



Respicientes

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX Protesting The Taking Of The Pontifical States

November 1, 1870

To All Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Ordinaries having Favor and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

As We look back on all the things which for many years the government of Piedmont has undertaken in order to overthrow the civil rule which God granted Our Apostolic See, We are moved by profound sorrow. God's purpose in providing the successors of St. Peter with temporal jurisdiction was to enable them to perform their spiritual duties in complete freedom and security. This government, by force and contrary to all divine law, has finally executed the plan it has long considered: the sacrilegious invasion of Our dear City and the cities We continued to rule after the previous occupation. We, prostrate before God, cry out using the words of the prophet: "Therefore do I weep and my eyes run down with water, because the Comforter, the Relief of my soul, is far from me. My children are desolate because the enemy hath prevailed."¹

History of the War

2. We have already narrated the history of this evil war to the Catholic world. We did this in addresses, in encyclicals, and in short letters. The short letters were issued at various times, namely November 1, 1850; January 22 and July 26, 1855; June 18 and 28 and September 26, 1859; and January 19, 1860. Our encyclical was released March 26, 1860, and the addresses took place September 28, 1860; March 18 and September 30, 1861; and September 20, October 17, and November 14, 1867. This series of documents reveals and confirms that serious injuries were perpetrated by the government of Piedmont even before the seizure of Our ecclesiastical sovereignty. Such injuries were inflicted by the enacting of laws contrary to the natural, divine, and ecclesiastical order. That government also subjected ministers, religious communities, and even bishops to degrading ill-treatment. It violated its solemn agreements with Us by resolutely denying the inviolable rights of the very agreements it had confirmed. At the same time the government indicated that it wanted to enter into new agreements with Us. These

documents demonstrate by what arts and with what sly and disgraceful machinations this same government oppressed the rights of the Apostolic See; they also indicate the efforts We made to check its increasing audacity and to vindicate the cause of the Church.

3. In 1859 the cities of Emilia were stirred up to rebellion by the Piedmontese, who supplied propaganda, conspirators, arms, and money. Not much later, a plebiscite was feigned by announcing a popular election and stealing the votes. By that deceit Our provinces situated in that region were torn from Our paternal rule; the opposition of the faithful proved vain. The following year this same government used deceitful pretexts to launch an unexpected attack, in order to wrest Our provinces located in Picenum, Umbria, and Our patrimony from Our rule. The enemy surrounded Our soldiers and a band of volunteer Catholic youth. Such a sudden attack was not at all anticipated. Our army fought fearlessly for its faith, but was put down in a bloody battle. Everyone knows the extraordinary impudence and hypocrisy of this government. To minimize the odium of this sacrilegious usurpation, they boasted that they invaded these provinces to restore the principles of moral order there. But in fact they spread every kind of false doctrine; they gave free reign to cupidity and impiety; they inflicted undeserved penalties on the bishops and other clerics, even jailing them and permitting them to suffer public insults. Meanwhile, they let persecutors and those who did not even spare the dignity of the Supreme Pontiff go unpunished.

4. In the performance of Our duties, We have always refused the repeated offers and commands to betray Our office shamefully, either by surrendering the rights and possessions of the Church, or by entering a wicked compact with the usurpers. We also opposed these crimes against human and divine law with solemn protestations lodged before both God and man. We declared that the authors of these crimes and their partisans have incurred ecclesiastical censure, and whenever necessary We censured them again with the same sanctions. The previously mentioned government has nevertheless persisted in its contumacy and its schemes. It attempted to stir up rebellion in Our remaining provinces, especially in Rome, by sending in instigators and by all kinds of arts. But these attempts did not go according to plan because of the unshaken fidelity of Our soldiers and because of the love and zeal of Our people, who supported Us.

Enemy Defeated

5. Finally that turbulent storm erupted against Us in the autumn of 1867, when divisions of wicked men attacked Our borders and Our City. They received assistance from the Piedmontese and were inflamed with wrath and crime. A number of them had already secretly infiltrated the City. Because of their arms, along with their cruel and violent nature, We and Our subjects feared painful and bloody treatment. But Our merciful God by the strenuous resistance of Our troops and the assistance of the French legions, returned their ineffectual attacks.

Reputation of the City

6. The piety and zeal of you and your faithful people for Us, manifested by your charity, have consoled Us in the midst of so much grief. With strength from God We never relax Our concern in safeguarding the temporal welfare of Our subjects. People from all nations visit Our City. They note Our public tranquility and security, Our finest arts and sciences, and the confidence and good will of Our people for Us. These visitors stream into Our City at all times, but especially during the many masses and solemn feasts which We celebrate.

