



# On Secularism

*First Pastoral Letter of His Grace, Archbishop Gabriel Reyes of Manila.*

TO THE CLERGY, SECULAR AND REGULAR AND TO ALL THE FAITHFUL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MANILA:

Shortly after my installation, brethren, as Archbishop of Manila, wished to greet all the members of my new flock in the only way that could; namely, by a pastoral letter. Until recently, however, I had to continue with the burden of my old office as Archbishop of Cebu, and this, added to the new and even heavier responsibilities of the See of Manila, kept me from executing my desire.

Meanwhile its execution has become urgent, for the mounting seriousness of the times and the growing menace both to our faith and to our national existence have forced on me as a divinely constituted shepherd of the flock of Christ the duty of raising my voice to protect that flock by teaching, guiding, warning.

Now that the burdens of Cebu have been transferred to other shoulders, and we are now in Holy Week, a season that invites to deep and serious

reflections on the duties of religion and our own fulfilment of them, an opportunity is afforded and which I must not neglect.

In this my first pastoral letter as Archbishop of Manila I purpose to reaffirm the relations that should exist between a bishop and his flock. On each Christ has laid obligations towards the other; and to each He gives a special grace to fulfil those obligations, that both may be knit together in invincible unity against all the assaults of the gates of hell.

### **The Obligations of a Bishop**

Let us consider first the obligations that weigh upon a bishop.

When our divine Savior came on earth, He found the lost race of men, we are told, as sheep without shepherds, every one gone astray each in his own way; all blind, yet thinking they had vision; sitting in the darkness and illusion of their own opinions, and calling it light. So Christ came to be Himself the Light of the world, the Way, the Truth and the Life, to all those who would believe in Him and submit to His divine authority. He saw that man, left to his own conceptions, had lost the truth about God, and that even if that truth were restored to him, he would inevitably lose it again, if still left to his own conceptions.

No mere exposition of that truth and law in a bible or code could satisfy man's need for a teacher. Written words can never be a final court of appeal, for they are dead things that demand a living mind to interpret them, and this living interpreter is necessarily the final court of appeal. If human society had only written codes of laws to go by, and no supreme tribunal to interpret them, or any authorized tribunal at all except the private judgment of each individual, it would swiftly cease to be a society at all, and would disintegrate into chaos.

If Christ wanted His truth and His law to stand intact to the end of time, safe from the disintegrating influence of private judgment, there was no other way so suitable, so natural, as the way He actually chose: that of setting up a living authority so fortified from human vagaries by His divine power that it could not fail in its teaching mission, and men could have recourse to it in all matters of faith and morals with the solid assurance of being told the truth.

In this acceptance of a divinely set-up and divinely guaranteed authority, the human mind would be rescued and freed from all the human pseudo-authorities that had hitherto tyrannized over it, jostling and pushing it hither and yon with the winds and tides of passions, prejudices, catchwords, slogans, fashions, fads, philosophies, panaceas, pressure groups, and the bullying of the State.

From all these, from all the false Christs, Christ meant to deliver the

human race when He sent forth His apostles with the words: "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth. Going therefore, teach all nations. . . all things that I have commanded you, and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." "He that hears you, hears Me, and he that despises you, despises Me." "I will ask the Father and He will give you another Advocate to dwell with you forever, the Spirit of Truth. . . He will teach you all things, and bring to your mind whatever I have said to you."

This then is the first obligation a bishop has as a successor of the Apostles, and as a divinely appointed spokesman for Christ: he must teach Christ's doctrine entire and unadulterated; he must teach it effectively.

Accordingly, he must be able to distinguish clearly between contemporary truths and contemporary falsehoods; modernity and truth are not necessarily the same thing. He must be careful to label as sound what is sound, and as dangerous what is dangerous; he must point the flock to wholesome pasturage and restrain it from poisonous weeds. If he fails in this duty, or if he deserts the flock when he sees the wolf coming, he is not a good shepherd after the model of his Lord.

The good shepherd, Christ says, must be ready to lay down his life in defense of the flock entrusted to him. Not for fear or greed, not for any threats or cajolery of the powers of this world, is he to swerve from his duty of denouncing any doctrine or book or enactment or judgment of a human tribunal, which his conscience tells him is opposed to the everlasting truth which Christ entrusted to His Church nineteen centuries ago, and which that Church has preserved unchanged all these ages.

