



Levate

On The Afflictions Of Church

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX On The Afflictions Of Church

October 27, 1867

To the Venerable Brothers Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops and Bishops of the Entire Catholic Community in Favor and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

Lift up your eyes, venerable brothers. Look about you and grieve at the evil abominations which now defile unhappy Italy. We can but humbly revere the inscrutable judgments of God, which destined Us to live in these most sorrowful times. By the efforts of many, particularly those who hold power in Italy, the venerable commands of God and the sacred laws of the Church are completely despised. Here triumphant impiety rears her ugly head, and here We grieve to see all kinds of injustice, evil, and destruction. Hence the many phalanxes of rebels, men who walk in impiety and fight under the standard of Satan -- a leader branded with deceit. Raising their mouths to the very heavens, they blaspheme God; polluting and scorning all that is sacred, they trample underfoot all laws, divine and human. Like ravening wolves panting after their prey, they spill blood and destroy souls with their grievous scandal. They seek the unjust gain of their own malice and seize the property of others.

Then they sadden the lowly and the poor, making widows of wives and orphans of happy children. They pardon the impious and condemn the just, for there are bribes to take and goods to steal; with a corrupt heart they satisfy every depraved desire, to the detriment of all civil society.

Evil Men

2. At present We are surrounded by evil men of this sort, men entirely animated by a diabolical spirit. They plan to raise the standard of lies in this beloved city of Ours, before the very Chair of Peter, the center of Catholic truth and unity. And the officials of the government of Piedmont, who should have repressed these uprisings, have aided them in every way. They supply them with arms and other

goods and even fortify the approach to this city. But these officials, though they hold the highest rank in civil government, are fearful because through their wickedness they ensnare themselves in a net of ecclesiastical penalties and censures. In the humility of Our heart We continue to beseech the God of mercy to return these miserable men to a salutary penitence and to the straight path of justice, religion, and piety. Nevertheless We must declare the dangers We are exposed to in this hour of darkness. We tranquilly await whatever events may bring, be it nefarious frauds, calumnies, treachery, or lies. We place all Our hope in the God of Our salvation, who is Our helper and strength in all Our tribulations. He does not permit those who trust in Him to be confounded, He who thwarts the attacks of the impious and breaks the necks of sinners. In the meantime We are anxious to inform you and your faithful of the sad condition and the great danger in which We live, due especially to the activity of the Piedmont government. Although Our faithful army defends Us vigorously and heroically, it is clear that they cannot resist for long because they are greatly outnumbered by these unjust aggressors. The filial piety of Our subjects, now greatly reduced in number by the evil usurpers, consoles Us. But We must also grieve since they suffer serious dangers rising against them from the savage throngs of the wicked, who terrify them constantly with all sorts of threats and plunder them exhaustively.

Evils in Poland and Russia

3. But We have other evils to deplore, too. You know well from Our consistorial address of October 29 of last year, and from its publication with supporting documents, the many calamities with which the Catholic Church and her sons are troubled in the Russian Empire and in the Polish Kingdom. There the Catholic bishops, the ecclesiastics, and the lay faithful are exiled, thrown into prison, harassed in every way, robbed of their possessions, and oppressed with severe penalties. The canons and laws of the Church are completely trampled underfoot. And not at all content with this, the Russian government continues with its long-standing plan to violate the teaching of the Church and to break the chain of union and communication between those faithful to Us and the Holy See. The government strives to overthrow the Catholic religion completely in regions, separating the faithful from the Church in order to draw them into a disastrous schism. With great sorrow We inform you that that government has issued two decrees after the last address We mentioned. An abhorrent decree promulgated last May 22 suppressed the Polish diocese of Podlachia, together with its college of canons, the Consistory General, and the diocesan seminary. The bishop of the diocese was separated from his flock and at once forced to leave his territory. And this decree is similar to the one published last June 3, which We were not able to mention because We had no knowledge of it. By this decree the same government arbitrarily suppressed the diocese of Kamieniec and dispersed its college of canons, Consistory, and seminary; then it violently tore its bishop from his diocese.

