

Pius XI

To His Son. William Gier, Superior General
of the Society of the Divine Word

Beloved Son!
Greeting and Apostolic Blessing!

It is to Us a source of deep joy to learn that the college for the education of Negroes which you had established temporarily at Greenville, in the Diocese of Natchez, will shortly be transferred to Bay St. Louis, in the same diocese, and converted into a mission house for the training of negro boys according to the Rule of your Order. You are determined to carry this plan through to success, because it accords perfectly with the ideals of your Society, with God's admonition to the Church to teach all nations, and with the precepts of this Apostolic See.

In your new undertaking you are following the very principle which, in so far as circumstances allowed, has always guided the Catholic Church. To this mother has arisen, especially in recent times, a numerous progeny among the black races — a host of children who have frequently displayed virtues so splendid that they sealed their faith with their blood as in the most glorious epochs of Christian history.

“It is indispensable that priests of the same race shall make it their life-task to lead these peoples to the Christian faith and to a higher cultural level. You, beloved son, regard it as a very practical step to admit into the Society of the Divine Word Negroes who give evidence of a vocation for the regular life. These candidates are later to be admitted to the priesthood, and eventually work as apostles among the members of their race. You have chosen this path because you are firmly convinced that the Negroes can thus be brought much more easily and rapidly into the Church. For does it not indeed follow, from the very nature of the Church as a Divine institution, that every tribe or people should have priests who are not with it in race and character, in habit of thought and temperament? Aside from the fact that such priests will find a friendly welcome, will they not also prove far more effective in leading their brethren into, and confirming them in, the faith than any priests of a different race and from another country? Moreover, as experience has shown, the young Negro is not poorly gifted, mentally, so that he cannot assimilate higher education and the theological sciences — and the latter, not in a superficial and abbreviated form, but in the full courses as prescribed.

We extend, therefore, Our best wishes for the seminary which you intend soon to dedicate solemnly in the town of Bay St. Louis. May it prosper greatly under the care of the American episcopate, and may it attract a large attendance of negro pupils inspired with pure intentions!

May the Holy Doctor St. Augustine, under whose protection you have appropriately placed the seminary, also implore for the Negro race that fullness of the light of Christian knowledge which, as history shows, once suffused the fields of Africa!

Finally, beloved son, in so far as We are concerned, rest assured that We are most anxious to do everything to promote this salutary undertaking. For the present, as a pledge of heavenly favors and in token of Our fatherly good-will, We lovingly extend the Apostolic Blessing in our Lord to you, beloved son, to the Society which you govern, and to the Negroes in whom you are interested.

ROME, ST. PETERS, April 5, 1923,
in the second year of Our Pontificate.