Another Attack

7. Just now when Our people were enjoying a state of peace, the King of Piedmont and his government seized the opportunity presented by a war between the two most powerful nations of Europe. They made an agreement with one of the warring nations that they would preserve the present state of ecclesiastical or spiritual authority of the Church and would not permit it to be violated by factious individuals. They decreed that they would, however, invade and subject to their own power the lands which remained under Our temporal authority and Our See itself. What was the purpose of this hostile invasion, and what causes were presented? Everyone knows what the king discussed in his September 8 letter, which was addressed to us and delivered by his own spokesman. With fallacious sophistries of word and thought he proffered the images of a loving son and of a loyal Catholic and pretended to have the cause of public order, of the pontificate itself, and of Our person at heart. Under these pretenses he asked that We not consider the loss of Our temporal power as a criminal act, but that We surrender that power willingly. He asked Us to trust in his empty promises by which the desires of the Italian people could be reconciled with the freedom and the supreme spiritual authority of the Roman Pontiff.

Rejection of Proposals

8. For Our part We could not help but be astonished at his means of concealing the violence soon to be inflicted on Us. Nor could We help but pity the lot of this same king; driven by unjust counsels, he daily inflicts new wounds on the Church. Because of his reverence for man rather than God, he does not believe that the King of kings and Lord of lords reigns in heaven "who shows no partiality nor does He fear greatness, because He Himself made the great as well as the small . . . but for the powerful a rigorous scrutiny impends."² However concerning his proposals, We knew there was no time for delay. Obeying the laws of Our office and conscience, We followed the example of Our predecessors, particularly Pius VII whose problems were much like Our own. We borrow his words here:

"Let us recall with St. Ambrose 'the saintly man Naboth who owned a vineyard and was petitioned by a royal demand to give up his vineyard, so that the king, after cutting down the vines, might sow lowly vegetables. Naboth answered him: "Be it

far from me to surrender the inheritance of my predecessors".³ We judged that there was far less right for Us to give up so ancient and sacred an inheritance (namely the temporal power of this Holy See, held by the Roman Pontiffs for many centuries). Nor could We tacitly consent that someone occupy Our City and destroy its holy form of government, bequeathed by Jesus Christ to His Church and ordered according to the sacred canons which were inspired by the Holy Spirit. It would be replaced by a system opposed not only to the sacred canons, but also to the precepts of the Gospel. Then, as is customary, a new order of things would be introduced which would tend to associate and confuse all sects and superstitions with the Catholic Church.

"Naboth defended his vineyard with his own blood."⁴ Similarly, could We restrain Ourselves -- no matter what might happen to Us -- from defending the rights and possessions of the Holy Roman Church when We had sworn to defend the same to the best of Our ability? Could We refuse to protect the freedom of the Apostolic See which is so closely joined with the freedom and welfare of the whole Church? In truth these events demonstrate how necessary this temporal rule is for protecting the safe and free exercise of the pope's spiritual power, which was divinely given to him."⁵

Occupation of the City

9. Therefore clinging to the observations which We had declared in Our addresses, We reproved the king's unjust demands in Our reply to him and We showed that Our bitter pain was joined with paternal charity, which cares even for those sons who imitate the rebellious Absalom. However before We sent this letter, his army occupied Our cities, which until then were untouched and peaceful; the soldiers on guard were easily dispersed when they attempted to resist. Shortly thereafter dawned that unlucky day, September 20, when this City, the Seat of the Prince of the Apostles, the Center of the Catholic religion, and the refuge of all nations, was occupied by many thousands of armed men. It is deplorable to Us that after the walls were breached and fear of the enemy's dreadful missiles spread on all sides, the City was taken at the king's command who, a little before, had professed his filial affection for Us and his fidelity to religion. What could be more lamentable for Us and for all good people than that dread day? After the troops entered the City, which was already filled with a multitude of foreign agitators, We saw public order immediately disturbed and overturned; We saw the dignity and sanctity of the pontificate impiously attacked; We saw Our faithful soldiers subjected to abuse of every kind; We saw unbridled license and wantonness reigning where a short time before the filial love of children who desire to comfort a common spiritual Parent in his grief had shone forth.

Resultant Evils

10. From that day forward We have seen with Our own eyes events which cannot be recalled without indignation by all good people: Wicked books filled with lies,

infamy, and impiety; are offered for sale and disseminated widely; numerous magazines are published each day to corrupt minds and upright laws, to show contempt for religion, and to rouse public opinion against Us and this Apostolic See. In addition, filthy and shameful pictures and other things of this kind are published in which sacred things and persons are derided and exposed to public ridicule. Honors and memorials have been decreed for those convicted of grave crimes, while clerics have been repeatedly and wrongfully harassed, some even wounded by beatings from traitors. Some religious houses were subjected to unjust search and Our Quirinal houses were violated. A cardinal who had his See there was violently forced to flee, while other clerics of Our domestic staff were denied the use of the Quirinal houses and badgered. Laws and decrees were issued which obviously injure and destroy the freedom, immunity, properties, and rights of the Church of God. These evils will spread still more widely unless God intervenes. We, in the meantime, are prevented from bringing any cure because of Our condition. Every day We are violently reminded of Our captivity and of Our lost liberty. They declare with lying words that freedom has been left for Us in the exercise of Our apostolic ministry, and the usurping government boasts that it desires to strengthen this liberty with the necessary precautions, as they call them.

