

III. INTERVENTIONS TO SOLVE THE MATTER OF BISHOPS' 'TEMPORALITIES' (1872-1874)

The Law of Guarantees on 13 May 1871 and decrees applying to this required that for newly appointed bishops to enter into possession – the so-called temporalities – they had to present the Minister with the original decree of appointment and formally ask for the exequatur to be granted. This act, in the Holy See's judgement, implied recognising the Kingdom of Italy which came into being in 1861, and included part of the Papal States 'illegally' taken from the Pontiff.

Since the Holy See was not ready to give such recognition, even indirectly, to the new Kingdom, and since the Government did not intend to step back from its position, the bishops were between a rock and a hard place, between the intransigence of both Minister and Vatican. So they had to be content with a papal subsidy, and those who took steps not authorised by the Holy See (Montecassino, Saluzzo) were reprimanded and punished. A number of compromises were attempted, some cases were solved, but the situation remained blocked.

Don Bosco in 1872, on the basis of certain oral understandings with ministers in previous years, intervened once more by his personal initiative on both sides, but without getting much of a hearing at the Vatican. In the two years that followed the Vatican seemed to step back from its absolute intransigence, hypothetically accepting another compromise, that of the government being presented, by whatever authority, even a public notary, with a copy of the bull of appointment from the original posted up in the sacristy. Don Bosco kept in close contact with both sides despite being attacked by some zealous Vatican personnel.

Halfway through January 1874 when it seemed that the matter might find a solution with both sides accepting the above approach, it all collapsed from Government opposition also the result of international pressure. The linking role which Don Bosco played and where he did not spare himself the journeys, discussions and letters with various political and Vatican figures had not succeeded in "reconciling the irreconcilable."²⁰

²⁰ Cf. Francesco MOTTO, *La mediazione di don Bosco fra Santa Sede e governo per la concessione degli "exequatur" ai vescovi d'Italia (1872-1874)*. (= Piccola Biblioteca dell'ISS, 7). Roma, LAS 1987.

In the decisive stage of the dispute, the slow and careful acceptance by the Vatican in the two years that followed (1875-1876), Don Bosco seemed not to play any further part.

In relation to this question of the “temporalities”, we publish here Don Bosco’s correspondence with Ministers Giovanni Lanza (no. 70, 72), Marco Minghetti (no. 73), Paolo Onorato Vigliani (no. 76), Pope Pius IX (no. 71) and Cardinal Antonelli (nos. 74-77).

**70. To the President of the Council of Ministers [Prime Minister]
and the Minister for the Interior, Giovanni Lanza**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 397-398.

Varazze, 11 February 1872

Your Excellency,

I meant to write sooner and ask for clarification on the matter of the Bishops’ temporalities but illness has prevented me thus far from doing so. I am now asking you to spare a moment to read what I write here.

When I had the honour of speaking with Your Excellency on September 9 last, it seemed to me that the Government had agreed to allow the Pope full freedom in the choice of Bishops, and that the Government would not put any difficulties in the way of obtaining the *temporalities*.

I communicated this much to the Holy Father and when for his part two days later His Holiness expressed his gratitude and some further thoughts on the matter, Your Excellency was happy to confirm all this.

I am receiving inquiries about this matter, and I myself would like to know if I misunderstood or if the government has had cause to change its position.

If Your Excellency could kindly give me something I can say about this, it would remove a serious embarrassment, and the Government’s intentions would be properly understood.

I believe it would be good to point out here how the most recent appointments of bishops have found universal acceptance, and the people’s satisfaction borders on enthusiasm.

Both parties have praised the Government in most flattering terms for the freedom left to the Pontiff and the Bishops in exercising their ministry. But when they saw the bishops once again obliged to take up residence in one of the diocesan seminaries, or their own home, or an inn or rented apartment, well I can't tell you just how much public opinion began to change.

I believe if Your Excellency had the opportunity to listen to what is being increasingly noised abroad on these matters every day, you would take effective measures to see that these matters are settled; and it seems things could be settled without it being at the expense of either party.

I write with confidence, and I assure you that while I make it clear I am a Catholic priest devoted to the Head of the Catholic religion, I have also shown myself to be devoted to the Government. I have always dedicated my life and means to its subjects.

