

The Catholic Catechism on Freemasonry

Lecture Series on Freemasonry Through the Light of Catholicism

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The Catholic Catechism on Freemasonry

Session Five – *Providas Romanorum*

The objective of this five lecture is to ground the student in the focus of Pope Benedict XIV's *Providas Romanorum*, which was to reiterate *In Eminenti* to countries that had ignored it.

CATHOLIC
CATECHISM ON
FREEMASONRY
LESSON FOUR -
HIGH WARNING

Providas Romanorum

Historical Background of Papal Encyclical

Areas of Major Contribution & Legacy

PROVIDAS ROMANORUM - FAST FACTS

- **Author:** Pope Benedict XIV (1740 – 1758)
- **Promulgated:** at Saint Mary Major 1751
- **Purpose:** There are rumors (slanders) that Pope Benedict XIV and some of his cardinals had been Freemasons, because he had not purposed his own Papal Bull against Freemasonry; In *Eminentissimi* 13 years old. The Kings of Spain and Naples press upon him to issue decrees suppressing Freemasonry.
- Along with inserting in *In Eminentissimi*, Benedict XIV, adds commentary on the Papal Bull and states six issues with Freemasonry

IN PROVIDAS ROMANORUM - HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Despite enjoying such an impeccable reputation as a leader and a theologian, Pope Benedict XIV could not escape the rumors swirling around that he and some of his cardinals had been initiated as Freemasons.

In the Kingdoms of Spain and Naples, there was a growing need to act more strongly against the threat and infiltration of Freemasons. The constitution of Pope Clement XII against Freemasonry was only thirteen years old, but it was old enough for some to raise doubts about its validity, being that it had not been affirmed by his successor since he took office on August 17, 1740. Therefore, the Kings of Spain and Naples impressed upon Pope Benedict XIV to affirm *In Eminentissimi apostolatus spec-ula* in some sort of manner that would give them ecclesial back-ing to continue the work to suppress Freemasonry.

Following the promulgation of *Providas Romanorum*, the Kings of Spain and Naples both issued decrees suppressing Freemasonry. In countries that had previously ignored *In Eminentissimi*, this new Constitution also fell on deaf ears.

IN EMINENTI APOSTOLATUS SPECULA - AREAS OF CONCERN

Paragraph Seven, Pope Benedict XIV restates the reasons found in *In Eminenti* for the prohibition against Freemasonry. He delineates them as six.

1. **Indifferentism and false ecumenism;** the Catholic Church's central and most powerful theological argument against Freemasonry is that the idea of men of any religion and sect binding themselves together in a brotherhood and uniting together under the name of one generic god harms the purity of the Catholic religion. Benedict XIV believes, as all Catholics should, that there is something truly exceptional about Catholicism that needs to be preserved and not treated like a prostitute and shared with mixed company as if she is equal to or lesser than them.
2. **Inviolable secrecy;** Freemasons not only take vows to never disclose the secrets of a Master Mason, but they also meet in secret with one another. *"The honest things always love public light; the wicked are secret."* Demonstrating how well-read he is, Benedict XIV draws upon this quote from the Catholic writer Marcus Minucius Felix, who was a second or third century Latin speaking writer and lawyer from northern African. In his apologetic dialogue *Octavius*, he is represented by his character Ottavio who challenges Cecilio Natale (Caecilius) over his pagan beliefs in adoring the god Serapis. Cecilio would like to invite Minucio to judge their controversy, but he declines to be a religious umpire. The dialogue is crafted in such a way as to give Ottavio the stronger argument, but Cecilio is too proud to admit defeat. This was a peculiar quote for Benedict XIV to use because it was made by Cecilio against Christianity because Christians cannot even see their God, and they have *"no altars, no temples, and no acknowledged images."*

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- 3. Subversive secrecy;** these oaths that Freemasons take are subversive to society because they oblige Freemasons to avoid making a good confession. Primarily, this objection points back to the political problem of Freemasonry being an export from England that may be intent on causing revolution and disruption to the monarchical system. Secondly, it is also a religious objection because such secrecy could invalidate the conferral of the Sacraments on a person.
- 4. Meetings are in violation of the law;** there were laws in place throughout countries in Europe that required permits for groups to meet. Owners of meeting facilities were expected to ensure that people meeting in their facilities had permission to gather there. Such as laws even in the United States today, where groups need a permit to hold public marches and parades. On university campuses, organizations need to meet certain standards to hold their meetings on school property. While this objection to Freemasonry meeting illegally may no longer be applicable in most parts of the world today, it does not then, thereby, invalidate any of the other errors.

