

ENCYCLICAL LETTER

Of Our Holy Father by Divine Providence Pope Leo XIII.

To Our Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Local Ordinaries Having Peace and Communion with the Holy See.

Venerable Brethren,

Health and the Apostolic Benediction.

The outlook on the future is by no means free from anxiety; on the contrary, there are many serious reasons for alarm, on account of numerous long-standing causes of evil, of both a public and private nature. Nevertheless, the close of the century really seems in God's mercy to afford us some degree of consolation and hope. For no one will deny that renewed interest in spiritual matters and a revival of Christian faith and piety are influences of great moment for the common good. And there are sufficiently clear indications at the present day of a very general revival or augmentation of these virtues. For example, in the very midst of worldly allurements and in spite of so many obstacles to piety, what great crowds have flocked to Rome to visit the "Threshold of the Apostles" at the invitation of the Sovereign Pontiff! Both Italians and foreigners are openly devoting themselves to religious exercises, and, relying upon the indulgences offered by the Church, are most earnestly seeking the means to secure their eternal salvation. Who could fail to be moved by the present evident increase of devotion towards the person of Our Saviour? The ardent zeal of so many thousands, united in heart and mind, "from the rising of the Sun to the going down thereof," in venerating the Name of Jesus Christ and proclaiming His praises, is worthy of the best days of Christianity. Would that the outburst of these flames of antique faith might be followed by a mighty conflagration! Would that the splendid example of so many might kindle the enthusiasm of all! For what so necessary for our times as a widespread renovation among the nations of Christian principles and old-fashioned virtues? The great misfortune is that too many turn a deaf ear and will not listen to the teachings of this revival of piety. Yet, "did they but know the gift of God," did they but realize that the greatest of all misfortunes is to fall away from the World's Redeemer and to abandon Christian faith and practice, they would be only too eager to turn back, and so escape certain destruction.

The most important duty of the Church, and the one most peculiarly her own, is to defend and to propagate throughout the world the Kingdom of the Son of God, and to bring all men to salvation by communicating to them the divine benefits, so much so that her power and authority are chiefly exercised in this one work. Towards this end we are conscious of having devoted our energies throughout our difficult and anxious Pontificate even to the present day. And you too, Venerable Brethren, are wont constantly, yea daily, to give your chief thoughts and endeavors together with Ourselves to the self-same task. But at the present moment all of us ought to make still further efforts, more especially on the occasion of the Holy Year, to disseminate far and wide the better knowledge and love of Jesus Christ by teaching, persuading, exhorting, if perchance our voice can be heard; and this, not so much to those who are ever ready to listen willingly to Christian teachings, but to those most unfortunate men who, whilst professing the Christian name, live strangers to the faith and love of Christ. For these we feel the profoundest pity: these above all would we urge to think seriously of their present life and what its consequences will be if they do not repent.

The greatest of all misfortunes is never to have known Jesus Christ: yet such a state is free from the sin of obstinacy and ingratitude. But first to have known Him, and afterwards to deny or forget Him, is a crime so foul and so insane that it seems impossible for any man to be guilty of it. For Christ is the fountain-head of all good. Mankind can no more be saved without His power, than it could be redeemed without His mercy. "Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv., 12). What kind of life that is from which Jesus Christ, "the power of God and the wisdom of God," is excluded; what kind of morality and what manner of death are its consequences, can be clearly learnt from the example of nations deprived of the light of Christianity. If we but recall St. Paul's description (Romans i., 24-32) of the mental blindness, the natural depravity, the monstrous superstitions and lusts of such peoples, our minds will be filled with horror and pity. What we here record is well enough known, but not sufficiently realized or thought about. Pride would not mislead, nor indifference enervate, so many minds, if the Divine mercies were more generally called to mind and if it were remembered from what an abyss Christ delivered mankind and to what a height He raised it. The human race, exiled and disinherited,

true and real purchase. "You are not your own: for you are bought with a great price" (2 Corinthians vi., 19-20). Hence in Christ all things are made new. "The mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed to Him, in the dispensation of the fullness of times to re-establish all things in Christ" (Ephesians i., 9-10). When Jesus Christ had blotted out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, fastening it to the cross, at once God's wrath was appeased, the primeval fetters of slavery were struck off from unhappy and erring man, God's favour was won back, grace restored, the gates of Heaven opened, the right to enter them revived, and the means afforded of doing so. Then man, as though awakening from a long-continued and deadly lethargy, beheld at length the light of the truth, for long ages desired, yet sought in vain. First of all, he realized that he was born to much higher and more glorious things than the frail and inconstant objects of sense which had hitherto formed the end of his thoughts and cares. He learnt that the meaning of human life, the supreme law, the end of all things was this: that we come from God and must return to Him. From this first principle the consciousness of human dignity was revived; men's hearts realized the universal brotherhood; as a consequence, human rights and duties were either perfected or even newly

Those who go astray from the road wander far from the goal they aim at. Similarly, if the pure and true light of truth be rejected, men's minds must necessarily be darkened and their souls deceived by deplorably false ideas. What hope of salvation can they have who abandon the very principle and fountain of life? Christ alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John xiv., 6). If He be abandoned the three necessary conditions of salvation are removed.

