

ECCLÉSIAE FASTOS

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS XII
ON ST. BONIFACE
TO OUR VENERABLE BROTHERS THE ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS,
AND OTHER LOCAL ORDINARIES OF GREAT BRITAIN, GERMANY,
AUSTRIA, FRANCE, BELGIUM AND HOLLAND
AT PEACE AND IN COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE

June 5, 1954

*Venerable Brothers,
Health and Apostolic Blessing.*

It is eminently fitting and desirable that the Church's history should not only be meditated on but also publicly celebrated; for it demonstrates the sanctity in every age of the society founded by Jesus Christ. And when the examples of virtue with which its pages are adorned are expressly set forth, they excite others to imitation and emulation according to their capacities .

2. We were very glad, therefore, to hear that those countries which owe a special debt of gratitude to St. Boniface intend to make the twelfth centenary of the martyrdom of this shining glory of the Benedictine order an occasion of special rejoicing and public prayer.

3. But if your countries have reason to venerate this saintly man and to recall his great achievements at this happy commemoration, much more so has this Apostolic See. Three times he undertook the long and arduous journey to Rome as a pious pilgrim, to kneel in reverence before the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles. Here also, with filial respect, he besought from Our predecessors, the mission which he so ardently desired of preaching Our Divine Redeemer's name to remote and barbarous tribes, and of bringing Christian civilization to them.

4. Boniface was Anglo-Saxon by birth. At an early age he strongly felt God calling him to leave his ancestral possessions and the attractions of a life in the world and to enter a monastery, within whose safe walls he could more easily devote himself to heavenly contemplation and the practice of the counsels of perfection. He answered the call; and in the monastery he made such rapid progress in the study of both liberal and sacred sciences and also in the practice of Christian virtues that he was elected Superior. But being endowed with a lofty and generous nature, he had long cherished the desire of going abroad to uncivilized countries, to bring them the light of the Gospel message and instruct them in Christianity. Nothing could detain or hinder him, neither the thought of exile, nor long and difficult journeying, nor the dangers he was likely to encounter in an unknown land. His was an apostolic spirit so active, so eager and so vigorous, that it could not be fettered by any merely human considerations.

5. About a hundred years previously, Britain, after many vicissitudes, had been brought back to the Christian religion by Our predecessor of immortal memory, Gregory the Great, when he sent thither a band of Benedictine monks under the leadership of St. Augustine. It is surely wonderful,

then, that in this short interval it should have been distinguished by so firm a faith and so ardent a charity that, like a river overflowing and irrigating the surrounding land, it should want to send many of its best sons to other nations to gain them to Christ and to bind them closely to His Vicar on earth. This seemed to be its manner of thanking God for having received the benefits of the Catholic religion, civilization, and Christian culture.

6. Winfred, afterwards named Boniface by Pope St. Gregory II, was undoubtedly outstanding among the missionaries for his apostolic zeal and fortitude of soul, combined with gentleness of manner. Together with a small but courageous band of companions, he began that work of evangelization to which he had so long looked forward, setting sail from Britain and landing in Friesland. However, the tyrant who ruled that country vehemently opposed the Christian religion, so that the attempt of Boniface and his companions failed, and after fruitless labors and vain efforts they were obliged to return home.

7. Nevertheless he was not discouraged. He determined, after a short while, to go to Rome and visit the Apostolic See. There he would humbly ask the Vicar of Jesus Christ himself for a sacred mandate. Fortified with this and by the grace of God he would more readily attain the difficult goal of his most ardent desires. "He came, therefore, without mishap to the home of the Blessed Apostle Peter,"[1] and having venerated with great piety the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, begged for an audience with Our predecessor of holy memory, Gregory II.

8. He was willingly received by the Pontiff, to whom "he related in detail the occasion of his journey and visit, and manifested the desire which for long had been consuming him. The Holy Pope immediately smiled benignly on him,"[2] encouraged him to confidence in this praiseworthy enterprise, and armed him with apostolic letters and authority.