If you believe I can help in something which would be to the advantage of the Government and religion you only have to show me how.

May God be good to Your Excellency and please accept my profound gratitude.

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

J. Bosco

P. S. After the 13th of this month I will be in Turin.

71. To Pope Pius IX

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 349-350.

[Turin], 8 April 1872

Most Holy Father,

Thanks to Archbishop Fissore of Vercelli I am able to deliver this letter safely into the hands of Your Holiness.

With great consolation I can tell you, Holy Father, that the new bishops were welcomed with the highest respect by every category of citizen; but what

will certainly be of great comfort to Your Holiness is the zeal of these pastors and the care and obedience constantly shown them.

Even just considering Turin we can say that the principles of social order and religion have made extraordinary progress.

However the matter of the *temporalities* is what is still causing not a little grief. When the government began to raise objections, I immediately wrote to Prime Minister Lanza. I reminded him of the formal pledge made by the government and by the king himself that nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the bishops' *temporalities*.

I reminded him that he, Lanza, had repeatedly told me to tell the Holy Father everything; and that this way things would not come to such a formal lack of communication. He replied that there was no cause to worry because the difficulties that had arisen were temporary and would be resolved, and that the government's position in the matter had not changed at all.

As time went by, noting that nothing was being done I made further inquiries but got no reply. I know for a fact that the government would like to move out of this embarrassing situation, but it cannot find a way.

Meanwhile, Holy Father, I am in debt to you for my health. The doctors had told me there was no hope of recovery. But when I received Your holy blessing I began to improve and after a few days I had recovered and was able to go about my ordinary affairs.

Archbishop Fissore will speak to you of our Congregation, which God blesses and marvellously makes prosper.

With my priests, seminarians and boys, about 6,000 in all, we kneel before Your Holiness' feet and like children kneeling before their father we implore your holy blessing.

I sign on behalf of all.

Your most indebted and devoted son,

Fr John Bosco

**72. To the President of the Council of Ministers
and Minister for the Interior Giovanni Lanza**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 434-435.

[Turin], 21 May 1872

Your Excellency,

The matter of the Bishops' *temporalities* recently made public must be settled somehow. There are too many rumours around which are harmful to the Church, the Government, and of benefit to no one.

Some time ago I wrote to Your Excellency how I thought it would not be difficult to come to a rapprochement and leave intact principles that the Government on one side and the Holy see on the other want to preserve.

Although I stand apart from politics and public matters, nor do I have any responsibility of this kind, I believe nevertheless that the Government can be satisfied by a genuine note from the Holy see, declaring to the Government that in the Consistory held on n.n. bishops were publicly appointed to the vacant sees ...

So when Your Excellency thinks this plan or some other one that you believe to be easier would be possible to implement, and if you would like to use me to communicate it to the appropriate individuals, I would consider myself fortunate to have offered some service to my Government and brought some benefit to the Church. As a private individual unknown to the political world, I would give the press no opportunity to speak either for or against, as you would already know from similar situations.

At any rate I beg you to forgive me disturbing you once more and I ask you to accept my profound respect and deep gratitude.

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

**73. To the President of the Council of Ministers
[Prime Minister] Marco Minghetti**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 128-129.

[Turin], 14 July 1873

Your Excellency,

Although I stand quite apart from political matters, nevertheless I have never refused to play a part in things that can be of some advantage to my country.

It was for this that last March, having gone to Rome I made the effort to visit Prime Minister Lanza to study a way that bishops could come into possession of their temporalities²¹. His Excellency was pleased with this idea, and when he knew that I had no official role for this from the Holy See, we met a number of times to look at a *modus vivendi*. He then showed me four proposals by the Council of State, one of which, with some modifications, is the one described on the separate sheet.

I reported the proposals to Cardinal Antonelli and to the Holy Father himself. All parties understood that once the debate on the Bill against religious corporations was concluded, and parliament adjourned for the summer recess, the proposal would be put into effect as modified.

I hope the new government still intends to work toward the settlement of a dispute that is harmful to many and advantageous to no one. I shall be happy again to be of service in any capacity that may be for the good of my country and of the Church. The Minister for the Interior was to receive a large package containing everything we had dealt with on this matter.

