



Introduction: A Document That Shook the World

In 1864, at the height of liberal revolutions, Pope Pius IX published one of the most controversial and misunderstood documents in Church history: the *Syllabus Errorum* (or “Catalog of Errors”). Attached to the encyclical *Quanta Cura*, this text condemned 80 propositions deemed contrary to the faith and Christian social order. Among them, one in particular has sparked debate to this day: **the condemnation of liberal democracy and religious relativism**.

Why would a Pope oppose democracy? Does the Church reject freedom? What did Pius IX have against the modern world? These questions are far from merely historical—they hold **urgent relevance today**, in an age where truth is relative, faith is diluted, and governments promote ideologies opposed to Catholic morality.

In this article, we will explore:

1. **The historical context of the *Syllabus***: What was happening in the 19th century?
2. **The condemned errors**: Why did Pius IX reject liberal democracy?
3. **The controversy and misinterpretations**.
4. **The relevance of the *Syllabus* in the 21st century**: Does it have something to say to us today?

1. The World That Provoked Pius IX's Wrath

To understand the *Syllabus*, we must go back to the **19th century**, a time of **revolutions, secularization, and direct attacks against the Church**.

The French Revolution and Its Aftermath

- The Revolution (1789) had overthrown monarchies, guillotined priests, and proclaimed the **cult of Reason** in place of God.
- Governments emerged that **expelled the Church** from public life, confiscated its property, and persecuted Catholics.
- **Liberalism** (not in the economic sense, but the ideological one) promoted the idea that religion was a private matter and that the State should be neutral.



The Risorgimento and the Loss of the Papal States

- Italy was unifying under an **anti-clerical** government that invaded papal territories.
- Pius IX, initially seen as a reformer, became the **great defender of Tradition** against revolutionary ideas.

In this context, the *Syllabus* was not a whim but a **necessary response** to a civilization seeking to erase God from society.

2. What Exactly Did the *Syllabus Errorum* Condemn?

The document lists **80 errors**, divided into categories such as:

- **Rationalism and naturalism** (denial of Revelation).
- **Religious liberalism** (the idea that all religions are equal).
- **Socialism and communism** (condemned before Marx gained influence).
- **Errors concerning the Church and the State.**

The Condemnation of Liberal Democracy

One of the most debated points is **Proposition 80**, which rejects the idea that:

“The Roman Pontiff can and should reconcile himself with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization.”

Does this mean the Church is against democracy? Not exactly.

- Pius IX **was not condemning all forms of popular government**, but rather **the liberalism that excludes God from public life**.
- The modern democracy of the 19th century **sought to build a society without Christ**, where morality was decided by majority vote, not natural law.
- Today, we see the fruits of this: **governments promoting abortion, gender ideology, and religious persecution**.



Other Key Condemnations

- **Unlimited freedom of worship** (Error #15): The Church cannot accept that error has the same rights as truth.
 - **Total separation of Church and State** (Error #55): Civil authority cannot ignore God.
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3. The Controversy: Was Pius IX a Reactionary?

The *Syllabus* was met with **outrage** in Europe. Secularists used it to paint the Church as **an enemy of freedom**.

Common Misinterpretations

1. **“The Church hates freedom”**: False. The Church defends **true freedom** (the kind that leads to God), not license.
 2. **“The Pope wanted to maintain privileges”**: In reality, Pius IX defended **Christ’s right to reign over nations**.
 3. **“It’s an obsolete document”**: Its warnings **are more relevant today than ever**.
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4. The *Syllabus* in the 21st Century: What Does It Say to Us Today?

We live in a **new age of errors**:

- **Dictatorship of relativism** (as warned by Benedict XVI).
- **Governments imposing immoral laws** (abortion, euthanasia).
- **Christians persecuted** in the West not by swords, but by laws and censorship.

Lessons for Today

1. **Not all progress is good**: Technology advances, but morality declines.
2. **Democracy without God leads to tyranny**: When truth is put to a vote, error wins.
3. **The Church cannot surrender to the world**: Like Pius IX, we must **stand firm in the truth**, even if the world calls us “intolerant.”



Conclusion: Was Pius IX a Prophet?

The *Syllabus Errorum* was not an act of hatred but of **love for truth**. Pius IX saw where the world was heading and **warned us**.

Today, as Western nations **deny their Christian heritage**, as faith is ridiculed and the family destroyed, the *Syllabus* echoes as a **prophetic cry**:

“You cannot serve both God and the world.”

The question is: **Which one do you serve?**

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