9. The receiving of a mandate from the Vicar of Jesus Christ was to Boniface a mark of the divine assistance. Relying on this he feared no difficulties from men or circumstances; and now with the prospect of happier results he hoped to carry out his long cherished design. He traversed various parts of Germany and Friesland. Wherever there were no traces of Christianity, but all was wild and savage, he generously scattered the Gospel seed, and labored and toiled that it might fructify wherever he found Christian communities utterly abandoned for want of a lawful pastor, or being driven by corrupt and ignorant churchmen far from the path of genuine faith and good life, he became the reformer of public and private morality, prudent and keen, skilful and tireless, stirring up and inciting all to virtue.

10. The success of the apostle was reported to Our predecessor already mentioned, who called him to Rome, and despite the protest of his modesty, "intimated his desire to raise him to the Episcopate, in order that he could with greater firmness correct the erring and bring them back to the way of truth, the greater the authority of his apostolic rank; and would be more acceptable to all in his office of preaching, the more evident it should be that he had been ordained to it by his apostolic superior."[3]

11. Therefore he was consecrated "regional bishop" by the Sovereign Pontiff himself, and having returned to the vast territories of his jurisdiction, with the authority which his new office conferred on him, devoted himself with increased earnestness to his apostolic labor.

12. Just as Boniface was dear to St. Gregory II for the eminence of his virtue and his burning zeal for the spread of Christ's kingdom, he was likewise to his successors: namely, to Pope St. Gregory III, who, for his conspicuous merits, named him archbishop and honored him with the sacred pallium, giving him the power to establish lawfully or reform the ecclesiastical hierarchy in this territory, and to consecrate new bishops "in order to bring the light of Faith to Germany;"[4] to Pope St. Zachary also, who in an affectionate letter confirmed his office and warmly praised him;[5] finally, to Pope Stephen II, to which Pontiff shortly after his election, when already coming to the end of his life's span, he wrote a letter full of reverence.[6]

13. Backed by the authority and support of these Pontiffs, throughout the period of his apostolate Boniface traversed immense regions with ever-growing zeal, shedding the Gospel's light on lands until then steeped in darkness and error; with untiring effort he brought a new era of Christian civilization to Friesland, Saxony, Austrasia, Thuringia, Franconia, Hesse, Bavaria. All these lands, he tirelessly cultivated and brought forth to that new life which comes from Christ and is fed by His grace. He was also eager to reach "old Saxony,"[7] which he looked on as the birthplace of his ancestors; however, this hope he was unable to realize.

14. To begin and carry out successfully this tremendous undertaking, he earnestly called for companions from the Benedictine monasteries in his own land, then flourishing in learning, faith and charity, - for monks and nuns too, among whom Lioba was an outstanding example of evangelical perfection. They readily answered his call, and gave him precious help in his mission. And in those same lands there were not wanting those who, once the light of the Gospel had reached them, eagerly embraced the faith, and then strove mightily to bring it to all whom they could reach. Thus were those regions gradually transformed after Boniface, supported, as we have said, by the authority of the Roman Pontiffs, undertook the task; "like a new archimandrite he began everywhere to plant the divine seed and root out the cockle, to build monasteries and churches, and to put worthy shepherds in charge of them."[8] Men and women flocked to hear him preach, and hearing him were touched by grace; they abandoned their ancient superstitions, and were set afire with love for the Redeemer; by contact with his teaching their rude and corrupt manners were changed; cleansed by the waters of baptism, they entered an entirely new way of life. Here were erected monasteries for monks and nuns, which were centers not only of religion, but also of Christian civilization, of literature, of liberal arts; there dark and unknown and impenetrable forests were cleared, or completely cut down, and new lands put to cultivation for the benefit of all; in various places dwellings were built, which in the course of centuries would grow to be populous cities.

15. Thus the untamed Germanic tribes, so jealous of their freedom that they would submit to no one, undismayed even by the mighty weight of Roman arms, and never remaining for long under their sway, once they were visited by the unarmed heralds of the Gospel, docilely yielded to them; they were drawn, stirred and finally penetrated by the beauty and truth of the new doctrine, and at last, embracing the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ, willingly surrendered to Him.