Communication by Papal Decree

4. Now since We cannot communicate with those faithful, and also lest someone be exposed to arrest, exile, or some other penalty, We have been compelled to insert an Act in Our publication to provide for the exercise of legitimate jurisdiction in those extensive dioceses and for the spiritual needs of the faithful. By means of the printed word, notice of Our plans will reach them. Anyone can easily understand the attitude and purpose with which the Russian government would publish such a decree, since the suppression of dioceses is added to the absence of many bishops.

Governmental College

5. But what adds to Our bitterness is another decree of this same government, promulgated last May 22, by which a college was established in St. Petersburg, a college called "Roman Catholic Ecclesiastical," with the presiding officer the Archbishop of Mohilev. All petitions pertaining to matters of faith and conscience which the bishops, clergy, and faithful of the Russian Empire and Polish Kingdom send to Us and this Apostolic See are first to be sent to this college. This same college is to examine them to determine whether the petitions exceed the power of the bishops; if so, it will send them to Us. But after Our decision reaches there, the presiding officer of the college is bound to send this decision to the minister of internal affairs, who is to determine whether it contains anything against the laws of the state and the rights of the supreme ruler. If nothing is found, he may execute it according to his will and judgment.

Condemnation of This College

6. You surely see how vehemently a decree of this kind must be condemned. This schismatic secular power destroys the constitution of the Catholic Church and subverts ecclesiastical discipline. Furthermore, it inflicts the greatest injury on Our supreme Pontificate, on the power and authority of this Holy See and of the bishops, and on the liberty of the highest pastor of all the faithful. It therefore drives the faithful to a mournful schism and even tramples underfoot natural law in matters pertaining to faith and conscience.

7. Add to this that the Catholic Academy of Warsaw has been closed and that a sad ruin awaits the Ruthenian dioceses of Chelm and Belzium. And what is most grievous is that a certain priest Woicicki has been found whose faith is suspect and who has no regard for ecclesiastical penalties and censures, nor for the terrible judgment of God. He was not afraid to accept the rule and administration of this same diocese from that civil power, nor to issue ordinances contrary to ecclesiastical discipline and favoring schism.

8. In these calamitous difficulties, no one fights for Us except Our Lord and God. We earnestly beseech you, because of your love for things Catholic and your devotion to Us, that you join your most fervent prayers with Ours. Together with all your clergy and faithful people, beseech God unceasingly to snatch His Holy

Church and Us from such great evils. The sons of this same Church, who are most dear to Us, are exposed to many plots and afflicted with many hardships almost everywhere, but especially in Italy, in the Russian Empire, and in the Kingdom of Poland. Pray that God may aid and defend them by His omnipotent power. Pray that He may preserve, confirm, and strengthen them more each day in the Catholic faith and the profession of its salutary doctrines. Pray that He thwart all the impious plans of hostile men, recalling them from the abyss of iniquity to the way of salvation and leading them in the path of His commandments.

Plenary Indulgences

9. Therefore We desire that within six months a three-day period of public prayer be proclaimed in your dioceses; for those beyond the sea, the proclamation should be made within one year. To encourage more ardent devotion at these prayers, We grant mercifully in the Lord a plenary indulgence and the remission of all their sins to each and all the faithful in Christ, both men and women, who are devoutly present at these prayers on these three days, who have prayed to God for the present necessities of the Church according to Our intention, who have expiated their sins by sacramental confession, and who have received holy communion. But to the faithful who with at least a contrite heart are present on any one of these days, and have performed the other works, We grant an indulgence of seven years, and We relax as many forty day periods of the penance enjoined on them or otherwise owed by them, in accordance with the usual custom of the Church. We also grant that these indulgences, all and singly, the remission of sins, and the relaxation of penances are applicable by way of suffrage to the souls of the faithful who, joined to God by love, have left this life. We also declare that anything to the contrary has no power to resist Our decrees.

10. Finally, nothing is more pleasing to Us than that We may use this occasion to testify and confirm the great benevolence with which We embrace you in the Lord. Receive as a certain pledge of this the Apostolic Benediction which We impart most lovingly to you, venerable brothers, and to all the clergy and faithful laity entrusted to your vigilance.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, October 21, 1867, in the twenty second of Our pontificate.