

# APOSTOLIC LETTER

OF HIS HOLINESS

POPE LEO XIII.

UPON THE

## REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM.

TO THE PRINCES AND PEOPLES OF THE WORLD.

HEALTH AND PEACE IN THE LORD.

### OFFICIAL TRANSLATION.

THE splendid testimonies of public congratulations which reached Us in the course of last year from all parts of the world on the occasion of Our Episcopal Jubilee, which lately reached their height in the marked devotion of the Spanish nation, have chiefly consoled Us by the thought that in this unanimity of sentiment shone forth the unity of the Church and their wonderful union with the Supreme Pontiff. It seemed in those days as if the Catholic world turned aside from other cares to fix its gaze and its thoughts upon the Vatican. Embassies from Princes, numerous pilgrimages, letters full of affection, and most august ceremonies, brilliantly attested that Catholics in their reverence for the Apostolic See are of one heart and soul. These events are even more joyful and acceptable since they answer to Our designs. Seeing that we well understand the condition of the times, and mindful of Our duty, We have through the whole course of Our Pontificate turned constantly Our attention—and as far as We could by teaching and work—to draw more closely to Us the nations and peoples of the whole world, and to show clearly the always beneficent efficacy of the Roman Pontificate. We therefore render grateful thanks to the Divine Goodness for having granted us the singular favor of reaching safely so great an age. We are also grateful to the Princes, the Bishops, the clergy, and many others, who, with numerous demonstrations of piety and respect, worked together to render honour to the dignity We hold, and to offer to Our selves very opportune consolation. In truth, however, to obtain a full and perfect consolation there remains not a little yet to be desired.

### THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD.

Because, while in the midst of these testimonies of the joy and love of the people, there were present in Our mind the immense multitude who were strangers to these Catholic celebrations—some because they were deprived of all knowledge of the Gospel; some who, although Christians, dissented totally from the Catholic faith. This fact, then, bitterly afflicted Us, and it afflicts Us to this hour, for it is not possible to reflect without heartfelt grief on so large a portion of the human race having wandered away so far from Us by misleading paths. Now therefore, as We are upon earth the representative of Almighty God, who wishes all men to be saved and attain to a knowledge of the truth, and as our years and bitterness of soul urge Us to the close of Our mortal career, it seemed good to Us to imitate our Redeemer and Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, on the eve of returning to heaven, earnestly besought God the Father that His Disciples and followers should be all of one mind and one heart. "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us" (St. John xvii. 21). This divine prayer and supplication was made not alone for those who already believed in Christ, but also for all those who in the future should believe. Not without reason therefore do We wish to make known Our strong desire, and within the measure of our power to bring about that all people of every land and race should be called and invited to join the unity of divine faith.

### MISSIONS TO THE HEATHEN.

Moved by charity, which hastens most speedily to where there is most need of help, the mind first turns to peoples who are the most unfortunate, whom the light of the Gospel has not reached or has been extinguished by carelessness, or by the vicissitudes of the times, who are ignorant of God, and remain in the worst of errors. Since all salvation comes

from Jesus Christ—"For there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12)—it is Our greatest wish that the Most Holy Name of Jesus should be known without delay, and should reign in every region of the earth. And to effect this the Church has never ceased to carry out the mission she had from God. She has devoted herself to this work during 1900 years, and what task could she carry out with more ardour and constancy than to summon the peoples of the world to the truth and to a Christian life? And now also We have frequently sent forth preachers of the Gospel, who have crossed the seas to carry it to the most distant countries. There never passes a day that We do not supplicate Almighty God that He would mercifully deign to multiply priests worthy of the apostolate, in order that, to extend the reign of Christ, they may not hesitate to sacrifice their health, and, if needs be, their life also. And Thou, O Saviour and Father of the human race, our Lord Christ Jesus, hasten and do not delay the fulfilment of Thy promise that when Thou wert lifted up all men shall be drawn to Thee. Come now therefore and reveal Thyself to the multitudes who are now altogether deprived of the most precious benefits which Thou hast gained for mortals with Thy precious blood; appeal to those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, that, enlightened by the splendour of Thy wisdom and power, in Thee, and by Thee, they may be united in one.