16. Through the activity of St. Boniface, what was certainly a new era dawned for the German people; new not only for the Christian religion, but also for Christian civilization. Consequently this nation should rightly consider and regard him as their father, to whom they should be ever grateful and whose outstanding virtues they should zealously imitate. "For it is not only almighty God Who is called Father in the spiritual order, but also all those whose teaching and example lead us to the truth and encourage us to be strong in our religion. . . Thus the holy bishop Boniface can be called the father of all Germans, since he was the first to bring them forth in Christ by his holy preaching and to strengthen them by the example of his virtue, then finally to lay down his life for them, greater love than which no man can show."[9]

17. Among the various monasteries (and he had many built in those regions) the monastery of Fulda certainly holds first place; to the people it was as a beacon which with its beaming light shows ships the way through the waves of the sea. Here was founded as it were a new city of God, in which, generation after generation, innumerable monks were carefully and diligently instructed in human and divine learning, prepared by prayer and contemplation for their future peaceful battles, and finally sent forth like swarms of bees after they had drawn the honey of wisdom from their sacred and profane books, to impart generously that sweetness far and wide to others. Here none of the sciences of liberal arts were unknown. Ancient manuscripts were eagerly collected, carefully copied, brilliantly illuminated in color, and explained with careful commentaries. Thus it can justly be maintained that the sacred and profane studies Germany so excels in today had their venerable origins here.

18. What is more, innumerable Benedictines went forth from these monastic walls and with cross and plow, by prayer, that is, and labor, brought the light of Christian civilization to those lands as yet wrapped in darkness. By their long untiring labors, the forests, once the vast domain of wild beasts, almost inaccessible to man, were turned into fruitful land and cultivated fields; and what had been up to that time separate, scattered tribes of rough barbarous customs became in the course of time a nation, tamed by the gentle power of the Gospel and outstanding for its Christianity and civilization.

19. But the monastery of Fulda was in a particular way a center of divine contemplation and prayer. For there the monks, before undertaking the difficult task of evangelizing the tribes, strove through prayer, penance and labor to attain the heights of sanctity. Boniface himself, as often as he could withdraw briefly from his apostolic labors and rest a little, loved to repair there to refresh and strengthen his soul by divine contemplation and protracted prayer. "It is a forest place," he wrote to Zacharias, Our predecessor of holy memory, "in an immense wilderness, where among the tribes to whom we preach we have built a monastery and established monks who live the rule of our holy father Benedict, men of strict abstinence who get along without meat and wine, without strong drink, without serfs, content with the labor of their own hands. . . In this place, with the consent of Your Holiness, I propose to rest a little while, for a few days, and refresh my body worn out with age, then after death to lie here. For there are four separate tribes living in this surrounding territory. We have by the grace of God preached Christ's word to them, and with the help of your prayers, I can be of service to them as long as I have life and understanding. Relying on your prayers and the grace of God, I want to remain always in union

with the Church of Rome and in your service among the German tribes to whom I have been sent, and to obey your orders." [10]

20. It was especially in the silence of this monastery that he found the power from on high that strengthened him to go forth eagerly to fresh combat, to bring into the fold of Christ so many German tribes, to confirm them in the faith, and oftentimes to lead them on even to lives of evangelical perfection.

21. But if Boniface was the special apostle of Germany, nevertheless the zeal which burned within him for spreading the kingdom of heaven did not halt at the borders of that nation. The Church of Gaul, which from apostolic times had so generously embraced the Catholic faith, had sealed its faith with the blood of innumerable martyrs, and after the establishment of the Frankish empire, had written into the annals of Christendom pages worthy of the highest praise, at the time of St. Boniface was greatly in need of moral reform and the restoration of Christian life. For many dioceses were either without bishops or entrusted to unworthy ones; elsewhere superstitions of all kind, heresies and schisms brought disquiet to many consciences; with lamentable negligence long periods of time elapsed without any Church Councils being called, so necessary for preserving the purity of the faith, for restoring the discipline of the clergy, for reforming public and private morality. Very often consecrated ministers of religion did not measure up to the lofty dignity of their office; and often the people lay helpless in the toils of corrupt morality and an egregious ignorance of the sad state of affairs reached the ears of St. Boniface; no sooner did he learn that the illustrious Frankish Church was imperiled than he set about applying a remedy with energy and skill.

