# INSCRUTABILI DEI CONSILIO

*ON THE EVILS OF SOCIETY*
*Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on April 21, 1878.*

To the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, and Bishops of the Catholic World in Grace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

When by God's unsearchable design, We, though all unworthy, were raised to the height of apostolic dignity, at once We felt Ourselves moved by an urgent desire and, as it were, necessity, to address you by letter, not merely to express to you Our very deep feeling of love, but further, in accordance with the task entrusted to Us from heaven, to strengthen you who are called to share Our solicitude, that you may help Us to carry on the battle now being waged on behalf of the Church of God and the salvation of souls.
2. For, from the very beginning of Our pontificate, the sad sight has presented itself to Us of the evils by which the human race is oppressed on every side: the widespread subversion of the primary truths on which, as on its foundations, human society is based; the obstinacy of mind that will not brook any authority however lawful; the endless sources of disagreement, whence arrive civil strife, and ruthless war and bloodshed; the contempt of law which molds characters and is the shield of righteousness; the insatiable craving for things perishable, with complete forgetfulness of things eternal, leading up to the desperate madness whereby so many wretched beings, in all directions, scruple not to lay violent hands upon themselves; the reckless mismanagement, waste, and misappropriation of the public funds; the shamelessness of those who, full of treachery, make semblance of being champions of country, of freedom, and every kind of right; in fine, the deadly kind of plague which infects in its inmost recesses, allowing it no respite and foreboding ever fresh disturbances and final disaster.[1]
3. Now, the source of these evils lies chiefly, We are convinced, in this, that the holy and venerable authority of the Church, which in God's name rules mankind, upholding and defending all lawful authority, has been despised and set aside. The enemies of public order, being fully aware of this, have thought nothing better suited to destroy the foundations of society than to make an unflagging attack

upon the Church of God, to bring her into discredit and odium by spreading infamous calumnies and accusing her of being opposed to genuine progress. They labor to weaken her influence and power by wounds daily inflicted, and to overthrow the authority of the Bishop of Rome, in whom the abiding and unchangeable principles of right and good find their earthly guardian and champion. From these causes have originated laws that shake the structure of the Catholic Church, the enacting whereof we have to deplore in so many lands; hence, too, have flowed forth contempt of episcopal authority; the obstacles thrown in the way of the discharge of ecclesiastical duties; the dissolution of religious bodies; and the confiscation of property that was once the support of the Church's ministers and of the poor. Thereby, public institutions, vowed to charity and benevolence, have been withdrawn from the wholesome control of the Church; thence, also, has arisen that unchecked freedom to teach and spread abroad all mischievous principles, while the Church's claim to train and educate youth is in every way outraged and baffled. Such, too, is the purpose of the seizing of the temporal power, conferred many centuries ago by Divine Providence on the Bishop of Rome, that he might without let or hindrance use the authority conferred by Christ for the eternal welfare of the nations.[2]

4. We have recalled to your minds, venerable brothers, this deathly mass of ills, not to increase the sorrow naturally caused by this most sad state of things, but because we believe that from its consideration you will most plainly see how serious are the matters claiming our attention as well as devotedness, and with what energy We should work and, more than ever, under the present adverse conditions, protect, so far as in Us lies, the Church of Christ and the honor of the apostolic see -- the objects of so many slanders -- and assert their claims.

5. It is perfectly clear and evident, venerable brothers, that the very notion of civilization is a fiction of the brain if it rest not on the abiding principles of truth and the unchanging laws of virtue and justice, and if unfeigned love knit not together the wills of men, and gently control the interchange and the character of their mutual service. Now, who would make bold to deny that the Church, by spreading the Gospel throughout the nations, has brought the light of truth amongst people utterly savage and steeped in foul superstition, and has quickened them alike to recognize the Divine Author of nature and duly to respect themselves? Further, who will deny that the Church has done away with the curse of slavery and restored men to the original dignity of their noble nature; and -- by uplifting the standard of redemption in all quarters of the globe, by introducing, or shielding under her protection, the sciences and arts, by founding and taking into her keeping excellent charitable institutions which provide relief for ills of every kind -- has throughout the world, in private or in public life, civilized the human race, freed it from degradation, and with all care trained it to a way of living such as befits the dignity and the hopes of man? And if any one of sound mind compare the age in which We live, so hostile to religion and to the Church of Christ, with those happy times when the Church was revered as a mother by the nations, beyond all question he will see that our epoch is rushing wildly along the straight road to destruction; while in those times which most abounded in excellent institutions, peaceful life, wealth, and prosperity the people showed themselves

