Letter from Cardinal Faulhaber to Gustav Stresemann, Nov. 6, 1923

Source: *Akten Faulhabers*, no. 146, pp. 318-320

Translation from the original German:

Esteemed Herr Reich Chancellor!

In your esteemed letter of October 13th you repeatedly expressed the idea, which also resounds to an extent in your public statesmanlike speech, namely that only in the moral rebirth of the German people lie the strong roots of its economic and social re-uplifting, and that the Catholic   
Church is in position to exert a great influence for this saving of the soul of the people. This idea is so near to my heart and contains such a high valuation of the harmonious cooperation of Church and State, that I feel myself obligated to thank Your Excellency most devotedly for the letter of October 13th.

Unfortunately, for reasons of health and for considerations of Church law, it is not possible for me to place myself at the disposal of the recommendation made in your letter. I may however give Your Excellency the assurance, without intervening in purely political developments and trying to take up today all the political issues of the moment, that the Church considers it a conscientious obligation to cooperate powerfully for the moral rebirth of the people, especially in the dismantling of a raging critical spirit and the fostering of a sense of authority, in the dismantling of hatred and opposition among classes and the fostering of a sense of the common good, in the dismantling of self-seeking and the fostering of a sense of self-sacrifice. I am writing this letter on my own authority, but I know that I am in unity of thought with the pastoral letter of the Bishops gathered in Fulda this year. How should men called to be statesman have the enduring courage to bear the burden of responsibility in government, when their permanent guideposts are destroyed and all proclamations and measures of the government are answered with unfruitful and purely negative criticism instead of positive cooperation?

How should we master the immensely growing economic crisis and the coming misery of winter with unemployment, if all the moral powers do not work together without distinction of denomination and social class and party? How otherwise do we intend to dismantle the hatred that rages blindly against our Israelite fellow citizens or wholesale against other ethnic groups, without any indication of guilt on the part of the individuals who are condemned, or how do we prevent a civil war that would inevitably bring new devastations and would seal the misery of our poor people with self-destruction? History testifies that civil wars are always the bitterest and bloodiest and most damaging wars.

I have never made a secret of my view that the federal structure of the Weimar Constitution was a statesmanlike necessity, in order to end the creeping civil war and to muster the valuable energies of the various elements of the German people for the service of the whole. I have never made a secret of my view that all efforts toward Reich school laws that until now have threatened the legal status of the rightly existing denominational schools and thereby infringed upon the freedom of conscience of parents, have shaken the trust of widespread elements of the people in the new Reich. I have never made a secret of my view that the loyalty of the Bavarian people to their Royal House is entitled to recognition under the principle of self-determination for a people. But all of that may proceed only according to the Constitution, in non-bloody ways, not through revolution and powerful bloody interventions in the course of events. With God’s help may we succeed first of all in giving our poor people bread and work, in coming to a peaceful resolution with neighboring countries on the basis of justice and mutual respect and in preventing a civil war.

It was a necessity for me, esteemed Herr Reich Chancellor, to write this answer to your esteemed letter.

With the expression of exceptional justifiable respect I remain,

M. Cardinal Faulhaber

Archbishop of Munich

Footnote by editor: Stresemann’s letter was a far-reaching emotional effort that proceeded from a visit by Mittelmann and Geier with Faulhaber on Sept. 23, 1923. Faulhaber wrote an explanation for the editor of Stresemann’s papers: “I wrote the letter in the evening hours of November 6, 1923 in one sitting and gave it to Baron Geier at 11 p.m. that night, which he, as far as I know, immediately telephoned to Berlin. I myself was never of the impression that the discussion of September 23rd had an inherent connection with the Herr Reich Chancellor’s letter of October 13th to me, and that the Herr Reich Chancellor was above all laying claim to my cooperation in the “Reich and Bavaria” question. My verbal and written response that it was impossible for me, for reasons of health, to place myself at the disposal of his recommendation, also could naturally only be taken as relating to the theme of moral renewal. If the Reich Chancellor, for his part, was of the view that I should first of all work for the strengthening of the unity of the Reich, then that would have best been accomplished here in this place, not by a trip to northern Germany. To that extent the book (about Stresemann), concerning what the goals of the interaction between the Herr Reich Chancellor and me were about, surprised me a little… For myself no political task crossed my mind, rather a moral task, and there, where I touched upon political questions in the letter, I touched upon them only from the moral aspect, not to shy away, rather because then just as now I cannot consider cooperation in purely political questions to be the task of a bishop. I have decided to provide this explanation because I see how one-sidedly some newspapers misrepresented and exploited my letter to the Herr Reich Chancellor, without covering the full meaning of his letter and mine.”