Oration “Existimatis fortasse” of Pope Pius II (1 March 1462, Rome). Edited and translated by by Michael von Cotta-Schönberg. 4th version. (Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II; 64)

Michael Cotta-Schönberg

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Submitted on 28 Nov 2019

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(Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II; 64)
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2019
Abstract

After his return from Mantua in October 1460, Pope Pius II had not been very active in the matter of the crusade. In the face of the European rulers’ skepticism and even directly negative attitudes towards a crusade, he was unsure of how to proceed, and moreover he had become engaged in two wars, one in the Papal States and one in the Kingdom of Naples. By March 1462, however, he had found a way, he thought, to reactivate the crusade project, viz. by holding the Duke of Burgundy to his crusade oath, made in January 1454 and publicized all over Europe. As he also knew that Venice was now ready to join a crusade, he summoned a small group of loyal cardinals and submitted the matter to them in the oration “Existimatis fortasse”.

Keywords

Enea Silvio Piccolomini; Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini; Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini; Pope Pius II; Papa Pio II; Burgundy; Venice; Duc Philippe III le Bon; Duke Philip III the Good; Emperor Frederick III (Habsburg); Kaiser Friedrich III (Habsburg); King Charles VII; Doge Pasquale Malipiero; Crusades; War against the Turks; 1462; Cardinals; King Louis XI; Roi Louis XI; Venezia; Venice; Hungary; Renaissance orations; Renaissance oratory; Renaissance rhetorics; 15th century; 1462

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Foreword

In 2007, I undertook a project of publishing the Latin texts with English translations of the orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II. Altogether 80¹ orations (including papal responses to ambassadorial addresses) are extant today, though more may still be held, unrecognized, in libraries and archives.

At a later stage the project was expanded to include ambassadors’ orations to the pope, of which about 40 are presently known.

I do not, actually, plan to publish further versions of the present volume, but I do reserve the option in case I – during my future studies – come across other manuscripts containing interesting versions of the oration or if important new research data on the subject matter are published, making it appropriate to modify or expand the present text. It will therefore always be useful to check if a later version than the one the reader may have previously found via the Internet is available.

I shall much appreciate to be notified by readers who discover errors and problems in the text and translation or unrecognized quotations.

12 September 2019
MCS

¹ 81 orations, if the “Cum animadverto” is counted as a Piccolomini-oration, see oration “Quam laetus” [18], Appendix
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I. INTRODUCTION
1. Context

In the years after the Congress of Mantua in 1459 it had become painfully obvious that the promises of kings, princes, and city states regarding the crusade against the Turks would not be kept, and that the whole Congress had been a failure. The pope himself had fought valiantly for the crusade and nobody could blame him for indifference in this regard, but this was a meager and bitter consolation to the pope who was deeply disappointed at the outcome and justifiably put the blame for the failure on the princes.

On the other hand, during these years the pope’s energies and resources were tied up in two other wars, one in the Church States and one in the Kingdom of Naples, and it would really not have been possible for him at the same time to engage in a large scale war against the Turks.

Still, his inability to make the Turkish matter progress was deeply distressing to him, and though he did not speak of it publicly, in his mind he kept returning to the crusade and how to organize it when the European powers, especially Germany and France, were so unenthusiastic, not to say directly opposed to it.

By the beginning of 1462, certain developments made him believe that the time had come to make another attempt. Evidently this new attempt could not be based on a general agreement between the European powers to go to war against the Turks – that had been tried at Mantua without success – but instead a coalition between a smaller group of powers might work and could possibly induce others to join up.

The first development concerned the military situation in the Papal States and in the Kingdom of Naples: his enemies in the Church States were on the decline, and the military situation in the Kingdom was improving: it was mainly a matter of time before the three allies, the pope, the Duke of Milan, and King Ferrante would defeat the Angevin pretenders to the throne of Naples.