### UNITY OF FAITH NECESSARY.

Dwelling in Our thoughts upon the need of unity, We thought of all those nations whom the Divine Pity drew a long time since from their former errors to the wisdom of the Gospel. In truth, nothing gives more joy than to remember, with abundant thanks to the providence of God, than these ancient ages when the Christian faith was universally regarded as the common and undivided patrimony; when nations diverse in locality, in genius, and in customs, although often disagreeing with each other, and even in conflict, nevertheless in matters of religion were unanimous in the faith of Christ. Remembering these facts, it is too painful to think that in succeeding ages distrust and enmity, the result of ill-omened events, have snatched from the bosom of the Roman Church great and flourishing peoples. Notwithstanding this, confiding in the grace and mercy of Almighty God, who alone knows the hour of assistance, and in whose hand it remains to incline as He pleases the will of men, to these same peoples We address Ourselves, and with paternal love We exhort and beseech them that, putting aside all dissensions, they may turn to unity.

### THE EASTERN CHURCHES.

And first of all with intense affection We look to the East, from which came from the first the salvation of the world. Yes, it is Our anxious and earnest desire to be able to hold the joyful hope that the Churches of the East, enlightened by their hereditary faith and by their ancient glories, should no longer absent themselves, but should return to the point from which they parted. We have the greater confidence in this, since the distance between Us is not great; hence while so few matters divide Us, on the remainder We can agree and unite in defence of Catholic doctrine, giving testimony and proof also by the rites, the teaching, and the practices of the Oriental Church. The principal point of dissent is the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. Let them look to early times, consult the opinions of their ancestors, and the traditions of the first century. Assuredly these show forth strongly the proof that it was to the Roman Pontiffs

that the oracle of Christ applied: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church." And among the number of the Pontiffs we find in the early days not a few drawn from the East, and especially—an Anacletus, an Evaristus, an Anicetus, an Eleutherius, a Zozimus, an Agatho—to many of whom also it was given to seal with their blood the government of the whole Christian Church wisely and safely ruled by them. The time, the circumstances, the authors of the unhappy discord are well known. Before man had separated what God had joined together, the name of the Apostolic See was venerated by the whole Christian world, and to the Roman Pontiff, as legitimate successor of St. Peter, and thus Vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth, the East, equally with the West, yielded obedience in concord. Therefore if We look at the commencement of the discord, Photius himself deemed it necessary to send legates to Rome to decide his questions, and Pope Nicholas I., without any opposition, sent from Rome his representatives to Constantinople in order that "they should discreetly investigate the case of the Patriarch Ignatius, and truthfully and with full evidence should submit the same to the Apostolic See." Hence the whole history of this fact manifestly confirms the primacy of the Roman See. Lastly, in the two Ecumenical Councils, the second of Lyons and in that of Florence, nobody ignores the fact that spontaneously and with one voice all the Latins and Greeks decreed as a dogma the supreme power of the Roman Pontiffs. We love to remember these facts precisely, because We invite them to return to peace, the more so as with the Easterns it seems the hour to entertain milder feelings, when there is such a tendency shown of good-will towards Catholics. We had lately a proof of this when We saw pious bands of Catholic pilgrims received in the East with singular demonstrations of courtesy and friendship. To you therefore Our heart opens, whether you be of the Greek or other Oriental Rite, separated from the Catholic Church. Let each one remember, as we most earnestly desire, the grave and moving words of Bessarion to your fathers:

"What justification shall we plead before God for being separated from our brethren, although to unite them into one fold He Himself came down from heaven, was born and crucified? What defence will be ours before posterity? Let us not suffer such shame, venerable fathers; far from us be such an advice; let us not deal so badly for ourselves and our children."