### **The Gravity of These Obligations**

Heavily does this obligation weigh on every Catholic bishop. What is at stake is nothing less than the souls of his flock, those souls that Christ paid for with His blood. To Christ the Judge he must render a rigorous accounting for each one of those souls, and for the diligence with which he has performed his task. Such is the heavy obligation, brethren, that has been laid on me for the souls of all of you.

In my ears I hear the warning Christ gave His apostles at the end of the last discourse of His public life, on Tuesday of Holy Week: "Which of you is a faithful and wise servant," He asked them, "one whom his master will entrust with the care of his household, to give them the food at the appointed time? Blessed is that servant who is found doing this when his lord comes; . . . But if that servant plays him false, . . . then on some day, at an hour when he is all unaware, his lord will come and cut him off, and assign him his portion with the hypocrites."

In my ears, too, sounds the last solemn adjuration of Saint Paul to the bishop Timothy whom he had consecrated: "I adjure thee in the sight of God and of Jesus Christ, who is to judge the living and the dead; preach the word, dwelling upon it continually, welcome or unwelcome; bring home wrongdoing, comfort the waverer, rebuke the sinner, with all the patience of a teacher. The time will surely come when men will tire of sound doctrine, always itching to hear something new; and so they will provide themselves with a continuous succession of new teachers as the whim takes them, turning in a deaf ear to the truth, . . ." That time, which Saint Paul warned against, has indeed come; as we can all see; and a bishop today must be all that Saint Paul demanded of Timothy.

To perform effectively this weighty obligation a bishop must sometimes make use of the power, which Christ has given him for this purpose, of imposing obligations and sanctions. "Whatever you bind on earth," He said, "will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

There are three features to this power of binding, brethren, which we should carefully attend to. First, a bishop uses reluctantly and rarely,—only when he must. Second, he uses it only for the protection of that flock for whose safety he must answer to Christ. Third, the sanctions he imposes are not those of physical force but purely spiritual, whose whole force depends on faith; whoever does not recognize Christ speaking in the bishop's voice will not heed that voice; consequently, it is not to a mere man that submission is made, but to Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Briefly, then, your bishop's obligation is to be a good shepherd and a devoted father, feeding Christ's faithful with Christ's truth, guiding them in safe paths to God, and protecting them from false teachers—from open assaults and subtle devices, from the wolf and the snake.

And since this obligation is all too heavy for any unaided human shoulders to sustain, there is given me, for your sake, the mighty grace of Sacred Orders, which means the omnipotent backing of Jesus Christ; it means the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church to steady its hierarchy in teaching the fulness of Christ's truth. On his grace I rely, and on it you too, strong in your faith in Christ, can securely trust, as generations have done before you.

#### **Obligation of the Faithful**

And now, what of the obligation of the faithful towards their bishop? In one word, it is that they be faithful. Faith in God's word will make them see in the bishop no merely human expert, no merely human authority, but Christ's representative, speaking with the very authority of the Son of God.

Having this insight, they will not waver in their loyalty to the bishop's teaching, knowing that to despise it is to despise Christ. They will see it is not the private interests of some secular organization that are in question when he speaks, but the interests of Christ, which they have taken for their own interests from that day when they united their lives and destinies to Him through the sacrament of Baptism.

Of all the interests a man can have these are the grandest, the noblest: they are nothing less than the saving of the world, and the bringing to the heartbroken and distracted human race God's heavenly peace. Is that object not worth some striving and sacrifices?

Again, the Catholic layman whose faith assures him that such is the mission and such the authority of Christ's Church will not be found shutting his ears to its voice and listening to its enemies instead; he will not turn for guidance from the shepherd to the wolf. And yet we have seen to our sorrow some Filipino Catholics fall into this tragic folly.

Our Lord Himself declared it the mark of His true sheep that they would listen to His voice and not to that of a stranger. "You do not believe," He told the Jewish leaders, "because you are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. . . and they follow Me."

### **The Bishop a Divinely Constituted Teaching Authority**

But the bishop, it is sometimes objected, is not infallible; what he teaches is not necessarily true; and using this objection some lax and damaged Catholics presume to doubt or reject any pronouncement of their bishop that goes counter to their own private opinion or personal advantage. What a nullification this is of the bishop's office and authority!