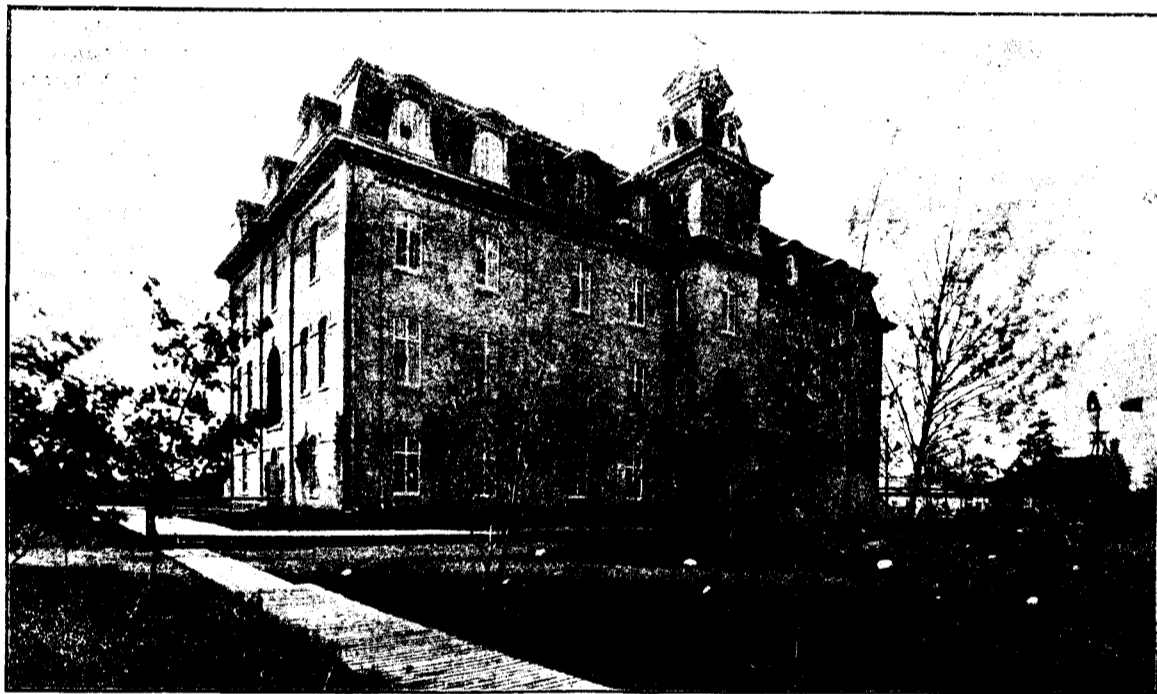
CHRIST THE WAY.

It is surely unnecessary to prove, what experience shows and what each individual feels in himself, even in the very midst of all temporal prosperity—that in God alone can the human will find absolute and perfect peace. God is the only end of man. All our life on earth is the truthful and exact image of a pilgrimage. Now Christ is the "Way," for we never can reach God, the supreme and ultimate good, by this tortuous and doubtful road of mortal life, except with Christ as our leader and guide. How so? Firstly and chiefly by His grace; but this would remain "void" in man if the precepts of His law were neglected. For, as was necessarily the case after Jesus Christ had won our salvation, He left behind Him His Law for the protection and welfare of the human race, under the guidance of which men, converted from evil life,

Christ our Lord. But the Christian is absolutely obliged to be firm, and patient in suffering, if he wish to lead a Christian life. Have we forgotten of what Body and of what Head we are the members? "Having joy set before Him, He endured the Cross," and He bade us deny ourselves. The very dignity of human nature depends upon this disposition of mind. For, as even the ancient Pagan philosophy perceived, to be master of oneself and to make the lower part of the soul obey the superior part, is so far from being a weakness of will that it is really a noble power, in consonance with right reason and most worthy of a man. Moreover, to bear and to suffer is the ordinary condition of man. Man can no more create for himself a life free from suffering and filled with all happiness than he can abrogate the decrees of his Divine Maker, who has willed that the consequences of original sin should be perpetual. It is reasonable, therefore, not to expect an end to troubles in this world, but rather to steel one's soul to bear troubles, by which we are taught to look forward with certainty to supreme happiness. Christ has not promised eternal bliss in heaven to riches, nor to a life of ease, to honors or to power, but to long-suffering and to tears, to the love of justice and to cleanness of heart.

