

### 13. THE SUPPRESSION OF THE PAPAL STATES - THE EXCOMMUNICATION

Meanwhile Napoleon followed his own road. He had conquered everything: he had subjugated Spain - where nevertheless there was a deaf gorilla<sup>1</sup> in the mountains - and had put on the throne of the nation his brother Joseph. As far as his other brothers, Louis was King of Holland, Jerome was King of Westphalia; his brother-in-law Joachim Murat, King of Naples, his sister Elisa and her husband Baciocobi Duke of Lucca and soon Archduke of Toscana. He had again invaded Austria, and once the other armies were defeated, he had installed himself as conqueror in the regal palace of the Habsburg in Schönbrunn.

From there on 16 May 1809 he promulgated the decree which suppressed the temporal power of the pope and annexed Rome and the Pontifical States to his Empire of the West.

At 10 in the morning of 10 June, amid the artillery shots, the papal standard was lowered on the Castle San'Angelo and in its place was raised the three-colored flag, while at the sound of the trumpets the above mentioned decree was proclaimed for all of Rome. Cardinal Pacca recounts the following: "I ran immediately to the quarters of the Holy Father. If I do not remember wrongly, he pronounced at the same time the words of our Redeemer on the cross: 'It is finished.' In any case I found him not showing apparently any change of spirit, which makes me reevaluate his valor and impressed me greatly. Some two minutes later my nephew, Giuseppe Tiberio Paces, arrived and brought a copy of the imperial decree that the French had spread throughout all of Rome. I took the decree into

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<sup>1</sup>Editor's note: there were many guerrilla soldiers in the mountains who refused to show allegiance to Napoleon.

my hands and asked the pope to come near us at the window to be able to read it, because the curtains were closed and it was a bit dark. The pope got out of his chair and followed me. I wanted to read it serenely and in a reflexive way, for on this reading would depend future reactions; but it was not possible for me, and only by working hard and with palpitating perspiration and with many interruptions could I barely read the points most essential of the decree. Observing the pope attentively, I realized from the first words read that his face was changing, and I recognized the signs, not of fear or dismay, but of indignation more than justifiable, but little by little he was composing himself and heard the rest of the reading with tranquility and resignation."<sup>2</sup>

The pope sat down at his desk and signed with his own hand the copies of the Italian protest, which was published the following day. The cardinal saw that the pope was disturbed when he treated of the "grand act of publication of the Bull of Excommunication". Pius VII said that, having read it once again, he thought that some phrases were too strong against the French government; he asked for the advice of the cardinal"

"But, your Eminence, what would you do in my place?"

The cardinal replied:

"With this you threaten the French and there might grow a hope for the people; I would do it, but the question of Your Holiness confuses me; look up to the heavens, most blessed Father, and then give me orders and I am sure that everything that comes from your mouth will be what heaven wants."

He turned his eyes to heaven and after a brief pause he said:

"Let's do it."

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<sup>2</sup> Pacca, Vol. I, p. 205 ff.

He tried to put the Bull on the “*ad valvas Bascilicarum*” (on the doors of the principal basilicas), which was an act very dangerous for him who had to realize physically his ambient and the historic moment.

Be careful, said the pope, that no one discovers the persons who executed my orders, because surely they will be shot and that would leave me unconsolable.

Actually, the placing of these notices was done in a few hours and in such an extraordinary fashion that the French were stupefied and all of Rome was emotional. The executors, given the recommendation to act with prudence and use no adventurous methods, had the courage to finish their work in the places most used, among the three Basilicas of St. Peter, Santa Maria Major and St. John, between 22 and 23 hours (10:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.), during the singing of Vespers. Many persons saw them and not one of them was discovered nor arrested at this time nor later, even when later the extraordinary French Council carried out innumerable investigations and very severe inquisitions.

In the following days congratulations rained upon the pope; meanwhile on the streets of Rome there were signs of approbation and signs of satisfaction.

As one man, all of the Romans, of the most diverse categories as if you had heard one voice of command, put aside their small or great particular affairs and they went to the Quirinal in order get instructions if they could or could not follow in their employment, all completely declaring themselves to be decided and disposed to sacrifice everything they had, before they incurred the fault of serving the new government. “It seems incredible” - wrote Cardinal Pacca - “nevertheless it is certain that the workers in Customs and the sweepers of the public streets did not want to go to their work and

they did not appear in their usual places. It was necessary, because of this, to send immediately a copy of the Bull to the Tribunal of the Penetenciaria so that it could be examined in detail and that instructions be given to the confessors and ecclesiastical tribunals as to who incurred the excommunication and which were the offices and works that could not continue to function without incurring the excommunication. Two days later arrived the reply of the Penetenciaria and it was approved by the Holy Father.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pacca, *Ibid.*