*Osservatore Romano*, Sept. 22, 1935, page 3

Headline: The Pastoral Letter of the German Bishops to the German Catholics

Subhead: Supreme duties – Clear refutations – Just and firm defense – Discipline operative for the Church and the Fatherland – Victory through faith and prayer

On the 20th of August the reverend Bishops of Germany were gathered at Fulda. The twenty-six Bishops in attendance at their annual Conference addressed a Pastoral Letter to the faithful, to be read on on the 1st of September in all the churches.

We publish it in its entirety, because there could not be a more authoritative and clear, more charity-filled and efficacious presentation to the consciences of German Catholics and all others, and all of world public opinion, on the current state of the religious “question” in Germany, the rationale of the Church, the groundlessness of the attacks, and the pious and civil solicitude of the Sacred Pastors for the defense of the Christian patrimony of the Fatherland.

Greeting and Benediction

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The Enemy Is Legion

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The Bulwark of Truth

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The Foundation of Order

Remain constant in the faith! This faith is the foundation of the moral order in the world. The pagan concepts of the world that want to rule the world without the commandments of God and without the grace of God do not offer the people any moral support. Without faith in God there is inevitably an impoverishment of human conscience and nobility, the spirit of solidarity and sacrifice, justice and social charity. We see currently in other countries the abysses of perversity toward which a people without faith in God are heading. The active idea of renewal of the German people will succeed only if it is founded, not on the changeable ground of human ideology, but on the rock of the Christian religion. The Catholic Church is founded and ordained first of all to give testimony to the truth of eternal life, to announce the precepts of the moral order, to dispense the Holy Sacraments, grace and redemption. Secondly the Church, as world history demonstrates, has also impressed optimal progress upon intellectual life and human art; has consolidated the social life of peoples; has inculcated respect and obedience toward the authority of the State and has spread in general, on all human cultural activity, an undeniable benediction.

The Inviolable Moral Law

The Christian faith proclaims an objective, divine moral law, which is most concisely expressed in the Ten Commandments of God and is not subject to change over time or to the arbitrary will of people. The fourth of these commandments demands respect toward the authority of the State and obedience to its laws. But when the laws of the State are in opposition to the natural law and the commandments of God, then this phrase applies, by which the first apostles allowed themselves to be whipped and thrown into jail: “We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts of the Apostles 5:29). We condemn all transgressions against the laws justly in force in the State. But we also condemn, as does the Gospel, that pharisaical pride which always casts a stone only at others and does not see the beam in their own eye; which for their own consciences covers everything with a mantle of silence and for the others makes of everything a great clamor. We condemn the use of dual weights and measures and the laying of transgressions committed by individual Catholics to the charge of the *totality* of German Catholics.

The touchstone for assessing the high or low level of morality among a people is the *morality of marriage*. The laws of marriage of the Catholic Church, such as the prohibition of marriage between close relatives or the prohibition of divorce, have been an immense benefit for the preservation of the purity of blood and hereditarily healthy families. It would be morally pernicious to want to consider marriage, contrary to Christian marriage laws, solely from the standpoint of preservation of the purity of the race. It would be a terrible disgrace to German honor in the sight of the whole world, to exhume and cast upon the people the old watchword of communism, affirming the equality of legitimate and illegitimate motherhood: that it would be equally acceptable for a young German woman to become a mother whether in marriage or outside marriage. Thus it is false to assert that Christian moral doctrine has degraded women and caused the decay of German culture. Also the slow death of peoples through diminution of the birth rate would be uniquely arrested by the moral force of the Christian religion, far better than by police measures. All efforts of renewal of the people and education of the people will find the best allies in the Church and in its fonts of grace. On the other hand, it will be impossible in fact to raise a morally healthy and strong youth without the directives and the fonts of grace of the Christian religion.

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Religion and Politics

Dear faithful! It is impossible, in a single pastoral letter, to respond one by one to all attacks. But toward several phrases of dispute we must give a brief response. Be steadfast in the faith when it is said: religion has nothing to do with politics, and so political Catholicism must be eradicated. We cannot repeat everything that has already been said in the past against this axiom of Marxism, “that religion is a private matter.” . . .

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Christian Public Life

Be steadfast in the faith when they want to proceed to eliminate all religious elements from public life, which only signifies the elimination of Christianity from public life. In this new watchword there is a contradiction against the Reich Concordat, which right in its first words “assures the *public exercise* of the Catholic religion.” . . .

The Christian Family

Be steadfast in the faith! The most secure means of recovery of faith and Christian life remains the Christian family. The parents have the first, inalienable right, natural and divine, in the field of the education of their children. . . .

The Denominational School

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Catholic Action

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An Oath of Allegiance

With all the pastoral affection of our hearts, we also reach out to the Catholic youth who are in the ranks of the state organizations. On the day of their first communion and again on the day of their confirmation, these youth have sworn fidelity to the Redeemer and to his Church. For German men, fidelity is not a vain utopia. German youth keep their word, which they have given to the authority of the State. But German youth owe no less to the sacred promise of the day of their confirmation. That is an act of faith in the truths of revelation and walking the path of the commandments of God. It is an act of infidelity to associate with mockery of the truths of the faith . . . We note with great concern the anti-Church content from some heads of youth organizations and some bulletins for young people. Yet, a greater heroism is revealed in the one who comes forward and announces eagerness to go to church, than in the one who mocks those who go to church. Similar mockery also offended our brave Schlageter, who, before his death, courageously made a manly confession and received Holy Communion.

Charity and Discipline

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Place a guard on your ears and do not listen to the alarming voices that speak against the authority of the State, be afraid of sin, which consists of repeating such rumors. The eighth commandment not only prohibits lies and slanders, but also prohibits the spreading of lies and slanders. So help to moderate the violent tone that is currently in vogue in public discussions. This will be the best answer to all accusations; Catholics will distinguish themselves by the conscientiousness of their professions and the conscientiousness of their spirit of sacrifice and will be fathers of exemplary families and faithful and dutiful employees of the State.

Unity in the Church

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