

VOX IN EXCELSO

22nd March, 1312.

Clement, bishop, servant of the servants of God, for an everlasting record. A voice was heard from on high, of lamentation and bitter weeping, for the time is coming, indeed has come, when the Lord shall complain through his prophet: This house has aroused my anger and wrath, so that I will remove it from my sight because of the evil of its sons, for they have provoked me to anger turning their backs to me, not their faces, and setting up their idols in the house in which my name is invoked, to defile it. They have built the high places of Baal in order to consecrate their sons to idols and demons. They have sinned deeply as in the days of Gibeah. When I learnt of such deeds of horror, at the dread of such notorious scandal—for who ever heard of such infamy? who ever saw the like?—I fell down at hearing it, I was dismayed at seeing it, my heart grew embittered and darkness overwhelmed me. Hark, a voice of the people from the city! a voice from the temple! the voice of the Lord rendering recompense to his enemies. The prophet is compelled to exclaim: Give them, Lord, a barren womb and dry breasts. Their worthlessness has been revealed because of their malice. Throw them out of your house, and let their roots dry up; let them not bear fruit, and let not this house be any more a stumbling block of bitterness or a thorn to hurt.

Not slight is the fornication of this house, immolating its sons, giving them up and consecrating them to demons and not to God, to gods whom they did not know. Therefore this house will be desolate and in disgrace, cursed and uninhabited, thrown into confusion and levelled to the dust, lowly, forsaken, inaccessible, spurned by the anger of the Lord, whom it has despised; let it not be lived in but reduced to a wilderness. Let everyone be astonished at it and hiss at all its wounds. For the Lord did not choose the people on account of the place, but the place on account of the people. Therefore the very place of the temple was made to share in the punishment of the people, as the Lord proclaimed openly to Solomon when he built the temple for him, to Solomon who was filled with wisdom like a river: But if your sons turn aside from me, not following and honouring me but going instead after strange gods and worshipping them, then I will cut them off from before me and expel them from the land which I have given to them; and the temple which I have consecrated to my name I will cast out of my sight, and it will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. Everyone passing by it will be

astonished and shall hiss, and shall say, "Why has the Lord done thus to this temple and to this house?" And they will say : "Because they forsook the Lord their God who bought and redeemed them, and followed instead Baal and other gods, worshipping and serving them. Therefore the Lord has brought all this evil upon them".

Indeed a little while ago, about the time of our election as supreme pontiff before we came to Lyons for our coronation, and afterwards, both there and elsewhere, we received secret intimations against the master, preceptors and other brothers of the order of Knights Templar of Jerusalem and also against the order itself. These men had been posted in lands overseas for the defence of the patrimony of our lord Jesus Christ, and as special warriors of the catholic faith and outstanding defenders of the holy Land seemed to carry the chief burden of the said holy Land. For this reason the holy Roman church honoured these brothers and the order with her special support, armed them with the sign of the cross against Christ's enemies, paid them the highest tributes of her respect, and strengthened them with various exemptions and privileges; and they experienced in many and various ways her help and that of all faithful Christians with repeated gifts of property. Therefore it was against the lord Jesus Christ himself that they fell into the sin of impious apostasy, the abominable vice of idolatry, the deadly crime of the Sodomites, and various heresies. Yet it was not to be expected nor seemed credible that men so devout, who were outstanding often to the shedding of their blood for Christ and were seen repeatedly to expose their persons to the danger of death, who even more frequently gave great signs of their devotion both in divine worship and in fasting and other observances, should be so unmindful of their salvation as to commit such crimes. The order, moreover, had a good and holy beginning; it won the approval of the apostolic see. The rule, which is holy, reasonable and just, had the deserved sanction of this see. For all these reasons we were unwilling to lend our ears to insinuation and accusation against the Templars; we had been taught by our Lord's example and the words of canonical scripture.