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1 CO, VII, 16; Rainaldus, ad ann. 1462, nos. 33-34; Ady, pp. 315-316; Boulting, pp. 341-342; Gregorovius, XIII, 1, pp. 98-99; Helmrath, pp. 122-14; Housley: Pope, pp. 230-232; Lucius, pp. 60-66; Müller, pp. 105-126; O’Brien, p. 184; Paparelli, p. 323; Pastor, pp. 186-187; Paviot: Burgundy; Paviot: Ducs, ch. 3; Setton, II, pp. 233-236; Voigt, IV, pp. 640, 676-677

2 See orations “Cum bellum hodie”[56] and “Septimo jam exactomense”[54]

3 See oration “Flentem et admodum dolentem”[60]

4 See orations “Ingentes vobis quirites”[61] and “Sextus agitur annus”[75]

5 The nationum consensus, see Housley: Pope, p. 231

6 Bisaha, p. 48
The second development concerned Venice: at the time of the Congress of Mantua, the Venetians had pursued a strategy of accommodation with the Turks in order to safeguard their commercial and political interests in the East (they really did not share the pope’s religious concerns)\(^1\), and they had not been very helpful in the matter of the crusade, to say the least.\(^2\)

In the meantime, it had become quite evident that the Turk would pursue his military expansion, including conquering lands belonging to the Venetians.\(^3\) So, Venice decided that the policy of appeasement was not working and that it would probably have to go to war against the Turks. As they were not strong enough to do it on their own, they began to search for allies.\(^4\)

As early as 1461 there had been various contacts between the pope and Venice on the matter of the crusade.\(^5\) In Autumn 1461, the Venetians pointedly reminded the pope of his responsibilities with regard to the crusade against the Turks, and in January 1462 they decided to send an ambassador to Rome further this matter.\(^6\)

In this situation, Pius decided to re-activate the crusade project. An alliance between the papacy and the frontline states, Hungary and Venice came to mind, but it would not be enough. However, one great European prince had consistently and over many years favoured the cause of a crusade, Duke Philippe of Burgundy, whose crusading fervour Piccolomini himself, as an imperial diplomat, had personally learnt of as early as 1451 – two years before the Fall of Constantinople in 1453\(^7\) - and later at the Diet of Regensburg in 1455.\(^8\)

In the years following the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the Feast of the Pheasant\(^9\) where Duke Philippe and his court had vowed to reconquer Constantinople from the Turks, the duke endeavoured to organize a crusade against the Turks. However, the failure of three imperial diets and in particular the Diet of Wiener Neustadt in Spring 1455, the death of Pope Nicolaus V, the determined resistance of the French King Charles VII and his successor King Louis XI, and conflicts between the duke and his son Jean le Témeraire effectively blocked his efforts. During this period, however, the Duke did not cease to collect money and plan for the enterprise, and at the

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\(^1\) Voigt, IV, p. 674
\(^2\) On the rather complicated matter of the Venetian position at the Congress of Mantua, see Picotti’s conclusion, pp. 387-396
\(^3\) Babinger, ch. 3-4
\(^4\) Voigt, IV, pp. 674-676; Setton, II, p. 234
\(^5\) Mission of Cardinal Bessarion and a letter from the pope to Venice, see Bisaha, p. 48
\(^6\) Lucius, pp. 60-62; Setton, II, pp. 233
\(^7\) See oration “Quamvis in hoc senatu” [17]
\(^8\) See oration “Quamvis omnibus” [21]
\(^9\) Lille, February 1454
Congress of Mantua his representatives had reiterated the offers of a contribution to the crusade made by the duke at the Diet of Regensburg in 1454.¹

By 1462 the difficulties and barriers preventing the duke from committing himself fully to the crusade which his heart so ardently desired² had not disappeared. However, Pius had an idea which he thought might clinch the matter: if the pope himself took part in the crusade, the duke could not honourably refuse to join up.³ So, under pressure from Venice, the pope decided that a double strategy based partly on an alliance preferably with Burgundy, France,⁴ Venice, and Hungary, and partly on his personal participation in the Crusade might be feasible.

But it was a delicate matter, depending on complex diplomatic negotiations, which would have to be conducted in secrecy.

In his coronation oath, the pope had promised that his crusading venture should be decided on together with the cardinals. So, in this phase he gathered six loyal cardinals, presumably including Bessarion and Carvajal and probably some cardinals that he had himself appointed, including his nephew, and submitted the matter to them with the very emotional and almost desperate⁵ oration “Existimatis fortasse”.