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- 5. A sense of the faithful; there was a growing sense outside of Protestant Europe that Freemasonry was a danger and a threat.** Here, Pope Benedict XIV is confirming that even thirteen years later, our prohibition against Freemasonry is still in harmony with where the public is on this issue. Again, the world is much bigger today than it was in 1751, but it is still true that wherever Protestantism and religious indifferentism is accepted as the norm, Freemasonry is able to be legally practiced.
- 6. Finally, the last reason is that among the prudent and honest men the aforementioned Societies and Aggregations were blamed: in their judgment, anyone who enrolled in them was accused of blasphemy and perversion. Scandal;** the final reason for the prohibition is that Catholics view those who belong to Freemasonry as blasphemers and heretics. It is still true today that faithful Catholics know that Catholics who are enrolled in the Masonic orders are living contrary to the faith and are committing a sin that is of grave matter. To see people like these receive the Holy Eucharist and participate in the life of the Church (without correction) causes scandal and actual harm to other's spiritual life.

IN EMINENTI APOSTOLATUS SPECULA - CONTRIBUTION & LEGACY

Providas Romanarum would be the final Papal document that explicitly and specifically addressed the error of Freemasonry until Pope Pius IX's *Etsi Multa* in 1873. Until then, there would be four documents that addressed the broader subject of secret societies, as others had cropped up around Europe and the Americas that were exercising similar philosophies and political agendas as Freemasonry, such as the Carbonari. Three documents attacked the heresy of indifferentism, which is the first objection that Catholicism has with Freemasonry.

- *Quo Graviora*, Pope Leo XII (1825), *Traditi Humiltati*, Pope Pius VIII (1829) and *Qui Pluribus*, Bl. Pope Pius IX (1846).
- *Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo*, Pope Pius VII (1821).
- *Mirari Vos*, Pope Gregory XVI (1832), *Inter Multiplices*, Bl. Pope Pius IX (1853), and *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore*, Bl. Pope Pius IX (1863).

IN EMINENTI APOSTOLATUS SPECULA - CONTRIBUTION & LEGACY

In the important instance of Pope Leo XII's (1823 – 1829) 1826 *Quo Graviora*, it followed a similar format to *Providas Romanorum* by including the text of *In Eminenti, Providas Romanorum, and Ecclesiam a Jesu Christo* to demonstrate that the prohibition against Freemasonry and the Carbonari is a permanent (dogmatic) teaching of the Church. It also invoked the wraths of Ss. Peter and Paul, as did *Providas Romanorum*. Distinct from the three previous documents, *Quo Graviora* was issued from the Seat of Peter; together with all other factors included, qualifies it as having met the future criteria of being an infallible pronouncement of a Supreme Pontiff. Also distinct was the fact that *Quo Graviora* not only repeated the prohibition against Freemasonry and the Carbonari, but it also extended that same prohibition to all secret societies then present in 1826 and all those that will come in the future that rise up against the Catholic Church.

Despite the efforts of the Catholic Church to protect the faithful and to expose evil for what it is, the world would continue to see Freemasonry spread in every country where Protestantism and indifferentism had been normalized.

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Session Six – Etsi Multa

The objective of this sixth lecture is to ground the student in the focus of Pope Pius IX's *Etsi Multi* which was to speak of the dangers of Freemasonry within the context of the culture wars taking place in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, and Belgium (called Kultrkampf - i.e., culture struggle)