

## GREAT QUESTIONS OF THE DAY

THE AUSTRALIAN PLENARY COUNCIL'S  
PASTORAL LETTER

The following is the Pastoral Letter of the Archbishops and Bishops of the Australian Commonwealth in Plenary Council assembled to the clergy and laity of their charge:—

Venerable Brethren of the Clergy, Beloved Brethren of the laity,—

Having assembled at the call of the Chief Pastor of the Church to take counsel with one another and with our Reverend Brethren in the Sacred Ministry on matters affecting the welfare of the Church in Australia, and having with the Divine assistance agreed upon those things which it seemed right to us to ordain, we deem it our duty before separating to address to you some words of encouragement and exhortation.

## Growth of the Church in Australasia

In the first place, we invite you to unite with us in blessing the Father of Mercies for the favors He has abundantly showered on Australia, especially during the ten years that have elapsed since the Second Plenary Council was celebrated. The period has been one of quiet growth and consolidation, rather than of that pioneer missionary expansion which was distinctive of earlier periods of our history. Our Catholic population (in Australasia) has grown to something over a million (1,011,550). The clergy number over thirteen hundred; the teaching Brothers over six hundred; the nuns over five thousand five hundred. We maintain thirty-three colleges for boys and one hundred and sixty-nine boarding-schools for girls; two hundred and fifteen superior day schools; ten hundred and eighty-seven primary schools; ninety-four charitable institutions, and the children in Catholic schools number over one hundred and twenty-seven thousand. From these figures it can be seen that, although ours is a land which has developed and grown with the rapidity of adolescence, the Church has progressed also, even so as to keep well to the front among the most progressive institutions of the country.

## Singular Unity of Australian Catholics

While we thank God for these results which His Providence has achieved in us, we must thank Him particularly for two blessings which have been to our seeming the great means used by the Almighty to promote the Faith of Australia. These two features in our Christianity are the singular unity by which we Bishops are united with one another and with our priests and people and the uncompromising spirit of Faith which has filled and sustained the heart of Catholic Australia in its hard and costly struggle for the religious education of the children.

We characterise as singular the unity of Australian Catholicity, and to justify the epithet we would need to be able to claim something more than our share in that Catholic unity of Faith, worship, and obedience which has ever been the first and plainest of the marks of the Church founded by Christ on Peter. Of this singular unity which is so salient a trait of 'Australian Catholicity, there is evidence in the fact that now, for the first time within a period of twenty years, the Bishops of all this vast Commonwealth have harmoniously deliberated in Plenary Council, and also in the celebration so successfully carried out during the past five years of no less than two Australasian Catholic Congresses. While we thank God for this blessing of unity—the mark and the pledge of His Divine Protection—we exhort you most earnestly, Reverend Brethren and dear children, to cherish the gift most tenderly, and to do your part in praying for and ensuring its continuance. The visible cause of the Church's unity is dependence on the See of Peter; and we can claim for Australia that, though the farthest from Rome, and one of the latest born of the Church's great family, she does not yield to any in close attachment and love for 'this Chair of Peter, the principal Church whence comes religious unity.' (St. Cyprian, Ep. 55.)

## Zeal for Catholic Education

Australian Catholics have, from the beginning, been true to the instincts of Faith in regard to the education of their children. They have not been beguiled by the soft enticements of statesmen, nor discouraged by the weakness of non-Catholic fellow-Christians; but faithful to their trust as guardians of their children's faith, they have refused the free gifts of the State, and denied themselves in order to support schools where the religion of their little ones may be preserved and strengthened. By thus acting they have won the admiration of all who are capable of admiring self-sacrifice

in a noble cause. And, what is more, they have brought God's blessing on themselves and on all their religious undertakings.

## Confidence Inspired by the Church's Position

When we consider the position of the Catholic Church at the opening of the twentieth century of her existence, and especially her history during the past hundred years, our faith in her is comforted by manifest proofs that the guiding providence of God is directing her steps, and that the promise of her Divine Founder is in course of perfect fulfilment; 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against her.' (St. Matt., 16-18.)

It was expected by her enemies that the anarchy of the French Revolution would destroy the Church, as it did the thrones of Europe; and when Pius VI. died in exile at Valence, in 1799, they said the Church was to end with his life. But it was only by re-establishing the Church in France that Napoleon was able to bring back order and civil life to the empire he ruled. When again, blinded by the glare of victory, he became the persecutor of the Church, and dragged the Holy Pontiff, Pius VII., from Rome to Fontainebleau, the overruling power of God did make the arms drop from the frozen hands of his soldiers, and quickly brought the tyrant himself to sign his abdication in the very castle where he had held the Pope a prisoner.

The Church survived the Revolution; but it was destined to find in the succeeding years the number of its persecutors increased, and the area of persecution widened. The names of these enemies history does not record, and they are legion; for their names are covered by the darkness of secrecy, and they are leagued together in their unholy work. Liberalism was the name of which they boasted in the light of day:

## Freemasonry

is the name by which we best know the chief sect of their banded brotherhood. Opposition to the Church and, when they could, open persecution of her, were their works. Their spirit of opposition permeated all classes. In 1830 it drove the rabble of France to the desecration of altars and the murder of priests; and in 1870 it inspired the rulers of the nations to permit the spoliation of the Holy See, and the Chancellor of Germany to wage war on the Catholic Church as the enemy of culture.

In recent years despite its vaunted love of liberty, one of the great nations of the world has allowed itself to be dominated by this anti-Christian spirit, so far as to refuse to its own subjects the liberty to teach children, because they had devoted their lives to teach them Christianity. France, that was so long the most Catholic of nations, just now stands before the world as the destroyer of religious teachers, and the persecutor of the Church to which she owes most of the glories of her history. And it has been placed beyond all question, that the hidden spring and source of such strange action is the violent and widespread activity of that society which dreads the light of day, and seems to reckon not what injury it may cause to the nation, if only it may cripple the beneficent action of the Church of God.

In spite, however, of all the machinations of the powerful, notwithstanding Revolution and Freemasonry, the Church not only exists, but she is every day growing in the active zeal of her own faithful children, and in the respect of all honest men outside her fold.

## Relations of the Church and State in Australia

In our own land the Church enjoys a liberty which she fully appreciates. She can, in the memory of those now living, go back to her early days, ere yet the sun of liberty had risen on the Catholics of the British Empire, and recall cruel attempts to transplant in these sunny climes the thralldom of religious ascendancy, which had, 'in dark and evil days,' cast its blighting shadow over the life of a brave and generous people. But memory also recalls the failure that attended the attempt. Australia may rightly claim that she is a land of liberty, and Australian Catholics, who are so largely descendants of the martyr-nation of liberty, are not likely to prize their freedom lightly, nor to be backward, should the need arise, in defending it.

The Church in our Australian Commonwealth is free from any direct civil disability; and towards the throne of his Imperial Majesty, and the persons of the Governors, who represent him, is loyally affected in every dutiful manner. We share, none the less, the pain that all his Majesty's Catholic subjects feel, when they reflect that the Empire's law still requires their Sovereign to insult their religion when coming to his throne; and we now express our united hope that the blot of the anti-Catholic declaration in the Coronation Oath may soon be removed from the Statute Book of England.

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