



# The Holy See

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## ***FIRMISSIMAM CONSTANTIAM***

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS XI

ON THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN MEXICO

TO THE VENERABLE BRETHREN

THE ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS, AND OTHER ORDINARIES OF MEXICO

IN PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE.

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction. There is well known to Us, Venerable Brethren - and it is a great cause of consolation for Our paternal heart - your constancy, that of your priests and of the great part of the Mexican faithful, in ardently professing the Catholic Faith and in opposing the impositions of those who, ignoring the divine excellence of the religion of Jesus Christ and knowing it only through the calumnies of its enemies, delude themselves that they are not able to accomplish reforms for the good of the people except by combating the religion of the great majority. But unfortunately, the enemies of God and Christ have succeeded in overcoming many lukewarm and timid souls who, although they adore God in the intimacy of their consciences, nevertheless, either through human respect or through fear of earthly evils, have become, at least materially, cooperators in the dechristianization of a people that owes to religion its greatest glories.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to these apostasies and weaknesses, which afflict Us profoundly, there appears to Us all the more praiseworthy and meritorious the resistance to evil, the practice of Christian life and the frank profession of faith by those most numerous Faithful whom you, Venerable Brethren, and with you your clergy, illuminate and guide with pastoral strength no less than with the splendid example of your life. This consoles Us in the midst of Our sorrow, and engenders in Us the hope for better days for the Mexican Church, which, re-animated by so much heroism and sustained by the prayers and sacrifices of so many elect souls, cannot perish, even more, it must flourish again more vigorously and more luxuriously.<sup>3</sup> And precisely to revive your confidence in Divine Aid, and to encourage you to continue in the practice of a fervent Christian life, We address this letter to you, and We avail ourselves of this occasion to remind you how, under the present difficult circumstances, the most efficacious means for a Christian restoration are - and also among you - above all the holiness of priests, and in the second place the correct formation of the laity in order that they may be capable of cooperating fruitfully in the Apostolate of the Hierarchy, so much more necessary in Mexico both because of the vastness of the territory and because of other circumstances known to all.<sup>4</sup> Our thought, therefore, is fixed in the first place on those who must be the light that illuminates, the salt which conserves, the good leaven which penetrates the entire mass of the Faithful: We mean your priests. In truth, We know how tenaciously and at the cost of how many sacrifices you care for the selection and increase of sacerdotal vocations, in the midst of all sorts of difficulties, well persuaded as you are thus to provide the solution of a vital problem, truly the most vital of all the problems relating to

the future of the Church. In view of the almost absolute impossibility of having in your own country wellordered and tranquil seminaries, you have found in this city an ample and gracious refuge in the South American *Pio Latino* College, which has formed and continues to form in science and virtue so many worthy priests and which, for its precious work, is particularly dear to Us. But since in many cases it has been impossible to send your students to Rome, you have worked solicitously to find an asylum in the hospitality of a great neighboring nation.<sup>5</sup> In congratulating you on this praiseworthy initiative which is already becoming a consoling reality, We again express Our gratitude to all those who have so generously tendered you hospitality and assistance. And with paternal instinct We remind you again on this occasion of Our precise wish that you make known and explain suitably, not only to the clerics, but to all your priests, Our Encyclical *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, which explains Our thoughts on this the gravest and most important among the grave and important subjects treated by Us.<sup>6</sup> The Mexican priests thus formed according to the Heart of Jesus Christ will feel that in the actual conditions of their country (of which We spoke in Our Apostolic Letter *Paterna Sane Sollicitudo* of February 2, 1926) - which are so similar to those of the early times of the Church, when the Apostles appealed for the collaboration of the laity - it would be very difficult to reconquer for Christ so many misguided souls without the providential assistance which the laity give by means of Catholic Action. More so since at times grace prepares among them generous souls ready to develop most fruitful activity if they encounter a learned and holy clergy capable of understanding and guiding them.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, to the Mexican priests, who have dedicated their lives to the service of Jesus Christ, of the Church and of souls - to these We direct Our first and warmest appeal, that they will generously second Our and your solicitude for the progress of Catholic-Action, dedicating to it their best efforts and most opportune diligence. The methods of an effective collaboration of the laity with your action will never be lacking if the priests will devote themselves with careful attention to cultivating the Christian people by means of wise spiritual direction and careful religious instructions, not diluted in vain discourses, but nourished with sound doctrine taken from Holy Scripture and full of unction and of force.<sup>8</sup> It is true that not all understand fully the necessity of this holy apostolate of the laity, although from Our first Encyclical, *Ubi Arcano Dei*, We declared that this appertains undeniably to the pastoral ministry and to Christian life. But since, as We have already indicated, We are addressing Ourselves to pastors who must regain a sorely tried and to a certain extent dispersed flock, today more than ever before We recommend that you make use of those secular people to whom, as living stones of the Holy House of God, St. Peter attributes a profound dignity which makes them in a certain manner participants in a holy and regal priesthood (1 *Peter* ii.9).