Think of your duty to God; that is what We desire. No human respect but divine charity should exhort you to peace and union with the Roman Church—we mean a full and perfect union—but this can be effected by no other means than by a community of dogma and an exchange of fraternal charity. The true union for Christians is that which Christ Jesus, the founder of the Church, instituted and wished for, which is founded upon unity of faith and unity of rule. Have no fear that either We or Our successors should wish to interfere with your rights, with the Patriarchal prerogative, or with the ritual customs of each Church, because it was always the intention and the practice of the Apostolic See to regard broadly and equitably the origins and customs of the various nations. On the contrary, if your communion with us is re-established no one can sufficiently say what will be the amount of fruit and glory which will flow into your Church, thank God. Therefore address to our all-good God your own prayer: "Abolish, O Lord, the schisms of the Church." And, again, "Gather together and bring back the wanderers to the one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church" (Liturgy of St. Basil). Then turn to this one and holy faith, which the most remote antiquity has unalterably transmitted to you and to us equally, which your fathers and clergy preserved inviolate, which yet shines with the splendour of the virtues, the greatness of the genius, and the excellence of the doctrines preached and illustrated by Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, the two Cyrils, and many other great men whose glory belongs equally to the East and the West.

### TO THE SLAVONIAN CHURCH.

In particular, We would address a few words to the Slav people, to whose name history has rendered such worthy testi-

mony. You know how honored by the Slavs are Sts. Cyril and Methodius, your fathers in the faith, to whose memory We Ourselves decreed a few years ago a due increase of honor. For a long period there existed between the Slavs and the Roman Pontiffs an exchange of favours on the one side and of most faithful piety on the other. But the deplorable misfortunes of time alienated a large number of your forefathers from the faith of Rome. Consider therefore how precious to you would be your return to unity. For the Church does not hesitate to re-call you to her bosom, and is ready to convey to you copious aids to salvation, prosperity, and grandeur.

### PROTESTANTISM.

With equal love we look to the peoples who in a later age were separated from the Roman Church by a strange revolution of events. Ignoring the many vicissitudes of preceding ages, they soared mentally above the limits of human reason, and with minds eager for truth and salvation set themselves to study the Church which was established by Christ. And they endeavoured to make equal with it their own particular Church, considering in what manner they could find religion in it, they permitted it to be taught that, denying the primitive belief, she had by successive variations fallen into erroneous novelties on many points of great importance. They ventured to deny the patrimony of truth, so that the innovators took with themselves in separating no formula of faith which should remain with them. Thus matters progressed to such an extent that many proceeded to attack the basis itself on which rests all the religion and all the hopes of the human race—that is to say, the divinity of Jesus Christ our Lord. Similarly the books of the Old and New Testament, which had before been recognized as divinely inspired, were now stripped of that authority, which must inevitably ensue if everybody had the privilege of interpreting them for himself. Hence the private conscience of each one was made the only guide and moral rule, rejecting every rule of action, from which there arose many opposite opinions and a multiplicity of sects which often resulted in Naturalism or Rationalism. From this cause, despairing of ever finding themselves in accord on doctrinal matters, they exalt and command fraternal union in charity. And this is just, since we should all try to be united in mutual charity. This Jesus Christ commanded above all things, and He made love of one another the distinctive mark of His flock. But how can perfect charity unite hearts if faith has not brought the minds into accord? It is on this account that many of whom We have spoken, having good judgment and being eager for the truth, have sought in Catholicism the safe road of salvation, knowing well that they cannot be united to Jesus Christ as their head unless they are united at the same time to His body, which is the Church; nor could they follow the true faith of Christ while repudiating the legitimate supremacy given to Peter and his successors. They recognized therefore in the Roman Church the ideal type of the true Church, easily shown by the marks placed on her by God, her founder. And among these were numbered many learned men of the most acute intelligence, who in able works proved the uninterrupted Apostolic succession of the Roman Church, the completeness of her dogmas, and the consistency of her discipline.

### APPEAL TO ANGLICANS.

These examples being given, We make an appeal to you, Our dear brothers, who have been divided from Us for now three centuries concerning the faith of Christ, and to you others also who afterwards separated from Us for whatsoever motive. "Let us meet in the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephes. iv. 13). To this unity you can never come but by the Catholic Church. Permit Us, then, to invite you, and with intense love We offer you Our right hand. The Church, the mother of all, from whom you have been separated so long, recalls you to her. To you all Catholics look eagerly because you pray piously to God with Us, closely united with Us in the profession of one Gospel, of one faith, and of one hope in perfect charity.

### TO ALL CATHOLICS.

To complete the harmony of this much-desired unity, it only remains now to give instructions to all those through-