

SPECTATA FIDES (On Christian Education)

Pope Leo XIII

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on 27 November 1885.

To Our Venerable Brethren, Henry Edward, Cardinal Priest of the Holy Roman Church, of the Title of SS. Andrew and Gregory on the Coelian Hill, Archbishop of Westminster, and the other Bishops of England.

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

Your proved fidelity and singular devotion to this Apostolic See are admirably shown in the Letter which We have lately received from you. Our pleasure in receiving it is indeed increased by the further knowledge which it gives Us of your great vigilance and anxiety, in a matter where no care can be too great: We mean the Christian education of your children, upon which you have lately taken counsel together, and have reported to us the decisions to which you came.

2. In this work of so great moment, Venerable Brethren, We rejoice much to see that you do not work alone; for We know how much is due to the whole body of your clergy. With the greatest charity, and with unconquered efforts, they have provided schools for their children; and, with wonderful diligence and assiduity, they endeavor by their teaching to form them to a Christian life, and to instruct them in the elements of knowledge. Wherefore, with all the encouragement and praise that Our voice can give, We bid your clergy to go on in their meritorious work, and to be assured of Our special commendation and good will, looking forward to a far greater reward from our Lord God for Whose sake they are laboring.

3. Not less worthy of commendation is the generosity of Catholics in this matter. We know how readily they supply what is needed for the maintenance of schools; not only those who are wealthy, but those also who are of slender means, and poor; and it is beautiful to see how, often from the earnings of their poverty, they willingly contribute to the education of children.

4. In these days, and in the present condition of the world, when the tender age of childhood is threatened on every side by so many and such various dangers, hardly anything can be imagined more fitting than the union with literary instruction of sound teaching in faith and morals. For this reason We have more than once said that We strongly approve of the Voluntary schools, which, by the work and liberality of private individuals, have been established in France, in Belgium, in America, and in the colonies of the British Empire. We desire their increase, as much as possible, and that they may flourish in the number of their scholars. We Ourselves also, seeing the condition of things in this city, continue, with the greatest effort and at great cost, to provide an abundance of such schools for the children of Rome. For it is in and by these schools that the Catholic faith, our greatest and best inheritance, is preserved whole and entire. In these schools the liberty of parents is respected; and, what is most needed, especially in the prevailing license of opinion and of action, it is by these schools that good citizens are brought up for the State; for there is no better citizen than the man who has believed and practiced the Christian faith from his childhood. The beginning and, as it were, the seed of that human perfection which Jesus Christ gave to mankind, are to be found in the Christian education of the young; for the future condition of the State depends upon the early training of its

children. The wisdom of our forefathers, and the very foundations of the State, are ruined by the destructive error of those who would have children brought up without religious education. You see, therefore Venerable Brethren, with what earnest forethought parents must beware of entrusting their children to schools in which they cannot receive religious teaching.

5. In your country of Great Britain We know that, besides yourselves, very many of your nation are not a little anxious about religious education. They do not in all things agree with Us; nevertheless they see how important, for the sake both of society and of men individually, is the preservation of that Christian wisdom which your forefathers received through St. Augustine, from Our Predecessor, Gregory the Great: which wisdom the violent tempests that came afterwards have not entirely scattered. There are, as We know, at this day, many of an excellent disposition of mind, who are diligently striving to retain what they can of the ancient faith, and who bring forth many and great fruits of charity. As often as We think of this, so often are we deeply moved, for We love with a paternal charity that island which was not undeservedly called the Mother of Saints; and We see, in the disposition of mind of which We have spoken, the greatest hope and, as it were, a pledge of the welfare and prosperity of the British people.

6. Go on, therefore, Venerable Brethren, in making the young your chief care; press onward in every way your episcopal work; and cultivate with alacrity and hopefulness whatever good seeds you find: for God, Who is rich in mercy will give the increase.

7. As a pledge of gifts from above, and in witness of Our good will, We lovingly grant in the Lord to you, and to the clergy and people committed to each one of you, the Apostolic Benediction.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the 27th day of November, in the year 1885, the eighth year of Our Pontificate.

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