



The Holy See

SAECULO EXEUNTE OCTAVO

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS XII
ON THE EIGHTH CENTENARY OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF PORTUGAL
TO THE VENERABLE BROTHER, THE PATRIARCH OF LISBON,
THE ARCHBISHOPS, BISHIOPS AND OTHER ORDINARIES OF
PORTUGAL AND ITS OVERSEAS POSSESSIONS,
IN PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE

*To Our Beloved Son, Venerable Brothers,
Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.*

You, Our Beloved Son, and Venerable Brothers and your very noble nation, this year will celebrate a most happy event, the eighth centenary of the independence of Portugal; it is the third since its restoration to freedom. We cannot pass this over in forgetfulness and silence.

2. And indeed there is a special reason why We, together with you, commemorate the liberty you have achieved, seeing that also by the efforts of the Roman Pontiffs, as is well known, your fatherland of old was a free state juridically constituted.

3. In the twelfth century Our predecessors Innocent II, Lucius II, and Alexander III accepted the service of obedience offered by Alfonso Henriques, first Count of Portugal and afterward King. They promised him their protection over all the territory which he had recovered in battle from Moorish domination and declared its liberation legitimate. The acts by which this was accomplished honorably rewarded the Portuguese people for their outstanding success in safeguarding the faith they had acquired.

4. And indeed the Catholic faith, which nourished the nation of Portugal from its very origin, was the principal force which raised your fatherland to the peak of its glory, extending the boundaries of both religion and empire[1] The Church adorned Portugal with all the embellishments of culture

and rendered it worthy of its sacred endeavors in missions. Of this, history itself speaks and to this events testify most splendidly.

5. When the sons of King John I asked him to permit the first overseas expedition which liberated the city of Ceuta, that great prince asked them whether or not it would promote the service of God. In like manner, all the following expeditions were especially aimed at propagating the faith. In the West faith had motivated those signed with the cross, and the same faith had animated the military orders who fought strenuously against the Moors.

6. Displaying a white standard ornamented with a purple cross of the divine Redeemer, the ships which transported the intrepid explorers bound for the western shore and islands of Africa also carried missionaries. Henry the Navigator, who supported your colonial and sacred expeditions, said that the missionaries hoped to subject the barbarians to the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ.

7. And that prince of Portuguese explorers, Vasco Da Gama, weighing anchor to begin his fortunate trip to India, had with him two religious men of the Order of the Most Holy Trinity. One of them, after he had brought the light of the gospel to nations in India with apostolic zeal, suffered martyrdom. But just as in all ages of the Church, so also at that time and in those far distant regions, the blood of this martyr and of the other heroic missionaries of Portugal became the seed of Christianity. Their illustrious example greatly inspired the Catholic world, including the spirited citizens of your fatherland, to promote more widely the works of the apostolate.

8. And now, when more than a few European nations have been lost to the Church because of the changes in these calamitous times, We see your people and their Spanish brothers opening paths and laboring for the Church in the spacious lands of Africa, Asia, and America. There they recruit numerous adherents of the Church to replace those who have miserably left her embrace. Then dioceses, parishes, sacred seminaries, monasteries, hospitals, and public orphanages arise almost everywhere in these places to prove the vital force and perennial virtue of the Catholic Church.

9. But how does it happen that you, although not numerous, achieve such good deeds?[2] Where did the people of Portugal get that vigorous strength with which they were able to dominate the shores of Africa and Asia and even the distant land of America? Without a doubt this came about because that nation, as the greatest poet of Portugal sang, persevered in an ardent and strong faith; also, your leaders were preeminent in Christian wisdom and prudence. Therefore, God used your nation as a precious instrument for admirable accomplishments.

10. Distinguished men such as Alphonsus of Albuquerque and John de Castro prudently governed the Portuguese colonies. They gave protection and assistance to the good missionaries, whom highly esteemed kings like John II gladly sent to the regions accredited to their rule. Then all the world admired your nation because of its strength and outstanding labors, which humanized

barbarous lands. Contrastingly, the Catholic faith languished when the zeal for sacred missions became torpid and died. Also, the governors of the state finally obstructed missionary activities, to say nothing of protecting them, and scattered the orders of religious men, weakening and enervating their undertakings. Thus it is that the flame of missionary work flickered, together with the Christian faith and charity which bore and nourished that same flame.

11. It will not be useless for you to turn your mind and soul also to those things which do not glow with the light of glory. But it is Our intention at present, while you are about to celebrate the auspicious and illustrious deeds of your renowned fatherland with many solemnities, to exhort you with fatherly concern to recall those distinguished deeds which so many of the sowers of evangelical truth among you have accomplished; then you also will feel yourselves drawn again and again to the zeal of this apostolate of your ancestors .