True it is that an individual bishop, the Bishop of Rome excepted, is not infallible; but it is also true that he is the one divinely constituted teaching authority in matters of faith and morals. Consequently, whenever he teaches in a matter of faith and morals, his teaching must be accepted as true until it is controverted by an equal or higher ecclesiastical authority. No lay opinion or pronouncement can have any validity against it.

Their faith too will show the laity what attitude they should take when the bishop, acting in accord with his conscience and his office, lays some special obligation on his flock. To the worldly it comes natural to complain that such obligations are an infringement of personal liberty, that the Church is dictatorial, and so on; for the worldling has that "wisdom of the flesh" against which Saint Paul warned the Romans.

It is this pseudo-wisdom that impels a man to reject God's authority and follow his own judgment and his own self-will. "The wisdom of the

flesh," he says, "is an enemy to God. For it is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be."

But to Christ's faithful their faith is a light that shows them that "this wisdom of the flesh is death"; that to refuse submission to Christ is to condemn one's mind to all that degrading tyranny of passions and fashions and fads and false Christs from which He came to set us free and give us an infinitely larger and diviner freedom as well: the freedom of the sons of God. Men have only a choice of yokes; the gentle, ennobling yoke of Christ, or the cruel, degrading yoke of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

#### **Law and Freedom**

Is not all law a curb on human freedom? But it is a reasonable curb for the general good. The man who has the general good at heart, and also the wisdom to perceive the best means of attaining it, does not need the law; laws, says Saint Paul, are made not for good men but for bad; but once they are made, both good and bad must obey them. If the civil power, for instance, had never passed an ordinance compelling drivers of motor cars to prove their competence to drive by securing a state license, responsible citizens would still not have driven on public roads without first making sure they were competent to do so.

But since there are also irresponsible citizens who would drive without the requisite competence, the civil power had to make an ordinance binding not only on these, but on responsible folk as well. So it is with all laws, whether of the civil or the ecclesiastical authority. For the general good an obligation is laid on all, even though it was not needed for some.

When therefore a bishop for the general good, forbids, let us say, his flock to read a certain book without permission, the Catholic who has faith and good sense will not complain of it, any more than as a good citizen he complains that the state will not let him without a license drive a car on the public roads or sell meat in the public market. He knows that though this ordinance was not made because of him, it was made for his good, because the general good is his good too.

#### **The Part of Love**

The same faith that makes a Catholic hold fast to the Church's teaching and laws, makes him strong in upholding and defending them. There is nevertheless something more than faith involved here; there is also love. The Catholic who loves Christ cannot help loving the Church, Christ's visible representative and mystical body.

The Catholic who has enrolled in Christ's army will not desert that

army when it is assailed. He will not be found too engrossed in his own interests to have time or energy for the imperiled interests of Christ. He knows well that Christ's interests take priority over every other; indeed he knows that we can have no real interests at all, independent of Christ's interests, and that to care for His is the only true and wise way of caring for our own.

The Catholic merchant or banker or publisher or politician who thinks he has the right or duty to keep his religion carefully out of his professional life is disastrously at wrong. For religion must be no mere department, large or small, of a man's life; it must BE a man's life, if he is truly to live at all. In one word, the religion of a Catholic must be catholic—that is, universal; Christ's kingdom extends both to the whole of the human race and to the whole of every human life.

According to His teaching, all that a man has — his talents, his property, his career and office — he holds in trust to God as a stewardship for which he must render to God a strict account. We can never be indifferent to Christ.

If we design to go through life as stealthy Catholics, inert when the Church's foes are most active, speechless when they are most vociferous, or even catching up and repeating their arguments against it because theirs is the fashionable cause, and the Church is out of fashion; if, in a word, we propose to be Palm Sunday welcomers of Christ, and Good Friday mutes or mudflingers as He goes by on the way to Calvary, let us ponder these terrible words of His: "He that shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of him when he shall come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

### **The Modern Plague, Secularism**

Never did those words of our Lord have more meaning than they do today. These days the press is filled with voices of alarm, and warnings of imminent world debacle.

We read of the tremendous advances of Communism's vast international conspiracy to enslave the human race and extinguish the human spirit; we read of frantic eleventh-hour efforts to check that conspiracy with hastily organized alliances. Here in our own country we see Communist rebels suddenly taking the offensive against the government and spreading violence from end to end of Luzon.