most obedient to the Church's rule and laws. Therefore, if the many blessings We have mentioned, due to the agency and saving help of the Church, are the true and worthy outcome of civilization, the Church of Christ, far from being alien to or neglectful of progress, has a just claim to all men's praise as its nurse, its mistress, and its mother.

6. Furthermore, that kind of civilization which conflicts with the doctrines and laws of holy Church is nothing but a worthless imitation and meaningless name. Of this those peoples on whom the Gospel light has never shown afford ample proof, since in their mode of life a shadowy semblance only of civilization is discoverable, while its true and solid blessings have never been possessed. Undoubtedly, that cannot by any means be accounted the perfection of civilized life which sets all legitimate authority boldly at defiance; nor can that be regarded as liberty which, shamefully and by the vilest means, spreading false principles, and freely indulging the sensual gratification of lustful desires, claims impunity for all crime and misdemeanor, and thwarts the goodly influence of the worthiest citizens of whatsoever class. Delusive, perverse, and misleading as are these principles, they cannot possibly have any inherent power to perfect the human race and fill it with blessing, for "sin maketh nations miserable."[3] Such principles, as a matter of course, must hurry nations, corrupted in mind and heart, into every kind of infamy, weaken all right order, and thus, sooner or later, bring the standing and peace of the State to the very brink of ruin.

7. Again, if We consider the achievements of the see of Rome, what can be more wicked than to deny how much and how well the Roman bishops have served civilized society at large? For Our predecessors, to provide for the peoples' good, encountered struggles of every kind, endured to the utmost burdensome toils, and never hesitated to expose themselves to most dangerous trials. With eyes fixed on heaven, they neither bowed down their head before the threats of the wicked, nor allowed themselves to be led by flattery or bribes into unworthy compliance. This apostolic chair it was that gathered and held together the crumbling remains of the old order of things; this was the kindly light by whose help the culture of Christian times shone far and wide; this was an anchor or safety in the fierce storms by which the human race has been convulsed; this was the sacred bond of union that linked together nations distant in region and differing in character; in short, this was a common center from which was sought instruction in faith and religion, no less than guidance and advice for the maintenance of peace and the functions of practical life. In very truth it is the glory of the supreme Pontiffs that they steadfastly set themselves up as a wall and a bulwark to save human society from falling back into its former superstition and barbarism.

8. Would that this healing authority had never been slighted or set aside! Assuredly, neither would the civil power have lost that venerable and sacred glory, the lustrous gift of religion, which alone renders the state of subjection noble and worthy of man; nor would so many revolutions and wars have been fomented to ravage the world with desolation and bloodshed; nor would kingdoms, once so flourishing, but now fallen from the height of prosperity, lie crushed beneath the weight of every kind of calamity. Of this the peoples of the East also furnish an example, who, by breaking the most sweet yoke that bound them to this apostolic