In his Commentarii, the pope wrote about the event:

> At this time Pius brought together six of the cardinals he thought most loyal and prudent and said to them: [here follows the text of the oration]. The cardinals listened to the pope in amazement and shock. They did not doubt that any plan that attempted to support the cause of God must come from God, but faced with such a grand and strange and unprecedented proposal, they begged time for consideration. This they were granted. After conferring together for a number of days they came back to the pope and said that his intentions were worthy of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, who like a shepherd did not hesitate to lay down his life for his sheep. Nothing could be said against such a praiseworthy and noble plan, though it seemed there might be some difficulties along the way. But when they specified what these were, the pope who had thought everything through in advance, easily

¹ Müller, p. 108; Paviot: Ducs, pp. 127-161; Paviot: Burgundy, pp. 74-75
² Müller, p. 108
³ Bisha, p. 48, 50; Müller, pp. 113-114
⁴ At the time Pius was aware that the French embassy, which was due in Rome in a week’s time, would bring King Louis’ offer of 70,000 soldiers for the crusade. So, in March 1462 Pius may be excused for having believed that Louis XI had not taken over his father’s inveterate resistance to the crusading enterprise and that he would not play the crusade card in the matter of the Angevin claim to Naples - but he would soon be robbed of his illusions
⁵ Housley: Pope, p. 230
answered them. Next they decided to write to the Venetians, who were urged to keep the matter secret and to communicate it to no one except those without whom a question of such importance could not legally be decided; it was vitally necessary that things be done in this way. The letter was written in the pope’s own hand and can be found in the volume of his letters.¹

The letter to Doge Malipiero was sent already on 8 March. It was received positively, and probably with some relief.²

Thus the procedure was set in motion which eventually resulted in a crusade alliance between Hungary, Venice, Burgundy, and the Papacy.

Helmrath has, somewhat dramatically, called the oration a pessimistic mixture of tearfulness (Larmoyanz) and sarcasm, reflecting Pius’ perception of political motives – between illusion and realism.³ The pope’s previous career as imperial diplomat had eminently suited him for a realistic and pragmatic assessment of political motives. He may therefore not have been surprised at the failure of the Congress of Mantua, but still he was sorely disappointed, not only because it had made evident how little influence the pope had on secular rulers, but also because the pope – with some justice – viewed the Turkish war of aggression against Europe as a mortal military, political, and cultural danger, which it would be in the princes’ own vital interest to counter. His analysis of the failings of the clergy is quite clear-sighted and would naturally sadden the heart of any honest churchman, and above all the pope himself.

The incipit of the oration, “Existimatis fortasse”, had some significance, though not many might have caught it. In his Historiarum ab inclinatione Romanorum Imperii decades II⁴ Flavio Biondo had included his own fictive version of Pope Urban II’s address to the Council of Clermont in 1495, effectively launching the First Crusade. The incipit in Biondo’s version was “Existimatis forte”. It is doubtful that even the cultured public knew Biondo’s work, but Pius’ choice of incipit was undoubtedly a signal that his own crusade initiative was an integral part and continuation of traditional papal crusade policies.

¹ Pius II: Commentari (Meserve, III, p. 461, 469)
² Voigt, IV, p. 677; Lucius, pp. 62-66; Setton, II, 235-236
³ Helmrath, p. 122-123
⁴ Liber III
2. Themes

2.1. Pius’ engagement in the crusade

As Pius himself clearly states in the beginning of the oration he had not been very active in the crusade since the Congress of Mantua:

... maybe you believe, as most others, that We have been neglecting the common weal, since after Our return from Mantua, We have neither made preparations for nor spoken about the expedition to drive out the Turks and defend the Christian religion, although the enemy has pressed us ever more. We do not deny that We have remained silent ... [Sect. 1]

This seeming passivity made the pope vulnerable to accusations of having let his Italian policies and his war-mongering in Italy\(^1\) deflect him from the more worthy cause of the crusade.

