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Letter of Pope Benedict XV To The Most Reverend Father Master Louis Theissling, Master General of the Dominican Order, On the occasion of the Seventh Centenary of the Confirmation of the Order

Pope Benedict XV

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LETTER OF

POPE BENEDICT XV

To The Most Reverend Father Master Louis Theissling

Master General of the Dominican Order

On the occasion of the Seventh Centenary of the Confirmation
of the Order

LETTER OF

The Most Reverend Father Master Louis Theissling

Master General of the Dominican Order

On the observance of the solemnity of the Seventh Centenary of the
Confirmation of the Order

LETTER OF

The Most Reverend Father Master Louis Theissling

Master General of the Dominican Order

to the Very Reverend Prior Provincials, Masters, Ex-Provincials,
Conventual Priors as also to each and every one
of the Fathers, Brothers and Sisters
of the Order of Friars
Preachers

Imprimatur:

RAYMUNDUS MEAGHER, O.P.,
Prior Provincialis.

Imprimatur:

✠ JACOBUS JOSEPHUS,
Episcopus Columbensis.

LETTER OF
POPE BENEDICT XV

To the Most Reverend Father Master Louis Theissling
Master General of the Dominican Order

On the occasion of the Seventh Centenary of the Confirmation
of the Order

Beloved Son, Health and Apostolic Benediction:

I.

At the congress of Dominican Tertiaries held at Florence three years ago, at which We and many other Bishops were present, it was decided with our entire approval and advice, that another congress of the same kind, but of far greater solemnity, should be held at Bologna during the solemn festivities that were shortly to be observed in memory of the seventh centenary of the confirmation of the Dominican Order. Little did We then suspect what the decrees of God had in store for Our unworthiness and what He so soon was to bestow upon Us; but certain personal and special reasons seemed to prompt Us to honor the Institute and the memory of the most holy Patriarch St. Dominic, since We were, so to speak, the defenders and guardians of his sacred ashes, and since, moreover, We venerate among those of Dominic's sons who have been raised to the altars of the Church a member of Our own family. But now, since by the will of God it happens that at the approach of this centenary We find Ourselves no longer in the Seat of St. Petronius, but in the very Chair of the Prince of the Apostles, therefore is it seemly that We should take into account the enduring benefits in behalf of the Church due to the Dominican Order rather than any private ties of Our own, and that We should give some singular proof of apostolic charity towards this illustrious Order.

Our predecessor Honorius III seemed, indeed, divinely illuminated when he foretold the glories of the Dominican family. For on December 22, 1216, when he confirmed the Order founded

nine years before, he again addressed apostolic letters to the holy Founder. "Considering," he wrote, "that the Brethren of your Order will be *champions of the Faith and true lights of the world*, We do hereby confirm your Order." How truly he spoke, the history of the Dominicans from that day down to our own times is a shining proof.

II.

For in respect to their labors and struggles for the Faith, it is certain that there were never any who opposed more strongly or more constantly the adversaries of Christian truth. First of all, with what great strength did they not crush the audacity of the Albigenses, for whose defeat, indeed, they were divinely raised up! Then, how strenuously and learnedly did they not oppose, by their teaching, preaching and writing, the Cathari, the Patarines, the Hussites, the Reformers and all the heretics that followed! Nor rarely were there found among them those who sealed their faith by the outpouring of their blood. As an example We need but mention the illustrious Peter Martyr, the glory of Verona. With what zeal they cherished and guarded the integrity of Faith and of Christian life among the people, who does not know? To pass over other things beneficially introduced by them to this end, such as the Holy Name Society, the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, the Third Order of St. Dominic, undoubtedly it was from the hands of St. Dominic and his children that the church received the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin, "that great protection against heresies and vices." Nor did they labor less zealously and usefully in propagating the Faith. For we know that from the very beginning of the Order their missionaries carried the Word of God with great fruit to the barbarians of Asia and Northern Africa; with even greater success did they spread the truths of Christianity in Europe, especially among the Poles and Hungarians. And when America was discovered, the Dominicans, in particular those of Spain, felt that a new and immense field had been opened to their apostolic zeal. In such manner did they at all times conduct their apostolate in the New World, that the result was a rich harvest of souls and honorable renown.

Most conspicuous among these Dominican missionaries to America were Louis Bertrand and Bartholomew de las Casas.

The one by the splendor of his virtues and the greatness of his miracles renewed the illustrious example of the Apostles. The other is deservedly ranked as one of the great vindicators of the dignity of human nature, because not only did he free the Indians from the slavery of Satan, but also protected them from the domination and persecution of wicked men.

Finally, that which above all else proves the sincere and unsullied Faith of the Dominican Order is its especial and uninterrupted devotion to this Holy See.