12. This celebration of your prosperity is linked to the present renewal among you of the vigor of your spiritual life. The Apostolic See and your country have mutually agreed on matters concerning missionary work. It is therefore fitting that you use this opportunity to increase your apostolic and missionary labors and so emulate those of old.

13. But what person, animated by apostolic zeal, can neglect the multitude of men, to the number of a hundred times a hundred thousand, dwelling in lands subject to Portugal, who, for the most part are still waiting for the light of the Gospel? Who in your generous nation would not support missionaries, who have brought the greatest praise and profit to the people of Portugal, in order that converts may continue to increase daily?

14. Therefore, as you recall joyfully such illustrious memories of your fatherland and its glory, remember the almost numberless men in your colonies who still await those who may teach them the truths of God and impart to them "the unfathomable riches of Christ"[3] We repeat to you the words and exhortation of our divine Redeemer to the Apostles: "Lift up your eyes and behold that the fields are already white for the harvest."[4] "for the harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest."[5]

15. Truly, "the laborers are few!" The old dioceses of Portuguese Africa suffer from a lack of heralds of the divine word, and few missionaries are assigned to vast sections of the earth.

16. "Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest"; pray especially that God may inspire both the people of Portugal and those of the nations subject to your rule to become priests or coadjutor brothers or nuns or catechists devoted to missionary work.

17. This holy and most urgent intention should have the principal place in the prayers of each priest. Those who have been called to the sacred orders of the contemplative life are to pray for this special intention, and the faithful, when reciting the rosary so highly commended by the

Blessed Virgin at Fatima, should entreat this same Virgin to intercede in favor of this divine vocation in order that the missions will flourish.

18. And it seems important to determine special days on which, with the august sacrament of the altar exposed for adoration, the works of the sacred missions are commended in appropriate sermons. And We desire that this be done annually in each parish, in the colleges, and in the seminaries. May the youth especially approach the Eucharistic table to receive the bread of the strong and "the corn of the elect." [6] Then perhaps not a few among them will experience with the greatest joy of soul, the divine call to this kind of vocation.

19. But who more aptly than the clergy can encourage such most holy beginnings? We therefore earnestly exhort the priests of Portugal to join the Missionary Union of the Clergy. This pious association, which We and Our nearest predecessor highly commended, exists in almost every nation to encourage Christian people to actively support mission affairs.

20. We also wish that the Missionary Association for Portuguese Priests, which is in its infancy, will increase rapidly. It is from priests especially of this association that We hope to obtain that skillful labor by which infant trees are carefully chosen and cultivated; these Christ nurtures in his vineyard so that they may in time be transplanted into the field of the missions.

21. Indeed also God himself expects something great and of the first rank from his ministers. It is that they diligently prepare the fields and cultivate them, so that such little trees can sprout. It is the task of priests to propagate among the faithful a knowledge of the mission apostolate; as Our predecessor Pius XI admonished, no one should be considered a priest who does not burn with charity for the missions. [7]

22. To you therefore, We repeat the words and command which are found in the encyclical letter *Rerum Ecclesiae*: "You are ordered to establish among you the Missionary Society of the Clergy, or, if already established, to urge it daily to more zealous action by your counsel, exhortation, and authority." [8]

23. The purpose of this society is to disseminate articles concerning these things. If published articles which make mention of this serious matter and of the needs of the missionaries are not circulated, there is no doubt that not only the Christian people but also the clergy have nothing to consider.

24. We are well-disposed toward the magazine which the Missionary Society of the Clergy of Portugal publishes under the banner "*O clero e as missões*", and We earnestly desire that it flourish more every day to remind all Portuguese priests of their duty to promote the Catholic faith. May it inflame them with a more active zeal for this apostolate.

25. We likewise approve, with the same good will, other articles on this matter. For them We predict that they will bring forth more and better fruit by teaching and inspiring the people.

26. We grant a special blessing to those priests who generously strive to propagate the Missionary Union of the Clergy. For them and their zeal We pray that all goes well; and particularly that the apostolic zeal with which they are on fire will reveal to them numberless ways by which they may be able to attain their most holy purpose.

27. We desire besides that in the seminaries, the candidates for the sacred priesthood be taught a solid knowledge of missions. This will strengthen the formation of the priestly character and will be very appropriate to every task assigned by the counsel of a provident God.

