



The Holy See

AD SINARUM GENTEM

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS XII

ON THE SUPRANATIONALITY OF THE CHURCH

TO THE VENERABLE BRETHERN AND BELOVED SONS,

THE ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS, AND OTHER LOCAL ORDINARIES AND

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE OF CHINA

IN PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE *Venerable Brothers and Beloved Sons, Greetings*

and Apostolic Benediction. About three years ago We issued the apostolic letter *Cupimus Imprimis* (AAS 44:153 ff.) to

Our dear Chinese people, and in a special manner to you, Venerable Catholic Brothers and beloved sons. We issued it

not only to express to you Our sympathy in your afflictions, but also to exhort you paternally to fulfill all the duties of the

Christian religion with that resolute fidelity that sometimes demands heroic strength. At the present moment, We once

more send up Our prayers, together with yours, to Almighty God, Father of mercy, that "as the sun shines forth again

after the tempest and the storm, so, too, after so much distress, disturbances and suffering, there will, with God's help,

shine forth upon your Church peace, tranquillity and freedom" (*Ibid.*, p. 157).² In recent years, however, the conditions of

the Catholic Church in your midst have not improved in the least. The accusations and calumnies against the Apostolic

See and those who keep themselves faithful to it have increased. The Apostolic Nuncio, who represented Our person

among you has been expelled. The snares to deceive those less instructed in the truth have been intensified.³ However

- as we wrote to you - "you are opposing with a firm will all forms of insidious attack, whether subtle, hidden, or masked

under a false appearance of truth" (*Ibid.*, p. 155). We know that these words of Our previous Apostolic Letter were not

able to reach you. So We willingly repeat them for you by means of this Encyclical. We know too, to Our great mental

comfort, that you have persevered in your firm and holy resolve, and that no force has succeeded in separating you from

the unity of the Church. For this We heartily congratulate you and give you deserved praise.⁴ But as We must be

solicitous for the eternal salvation of each person, We cannot hide the sadness and affliction of Our soul in learning that,

although the great majority of Catholics have remained steadfast in the Faith, still there are some in your midst who,

either deceived in their good faith, or overcome by fear, or misled by new and false doctrines, have adhered, even

recently, to dangerous movements being promoted by the enemies of all religion, especially of the religion divinely

revealed by Jesus Christ.⁵ The consciousness of Our duty demands that We once more direct Our words to you through

this Encyclical Letter, with the hope that it can become known to you. May it be of some comfort and encouragement for

those who persevere staunchly and bravely in truth and virtue. To the others may it bring light and Our paternal

admonitions.⁶ First of all, today as in the past, the persecutors of the Christians falsely accuse them of not loving their

country and of not being good citizens. We wish once more to proclaim - what cannot fail to be recognized by anyone