22. But also in these immense difficulties he felt the need of the authority of the Apostolic See. [11] Backed by this authority and acting as legate of the Roman Pontiff, [12] for almost five years he worked with indefatigable energy and consummate prudence to restore the Church of the Franks to its pristine glory. ". . . For then, with God's help and at the instigation of Boniface, the saintly archbishop, the Christian faith was reaffirmed, legitimate synods of orthodox churchmen were established in France, and everything was corrected and set right by the authority of the canons." [13] By the initiative and leadership of St. Boniface four Councils were held for this purpose, [14] one of them, the fourth, being a Council of the whole Frankish empire. The ecclesiastical hierarchy was restored, bishops worthy of the name and the office were chosen and assigned to their different sees, clerical discipline was re-instated and reformed as far as possible, the authority of the sacred canons was safeguarded, the morals of the people were carefully improved, superstitious practices were forbidden, [15] heresies repudiated and condemned, [16] and schisms happily healed. Then to the great joy of St. Boniface and all good men, the Church of the Franks was seen to flourish again and to shine with new splendor. Vices were stamped out, or diminished at least, Christian virtues were held in honor, and the necessary union with the Roman Pontiff was forged with stronger and closer bonds. The assembled Fathers of the Council which represented the entire domain of the Franks sent on to Rome, to the Sovereign Pontiff, the acts which they had solemnly decreed, as a splendid testimony of their faith and the faith of their people, to lay at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles this proof of their reverence, piety and unity. [17]

23. When by the grace and favor of God this very important task was done, Boniface did not allow himself his well-earned rest. In spite of the fact that he was already burdened by so many cares, and was feeling now his advanced age and realizing that his health was almost broken by so many labors, he prepared himself eagerly for a new and no less difficult enterprise. He turned his attention again to Friesland, that Friesland which had been the first goal of his apostolic travels, where he had later on labored so much. Especially in the northern regions this land was still enveloped in the darkness of pagan error. Zeal that was still youthful led him there to bring forth new sons to Jesus Christ and to bring Christian civilization to new peoples. For he earnestly desired "that in leaving this world he might receive his reward there where he had first begun his preaching and entered upon his meritorious career." [18] Feeling that his mortal life was drawing to a close, he confided his presentiment to his dear disciple, Bishop Lullus, and asserted that he did not want to await death in idleness. "I yearn to finish the road before me; I cannot call myself back from the path I have chosen. Now the day and hour of my death is at hand. For now I leave the prison of the body and go to my eternal reward. My dear son, . . . insist in turning the people from the paths of error, finish the construction of the basilica already begun at Fulda and there bring my body which has aged with the passage of many years. [19]

24. When he and his little band had taken departure from the others, "he traveled through all Friesland, ceaselessly preaching the word of God, banishing pagan rites and extirpating immoral heathen customs. With tremendous energy he built churches and overthrew the idols of the temples. He baptized thousands of men, women and children." [20] After he had arrived in the northern regions of Friesland and was about to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to a large number of newly baptized converts, a furious mob of pagans suddenly attacked and threatened to kill them with deadly spears and swords. Then the holy prelate serenely advanced and "forbade his followers to resist, saying, 'Cease fighting, my children, for we are truly taught by Scripture not to return evil for evil, but rather good. The day we have long desired is now at hand; the hour of our death has come of its own accord. Take strength in the Lord, . . . be courageous and do not be afraid of those who kill the body, for they cannot slay an immortal soul. Rejoice in the Lord, fix the anchor of hope in God, Who will immediately give you an eternal reward and a place in the heavenly court with the angelic choirs'." [21] All were encouraged by these words to embrace martyrdom. They prayed and turned their eyes and hearts to heaven where they hoped to receive soon an eternal reward, and then fell beneath the onslaught of their enemies, who stained with blood the bodies of those who fell in the happy combat of the saints." [22] At the moment of this martyrdom, Boniface, who was to be beheaded by the sword, "placed the sacred book of the Gospels upon his head as the sword threatened, that he might receive the deadly stroke under it and claim its protection in death, whose reading he loved in life." [23]