Then came the intervention of our dear son in Christ, Philip, the illustrious king of France. The same crimes had been reported to him. He was not moved by greed. He had no intention of claiming or appropriating for himself anything from the Templars' property; rather, in his own kingdom he abandoned such claim and thereafter released entirely his hold on their goods. He was on fire with zeal for the orthodox faith, following in the well marked footsteps of his ancestors. He obtained as much information as he lawfully could. Then, in order to give us greater light on the subject, he sent us much valuable

information through his envoys and letters. The scandal against the Templars themselves and their order in reference to the crimes already mentioned increased. There was even one of the knights, a man of noble blood and of no small reputation in the order, who testified secretly under oath in our presence, that at his reception the knight who received him suggested that he deny Christ, which he did, in the presence of certain other knights of the Temple, he furthermore spat on the cross held out to him by this knight who received him. He also said that he had seen the grand master, who is still alive, receive a certain knight in a chapter of the order held overseas. The reception took place in the same way, namely with the denial of Christ and the spitting on the cross, with quite two hundred brothers of the order being present. The witness also affirmed that he heard it said that this was the customary manner of receiving new members: at the suggestion of the person receiving the profession or his delegate, the person making profession denied Jesus Christ, and in abuse of Christ crucified spat upon the cross held out to him, and the two committed other unlawful acts contrary to Christian morality, as the witness himself then confessed in our presence.

We were duty-bound by our office to pay heed to the din of such grave and repeated accusations. When at last there came a general hue and cry with the clamorous denunciations of the said king and of the dukes, counts, barons, other nobles, clergy and people of the kingdom of France, reaching us both directly and through agents and officials, we heard a doleful tale: that the master, preceptors and other brothers of the order as well as the order itself had been involved in these and other crimes. This seemed to be proved by many confessions, attestations and depositions of the master, of the visitor of France, and of many preceptors and brothers of the order, in the presence of many prelates and the inquisitor of heresy. These depositions were made in the kingdom of France with our authorisation, edited as public documents and shown to us and our brothers. Besides, the rumour and clamour had grown to such insistence that the hostility against both the order itself and the individual members of it could not be ignored without grave scandal nor be tolerated without imminent danger to the faith. Since we though unworthy, represent Christ on earth, we considered that we ought, following in his footsteps, to hold an inquiry. We called to our presence many of the preceptors, priests, knights and other brothers of the order who were of no small reputation. They took an oath, they were adjured urgently by the Father, Son and holy Spirit; we demanded, in virtue of holy obedience, invoking the divine judgment with the menace of an eternal malediction, that they tell the pure and simple truth. We pointed out that they were now in a safe and suitable place where they had nothing to fear in spite of the confessions they had made before others. We

wished those confessions to be without prejudice to them. In this way we made our interrogation and examined as many as seventy-two, many of our brothers being present and following the proceedings attentively. We had the confessions taken down by notary and recorded as authentic documents in our presence and that of our brothers. After some days we had these confessions read in consistory in the presence of the knights concerned. Each was read a version in his own language; they stood by their confessions, expressly and spontaneously approving them as they had been read out.

After this, intending to make a personal inquiry with the grand master, the visitor of France and the principal preceptors of the order, we commanded that the grand master, the visitor of France and the chief preceptors of Outremer, Normandy, Aquitaine and Poitou be presented to us while we were at Poitiers. Some of them, however, were ill at the time and could not ride a horse nor conveniently be brought to our presence. We wished to know the truth of the whole matter and whether their confessions and depositions, which were said to have been made in the presence of the inquisitor of heresy in the kingdom of France and witnessed by certain public notaries and many other good men, and which were produced in public and shown to us and our brothers by the inquisitor, were true. We empowered and commanded our beloved sons Berengar, cardinal, then with the title of Nereus and Achilleus, now bishop of Frascati, and Stephen, cardinal priest with the title of saint Cyriacus at the Baths, and Landulf, cardinal deacon with the title of saint Angelo, in whose prudence, experience and loyalty we have the fullest confidence, to make a careful investigation with the grand master, visitor and preceptors, concerning the truth of the accusations against them and individual persons of the order and against the order itself. If there was evidence, it was to be brought to us; the confessions and depositions were to be taken down in writing by a public notary and presented to us. The cardinals were to grant absolution from the sentence of excommunication, according to the form of the church, to the master, visitor and preceptors—a sentence incurred if the accusations were true—provided the accused humbly and devoutly requested absolution, as they ought to do.

