

PIUS X, Encyclical, «Singulari Quadam»,

24th September 1912

ON LABOR ORGANIZATIONS
TO OUR BELOVED SON, GEORGE KOPP,
CARDINAL PRIEST OF THE HOLY ROMAN CHURCH,
BISHOPS OF Breslau, AND TO THE OTHER
ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS OF GERMANY

Beloved Son and Venerable Brethren, Health and the Apostolic Blessing.

We are moved by particularly affectionate and benevolent sentiments toward the Catholics of Germany, who are most loyally and obediently devoted to the Apostolic See and accustomed to battle generously and courageously on behalf of the Church. We therefore feel compelled, Venerable Brethren, to devote Our full strength and attention to the discussion of that issue which has arisen among them about workingmen's associations. Concerning this problem several of you, as well as qualified and respected representatives of both viewpoints, have already informed Us repeatedly during the past few years. Conscious of Our Apostolic Office, We have studied this problem most diligently. We fully realize that Our sacred duty is to labor unceasingly that Our beloved sons may preserve the Catholic teaching unadulterated and unimpaired, in no way allowing their Faith to be endangered. If they are not in time urged to be on guard, they would obviously, gradually and inadvertently, fall into the danger of being satisfied with a vague and indefinite form of the Christian religion which has lately been designated as *intercredal*. This amounts to nothing more than an empty recommendation of a generalized Christianity. Obviously, nothing is more contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Moreover, since Our most ardent desire is the promotion and fortification of concord among Catholics, We constantly try to remove all those occasions of quarrels which dissipate the strength of men of good will and are advantageous only for the enemies of religion. Finally, We desire and intend that the faithful live with their non-Catholic fellow citizens in that peace without which neither the order of human society nor the welfare of the State can endure.

If, however, as We have already said, the existence of this question was known to Us, We nevertheless thought it wise to obtain each of your opinions, Venerable Brethren, before announcing Our decision. You have answered Our questions with that conscientiousness and diligence which the seriousness of the question demands.

2. Accordingly, We first of all declare that all Catholics have a sacred and inviolable duty, both in private and public life, to obey and firmly adhere to and fearlessly profess the principles of Christian truth enunciated by the teaching office of the Catholic Church. In particular We mean those principles which Our Predecessor has most wisely laid down in the encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum*. We know that the Bishops of Prussia followed these most faithfully in their deliberations at the Fulda Congress of 1900. You yourselves have summarized the fundamental ideas of these principles in your communications regarding this question.

3. These are fundamental principles: No matter what the Christian does, even in the realm of temporal goods, he cannot ignore the supernatural good. Rather, according to the dictates of Christian philosophy, he must order all things to the ultimate end, namely, the Highest Good. All his actions, insofar as they are morally either good or bad (that is to say, whether they agree or disagree with the natural and divine law), are subject to the judgment and judicial office of the Church. All who glory in the name of Christian, either individually or collectively, if they wish to remain true to their vocation, may not foster enmities and dissensions between the classes of civil society. On the contrary, they must promote mutual concord and charity. The social question and its associated controversies, such as the nature and duration of labor, the wages to be paid, and workingmen's strikes, are not simply economic in character. Therefore they cannot be numbered among those which can be settled apart from ecclesiastical authority. "The precise opposite is the truth. It is first of all moral and religious, and for that reason its solution is to be expected mainly from the moral law and the pronouncements of religion." [1]

4. Now, concerning workingmen's associations, even though their purpose is to obtain earthly advantages for their members, nonetheless those associations are to be most approved and considered as most useful for the genuine and permanent advantage of their members which are established chiefly on the foundation of the Catholic religion and openly follow the directives of the Church. We have repeated this declaration on several previous occasions in answer to question from various countries. Consequently, such so-called confessional Catholic associations must certainly be established and promoted in every way in Catholic regions as well as in all other districts where it can be presumed that they can sufficiently assist the various needs of their members. However, when there is a question about associations which directly or indirectly touch upon the sphere of religion and morality, it would not be permitted to foster and spread mixed organizations, that is, associations composed of Catholics and non-Catholics, in the areas just mentioned. Over and above other matters, in such organizations there are or certainly can be for our people serious dangers to the integrity of their faith and the due obedience to the commandments and precepts of the Catholic Church. Venerable Brethren, you yourselves have also openly called attention to this question in several of your answers which We have read.

