

The Pian Bulls of the Order of Saint Lazarus: History and Significance

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The Papal Bulls *Inter Assiduas Domenici* of Pius IV (1565) and *Sicut Bonus Agricola* of Pius V (1567) are, along with the Bulls *Pontifex Romanus* (1607) and *Militantium Ordinum* (1608), both of Paul V, specified as the defining bulls of the Order in the Bull of Cardinal de Vendôme uniting the Orders of Saint Lazarus and Our Lady of Mount Carmel (1668, under the authority of Clement IX). Subsequently, the last Papal Bull published on the United Orders, *Militantium Ordinum Instituto* of Clement XIV (1772) also references these bulls.¹

The historical context of the Pian bulls is crucial to their interpretation. *Inter Assiduas* was published on 4 May 1565. The Great

¹ The various Bulls are transcribed and available in the original Latin:

- Pius IV: *Interassidua Domenici...* dated 4 May 1565 [Transcribed in: L. Cherubini, A.M. Cherubino. *Magnum bullarium romanum, a Pio Quarto usque ad Innocentium IX*. P. Borde, L. Arnaud & C.I. Rigaud, Lyon, 1673, vol.2, pp.136-150]
- Pius V: *Sicula bonis agricola...* dated 7 February 1567. [Transcribed in: L. Cherubini, A.M. Cherubino, 1673, *ibid.*, vol.2, pp.204-212]
- Paul V: *Romanus Pontifex cuius Principatum* dated 16 February 1607 [Transcribed in: L. Cherubini, A.M. Cherubino. *Magnum bullarium romanum, a Clemente VII usque ad Gregorium XV*. P. Borde, L. Arnaud & C.I. Rigaud, Lyon, 1655, vol.3, pp.228-230]
- Paul V: *Militantium Ordinum.....* dated 26 February 1608 [Transcribed in: L. Cherubini, A.M. Cherubino, 1655, *ibid.*, vol.3, pp.228-230]
- Cardinal de Vendome, Legat a Latere en France. *Bull addressed to 'Carolus Achilles, Marchio de Neremstang, Magnus Magister'* dated 5 June 1668. [Transcribed in: P.E.G. de Sibert. *Histoire des Ordres Royaux, Hospittaliers-Militaires de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel, et de Saint-Lazare de Jerusalem*. Imprimerie Royale, Paris, 1772, Pièces Justificatives, Doc. 34/35, pp.lxxxiii-lxxxvii]
- Clemens XIV. *Militarium Ordinum institutio* dated 1772. [Transcribed in: *Lettre Patientes du Roi, concernant l'Ordre de Saint-Lazare données à Versailles le 18 Janvier 1773*. Registrées en Parlement le 27 Février audit an. 1773, +8p.]

Siege of Malta by the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman's Admiral Dragut commenced on 18 May 1565, two weeks later. This siege, involving an Ottoman fleet of some 200 ships and an estimated 30,000 men, was raised in September 1565.² The survival of the Knights of Saint John against almost overwhelming odds is considered one of the great military victories of the 16th century.

The strong Ottoman presence in the western Mediterranean nevertheless continued for several years. On 25 May 1571, the Holy League was formed, consisting of the Papal States, the Habsburg states of Spain, Naples and Sicily, the Republic of Venice, the Republic of Genoa, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Duchies of Savoy, Parma and Urbino and the Knights of Malta. On 7 October, the Holy League's fleet under the command of Don Juan of Austria, the illegitimate son of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, led the fleet to the major defeat of the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto. Until the Battle of Lepanto, however, the Turks were a major threat to Italy, Sicily and Malta, including the Papal States. The Pian bulls must be seen as a response to the possible defeat and elimination of the Knights of Saint John by the Turks and the loss of Malta. Both *Inter Assiduas* and *Sicut Bonus Agricola* were major bulls, of some 43 and 23 single-spaced typescript pages (in English translation) respectively.