The cardinals went to see the grand master, the visitor and the preceptors personally and explained the reason for their visit. Since these men and other Templars resident in the kingdom of France had been handed over to us because they would freely and without fear of anyone reveal the truth sincerely to the cardinals, the cardinals by our apostolic authority enjoined on them this duty of telling the truth. The master, the visitor and the preceptors of Normandy, Outremer, Aquitaine and Poitou, in the presence of the three

cardinals, four notaries and many other men of good repute, took an oath on the holy gospels that they would tell the truth, plainly and fully. They deposed one by one, in the cardinals' presence, freely and spontaneously, without any compulsion or fear. They confessed among other things that they had denied Christ and spat upon the cross at their reception into the order of the Temple. Some of them added that they themselves had received many brothers using the same rite, namely with the denial of Christ and the spitting on the cross. There were even some who confessed certain other horrible crimes and immoral deeds, we say nothing more of these at present. The knights confessed also that the content of their confessions and depositions made a little while ago before the inquisitor was true. These confessions and depositions of the grand master, visitor and preceptors were edited as a public document by four notaries, the master and the others being present and also certain men of good repute. After some days, the confessions were read to the accused on the orders and in the presence of the cardinals; each knight received an account in his own language. They persisted in their confessions and approved them, expressly and spontaneously, as they had been read out to them. After these confessions and depositions, they asked from the cardinals absolution from the excommunication incurred by the above crimes; humbly and devoutly, on bended knee, with hands joined, they made their petition with many tears. Since the church never shuts her heart to the sinner who returns, the cardinals granted absolution by our authority in the customary form of the church to the master, visitor and preceptors on abjuration of their heresy. On their return to our presence, the cardinals presented to us the confessions and depositions of the master, visitor and preceptors in the form of a public document, as has been said. They also gave us a report on their dealings with these knights.

From these confessions, depositions and report we find that the master, the visitor and the preceptors of Outremer, Normandy, Aquitaine and Poitou have often committed grave offences, although some have erred less frequently than others. We considered that such dreadful crimes could not and should not go unpunished without insult to almighty God and to every Catholic. We decided on the advice of our brothers to hold an enquiry into the above crimes and transgressions. This would be carried out through the local ordinaries and other wise, trustworthy men delegated by us in the case of individual members of the order; and through certain prudent persons of our considered choice in the case of the order as a whole. After this, investigations were made both by the ordinaries and by our delegates into the allegations against individual members, and by the inquisitors appointed by us into those against the order itself, in every part of the world where the brothers of the order have usually lived. Once made and sent to us for examination, these investigations were very carefully

read and examined, some by us and our brothers, cardinals of the holy Roman church others by many very learned, prudent, trustworthy and God-fearing men, zealous for and well-trained in the catholic faith, some being prelates and others not. This took place at Malaucene in the diocese of Vaison.

Later we came to Vienne where there were assembled already very many patriarchs, archbishops, selected bishops, exempt and non-exempt abbots, other prelates of churches, and procurators of absent prelates and of chapters, all present for the council we had summoned. In the first session we explained to them our reasons for calling the council. After this, because it was difficult indeed almost impossible, for the cardinals and all the prelates and procurators gathered for the council to meet in our presence in order to discuss how to proceed in the matter of the Templars, we gave orders as follows. Certain patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, exempt and non-exempt abbots, other prelates of churches, and procurators from all parts of Christendom, of every language nation and region, were concordantly chosen out of all the prelates and procurators at the council. The choice was made from those believed to be among the more skilful, discreet and apt for consultation on such an important affair and for discussing it with us and the above-mentioned cardinals. After this we had the attestations received during the inquiry read publicly in the presence of the prelates and procurators. This reading went on during several days, for as long as they wished to listen, in the place assigned for the council, namely the cathedral church. Afterwards the said attestations and the summaries made from them were considered and examined, not in a perfunctory manner but with great care, by many of our venerable brethren, by the patriarch of Aquileia, by archbishops and bishops of the present sacred council who were specially chosen and delegated for the purpose, and by those whom the whole council had chosen very carefully and earnestly.

