

# THE APOSTOLIC LETTER

OF OUR HOLY FATHER POPE LEO XIII

On the Preservation and Protection of the Eastern Churches.

LEO, BISHOP, SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD.

The dignity of the Eastern Churches, shown forth by ancient and distinguished monuments, is in great veneration and glory through the whole Christian world. For the origin of man's redemption, according to the most merciful plan of God, having taking place among them, they have quickly hastened on to such increase as to attain the praise of apostleship and martyrdom, of doctrine and holiness, in the first degree, and have brought forth the earliest joys of most useful fruit. And from them the amplest and most beneficial power has flowed widely and wonderfully to other peoples, while the most blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, striking down the multi-form depravity of error and of vice, brought, under Heavenly guidance, the light of God's truth, the good tidings of peace, and the "liberty with which Christ has made us free," into that city which was the mistress of nations. But the Roman Church, the head of all Churches, has from Apostolic memory been accustomed to show the greatest honor and charity to the Churches of the East, and to mutually rejoice in their faithful obedience. And she, through varied and bitter trials, has never ceased to provide for and benefit them, to lift them from their perils, to bind them to her when they were friendly, to recall them when they fell away. Nor was it the last office of her vigilance to guard perpetually and defend in their entirety those particular customs and methods of worship of each Eastern people which, in accordance with her authority and wisdom, she declared lawful; in proof whereof are the many acts which Our predecessors—pre-eminently Pius IX., of happy memory—either themselves by their own decrees, or by the Sacred Council for the spreading of the Christian name, considered to be most prudent.

"We, also, moved and led on by not less zeal, at the very beginning of Our Pontificate turned Our eyes in love on the Christian nations of the East. Indeed, We hastened to show Our anxiety for the alleviation of their necessities, and since then, We have seized other opportunities showing them Our hearty good will. But assuredly nothing was, nor is, more in accordance with antiquity and piety, than so to excite in hearts bound to the Holy See, the warmth and fruitfulness of the faith, that they may mount to the excellence and praiseworthiness of their ancestors, by the renewal of their example.

We have already been able to give certain help to these Churches. We have founded a college in this city itself for the education of the Armenian and Maronite clergy, and also at Philippopolis and Adrianople for the Bulgarians; We have decreed to found, at Athens, a college to be called the Leonine; also, We give every favour to the Seminary of St. Anne, which has been begun at Jerusalem to educate the Melchite clergy. We are also engaged in increasing the number of Syrians among the students of the Urbanian College, and in restoring the Athanasian College of the Greeks to its original purpose. This Gregory XIII., a munificent benefactor, wisely longed for. Most distinguished men have there been trained. Many other things also of a similar nature We now most vehemently wish to attempt and to effect, since, God inspiring Us, We have adopted a plan, long thought on, of calling by special letter princes and people to the happiness of unity in Divine Faith.

Now, among the Christian nations so lamentably torn from Us We hasten to call, to exhort, to beseech, the Orientals, first of all, with the greatest Apostolic and Paternal charity. It has happened to Us, fortunately, to daily more and more foster the hope We entertained, and it is certain that so salutary a work has special claims upon Us, so that We may thoroughly fulfil the expectations men may form of the foresight of the Apostolic See, as well by removing all cause of ill-feeling or suspicion, as by applying the best remedies for reconciliation. We think the fittest course to take is to apply Our mind and Our care to safeguard the discipline peculiar to the Oriental Churches, as We have ever done.

Indeed, We have always worked on

this plan in the Clerical Institutes founded for Eastern peoples, and we shall follow the same plan in those to be founded, viz.: that the students should worship in, and observe with the greatest veneration, their own rites, and should learn and practise them. Indeed, there is more importance, than may be thought, in the preservation of Eastern Rites. For that august antiquity, by which the various classes of those rites are ennobled, is a distinguished ornament to the whole Church, and a proof of the Divine Unity of the Catholic Faith. For, thence, in truth, while their own Apostolic origin shows more clearly in the principal Churches of the East, there appears simultaneously and shines forth their closest unity with the Roman Church from the very beginning. Nor perhaps is there anything more admirable to illustrate the note of Catholicity in God's Church than the singular evidence which is shown by the different ceremonial forms and the noble tongues of antiquity, made more noble from the use of them by the Apostles and the Fathers; as if almost in imitation of what occurred to Christ, the Divine Author of the Church, at His birth, when the Wise Men from different quarters of the East came "to adore Him" (Matt. ii., 1, 2). And here it is in point to remark that the Sacred Rites, although in themselves not instituted to prove the truth of the Catholic doctrines, do nevertheless show them forth in a lively manner, and splendidly portray them.