5. We therefore lavish praise upon each and every one of the strictly Catholic workingmen's associations existing in Germany. We wish them every success in all their endeavors on behalf of the laboring people, hoping they will enjoy a constant increase. However, in saying this We do not deny that Catholics, in their efforts to improve the workers' living conditions, more equitable distribution of wages, and other justified advantages, have a right, provided they exercise due caution, to collaborate with non-Catholics for the common good. For such a purpose, however, We would rather see Catholic and non-Catholic associations unite their forces through that new and timely institution known as the *cartel*.

6. Not a few of you, Venerable Brethren, have asked Us whether it is permissible to tolerate the so-called Christian Trade Unions that now exist in your dioceses, since, on the one hand, they have a considerably larger number of members than the purely Catholic associations and, on the other hand, if permission were denied serious disadvantages would result. In view of the particular circumstances of Catholic affairs in Germany, We believe that We should grant this petition. Furthermore, We declare that such mixed associations as now exist within your dioceses can be tolerated and Catholics may be permitted to join them, as long as such toleration does not cease to be appropriate or permissible by reason of new and changed conditions. Necessary precautions, however, must be adopted in order to avoid the dangers which, as has already been mentioned, follow upon such associations.

The following are the most important of these precautions: In the first place, provision should be made that Catholic workers who are members of the trade unions must also belong to those Catholic associations which are known as *Arbeitervereine*. In the event that they must make some sacrifice for this cause, even in a monetary way, We are convinced that they will readily do so for the sake of safeguarding the integrity of their Faith. As has been happily demonstrated, the Catholic workmen's associations, aided by the clergy and by its leadership and alert direction, are able to achieve very much toward preserving the truths of religion and the purity of morals among their members, and nourish the religious spirit through frequent practices of piety. Therefore, the leaders of such associations, clearly recognizing the needs of the age, are undoubtedly prepared to instruct the workers about their duties in justice and charity, especially regarding all those commandments and precepts in which an accurate knowledge is needed or useful in order to enable them to take an active part in their trade unions according to the principles of Catholic doctrine.

7. Furthermore, if Catholics are to be permitted to join the trade unions, these associations must avoid everything that is not in accord, either in principle or practice, with the teachings and commandments of the Church or the proper ecclesiastical authorities. Similarly, everything is to be avoided in their literature or public utterances or actions which in the above view would incur censure.

The Bishops, therefore, should consider it their sacred duty to observe carefully the conduct of all these associations and to watch diligently that the Catholic members do not suffer any harm as a result of their participation. The Catholic members themselves, however, should never permit the unions, whether for the sake of material interests of their members or the union cause as such, to proclaim or support teachings or to engage in activities which would conflict in any way with the directives proclaimed by the supreme teaching authority of the Church, especially those mentioned above. Therefore, as often as problems arise concerning matters of justice or charity, the Bishops should take the greatest care to see that the faithful do not overlook Catholic moral teaching and do not depart from it even a finger's breadth.

8. We are convinced, Venerable Brethren, that you will diligently take care to see that all these directives of Ours are conscientiously and exactly fulfilled, carefully and constantly reporting to Us concerning this very serious problem. Since We have taken this matter under Our jurisdiction and, after hearing the views of the Bishops, since the decision rests with Us, We hereby command all Catholics of good will to desist from all disputes among themselves concerning this matter. We are confident that with fraternal charity and perfect obedience they will completely and gladly carry out Our command. If any further difficulty arises among them, they should seek its solution in the following manner: Let them first turn to their Bishops for counsel, and then submit the matter to the Apostolic See for its decision.

There is one more point to consider, and it was already implied in what has been said. On the one hand, no one could accuse of bad faith and, under such a pretext, bear ill will toward those who, while firmly defending the teachings and rights of the Church, nonetheless for good reasons have joined or wish to join mixed labor associations in those places where, under certain safeguards, ecclesiastical authority has permitted them in view of local conditions. On the other hand, it would likewise be most reprehensible to oppose or attack the purely Catholic associations (this type of association must, on the contrary, be supported and promoted in every possible manner), and to demand that the so-called intercredal associations be introduced and force their establishment on the grounds that all Catholic associations in every diocese ought to be set up along one and the same pattern.

9. While expressing Our desire that Catholic Germany may make great progress in religion and civil life, and in order that this wish may be happily fulfilled, We beseech for the beloved German people the special help of Almighty God and the protection of the Virgin Mother of God, the Queen of Peace. As a pledge of the divine graces and also as sign of Our particular love, We impart, most lovingly, to you, Beloved Son and Venerable Brethren, to your clergy and people, the Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Saint Peter's, Rome, on September 24, 1912, the tenth year of Our Pontificate.

PIUS X

1. Encyclical letter of Leo XIII, *Graves de communi*, January 18, 1901.