



On Freemasonry

Inimica Vis

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on December 8, 1892.

To the Bishops of Italy.

The enemy forces, inspired by the evil spirit, ever wage war on the Christian name. They join forces in this endeavor with certain groups of men whose purpose is to subvert divinely revealed truths and to rend the very fabric of Christian society with disastrous dissent. Indeed, how much damage these cohorts, as it were, have inflicted on the Church is wellknown. And yet, the spirit of all previous groups hostile to Catholic institutions has come to life again in that group called the Masonic sect, which, strong in manpower and resources, is the leader in a war against anything sacred.

2. Our predecessors in the Roman pontificate have in the course of a century and a half outlawed this group not once, but repeatedly. We too, in accordance with Our duty, have condemned it strongly to Christian people, so that they might beware of its wiles and bravely repel its impious assaults. Moreover, lest cowardice and sloth overtake us imperceptively, We have deliberately endeavored to reveal the secrets of this pernicious sect and the means by which it labors for the destruction of the Catholic enterprise.

3. Now, though, a certain thoughtless indifference on the part of many Italians has resulted in their not recognizing the magnitude and extent of the peril. And so the faith of our ancestors, the salvation won for mankind by Jesus Christ, and, consequently the great benefits of Christian civilization are endangered. Indeed, fearing nothing and yielding to no one, the Masonic sect proceeds with greater boldness day by day: with its poisonous infection it pervades entire communities and strives to entangle itself in all the institutions of our country in its conspiracy to forcefully deprive the Italian people of their Catholic faith, the origin and source of their greatest blessings.

4. This is the reason for the endless artifices they employ in their assault on the divinely inspired faith; this is the reason why the legitimate liberty of the Church is treated with contempt and beset with legal oppression. They believe that the Church does not possess the nature and essence of a true society, that the State has priority over it, and that civil authority takes precedence over sacred authority. This false and destructive doctrine has been frequently condemned by the Holy See. Among many other ills, it has been responsible for the usurpation on the part of civil authorities of that to which they have no right and for their unscrupulous appropriation of what they have alienated from the Church. This is clear in the case of ecclesiastical benefices; they usurp the right to give or withhold the revenues of these according to their good pleasure.

5. Likewise, in a manner no less insidious, they plan to soften the opposition of the lower clergy with their promises. Their purpose in this endeavor can easily be detected, especially since the very authors of this undertaking do not take sufficient pains to conceal what they intend. They wish to win over the clergy by cajolery; once the novelties have confused them, they will withdraw their obedience to legitimate authority. And yet in this matter they seem to have underestimated the virtue of our clergy, who for so many years have given manifest examples of their moderation and loyalty. We have every reason to be confident that, with God's help, they will continue their devotion to duty no matter what circumstances may arise.

6. This summary indicates both the extent of the activity of the Masonic sect and the goal of its endeavors. What compounds this harmful situation, however, and causes Us deep anxiety is that far too many of our compatriots, driven by hope of their personal advantage or by perverse ambition, have given their names or support to the sect. This being so, We commend first and foremost to your efforts the eternal salvation of those whom we have just mentioned: may your zeal never waver in constantly and insistently recalling them from their error and certain destruction. To be sure, the task of extricating those who have fallen into the snares of the Masons is laborious, and its outcome is doubtful, if we consider the cleverness of the sect: still the recovery of no one should ever be despaired of since the force of apostolic charity is truly marvelous.

7. Next, we must heal those who have erred in this respect out of faint-heartedness, that is, those who, not because of a debased nature but because of weakness of spirit and lack of discretion, have allowed themselves to be drawn into supporting the Masonic enterprises. Sufficiently weighty are the words of Our predecessor Felix III in this regard. "An error which is not resisted is approved; a truth which is not defended is suppressed.... He who does not oppose an evident crime is open to the suspicion of secret complicity." By reminding them of the examples of their forefathers, the broken spirits of these men must be reanimated with that courage which is the guardian of duty and dignity alike, so that they may be ashamed and regret their cowardly actions. For surely our whole life is involved in a constant battle in which our salvation itself is at stake; nothing is more

disgraceful for a Christian than cowardice.

8. It is likewise necessary to strengthen those who fall because of ignorance. By this we mean those, not few in number, who, deceived by appearances and allured by various enticements, allow themselves without understanding it to be enrolled in the Masonic order. In these cases We hope that with divine inspiration they will be able some day to repudiate their error and perceive the truth, especially if you try to remove the false outward appearance of the sect and reveal its hidden designs. Indeed these can no longer be considered hidden since their very accomplices have themselves disclosed them in many ways. Why, within the last few months, the designs of the Masons have been publicly proclaimed throughout Italy, even to the point of ostentation! They wish to see the religion founded by God reudiated and all affairs, private as well as public, regulated by the principles of naturalism alone; this is what, in their impiety and stupidity, they call the restoration of civil society. And yet the State will plunge headlong into ruin if Christians are not willing to be vigilant and not willing to labor to support its well-being!

9. But in the presence of such audacious evils, it is not sufficient merely to be aware of the wiles of this vile sect: we must also war against it, using those very arms furnished by the divine faith which once prevailed against paganism. Therefore, it is your task to inflame souls by persuasion, exhortation and example, nourish in the clergy and our people a zeal for religion and salvation which is active, resolute, and intrepid. These qualities frequently distinguish Catholic peoples of other nations in similar situations. It is commonly claimed that the ancient ardor of spirit in protecting their ancestral faith has grown cold among the Italian people. Nor is this perhaps false; especially since if the dispositions of both sides be inspected, those who wage war on religion seem to show more energy than those who repel it. But for those who seek salvation there can be no middle ground between laborious struggle and destruction. Therefore, in the case of the weak and sluggish, courage must be stirred up through your efforts; in the case of the strong, it must be kept active; with all trace of dissent wiped out, under your leadership and command, the result will be that all alike, with united minds and common discipline, may undertake the battle in a spirited manner.

10. Because of the gravity of the matter and the necessity of repelling the danger, We have decided to address the Italian people in a letter which We are including along with this one; propagate it as widely as possible and, where needed, interpret it to your people. In this manner, with the blessing of God, we can hope that spirits may be aroused through the contemplation of the threatening evils and betake themselves without delay to the remedies which We have pointed out.

11. As a presage of divine gifts and testimony of Our benevolence We affectionately accord to you, Venerable Brethren, and the people entrusted to your care, the apostolic blessing.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, 8 December 1892, in the 15th year of Our Pontificate.