In fact, every Christian conscious of his dignity and his responsibility as a son of the Church and a member of the Mystical Body of Christ - *Multi Unum Corpus Sumus in Christo Singuli Autem Alter Alterius Membra* (So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another) (*Romans* xii. 5) - cannot do less than recognize that between the members of this body there must exist a reciprocal communication of life and solidarity of interests. Hence the duty of each in the order of life and the increase of the whole organism *in aedificationem Corporis Chrisn*: hence the efficacious contribution of each member toward the glorification of the Head and of His Mystical Body (*Ephesians* iv. 12-16).

From these clear and simple principles, what consoling deductions, what luminous directives arise for many souls still uncertain and diffident, but desirous of orientating their ardor! What incitements to contribute to the spread of the Kingdom of Christ and to the salvation of souls!<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident that the apostolate thus understood does not come from a purely natural impulse to action, but is the fruit of a solid interior formation: it is the necessary expansion of an intense love of Jesus Christ and of souls redeemed by His Precious Blood, which is actuated by studying to imitate His life of prayer, of sacrifice, of inextinguishable zeal. This imitation of Christ will excite multiple forms of apostolate in every field, wherever souls are in danger or the rights of the Divine King compromised; it will extend to all the works of

the apostolate, which in any manner enter into the divine mission of the Church, and consequently will penetrate not only the soul of each individual, but also into the sanctuary of the family, the school and even public life.<sup>10</sup> But the magnitude of the work must not cause you to preoccupy yourselves more than the number of collaborators than with the quality. Following the example of the Divine Master, who wished to precede the few years of His apostolic work with a long preparation, and limited Himself to forming in the Apostolic College not many but select instruments for the future conquest of the world, so you also, Venerable Brethren, should care first of all for the supernatural formation of your directors and propagandists, without being too much preoccupied or grieved because at the beginning they form but a *pusillus grex* (*Luke* xii. 32).<sup>11</sup> And since We know that you are already working in this direction, We express to you Our satisfaction that you have already scrupulously selected and carefully formed good collaborators, who with word and example will bring the fervor of the Christian life and the Christian apostolate into the dioceses and the parishes. This, your work, will certainly succeed in being solid and deep, averse to publicity, tumult, noisy forms, working in silence, even without very apparent or immediate fruit; after the manner of the seed, which, in the apparent repose beneath the soil, prepares the new vigorous plant.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the spiritual formation and the interior life fostered in these your collaborators, will put them on their guard against dangers and possible deviations. Keeping in mind the ultimate aim of Catholic Action, which is the sanctification of souls, according to the Gospel precept: See ye first the Kingdom of God (*Luke* xii. 31), you will not run the risk of sacrificing principles for immediate and secondary ends, and that supreme end will never be forgotten to which must be subordinated even social and economic works and charitable undertakings. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us this with example; because when in the ineffable tenderness of His Divine Heart which makes Him exclaim: I have compassion on the multitude . . . And if I shall send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way (*Mark* viii. 2 to 3), He healed the infirmities of the body and came to the assistance of temporal needs, He had the supreme end of His mission always in view, that is, the glory of His Father and the eternal salvation of souls.<sup>13</sup> The so-called social works, in the meantime, are not to escape the activities of Catholic Action, inasmuch as they aim at putting into practice the principles of justice and charity, and inasmuch as they are means of approaching the multitudes; since often souls are not reached except through the relief of corporal miseries and economic needs. And this We, Ourselves, as did Our predecessor of blessed memory, Leo XIII, recommended several times. But it is also true that, if Catholic Action has the duty of preparing men fit to direct such works, and of pointing out the principles which must guide them, with norms and directions drawn from the genuine sources of Our Encyclicals, it must not nevertheless assume the responsibility in that part which is purely technical, financial, economic, which is outside its competency and outside its purpose.<sup>14</sup> Facing the frequent accusations made against the Church, that it is indifferent to social problems, or incapable of solving them, do not desist from proclaiming that only the teaching and the work of the Church, assisted as it is by its Divine Founder, can furnish a remedy for the very grave ills which burden humanity. It is for you then (as you have already shown your wish to do) to draw from these fruitful principles the certain norms to solve the grave social questions with which your country is struggling today, which are, for example, the agrarian problem, the reduction of the *latifundia* (large landed estates), the improvement of the living conditions of the working men and their families.<sup>15</sup> Thus, while saving the essence of the primary and fundamental rights, such as the right of ownership, remember that at times the common good imposes restrictions on such rights as a recourse more frequent than in the past to the applications of social justice. As a protection for the dignity of the human being, it may be necessary at times to denounce and to blame boldly unjust and unworthy living conditions; at the same time, however, care must be taken to guard against either making violence legitimate with the pretext of applying a remedy to the ills of the people, or admitting and favoring those rapid and violent changes of temporal conditions of society which may lead to effects that are more harmful than the evil itself which is intended to be corrected.<sup>16</sup> This intervention in the social question will bring you likewise to occupy