It would do me a great favour if you could simply let me know if this package arrived and was delivered to you.

²¹ In a letter on March 15 1873 Don Bosco communicated to Card. Giacomo Antonelli that in the evening he would be having the "final meeting with that individual" and would tell him of the results the following day: cf. E(m) IV, pp. 66-67.

With deep respect, I am,
Your Excellency's humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

[Attachment]

Bishops' temporalities

The *modus vivendi* most in accordance with the principles of the Holy See would be the following article with attached modifications:

1. *The Chapter, or Chancery or other competent authority will present a summary of the Bull, declaring that nothing was added to the formulas customarily employed in such texts.*

2. *The Chapter, the Chancery, or other competent authority will send a declaration to the King's Procurator or other government authority, that in the Consistory held on such and such a day ... the priest ... was officially appointed bishop of ... and that the customary Bull expressed in customary terms, or simply, the customary Bull, has been sent.*

74. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 137-138.

Turin, 3 August 1873

Your Eminence,

At the beginning of July the Prefect of Turin questioned me on behalf of the Minister if I was aware that the Holy See was still of the same mind regarding the business at hand.

I could not respond *viva voce*, but instead wrote a letter to Minghetti in which I said that if this matter referred to the Bishops' temporalities he would need to tell me which *modus vivendi* he was alluding to, if it was the one modified this winter with the Minister, and which I had a copy of; but I added that I had no formal role in this business but that when it would be a case of

bringing into effect what had been officially concluded, I would be happy and willing to speak with those in charge.

Minghetti answered in his own hand on July 16: *I have received your letter of the 14th and I will write to you regarding this matter within a few days* etc.

I immediately wrote to Your Eminence seeking guidelines to follow. Perhaps the letter did not arrive, or you did not understand what I meant; I wanted to send a coded message by means of Mons. Tortone²² who told me that such messages could no longer be sent.

He said he would send a brief message, and now I explain things more fully.

I would ask you now to tell me, even in broad terms:

1. if someone else is dealing with this matter;
2. if I should hold off or continue on the basis of what was already established.

It would be good for you to note, since we heard this here, that the Minister for Grace and Justice has gone to the baths and will return on the 4th of this month. I believe this may be the reason for Minghetti's delay in answering as he promised.

Forgive me for bothering you again, but I would be very happy if I could bring even just an atom of balance to this matter which is becoming more thorny and urgent every day.

May the Lord keep you in good health. I express my deep gratitude and am honoured to be,

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

²² Gaetano Tortone (1844-1891), Piedmontese priest who was "charge d'affaires" for the Holy See with the government in Turin after the breakdown of diplomatic relations in 1850.

75. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 150-151.

Turin, 25 August 1873

Your Eminence,

I have received Your Eminence's letter authorising me to deal with the matter of the Bishops' temporalities on the basis established last March.

I should inform you that the formulation enclosed with your letter would be more easily accepted, but the *modus vivendi* as it is called, and as discussed and definitively approved would be the one described in the attached sheet. If you tell me to stay with this there is no need for further discussion; but if I need to take up the one described in your letter then it becomes a new proposal.

At any rate thus far Minister Minghetti has only told me that he would be answering me regarding this matter as soon as possible.

If I need to come to Rome for this I would first come and see Your Eminence to have a basis and guidelines that you would judge most appropriate.

The bearer of this letter is Father Antonio Sala, the bursar of this house, who also brings the greetings of the entire Congregation. You could give him your reply.

We continue to pray for Your Eminence's precious health and we trust the the merciful God will hear our individual and common prayers. With deep gratitude, I have the honour of being,

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

76. To the Minister of Grace and Justice and Religion, Paolo Onorato Vigliani

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 166-167.

Turin, 12 October 1873

Your Excellency,

The great trust that Your Excellency enjoys publicly is what moves me to speak with you concerning a matter touching on the good of religion and the State. Let me explain things briefly.

In March of this year I had the honour of speaking with Prime Minister Lanza, to officially deal with the dispute over the Bishops' temporalities. He presented me with three *modus vivendi* proposed by the Council of State. He chose one which seemed closest to the positions of both parties. We made some adjustments more of form than of substance, and these are the ones indicated as letter A on the separate page.