28. But, dear Son of Ours and Venerable Brothers, if one of them is called to undertake sacred missions "then neither the poverty of the cleric nor the needs of the diocese may exempt or restrain you from giving consent, since your people, having at hand, so to speak, the aids of salvation, are far less distant from salvation than the pagans. When such an occasion arises, for the love of Christ and of souls, make the sacrifice of the loss of one of the clergy, if indeed it is to be considered a loss. For the one you have lost as a helper and a companion of your labors, the divine Founder of the Church will replace either by inspiring other applicants for the sacred ministry or by a more generous liberality of graces for the diocese." [9]

29. In the archdiocese of Goa, priests and members of religious orders born in that nation abound. So We hope that in the other regions under Portuguese rule, a beginning of this kind of work may be generously promoted so that they too may have an indigenous clergy as soon as possible modeled on the splendid example of Goa. Nor, in the same place with equal needs, should there be any lack of nuns born in the same land in which they exercise their ministry.

30. It is indeed admirable that Portugal has always undertaken to raise the people of its far-flung possessions to its own level of Christian culture. We know you will recruit and prepare natives of these possessions to form a nucleus of clergy for their own country. Do whatever lies in your power, so that this hope will not be in vain, but soon obtain the desired fulfillment.

31. But it is not enough to have a choice of many missionaries. It is essential to train them in sanctity and instruct them in all their duties.

32. You have, and no doubt appreciate, that notable memorial of the solicitude of the Apostolic See for those to be trained properly for work in the sacred missions. It is the Portuguese Society for the Promotion of the Catholic Foreign Missions, which Our predecessor Pius XI encouraged. We strongly endorse it also. This does not mean that We trust less the works and zeal of the religious orders and congregations of both sexes because, in the course of the ages, the greatest number of missionaries came from them. For this reason We place Our great hope in these orders

and congregations, as do the missionaries themselves. And since We know well the spiritual needs of the Portuguese colonies, We desire that others join in the missionary efforts. The local ordinaries indeed should cherish and protect them, so that the number of consecrated laborers grows daily.

33. To the appropriate collegiate rectors and governors of other religious societies, We declare our fervent desire that the candidates for the work of the missions be properly trained in correct doctrine and virtue.

34. These same persons must diligently consider that no one can enter upon the difficult and arduous road of this apostolate who has not been called to it by a special grace of God. Similarly no one can continue on this road who does not correspond worthily to the divine inspiration and his vocation .

35. Indeed the herald of evangelical truth must of necessity be a man of God not only because he has been divinely called, but also because he has vowed himself to Him fully and perpetually. "Truly" - as our predecessor Benedict XV teaches in the admirable apostolic letter *Maximum illud* - "he must be a man of God, who preaches God; he must hate sin, who commands to hate sin. More progress will be made in preaching the faith by example than by words, especially among infidels who are led by the senses rather than by reason." [10]

36. What is required here, is that sanctity of life which has cast deep roots into the soul, not that defective and empty probity which is easily infected by the corrupt habits of the infidels. Those who are described by Paul as "having a semblance indeed of piety, but disowning its power [11] are not the salt of the earth which cures completely the wounds of corruption, nor the light of the world which teaches the way of salvation to those sitting in the shadow of death. And would that they themselves may not become liable to these corruptions, or, what is worse, unhappy teachers of them.

37. And besides it is necessary that the candidate be properly instructed in all things which pertain both to solid doctrine and to pastoral care, so that he may become "as a wise builder" [12] for the kingdom of God.

38. Nor is it enough to have acquired an extensive and excellent knowledge of sacred learning, but he must know also the worldly disciplines which affect his work. But if he is not in possession of these sacred and secular disciplines, and is led only by his enthusiasm, he is placing the foundation of the building to be erected on shifting sand.

39. Following in the footsteps of Him who "went about doing good and healing" [13] and obeying the command of His who said, "heal the sick" [14] and "make disciples of all nations," [15] the missionary not only speaks learnedly and wisely of the kingdom of God, but also attempts to heal

bodies infected with disease and misery. Thus at the same time that he raises the minds, he lifts up the souls, bound to the impiety of superstition and plunged in rough barbarism, to a more civilized life, and commands them to begin to shine with the light of evangelical doctrine.

40. Indeed there never was a time when the Church did not erect next to the Church building orphanages and hospitals and schools. And who else than the apostolic herald of Christian truth will be "the wise architect" of these most holy works? How indeed can he accomplish this unless he is pious, knowledgeable, and virtuous?

41. And all that We have communicated up to the present by way of explanation and exhortation for missionaries is to be repeated also for those who serenely but laboriously and beneficially labor to properly train sisters, whose pious zeal supplies the necessary aids for the support of the sacred missions.

42. We know that the congregations of sisters in Portugal are growing every day. Among them therefore let a diligent and careful choice be made of those who are called to the aid of the missions. In such a manner they may set out daily - in greater numbers and better trained - to enter upon their tasks as nurses of the sick, teachers of children, mistresses of catechetics, and able to perform all the tasks which their special apostolic duties demand.