guided by right reason - that the Chinese Catholics are second to no one in their ardent love and ready loyalty to their most noble fatherland (*Ibid.*, p. 155). The Chinese people - We want to repeat what We wrote in its praise in the Apostolic Letter cited above - "from the most remote times has been eminent among the other peoples of Asia for its achievements, its literature and the splendor of its civilization, and once it had been illuminated by the light of the Gospel that greatly excels the wisdom of this world, drew from it still finer qualities of soul, namely the Christian virtues which perfect and strengthen the natural virtues" (*Ibid.*, p. 153).⁷ We see that you are also worthy of praise for this reason. In the daily and prolonged trials in which you find yourselves, you follow only the just way when you give, as becomes Christians, respectful homage to your public authorities in the field of their competency. Moved by love of your country, you are ready to fulfill all your duties as citizens. But it is also a great consolation for Us to know that when the occasion has arisen, you have openly affirmed, and still affirm, that you can in no way stray from the precepts of the Catholic religion and that you can in no way deny your Creator and Redeemer, for Whose love many of you have faced torture and prison.⁸ As We have already written to you in the previous Letter, this Apostolic See, especially in these recent times, has exercised the greatest solicitude that as many priests and Bishops of your own noble race as possible be correctly instructed and trained. And so Our immediate predecessor of happy memory, Pius XI, personally consecrated in the majestic Basilica of St. Peter the first six Bishops chosen from among your people. We ourselves, having nothing dearer to Our heart than the daily advancement of your Church, have been happy to establish the Sacred Hierarchy in China and for the first time in history have conferred the dignity of the Roman Purple on one of your citizens (*Ibid.*, p. 155).⁹ We desire, then, that the day may soon come - for this We send up to God most ardent petitions and suppliant prayers - when Bishops and priests of your own nation and in sufficient number can govern the Catholic Church in your immense country, and when there will no longer be need of help from foreign missionaries in your apostolate.¹⁰ But truth itself and the knowledge of Our duty demand that We propose for your careful attention the following points: First, these preachers of the gospel, who left their own beloved countries to cultivate among you the Master's field with their labor and sweat, are not moved by earthly motives. They seek only, and desire nothing more than, to illumine your people with the light of Christianity, to teach them Christian customs and to help them with a supernatural charity. In the second place, even when the increased number of Chinese clergy will no longer need the aid of foreign missionaries, the Catholic Church in your nation, as in all the others, will not be able to be ruled with "autonomy of government," as they say today.¹¹ In fact, even then, as you well know, it will be entirely necessary for your Christian community, if it wishes to be part of the society divinely founded by our Redeemer, to be completely subject to the Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, and be strictly united with him in regard to religious faith and morals. With these words - and it is well to note them - is embraced the whole life and work of the Church, and also its constitution, its government, its discipline. All of these things depend certainly on the will of Jesus Christ, Founder of the Church.¹² By virtue of God's Will, the faithful are divided into two classes: the clergy and the laity. By virtue of the same Will is established the twofold sacred hierarchy, namely, of orders and jurisdiction. Besides - as has also been divinely established - the power of orders (through which the ecclesiastical hierarchy is composed of Bishops, priests, and ministers) comes from receiving the Sacrament of Holy Orders. But the power of jurisdiction, which is conferred upon the Supreme Pontiff directly by divine rights, flows to the Bishops by the same right, but only through the Successor of St. Peter, to whom not only the simple faithful, but even all the Bishops must be constantly subject, and to whom they must be bound by obedience and with the bond of unity.¹³ Finally by the same Divine Will, the people or the civil authority must not invade the rights and the constitution of the ecclesiastical hierarchy (Cf. Council of Trent, Sess. XXIII; De Ordine, Cann. 2-7; Vatican Council, Sess. IV; Canons 108-109).¹⁴ All ought to note - what to you, Venerable brothers and beloved sons, is evident - that We intensely desire that the time will soon come when the financial means furnished by the Chinese people will suffice for

the needs of the Church in China. However, as you well know, the offerings received for this from the other nations have their origin in that Christian charity through which all those who have been redeemed by the sacred blood of Jesus Christ are necessarily united to one another in fraternal alliance and are spurred by Divine Love to spread everywhere, according to their strength, the kingdom of our Redeemer. And this not for political or any profane ends, but only to put into useful practice the precept of charity that Jesus Christ gave to us all, and through which we are recognized as His true disciples (Cf. *John* 13. 35). Thus have the Christians of all ages voluntarily done, as the Apostle of the Gentiles related of the faithful of Macedonia and Achaia, who willingly sent their offerings "for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem" (*Rom.* 15. 26), and as the Apostle exhorted his children in Christ who lived in Corinth and Galatia to do the same thing (Cf. *I Cor.* 16. 1-2).¹⁵ Lastly, there are some among you who would wish that your Church would be completely independent, not only, as We have said, in regard to its government and finances, but also in regard to the teaching of Christian doctrine and sacred preaching, in which they try to claim "autonomy."¹⁶ We do not at all deny that the manner of preaching and teaching ought to differ according to place and therefore ought to conform, when possible, to the nature and particular character of the Chinese people, as also to its ancient traditional customs. If this is properly done, certainly greater fruits will be gathered among you.¹⁷ But - and it is absurd merely to think of it - by what right can men arbitrarily and diversely in different nations, interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ?¹⁸ Bishops, who are the successors of the Apostles, and priests, who according to their proper office cooperate with the Bishops, have been charged with announcing and teaching that gospel which Jesus and His Apostles first announced and taught, and which this Holy See and all the Bishops united to it have preserved and transmitted pure and inviolate through the centuries. The holy pastors, therefore, are not the inventors and the composers of this gospel, but only its authorized custodians and its divinely constituted heralds. Wherefore We Ourselves, and the Bishops together with Us, can and ought to repeat the words of Jesus Christ: "My teaching is not my own, but his who sent me" (*John* 7. 16). And to all the Bishops, in every age, can be directed the exhortation of St. Paul: "O Timothy, guard the trust and keep free from profane novelties in speech and the contradictions of so-called knowledge" (*I Tim.* 6. 20). And so also these words of the same Apostle: "Guard the good trust through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us" (*2 Tim.* 1. 14). We are not teachers of a doctrine invented by the human mind. But our conscience obliges us to embrace and follow what Jesus Christ Himself taught, and what He solemnly commanded His Apostles and their successors to teach (Cf. *Matt.* 28. 19-20).¹⁹ A Bishop, or a priest of the true Church of Christ, ought time and again to meditate on what the Apostle Paul said of his preaching of the Gospel: "For I give you to understand, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not of man. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it; but I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ" (*Gal.* 1. 11-12)²⁰. Being most certain that this doctrine (whose integrity We must defend with the help of the Holy Ghost) has been divinely revealed, We repeat these words of the Apostle of the Gentiles: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel to you other than that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema" (*Gal.* 1.8).²¹ You can easily see, Venerable Brothers and beloved sons, why he cannot be considered a Catholic or bear the name of Catholic who professes or teaches differently from what We have up to this point briefly explained. This includes those persons who have adhered to the dangerous principles underlying the movement of the "Three Autonomies," or to other similar principles.²² The promoters of such movements with the greatest cunning seek to deceive the simple or the timid, or to draw them away from the right path. For this purpose they falsely affirm that the only true patriots are those who adhere to the church thought up by them, that is, to that which has the "Three Autonomies." But in reality they seek, in a word, to establish finally among you a "national" church, which no longer could be Catholic because it would be the negation of that universality or rather "catholicity" by which the society truly founded by Jesus Christ is above all nations and embraces them one and all.²³ We want to repeat here the words that We have written on the same argument in the letter already

