

LEO XIII POPE  
TO OUR BELOVED SON JAMES GIBBONS

CARDINAL OF THE HOLY ROMAN CHURCH

OF THE TITLE OF SANTA MARIA IN TRASTEVERE,

AND BY APOSTOLIC DISPENSATION

ARCHBISHOP OF BALTIMORE:

---

**B**ELOVED SON, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

What Our Venerable Brethren, the Bishops of North America, assembled in the last Council of Baltimore, in the year 1884, proposed concerning the establishment of a University in your Republic, We learn from your joint letter of October 25<sup>th</sup> of last year that yourself and the other Bishops of the United States are now anxious to put into practical effect. And We have been especially rejoiced by this admirable manifestation of your faith, and by the sincere homage of your affection towards this Apostolic See, to whose patronage and care you have commended the University from its very first beginnings. For it has ever been the glory of the Pastors of the Church, and especially of her Supreme Pontiffs, earnestly to promote true knowledge, and studiously to provide that in her schools the sciences, and especially those of theology and philosophy, should be taught in conformity with divine faith, so that the forces of revelation and reason combined should form an invincible bulwark of faith. Hence Our Predecessors, always ardently solicitous for the education of Christian people in the past, spared no pains nor labor to found in the principal cities of Europe those celebrated institutions of learning, that is to say, those Universities which, in the middle ages

and in the centuries following, enriched Church and State with multitudes of men of learning. For this same end, from the moment that the government of the Church was committed to Us, We have labored assiduously for the revival of learning, and directed our efforts especially to the restoration of the teachings of Saint Thomas and to establish them in the place of honor they held in the past; with this aim in view that, in the cultivation of the more important studies, while full account should be taken of all the results which the industry of learned men has skilfully and wisely attained to in recent times, the system of philosophy should be shaped according to the noble wisdom of the ancients, and follow with docile zeal in the footsteps of the Angelic Doctor. For there was no doubt whatever in Our mind that, this revival of the sciences once effected, the study even of letters and of the other branches of human learning, joined with regard for religion, would redound greatly to the advantage of civil society.

The importance of this is made manifest by the dangers to which youth is exposed in European countries in our days; and your own acquaintance with the condition of things in North America cannot but have convinced you likewise of its very grave moment. For the unlimited license of thought and of writing, to which erroneous notions concerning both divine and human things have given rise not only in Europe but also in your country, has been the root and source of unbridled opinions; while on the other hand, with religion banished to a great extent from the schools, wicked men audaciously strive, by the craft of fallacious wisdom, to extinguish the light of faith in the minds of the young, and to enkindle therein the flames of irreligion. Wherefore it is necessary that youth be nourished more carefully with sound doctrine, and that those young men especially who are being educated for the Church, should be fully armed to fit them for the task of defending Catholic truth.

We therefore most gladly welcome and heartily approve your project for the erection of a University, moved as you are by a desire to promote the welfare of all and the interests of your illustrious Republic. But in order that this noble institute may

be happily established and conducted to ever increasing prosperity, it must remain under the authority and protection of all the Bishops of the country, in such a way that its whole administration shall be directed by them through certain Bishops selected for that purpose, whose right and duty it shall be to regulate the system of study, to make rules of discipline, to select the professors and other officials of the University, and to ordain whatever else pertains to its best government. And it is fitting that whatever shall be established concerning all these things shall be presented to this Apostolic See for its approval. But as to the choice of the city in which the University is to be erected, We desire that counsel be taken with all the Bishops of the United States, and that the question be decided after the opinion of all has been asked.

Go on therefore, Beloved Son, together with all Our other Venerable Brethren the Bishops of the United States, to carry to perfection with one mind what you have begun; and let not any one of you be deterred by any difficulty or labor, but let all take courage from the assured hope that they will receive an abundant return for their cares and sollicitudes, having laid the foundations of an institute destined to provide the Church with worthy ministers for the salvation of souls and the propagation of Religion, and to give to the Republic her best citizens. And We earnestly beseech Almighty God, that He would send forth upon you Wisdom that sitteth by His throne, that she may direct the minds and hearts of you all; and as a pledge of the divine gifts, and a mark of Our good will, We most lovingly bestow upon you, Our Beloved Son, and upon all Our Venerable Brethren the Archbishops and Bishops of the United States, and upon all others who will aid you in this work by their liberality, the Apostolic Benediction.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, this 10<sup>th</sup> day of April 1887, in the tenth year of Our Pontificate.

LEO XIII, POPE.