11. We must mention here the monstrous crime which you are certainly aware of. They made use of a ludicrous type of plebiscite in the provinces stolen from Us. As if the properties and rights of the apostolic See, long considered sacred and inviolable, might now be called into question, and as if the censures which are called down upon these violators might be loosened and the robbery which We have suffered might be made legitimate. Those who are accustomed to rejoice in evil events were not ashamed to carry rebellion and contempt for ecclesiastical censures through the cities of Italy on this occasion as in a triumphal procession. But the true feelings of the majority of the Italian people are impeded. Their religion, devotion, and confidence in Us and the Holy Church have been restrained in many ways so that these sentiments cannot flow forth freely.

Papal Protests against Usurpations

12. We have been placed by God to rule and govern the whole house of Israel and appointed as the protector of religion, justice, and the rights of the Church. If We remained silent, We could be accused before God and the Church of having consented to these perverse disturbances. We therefore renew and confirm what We have solemnly declared already in the addresses, encyclicals, and short letters cited above, and most recently a protest which Our cardinal in charge of public affairs made in Our name and at Our order on September 20. This protest was delivered to the ambassadors, ministers, and representatives of foreign nations who remained with Us and the Holy See. We now again solemnly declare to you that We are determined to retain all the dominions of this Holy See and its rights whole, entire, and unviolated, and to transmit them to Our successors. We declare all usurpations to be unjust, violent, null, and void. We announce now that any acts committed by Our enemies and invaders to confirm these usurpations-either at the

present time or in the future -- are condemned by Us and null and invalid. Furthermore, We protest before God and the whole Catholic world that while detained in such captivity, We are unable to exercise Our supreme pastoral authority safely, expediently, and freely. Finally, We obey the admonition of St. Paul: "For what has justice in common with iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?"⁶ We declare openly, mindful of Our office and of Our oath, that We will never assent to a conciliation or an agreement which in any way may destroy or diminish Our rights and therefore those of God and the Holy See. In like manner We confess that for the Church of Christ We are prepared, with the help of divine grace, to drink to the dregs that cup which the Lord first deigned to drink for her. We will never accept and obey unjust demands which are presented to Us. And indeed as Our predecessor Pius VII said: "To do violence to this highest power of the Apostolic See, to disjoin its temporal authority from its spiritual power, to disassociate, separate by force and cut off the duties of Pastor and Prince, is nothing less than to overturn and destroy the work of God. It is nothing less than to attempt to inflict the greatest damage on religion and to deprive it of its most effective defense. Then the highest Ruler of the Church would be unable to offer help to the Catholics spread all over the earth, who request his help and support because of his spiritual power."⁷

Excommunication for Usurpers

13. Our warnings, admonitions, and expostulations had no effect; therefore by Our own authority and that of God and of the Apostles Peter and Paul, We declare to you and to the whole Church that any who have invaded or usurped Our provinces or Our beloved City (as well as those commanding these things and their partisans, helpers, advisers, and followers) have incurred excommunication and the other censures and ecclesiastical penalties imposed by the sacred canons, Apostolic Constitutions, and decrees of Trent (Sess. 22, c. 11 de Reform.) following the form and duration expressed in Our apostolic letter of March 26, 1860.

Hope That Usurpers Will Reform

14. But mindful that We hold His place on earth who came to seek and save what was lost. We desire nothing more than that the wandering sons, returning to Us, may be embraced with paternal charity. We humbly beseech God, that He may be with Us and help Us. May He also be with His Church, reflecting on the eternal damnation which they pile up for themselves and fearing His justice, may strive to please Him before the Judgment Day. With their wicked schemes abandoned, may they alleviate the groans of Holy Mother Church and Our own grief.

15. But that We may obtain these blessings from the divine clemency, We earnestly request, venerable brothers, that you and your faithful flocks join your fervent prayers with Ours. Then all of us together shall approach the throne of grace and mercy, using as intercessors the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God,

and the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul. "The Church of God from its beginning up to the present time was often in tribulation, and was often delivered. Her voice is: 'Often have they fought against me from my youth, but have not prevailed against me. On my back sinners have wrought havoc; they lengthened their iniquity.' Neither does the Lord now permit the rod of the wicked to rest over the lot of the just. The hand of the Lord has not been shortened, nor made incapable of salvation. Without a doubt He will now deliver His spouse whom He redeemed with His blood, endowed with His spirit, adorned with heavenly gifts, and enriched with terrestrial wealth."⁸

16. Meanwhile, We pray with all Our soul that you may be showered with the gifts of heavenly graces, venerable brothers, and that all the clergy and the lay faithful entrusted by God to your care may share in these gifts. As a pledge of Our special love, We affectionately impart the apostolic benediction to you and to Our beloved sons.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, November 1, 1870, the 25th year of Our Pontificate.

1. Lam 1.16.
2. Wis 6.8,9.
3. De Basil. trad. n. 17.
4. St. Ambrose, Ibid.
5. Apostolic letter, 10 June 1809.
6. 2 Cor 6.14,15.
7. Alloc., 16 March 1808.
8. St. Bernard, Epistle 244 to King Conrad.