Wherefore the true Church of Christ, as she greatly desires to preserve inviolate those things which, as being Divine, are unchangeable; so, in using their forms she has sometimes allowed or conceded novelty where it would be in accord with due veneration to antiquity. In this way there appears the power of her vitality, which grows not old, and she shines forth more magnificently as Christ's spouse, whom the wisdom of the Holy Fathers saw shadowed forth in the words of David: "The Queen stood on thy right hand, in gilded clothing, surrounded with variety . . . in golden borders, clothed round with varieties" (P. xlv., 9, 14).

Therefore, since this diversity of Oriental liturgy, proved by facts, besides its other worth, is turned into so much honor and use to the Church, surely it is no less a part of our duty that care should be taken lest damage through imprudence should arise from those ministers of the Gospel whom the charity of Christ leads out of the West to those Eastern nations. Valid, indeed, remain those things which on this matter Benedict XIV., Our illustrious predecessor, wisely and with forethought, decreed by the constitution *Damandatum* in the form of a letter given on the 24th day of December, 1743, to the Antiochene Patriarch of the Melchite Greeks and to all the Bishops of that Rite, subject to the great Patriarch. But as a long space of time has elapsed, and conditions of things in those places have been changed, and the Latin missionaries and institutes have been multiplied there, it has come to pass that the peculiar care of the Apostolic See is required; and, that this will be opportune, We Ourselves, in these latter years have learnt by many signs, and we are confirmed in this by the most just desires of Our Venerable Brethren, Patriarchs in the East, whose communications have come to Us, time and again. But in order that the fulness of the whole of this matter might be more openly displayed, and more fitting methods of dealing with it might be secured, We decided to summon the said patriarchs lately to Our city, to enter into discussion with them. Along with several of Our beloved sons, Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, we held frequent deliberations. Now having fully pondered upon all those things which we mutually proposed and discussed, we determined to unfold and amplify such regulations of the Benedictine Constitution as might be profitable to the altered circumstances of those peoples. In securing this, We took this principle from the said Constitution, namely, that the Latin priests should be sent by the Apostolic See into those regions for this intention only, that they might be a help and assistance to the Patriarchs and Bishops; carefully guarding lest in the use of faculties granted to them they should act in prejudice of the jurisdiction of the said patriarchs and Bishops, and decrease the number of their subjects (Const. "*Damandatum*," N. 18). From which it is clear by what laws the duties of these

Latin priests, relative to the Eastern Hierarchy, should be governed.

Therefore it seemed good to Us, the Lord, relying as We do on the authority of the apostles, to prescribe and sanction the following regulations, declaring by these presents Our wish and resolve, that the said Benedictine decrees, which were originally given concerning the Melchite Greeks, shall regard all the faithfully universally of every Oriental rite.

No. I.—Every Latin missionary, whether secular or regular, who by counsel or help shall win over any Oriental to the Latin rite, besides *suspensio a divinis*, which he will incur *ipso facto*, and the other penalties inflicted by the said Constitution "*Damandatum*," shall be deprived and excluded from his office; and in order that this regulation shall stand clear and firm, We order that a copy of it shall be declared and published among the Latin Churches.

No. II. Where a priest of their own rite is wanting, to whom the Oriental Patriarch may give the spiritual administration of his people, there, the parish priest of another rite may undertake charge of them, using the same species as they, fermented or unfermented, for consecration; and let him be preferred who uses them according to the Oriental rite. Let the faithful have the power to communicate in either rite, not merely in those places where there is no church or priest of their own rite, as was decreed on the 18th day of August in the year 1893 by the Sacred Council for the propagation of the Christian name, but even where on account of distance from their church they cannot reach it except with great difficulty; and of this the Ordinaries are to be judges. And let this be clearly understood, that he who has communicated, even for a long time according to a rite not his own, is not therefore to be considered to have changed his rite; but in all other matters he must continue submitted to his parish priest.

No. III. The Latin sodalities of religious who labor for the education of youth in the East, if they have in any college a rather large number of students of the Oriental rite, must, after consultation with the Patriarch, have in their institution, for the use of the students, a priest of their own rite to say Mass, to give Communion, to teach catechism in their mother tongue, and to explain their rites; or at least on Sundays and holidays of obligation they must summon such a priest for these duties. Wherefore We decree that whatever privileges, even specially mentioned, the said sodalities may enjoy, in accordance with which students of the Oriental rite, as long as they stay in their colleges, may follow the Latin rite, are all abolished. But let presidents, with religious equity, see to the observance of the ritual abstinences; likewise let care be taken for the students who live outside; these must be sent, or taken, to their own churches or religious edifices, unless it seems fitting that they should be admitted to the sacred Offices along with the students of the same rite, who live in.