see, forfeited the splendor of their former greatness, their renown in science and art, and the dignity of their sway.
9. Of these remarkable benefits, however, which illustrious monuments of all ages prove to have flowed upon every quarter of the world from the apostolic see, this land of Italy has had the most abounding experience. For it has derived advantages from the see of Rome proportionate to the greater nearness of its natural situation. Unquestionably, to the Roman Pontiffs it is that Italy must own herself indebted for the substantial glory and majesty by which she has been preeminent amongst nations. The influence and fatherly care of the Popes have upon many occasions shielded her from hostile attack and brought her relief and aid, the effect of which is that the Catholic faith has been ever maintained inviolate in the hearts of Italians.
10. These services of Our predecessors, to omit mention of many others, have been witnessed to in a special manner by the records of the times of St. Leo the Great, Alexander III, Innocent III, St. Pius V, Leo X, and other Pontiffs,[4] by whose exertions or protection Italy has escaped unscathed from the utter destruction threatened by barbarians; has kept unimpaired her old faith, and, amid the darkness and defilement of the ruder age, has cultivated and preserved in vigor the luster of science and the splendor of art. To this, furthermore, bears witness Our own fostering city, the home of the Popes, which, under their rule, reaped this special benefit, that it not only was the strong citadel of the faith, but also became the refuge of the liberal arts and the very abode of wisdom winning for itself the admiration and respect of the whole world. As these facts in all their amplitude have been handed down in historical records for the perpetual remembrance of posterity, it is easy to understand that it is only with hostile design and shameless calumny -- meant to mislead men -- that any one can venture in speech and in writing to accuse the apostolic see of being an obstacle to the civil progress of nations and to the prosperity of Italy.
11. Seeing, therefore, that all the hopes of Italy and of the whole world lie in the power, so beneficent to the common good and profit, wherewith the authority of the apostolic see is endowed, and in the close union which binds all the faithful of Christ to the Roman Pontiff, We recognize that nothing should be nearer Our heart than how to preserve safe and sound the dignity of the Roman see, and to strengthen ever more and more the union of members with the head, of the children with their father.
12. Wherefore, that We may above all things, and in every possible way, maintain the rights and freedom of this holy see, We shall never cease to strive that Our authority may meet with due deference; that obstacles may be removed which hamper the free exercise of Our ministry and that We may be restored to that condition of things in which the design of God's wisdom had long ago placed the Roman Pontiffs. We are moved to demand this restoration, venerable brethren, not by any feeling of ambition or desire of supremacy, but by the nature of Our office and by Our sacred promise confirmed on oath; and further, not only because this sovereignty is essential to protect and preserve the full liberty of the spiritual power, but also because it is an ascertained fact that, when the temporal sovereignty of the apostolic see is in question, the cause of the public good and

the well-being of all human society in general are also at stake. Hence, We cannot omit, in the discharge of Our duty, which obliges Us to guard the rights of holy Church, to renew and confirm in every particular by this Our letter those declarations and protests which Pius IX,[5] of sacred memory, Our predecessor, on many and repeated occasions published against the seizing of the civil sovereignty and the infringement of rights belonging to the Catholic Church. At the same time We address ourselves to princes and chief rulers of the nations, and earnestly beseech them in the august name of the Most High God, not to refuse the Church's aid, proffered them in a season of such need, but with united and friendly aims, to join themselves to her as the source of authority and salvation, and to attach themselves to her more and more in the bonds of hearty love and devotedness. God grant that -- seeing the truth of Our words and considering within themselves that the teaching of Christ is, as Augustine used to say, "a great blessing to the State, if obeyed,"[6] and that their own peace and safety, as well as that of their people, is bound up with the safety of the Church and the reverence due to her -- they may give their whole thought and care to mitigating the evils by which the Church and its visible head are harassed, and so it may at last come to pass that the peoples whom they govern may enter on the way of justice and peace, and rejoice in a happy era of prosperity and glory.

13. In the next place, in order that the union of hearts between their chief Pastor and the whole Catholic flock may daily be strengthened, We here call upon you, venerable brothers, with particular earnestness, and strongly urge you to kindle, with priestly zeal and pastoral care, the fire of the love of religion among the faithful entrusted to you, that their attachment to this chair of truth and justice may become closer and[7] firmer, that they may welcome all its teachings with thorough assent of mind and will, wholly rejecting such opinion, even when most widely received, as they know to be contrary to the Church's doctrine. In this matter, the Roman Pontiffs, Our predecessors, and the last of all, Pius IX, of sacred memory, especially in the General Council of the Vatican, have not neglected, so often as there was need, to condemn wide-spreading errors and to smite them with the apostolic condemnation. This they did, keeping before their eyes the words of St. Paul: "Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy and vain deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world and not according to Christ."[7] All such censures, We, following in the steps of Our predecessors, do confirm and renew from this apostolic seat of truth, whilst We earnestly ask of the Father of lights[8] that all the faithful, brought to thorough agreement in the like feeling and the same belief, may think and speak even as Ourselves. It is your duty, venerable brothers, sedulously to strive that the seed of heavenly doctrine be sown broadcast in the field of God, and that the teachings of the Catholic faith may be implanted early in the souls of the faithful, may strike deep root in them, and be kept free from the ruinous blight of error. The more the enemies of religion exert themselves to offer the uninformed, especially the young, such instruction as darkens the mind and corrupts morals, the more actively should we endeavor that not only a suitable and solid method of education may flourish but above all that this education be wholly in harmony with the Catholic faith in its literature and system of training, and chiefly in philosophy, upon which the direction of other