From this it may clearly be seen what consequences are to be expected from that false pride which, rejecting our Saviour's Kingship, places man at the summit of all things and declares that human nature must rule supreme. And yet this supreme rule can neither be attained nor even defined. The rule of Jesus Christ derives its form and its power from Divine Love: a holy and orderly charity is both its foundation and its crown. Its necessary consequences are the strict fulfilment of duty, respect of human rights, the estimation of the things of heaven above those of earth, the preference of the love of God to all things. But this supremacy of man, which openly rejects Christ, or at least ignores Him, is entirely founded upon selfishness, knowing neither charity nor self-devotion. Man may indeed be king, through Jesus Christ, but only on condition that he first of all obey God, and diligently seek his rule of life in God's law. By the law of Christ we mean not only the natural precepts of morality and the Ancient Law, all of which Jesus Christ has perfected and crowned by His declaration, explanation and sanction; but also the rest of His doctrine and His own peculiar institutions. Of these the chief is His Church. Indeed whatsoever things Christ has instituted are most fully contained in His Church. Moreover, He willed to perpetuate the office assigned to Him by His Father by means of the ministry of the Church so gloriously founded by Himself. On the one hand He confided to her all the means of man's salvation, on the other He most solemnly commanded men to be subject to her and to obey her diligently, and to follow her even as Himself: "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me" (Luke x., 16.) Wherefore the law of Christ must be sought in the Church. Christ is man's "Way"; the Church also is his "Way"—Christ of Himself and by His very nature, the Church by His commission and the communication of His power. Hence all who would find salvation apart from the Church, are led astray and strive in vain.

As with individuals, so with nations. These, too, must necessarily tend to ruin if they go astray from "The Way." The Son of God, the Creator and Redeemer of mankind, is King and Lord of the earth, and holds supreme dominion over men, both individually and collectively. "And He gave Him power, and glory, and a kingdom: and all peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve Him" (Daniel vii., 14). "I am appointed King by Him. . . . I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession" (Psalm ii., 6, 8). Therefore the law of Christ ought to prevail in human society and



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had for ages been daily hurrying into ruin, involved in the terrible and numberless ills brought about by the sin of our first parents, nor was there any human hope of salvation, when Christ Our Lord came down as the Saviour from Heaven. At the very beginning of the world, God had promised Him as the conqueror of "the Serpent," hence, succeeding ages had eagerly looked forward to His coming. The Prophets had long and clearly declared that all hope was in Him. The varying fortunes, the achievements, customs, laws, ceremonies and sacrifices of the Chosen People had distinctly and lucidly foreshadowed the truth, that the salvation of mankind was to be accomplished in Him who should be the Priest, Victim, Liberator, Prince of Peace, Teacher of all Nations, Founder of an Eternal Kingdom. By these titles, images and prophecies, differing in kind though like in meaning, He alone was designated who "for His exceeding charity wherewith He loved us," gave Himself up for our salvation. And so, when the fullness of time came in God's Divine Providence, the only-begotten Son of God became man, and in behalf of mankind made most abundant satisfaction in His Blood to the outraged majesty of His Father, and by this infinite price He redeemed man for His own. "You were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver. . . . but with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a lamb, unspotted and undefiled" (1 Peter i., 18-19). Thus all men, though already subject to His Kingly power, were over and above made His property by a

created, whilst on all sides were evoked virtues undreamt of in pagan philosophy. Thus men's aims, life, habits and customs received a new direction. As the knowledge of the Redeemer spread far and wide and His power, which destroyeth ignorance and former vices, penetrated into the very life-blood of the nations, such a change came about that the face of the world was entirely altered by the creation of a Christian civilization. The remembrance of these events, Venerable Brethren, is full of infinite joy, but it also teaches us the lesson that we must both feel and render with our whole hearts gratitude to our Divine Saviour.

We are indeed now very far removed in time from the first beginnings of Redemption; but what difference does this make when the benefits thereof are perennial and immortal? He who once hath restored human nature ruined by sin the same preserveth and will preserve it for ever. "He gave Himself a redemption for all" (1 Timothy ii., 6). "In Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians xv., 22). "And of His Kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke i., 33). Hence by God's eternal decree the salvation of all men, both severally and collectively, depends upon Jesus Christ. Those who abandon Him become guilty by the very fact, in their blindness and folly, of their own ruin; whilst at the same time they do all that in them lies to bring about a violent reaction of mankind in the direction of that mass of evils and miseries from which the Redeemer in His mercy had freed them.

might safely tend towards God. "Going, teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew xxviii., 19-20). "Keep my commandments" (John xiv., 15). Hence it will be understood that in the Christian religion the first and most necessary condition is docility to the precepts of Jesus Christ, absolute loyalty of will towards Him as Lord and King. A serious duty, and one which oftentimes calls for strenuous labour, earnest endeavor, and perseverance! For although by Our Redeemer's grace human nature hath been regenerated, still there remains in each individual a certain debility and tendency to evil. Various natural appetites attract man on one side and the other; the allurements of the material world impel his soul to follow after what is pleasant rather than the law of Christ. Still we must strive our best and resist our natural inclinations with all our strength "unto the obedience of Christ." For unless they obey reason they become our masters, and carrying the whole man away from Christ, make him their slave. "Men of corrupt mind, who have made shipwreck of the faith, cannot help being slaves. . . . They are slaves to a threefold concupiscence: of will, of pride, or of outward show" (St. Augustine, De Vera Religione, 37). In this contest every man must be prepared to undergo hardships and troubles for Christ's sake. It is difficult to reject what so powerfully entices and delights. It is hard and painful to despise the supposed goods of the senses and of fortune for the will and precepts of