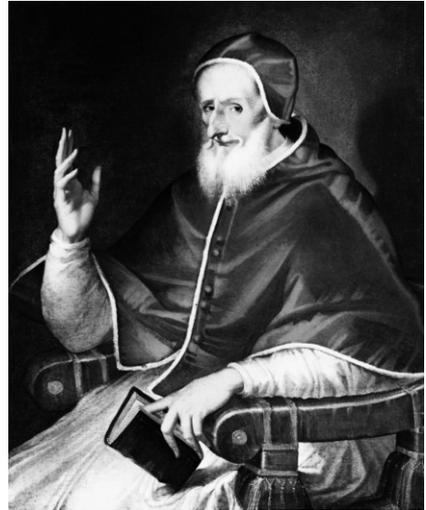
The personal context of the two pontiffs must also be considered when interpreting the two Pian bulls. Pius IV (Giovan Angelo de' Medici, pope 1559-1565) had just overseen the conclusion of the Council of Trent, conducted in some 25 sessions in the two decades from 1545 to 1563. Pius IV, who was unrelated to the Florentine Medicis, re-opened the Council of Trent in order to bring to a successful conclusion the dogmatic reforms of the church which constituted the counter-reformation. Despite these theological reforms, Pius IV continued the nepotistic traditions of his predecessors (although his appointment of his nephew, Saint Carlo Borromeo, as Archbishop of Milan, was subsequently applauded). For the Order of Saint Lazarus, however, Pius

² Nicholson H. *The Knights Hospitaller*. Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2001

IV's appointment as Grand Master of the Order his favourite Giovanni de Castiglione (d. 1572) was an occasion of providing the Grand Master with sweeping powers in *Inter Assiduas*.



Pius IV (Medici)
(Pope 1559-1565)



St Pius V (Ghislieri)
(Pope 1566-1572)

The successor of Pius IV was Michele Ghislieri, Saint Pius V (pope 1565-1572). Pius V, a Dominican, displayed exemplary religious zeal, and was Grand Inquisitor at Rome. He was renowned for his severity, wore a hair shirt under his vestments, and engaged in strict fasting. However, he also believed that the Church had little need for cannons and soldiers. His pontificate was characterized by the severity of his discipline, with public whippings for adulterers, and Giovagnoli described him as “one of the most frenetic and bloodiest monsters who have ever dishonoured the human race”. Writing to Phillip II of Spain, Pius V exhorted him to “...persecute to the very end; slaughter, burn, put

everything to the torch and draw blood, for the Lord to be revenged...".³ Not surprisingly, his bull on the Order of Saint Lazarus, *Sicut Bonus Agricola* (referring to the good farmer who prunes savagely his vines) reduced the power of the Grand Master (Pius IV's favourite) and focused on the religious obligations of the Order. *Sicut Bonus Agricola* was essentially a re-writing of *Inter Assiduas*, although with many paragraphs of *Inter Assiduas* repeated almost verbatim.

The appellation of the bull, "*Sicut Bonus Agricola*" is taken from the opening explanation, "so that the forest not by chance swell with useless leaves, and with sterile branches cut back or pruned... and reduce it to better and more useful cultivation" expresses the intention of Pius V to prune the Order to remove excess and make it more productive. He expressed his purpose as being to "...confirm, with limitations and restrictions added...", with the additional stated purpose of confirming only what existed when Pius IV wrote. He added that the Order must always be ready for service to the Church against its enemies – clearly seeing it as a weapon and a defence against the Turks.

All places under the invocation of Saint Lazarus are subject to the Grand Master, and all hospitals called Saint Lazarus for lepers are to come under the jurisdiction of the Order, thus delineating the wide power of the Order, and adding a significant number of properties to the Order. Some provisions of the Bull are puzzling, including the right "...to hang bells and towers with pigs and any other animals which happen to be offered to the Order of Saint Lazarus...". And again, parity with the Order of Saint John of Malta is specified, giving the Order of Saint Lazarus all the "...privileges, graces, exemptions and other powers up to now conceded or in future conceded..." to the Order of Malta. No other granted exemption will prevail against obedience to the Grand Master and Council, meaning that any exemptions granted by the Papacy elsewhere cannot justify any exemption from the powers of the Order.