And we see everywhere, both here and abroad, secularism, that deadly disease of the modern world — that negation in theory or practice of all spiritual realities and values — eating in like termites and rotting the power of civilization to resist the Communist menace, or to answer its arguments;

and thus building up for Communism a vast sphere of sympathy, and an inexhaustible supply of recruits or dupes or fellow travelers.

Of this modern plague, the plague of Secularism, His Holiness, of happy memory, Pope Pius XI speaks thus:

"That plague is not the growth of a day. It has been growing for some time. First the rule of Christ over nations was repudiated. The right of the Church to teach, legislate and govern men, guiding them along the path of salvation was denied, even though she holds that right from Christ Himself. Gradually the true religion of Christ was likened to all other false, man-made religions and put on a par with them. Then it was placed under the power of the state, and merely tolerated at the whim of rulers of states. Some even went so far as to advocate replacing God's true religion by a natural religion, based on some vague religious feeling. Others urged the abandonment of God and advocated openly the practice of impiety." — **Encycl.**

#### **"The Kingship of Christ".**

This secularism is thus the real power behind Communism, the ally that has brought it to so terrible a pitch of power that it now threatens the entire world.

#### **The One Answer — The Catholic Church**

Against that world-wide organized threat stands one, and only one world-wide organized foe — the Catholic Church. Everywhere it is the Church that speaks out, and the Church that bears the brunt of persecution when the Communists have gained power. Wise lovers of human freedom in every land have recognized his leadership of the Church and praised her for it; to the Church more and more they look for the steadfastness needed to weather the rising storm.

But there are old enemies of the Church also to whom this glory of leadership is wormwood; these try to make people believe that the Church fights the totalitarianism of the Communists because the church is itself totalitarian. Only ignorance and bad faith could so misuse words and so confuse issues. . . We have only to consider what totalitarianism is and what the Church's doctrine of human government has always been to see that the Church is not only by its very nature anti-totalitarian, but is also the one effective universal bulwark against totalitarianism of every form.

Totalitarianism is a doctrine containing these two propositions: First, there is but one supreme authority, the State, whose competence is unlimited and absolute; second, the State should regiment all the activities of all its citizens to achieve the planned objectives laid down by those who control



the State. The result of this doctrine is the total enslavement of the individual to the group of men that run the states.

### **The Church's Doctrine of Government**

Turning now to the Catholic Church's doctrine of government — unchanged through nineteen centuries — we see that it, too, contains two propositions; they are: First, that there are TWO supreme authorities, each with a sphere of competence, the Church and the State; the Church supreme in spiritual matters, the State in temporal.

Second, since these two spheres of competence overlap at certain points, for instance, in education and in the regulation of marriage, and since these two authorities were both set up by the one God and have the same subjects to direct, they should work together in harmony and not at cross-purposes. Two independent, limited, but harmonious supreme powers — that is the Catholic doctrine of government, and just as it is necessarily opposed to totalitarianism of every description, so it necessarily desires to cooperate with the civil power for every legitimate objective.

Wherever the Church raises its voice in protest at some invasion by the State of the realm of faith or morals, and for so protesting is denounced by some one as totalitarian, recognize, brethren, in the denouncer a hidden totalitarian; for in denying to the Church any field of competence in which it is independent of the State, he is implicitly asserting an omniscient, unlimited, absolute State that can regiment the citizen as much as it pleases.

### **An Example of Secularism in the Philippines**

Sadly we must confess that here in our own land is much of this pernicious misuse of words, much secularism, much apathy and inertia of Catholics in the face of open affronts against, and attacks upon, their faith. I shall cite but one example.

A book was published last year that contained under its stated thesis the following insinuations: First, that to retract Freemasonry and return to the Catholic faith is an act so discreditable that the national hero of our people could not have done it; otherwise he would lose his claim to be a man of strong and noble character. Second, and consequently, that to be a Catholic is the sign of either an ignorant or an ignoble spirit.

Third, that lying and forgery are characteristic devices of the priests of a religious order which enjoys the respect of all true Catholics, and the unqualified approval of the Catholic Church. Every one of these insinuations is a grave affront to the Catholic Church.

