

## 22. THE RESISTANCE AGAINST THE FRENCH IN ROME AND IN LAZIO

“One day of work by a pastor destroys the work that I have been able to do in a month of work.”<sup>1</sup> So wrote Mr. Norvin, the Director of the Imperial Police in Rome on 2 August 1811.

These words reveal the real opposition what the Roman clergy had for the new “constitutional” reform imposed by the invader.

The case of Rome was unique among the group of kingdoms, principalities, dukedoms - all joined together by Napoleon by means of true dynastic transformations in the European eighteenth century. The other nations and regions, including the rest of the cities of Italy, had accepted more or less servilely the will of the new Charlemagne. Spain, to tell the truth, still fought against the emperor.

Rome resisted in every way. But it was a complicated resistance whose extension and quality are difficult to evaluate.

It is necessary, before everything else, to make a clean distinction between the resistance in the city of Rome from that of the provinces. We will treat first that of Rome, and then that of the provinces. In the city of Rome the waters appeared undisturbed. The city submitted to the situation in an exterior, superficial, quiet manner: the offices functioned, businesses sold things, the people continued to live. But as far as the French command, in its various sections of prefectures, police, administration, cultural organisms, one would have to look beyond the swaddling-cloth of passive resignation, to find

the Roman spirit. Napoleon said of the Russians: “Scrape and scrape, and you will find a Tartar,” and he could have said about the Romans: “Scrape and scrape, and you will find a papist.” And note well, by “papist” we mean not only in the political and practical sense, but above all in the religious sense: “papist” would be the equivalent of Catholic and a man of conscience.

At this level of the story, it is necessary that we make an observation. The imposition of the oath began in 1810, and among the first ones called to take the oath were Gaspar, Marchetti, Gambini and Albertini. They found themselves in a situation very similar to that of the soldiers of the vanguard of the army who had to defend themselves. Very often the conduct of the first ones influenced the way the majority of the rest of the group acts. The clergy of Rome, confronted with the dilemma of the oath or persecution, would respond in the majority choosing the second option. To what extent did the option of the first ones influence the majority of the rest?

The value of example that was seen in the behavior of our friends and which by their influence found repercussion in the decisions of many ecclesiastics and civilians, must be before our eyes as we consider the conduct of the diverse categories of religious and civilians in the City.

They wanted to make the Romans apostatize, in various aspects, against the apostolic and Roman Church, accepting undue changes; but against this the Roman resisted and was stirred up. In this was the essential cause of the resistance. Having been able to force and break all the other interests and sentiments of the Roman soul, the tenacious French stumbled against that reality, so intimate and hidden that it would become a surprise for those who do not know the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Madelin, *La Rome de Napoléon*, Paris 1906, p. 435.

Romans: the conscience of the Church. And against this there is nothing that can be done; there is no way to root it out.

In truth, during those years of 1810 to 1814, the Roman people of all classes offered a spectacle of passive resignation, but only up to the basic point of “faith”.

At the bottom of this manifestation, which we could consider communitarian from the historical point of view, was the influence of the priests. Diocesan priests and religious priests. The latter were less known but just as efficient as the former. The new Constitution had suppressed the religious communities and their members had been dispersed, humiliated, force to hide, and their goods were confiscated and usurped.

“But”, as Madelin<sup>2</sup> opportunely says, “never were there more priests than the laws permitted. They multiplied with great rapidity in the rural areas, finding lodging with families, finding refuge in offices dressed as civilians; and where the church remained abandoned because the pastor or chaplain, who rejected the oath, had been deported, there the available religious priests were installed to assume the reins of the parish and found generally the spontaneous and active acceptance on the part of the people.”

This activity, which at the beginning remained bound and encased within the walls of the convents, now was multiplied and was overflowing clandestinely in the form of a diaspora, yet more efficiently. In reality, the spirit of the participants is easy to discover: dramatically forced out of their homes, how could you have blessed, with an act of admirable virtue, the very ones that had been thrown out? Or to speak well of those who had been touched by this operation - “logistics” - with the pope, with the cardinals,

with the bishops with the pastors? ... Naturally the people in the greater part felt the same.

