

1870 -- The Church's Doomsday That Wasn't

By LOUIS A. PANARALE

Rome — (NC) — The anti-clericals greeted it as doomsday for the Church, which they jubilantly concluded would crumble within a decade. Catholics were fearful.

It happened 100 years ago Sept. 20. On that day in 1870 Italy captured the city of Rome from Pope Pius IX and thus became a modern state with its own capital—while the Papal States lost the last vestige of territory.

The news evoked different feelings. Among the Church's foes throughout Europe it was greeted with jubilation.

Many Catholics throughout the world concurred, sadly, that this could begin a gradual dissolution of the Church.

The Pope was no longer a temporal leader. By necessity and by his own moral conviction Pius IX proclaimed himself a prisoner of the Vatican. For nearly 50 years he and four successors looked upon the Italian government as usurpers of papal territory.

Pius IX would not hear of reimbursements or any other scheme short of unconditional return to the Holy See of the papal territory taken by the Italians.

That September day of 1870 marked the beginning of some of the bitterest feelings harbored—and oftentimes bluntly expressed by both the Holy See and the Italian government.

Ten years before Italy virtually had been united. Only the Papal States that spread across the center of Italy prevented the country from being one. Through a series of campaigns the troops of king Victor Emmanuel II systematically reduced the papal territory to Rome and the immediate vicinity.

On Sept. 8, less than two weeks before the eventual invasion, the king sent an envoy with a letter addressed to the Pope. In the letter the king pleaded with the Pope to bow to the inevitable.

"To the heart of your holiness," the king wrote, "I address myself, as on other oc-

casions, with the affection of a son, the faith of a Catholic, and the spirit of an Italian."

The letter left Pius IX determined as ever not to come to terms with the king.

The Pope stonily assured the envoy that Italian troops would never enter Rome. The envoy, thinking there was nothing further to be said, began to leave. But the Pope called him back and said with a smile: "But that assurance is not infallible."

The Pope gave instructions to his troops not to engage in battles with the king's troops but to withdraw gradually toward the city and wait.

The troops were given further instructions to put up only token resistance and then lay down their arms. Pius felt that in this way he would avoid bloodshed and at the same time make it known to the world that he was yielding to force.

At dawn on Sept. 20 the king's troops began a bombardment at three of the gates of Rome. Meanwhile, in the Vatican, diplomats to the Holy See were summoned by the Pope.

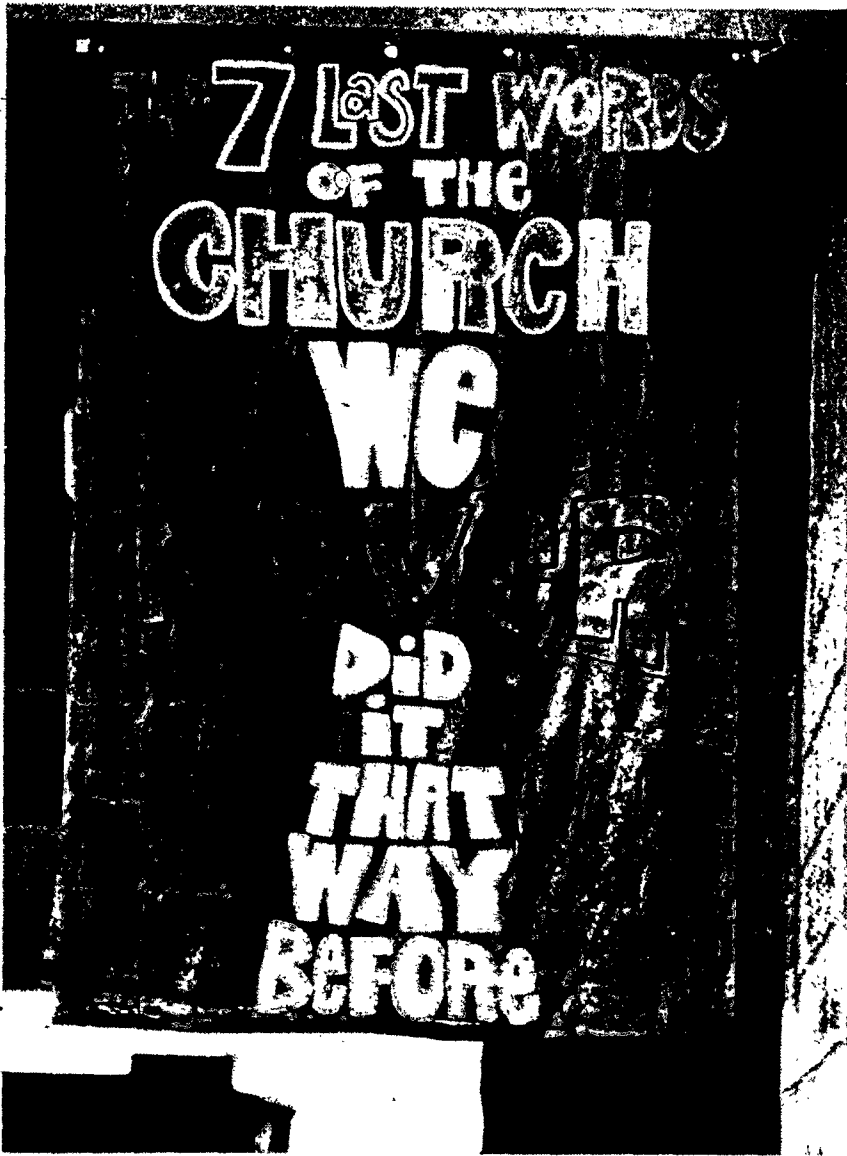
After dismissing the diplomats, Pius became perturbed when told that the white flag of surrender had not been raised by his troops. The Pope then ordered the flag raised on the cupola of St. Peter's basilica. Soon afterward the cannonade ceased.

The Italian troops suffered 56 dead and 141 wounded. The papal troops had 20 dead and 49 wounded. An armistice was concluded on that very afternoon and Rome thus became the capital of a united Italy.

Several months after the invasion the government presented to the Pope a document known as the Law of Guarantees. Its main points were: the Pope's person was sacred and inviolable, he was entitled to royal honors and protection, he was provided with an annual income to reimburse him for the loss of his territory.

The Pope refused to recognize the law. He maintained that his sovereignty was by divine right and not by a statutory concession of the Italian state, which would treat him as one of its subjects, and which could at any time repeal the law.

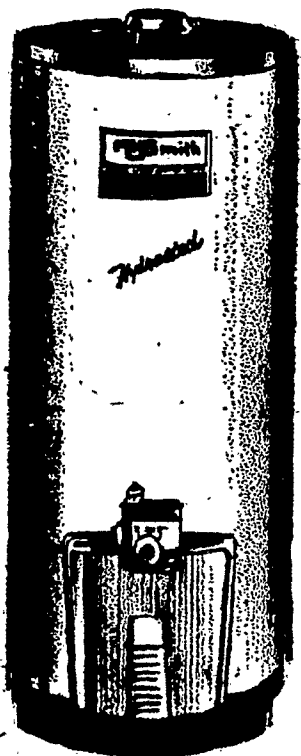
For the remaining eight years of his life, Pius IX remained in the confines of the Vatican Palace, a voluntary prisoner. It was an example to be followed by his four successors until the signing of the Lateran Treaty in 1929 between Italy and the Holy See.



A Message

While banners have become popular in many churches, few deliver as strong a message as this one which hangs in the Trinity Baptist church in San Antonio. (RNS)

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