

PATERNA CARITAS
ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII
ON REUNION WITH ROME

July 25, 1888

To Our Venerable Brothers Stephen Peter Patriarch of Cilicia, the Archbishops, Bishops, and Beloved Sons the Clergy, Monks, and People of the Armenian Rite in Grace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brethren, Beloved Children, Health and the Apostolic Benediction.

The fatherly love with which We regard the whole of the Lord's flock is so strong and deep that everything happening among the Christian body is felt by Us with constant and ready sympathy. Hence in proportion to the great and enduring sorrow with which Our soul was filled because certain members of the Armenian race held themselves aloof from fraternal communication with you, is the keen and long-desired joy which We feel now that the difference, by God's blessing, has been appeased. But while We congratulate you on the restoration of peace and unity, We cannot refrain from exhorting you earnestly to preserve with care, and even to increase, this evidence of God's goodness to you; but to obtain this grace, namely, to think and feel in unity on the doctrines of faith it is necessary that you should all preserve-as you now do - your obedience to the Apostolic See, and that you, beloved children, should well and truly strive to obey with all submission your Patriarch and the other Bishops who rightfully are placed over you. But since so many temptations arise to wean you from this religious unity - both from party strife connected with public life, and from distractions among your domestic circles - you will find your great defence from these evils in that loyal reverence and subjection of spirit, which is so conspicuous among you, towards the head of the Ottoman Empire, whose fairness of feeling, desire for peace, and good-will, evidenced on so many occasions towards Us, have been matters of universal observation. Dissension and party strife will cease among you if you preserve constantly the remembrance of what Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, wrote on perfect charity, which "is patient, is kind; envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil."(1) But this admirable unanimity of feeling, if accomplished among you, will be fraught with yet another good, so that you may, as we have said, reap even richer harvests from the restoration of peace and unity; it will turn to you the minds and hearts of others who, although they boast to belong to the same race as yourselves, still stand aloof from Us, and do not form part of the sacred sheepfolds of the flock over which We are set. Thus, looking upon the examples which you display of peace and brotherly love, they will be led easily to understand that the spirit of Christ is ruling you, since He only is powerful enough to join His followers in one mind and make them one body. May they recognise this and resolve to return to that unity from which their ancestors fell away! Hence, there will be in store for them untold gladness when they find themselves joined in faith to Us and to you, yea, and to all the faithful who call themselves Catholic, throughout the whole world; and they will know by experience what it means to dwell in the halls of the mystical Zion, to which it has been granted by the divine word to widen its dwelling and stretch the skin of its tents over the face of the whole earth.

2. Now for the accomplishment of this conversion it is necessary for you, Venerable Brethren, who rule the Armenian dioceses, and who, We know, will never be wanting in zealous exhortation or persuasive teaching, to give all your efforts. Moreover, We are anxious that they, who do not acknowledge Us, should be called back through you, in Our name and by Our words; for it is no shame - nay, it is praiseworthy in the highest degree - that a father should himself call his wandering and long expected children home - should even go forth with open arms to receive and welcome them. Nor do We think it possible for your words and arguments to fall on barren soil, for the great mercy of God which He has shown to the nations, supported by the humble - mindedness and docility of the Armenian people give Us hope for a favourable result. The testimony of history is full of manifold examples of their readiness to embrace truth once recognized, and their eagerness to retrace their steps if they see that they have fallen away from the right path. Nay, even these very men who fulfil the duties of religion in schism from you, boast that the Armenians were taught the faith of Christ by Gregory, a man of eminent holiness, who earned the surname of "the Enlightener," and they honour him as their father and patron with displays of much reverence and devotion. It is moreover recorded amongst them that this man undertook a journey to the City of Rome, to lay his faith and his obedience at the feet of the Roman Pontiff, St. Sylvester, who, it is said, received him with much affection and conferred upon him several privileges. We know, moreover, that many of those who afterwards ruled the Armenian Churches followed in the footsteps of Gregory - from their letters, their pilgrimages to Rome, and especially from their Synodal Decrees. Particularly memorable are the Decrees of the Armenian Fathers in the Synod of Sizeboli, held in the year 1307, on the duty of obedience to this Apostolic See: "As the body must obey the head, so the Universal Church (which is the body of Christ) should obey him who has been appointed by Christ the Lord, head of the whole Church." and explained more clearly in the Council of Adano in the 16th year of the same century. You are well aware also - to speak of less important embassies - what took place in the Synod of Florence; for when the Legates of the Patriarch Constantine V arrived there, they said that they had come to the head, to the shepherd, to the corner-stone of the Church, entreating Eugene IV, Our predecessor in the Vicariate of the Lord Christ, as head to sympathise with the members, as shepherd to gather together the flock, as corner-stone to strengthen the Church;(2) and bringing forth the symbol of their faith they asked, "If aught is wanting, instruct us." Then the Constitution of the Council, *Exultate Deo*, was published by the pope, in which he taught them all that he considered to be necessary for the right knowledge of Catholic truth; and upon this, the Legates, in the name of their Patriarch, and of the whole Armenian race, declared that they received the Constitution in entire submission and readiness to obey, "promising in the same name, as true sons of obedience, loyally to obey the behests and commands of the Apostolic See." On this account Azarias, Patriarch of Cilicia, wrote most truly in letters addressed to Our predecessor, Gregory XIII, dated April 10th 1585; "Behold we have found the Decrees of our predecessors on the obedience of Catholics and our Patriarchs to the Roman Pontiff, and on the submission of St. Gregory 'the Enlightener' to Pope St. Sylvester." Hence it has ever been the custom of the Armenian race to receive with honour Legates sent on any mission from the Apostolic See, and to carry out the commands of that See with religious care.