yourselves with the lot of so many poor workingmen who too easily become the prey of de-Christianizing propaganda, with the mirage of economic advantages presented to them as a reward for their apostasy from God and from His Church. If you truly love the laborer (and you must love him because his conditions of life approach nearer to those of the Divine Master), you must assist him materially and religiously. Materially, bringing about in his favor the practice not only of commutative justice but also of social justice, that is, all those provisions which aim at relieving the condition of the proletarian; and then, religiously, giving him again the religious comforts without which he will struggle in a materialism that brutalizes him and degrades him.<sup>17</sup> No less grave and no less urgent is another duty: that of the religious and economic assistance of the *campesinos* (peasants), and in general of that not small portion of your sons forming the population, mostly agricultural, of the Indians. There are millions of souls, they too redeemed by Christ, entrusted by Him to your care and for whom He will some day ask you to render an account; there are millions of individual men often in such sad and miserable living conditions that they have not even that minimum of well-being indispensable to protect their very dignity as men. We conjure you, Venerable Brethren, in the bosom of the charity of Christ to have particular care for these children, to encourage your clergy to devote themselves with ever-increasing zeal to their assistance, and to interest the whole Mexican Catholic Action in this work of moral and material redemption.<sup>18</sup> Nor can We fail to mention a duty which in these recent times is ever increasing in importance: the assistance for Mexicans who have emigrated to other countries, who, torn away from their country and their traditions, more easily become prey to the insidious propaganda of the emissaries seeking to induce them to apostatize from their Faith. An arrangement with your zealous confreres of the United States of America will bring about a more diligent and organized care on the part of the local clergy and will assure for the Mexican emigrants those social and economic provisions which are so well developed in the Church in the United States.<sup>19</sup> If Catholic Action cannot neglect the most humble and the most needy classes, of the laborers, of the peasants, of the emigrants, it has in other fields no less grave and inescapable duties; among other things it must occupy itself solicitously with the students who some day will have, as professional men and women, a great influence in society and will perhaps hold public offices. To the practice of the Christian religion, to the formation of character and the Christian conscience, which are fundamental elements for all the Faithful, you must associate a special and correct education and intellectual preparation, supported by Christian philosophy - that is, that philosophy which was truthfully called perennial philosophy. Today, in fact, a solid and adequate religious instruction seems still more necessary in view of the tendency, always more generalized, of modern life toward externals, the repugnance toward and difficulty of reflection and recollection, and the propensity, even in the spiritual life, to allow sentiment rather than reason to be guide.<sup>20</sup> We ardently desire that you carry out among yourselves, at least to the degree possible and adapting the instruction to particular conditions, to the necessities and possibilities of your country, that which Catholic Action is so well doing in other countries for cultural formation and to assure that religious instruction should hold an intellectual primacy among students and educated Catholics.<sup>21</sup> The university students who are actively engaged in Catholic Action give Us great hope for a better future for Mexico, and We do not doubt that they will fulfil Our hopes. It is evident that they are a part, and an important part, of this Catholic Action which is so close to Our heart, whatever be the forms of its organization, since these depend in great part on local conditions and circumstances which vary from region to region. These university students not only afford, as We have said, the most valid hopes for a better tomorrow, but even today can render effective service to the Church and to the country, by the apostolate which they carry on among their companions as well as by supplying the various branches and various organizations of Catholic Action with capable and enlightened directors.<sup>22</sup> The special conditions of your country oblige Us to recall the necessary, obligatory, inescapable, care of the children, whose innocence is ensnared, whose education and Christian formation is thus so sorely tried. Two grave precepts are imposed on all Catholic Mexicans: the one negative, that is, to keep the children as

