Letter of Pope Leo IX

to

the Emperor Constantine Monomachos

(1054)


THE TEXT

Bishop Leo, servant of the servants of God, [sends] greetings to his beloved son, the glorious and religious emperor of New Rome Constantine Monomachos.

What great thanks we should constantly render to the holy and individuated Trinity, creator and governor of all things, for its ineffable gift by which it does all things in all [I Cor. 12], we can indeed assess from your religious devotion and industry, most glorious son and most serene emperor. For out of freely given piety, it has shown and provided such a person as you to us in these days, through whose faithful aid we trust that both the state of the catholic Church may be relieved and the republic of terrestrial rule be improved. For after excessively long and pernicious quarrels, you have become the first monitor, the bearer, and the much desired exactor of peace and concord and you seem to say with Paul, that most humble vessel of election: As we carry out Christ's embassy, we entreat you, as if God was exhorting you through us: be reconciled for His sake, who is our peace and who makes the two one. [II Cor. 5:20; Eph. 2:14] For like a religious offspring of outstanding ability, you do not forget the cries of your mother, nor do you think that she should be condemned because she has aged but rather revered and with bowels full of charity, you contemplate returning to her so that you may become all the more dear and close to the one God and Father of all, as you are kinder and more humble to this first mother. For it does not escape your prudence what the words say in Ecclesiasticus: The father's blessing strengthens the houses of the sons; the mother's curse uproots their foundations.[Eccl. 3:9] And this: Do not dismiss the law of your mother, but bind it in your heart constantly.[Prov. 1:8] These proverbs, of course, take care to commend to us the mother who bears us and trains us for eternal life rather than the mother who bears us unto death and loves and instructs us carnally. But unless the [ecclesial] mother takes the place of the [earthly] mother, so that she might re-generate and re-nourish her children, there is no doubt but that the [earthly] mother destines them for a second death. Now, this catholic mother and unsullied virgin, although she has occupied and filled the ends of the world with her members, she has nonetheless set up and set forth one head which should be reverenced and received by all. Those who dishonor it, number themselves in vain among her members. What that head is, your imperial brilliance fully knows: the one, of course, which the voice of Christ placed first and wished to praeeminent over all and the subsequent piety and general consensus of the holy fathers has constantly celebrated until now. You, too, choose to honor its venerable face, since you are not ungrateful to that [mother] who fittingly marked your head with the diadem of earthly rule, made you one to be feared and loved by the peoples, and anointed you with the chrism of adoption so that you
may reign forever. Indeed, this ancient and now veteran Rome brought forth in time, nourished, advanced, and set over all mortals that first most noble and religious Constantine, in whose genealogy you glory and in whose might you are made great and after whom the famous royal city is named. Nor did it cease from its beneficent acts until it gathered him in the glory of the eternal kingdom. This is why, most glorious son, in extolling your excellence with manifold thanksgiving, we are filled with all the greater joy over your devotion and recognition as a greater number of souls depend on your rule and are strengthened by your example. And therefore we shall not cease praying our common Lord, through Whom kings hold their kingdoms and princes judge justly [cf. Prov. 8:15], so that He may keep you in His good pleasure through a long life and may fulfill your desire in good things.

I myself, some sort of vicar of the Apostolic See according to the measure of my humility and possibility, labor to fulfill the office of the dispensation entrusted to me in accordance with the God-speaking Paul: Woe upon me, if I do not preach the Gospel, for the greatest necessity falls upon my shoulders,[I Cor. 9:16-17] since I am going to render an account to the eternal and strict judge for the rule of one church but based on the merit of all churches. Therefore when I saw with that concern with which I must stand watch over all the churches, that a foreign nation without discipline [i.e. the Normans] was rising up against the churches everywhere with unbelievable and unheard of rage and with an impiety that was more than pagan, that they were killing Christians and afflicting some with new and horrible tortures until their spirit failed, that they spared neither infants nor the old nor feminine fragility out of any respect for humanity, that they do not keep any distance between the sacred and the profane, that they despoiled, burned, and destroyed to the ground the basilicas of the saints, frequently I rebuked, I entreated, I preached, I pressured their perversity at times opportune and inopportune, and proclaimed the terrors of divine and human vengeance. But because the Wise Man says: No one can correct someone whom God has despised, and the fool is not corrected,[Eccles. ??] their wickedness remained so hardened and obstinate that from day to day they added worse things to the worst. Since I not only wished to expend exterior goods for the liberation of Christ's sheep but supremely desired to be expended myself, it seemed to me that human defense should be gathered from all around to bear witness to their iniquity or, if it should thus turn out to be useful, to repress their contumacy. For I heard from the Apostle that princes do not bear the sword without cause but rather they are ministers of God, avengers in wrath upon everyone who does evil, and that princes are not a terror to good work but to evil, and that kings and dukes have been sent by God to wreak vengeance upon malefactors.