For it should never be forgotten that when the Papal authority was contumaciously attacked by the civil power, the Dominicans especially suffered much because of their unfailing loyalty to the Popes; whenever there was need to uphold the rights of the Roman Pontiff, the Dominicans were the first to undertake their defence. Furthermore, as long as the memory of Catherine of Sienna endures, the singular bond that unites the Dominican family to the Apostolic See will be sufficiently manifest.

III.

There can be no question whatever but that the light which the Dominicans have shed upon the world to Our own day has come chiefly from their learning. It is known to all what great industry they have always exercised in those higher studies which promote the true progress of the race in right living; nor is it necessary to mention those among them whose genius and erudition have been immortalized by writings, vast and profound.

For who is there familiar with the highest studies who does not stand in amazement at the volumes of Albert the Great, of Antoninus and of Cajetan? Who is there devoted to the graver sciences, who if he join the love of holy Church with the love of study, will not most highly esteem, most earnestly love, most religiously follow Thomas Aquinas, the light of whose doctrine has been granted the Church by divine providence for the confirmation of truth and the refutation of all the errors of time to come? Praise is due this Order not merely because it produced the Angelic Doctor, but also because it never afterwards deviated a hair's breadth from his teaching. But the Dominican Order is characterized not only by the light of learning, but also by that diviner light of holiness.

At every period of its history, great multitudes of this religious family have by the sanctity of their lives, in which, indeed, some surpassed others, attained to the blessedness of heaven, and from there they illuminate for the faithful the pathway to every virtue. This choir of Saints is led by their Father Dominic, and after him, shining with lesser glory, follow in wonderful variety Aquinas, Ferrer, Raymond, the Virgin of Sienna, and she who was the first by the fame of her sanctity to glorify the shores of South America.

IV.

Considering these things one cannot wonder that the Dominican Order has always been held in high regard by the Apostolic See, which, indeed, was itself most worthily occupied by four Dominican Popes. Hence the Roman Pontiffs often conferred upon the members of this Order the highest dignities and entrusted to them the gravest duties; and certain offices, instituted for the protection of the Faith, were committed to the Order as a commendation of the soundness of its discipline and doctrine.

Now We, Beloved Son, having regard of all these things, first of all do render supreme thanks to God, the Author and Giver of all good, for that, according to His kindness, He has till this present time favored the Institute of your Founder, and We suppliantly pray that He may deign in a similar way to cherish and assist it in the future. Therefore from Our heart We congratulate you and all the members of your threefold Order, and We exhort you that you continue to show yourselves worthy to be children of so great a Father and recipients of such an inheritance. We think it augurs well for you yourself that you begin the government of the Order at the approach of this happy commemoration, and We wish you a term of office marked by prosperity and fruitful to the Church. In order that this centenary festivity, which falls on December 22d of this year, may be celebrated with greater spiritual profit and joy, it has pleased Us to enrich it with a Pontifical indulgence. Therefore, We grant, for one time, and under the usual conditions, a plenary indulgence to all those who visit any church or public oratory of the first, second or third Order of St. Dominic, in which the seventh centenary is being commemorated by a triduum or by the observance of the feast day only. Moreover We grant not

only for the day of the solemnity, but also for the other two days of the triduum, where this is held, that the Mass of St. Dominic may be celebrated.

Meanwhile as a pledge of heavenly gifts and as a proof of our fatherly good-will most lovingly do We grant to you, Beloved Son, and to your entire Order the Apostolic Benediction.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, the 29th day of October, 1916, in the third year of Our Pontificate.

BENEDICT XV, *Pope.*

LETTER OF
THE MOST REVEREND FATHER MASTER LOUIS THEISSLING
Master General of the Dominican Order

On the observance of the solemnity of the Seventh Centenary of
the Confirmation of the Order

Very Reverend Father Provincial:

Our venerated Predecessor, Most Rev. Fr. Hyacinth M. Cormier, in his letter of September 12, 1915, recommended to all the Provincials and to all the Vicars of Congregations the celebration of the seventh centenary of the confirmation of our Order in these words: "The present event is of such nature that it ought to be celebrated by all the Brethren and Sisters of the Order of St. Dominic with sentiments of deepest gratitude towards God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Apostolic See and Christ's Vicar on earth. . . . Neither should the Brethren and Sisters of the Third Order fail to take part in such a festivity: nay, rather let them, according to their ability, emulate the Friars Preachers, in order that a day so memorable and which interests the whole family of St. Dominic, may be celebrated by all his children with united efforts and prayers and with the same heartfelt joy."

We rejoice to learn that in obedience to these paternal exhortations our Brethren have already commemorated this event in the principal churches of our Order by solemn and even triduan exercises. But this is not enough for Us: We wish and We do most earnestly renew the recommendation that in *each and every* church of our Order, whether of the Brethren or of the Sisters, at least one day be set apart for the observance of this seventh centenary. We ask, therefore, that you make known to all Priors, Vicars and Prioresses of houses subject to your Province, even to those that have already celebrated this event, Our firm wish in this matter, and that likewise you earnestly

urge the same thing to the Sisters of the Third Order living in your Province.

