

ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM TO POPE INNOCENT I¹

[From Constantinople, between Easter and Whitsuntide, 404.]

*To Innocent, my most reverend master, the bishop beloved of God;
greeting in the Lord from John.*

I THINK that even before this letter Your Piety will have had intelligence of the outrages committed here. When events so terrible have happened, what place in the world can remain in ignorance of the dire calamity? Report of it has been carried to the ends of the earth, and has brought with it everywhere wide sorrow and lamentation. But the time is not one for lamentation only, but for remedy and for counsel—how best to stay the terrible tempest that has fallen upon the Church. I have therefore considered it my duty to urge certain holy and reverend bishops—Demetrius, Pansophius, Pappus and Demetrius—to leave the churches committed to them, brave the great stretch of seas, embark on this distant journey and make all speed to Your Charity; they can then put all before you clearly and help to contrive an early remedy. With them I have sent my honoured friends the deacons Paul and Cyriacus; I myself will briefly relate events as well as the space of a letter allows.

The Emperor had had laid before him² some charges against Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria. He summoned him to appear alone, but the Patriarch brought along with him a great number of Egyptian bishops,³ meaning, it would seem, to show at the outset that he had come to give pitched battle. Upon reaching Constantinople—this majestic and sacred capital—he flouted custom and long tradition by not entering the cathedral church and not visiting myself; he would neither speak nor pray nor communicate with me. Having disembarked, he rode past the cathedral entrance and out beyond the city, and there he took up his quarters. More than once I invited him and the others to be my guests (I had made all proper preparations for receiving and lodging them), but neither he nor they would so much as hear of it. Finding this so, I was much perplexed; hostility so unjustified was something I could not fathom. However, I kept to my duty and did what might be expected of me; again and again I invited him to meet me and explain why his earliest actions should be to kindle strife and rouse discord in the capital. He would give no

¹ Migne 52, cols. 529-536; D'Alton, *Selections*, pp. 297-303.

² By the monks of Nitria led by the 'Tall Brethren'.

³ Twenty-nine of them. This was in August 403.

reason, and meanwhile his accusers were urging their case. His Majesty summoned me and bade me go outside the city to where Theophilus was and there hear the charges against him, which included assault and murders and much besides. But I knew the traditional canons on the matter, and could not forget the respect and honour due to the Patriarch, who had moreover reminded me by letter that disputes must never be dragged outside their proper boundaries and that the affairs of any ecclesiastical province must be examined within that province. Hence I declined to act as judge and protested strongly against the notion.

But Theophilus went to new extremes. He high-handedly summoned my archdeacon—as though the diocese were widowed of its bishop already—and made use of him to bring all the clergy over to his own side. The churches were thrown into disorder, since the priests belonging to each of them were induced to desert me and encouraged and instigated to lay complaints and charges against me. At this stage the Patriarch sent messengers summoning me to trial, though he had yet to disprove the charges against himself—a thing clean contrary to the canons and to every ecclesiastical law.

I knew that this was no case of appearing before a judge (had it been so, I was a thousand times ready to go) but before a downright enemy, as was proved by events before and after. I therefore sent three bishops to him—Demetrius of Pisinus, Eulysius of Apameia, Lupicinus of Appiaria—and also two priests, Germanus and Severus. Without departing from proper moderation, I replied through them that I did not decline a trial as such but trial before a professed and open enemy. When a man still lacked the needful documents, when his conduct from the beginning had been what it had been here, when he had broken away from prayer and communion with the church of the diocese, when he was prompting informers, when he was making priests disloyal and churches desolate, by what right could he take a judge's seat, to which he had no title whatever? It was against all reason that an Egyptian should judge those who belonged to Thrace.⁴ the more so when he was himself under accusation and was moreover an open enemy. Unabashed by this, he hastened to execute his designs. I had declared my readiness to appear before a hundred bishops—or a thousand—to refute the charges and prove myself innocent, as indeed I am. But he would have none of it. While I kept away, while I was demanding a general council and seeking to be tried before one, not declining a hearing of my case but a hearing before a professed enemy, Theophilus was receiving informers, reconciling

⁴ The See of Constantinople, though since 381 its Patriarch ranked next to the Pope, was technically still attached to the ecclesiastical province of Thrace.

men I had excommunicated, accepting from them petitions against me before they were cleared of the charges against themselves, securing indictments of me. All this was against tradition and the tenor of the canons. To be brief, he did not desist from his machinations till he had ousted me⁵—most tyrannically and autocratically—alike from the city and from the see. Late one evening, with all the populace following me, I was seized by the governor's agent in the middle of the city, arrested and forcibly dragged away, thrust into a boat and carried away by sea through the night; all this because I demanded a general council to give me a fair trial.