We convoked therefore the said cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops and bishops, the exempt and non-exempt abbots, and the other prelates and procurators elected by the council to consider this affair, and we asked them, in the course of a secret consultation in our presence, how we should proceed, taking special account of the fact that certain Templars were presenting themselves in defence of their order. The greater part of the cardinals and nearly the whole council, that is those who were elected by the whole council and were representing the whole council on this question, in short the great majority, indeed four-fifths among every nation taking part, were firmly convinced, and the said prelates and procurators advised accordingly, that the order should be given an opportunity to defend itself and that it could not be condemned, on the basis of the proof provided thus far, for the heresies that had been the subject of the

inquiry, without offence to God and injustice. Certain others on the contrary said that the brothers should not be allowed to make a defence of their order and that we should not give permission for such a defence, for if a defence were allowed or given there would be danger to a settlement of the affair and no small prejudice to the interests of the holy Land. There would be dispute, delay and putting off a decision, many different reasons were mentioned. Indeed although legal process against the order up to now does not permit its canonical condemnation as heretical by definitive sentence, the good name of the order has been largely taken away by the heresies attributed to it. Moreover, an almost indefinite number of individual members, among whom are the grand master the visitor of France and the chief preceptors, have been convicted of such heresies, errors and crimes through their spontaneous confessions. These confessions render the order very suspect, and the infamy and suspicion render it detestable to the holy church of God, to her prelates, to kings and other rulers, and to Catholics in general. It is also believed in all probability that from now on there will be found no good person who wishes to enter the order, and so it will be made useless to the church of God and the carrying on of the undertaking to the holy Land, for which service the knights had been destined. Furthermore, the putting off of a settlement or arrangement of this affair of the Templars, for which we had set ourselves a final decision or sentence to be promulgated in the present council, would lead in all probability to the total loss, destruction and dilapidation of the Templars' property. This has for long been given, bequeathed and granted by the faithful for the aid of the holy Land and to oppose the enemies of the Christian faith.

There were therefore two opinions: some said that sentence should immediately be pronounced, condemning the order for the alleged crimes, and others objected that from the proceedings taken up to now the sentence of condemnation against the order could not justly be passed. After long and mature deliberation, having in mind God alone and the good of the holy Land without turning aside to right or to left, we elected to proceed by way of provision and ordinance, in this way scandal will be removed, perils avoided and property saved for the help of the holy Land. We have taken into account the disgrace, suspicion, vociferous reports and other attacks mentioned above against the order, also the secret reception into the order, and the divergence of many of the brothers from the general behaviour, way of life and morals of other Christians. We have noted here especially that when new members are received, they are made to swear not to reveal the manner of their reception to anyone and not to leave the order; this creates an unfavourable presumption. We observe in addition that the above have given rise to grave scandal against the order, scandal impossible to allay as long as the order continues to exist.

We note also the danger to faith and to souls, the many horrible misdeeds of so many brothers of the order, and many other just reasons and causes, moving us to the following decision.

The majority of the cardinals and of those elected by the council, a proportion of more than four-fifths, have thought it better, more expedient and advantageous for God's honour and for the preservation of the Christian faith, also for the aid of the holy Land and many other valid reasons, to suppress the order by way of ordinance and provision of the apostolic see, assigning the property to the use for which it was intended. Provision is also to be made for the members of the order who are still alive. This way has been found preferable to that of safeguarding the right of defence with the consequent postponement of judgment on the order. We observe also that in other cases the Roman church has suppressed other important orders for reasons of far less gravity than those mentioned above, with no fault on the part of the brethren. Therefore, with a sad heart, not by definitive sentence, but by apostolic provision or ordinance, we suppress, with the approval of the sacred council, the order of Templars, and its rule, habit and name, by an inviolable and perpetual decree, and we entirely forbid that anyone from now on enter the order, or receive or wear its habit, or presume to behave as a Templar. If anyone acts otherwise, he incurs automatic excommunication. Furthermore, we reserve the persons and property for our disposition and that of the apostolic see. We intend with divine grace, before the end of the present sacred council, to make this disposition to the honour of God the exaltation of the Christian faith and the welfare of the holy Land. We strictly forbid anyone, of whatever state or condition, to interfere in any way in this matter of the persons and property of the Templars. We forbid any action concerning them which would prejudice our arrangements and dispositions, or any innovation or tampering. We decree that from now on any attempt of this kind is null and void, whether it be made knowingly or in ignorance. Through this decree, however, we do not wish to derogate from any processes made or to be made concerning individual Templars by diocesan bishops and provincial councils, in conformity with what we have ordained at other times.

Given at Vienne on 22 March in the seventh year of our pontificate.