When this book finally appeared, the Freemasons and other enemies of religion started a campaign to have it made required homereading in the public high schools. Now it has never been the practice in democratic

countries, so far as we can learn, to compel the youth of the country to read biographies of their national heroes. No schoolboy in the United States is obliged by law to read a life of Washington, no schoolboy in France a life of Joan of Arc, nor any English schoolboy a life of Nelson or Wellington. Compulsion is unnecessary.

In democratic lands with true heroes of freedom, love and admiration are all the stimulus needed to make these known and their lives read. Only in totalitarian countries must rigged-up lives of their spurious heroes — the Hitlers, the Stalins and the Titos — be forced down children's throats.

But if it be true that our children must be compelled to read the life of one whom all Filipinos love and admire; at least, this being a democracy with a constitutional bill of rights, they should not be forced to read a biography, written in such a fashion that affronts by its insinuations the religion professed by the overwhelming majority of the people.

So, when the Masons urged this demand, the Knights of Columbus protested. Thereupon the government referred the book to a committee to determine whether it contained matter injurious to the Catholic religion. Observe that point. The government explicitly defined the question as one of religion, — of the Catholic religion.

Now when serious questions touching special fields are to be settled, they are always referred to the recognized authorities in those fields, and everyone in the Philippines knows that in questions relating to the Catholic religion the only authorities are its Hierarchy. But the government did not refer this book to the Catholic hierarchy; it handed the book to three officials one of whom was not even a Catholic. The hierarchy nevertheless did not remain silent; they unanimously condemned the book as anti-catholic.

The committee, however, pronounced that the book contained nothing against the Catholic religion and nothing injurious to the faith of Catholics and should be put on the required-reading list for public-school children. Faced with these contradictory statements, what did the government do?

In this matter which it had itself defined to be one purely religious and purely of the Catholic religion, it approved the verdict of the members of this commission who pontificated as theologians, while the authorized theologians of the Catholic Church for speaking out were denounced as meddlers in politics.

#### **A Call to Action**

Here was a manifest injustice to our religion, and an open invitation to its enemies to launch new attacks against it — an invitation they have been only too eager to take advantage of. What did our prominent

Catholics, the leaders of public opinion, do about it? Except for a glorious but tiny handful, nothing! This apathy and indifference of even our educated Catholics to the cause of the Church and of Christ our King — this is our real sorrow and matter of concern. It is not the enemies of the Church in the Philippines that worry us; they are in themselves insignificant enough, but the resistance to them is even more insignificant.

Fifty years ago Catholicism was the universal faith of this land; it is still the faith of three-fourths of its inhabitants. It is a sleeping colossus; but while it slumbers, its small but unrelenting foes keep wounding it with tiny pricks that in the long run will wear its strength away. When will that colossus, the country's one greatest hope for survival, unity and greatness, finally awake and make its power felt? The time is growing short.

Here in this Holy Week of 1950, with the shadows of a new and dreadful conflict darkening about us, is a season for solemn thoughts. Each of us should put himself under the Cross of Christ on Calvary and ask: "Has that Blood been poured out for this people in vain? Has it been poured out in vain for me? Must I, after seeing God and the Church and the human spirit with all its ideals and aspirations and freedom and security, extinguished in this land because of my apathy, and a repulsive totalitarian yoke imposed on my country, my family and me — after all this must I go forth into eternity and find Christ ashamed of me because I was ashamed of Him and His words in this adulterous and sinful generation?"

Let each of us before the crucifix on Good Friday ask himself these questions. The answer to them need not be Yes. If Good Friday means anything, it means the birth of hope and salvation in the very midst of death. If we will begin to do to death our old habits of apathy and spiritual cowardice, the secularist ways of thinking that have obscured the clarity of our faith, the self-interestedness that has all but shut out of our hearts the interests of Christ, we can still bring ourselves and our beloved country to the joyous resurrection of a Pascua Florida. God grant we may not miss the chance.

God grant, also, that with this understanding we may be encouraged and strengthened to grow in our faith and to live truly Catholic lives so that in the individual, in the family, in society the Kingdom of Christ may advance.

With these paternal sentiments, and as a pledge of the grace which I implore for you, I impart with all my heart, my paternal blessing upon you my fellow priests and upon each and every member of my flock.

Given in Manila during Holy Week of the Holy Year of 1950.

† GABRIEL M. REYES  
*Archbishop of Manila*