

Anni Sacri

Combating Atheist

Pope Pius XII - 1950

To the Venerable Brethren the Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

The Holy Year, which is in the course of passing, has already furnished Us with more than one reason for joy and consolation. To Rome, whence the light of the Gospel teaching radiates since the origins of the Church, multitudes of the faithful have streamed from all parts of the world. They have come to the See of Peter not only to redeem their own faults, but also to expiate the sins of the world and implore the return of society to God, from Whom alone can come true peace of heart, civil concord and the well-being of nations.

2. And We know that these first groups of pilgrims form the vanguard of those who will come more frequently and in greater numbers during the favorable season. Therefore, the hope is warranted that from this still more salutary and abundant fruits will be harvested. Nevertheless, if these sights have given Us gentle comfort, reasons are not lacking for the anxiety and anguish which grieve Our paternal heart. And in the first place, although war has almost everywhere ceased, nevertheless, the longed-for peace has not come — a stable and solid peace which might happily solve the many and ever-increasing reasons for discord. Many nations are still opposed to each other; and as confidence lessens an armaments race begins, leaving the hearts of all overcome by fear and trepidation.

3. That which seems to Us not only the greatest evil but the root of all evil is this: often the lie is substituted for the truth, and is then used as an instrument of dispute. On the part of not a few religion is passed by as a thing of no importance, and elsewhere absolutely prohibited in family and social life as a remnant of ancient superstitions; public and private atheism is exalted in such a way that God and His law are being abolished, and morals no longer have any foundation. The Press also too often vulgarly reviles religious feeling, while it does not hesitate to spread the most shameful obscenities, agitating and with incalculable harm leading into vice tender childhood and betrayed youth.

4. By means of false promises a people is deceived and provoked to hatred, rivalry and rebellion, especially when the hereditary faith, the only relief in this earthly exile, is successfully torn from its heart. Disturbances, riots and revolts are organized and fomented in continuing series, which prepare for the ruin of the economy and cause irreparable harm to the common good.

5. We must above all deplore with overwhelming sadness that in not a few nations the rights of God, Church and human nature itself are outraged and trampled upon. Sacred ministers, even those invested with high dignities, are either driven from their proper Sees, exiled and imprisoned, or impeded in a manner preventing them from exercising their ministry. In the field of education, whether of lower or of university level, as well as in publications and the Press, permission to explain and defend the doctrine of the Church either is not given or is so restricted and subjected to such surveillance by official censorship that the arbitrary proposition

that truth, liberty and religion must submissively serve only the civil authority seems to be the established principle.

6. Since these innumerable evils spring, as We have said, from one source only, the repudiation of God and contempt for His law, it is necessary, Venerable Brethren, to offer to God fervent prayers and recall all to those principles whence alone can come enlightenment for minds, peace and concord for souls and well ordered justice between the various social classes.

7. As you know, once religion is taken away there cannot be a well ordered, well regulated society. In this point lies the urgency to spur on priests under your guidance in order that, especially during the Holy Year, they spare no efforts so that souls entrusted to them, with their false prejudices and erroneous convictions cast aside, and hatreds and discords settled, may nourish themselves on the teachings of the Gospel and thus participate in Christian life so as to hasten the desired renewal of morals.

8. And since the priest can reach neither everybody nor everything, and as his work is not always able to meet adequately all needs, those who serve in the Catholic Action ranks must offer the aid of their own experience and activity. No one must be idle and lazy in the face of so many evils and dangers while those in the other camp strive to destroy the very basis of Catholic religion and Christian worship. Let it never come to pass that “the children of this world are wiser than the children of light” (Luke xvi. 8); let it never be that the latter are less active than the former.

9. But human efforts are ineffective unless strengthened by Divine Grace. We exhort you, therefore, Venerable Brethren, to begin a veritable crusade of prayer among your faithful to implore from the Father of Mercies and the God of Consolation (2 Cor. i. 3) suitable remedies for the present evils. We intensely desire that, united with Us, they offer public prayers on March 26th Passion Sunday, when the sacred rites of the Church begin to commemorate the bitter sufferings by means of which the Divine Redeemer liberated us from slavery to the demon and led us back to the freedom of the sons of God. It is Our intention on that day to descend into the Basilica of St. Peter to unite Our prayers not only with those present but — as We hope — with those of the whole Catholic world. Let those who, because of illness or old age or other reasons, cannot come to church, offer to God with humble and trusting heart their sufferings and their fears so that the prayer of all, the yearning of all and the wish of all may be one.

10. Let all, united with Us in prayer, implore from Divine mercy that a new order, based on truth, justice and charity, may arise from the longed-for restoration of morals. May the Heavenly Light illuminate the minds of those who have in their hands the destinies of peoples; may they realize that just as peace is the work of wisdom and justice, so war is the fruit of blindness and hatred; let them consider that one day they must render account not only to history but to God’s eternal judgment.

11. Those who profusely sow the seed of hatred, of discord and of rivalry; those who secretly or openly arouse the masses and provoke rebellions; those who deceive with empty promises the easily agitated masses, even they must understand that the justice demanded by Christian principles, which gives birth to equilibrium and fraternal concord, is achieved not through force and violence, but with the application of the law.

12. Guided by the supreme light gained by collective prayer, let all be persuaded that only the Divine Redeemer can compose the many and formidable conflicts; only Jesus Christ, We say, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John xvi. 6), Who bestows celestial clarity to clouded minds and Divine strength to doubtful and indolent wills (Imitation of Christ, III, 50 8, 5); He alone can set on the road to eternal happiness the souls of men joined by the bond of brotherhood.

13. With faith, love and hope, therefore, We address to Him Our prayers. May He then, especially during this Holy Year, benignly look down upon humanity, oppressed by so many misfortunes, assailed by so many fears and by waves of so many discords. And as one day, by His divine sign, He calmed the tempest on the Lake of Galilee, so today may He quieten human storms.

14. Let the lies of the wicked be exposed by His light, let the surly arrogance of the proud be humbled, let the rich be led to justice, generosity and charity, let the poor and wretched take as their model the family of Nazareth, which also earned its bread through daily labor; finally, let those who hold the Government of State be persuaded that there is no more solid social foundation than Christian teaching and the safeguarding of religious liberty.

15. We desire, Venerable Brethren, that you make these things known to the faithful entrusted to your care and that you exhort them to pray fervently with Us to the Lord.

16. Confident that all will respond to our exhortations with loving willingness, with fullness of heart We impart to each one of you and all your faithful Our Apostolic Benediction, pledge of Our benevolence and token of heavenly favor.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, March 12th, 1950, the twelfth year of Our Pontificate.