The treatment of the pastors was divided, as it was in France during many years: the one who took the oath maintained their positions and functions, and those who refused were expelled from their positions and in general sent into exile or deported to prisons. We know this very well based on the experiences that Gaspar had to suffer.

But with all this something happened that does honor to the Romans: the priests that took the oath found themselves almost without faithful; fallen into discredit, greater than anything they had imagined, they practically never had a chance to practice their ministry; and this humiliated them and seriously confounded them. And in the practical aspect they were in an equally bad situation, because the French treasury for the payment of these priests, weighted down with many other expenses, could hardly pay the “oath-takers”, and in many cases, or during some long periods, they simply were not paid.

Moral misery accompanied the material misery. Many of them, completely repentant retracted their oath.

But more importantly there were more “reactionaries”; and the “oath-takers” were frankly in the minority. This is said in tribute to the Roman clergy.

The French answered this curious phenomenon. The news of France and of Europe arrived in Rome with surprising quickness. In the salons, in the cafes, in the homes, even those most humble, everyone knew everything: about political decisions, about military movements, alliances, dynastic events, decrees. Everything arrived in Rome, crossed through the severe Aurelian walls and penetrated into all the corners of the city; this happened in the classic manner, while you were walking, that is, from mouth to mouth,

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<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 436. *Id.* for the information that follows.

from ear to ear; the news was inflated or lessened according to how the antennas transmitted or received; sometimes they showed roseate tones, other times with shadowy, angry, toxic ... It all depended, as is usually the case in every part of the world, on how it is repeated and how it is heard.

At the same time, the news that was elaborated in this way acted on their minds and formed public opinion. And among them circulated true ethnic uprisings or supposed ones, in a Europe submerged in a orgy. On the base of this spontaneous and collective elaboration not only the inspiration of the moment was acting but also the passions and preventatives: optimism, pessimism, confidence or lack of confidence in "Charlemagne". How could you have pondered this strange equalizing of transformation?

The spirit of the priests, generally, was not accommodating; but neither was it a delusion; in many cases it encased a profound conviction that obliged them to be objective; this could not be said for the fantasy of the lay people. Different classes of citizens were invited to take the oath, but the example of the clergy had a profound influence on them, and in some cases, very resonant. Everyone had their eyes fixed on the major basilicas: in St. John Lateran, for example, of the 35 canons, only six took the oath; in St. Peter Basilica, of the 68 canons, fourteen took the oath. It was a result little appreciated by the imperial police.

Then came, as we have seen, the deportations and prisons; but with all, that attitude gave an example that influenced profoundly the lay persons. For these latter ones, the obligation of taking the oath was less rigorous than that for the priests. The lawyers, doctors, workers and businessmen were governed by every day life; priests governed souls and "souls" signified intelligence, hearts, wills, and in essence, the

psychological conquest of the people, which for Napoleon was a very special importance and which could be reached principally by the priests.

But, we must repeat, the lay people followed the example of the priests. Freer, or better said, less pressured in their decision, they announced their refusal or acceptance in different proportions: of 1200 lawyers. Procurators and notaries, only 40 took the oath, which meant that more than a thousand were excluded from their profession; this result was very upsetting for the heads of government. How could the courts continue to function in the tribunals of Rome, which for the people was the life blood for legal justice?

The oath was demanded of the artists who worked in the imperial household; Canova, among the first, turned his back and was struck down for two whole years for his refusal; Camuccini took the oath only with certain reservations; among the musicians, the celebrated Zingarelli refused roundly to take the oath; and together 30 singers of the Sistine Choir out of 45 pronounced a decided "no". Zingarelli was imprisoned with only bread and water with the indignation of Rome who adored his art.

Then came the turn of the illustrious families.