3. We may consider these facts to be of such force, that We trust many who hitherto have remained out of communion with Us will incline now to the renewal of it; and if a fear that they will not find the Holy See sufficiently interested in them, or will not be welcomed as lovingly as

they wish, is any reason for delay or obstinacy, bid them, Venerable Brethren, recall to their minds the acts of Our predecessors, who have never permitted the Armenians to feel the want of fatherly affection. For the Roman Pontiffs have always offered them a cordial welcome - whether as pilgrims or as refugees-and have even desired to open hospices for them. It is well known that Gregory XIII intended to fund a school for the education of Armenian youths, and when, cut off by death, he was unable to do this, Urban VIII partially effected it by receiving Armenians among other students into the immense college founded by him for the propagation of the faith. We, however, though Our lot has been cast in troublous times, were enabled by God's help to carry out more completely the plans of Gregory XIII, and We devoted a house of considerable size dedicated to St. Nicholas, at Tolentino, for the needs of Armenian students - which We have formally erected into their College. All this has been done in order to render due honour to the Armenian liturgy and language, which are immortalised in an abundance of writings which are at once ancient, graceful, and polished; for this object also it has been long the custom for one of the bishops professing your rite to remain always in Rome, and it is his duty to ordain the young Armenians whom the Lord has chosen for His vineyard. For these reasons a class of the Armenian language has long been an institution in the Urban College, and Pius IX, Our predecessor, arranged that there should be a professor in the Roman Pontifical Seminary to teach Our own students the language, literature, and history of the Armenian nation. Nor was the care of the Roman Pontiffs for that people confined to the limits of this city, for there are few things which they had so constantly at heart as extricating your Church from complication, healing the wounds inflicted upon it by the evils of the times, and consulting its interests. No one is ignorant of the zeal with which Benedict XIV strove that your liturgy might be kept in its entirety like that of other Eastern Churches, and that the succession of the Catholic Patriarchs of Armenia in the See of Szeboli might be restored. You are also well aware of the action taken by Leo XII and Pius VIII towards obtaining a prefect of civil affairs in the chief city of the Armenian Ottoman Empire, as was the privilege of other nations acknowledging the same rule. Finally, the action of Gregory XVI and Pius IX in the increase of episcopal sees in your country, and in giving to the Armenian Bishop of Constantinople an honourable rank and prestige, are of recent date; this being first accomplished when the Archiepiscopal and Primatial See was constituted, and again by the union made with it and the Patriarchate of Cilicia - under this condition, that the Patriarch should dwell in the capital of the empire. Lest, moreover, the distance intervening between the Armenian faithful and the Roman See might weaken the bonds between them, it was prudently arranged that there should be an Apostolic Delegate in the capital of the empire to take the place of the Pope. To the anxious care which We have felt for your nation you yourselves can bear witness, and We in Our turn testify to your goodwill towards Us, of which We have received proof many times.

4. Wherefore, since on the one hand popular feeling, inherited inclinations, and all the associations of the past unite in drawing the separated Armenians to the truth, and in a manner too strong to be resisted by a longer delay; and, on the other hand, the Holy See has always striven for a complete union with that nation, and for a recall to former obedience at times when they had fallen from it; you have, indeed, Venerable Brethren, many and most weighty arguments at hand to aid you in your persuasions, giving Us great hope that the old harmony will be completely restored; and this will prove not only of universal benefit in the eternal salvation of souls, but also in earthly happiness and glory, which may be piously desired. For history

testifies that among the bishops of Armenia, those shone above all the others with starlike splendour who adhered most closely to the Roman Church, and the nation fulfilled its greatest glory in the days when the Catholic religion was the most widespread.

5. That matters will end prosperously and as We wish, God the ruler of all can grant, Who "calleth whom he holdeth worthy, and to whom He willeth giveth the grace of faith."(3) Send up your prayers to Him, with Us, Venerable Brethren and beloved sons, that those of your nation who have brought by baptism into the Christian body and yet are separated from Us, may be moved by His bending grace, and may fill up the measure of Our joy by their return, "being of one mind, having the same charity, being of one accord, agreeing in sentiment."(4) Pray (in the words of the Armenian antiphon) that she may approach the throne of grace as intercessor who is the "glorious blessed, holy Mary, ever Virgin, Mother of God, Mother of Christ," that she may offer "Our prayers to her Son and Our God."(5) May the illustrious martyr Gregory "the Enlightener," lend his prayers to hers, that the work which he began in toil and in the heroic suffering of cruel torments, may be perfected and strengthened by him as the servant of the divine strength. Lastly, pray with Us, that the docility of the Armenians, and their return to Catholic unity may be an example and guiding light to others who indeed are Christians, but have seceded from Rome, so that all having returned to the home from which they fell away, there may be one fold and one shepherd.

6. And while We look forward to this in Our prayers, and in Our hopes, with heartfelt affection We grant to you in token of our kindness, Venerable Brethren, and to you all, beloved children, the Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, July 25th, 1888, the 11th year of our Pontificate.

LEO XIII

REFERENCES:

1. 1 Cor xiii, 4-5.
2. Labbaei *Conc. Collect.*, Suppl. v. 210.
3. S. Ambros. *in Luc.* c. iv.
4. Phil. ii, 2.
5. Antiph. Liturg. Arm.

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