

CHAPTER X

THE CHURCH'S OBLIGATION TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL TO ALL NATIONS OF THE WORLD

45. The Existence and Basis of the Task.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said of himself, "I have come to cast fire on the earth, and how I desire that it be kindled" (Lk 12:49), and when he was about to return from this world to the Father, he commanded the Apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations: "Going into the whole world, preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). The Apostles experienced and acknowledged this command as a true necessity imposed on themselves. The Apostle says, "If I preach the Gospel, it is no glory to me, for necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). This greatest and holiest of duties was not to come to an end with their earthly lives, but was to be continued by the Church until the end of the world.¹ Indeed, it is a part of that chief mission of the Church by which it is to spread the true worship of God in living faith and love to the very ends of the earth and to make all men sharers in Christ's redemption so that they may attain eternal happiness.² The duty to preach the Gospel to all nations and the right to fulfil it derive from the primal right of Christ himself, for he solemnly said, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Going, therefore, teach all nations" (Mt 28:19).

46. The Nature of the Task.

Since it was conferred on the Church by its divine Founder, this duty is of divine origin. As is clear from the words of Christ, it embraces all men and all parts of the world.³ For the Church must perpetuate the work of Christ who came down from heaven and became incarnate for the salvation of the whole world. Everywhere on earth, therefore, independently of any human power, the Church has the inalienable right to send preachers of the Gospel,⁴ to establish Christian communities, by baptism to make people her members, and to exercise over them, as her subjects, her power to teach, rule, and sanctify.⁵

No civil community, therefore, should consider that it can legitimately oppose the fulfilment of this mission divinely entrusted to the Church for the whole world.⁶ For Catholic doctrine contains nothing that is not supremely consonant with human reason, most in harmony with human dignity, and so perfective of human life, individual and social, that, if citizens imbued with the spirit of Christ were to devote themselves to the common good, they would be for the state what the soul is to a healthy body.⁷ Much less should a civil society think that it can impede the exercise of this mission in order to gain temporal benefits. For we are to make such use of temporal goods that we do not lose eternal goods.⁸

Some people think that it possible to oppose to the preaching of the Gospel the just and legitimate desire to preserve those true benefits which, as a sacred heritage, constitute a nation's own distinctive character. This is not only an error, it also harms the good of their own people. For in the forms of human and civic life proper to any nation, in the customs received from ancestors, and in traditional institutions, the law of the Gospel refuses only what is contrary to natural reason and to the divine law. Whatever truth, goodness, nobility, or beauty any nation

possesses as its own character and genius, the Church insists must be preserved and, in accordance with her role, she raises all that to a higher order.⁹

The Church can never tolerate that her right to preach the Gospel be taken from her; nor can she ever cease to undertake it. If she did, she would not be fulfilling her chief mission; she would be failing to glorify God her Savior; she would be depriving people of the ordinary means of salvation. If civil societies try to prevent her from exercising her right and duty, the Church cannot give in to them; she has to resist even to the point of shedding her blood; for, as the Apostle says, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

The holy Synod, therefore, solemnly proclaims before all peoples the right of the Church to preach the Gospel to all the nations of the world and to offer them all the helps to salvation. It also admonishes all who exercise authority over peoples not to oppose the full freedom of the Church to fulfil this task, but rather to support its exercise in the nations which divine Providence has entrusted to them.

*47. Who have the Power and Duty to Preach the Gospel, and how they are to Exercise it.*¹⁰

Concern for the preaching of Christ's Gospel throughout the world belongs to the body of pastors along with the Vicar of Christ, for it was to them in common that Christ gave the command and imposed the common duty.¹¹ All bishops, therefore, and not only bishops and vicars apostolic living in the missions, along with their Head, should be concerned with this apostolic task of proclaiming the faith to all nations.¹² But what is commanded of all the Apostles and of their successors falls principally upon Peter and his successors, the Roman Pontiffs, to whom the Lord entrusted the totality of his flock. The Roman Pontiff, therefore, has the supreme, absolute, and universal right to send preachers of the faith into the whole world, and he has the duty to strive with all his skill that the Church be spread everywhere and that all men become sharers in the redemption of Christ.¹³ Individual bishops have not only the right and duty with all their energies to see to it that unbelievers living in their territories are evangelized;¹⁴ out of the concern with which they are required to promote the good of the universal Church in their own dioceses, they must also encourage vocations to the missions. They must not, moreover, cease promoting with all their hearts those missionary works by which the spiritual and temporal needs of universal evangelization are provided for.¹⁵ Secular and religious priests, religious men and women, and all the faithful can be endowed by the Sacred Hierarchy with a mandate, so that each in his own way can provide assistance to the fulfilment of this supreme task of the Church. For all, as members of the Mystical Body of Christ, must contribute as much as possible to its growth (see Eph 4:16; Col 2:19).¹⁶ Religion and charity, furthermore, always require of all Catholics that, grateful to God for the very precious gift of the faith they have received, they never let pass any opportunity to communicate that gift to others¹⁷ or to assist with their prayers, contributions, and other means¹⁸ those who are actively engaged in fulfilling the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will always be present to the Church lest it ever fail to proclaim the Gospel to all nations, according to the divine promise, "Behold, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world" (Mt 28:20).