In July 1811 communications were sent to various houses of princes and in general of nobility, in which the emperor graciously invited them to inscribe their children as students of the most celebrated institutes of France where they would receive an education more manly and not from the sacristy. Some were already chosen by name: Alessandro Chigi and Urbano Barberini to go to the School of St. Germaine; two of the family Ruspoli and one of the Altieri family, one of the Spada family and one of the Saechetti family, one of the Olgiati family and

17 noble youths from Rome and 13 from the district of Perugia and Trasimonto, to the School of St. Cyr; another 34 youths of the nobility "Pritaneo" of "La Flèche". All of these entered the system of education centralized by Napoleon according to which the noble youths from the Tago to Elba, from the North Sea to the Canal of Sicily, should to be instructed and educated in France so that they form a class directed to the tomorrow, for a united Europe and in accord with his interests.

In the face of this, the princesses cried, and their parents showed themselves obstinate. The spirit of rebellion flashed including among the concealed crowns. But among them all, only one or the other was truly opposed and with full force, declaring: "I prefer to renounce being father than to send my children outside the country." It was the Marquis Patrizi who said this, who less than anyone else would have been thought to be in opposition. He was considered by all to be a holy person, one hundred percent inoffensive; for it was justly he who was obstinate in a negative way that saved his face - at least one of his faces - of the noble Roman. For three months he kept discussing with the Prefect Norvins, who said to him:

"You cannot refuse the invitation of the emperor as you would refuse an invitation to dinner."

"This is no invitation," responded Patrizi. "It is a persecution against my family."

"Then we ought to use force to make you fulfill the will of the emperor, and this in no way would take away the "gracious" character of the invitation which I have given."

"You can hang me or guillotine me, but I will not renounce my inalienable right of

father."<sup>3</sup>

And so he was arrested and he and his wife, the princess of Saxony, were obliged to accompany their sons Philip and Xavier to Paris.

In contrast to these dark shadows ever more weighty when it involved the figure of Napoleon in the minds the Romans, that of Pius VII had acquired a halo of growing admiration. In reality, the pontiff, from his exile, kept up some communication with Rome, in spite of the meticulous vigilance that surrounded him. In so far as Savona stretched a circle around him and he was denied paper and pen and ink, his thoughts and dispositions got by every means to the people of the City.

The police of Rome believed it opportune to imprison certain suspicious people, principally Monsignor Sala; but the spiritual messages of Pius VII continued to arrive and they uplifted the spirit of the people.

With this his image grew stronger and made him more loved by the people. With reports of favors and miracles received through his intercession, an invisible bridge of prayer and confidence joined the isolated pontiff with the people from which he was snatched.

Here is a case that caused quite a stir: Lucia, the wife of a certain Ambrosio Cormaeci was dying, and the doctor had given up on her; but then her sister made her touch two or three threads from a shirt of Pius VII, and the sick woman suddenly was healed.

This story circulated throughout Rome; it entered the cafes and the same doctor began to repeat it, and the fragile and exhausted figure of the pope was surrounded with fame.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Madelin, *Op. cit.*, pp. 480-481. Also for that which follows.

In the churches, the prayers of the faithful were recited for him and not for “Charlemagne”, for whom nevertheless was dedicated the “*Salvum fac Imperatorem*”. It happened at times that if a canon began the hymn, many fled out of the church early and scandalously. In some of the churches instead of “*Salvum fac*” they sang the “*Miserere*”. And the situation became more complicated even more in 1811 when the “King of Rome” was born and the question of the “*Te Deum*” in thanksgiving. Beginning when it was to be intoned in St. Peters; it stirred up emotions and complications arose.

The testimonies of the French protagonists of these events, such as Norvins, Daru, Tournon, Raffin and various others, all men of different stripes and different intentions, described with an abundance of details this intangibility of the Roman soul; that of the wagon-masters, contrary in their practical activity and known for the purity of their faith, and that of the princesses which already were considered beforehand as a Niobe.<sup>4</sup> The truth is that Rome, even though it let itself be occupied, would not let itself be “conquered”, while many other flourishing regions and cultures of Italy and of Europe had been conquered and dominated, up to the smallest detail. The Romans, apparently ingenious and easy-going, were fundamentally unconquerable, and Rome constituted the “great scandal” of the empire.

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<sup>4</sup> Niobe, a daughter of Tantalus and wife of Amphion held in Greek legend to have been turned into stone while weeping for her slain children and to continue weeping her loss.