The date assigned for all will be December 22, as being the seven hundredth anniversary of the day on which Pope Honorius III issued the Bull of imperishable memory by which he confirmed the Order. However, if it be more convenient, some other date, close to December 22, may be chosen for this celebration.

The Supreme Pontiff himself, Benedict XV, a most loving Son and most capable Protector of our Order, will deign to grant letters commending the commemoration of this centenary, which in due time will be transmitted to all the Brethren. Moreover, in accordance with his benevolence towards our Order, and in order the more to arouse the devotion of the faithful, he has already granted a plenary indulgence, which may be gained once on the day or days of the above mentioned solemnities by all the faithful who shall visit the church and fulfill the usual conditions.

We commend these Our wishes to your ardent zeal and sincere love of the Order, and We are certain that everywhere the day so memorable and so dear to us all will be celebrated in the best way possible and with the most solemn pomp.

Farewell. From Our whole heart We impart to you, Very Rev. Fr. Provincial, and to all the Brethren of your Province Our paternal blessing, at the same time recommending Ourselves and Our Socii to your prayers.

Given at Rome at the Collegio Angelico on the 22d day of October, 1916.

FR. LOUIS THEISSLING, O.P.,
Master General of the Order.

FR. JEROME CODERICH,
Master in Sacred Theology,
Provincial of Greece and Socius.

To our Beloved in the Son of God
The Very Reverend Prior Provincials, Masters, Ex-Provincials,
Conventual Priors,
As also to each and every one of the Fathers, Brothers and
Sisters of the Order of Friars Preachers
We
FATHER LOUIS THEISSLING
Professor of Sacred Theology
Humble Master General and Servant of the Whole Order
Health, Love and Increase of the Order

I.

You already know, Beloved Brethren, that at the General Chapter held at Fribourg, Switzerland, We were elevated to the Supreme government of the Order.

We freely confess that Our soul was not a little disturbed by the announcement of Our election. But since We were convinced that it was not lawful to refuse this charge, at once onerous and honorable, humbly bowing to the divine will, We took upon Us the government of the Order. May God Who has called Us supply by His divine assistance for Our deficiencies. This Our well-grounded hope has been especially strengthened for that the Brethren and Sisters scattered throughout the world have most willingly promised Us their filial reverence, prompt obedience and continual prayers.

Up to the present We have been impeded by many and diverse cares from addressing you in a pastoral letter and imparting to you Our paternal blessing. We are pleased to day to fulfill that which We have long desired.

II.

That We should exhort Our Brethren to order their lives according to the Rule which they have professed, is rightly said to be the first duty of Our office. Now the end of the Order is the salvation of souls. Lest, however, it should happen that

while laboring for the salvation of others we ourselves should stray from the path of perfection, our most holy Patriarch St. Dominic has given us approved laws which are calculated in an especial manner to strengthen the spirit against the weakness of the flesh. For what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his own soul? Hence the Apostle of the Gentiles, who was made all things to all men, and who desired to be even an anathema for his brethren, had such care above all for his own sanctification that he said: "If I have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal—I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway."

Our religious life is partly contemplative, partly active: neither side should be promoted to the neglect of the other, but both should be developed harmoniously.

III.

In order that we may guard the contemplative life, religious observance above all must be cultivated. For this is the foundation upon which we must build, unless we build upon the sand; this, the first principle of every religious family; this, the abundant fountain of graces, from which flow all other goods, to which, consequently, may be applied the words of the Book of Wisdom: "Together with it all other good things have come to me."

The want of religious observance cannot be compensated for either by the number, or by the learning, or by the labors of the Brethren. Adhering, therefore, to our ancient traditions, We admonish each and all of the Brethren, whether Professors, or Preachers, or Missionaries, whether Parish Priests or Assistants in the work of the ministry, that they attend to the rock whence they have been hewn, and most faithfully fulfill all of the observances not opposed to their obligations. Let them love their choral duties and never without lawful dispensation absent themselves therefrom. Let them sedulously assist at the community meditation, lead a perfect common life, and follow out with love and veneration all the monastic customs. If all this be observed, our Brethren will give to the faithful by word and example those things which through the help of divine grace

they have received in prayer. Imparting to others the fruit of their contemplation, they will walk worthy of their vocation.

IV.