No. IV.—The same regulations must be carried out, as far as can be, in sodalities of religious women who are employed in the education of girls in convents and schools, and if, owing to times and circumstances, any change should seem befitting, it must not be made before the consent of the Patriarch and the permission of the Apostolic See has been obtained.

No. V.—New colleges for the education of youth, or houses of religious of either sex, according to the Latin rite, must not be opened in future until the consent of the Apostolic See has been asked and obtained.

No. VI.—Priests, whether Latins or Orientals, must not, whether in their own churches or in those of another rite, absolve anyone in cases which are reserved to their own ordinaries, unless faculties are conceded by the said ordinaries. On this point every privilege, even specially mentioned, We absolutely revoke.

No. VII.—Orientals who, even with the Bishop's permission, may have adopted the Latin rite, may be allowed, with the consent of the Apostolic See, to return to their former rite.

No. VIII.—A woman of the Latin rite who has married a man of an Oriental rite, as also a woman of an Oriental rite who has married a man of the Latin rite, may on entering, or during, married life, go over to the rite of her husband; but

on the dissolution of her marriage she shall be free to resume her own rite.

No. IX.—Any Oriental, dwelling outside the Patriarchal territory, shall be under the rule of the Latin clergy, but shall remain ascribed to his own rite; still, so that, in spite of lapse of time, or any other cause whatever, he falls under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch as soon as he returns into his territory.

No. X.—It shall be unlawful for any religious Order, or institute of either sex, of the Latin rite, to receive any Oriental among its community who has not first exhibited testimonial letters from his own Ordinary.

No. XI.—If any community or family or person, now separated from the Church, shall return to Catholic unity, a condition having been laid down as necessary that the Latin rite should be embraced, such must remain attached to that rite for the time, but they must be free, when they choose, to return to their native Catholic rite; however, if no such condition shall have been laid down, but the said community, family, or person are therefore ministered to by Latin clergy because there are no Oriental priests, they must return to their rite as soon as there shall be a supply of Oriental clergy.

No. XII.—Matrimonial and ecclesiastical questions, whatever they be, concerning which appeal is made to the Apostolic See, must on no account be submitted for decision to the Apostolic delegate, unless the Holy See clearly orders it, but they must be altogether laid before the Sacred Council for the Propagation of the Christian Name.

No. XIII.—We give jurisdiction to the Melchite Greek Patriarch over those of the faithful also who live within the territories of the Turkish Empire.

Over and above these particular precautions and regulations *ex jure*, we are particularly anxious, as We touched upon before, that, in the more favourable spots in the East, seminaries, colleges, and institutions of all kinds should be founded for the especial purpose of instructing the native youth in their ancestral rite for their own advantage. We have concluded zealously to enter upon this design, in which we can scarcely say how great hope there is of advantage to religion, and to help it on to the utmost of our power, hoping, too, for assistance from the Catholics at large. The advantage of native priests, who will labour under more favourable circumstances and whose ministrations will be more willingly received and bear more fruit than if they were foreigners, has been set forth more at length by Us in the Encyclical letters which We issued last year on founding clerical colleges in the East Indies. So, assuredly, having once arranged for religious education of their youth, honour will accrue to the Orientals in their Theological and Biblical studies; there will increase a knowledge of the ancient tongues, equally with a greater ability in the modern; the wealth of doctrine and literature in which their Fathers and writers are so rich, to the common good, will more largely abound; with that wished for result, that the doctrine of the Catholic priesthood rising forth, and the praise of unswerving example shining bright, their separated brethren will more eagerly beg the embraces of that Holy Mother. And then indeed, if the ranks of the clergy shall associate mind, zeal, and acts with a truly fraternal charity, surely with the favour, and under the leading of God, that most happy day will dawn, when all, meeting in the "unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God," in fulness and perfection, "the whole body, compacted and fitly joined together by whatever joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity" (Eph. iv., 13, 16). For that Church alone can boast to be the true Church of Christ, in which most perfectly unite "one body and one spirit" (Eph. iv. 4). These things, one and all, which have been decreed by Us, will doubtless be received by Our Venerable Brethren, the Catholic Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops of every Oriental rite, not only in accordance with that love in which they excel towards the Apostolic Chair, and towards Us, but also in accordance with their solicitude for their churches; and they will sedulously strive that the observance of them shall be fully secured from those concerned. But the fulness of the fruits which we may augur and