sciences in great measure depends.[9] Philosophy seeks not the overthrow of divine revelation, but delights rather to prepare its way, and defend it against assailants, both by example and in written works, as the great Augustine and the Angelic Doctor, with all other teachers of Christian wisdom, have proved to Us.

14. Now, the training of youth most conducive to the defense of true faith and religion and to the preservation of morality must find its beginning from an early stage within the circle of home life; and this family Christian training sadly undermined in these our times, cannot possibly be restored to its due dignity, save by those laws under which it was established in the Church by her Divine Founder Himself. Our Lord Jesus Christ, by raising to the dignity of a sacrament the contract of matrimony, in which He would have His own union with the Church typified, not only made the marriage tie more holy, but, in addition, provided efficacious sources of aid for parents and children alike, so that, by the discharge of their duties one to another, they might with greater ease attain to happiness both in time and in eternity. But when impious laws, setting at naught the sanctity of this great sacrament, put it on the same footing of mere civil contracts, the lamentable result followed, that, outraging the dignity of Christian matrimony, citizens made use of legalized concubinage in place of marriage; husband and wife neglected their bounden duty to each other; children refused obedience and reverence to their parents; the bonds of domestic love were loosened; and alas! the worst scandal and of all the most ruinous to public morality, very frequently an unholy passion opened the door to disastrous and fatal separations. These most unhappy and painful consequences, venerable brothers, cannot fail to arouse your zeal and move you constantly and earnestly to warn the faithful committed to your charge to listen with docility to your teaching regarding the holiness of Christian marriage, and to obey laws by which the Church controls the duties of married people and of their offspring.[10]

15. Then, indeed, will that most desirable result come about, that the character and conduct of individuals also will be reformed; for, just as from a rotten stock are produced healthless branches or worthless fruits, so do the ravages of a pestilence which ruins the household spread wide their cruel infection to the hurt and injury of individual citizens. On the other hand, when domestic society is fashioned in the mold of Christian life, each member will gradually grow accustomed to the love of religion and piety, to the abhorrence of false and harmful teaching, to the pursuit of virtue, to obedience to elders, and to the restraint of the insatiable seeking after self-interest alone, which so spoils and weakens the character of men. To this end it will certainly help not a little to encourage and promote those pious associations which have been established, in our own times especially, with so great profit to the cause of the Catholic religion.

16. Great indeed and beyond the strength of man are these objects of our hopes and prayers, venerable brothers; but, since God has "made the nations of the earth for health,"[11] when He founded the Church for the welfare of the peoples, and promised that He will abide with her by His assistance to the end of the world, We firmly trust that, through your endeavors, the human race, taking warning from so many evils and visitations, will submit themselves at length to the Church, and turn for health and prosperity to the infallible guidance of this apostolic see.