NOTES

¹ See Benedict XV, Enc. *Maximum illud*, 30 Nov. 1919, *AAS* 11 (1919), 440-55; John XXIII, Enc. *Princeps Pastorum*, 18 Nov. 1959, *AAS* 51 (1959), 834ff, 845ff.

² Pius XI, Enc. *Rerum Ecclesiae*, 28 Feb. 1926, *AAS* 18 (1926), 65: "The Church arose for no other purpose than to make all men sharers in the saving redemption by spreading the Kingdom of God throughout the world"; Pius XII, Enc. *Fidei donum*, 21 April 1957, *AAS* 49 (1957), 237, citing the Address of 24 Nov. 1946 (*Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, VIII, p. 328); John XXIII, *Princeps Pastorum*, l.c.

³ See Mt. 28:18-20; Mk 16:15,20; Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8.

⁴ Code of Canon Law, c. 1322:2: "Independently of any civil authority, the Church has the right and duty to teach all nations the doctrine of the Gospel."

⁵ St. Augustine, *Letter 199 to Hesychius*, c. 12 (PL 33, 922-24); St. Augustine teaches that the goal of the preaching of the Gospel is that the Church may be established everywhere to render God the worship due him; c. 923: "Among whatever nations the Church does not yet exist, it must be established there"; St. Thomas, *Summa theol.*, I-II, q. 106, a. 4, ad 4; Pius XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, l.c., p. 74: "For what other reason, we ask, are there missions except that the Church be established and strengthened in so vast an immensity of places?" Pius XII, *Reply to the Homage of the Pontifical Missionary Works*, 24 June 1944, *AAS* 36 (1944), 207-08, 210; Letter *Perlibenti quidem animo*, 9 August 1950, *AAS* 42 (1950), 727; Enc. *Evangelii Praecones*, 2 June 1951, *AAS* 43 (1951), 507: "As everyone knows, the first aim of these expeditions is that the light of Christian truth should shine more splendidly among new nations and that there should be new Christians. But the final goal which must be pursued ... is that the Church should be firmly established among other peoples and that it have its own hierarchy, drawn from among the native people;" *Fidei donum*, l.c., p. 228.

⁶ The following defend this right with regard to the civil authority, whether Catholic or non-Catholic: F. Suarez, *De Fide*, disp. XVII, sect. I; F. Vittoria, *De Indis*, Rel. prior, sect. 3; D. Scoto, *In IV Sent.*, D. 5, q. un., a. 10; De Lugo, *De virt. Fidei Divinae*, d. XIX, sect. II, #1; Salmeron, *In Ev. et Act. Apost.*, l. XI, tract. XXXIII; l. XII, tract. XXXVIII.

The following allude to this right of the Church in the question about the nature of the teaching office: Franzelin, *De Ecclesia Christi*, Theses (Rome, 1887), pp. 58-60; Billot, *Tractatus de Ecclesia Christi*, II (Rome, 1899), pp. 64ff; Salaverri, *De Ecclesia Christi*, in *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, I (Madrid, 1950), pp. 525, 532ff; Journet, *L'Eglise du Verbe Incarné*, II (Paris, 1951), pp. 1223-1251 (Missiology); H. de Lubac, *Le fondement théologique des Missions* (Paris, 1946).

Canonical experts more explicitly discuss this right with regard to the civil authorities. For example: Wernz-Vidal, *Ius canonicum*, IV/II (Rome, 1935), pp. 6-7; G. Vromant, *Ius Missionarium* (Louvain, 1934), P. II, c. 1, pp. 50-56; G. Sartori, *Iuris Missionarii elementa* (Rome, 1951), pp. 41-42.