25. With this glorious death, which assured him a certain entrance into eternal happiness, St. Boniface finished the course of the life which he had spent wholly for the glory of God, for his own and his neighbor's salvation. After many vicissitudes his holy remains were brought "to the place which he had chosen in life," [24] that is, to the monastery of Fulda, where his disciples, singing holy psalms and shedding abundant tears, gave them worthy burial. As in the past, so today many come to venerate his resting place. There St. Boniface seems to speak as though still alive to all whose ancestors he converted to Jesus Christ and enriched with Christian civilization.

He speaks by the ardor of his charity and his piety, by the invincible courage of his soul, his inviolate faith, his strenuous zeal for the apostolate even to the end, and death which he made glorious by the martyr's palm.

26. Upon his death, all immediately began to praise his holiness, and to venerate him in private and in public. So quickly did his fame for sanctity spread that in Britain, shortly after his martyrdom, Cuthbert, the Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote as follows: "With love and veneration we place him among the outstanding teachers of the true faith. Wherefore in our general synod . . . we have introduced the date of his birth in heaven and that of his companions in martyrdom, and decree that it be solemnly celebrated each year." [25] With like zeal did the peoples of Germany, Gaul and other nations honor him from earliest times. [26]

27. Whence, Venerable Brothers, did St. Boniface draw that tireless energy, that unconquered strength of soul whereby he could surmount so many difficulties, endure so many labors, overcome dangers, and struggle on behalf of Christ's kingdom even to the shedding of his blood and the martyr's crown? Without a doubt he drew it from divine grace, which he ever sought in humble, persevering and fervent prayer. So strongly was he driven by love of God that his one aim was an ever closer union with Him, an ever lengthier converse with Him; his prime purpose was to preach God's glory to unknown tribes, and to bring them to Him in reverence and love. He could surely repeat with every right that phrase of St. Paul's: "With us, Christ's love, is a compelling motive." [27] And this other: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? . . . Of this I am fully persuaded; neither death nor life . . . neither what is present nor what is to come, no force whatever, neither the height above us nor the depth beneath us, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which comes to us in Christ Jesus our Lord." [28]

28. Whenever this divine love penetrates man's hearts and shapes and guides them, they can make their own the words of Paul: "Nothing is beyond my powers, thanks to the strength God gives me;" [29] so that nothing can resist or frustrate their efforts - this the history of the Church teaches us. What took place in apostolic times is then wondrously repeated: "the utterance fills every land, the message reaches the ends of the world." [30] In them the gospel of Jesus Christ has new sowers, men quickened by divine grace whom nothing can hold back, unless it be their chains, as is sadly evident in our times; only death can shackle them; and death, when made illustrious by the martyr's palm, always stirs up new multitudes, brings forth new followers of the Divine Redeemer, just as happened in Boniface's time.

29. From his letters it is abundantly clear how much this apostle trusted in divine grace, besought by humble prayer, to bring his undertakings to fruitful issue. In them he constantly begged for prayers from the Bishop of Rome, [31] from friends whose holiness he esteemed, from nuns whose communities he had either founded, or by wise counsel sought to lead to evangelical perfection; through their intercessions he hoped to receive divine help and grace. Let us quote, as an example, what he wrote to the "revered and dearly loved sisters Leobgith and Thecla, and to Cynehild": "I urge and direct you, beloved daughters, to pray to our Lord frequently, as we trust you do constantly, and will continue to do, as you have in the past . . . and know that we praise God, and our heart's yearning grows that God our Lord, refuge of the poor and hope of the lowly,

will free us from our straits and the trials of this evil age, that His word may spread, and the wonderful Gospel of Christ be held in honor, that His grace be not fruitless in me. . . And since I am the last and least of all the ambassadors whom the Catholic and Apostolic Church of Rome has destined to preach the gospel, pray that I may not die without some fruit for that Gospel." [32]

30. From these words shines forth not only his zeal for the spread of Christ's kingdom, a zeal strengthened by his own and others' incessant prayers, but also his Christian humility, and his close union with the Apostolic See of Rome. This union he carefully and earnestly preserved through his life; it could rightly be called the strong and unshakable foundation of his apostolic labors.

