruit. Hence the Apostle wrote: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." (Rom. x., 17.) But that he might show the necessity of teaching, he added, "How shall they hear without a preacher?"

If therefore, from all that has been hitherto said, it is clear of what importance is the religious training of the people, it should be our greatest concern that the teaching of Christian doctrine, than which, to use the words of our predecessor, Benedict XIV., nothing more useful has been instituted, should always be vigorously maintained, and where it has fallen into disuse restored.

Therefore, Venerable Brothers, wishing to satisfy the weighty obligations of our high and apostolic office, and desiring to see uniformity of custom everywhere established in so important a matter, we do decree and strictly command that in all dioceses throughout the world the following regulations be observed and enforced:

I. All parish priests, and in general all to whom the care of souls is committed, must teach the catechism to their young boys and girls for the space of one hour on all Sundays and holy days of the year without exception; explaining to them what each is bound to believe and practise in order to attain eternal salvation.

II. They shall also at stated times in the year carefully prepare these children for the Sacraments of Penance and Confirmation by courses of instruction extending through many days.

III. Likewise, by means of appropriate instructions and exhortations, given every day during the Lenten season, and if necessary also after Easter, they shall, but with very particular care and diligence, prepare their young people of both sexes for a worthy reception of their first Holy Communion.

IV. Let there be canonically established in every parish the association commonly known as the Society of Christian Doctrine, by means of which, especially where the number of priests is small, pastors may secure lay help in the teaching of catechism; and these lay teachers should apply themselves to their task out of zeal for the glory of God, as well as from a desire to gain the rich indulgences lavishly granted by the Roman Pontiffs.

V. In the larger cities, especially where there are public academies, colleges and universities, let religious doctrine classes be established for the purpose of teaching the truths of our faith and the precepts of Christian morality to the youths who attend such public institutions wherein no mention whatsoever is made of religion.

VI. And since, in our times especially, those more advanced in years stand in no less need of religious instruction than do the

young, all pastors and others having the care of souls shall, on Sundays and holy days, and at an hour most convenient for the majority of the faithful, instruct them in the catechism, using plain and simple language, adapted to their intelligence. This, moreover, is in addition to the usual homily on the Gospel prescribed for the parish Mass, and the hour chosen should not conflict with that of the children's instruction. The catechism of the Council of Trent should be followed in all these instructions, which ought to be so ordered as to cover in the space of four or five years the entire matter of the Apostles' Creed, the Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, Prayer and the Precepts of the Church.

All this, Venerable Brethren, we determine and decree by our apostolic authority; it will now be your duty, each in his own diocese, to put it into effect immediately and in every detail.

Moreover, it will be incumbent upon you to be vigilant in this matter, using your authority unto the end that what we now enjoin be not overlooked and forgotten, or, what would be as bad, that it be not put into effect negligently and listlessly. Indeed, if you would prevent such a result, you must constantly exhort and urge your pastors not to attempt these catechetical instructions offhand, but rather to prepare for them with the utmost care; for thus they will not discourse in the words of human wisdom, but "in simplicity of heart and the sincerity of God." (II. Cor. i., 12.) Let them take pattern by Christ Himself, who though uttering "things hidden from the foundation of the world" (Matt. xiii., 35), nevertheless declared all things "in parables to the multitudes; and without parables He did not speak to them." (Matt. xiii., 34.) We know, too, that the Apostles who were trained by Our Lord did the same; and St. Gregory the Great used to say that "their greatest care was to preach to the simple people the plainest truths, things not high and lofty, but such as they could easily comprehend." (Moral I., xvii., chapter 26.) And in matters of religion it is no different in our day; most men are to be moved and won by what is most simple and direct.

Now it would be a mistake, and far from our intention, were any one to conclude from what we have said about this striving after simplicity in religious instruction, that such manner of discourse calls for no effort, no thoughtful preparation. On the contrary, it demands much more than any other kind of public speaking. Far easier is it to find an orator who can deliver an elaborate and brilliant sermon than a catechist able to give a simple but flawless instruction. Therefore, however much one may be gifted by nature with ease in composition or fluency of expression, let him nevertheless be persuaded of this—that he will never derive any real

fruit for souls from his instructions on Christian doctrine to children or to the people, unless he has well prepared himself by long and careful study and meditation. It is a grievous mistake to count on the people's ignorance or slowness of comprehension, and use this as an excuse for negligence in the matter of preparation. The fact is, that the less cultured one's audience, the greater care and pains must be taken to bring within the reach of their feebleness comprehension truths the most sublime and far above the reach of the ordinary intelligence—yet truths as necessary to salvation for the ignorant as for the learned.

And now, Venerable Brethren, before closing this letter, we shall address to you the words of Moses: "If any man be on the Lord's side, let him join with me." (Exod. xxxii., 26.) Consider well, we entreat and beseech you, what a loss to souls arises from this one cause, ignorance of the things of God. There may doubtless be many useful and praiseworthy works established in your diocese for the good of the flock entrusted to you, yet it should be your desire and ambition, before all else, to urge this present matter with all possible zeal and insistence, to work for and promote this one great end—that knowledge of Christian doctrine may thoroughly pervade and imbue the minds of all the faithful. In the words of the Apostle St. Peter: "As every man hath received grace, ministering the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (I. Peter iv., 10.)

And while the Most Blessed and Immaculate Virgin will continually intercede for the success of your earnest and zealous efforts, they shall also be favored by our Apostolic Benediction, which we lovingly impart to yourselves, to your clergy and to the faithful under your care, both as a testimony of our affection and as a pledge of heavenly graces.

Pius X., Pope.

St. Peter's, Rome, April 15, 1905, in the second year of our Pontificate.