³ Rendina C. *The Popes*. McCusker, PD (transl.). Seven Locks Press, Santa Ana, CA, 2002, p.473

Further, there is exemption from all temporal powers with regard to dominion and burden, and exemption from tithes, tolls, and rents. This last point is interesting, since it appears to specify that any temporal protection is neither necessary nor warranted. This temporal independence is equivalent to the independence (excepting religious independence from the Papacy) given to the other Military Orders, the Hospitallers of Saint John of Jerusalem in *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* of Paschal II (1113), and the Templars in *Omne Datum Optimum* of Innocent II (1139). The recent argument that the Monastic Military Orders require a temporal protector in order to be recognized as legitimate orders of chivalry is specifically negated by the bulls defining the powers and rights of these orders, including the Order of Saint Lazarus (although it is true of the development of Royal orders of chivalry, which date from c.1325).⁴

The election of the Grand Master must be confirmed by the Holy See, but the Grand Master may institute *de novo* the rules and statutes, with the consent of their protector (note the term “protector”: not necessarily the Papacy), and correct and change them as long as they wish. The Grand Master and Assembly (and in *Sicut Bonus Agricola* this conjunction is almost invariably used when referring to the powers of governance) are the Ordinaries (that is, have the equivalent authority of a bishop of a diocese).

To avoid alienation of property, *Sicut Bonus Agricola* specified that places of the Order can only be conferred on those of the Religion and Habit, and alienations are not allowed: and pensions are payable only to brothers. This prevents the Grand Master (and may be particularly aimed at the existing Grand Master, Pius IV’s favourite John de Castiglione) from giving away property or pensions. Members of the Order have the right to bear arms anywhere, and erect buildings, without needing the permission of the local Bishop. Clergy of the Order may celebrate mass in pontifical habit, hear confessions, administer the

⁴ Vide: Boulton, d’A J D. *The Knights of the Crown: The Monarchical Orders of Knighthood in Later Medieval Europe, 1325-1520*. Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1987

sacraments, and bury bodies, emphasizing that the Order is a full religious order (i.e. an established religious body for ministry within the Church). Finally, *Sicut Bonus Agricola* repeats, for emphasis, that the Order has the same rights and privileges as the Order of Saint John of Malta, setting it up as fully equivalent.

In summary, these parallel bulls, the first giving wide powers to the Order, the second clarifying those powers, both see the Order as a weapon against the Turks in the decade of the great siege of Malta and the Battle of Lepanto. Pius V, however, removed the potential for abuse and alienation of the goods and properties of the Order, and retained more control over the Order, at least in the confirmation of the nomination of the Grand Master. Both Bulls gave the Order complete parity with the Order of Saint John of Malta in terms of its powers – extending the insurance policy on the Order of Saint John with a completely equivalent organization ready to replace it should it be necessary.

In terms of the global diplomatic context at the time, however, it is interesting to note that the Franko-Turkish alliance of 1536 was still in force, with France remaining neutral with regard to the Siege of Malta and the Battle of Lepanto. This almost certainly influenced subsequent Bulls regarding the Order of Saint Lazarus, particularly the 1572 Bull *Pro Commissa Nobis* of Gregory XIII which gave control of the Order to the Dukes of Savoy as Grand Masters, on the death of Grand Master John de Castiglione that same year. Having the Order based in Boigny and under the temporal protection of the Kings of France (and thus in theory allied with the Turks) would have been a major concern for an order committed to defend the Papacy, and therefore giving the hereditary Grand Mastership to a member of the Holy League (and specifying that there was no need for any temporal protection) was probably a reaction to this problem. *Pro Commissa Nobis*, however, was not specified as one of the defining Bulls of the Order in the Bull of Cardinal de Vendôme of 1668 (because of the splitting of the Order into Savoyard and French

fractions, and the permanent alienation of that fraction under the Grand Mastership of the Dukes of Savoy).

Any doubt as to the importance of the Order of Saint Lazarus both as insurance against the loss of the Order of Saint John of Malta and as a significant part of the defence of the Papacy, as to its independence from temporal control, and its existence as an important Order with wide authority and powers, is answered by *Inter Assiduas Domenici* and *Sicut Bonus Agricola*. They form the basis of the powers and statutes of the Order, subsequent to 1565.