Supported therefore by such a military company as the shortness of time and the pressing necessity allowed, I adjudged that the conversation and counsel of your duke and master Argyros should be sought out, not so that I might obtain the destruction of any of the Normans or of any human being or deal in death, but rather so that those who did not fear divine judgment might at least come to their senses out of human fear. In the meantime, as we were trying to shatter their pertinacity with saving admonition and they, in return, were pretending to promise complete subjection, they attack our company in a sudden onslaught but they still lament more than rejoice in their victor. For just as your piety took care to write for our consolation, so for this presumption of theirs they await their still greater indignation which will overcome them after that diminution of their own troops which they experienced. And we, believing that divine aid
shall be there for us and that human aid shall not be lacking, we shall not cease from our intention to free Christendom nor shall we rest in our time unless we rest with the rest of the holy, but endangered, Church. To achieve and obtain this we have as the greatest solace and protection from divine piety our dearest and most brilliant son Henry, whose promised and proximate arrival we await from day to day, since he comes to our aid girded for battle with an imperial expedition. Supernal grace has also aroused your serenity to do the same so that when you two, like two arms, expel that hostile nation from this side and that and cause them to flee far away, the honor of an afflicted Christendom may be revealed and the state of the republic may be reformed. But because iniquity abounded and charity grew cold and because the holy Roman and apostolic see had been too long possessed by mercenaries, not pastors, by people who seek what is their own rather than what is Jesus Christ's, it lay wretchedly devastated until now. But divine counsel wanted me to take up the wait of so great an episcopal see. Although my weak shoulders are greatly burdened and weighed down by it, not a little sacred hope remains for me when such sons, so brilliant in their religion and power, stand on both sides of me. Therefore, my most devoted son and most serene emperor, deign to work with us to reveal your holy mother Church and to recover the privileges of its dignity and reverence as well as its patrimony in the regions under your jurisdiction, just as you can learn from the writings and deeds of our and your venerable predecessors. Hence, we exhort you, who have become the great successor of Constantine the Great in blood, name, and rule, to become the imitator of his devotion towards the apostolic see. And what that marvelous man — after Christ — conferred upon this see, confirmed, and defended, you should constantly help to recover, retain, and defend in accordance with your name. For if you fight so extraordinarily, you shall have the same name in the eyes of God which you once had among men. Our most glorious son Henry clearly is trying to achieve this in his region. All this shall progress all the more happily and all the more times for us and for you as soon as a most firm treaty of peace and friendship is composed between you both, while the princes of the apostles intervene by the grace of God and I, their humble vicar, mediate and keep order.

Now then, our brother, Archbishop Michael, has sent us letters of exhortation to concord and unity. And since he admonishes us to so desireable and necessary a good, it is necessary that we receive him with all the more devotion and readiness as we consider more acutely that no one can be numbered among the disciples of Christ who disdained to acquiesce to brotherly peace when the Lord says to his disciples: *In this all shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,* [Jn. 13:35] and the Apostle Paul thus proclaims: *Pursue peace with all men and the sanctity without which no one shall see God.*[Heb. 12:14] And yet your brilliance should know that many unbearable things about his presumptions long ago came to our ears: how, burning hot against the Latin Church in open persecution, he did not fear to excommunicate all who touched sacraments made from unleavened bread; that, trying to deprive the ancient patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch of their ancient dignity, he desired to subject them to himself with novel ambition and contrary to right and justice; and you can know in detail the many things which he is said to usurp from our messengers. If he should be stubborn in these matters — which God forbid! — he can in no way retain our peace, because without a doubt *it turns to us,* as the Lord says, *if he should refuse to be a child of peace.*[Lk. 10:6] And the Apostle says: *If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, leave peaceably with all.*[Rom.12:18] For he honors the *paterfamilias* in vain who dishonors his wife. And in vain does he extol the head and face of the *materfamilias* who tramples the toes of her feet in attacking the least of her
children. Against such a man the wisdom of God in Ecclesiasticus sounds this note: *Whoever
flees his father is a man of the worst repute, and whoever exasperates his mother is cursed by
God.* [Eccles. 3:16] Nevertheless, we are confident that, with God's grace preceding, he shall be
found innocent of these things, or if corrected, he shall quickly repent when admonished and
shall become not as he is said to be but what we piously wish and hope that he is.

We now commend to your glory in every way the present messengers of ourselves and of
the holy Roman and apostolic see, so that, as is fitting, they may be received with liberality,
considered with reverence, treated with kindness and honor, listened to with reasonableness and
patience, and sent quickly back to us in praiseworthy fashion, lest they be disgusted that they
undertook so great a labor in vain and we be ashamed to have sent them. Also, you should not be
suspicious of the bishop of Amalfi, because he is a Roman through and through and, although
descended from Amalfitani, he has lived with us now in our familia for almost an entire year
now.

May the blessed God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies and God of
all consolation, deign to bless your excellency with every spiritual blessing and may He fill your
excellency with complete joy and peace so that in the present age you may rule happily for a long
time and in the age to come you, our honorable and desireable son in Christ and glorious
Augustus, may enjoy blessedly the kingdom of Heaven along with the King of Kings and the
Lord of Lords. Amen.