

## ON FRENCH ASSOCIATIONS OF WORSHIP

### GRAVISSIMO OFFICII MUNERE

Encyclical of Pope Pius X promulgated on August 10, 1906.

To Our Venerable Brethren, the Archbishops, and Bishops, of France.

Venerable Brethren, Health and the Apostolic Benediction.

We are about to discharge today a very grave obligation of Our office, an obligation which We assumed towards you when We announced, after the promulgation of the law creating a rupture between the French Republic and the Church, that We should indicate at a fitting time what it might seem to Us ought to be done to defend and preserve religion in your country. We have allowed you to wait until today for the satisfaction of your desires, by reason not only of the importance of this great question, but also and above all by reason of the quite special charity which binds Us to you and to all your interests because of the unforgettable services rendered to the Church by your nation.

2. Therefore, after having condemned, as was Our duty, this iniquitous law, We have examined with greatest care whether the articles of the said law would leave Us any means of organizing religious life in France in such a way as to safeguard from injury the sacred principles on which Holy Church reposes. To this end it appeared good to Us both to take the counsel of the assembled episcopate and to prescribe for your general assembly the points which ought to be the principal objects of your deliberations. And now, knowing your views as well as those of several cardinals, and after having maturely reflected and implored by the most fervent prayers the Father of Lights, We see that We ought to confirm fully by Our Apostolic authority the almost unanimous decision of your assembly.

3. It is for this reason that, with reference to the associations for public worship as the law establishes them, we decree that it is absolutely impossible for them to be formed without a violation of the sacred rights pertaining to the very life of the Church.

4. Putting aside, therefore, these associations which the knowledge of Our duty forbids us to approve, it might appear opportune to examine whether it is lawful to make trial in their place of some other sort of associations at once legal and canonical, and thus to preserve the Catholics of France from the grave complications which menace them. Of a certainty, nothing so engrosses and distresses Us as these eventualities; and would to Heaven that We had some hope of being able, without infringing the rights of God, to make this essay, and thus to deliver Our well-beloved sons from the fear of such manifold and such great trials.

5. But as this hope fails Us while the law remains what it is, We declare that it is not permissible to try this other kind of association as long as it is not established in a sure and legal manner that the Divine constitution of the Church, the immutable rights of the Roman Pontiff and of the Bishops, as well as their authority over the necessary property of the Church and particularly over the sacred edifices, shall be irrevocably placed in the said associations in full security. To desire the contrary is impossible for us, without betraying the sanctity of Our office and

bringing about the ruin of the Church of France.

6. It remains, therefore, for you, Venerable Brethren, to set yourselves to work and to employ all means which the law recognizes as within the rights of all citizens to arrange for and organize religious worship. In a matter so important and so arduous you will never have to wait for Our assistance. Absent in body, We shall be with you in thought and in heart, and We shall aid you on every occasion with Our counsel and with Our authority. Take up with courage the burden We impose upon you under the inspiration of Our love for the Church and for your country, and entrust the result to the all-foreseeing goodness of God, Whose help, We are firmly convinced, will not, in His own good time, be wanting to France.

7. It is not difficult to foresee the nature of the recriminations which the enemies of the Church will make against Our present decree and Our orders. They will endeavor to persuade the people that We have not had the interests of the Church of France solely in view; that We have had another design foreign to religion; that the form of the Republic in France is hateful to Us, that in order to overthrow it We are seconding the efforts of the parties hostile to it; and that We refuse to France what the Holy See has without difficulties accorded to other nations. These recriminations, with others of the same sort, which, as can be foreseen from certain indications, will be disseminated among the public in order to excite irritation, We denounce now and henceforth with the utmost indignation as false; and it is incumbent upon you, Venerable Brethren, as upon all good men, to refute them in order that they may not deceive simple and ignorant people.

8. With reference to the special charge against the Church of having been more accommodating in a similar case outside France, you should explain that the Church has acted in this way because the situations were quite different, and above all because the Divine attributes of the hierarchy were, in a certain measure, safeguarded. If any State has separated from the Church, while leaving to her the resource of the liberty common to all and the free disposal of her property, that State has without doubt, and on more than one ground, acted unjustly; but nevertheless, it could not be said that it has created for the Church a situation absolutely intolerable.

9. But it is quite otherwise today in France; there the makers of this unjust law wished to make it a law, not of separation, but of oppression. Thus they affirmed their desire for peace, and promised an understanding; and they are now waging an atrocious war against the religion of the country and hurling the brand of the most violent discords, and thus inciting the citizens against each other, to the great detriment, as every one sees, of the public welfare itself.

10. Assuredly they will tax their ingenuity to throw upon Us the blame for this conflict and for the evils resulting therefrom. But whoever loyally examines the facts of which We have spoken in the Encyclical "Vehementer Nos" will be able to see whether We have deserved the least reproach--We, who, after having patiently borne with injustice upon injustice in Our love for the beloved French nation, finally find Ourselves summoned to go beyond the last holy limits of Our Apostolic duty, and We declare that We will not go beyond them--or rather whether the fault does not lie entirely with those who in hate of the Apostolic name have gone to such extremities.

11. Therefore, if they desire to show Us their submission and their devotion, let the Catholic men of France struggle for the Church in accordance with the directions We have already given them, that is to say, with perseverance and energy, and yet without acting in a seditious and violent manner. It is not by violence, but by firmness, that, fortifying themselves in their good right as within a citadel, they will succeed in breaking the obstinacy of their enemies; let them well understand, as We have said and as we repeat that their efforts will be useless unless they unite in a perfect understanding for the defense of religion.

12. They now know Our verdict on the subject of this nefarious law: they should wholeheartedly conform to it, and whatever the opinions of some or others of them may have been hitherto during the discussion of the question, We entreat them all that no one shall permit himself to wound anyone whomsoever on the pretext that his own way of seeing things is the best. What can be done by concord of will and union of forces, let them learn from their adversaries; and just as the latter were able to impose on the nation the stigma of this criminal law, so by their united action will our people be able to eliminate and remove it.

13. In this hard trial of France, if all those who wish to defend with all their power the supreme interests of their country work as they ought to do in union among themselves with their Bishops and with Ourselves for the cause of religion, far from despairing of the welfare of the Church of France, it is to be hoped, on the contrary, that she will be restored to her former prosperity and dignity. We in no way doubt that the Catholics will fully comply with Our directions, and conform with Our desires: and We shall ardently seek to obtain for them by the intercession of Mary, the Immaculate Virgin, the aid of the Divine goodness.

14. As a pledge of heavenly gifts and in testimony of Our paternal benevolence, We impart with all Our heart the Apostolic Benediction to you, Venerable Brethren, and to the whole French nation.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on August 10, the Feast of St. Lawrence, the Martyr, in the year 1906, and the fourth of Our Pontificate.

Made available to the net by:  
Paul Halsall  
Halsall@murray.fordham.edu