Would not this move tears in the stoniest-hearted? But since, as I said before, these evils demand more than lamentation—they demand amendment—I appeal to Your Charity to rise up in sympathy and endeavour your utmost to stem the mischief. For this was by no means the end of these disorders, and new provocations were afoot.

To take events as they came—the Emperor expelled from the city these shameless insulters of the Church; and many of the visiting bishops, having witnessed these lawless actions, returned to their own dioceses, seeking escape from such violence as from a general conflagration. I was recalled to the city and see from which I had been expelled so wrongfully; more than thirty bishops escorted me back, and His Majesty sent a notary for the occasion. Theophilus took at once to ignominious flight. Why? Because on my entry I asked the Emperor to call a synod for the retribution of these misdoings. Conscious of his guilt and fearing to be called to account (for the Emperor had sent out letters convoking everyone) he crept into a boat at dead of night and made off with all his accomplices. I was still not satisfied; my own conscience was clear, and I appealed to His Majesty once more. With his wonted zeal for the cause of religion, he sent again to the Patriarch, summoning him from Egypt with all his associates that he might justify his behaviour and not suppose that it justified itself—this delivery in my absence of an unjust, presumptuous, one-sided judgment in conflict with so many laws of the Church. But Theophilus paid no heed even to the Imperial message; he remained at Alexandria, offering by way of excuse his fear of a rising among the populace and the untimely zeal of some of his supporters; though before the Emperor's message arrived this same populace had already lashed him with plenty of abuse. But I have no wish to dwell on that; I have said so much only to show that he was checked in his misdeeds.

5 Through the verdict given at the Synod of the Oak.

But even so I did not let matters rest; I kept pleading for a trial with questions and answers in due form; I said I was ready to prove my innocence and the utter lawlessness of the others. There were certain Syrians⁶ who had been with Theophilus and joined in all his misdeeds. These had remained in the city; I approached⁷ them in readiness for a trial and often pressed them upon the point. I asked to be shown the records of their proceedings or the formal indictments or at least to be told what kind of charges were made or who the accusers were. My requests went unheeded, and I was deposed from my see a second time.⁸

How relate the sequel of horrors beyond all tragedy? What words can tell it? What hearer will not shudder? I had maintained my former offer. Then on Holy Saturday, towards evening, a great crowd of soldiers burst into the churches all at once and drove out by force all the priests who were loyal to myself; the sanctuary was hedged around with arms. Women in the chapels had stripped before baptism; at this monstrous assault they fled in terror, naked, not allowed to clothe themselves in womanly decency; they were driven out, and many of them were wounded first; the fonts were filled with blood, the sacred waters crimsoned with it. But there was sacrilege worse than this. The soldiers—pagans, some of them, as I afterwards learned—went in where the Sanctissimum was; they saw everything there, and in the turmoil the Precious Blood was spilt on their clothes; in this scene of barbaric pillage no outrage was left unwrought. The layfolk were all driven out from the city into the open land beyond; there they stayed; the churches were empty during the feast; more than forty bishops in communion with me were wantonly hounded out with the people and the clergy. All the while there had been weeping and wailing and lamentation everywhere—in the market-places, the houses, the land beyond—the city's every quarter overflowing with these calamities. So extreme had the outrage been that my own grief was shared not only by the sufferers but by the men who had not been touched—not only by the orthodox but by heretics, Jews and pagans. The disorder, tumult and lamentations were those of a sacked city. All this violence took place under cover of night, against the will of His Majesty; there were bishops concerned⁹ who had soldiers at their command and thought it no shame to go about preceded by sergeants instead of deacons. Day-

⁶ The bishops Severian, Antiochus and Acacius.

⁷ Reading *prosemen*.