31. Though We have already touched on this point when We spoke about his pilgrimages to the tomb of blessed Peter and to the See of Christ's Vicar, We would like to enlarge on it somewhat, that his ready obedience to and respect for Our predecessors be more clearly seen as also the constant charity of the Roman Pontiffs towards him.

32. Indeed, when he first came to Rome to receive from Pope St. Gregory II his mandate to preach the Word, Our predecessor, after he had examined, approved and praised Boniface, wrote to him with fatherly kindness: "Your zealous and Christ-directed designs, which have been declared to Us, and the praiseworthy demonstration of your upright faith demand that We use you as Our helper in spreading the word of God, which through His favor has been entrusted to Us. . . We rejoice in your faith, and We desire to cooperate with graces so generously given . . . Wherefore, in the name of the indivisible Trinity, and by the unshakeable authority of the Prince of the Apostles, Peter, with whose teachings and office We are entrusted by (divine) dispensation, and whose Holy See We govern, We invest your humble person with a religious mission, and instruct you to make known, with the persuasive powers of truth, by revelation of the name of Christ our Lord and God, the gospel of God's kingdom to whatever peoples, lost in the darkness of unbelief, you may by his Grace reach." [33] Then, because of his outstanding virtues, having been consecrated bishop by Our predecessor, he pledged obedience to him and his successors, [34] and solemnly declared: "I will keep in all its purity the Catholic faith and by God's grace persevere in the unity of that faith on which certainly depends the salvation of all Christians." [35]

33. He very carefully showed reverence and obedience to St. Gregory II and his successors, and on occasion gave clear proof of this. [36] Thus, for example, did he write to Pope St. Zachary, immediately on learning of the latter's succession to the papal throne: "Never have we heard of gladder tidings which brought us more joy than the news that the Supreme Judge had entrusted to Your Holiness the government of the Apostolic See and the care of the sacred canons. Lifting our arms in prayer, we thanked God. So, just as if we were kneeling before you, we earnestly pray that we may merit, in perfect harmony with the sacred canons, to be obedient servants of Your Holiness, as we were devoted and submissive disciples of Your predecessors in Peter's chair. I cease not to call and urge to obedience to the Apostolic See all who wish to keep the Catholic faith and union with the Church of Rome, and whomever God gives me as followers or disciples in my apostolate." [37]

34. And in the last years of his life, when he was already an old man and broken by his labors, he humbly wrote the following to Stephen II, recently elected Supreme Pontiff: "With all my heart and all my strength I plead for Your Holiness' clemency, that I may be deserving to obtain from your gracious mercy the favor of being intimately united with the Holy Apostolic See and that among the disciples of Your Holiness, in the service of the Apostolic See, I may remain your faithful and devoted servant, just as I have been of three of your predecessors." [38]

35. Rightly therefore, on the occasion of the twelfth centenary of the beginning of this glorious martyr's apostolic mission among the peoples of Germany, Our predecessor of immortal memory, Benedict XV, wrote to the bishops of that nation: "Moved by this strong faith, inflamed by this piety and charity, Boniface most resolutely preserved that singular fidelity and devotion towards the Apostolic See which he seems to have first drawn from the contemplative exercises of the monastic life in his fatherland, which on the point of advancing into the open struggle of the apostolic life, he pledged by a sacred vow at Rome, over the tomb of Blessed Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and which finally he carried with him into the thick of the hazardous battle as the form of this apostolate and the rule of the mission he had undertaken. This same fidelity to the Apostolic See he never ceased to recommend strongly to all those whom he had brought forth through the Gospel, and to inculcate with such zeal that he seemed to have left it as his last will and testament." [39]

