

ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF OUR MOST HOLY LORD  
PIUS IX. BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE POPE,  
TO ALL PATRIARCHS, PRIMATEs, ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS, AND OTHER  
ORDINARIES IN THE GRACE AND COMMUNION OF THE APOSTOLIC  
SEE.

PIUS PP. IX.

VENERABLE BRETHREN; HEALTH AND THE APOSTOLIC BENE-  
DICTION.

ALTHOUGH many grievous and bitter sufferings, from the beginning of  
Our long Pontificate, have fallen to Our lot through various causes  
which We have unfolded in Our Encyclical letters from time to time,  
yet in these last years the number of Our sorrows has so increased  
that, were We not upheld by the mercy of God, We should be almost  
overwhelmed by them.

Of late indeed matters have reached such a pass, that death itself  
seems better than life amid such storms, and with eyes lifted up to  
heaven We are fain to cry, "It is better for us to die than to see the  
evils of the saints" (1). Ever since Our city of Rome by the will of  
God has been taken away by force of arms, and has passed under the  
sway of men, who despise law, who are enemies of religion, who con-  
found all things both human and divine, hardly a day has passed  
without inflicting some new wound on Our heart already suffering from  
repeated injuries and wrongs. There ring still in our ears the cries of  
religious men and women, who have been driven from their homes in  
poverty and scattered hither and thither by hostile hands, as is done  
where revolution triumphs: just as, according to Athanasius, the great  
Antony used to say, "The devil hates all Christians, but he cannot  
endure good monks and virgins dedicated to Christ."

We have now seen what we thought could never come to pass,  
viz., the suppression and abolition of the Roman University, which  
had been established (according to the words of an ancient author  
writing on the Anglo-Saxon school in Rome), that young church-  
students from distant parts might be educated in Catholic faith and  
doctrine, lest in their own lands they should be wrongly taught or in  
a way contrary to Catholic unity, and that they might go back strong  
and steadfast in the faith. Thus while by foul means We are by  
degrees deprived of all ways of ruling and governing the Universal  
Church, it is clearly manifest how very far from the truth is that  
which has been asserted, viz., that the liberty of the Roman Pontiff  
in the exercise of his spiritual ministry and in his relations with the  
Catholic world has been no wise diminished by the loss of Our city:  
nay it becomes clearer every day, how truly we have so often insisted,  
that the sacrilegious usurpation of Our territory has had for its especial  
object the subversion of the Pontifical authority and the destruction,  
if possible, of the Catholic Religion itself.

It is not however the object of Our letter to write to you on the  
woes of Our city and of the whole of Italy. We would rather pass in  
silence over Our own sorrows, if by the mercy of God We could  
assuage the bitter griefs which so many of Our Venerable Brethren,  
their clergy and people, are undergoing in other lands.

You are well aware, Venerable Brethren, that certain of the  
Cantons of the Swiss Federation—not at the suggestion of non-  
Catholics, some of whom have condemned the act, but at the bidding  
of those busy sectarians who have now everywhere possessed them-  
selves of power—have overturned the order and undermined the  
foundations of the Church of Christ, contrary to every rule of justice  
and in spite of their publicly pledged word; for according to solemn  
covenants passed by the laws and authority of the Federation the  
religious liberty of the Catholics ought to be maintained inviolate.

In Our Allocution of the 23rd of December, 1872, We lamented  
the wrongs inflicted on religion by the Governments of those Cantons,  
"both in making decrees concerning the doctrines of the Catholic  
Faith, in showing favor to apostates, and in forbidding the exercise of  
episcopal power." Our just complaints made by Our Envoy before  
the Federal Council were altogether overlooked, nor was greater regard  
shown to the repeated remonstrances of the Bishops of Switzerland,  
and of the Catholics of every class, and fresh wrongs put the last  
stroke to the injuries already inflicted.

After the forcible banishment of Our Venerable Brother Gaspar,  
Bishop of Hebron and Vicar-Apostolic of Geneva, so glorious for the  
sufferer and so disgraceful to those who put it into execution, the  
Government of Geneva, on the 23rd of March and the 27th of  
August of this year, enacted two laws of the same tenor as the decree  
of October, 1872, which was condemned by Us in the Allocution before  
mentioned. That Government has claimed the right of reforming the  
constitution of the Catholic Church in the Canton according to the  
democratic pattern, and of subjecting the Bishop to the Civil Power in  
the exercise of his proper jurisdiction, and the administration and  
delegation of his authority to others; forbidding him to dwell in the  
Canton, limiting the number and boundaries of the parishes, laying  
down the form and conditions of the election of parish priests and  
their assistants, and the manner of their resignation or suspension;  
assigning to laymen the right of nomination and the temporal adminis-  
tration and inspection of ecclesiastical affairs generally. Moreover,  
parish priests and their assistants, without permission—withdrawn at  
pleasure—of the Government, were forbidden to exercise their func-  
tions, to accept any dignities higher than that conferred upon them by  
the election of the people, and were also forced to take an oath in  
terms involving actual apostasy. It is clear that laws of this kind are  
not only null and void by reason of want of power in the law-makers  
as being laymen and non Catholics, but also as regards their provisions  
that they are so contrary to the doctrines of the Catholic Faith, and  
to the ecclesiastical discipline enjoined by Pontifical Constitutions and  
the Ecumenical Council of Trent, that they ought to be altogether  
rejected by Us.

We, therefore, as required by Our office, do, by Our Apostolic  
authority, solemnly reject and condemn them, declaring the required  
oath to be unlawful and sacrilegious, and that all those, who in the  
Canton of Geneva or elsewhere, having been elected according to the  
tenor of the same laws, or others like them, by the votes of the people,  
and confirmation of the civil power, shall venture to take upon them  
(1) Micah. iii. 12.

ecclesiastical functions, do *ipso facto* incur the greater excommunica-  
tion, especially reserved to this Holy See, and other canonical penalties;  
and that they are to be avoided by the faithful according to the Divine  
command "as strangers and robbers, who come not but to steal and to  
kill and to destroy" (2).

These are sad and sorrowful events, but deeds still more sorrow-  
ful have taken place in five of the seven cantons which form the  
Diocese of Bâle, viz., Solothurn, Berno, Bâle-Campagne, Aargau, and  
Zürich. In those parts also laws have been enacted concerning  
parishes, the election and discharge of parish priests and their assis-  
tants, subversive of the government and Divine constitution of the  
Church, and subjecting the Church to the secular and schismatical  
power. These laws, and especially the law of the 23rd of December,  
1872, passed by the Government of Solothurn. We denounce and con-  
demn, and order to be considered as so denounced and condemned.  
After Our Venerable Brother Eugenius, Bishop of Bâle, in his just  
indignation and Apostolic fortitude, had rejected certain articles pro-  
posed in the meeting or so-called diocesan conference, to which there  
came delegates from the five aforesaid cantons,—having a just reason  
for rejecting them as injurious to Episcopal authority, subversive of  
hierarchical government, and openly favorable to heresy: for this  
cause he was banished from his Bishopric, expelled from his house,  
and violently driven into exile. No kind of wrong and injury was  
left undone to lead into schism the clergy and people of the five afore-  
said cantons; the clergy were forbidden to hold any intercourse with  
their banished pastor; orders were given to the Cathedral Chapter of  
Bâle to proceed to the election of a Vicar-Capitular or Administrator,  
as if the See were actually vacant. The Chapter, however, vigorously  
protested, and spurned such unworthy action. In the meantime, by  
a decree of the civil magistrates of Berno, sixty-nine parish priests of  
the Canton of Jura were forbidden to exercise their functions, and  
deprived of their office, for the only reason that they had openly testi-  
fied, that they acknowledged only Our Venerable Brother Eugenius as  
their lawful Bishop and Pastor, and would not treacherously sever  
themselves from Catholic unity. The consequence is that the whole  
of that district—which had constantly preserved the Catholic faith,  
and which had been united to the Canton of Berno on the condition  
of keeping the exercise of religion free and inviolate—has been  
deprived of Mass, and the rites of baptism, marriage, and burial in  
spite of the complaints and remonstrances of the faithful, by the highest  
injustice reduced to the necessity either of receiving schismatical and  
heretical pastors thrust upon them by civil authority, or of being  
deprived of all assistance and ministry of their priest.

We thank God for upholding and strengthening with the same  
grace that sustained the martyrs, that chosen part of the Catholic  
flock, which manfully follows their Bishop, "setting up a wall for the  
house of Israel to stand in battle in the day of the Lord" (3), and  
without fear treading in the footsteps of the Head of Martyrs, Jesus  
Christ, meeting ferocious wolves with the meekness of lambs, and  
cheerfully and patiently fighting for the Faith.

This noble constancy of the faithful in Switzerland is imitated in  
a manner worthy of all praise by the clergy and faithful people of  
Germany, following the bright examples of their Bishops. They have  
been made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men, who from  
every side look up to them clad with the breastplate of Catholic truth,  
and in the helmet of salvation, valiantly fighting the battle of God.  
Their courage and invincible fortitude is the more admired and praised,  
as day by day the persecution raised against them in Germany, and  
especially in Prussia, rages more and more bitterly.

Beside many grave wrongs inflicted last year upon the Catholic  
Church, the Prussian Government has subjected to the civil power, by  
cruel and unjust legislation, altogether alien from its former conduct,  
the entire instruction and education of the clergy, in such manner that  
it belongs to the said power to enquire into and to decide in what  
manner Church students are to be taught and trained to the sacerdotal  
and pastoral life; and proceeding further, it gives to the same power  
the right of examining and judging in respect to collating to all  
ecclesiastical offices and benefices, and even of depriving sacred pastors  
of office and of benefice. Moreover, in order to subvert more speedily  
and completely the ecclesiastical government of the Church, and the  
order of Hierarchical obedience instituted by Christ Our Lord Him-  
self, many obstacles are interposed by the same laws to hinder the  
Bishops in providing with timely measures by canonical censures and  
pains for the salvation of souls, for the soundness of doctrine in  
Catholic schools, or for the obedience due to them from their clergy.  
For, according to the tenor of those laws the Bishops are not per-  
mitted to exercise these functions save only at the pleasure of the civil  
authority and according to the rules laid down by the same. Finally,  
that nothing should be wanting to the entire suppression of the  
Catholic Church a royal tribunal for ecclesiastical affairs has been  
instituted, before which Bishops and sacred pastors may be cited, both  
by private men who are their subjects, and by public magistrates,  
there to receive judgment as criminals, and to be coerced in the  
exercise of their spiritual office.

Thus the Holy Church of Christ, to which the necessary and full  
liberty of religion had been guaranteed by the solemn and reiterated  
promise of princes, and by public pacts and conventions, is now in  
mourning in those regions, stripped of its every right, and exposed to  
hostile powers which threaten it with final destruction; for this new  
legislation reaches to the point of rendering the life of the Church im-  
possible.

No wonder, therefore, that in that Empire the former religious  
peace should be broken up by laws of this kind and by the other  
councils and acts of the Prussian Government full of hostility to the  
Church. Wherefore, if any one would throw the blame of these  
perturbations on the Catholics of the German Empire, it would be  
altogether without warrant. For if it be imputed to them as an  
offence that they do not acquiesce in those laws in which with a safe  
conscience they cannot acquiesce; for a like reason and in like manner  
the apostles and martyrs of Jesus Christ are to be accused, who chose

(2) St. John x., 5, 10.

(3) Ezech. xlii. 5.