The discussions, which took place in the House of Representatives at that time, advised postponing the execution of the proposal until the end of that parliamentary session.

Except that the change of Minister brought things to a standstill.

About halfway through July, I gave a report on these matters to His Excellency Minghetti, who on the 16th of that month kindly told me he had received my letter adding that he would reply as soon as possible. The many serious public matters he has had to deal with will certainly have delayed him or perhaps he has even forgotten about the matter under discussion.

This is why I make bold to address Your Excellency, since you hold the Ministry that such matters refer to. On that occasion, however, we only spoke of the *modus vivendi* to be applied to bishops who were being appointed, but for those already appointed another was proposed which is marked on the page with the letter B.

We did not speak about that at the time nor reflected on it, reserving that for a more appropriate opportunity.

As a priest I love my religion, as a citizen I want to do whatever I can for the government, and taking the governments side here, it seems to me that the *modus vivendi* B is entirely consonant with the government's view of the matter; hence the Government:

1. Would be contacting the Holy See directly.
2. The Holy See would respond officially to the Government.
3. Upon receiving the official list of appointed bishops, the government could make its exceptions before granting the temporalities.
4. By admitting this principle it seems to me that the Government would be wielding a true exequatur, since it could grant or not grant the temporalities, and also set appropriate conditions.

I thought it best to make these reflections practical so things can be understood easily as they really are.

In the practical implementation of this plan certain details of the procedure could be modified, and I believe that the Holy See would raise no objections. For example where it is said *Inquiring of Monsignor* etc.; one may take it to be an oral inquiry through a delegate: it could equally be addressed to the Holy Father, or his Secretary.

I am totally uninvolved in politics or in public affairs. Hence, should Your Excellency see fit to make use of my humble services in this matter, there would be no unwanted publicity.

Having explained these matters I must carry out a serious duty asking your kind forbearance of perhaps my overly confident way of writing. I wish you every heavenly blessing, and with the greatest respect I am,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

[Fr John Bosco]

77. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 171-172.

Turin, 20 October 1873

Your Eminence,

A Senator of the Realm came to speak to me of the matter addressed in the attached letter. This discussion in no way altered the understanding we have, but it did give me an opportunity to write another letter in which I substituted the basis established in Your Eminence's for the other *modo* that had been discussed last winter and of which I had already sent a copy to you earlier. If after reading Mr Vigliani's letter you judge it convenient for me to make a trip to Rome, you only have to say so.

I am writing to keep you up to date with matters, and to assure you that for me it is always a real pleasure when I can be even of minimal service to the Holy See and Your Eminence. With profound gratitude I have the honour to declare myself

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

78. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 191-192.

Rome, 2 January 1874

Via Sistina 104

Your Eminence,

This evening I was able to speak with Mr Vigliani about this well-known matter. He expressed a desire to alter some words in order to forestall certain difficulties which he said he might encounter in the Council of State. Having looked at the formulation as a whole, he said he was happy and that he would present it to the Council of Ministers from whom, he said, there would be

no opposition, since he already had an understanding with them along these lines. He said the same for the Council of State.

He noted only that the Council of State was nearing the end of its session, and since it met only once a week, would deal with the question in about a fortnight. After which he would give me a communication which I could pass on to Your Eminence.

At the time Vigliani wanted to establish a formula for future choice of Bishops.

I limited myself to saying that I thought there would be no difficulty on the part of the Holy See, that the formula used for those chosen, taking away whatever concerned the current situation, could also apply to future bishops; but I quickly added that it would be better to complete one issue before beginning with the other.

Vigliani expressed some ideas of his own that I will put together and send you so you can be informed of what has been done about the second matter. The details then I would hope to explain in person.

May God grant you stable health and a happy year. I have the great honour of declaring myself,

Your Eminence's most humble servant,

Fr John Bosco²³

²³ In a letter from Rome to Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi (January 16, 1874) he communicated that the "well-known affair" had been finalised, that "the formula" to hand on to the Minister for Grace and Justice had been accepted by both parties, and that the Archbishop of Turin would be the first to use it, unless some interruption came from "the devil sticking his finger in the pie": cf. E(m) IV, pp. 203-204.