36. This manner of acting of St. Boniface, in which his respectful homage towards the Roman Pontiffs is seen most clearly, has always been faithfully followed, as you know well, Venerable Brothers, by all those who have kept in mind that the Prince of the Apostles was placed by our Divine Redeemer as the firm rock upon which is built the universal Church, which will last until the end of time, and that to him also were given the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the universal power of binding and loosing. [40] Those who reject rock and try to build without it certainly lay the foundations of a tottering edifice upon shifting sands; their efforts, works and undertakings, as all human things, cannot be solid, cannot be firm and stable, but - as both ancient and modern history show - must almost necessarily undergo change as time goes on, due to contradictory human opinions and the vicissitudes of human events.

37. We therefore consider it very opportune that through this solemn centenary celebration, under your guidance, the extremely close union of this outstanding martyr with the Holy See and his extraordinary accomplishments be shown in their full splendor; this will confirm the faith and loyalty of those who cling to the infallible Teaching Authority of the Roman Pontiffs, and it cannot help but arouse to salutary and deeper reconsideration those who for any reason whatsoever have been separated from the successors of Blessed Peter, and summon them, with the help of divine grace, to undertake deliberately and courageously that journey which would lead them happily back to the unity of the church. This is what We exceedingly long for and in suppliant prayer earnestly beg of the Giver of celestial gifts, namely, that the ardent desire of all good men be at last fulfilled, that all may be one [41] and all return to the unity of the fold, to be fed by a single Shepherd. [42]

38. The life of St. Boniface, which we have touched upon briefly, Venerable Brothers, teaches us all something else. On the pedestal of the statue which was erected in the monastery of Fulda in

1842 portraying the Apostle of Germany, one reads this sentence: "The word of the Lord lasts forever." [43] And indeed nothing more significant, nothing truer could have been inscribed there. Twelve centuries have passed, one after the other; different peoples have migrated back and forth; so many vicissitudes and horrible wars have followed one another; schisms and heresies have striven, and still strive, to rend the seamless garment of the Church; imperial might and the dictatorships of men who seemed to fear nothing, to shrink from nothing, have quickly crumbled; different philosophical conjectures, which strive to reach the peak of human learning, continually succeed one another with the passing of time and repeatedly assume a new appearance of truth. Yet the word that Boniface preached to the people of Germany, Gaul and Friesland, since it came from Him Who endures forever, flourishes also in our day and is the way, the truth and the life [44] for all those who willingly and gladly embrace it. Indeed also in our times there are not lacking those who reject this word, who try to corrupt it with fallacious errors, who finally, trampling upon the liberty due to the Church and the citizens themselves, strive to destroy and tear out completely this word from human hearts by means of lies, ill-treatment and persecution. Yet, as you well know, Venerable Brothers, this crafty art is not new; it was already known at the very beginning of the Christian era; Our Divine Redeemer Himself forewarned His disciples with these words: "Do not forget what I said to you: No servant can be greater than his master. They will persecute you just as they have persecuted me." [45] But yet that same Redeemer consolingly added: "Blessed are those who suffer persecution in the cause of right; the kingdom of heaven is theirs." [46] And again: "Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely because of me. Be glad and light-hearted, for a rich reward awaits you in heaven." [47]

39. We are not surprised therefore if, today also, the Christian name is hated in some places, if in many regions the Church in the discharge of her divinely given mission is obstructed by any and every means, if not a few Catholics are deceived by false doctrines and forced into the grave danger of losing their eternal salvation. May all of us be encouraged and strengthened by the promise of Our Divine Redeemer. "Behold I am with you all the days that are coming until the consummation of the world," [48] and may we obtain strength from on high through the intercession of St. Boniface who in order to spread the kingdom of Jesus Christ among hostile people did not flee from long labors, rough journeys and even death itself, which he courageously and confidently went to meet in the shedding of his blood.

40. Through his intercession may he obtain from God undaunted fortitude especially those who today are in the midst of grave perils because of the hostile machinations of God's enemies; and may he call back everyone to that unity of the Church which was his constant rule of life and action and his most earnest desire, urging him on during the whole course of his life to strenuous and unceasing labors.