Regular observance which proceeds from an interior movement of grace is most fruitful in sanctifying both ourselves and others, since it nourishes and solidifies in us the spirit of sacrifice and self-denial by which we are rendered fit to follow the example of the Apostle, who to gain all men for Christ, became all things to all. In order, however, that our Brethren may become, as their holy Founder intended, perfect champions of the Faith and true lights of the world, they should be distinguished not only for holiness of life, but likewise for a singular love of sacred studies. It was with this in view that the holy Patriarch sent his first followers to the University of Toulouse. Following in his footsteps his successors have earnestly inculcated in their subjects the study of sacred science, the twin-sister of regular observance. Hence we admire in our Order that glorious succession of Saints and Doctors, who by the splendor of their doctrine and the holiness of their lives have wondrously adorned the Church Universal. Among these stands first the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, in whom we rightly glory as in our Brother. "No one can enumerate the eulogies which theologians have pronounced in honor of the most holy Thomas, no one can estimate how much his unsullied doctrines have been acclaimed by the Supreme Pontiffs." To pass over commendations of St. Thomas spoken in times past, let it suffice to recall that our gloriously reigning Pontiff Benedict XV has declared and ordained that St. Thomas' doctrine be defended and propagated "to the end that there may be a full explanation and a victorious defence of divinely delivered truth."

By hereditary right, Beloved Brethren, has the doctrine of St. Thomas our Brother been committed to our Order. Therefore We deem it superfluous to exhort you all, especially the Moderators of Studies and the Lectors, to follow his teaching most faithfully, not merely in the strictly theological, but also in the metaphysical, psychological and other similar questions, as the General Chapter has admonished, taking care at the same time to borrow from the wonderful discoveries of the natural sciences, illustrations and confirmations of the profound prin-

principles of Thomistic doctrine. Nor is it sufficient to study the substance of the doctrine; let the text of the Holy Doctor be committed to memory and elucidated, so that the very foundations of the wavering, hazy and ruinous systems of our age may be overthrown (Chapter of Viterbo, 1907, on studies, No. 56).

Those who are truly imbued with the doctrine and method of St. Thomas easily acquire the Catholic sense, which was so natural to the Angelic Doctor, and perceive at once, as by a certain instinct, what is not in agreement with revealed truth.

Those who prefer their own views and opinions to the principles of St. Thomas are very much deceived by a philosophy and vain fallacy that is according to the traditions of men and not according to Christ.

V.

Finally, Beloved Brethren, in order that we may preserve to the best possible advantage the glorious inheritance which is ours, We beseech in the Lord all Provincials and all Superiors of Congregations that they exercise the greatest solicitude for the pious and religious education of the Brethren, that they altogether exclude from the reception of the habit every unworthy subject and admit no one without a diligent examination concerning his birth, family, character, health, science and morals. Let these Superiors and all other Brethren to whom it belongs according to our laws to admit postulants to the habit and novices to profession, fully realize that this is a most serious matter of conscience for them. Daily experience and history teach us how great is the detriment caused to religious Orders by the indiscreet admission of unworthy subjects. Let only the best of the Brethren be chosen as Masters of Novices, and let no suitable Novice-Master be removed from his charge, except for the gravest reasons. In the places in which the Novices are educated only exemplary Brethren should be assigned, so that the younger may learn from the example of the older Brethren how to become more religious and more diligent.

All our Brethren and Sisters scattered throughout the world have earnestly promised Us by letter their daily prayers. We request that you ask God graciously to grant, through the intercession of St. Louis Bertrand, Our own special patron, as well as the patron of our Novices, that in all the Provinces and Con-

gregations of the Order the Novices, whether clerics or lay-brothers, may be instructed in the true spirit of our Holy Father St. Dominic. This done, there can be no doubt that God will abundantly answer the wishes and prayers by which the Supreme Pontiff deigned to encourage Us when he wrote: "We implore God that He may confirm by His grace that which He has wrought in you and that He may so prosper your term of office that the fruits yielded by the counsel and piety of your Predecessor, Our beloved in Christ, Hyacinth Cormier, may by your sagacity and prudence become even more plentiful."

VI.

And now, Beloved Brethren, We very lovingly bless you all in the name of St. Dominic our Father.

In conclusion We make known to you that We have retained as Procurator General of the Order, Most Rev. Father Henry Desqueyrous, whose ability in managing affairs and whose singular benevolence towards all who need his help is known to every one. As Our ordinary Socii We have appointed Very Rev. Father Master Hyacinth Leca, Very Rev. Father Master Leonard Lehu, Very Rev. Father Ceslaus M. Hansen, Very Rev. Father Lector John Casas, Very Rev. Father Lector John McNicholas.

Farewell. Be ever mindful of Us and of Our Socii in your prayers to the Lord, to the Most Blessed Virgin, Queen of the Rosary, and to our Holy Father St. Dominic.

Given at Rome at the Collegio Angelico, the 10th day of October, 1916.

FATHER LOUIS THEISSLING,

Master General of the Order of Preachers.

FATHER LEONARD LEHU, O.P.,

Master in Sacred Theology,

Provincial of the Holy Land and Socius.