cited: "The Church does not single out a particular people, an individual nation, but loves all men, whatever be their nation or race, with that supernatural charity of Christ, which should necessarily unite all as brothers, one to the other.²⁴ "Hence it cannot be affirmed that she serves the interests of any particular power. Nor likewise can she be expected to countenance that particular churches be set up in each nation, thus destroying that unity established by the Divine Founder, and unhappily separating them from this Apostolic See where Peter, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, continues to live in his successors until the end of time.²⁵ "Whatever Christian community were to do this, would lose its vitality as the branch cut from the vine (Cf. *John* 15. 6) and could not bring forth salutary fruit" (AAS, 44: p. 135).²⁶ We earnestly exhort "in the heart of Christ" (*Phil.* 1. 8) those faithful of whom We have mournfully written above to come back to the path of repentance and salvation. Let them remember that, when it is necessary, one must render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and with greater reason, one must render to God what is God's (Cf. *Luke* 20. 25). When men demand things contrary to the Divine Will, then it is necessary to put into practice the maxim of St. Peter: "We must obey God rather than men" (*Acts* 5. 29). Let them also remember that it is impossible to serve two masters, if these order things opposed to one another (Cf. *Matt.* 6. 24). Also at times it is impossible to please both Jesus Christ and men (Cf. *Gal.* 1. 10). But if it sometimes happens that he who wishes to remain faithful to the Divine Redeemer even unto death must suffer great harm, let him bear it with a strong and serene soul.²⁷ On the other hand, We wish to congratulate repeatedly those who, suffering severe difficulties, have been outstanding in their loyalty to God and to the Catholic Church, and so have been "counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus" (*Acts* 5. 41). With a paternal heart We encourage them to continue brave and intrepid along the road they have taken, keeping in mind the words of Jesus Christ: "And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather be afraid of him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell . . . But as for you, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not be afraid . . . Therefore everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I in turn will disown him before my Father in heaven" (*Matt.* 10. 28, 30-33).²⁸ Certainly, O Venerable Brothers and beloved sons, the struggle imposed on you by divine law is not a light one. But Christ the Lord, Who has declared blessed those who suffer persecution for justice' sake, has commanded them to be glad and rejoice, for their reward in heaven will be very great (Cf. *Matt.* 5. 10-12).²⁹ He Himself will benignly assist you from heaven with His powerful aid, so that you can fight the good fight and keep the faith (Cf. *2 Tim.* 4. 7). Then too, the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, who is also the most loving mother of all, will assist all of you with her most efficacious protection. May she, the Queen of China, defend and help you in a particular way in this Marian Year, so that you may persevere with constancy in your resolutions. May you be aided by the Holy Martyrs of China, who serenely faced death for love of their fatherland, and above all for their loyalty to the Divine Redeemer and His Church.³⁰ Meanwhile may the Apostolic Benediction be for you an omen of heavenly graces, which in testimony of Our most special benevolence, We impart with much affection in the Lord both to you, Venerable Brothers and beloved sons, and to the whole and dearest Chinese nation. *Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, October 7, Feast of the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1954, in the sixteenth year of Our Pontificate.* **PIUS XII**