41. This is the object of Our most earnest prayer to God while to all of you, Venerable Brothers, and to each of the flocks entrusted to your care, with Our whole heart We impart the Apostolic Blessing, that it may be a pledge of heavenly gifts and a token of Our paternal affection.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's the fifth day of June, on the Feast of St. Boniface, Bishop and Martyr, in the year 1954, the sixteenth of Our Pontificate.

PIUS XII

1. *Vita S. Bonifatii*, auctore Willibaldo, ed. Levison (Hannoveras et Lipsiae, 1905), p. 21.
2. Ibidem, e.l.
3. *Vita S. Bonifatii* auctore Otloho, ed. Levison, lib. I, p. 127
4. *S. Bonifani Epistolae*, ed. Tangl (Derolini 1916), epist. 28, p.49.
5. Cf. Ibidem, Epist. 51, 57, 58, 60, 68, 77, 80, 86, 87, 89.
6. Ibidem, Epist. 108, pp. 233-234.
7. Ibidem, Epist. 73, p. 150.
8. *Vita S. Bonifatii* auctore Otloho, ed. Levison, lib. I, p. 157.
9. Ibidem, ed. Levison, lib. I, p. 158.
10. *S. Bonifani Epist.*, ed. Tangl, epist. 86, pp. 193-194.
11. Cf. Ibidem, Epist. 41, p. 66.
12. Cf. Ibidem, Epist. 61, pp. 125-126.
13. *Vita. S. Bonifanii*, auct. Willibaldo, ed. Levison, p. 40.
14. Cf. Sirmond, *Concilia antiqua Galliae* (Parisiis 1629), t. I, p. 511 et sq,
15. Cf. *S. Bonifatii Epist.*, ed. Tangl, epist. 28, pp. 49-52.
16. Cf. Ibidem, Epist. 57, pp. 104-105; et epist. 59, p. 109.
17. Cf. Ibidem, Epist. 78, p. 163.
18. *Vita S. Bonifatii*, auct. Willibaldo, ed. Levison, p. 46.
19. Ibidem, e. l.
20. Ibidem, p. 47.
21. Ibidem, pp. 49-50.

22. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 50; et *Vita S. Bonifatii*, auct. Otloho, ed. Levison, lib. II, p. 210.
23. *Vita S. Bonifatii*, auct. Radbodo, ed. Levison, p. 73.
24. *Vita S. Bonifatii*, auct. Willibaldo, ed. Levison, p. 54.
25. *S. Bonifatii Epist.*, ed. Tangl, epist. 111, p. 240.
26. Cf. *Epistolae Lupi Servati*, ed. Levillain, t. I (Parisiis 1927), epist. 5, p. 42.
27. II Cor. V, 14.
28. Rom. VIII, 35, 38, 39.
29. Phil. IV, 13.
30. Ps. XVIII, 5; Rom. X, 18.
31. Cf. *S. Bonifatii Epist.*, ed. Tangl, epist. 86, pp. 189-191.
32. *Ibidem*, epist. 67, pp. 139-140.
33. *Ibidem*, epist. 12, pp. 17-18.
34. Cf. *Ibidem*, epist. 16, pp. 28-29.
35. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 29.
36. Cf. *Vita S Bonifatii*, auct. Willibaldo, ed. Levison, p. 25; *ibidem*, pp. 27-28; *S. Bonifatii Epist.* ed. Tangl, epist. 67, pp. 139-140; epist 59, pp. 110-112; epist. 86, pp. 191-194; epist. 108, pp. 233-234.
37. *Ibidem*, Epist. 50, p. 81.
38. *Ibidem*, Epist. 108, pp. 233-234.
39. Epist. enc. *In hac tanta*, AAS 11 (1919) 216-17.
40. Cf. Matt. XVI, 18, 19.
41. Cf. John XVII, 11.
42. Cf. John XXI, 15, 16, 17.
43. Cf. I Peter I, 25.

44. Cf. John XIV, 6.

45. John XV, 20.

46. Matt. V, 10.

47. Ibidem, 11, 12.

48. Matt. XXVIII, 20.

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