17. Meanwhile, venerable brothers, before bringing this letter to a close, We must express Our congratulations on the striking harmony and concord which unites your minds among yourselves and with this apostolic see. This perfect union We regard as not merely an impregnable bulwark against hostile attacks, but also as an auspicious and happy omen, presaging better times for the Church; and, while it yields great relief to Our weakness, it seasonably encourages Us to endure with readiness all labors and all struggles on behalf of God's Church in the arduous task which We have undertaken.
18. Moreover, from the causes of hope and rejoicing which We have made known to you We cannot separate those tokens of love and obedience which you, venerable brethren, in these first days of Our pontificate, have shown Our lowliness, and with you so many of the clergy and the faithful, who by letters sent, by offerings given, by pilgrimages undertaken, and by other works of love, have made it clear that the devotion and charity which they manifested to Our most worthy predecessor still lasts, so strong and steadfast and unchanged as not to slacken toward the person of a successor so much inferior. For these splendid tokens of Catholic piety We humbly confess to the Lord that He is good and gracious, while to you, venerable brothers, and to all Our beloved children from whom We have received them, We publicly, from the bottom of Our heart, avow the grateful feelings of Our soul, cherishing the fullest confidence that, in the present critical state of things and in the difficulties of the times, this your devotion and love and the devotion and love of the faithful will never fail Us. Nor have We any doubt that these conspicuous examples of filial piety and Christian virtue will be of such avail as to make Our most merciful God, moved by these dutiful deeds, look with favor on His flock and grant the Church peace and victory. But as We are sure that this peace and victory will more quickly and more readily be given Us, if the faithful are unremitting in their prayers and supplications to obtain it, We earnestly exhort you, venerable brothers, to stir up for this end the zeal and ardor of the faithful, taking the Immaculate Queen of Heaven as their intercessor with God, and having recourse as their advocates to St. Joseph, the heavenly patron of the Church, and to Sts. Peter and Paul, the Princes of the Apostles. To the powerful patronage of all these We humbly commit Our lowliness, all ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and all the flock of Christ our Lord.
19. For the rest, We trust that these days, on which We renew the memory of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, may be to you, venerable brothers, and to all the fold of God, a source of blessing and salvation and fullness of holy joy, praying our most gracious God that by the blood of the Lamb without spot, which blotted out the handwriting that was against Us, the sins We have committed may be washed away, and the judgment We are suffering for them may mercifully be mitigated.
"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the charity of God, and the communication of the Holy Spirit be with you all,"[12] venerable brothers; to each and all of whom, as well as to Our beloved children, the clergy and faithful of your churches, as a pledge of Our special good-will and as an earnest of the protection of heaven, We lovingly impart the apostolic benediction.
Given at St. Peter's, in Rome, on the solemnity of Easter, the twenty-first day of April, 1878, in the first year of our pontificate.

ENDNOTES
1. This description of what is usually called a "corrupt government" or the government of a "corrupt party" is, in fact, the description of what necessarily happens to any government, or ruling party, when it rejects the moral rules taught by the Church. A religious error is the main root of all social and political evils.
2. An allusion to the capture of the Papal States by the Piedmontese army (1860) and to the usurpation of the temporal power of the Popes by King Victor Emmanuel II, in 1870.
3. Prov. 14:34.
4. Pope St. Leo I, Leo the Great (440-61), caused Attila, King of the Huns, to retreat without having attacked Rome. Pope Alexander III (1159-81) fought against the German Emperor Friedrick Barbarossa, to whom he opposed the Lombard League. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) strongly resisted the French King Philip Augustus. St. Pius V was Pope from 1566 to 1572 and during his reign occurred the naval victory over the Turks at Lepanto in 1571. Leo X (John of Medici), Pope from 1513 to 1521, presided over one of the most brilliant epochs in history: the "century of Leo X."
5. Pope Pius IX (1846-78) proclaimed the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and of the infallibility of the Popes in all matters related to faith and morals; published the "Syllabus," or conspectus of modern errors; witnessed the usurparion by Victor Emmanuel II of the temporal power of the Popes, but never acknowledged it.
6. "Letter" 138, to Marcellinus, 15 (PL 33, 532). 7. Col. 2:8.
8. James 1:17.
9. This point is developed in the encyclical "Aeterni Patris."
10. This point is developed in the encyclical "Arcanum." See also the encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI, "Divini Illius Magistri" (December 31, 1929, On the Christian Education of Youth.)
11. Wisd. 1:14: "For he created all things that they might be: and he made the nations of the earth for health: and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor kingdom of hell upon the earth."
12. 2 Cor. 13:13.