⁸ This paragraph covers a period of some months. Chrysostom says nothing of the activities of his most powerful enemy, the Empress Eudoxia, under whose influence the Emperor signed the decree of deposition (shortly before Easter 404).

⁹ The three Syrians.

light found the whole city outside the walls in the shelter of trees and glens; there it was that they kept their Easter, like so many scattered sheep.

The rest you can imagine; as I said before, it would be impossible to recount it fully. The worst thing is that these calamities neither have ceased nor are within sight of ceasing. Matters worsen daily, and we have become a mockery to men—but no, there is no one who mocks us, not the most lawless even; everyone, as I said, is distressed at lawlessness so unheard of, iniquity so extreme. The turmoil among churches elsewhere is past all words, for these troubles are not confined to us but have spread eastwards. Like a noxious humour that comes from the head and then infects the rest of the body, the evils that had their source in the capital have issued forth in a stream of disasters everywhere; everywhere the clergy have risen against their bishops; bishops are divided against bishops, layfolk against layfolk, and others will follow this beginning; the world is in travail with calamities and everything is turned upside down.

Now therefore, my reverend lords,¹⁰ now that you know all this, show the courage and zeal that befit your sacred office and check the inroads upon the churches of this disastrous anarchy. Should such things become a precedent, should it become lawful for all who so chose to enter an alien diocese, no matter how far away, to depose whom they please and act on their own authority just as they have a mind to, you may assure yourselves that there will be general ruin, and that ruthless war will overrun the whole world, with expulsions and counter-expulsions everywhere. That no such confusion may overtake the world, I would ask you to lay it down that these iniquitous and one-sided enactments—made against me in absence and in spite of my readiness for a trial—shall have no force (indeed of their nature they can have none) and that those convicted of such outrage shall be subject to the canonical penalties. And as for myself, who am not convicted or proved responsible, allow me still to enjoy your abundant letters, your love, and all besides that I once enjoyed.

And though I was deposed unjustly—though the records and indictments were never shown me and my accusers never revealed—yet if even now the authors of these misdeeds should be willing to make their charges openly before an impartial and duly constituted court, I will gladly appear there, make my defence and show myself guiltless of these accusations, for so indeed I am; but the proceed-

¹⁰ Other Western bishops are here included with the Pope. According to Palladius copies of this letter were sent to Venerius of Milan and St Chromatius of Aquileia.

ings thus far have been outside every kind of order, every kind of church law and canon. For that matter, justice was never so flouted in a secular court, or indeed in a barbarian one; Scythians or Sarmatians would never have given such a one-sided judgment, in the absence of the man accused, when that man demurred not to trial but to trial by enemies, when he asked for a jury of a thousand, declared himself innocent, and was ready to rebut the charges and show himself guiltless in the face of the whole world.

Weigh well all that I have said; ask a fuller account from these holy men, my brother bishops; then, I beseech you, give me the benefit of your zeal. You will earn the thanks not of myself only but of the whole body of churches and you will win your reward from God, who accomplishes all things through the peace of the churches. Long health, my honoured and holy master, and pray for me.

Translated by WALTER SHEWRING.

O B I T E R

THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN CRUSADE is examined in the Editorial of *Economie et Humanisme* (October), the French quarterly which continues to coordinate so admirably objective economic research with the demands of a Christian sociology. The Pope's answer to President Truman's letter of August 6, 1947 (in which the President affirmed 'the desire of the American nation to collaborate with all men of good will' for the abolition of war and the causes of war) is seen to be 'the acceptance of a mission, but the refusal of a crusade'. The President had coupled with his hopes for peace a specific attack on 'collectivism' and an appeal for what might not unfairly be called the American way of life. As *Economie et Humanisme* shows, 'a peace between two materialisms is impossible'. The Pope's words reveal the gulf that lies between an identity of political interests and true peace. 'It is only by means of a spiritual reawakening, undertaken by both sides alike that it will be possible to establish unity in the world.'

The same number has a valuable article on 'The destiny of Europe in the American-Russian play of politics' by Pierre Laurac, and a sociological study by the Bishop of Arras on vocations to the priesthood in Ile-et-Vilaine from 1910-1945.

WESTERN AND EASTERN TRADITIONS of Central Europe are considered by Professor Dvornik in the *Review of Politics* (University of Notre Dame) for October. Correcting in the light of the facts of history the