



Quod Nunquam

On The Church In Prussia

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX

February 5, 1875

To Our Venerable Brothers, the Archbishops and Bishops of Prussia.

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

What We never expected to happen has come about. Thus, We look back on those things which this Apostolic See established for the welfare of Catholics in agreement with the supreme ruler of Prussia in the twentyfirst year of this century and We observe that it has turned out otherwise. A wild and unexpected storm now reigns in your land, where the Church of God once enjoyed peace and tranquillity. Other new laws have been added to those laws against the rights of the Church which were proposed recently and which struck down and removed from their positions many clerics and laymen. These new laws thoroughly overturn the divine establishment of the Church and totally destroy the holy rights of the bishops.

2. These laws gave power to lay judges to cast bishops and others in charge of caring for souls from their dignity and from the exercise of their duty. They placed many serious impediments before those who were appointed to exercise legitimate jurisdiction in the absence of the pastors. The cathedral chapters were told that they could elect vicars according to the canons when the episcopal see is not yet vacant. Finally, passing over many other things, they entrusted the prefects of the provinces with the power to appoint even non Catholic men who, as substitutes for the bishops, preside over the administration of the temporal goods in the dioceses, even if those temporal goods were intended for holy people or the use of the Church. You know well, venerable brothers, what harm and abuses followed from these laws and from their harsh execution.

3. We shall pass over these matters in order not to increase our common sadness with recollections of them. However, we cannot keep silent concerning the damage to the dioceses of Gniezno and Poznan, as well as to the diocese of Paderborn. Miescyslaw, Archbishop of Gniezno and Poznan, and Konrad, Bishop of Paderborn, have been imprisoned and unjustly sentenced to be deposed from their episcopal

see and divested of their authority. These dioceses are deprived of the assistance of their shepherds and are sorrowfully hurled into a mass of serious difficulties and sorrows.

4. However, We ought not to weep over Our brothers just mentioned. Rather We should esteem them and follow them with rejoicing. "Happy are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal on account of the Son of Man." [2] Those who remember these divine words are not deterred by the punishment of the laws; instead they keep the laws and the commandments of the Church because of the seriousness of their ministry. These men have drawn honor and glory to themselves, just as other highly esteemed bishops from the same region. They suffer undeserved condemnation and the punishments of criminals for the sake of justice and show great virtue which overflows for the edification of the whole Church. They deserve praise rather than the tears of mourners.

5. However, the contempt of episcopal dignity, the violation of the Church's freedom and its rights, the abuses which oppress not only those dioceses mentioned above, but other Prussian dioceses as well, demand that We speak out. This is part of Our apostolic duty which God entrusted to Us, even though We did not deserve it. Thus We condemn those laws which produced so many evils and from which many more can be feared. We must vindicate the freedom of the Church which is depressed by unjust power. We intend to fulfill these aspects of Our duty through this letter announcing to everyone to whom the matter pertains and to the whole Catholic world that those laws are invalid insofar as they totally oppose the divine order of the Church. The Lord did not set the powerful of this world over the bishops in matters which pertain to the sacred ministry. Rather, He entrusted Saint Peter with the duty of feeding not only His lambs, but also His sheep. [2] Therefore, those "whom the Holy Spirit established as bishops to govern the Church of God" [3] cannot be deprived of the episcopal office by any lofty power of the world.

6. That thing happened which is unworthy of an illustrious nation and We believe that it will be seen so by the non-Catholics themselves -- who hardly share Our partisan zeal. These laws were protected by severe sanctions, threatened harsh punishment to the disobedient, and had the support of the military power. These peaceful and unarmed citizens turned away from these laws because of the dictates of their consciences. The legislators should never ignore or despise the leadings of conscience, but they certainly have done so by enacting laws which place the people in a position in which they are miserable and afflicted. The power of the law is stronger than the people, and they cannot avert it. Therefore, those laws do not seem to be announced to free citizens in order to request reasonable obedience. On the contrary, they have been imposed, as if on slaves so that they may extort forced obedience by fear.

7. We do not, however, want you to think that We consider these people justified

who prefer to obey men out of fear rather than God. The divine judge will condemn those unworthy men who, supported by the protection of civil authority alone, heedlessly occupy parish churches and have dared to seize the holy ministry in them. Moreover, We declare them to be lost. In the future, whoever intrudes into the government of the Church by a similar crime will incur excommunication according to the holy canons, and he will incur it ipso facto. We advise the pious faithful not to approach the holy rites of such people nor to receive the sacraments from them. They should prudently abstain from any business dealings and association with them so that the bad leaven does not corrupt the undefiled lump of dough.

8. Venerable brothers, your courage and faithfulness have helped to alleviate Our sorrow during these disasters. The rest of the clergy and the faithful emulated this courage and fidelity in encountering the bitter struggle. Their steadfast spirit in fulfilling Catholic duties and their glory were so great that they drew the eyes and admiration of everyone-even their staunchest opponents -- upon themselves. This could not have happened differently for "as destructive as the fall of someone placed in authority is and as much as it contributes to the ruin of those who follow, it is salutary and useful to the same degree when the bishop offers himself to his brothers as an example worthy of imitation through the firmness of his faith."[4]

9. We wish that We could bring you some consolation in these difficulties! We shall not fail you meanwhile with Our firm protestation as far as all those matters which oppose the divine establishment of the Church and its laws, and We shall not fail you in sure counsel and warnings as far as that force which was unjustly brought against you.

10. Let those who are your enemies know that you who refuse to give to Caesar what belongs to God will bring no harm to the authority of the king and will subtract nothing from it. Scripture says, "it is better to obey God than to obey men."[5] In addition, let them know that each one of you is prepared to give tribute and homage to Caesar in those matters which are subject to civil authority and power, not out of anger but on account of conscience.

11. Therefore, rightfully fulfill both duties. Obeying the ordination of God, be quick of mind and carry on with the task as firmly as you have begun it. You will gain much because you have patiently endured much in the name of Jesus and have not deserted Him.[6] Look up to Him who has preceded you in suffering and "encountered the penalty of a scandalous death so that His members might learn to flee the favors of the world, to be fearless, to love adversity for the sake of truth, and to shun riches."[7] He who put you in this battle line will give you strength equal to the fight. "In Him is our hope; we give ourselves to Him, and we implore His mercy."[8] See: what He foretold has already occurred. Therefore trust that He will accomplish what He promised. He says, "In the world you will have trouble, but be brave. I have conquered the world."[9]

12. Confident of that victory, We ask the Holy Spirit for peace and grace. Meanwhile, as a sign of Our special love, We lovingly impart Our apostolic blessing to you, to the entire clergy, and to the faithful entrusted to your vigilance.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on the fifth day of February in the year 1875, the twenty-ninth year of Our Pontificate.

1. Lk 6.22.
2. Jn 21.16-17-St. Augustine, De jund., chap. 4.
3. Acts 20.28.
4. St. Cyprian, Epistle 4.
5. Acts 5.29.
6. Ap 2.3.
7. St. Gregory the Great, Reg. Past., pt. I chap. 3.
8. St. Augustine, Sermon 55.
9. Jn 16.33.