far away as possible from the impious and corruptive school; the other positive, to give them complete and accurate religious instruction and the necessary assistance to maintain their spiritual life. Regarding the first point, a grave and delicate one, We recently took occasion to manifest Our thoughts. As regards religious instruction, although We know with what insistence you yourselves have recommended it to your priests and to your Faithful, yet We repeat that, this being one of the most important and capital problems of the Mexican Church today, it is necessary that what is so laudably practiced in some dioceses today should be extended to all the others, in such a manner that the priests and members of Catholic Action apply themselves with all ardor and at cost of any sacrifice to conserve for God and the Church these little ones, for whom the Divine Saviour has shown such predilection.<sup>23</sup> The future of these younger generations (We repeat it with all the anguish of Our paternal heart) awakens in Us the most urgent solicitude and the most lively anxiety. We know to how many perils the children and youth are exposed, today more than ever, everywhere, but particularly in Mexico, where an immoral and antireligious press implants in their hearts the seeds of apostasy from Jesus Christ. To remedy such grave evil and defend your youth from these perils, it is necessary that every legal means be taken and every form of organization be put in motion, as for example, the Leagues of Fathers of Families and the morality and vigilance committees for publications and censorship of the cinema.<sup>24</sup> Regarding the individual defense of children and youths, We know, from reports which reach Us from all over the world, that activity in the ranks of Catholic Action constitutes the best protection against the stratagems of evil, the most efficacious training ground in Christian strength. These youths, enraptured with the beauty of the Christian ideal, sustained by the Divine Help which is assured by prayer and the Sacraments, will dedicate themselves with ardor and joy to the conquest of the souls of their companions, gathering consoling harvests of good.<sup>25</sup> In this We have another proof that in view of the grave problems of Mexico, it must not be said that Catholic Action holds a place of secondary importance. If ever this institution, which is the educator of consciences and the former of moral qualities, were set aside in favor of another extrinsic work of whatsoever species, even if it were a case of defending necessary religious and civil liberty, it would be a sad mistake; because the salvation of Mexico, as of all human society, lies above all in the eternal and immutable evangelical doctrine and in the sincere practice of Christian morals.<sup>26</sup> For the rest, once this gradation of values and activities is established, it must be admitted that for Christian life to develop itself it must have recourse to external and sensible means; that the Church, being a society of men, cannot exist or develop if it does not enjoy liberty of action, and that its members have the right to find in civil society the possibility of living according to the dictates of their consciences. Consequently, it is quite natural that when the most elementary religious and civil liberties are attacked, Catholic citizens do not resign themselves passively to renouncing those liberties. Notwithstanding, the revindication of these rights and liberties can be, according to the circumstances, more or less opportune, more or less energetic.<sup>27</sup> You have more than once recalled to your Faithful that the Church protects peace and order, even at the cost of grave sacrifices, and that it condemns every unjust insurrection or violence against constituted powers. On the other hand, among you it has also been said that, whenever these powers arise against justice and truth even to destroying the very foundations of authority, it is not to be seen how those citizens are to be condemned who united to defend themselves and the nation, by licit and appropriate means, against those who make use of public power to bring it to ruin.<sup>28</sup> If the practical solution depends on concrete circumstances, We must, however, on Our part recall to you some general principles, always to be kept in mind, and they are:

- 1) That these revindications have reason [the ratio] of means, or of relative end, not of ultimate and absolute end;
- 2) That, in reason [ratio] of means, they must be licit actions and not intrinsically evil;
- 3) That, if they are to be means proportionate to the end, they must be used only in the measure in which they serve to obtain or render possible, in whole or in part, the end, and in such manner that they do not cause to the community

greater damages than those they seek to repair;

4) That the use of such means and the exercise of civic and political rights in their fulness, embracing also problems of order purely material and technical, or any violent defense, does not enter in any manner in the task of the clergy or of Catholic Action as such, although to both appertains the preparation of Catholics to make just use of their rights, and to defend them with all legitimate means according as the common good requires;

5) The clergy and Catholic Action, being, by their mission of peace and love, consecrated to uniting all men in *vinculo pacis* (*Ephesians iv. 3*), must contribute to the prosperity of the nation, especially encouraging the union of those social initiatives which are not opposed to dogma or to the laws of Christian morals.