⁷ See *Letter to Diognetes*, ch. 6 (PG 2, 1176).

⁸ See the Oration for the third Sunday after Pentecost.

⁹ This paragraph is drawn from several documents of Pius XII: Enc. *Summi Pontificatus*, l.c., pp. 428-29; Address *Vivamente gradito*, 24 June 1944, *AAS* 36 (1944), 210; *Evangelii Praecones*, l.c., pp. 521-24. John XXIII, *Princeps Pastorum*, l.c., pp. 843ff, 848, 854.

¹⁰ For the whole paragraph, see note 6.

¹¹ St. Celestine, *Letter to Syn. of Ephesus* (Mansi, 4, 1283); Benedict XV, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, l.c., pp. 68-69; Pius XII, *Fidei donum*, l.c., p. 237.

¹² St. Celestine, l.c.; Benedict XV, *Maximum illud*, l.c., pp. 440, 442; Pius XII, *Fidei donum*, l.c., p. 237.

¹³ In addition to the documents cited in n. 11, see: Leo XIII, Enc. *Grande munus*, 30 Sept. 1880, *ASS* 13 (1880), 145: "The great task of spreading Christianity which was entrusted in a particular way to St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and to his successors impels the Roman Pontiffs to see that heralds of the holy Gospel are sent at various times to the various nations of the world;" Code of Canon Law, cc. 1327 and 1350:2; St. Bernard, *De consideratione*, l. III, c. 1 (PL 182, 757-60); Thomas of Jesus (1564-1627), *De procuranda salute omnium gentium*, ed. Pammolli (Rome, 1940), l. II, pp. 67-68: "As the Supreme Pastor of the Church and the Successor of Peter in the apostolate, the Roman Pontiff has the authority to send preachers to spread the faith throughout the world."

¹⁴ Code of Canon Law, c. 1350:1; Synodus Vicariatus Sutchuens., 1803 (Coll. Lacensis, VI, 633: "*Among the chief duties of the apostolic office the most important is certainly that of spreading the faith among the gentiles and of keeping it whole and unblemished among the faithful;*" Leo XIII, *Quae mari sinico*, 17 Sept. 1902, *Acta Leonis XIII*, XXII, p. 204: "Wherever uncivilized nations still remain devoted to the frightful worship of idols, bishops and priests must know that they are to work for their conversion;" Encyclical Letter of the Sacred Congregation for Spreading the Faith (1879), (*Coll. S.C.P.F.*, II, n. 1507); Plenary Council of North America celebrated in Rome in 1898 (Ed. Rome 1900), p. 339: "Neither bishops nor pastors who know that there are Indians within their jurisdictions who have not yet been converted will satisfy their pastoral duties if they concentrate only on the faithful and do not attempt to rescue the others from the darkness of unbelief and to call them to Christ."

The theological reason is thus explained by Wernz-Vidal, *Ius canonicum*, IV/II (Rome, 1935), p. 58, n. 653: "The foreign missions get their name more from their principal aim, the *spreading* of the Catholic faith among people *foreign* to the Catholic Church, than from their distant lands. In this sense, every bishop in *his own* diocese, where there are unbelievers, heretics, schismatics, has from the very beginning of the Church down to our own age been established as a true successor of the Apostles to be an apostolic missionary in order to bring about their conversion and the spread of the Catholic faith."

¹⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Letter 123* (PG 52, 676-68); Leo XIII, Enc. *Sancta Dei civitas*, 3 Dec. 1880, *ASS* 13 (1880), 242, 246ff; Benedict XV, *Maximum illud*, l.c., pp. 451-55; Pius XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, l.c., pp. 71-75; Pius XII, *Evangelii Praecones*, l.c., pp. 525-28; *Fidei donum*, l.c., pp. 235-48.

¹⁶ See note 15.

¹⁷ Benedict XV, *Maximum illud*, l.c., p. 451; Pius XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, l.c., p. 68; Pius XII, *Evangelii Praecones*, l.c., p. 526; *Fidei donum*, l.c., pp. 225-27.

¹⁸ See the documents cited in notes 15 and 17. Also: Pius XII, Epist. *Perlibenti quidem animo*, l.c., pp. 725-27.