43. Let those on whose labors this most serious enterprise depends consider well that the sisters will happily produce greater blessings for the missions in proportion to the aptness and diligence of the training which their minds and souls have received. And would that by the inspiration of God the zeal of many holy native sisters may be added to the skillful activities of the missionaries.

44. In dealing with these matters, We have not forgotten you, most beloved sons, who have already obeyed that command of the divine Master: "Put out into the deep."^[16] We extend Our goodwill to you, who are already laboring and fatigued in the middle of the sea, striving to extend the boundaries of the Kingdom of God. And having lifted up your spirit, We address to one and all of you the words of the Apostle of the gentiles: "Use all care to present thyself to God as a man approved, a worker that need not be ashamed."^[17] "Be thou an example to the faithful in speech, in conduct, in charity, in faith, in chastity."^[18] And We also desire with the Apostle to suggest to you the necessary aids by which these exhortations may be put into action. We commend especially this most effective counsel: "Pursue righteousness."^[19] For if divine grace fills your soul, all the things which surround you will not be able to influence you, seeing that the Kingdom of God is ruled by this law: "The Kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and buried in three measures of flour, until all of it was leavened."^[20]

45. The annals of your sacred missions admirably testify to the truth of this law. Some attempted, usually unsuccessfully, to replace Catholic missions with those of lay people. On the other hand those apostolic men Francis Xavier and John de Brito contributed not only to the spiritual salvation

of souls, but also to the greater expansion of the fortunes of Portugal. Therefore follow them with fitting emulation.

46. This year, as you know, on March 15, is the fourth centenary of the divine call of St. Francis Xavier to the sacred missions of India in Portuguese territory. He learned of his call from a letter which John III, King of Portugal, sent to Rome to his legate requesting good, virtuous missionaries for the regions of India. Beyond all doubt it may be said that the saint, the patron of sacred missions, repaid your nation with most generous interest for the splendid assistance which helped this apostolic man to respond freely and gladly to his divine call. He could have done nothing greater for the good of Portugal if he had been born in your country. You see how great and how beneficent the virtue of purity is. From it We hope for happy results also for your projects. Therefore what St. Francis Xavier, Blessed John de Brito, and the other apostolic men of your nation took for themselves as the purpose and end of their sacred missions to the great profit of religion and the nation of Portugal, We may express in these words of the divine Master: "And for them I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.[21]

47. And now, before We end our letter, We address the generous people of Portugal who are most dear to us.

48. Christ the Lord commits to the care of all who already enjoy the blessings of Redemption this duty, that they share these same blessings with their brethren who do not yet possess these heavenly graces. Now your brethren inhabit your vast colonies, well to the number of many hundred thousand, and, in a special way, they ask of you and wait for the light of evangelical truth.

49. We exhort all of you therefore that, with the holy rivalry that exists among you, you will carry forward your sacred missions with all the means within your power.

50. Your ancestors, whose magnificent deeds you commemorate this year with festivities, surrounded their leaders and knights, waving flags signed with the cross, and either accompanied them, or - if this was not possible - followed them with prayers, a zealous good will, and their assistance. So too you should consider yourselves highly honored if you have contributed to the growth of the sacred missions your sons, your prayers, your aid.

51. And in a special way this most holy rivalry of which We speak extends to those who serve in the peaceful ranks of Catholic Action.

52. Without doubt God will shower upon the noble nation of Portugal the liberality of His blessings as he did at its birth. And the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Rosary, who is venerated at Fatima and is the same great Mother of God who obtained a great victory at Lepanto, will be with you with her powerful protection. Also with you will be St. Francis Xavier, the Patron of the Missions and a sort of adopted son of your country, and Blessed John de Brito, together with the resplendent phalanx

of the other Portuguese saints of the missions.

53. Meanwhile however may the Apostolic Blessing be an auspice of heavenly graces, and a testimony of Our paternal benevolence, which We impart to you, Our Beloved Son, and to you, Venerable Brothers, and to each flock committed to your care, with great love.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, June 13, the feast of St. Anthony, 1940, in the second year of Our Pontificate.

PIUS XII

1. Cf. Camoes, *Lusiadas*, I, 2.

2. Cf. Camoes, *Lusiadas*, VII. 3.

3. Eph 3. 8.

4. Jn 4. 35.

5. Lk 10. 2.

6. Za 9. 17.

7. Cf. A.A.S. 1926, p. 7. 1.

8. Ibidem.

9. A.A.S., 1926, p.70 sq.

10. A.A.S., 1919, p. 449.

11. 2 Tm 3. 5.

12. 1 Cor 3. 10.

13. Acts 10.38.

14. Lk 10. 9.

15. Mt 28. 19.

16. Lk 5.4.

17. 2 Tm 2. 15.

18. 1 Tm 4. 12.

19. 1 Tm 6. 11.

20. Mt 13. 33.

21. Jn 17. 19.