Furthermore, this very civil activity of the Mexican Catholics, carried out with such a noble and elevated spirit, will obtain results that are the more efficacious the more the Catholics themselves shall have the supernatural vision of life, that religious and moral education and that burning zeal for the spread of the Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ which Catholic Action intends to give.<sup>29</sup> In the presence of a happy coalition of consciences which do not intend to renounce the liberty vindicated for them by Christ (*Galatians iv. 31*), what power or human force could yoke them to sin? What dangers, what persecutions, what trials could separate souls thus tempered by the charity of Christ? (*Romans viii. 35*)<sup>30</sup>. This right formation of the perfect Christian and citizen, in which the supernatural ennobles all the talents and actions and exalts them, contains also, as is natural, the fulfilment of civil and social duties. Facing the adversaries of the Church, St. Augustine proclaimed in praise of his faith: Give me such fathers of families, such children, such masters, such subjects, such husbands, such spouses, such men of government, such citizens, as those which Christian Doctrine forms, and if you cannot give them, confess that this Christian Doctrine, if practiced, is the salvation of the State (*Epistle cxxxviii. 2*).<sup>31</sup> Thus a Catholic will take care not to pass over his right to vote when the good of the Church or of the country requires it. Thus there will be avoided the danger of seeing Catholics, in the exercise of their civil and political activities, organizing in particular groups, at times disputing among themselves or also contrary to the directions of the ecclesiastical authorities. That would be increasing the confusion and scattering the forces, to the complete detriment both of the development of Catholic Action and of the very cause that they wish to defend.<sup>32</sup> We have already mentioned activities which, although not conflicting with, are certainly outside the scope of Catholic Action, such as would be those of a political party or those which are purely economic and social. But there exist many other beneficent activities-such as the Leagues of Fathers of Families, for the defense of scholastic liberty and religious instruction, the union of citizens for the defense of the family and the sanctity of matrimony, and of public morality, which can be reorganized about the central nucleus of Catholic Action. In fact, it does not hold itself rigidly to fixed plans, but rather coordinates, as if about a radial center of light and heat, other initiatives and auxiliary institutions; which, enjoying always a just autonomy and a fitting liberty of action necessary for the accomplishment of their specific aims, feel the need of following the directions of its program.<sup>33</sup> That holds above all for your nation which is so extensive, where the variety of the needs and of local conditions may demand that, though on the basis of common principles, different methods of organization be used and different but equally just practical solutions be reached for the one same problem.<sup>34</sup> It will be for you, Venerable Brethren, placed by the Holy Spirit to rule the Church of God, to give the final practical decision in these cases, to which the Faithful will give their obedience and fidelity according to your instructions. And this is extremely close to Our heart, because the right intention and obedience are always and everywhere the indispensable conditions to draw down the Divine blessings upon the pastoral ministry and upon Catholic Action and to determine that unity of address and that fusion of energies which are an indispensable presupposition for the fruitfulness of the apostolate. With all Our spirit, therefore, We conjure the good Mexican Catholics to hold Obedience and Discipline dear. "Obey your prelates, and be subject to them. For they watch as being to render an account of your souls." And let this obedience be full of joy and a stimulus to greater energies:

"That they may do this with joy, and not with grief" (*Hebrews* xiii. 17). He who obeys unwillingly and only through force, venting his interior resentment in bitter criticism of his superiors and companions in work, of all that which is not according to his own way of viewing things, drives away the Divine benedictions, destroys the strength of discipline, and destroys where he ought to construct.<sup>35</sup> Together with obedience and discipline, We are pleased to recall those other duties of universal charity which are suggested to us by St. Paul in that same chapter iv. of the Letter to the Ephesians, which We have already quoted and which ought to be the fundamental norm of all those who work in Catholic Action: "I, therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy . . . with all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity, careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, one body and one Spirit" (*Ephesians* iv. 1 to 4).<sup>36</sup> To Our dearest Mexican children, who are such a part of the cares and of the affectionate solitudes of Our Pontificate, We renew the appeal to unity, to charity, to peace, in the apostolic labor of Catholic Action, which must give back Christ to Mexico and restore there peace and also temporal prosperity.<sup>37</sup> We deposit Our wishes and Our prayers at the feet of your heavenly Patroness, invoked under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who, in her sanctuary, still excites the love and the veneration of every Mexican.<sup>38</sup> Of her, who under this title is venerated and blessed also in this city where We, Ourselves, have erected a parish dedicated in her honor, We earnestly ask that she hear Our prayers and yours for the prosperous future of Mexico, for the Peace of Christ in the Reign of Christ. With these wishes and with these sentiments, We impart with all Our heart to you, to your priests, to the Mexican Catholic Action, to all the beloved children of Mexico, to the whole noble Mexican nation, a very special Apostolic Benediction.<sup>39</sup> May this, Our letter, be a pledge of spiritual resurrection for your country, as We have wished to date it on the Feast of the Resurrection as a paternal auspice that, since you have been so vividly participating in the sufferings of Christ, so you may likewise be participants in His resurrection. Given at St. Peter's in Rome on the Feast of the Resurrection, March 28, 1937, the fifteenth year of Our Pontificate. **PIUS XI** © Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana