

Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo - Pope Pius VII (1821)

The Church founded by Jesus Christ Our Savior upon a firm Rock, and against which Christ Himself has promised that the gates of hell will never prevail, has been so often assaulted, and by such dreadful enemies, that unless that Divine and Unchangeable Promise had intervened, it might seem that it must be feared that the Church itself, besieged by it by their power, their crafts, or their cunning, might entirely perish. But that which has happened in previous times, such also has been done and especially in this certainly sorrowful time of ours, which seems to be that end time foretold by the Apostles so long ago, during which time (Jude v. 18.) mockers will come walking according to their own desires in ungodliness. For It is not concealed from anyone how great the multitude of wicked men will have joined together in these most difficult times against the Lord and against His Anointed One, who are especially solicitous, once the faithful have been ensnared by Philosophy and vain deceit (Col 2:8.) and torn away from the Doctrine of the Church, for weakening and overturning the same Church, although by a useless effort. But in order to succeed more easily, the greater number of them have formed secret groups and clandestine sects, from which they were hoping that they might induce many into the fellowship of their conspiracy and crime.

A long time ago this Holy See, once these sects had been discovered, cried with a great and unbridled Voice against them, and exposed their plans, which had been devised secretly by them against Religion, indeed against civil society. Long ago it called forth the attentiveness of all, that they might beware lest it be allowed to these sects to attempt that which they were heinously contemplating. Indeed it must have grieved these endeavors of the Holy See not to have answered that destruction, which It was observing, and that wicked men had not desisted from their acknowledged plan; whence they at long last attained to those evils which We Ourselves have perceived; indeed, men whose arrogance has always mounted, have dared to begin new secret societies.

Mention must be made in this place of a society, recently born and propagated far and wide in Italy and in other regions, which although it has been divided into several sects, and according to their variety it sometimes assumes names among themselves different and distinct, nevertheless because the entity is a communion of opinions and crimes, and because a certain pact has been entered into, is one, and is generally accustomed to go under the name of the Carbonari. Indeed, they simulate a singular respect and a certain extraordinary zeal toward the Catholic Religion and toward the Person and

Doctrine of Jesus Christ Our Savior, Whom at times they also impiously dare to call the Rector and great Teacher of this society. But these ways of speaking, which are seen to be more slippery than oil, are nothing other than darts employed by crafty men, who come in sheep's clothing but are ravenous wolves inside, for more securely wounding the too little cautious.

Surely that most severe oath, by which, imitating for the most part the ancient Priscillianists they promise that they at no time ever, or in no case, either are going to expose to men not enrolled in the society anything which regards the society, or are going to share with those who are in the lower degrees anything which pertains to the higher decrees. In addition, those clandestine and furthermore illegitimate assemblies, which they have, after the manner employed by many heretics, and the selection of men of whatever religion and sect into their society, even if other things were not available, sufficiently convince that it is necessary to have no confidence in their related discourses.

But it is not necessary by conjectures and indications, that it be judged such concerning their sayings, as it was pointed out above. Books published by these very types in which the procedure is described, which is accustomed to be used in the meetings, especially of the higher degrees; their catechisms, statutes, and other authentic and credible documents, and in fact the testimony of those who, when they had abandoned that society to which they had previously adhered, revealed its errors and frauds to Legitimate Judges, have declared openly, that the Carbonari particularly incline in such a way that they give to each one great license for devising by his own genius and from his own ideas for himself a religion which he may practice, once indifference to religion has been introduced, than which hardly anything more destructive can be contrived, such that they profane and defile the passion of Jesus Christ by certain of their impious ceremonies, that they despise the Sacraments of the Church (for which they seem to substitute other new things invented by themselves through their supreme wickedness) and despise the very mysteries of the Catholic Religion and that they overthrow this Apostolic See against which, because on it the Sovereignty of the Apostolic Chair has always flourished, (S. Aug. Epist. 43.) they are roused by a certain unparalleled hate and they devise every dangerous destructive plot.

And the precepts concerning morals, which the society of the Carbonari hand on, are not, as it is certain from their monuments, less wicked, although it boasts confidently that it demands from its own followers, that they cultivate and exercise charity and every kind of virtue, and abstain from every vice. Therefore, it promotes sensual pleasure most shamelessly, it teaches that it is licit to kill those who have not kept the trust offered concerning the secret, which was mentioned above; and although Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, Decrees, that Christians (1 Pet. 2:13.) be subject to every human creature on account of God, whether to the king as pre-eminent, whether to the magistrates as ambassadors to them, etc., and although Paul the Apostle (Tit. 3:1.) commands that every soul be subject to Higher Powers: nevertheless that society teaches that it is allowed, once revolts have been provoked, to deprive of their power kings and other rulers, whom most unjustly it dares indiscriminately to call tyrants.

These and other dogmas and precepts of this society are the ones from which those crimes newly committed by the Carbonari have emerged, which have brought such intense grief to honest and pious men. We, therefore, who have been constituted as the Guardian of the House of Israel, which is Holy Church, and who in accord with Our Pastoral Office ought to beware lest the Lord's flock divinely entrusted to Us suffer any harm, consider in a case so serious that We cannot abstain from repressing

the filthy undertakings of men. We are also moved by the example of Clement XII and Benedict XIV, our Predecessors of happy memory, of whom the one on the 28th day of April of the year 1738 by the Constitution In Eminenti, the other on the 18th day of March 1751 by the Constitution Providas, have condemned and proscribed the societies de` Liberi Muratori, or Francs-Macons, or called by whatever other name according to the variety of regions and idioms, of which societies the society of the Carbonari, must be considered perhaps the offspring or certainly the imitation. And although We have already gravely prohibited this society with two Edicts published through Our Secretary of State; nevertheless, following Our above mentioned Predecessors, We think that severe penalties must be Decreed with a formality indeed more Solemnly against this society, especially since the Carbonari indiscriminately maintain that they are not included in those two Constitutions of Clement XII and Benedict XIV, and that they are not subject to the judgments and penalties proposed in them.

Therefore, now that the select Congregation of Our Venerable Brothers of the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church has been heard, indeed from its Counsel, and also by Our own motion and from Our certain knowledge and mature deliberation, indeed from the fullness of Our Apostolic Power, We have Decreed and Ordained that the society of the Carbonari mentioned above, or called by any other name whatever, its assemblies, meetings, gatherings, fellowships, or associations must be condemned and prohibited, accordingly as We condemn and proscribe by Our present Constitution forever Valid.

Wherefore We Order strictly and in Virtue of Holy Obedience each and every faithful of Christ of whatever state, grade, condition, order, dignity and pre-eminence, be they the laity or Clerics, both Seculars and Regulars and even those worthy of specific and individual mention, that anyone under whatever pretext, or special condition not dare or presume to join or propagate, to foster, the society of the Carbonari mentioned above, or otherwise named, and to admit and hide in their dwellings, or their homes, or any other place, to be enrolled in, to adhere to or to take part in it, indeed whatever degree of it, or to give opportunity or convenience that it may be convened in any place, to furnish it with anything, or otherwise to offer counsel, aid or good will, openly or in secret, directly or indirectly, per se or through others in any way whatever. Likewise no one may dare or presume to exhort, induce, provoke or persuade others to be inscribed in, be reckoned as part of or be among a society of this kind, or any degree of it, nor are they to help and thus support it in any way whatever. On the contrary they must absolutely abstain themselves from the same society and its assemblies, meetings, fellowships, or associations under pain of Excommunication needing to be incurred ipso facto without any declaration by all those offending as above, from which no one is able to obtain the favor of Absolution through anyone except Us, or the Roman Pontiff Reigning at that time, save one determined to be at the point of death.

Furthermore We Order all under the same pain of Excommunication reserved to Us and Our Successors, the Roman Pontiffs, that they are held to declare to the Bishops, or to others whom it pertains all those whom they know to have joined in this society or to have defiled themselves by any one of the crimes mentioned above.

Finally, that every danger of error may efficaciously be prevented, We condemn and We proscribe that all, as they call them, catechisms and books of the Carbonari, and We forbid, under the same pain of Major Excommunication reserved in the same way, every one of the faithful to read or to possess the books mentioned above, and We command that they hand over those materials, either to the Ordinaries,

or to others, to whom the right of receiving them pertains.

We Will, however, that absolutely the same Faith which would be applied to the Original Letter, if they would be produced or shown, is to be applied to duplicates, likewise printed copies, of the present Letter signed by the hand of some public notary, and secured by the seal of a person Constituted in Ecclesiastical Dignity.

It is allowed to no man to falsify this Letter of Our Declaration, Condemnation, Mandate, Prohibition and Interdict, or to oppose it by a rash boldness; but if anyone presumes to attempt this, let him know that he will incur the wrath of Almighty God, and of His Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at Rome in Saint Mary Major, in the 1821st year of the Incarnation of the Lord, on the 13th day of September, in the twenty-second year of Our Pontificate.