Pius could really not be blamed for the failure of the European powers to deliver on their – meager – promises at the Congress of Mantua, but nonetheless he himself was deeply embarrassed and pained by his enforced inactivity:

We have spent sleepless nights speculating, and tossing from side to side We bemoaned the calamities of our time. We were ashamed to be doing nothing when the Turks molested now Hungary, now Dalmatia with continuous warfare and made savage attacks wherever they wanted to. We seemed to be seeing the faces of all turned against Us, scolding Us for Our negligence because We did not come to the assistance of the Law of the Gospel that was being destroyed and allowed the Christian name to perish while We Ourselves were living in peace and quiet. Our soul swelled, Our bile was stirred up, and Our old blood boiled, and We wanted to immediately declare war against the Turks and fight for religion with all Our might. [Sect. 1]

The crusade might not only be a pious matter of defending the Christian Faith. Past history had made Pius’ contemporaries rather indifferent to the crusade idea, and many believed that the papal crusade was purely a pretext for raking in money for the Papal Court or for bolstering papal authority, very much in decline since the Great Western Schism. Indeed, the low credibility and authority of the papacy did not favour the crusade project, even though the Turkish military threat to Europe and Christianity should have been obvious to all:

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\(^1\) See oration “Ingentes vobis quirites” [61]
Nobody trusts our words. We are like merchants who have stopped answering their creditors. We have lost our credibility. Whatever We do is interpreted in the worst way, and since all kings are greedy and the ecclesiastical prelates are slaves to money, they judge Our disposition on the basis of their own. Nothing is more difficult than extracting money from the greedy. [Sect. 3]

In spite of all problems, the pope, however, wished to press ahead with the crusade:

But remaining silent, day and night, We have became more and more convinced that We must take counsel for the common welfare. [Sect. 4]

There is no reason not to take the pope’s words at their face value: he was – as he had been for years – truly, honestly, and deeply engaged in the crusade enterprise.¹

However, his deep motivations may have changed. In his various writings and orations on the crusade over the years there appears to be a change from a military, political, and cultural stance to a more religious and personal conviction. The religious element would of course have been much strengthened by his accession to the papacy. The personal one was connected with his own itinerary of faith and his longing to redeem the sins of his youth and his past life.

Nancy Bisaha has put it very well:

Towards the end of his pontificate, Pius’ crusade had become a deeply personal as well as a carefully considered show of faith to the flock he had determined to lead by example.²

2.2. New strategy for mobilizing the crusade

The strategy of assembling the European powers and formulating a joint plan for the crusade had failed miserably at Mantua, and so had other strategies:

If We think of gathering an assembly, Mantua shows Us that it is a foolish thought. If We send legates to ask the kings for help, people mock them. If We impose tithes on the clergy, they appeal to a future council. If We issue indulgences and promise spiritual gifts to those

¹ Setton, II, p. 231
² Bisaha, p. 50
who contribute money, We are accused of greed, and people believe that it is all a matter of amassing money. [Sect. 2]

Instead of those failed strategies, Pius decided to try another way: to make an alliance with some important European princes and afterwards draw the other powers along.

The Doge of Venice, whose fleet would be essential to the crusade,¹ had already confidentially communicated his willingness to join a crusade sponsored by the pope, but that would not be enough. Who else might be willing?

One brilliant idea came to the pope’s mind. For years, one great prince in Europe had proved an enthusiastic supporter of the crusade idea: Duke Philippe of Burgundy. At the Feast of the Pheasant in February 1454 he had promised to go on a crusade if one other major prince of Europe would go, e.g. the emperor, the King of France, or King Ladislaus of Hungary. The first two ones would not, and the third one had died prematurely. But if the pope himself, God’s Vicar on Earth, greater than emperors and kings, would go in person, the duke’s condition was fulfilled. And if the Duke of Burgundy came, then conceivably the French king would come too, and many others would join them.

So the crux of the matter was to make the duke commit himself definitively to the crusade:

Remaining silent, day and night, We have became more and more convinced that We must take counsel for the common welfare, and then one remedy has come to mind which We consider to be very potent – and indeed there may be no other. Listen now, as We explain it briefly. Afterwards you will give your opinions on Our plan.

In the year when Constantinople was lost, Duke Philippe of Burgundy made a public vow to God that he would go to war against the Turks and challenge our enemy, Mehmed, to a duel if only Emperor Friedrich or King Charles of France or King Ladislaus of Hungary or some other great prince whom he could honourably follow would also go to this war. Until now, none of these has been found willing to take up this great fight. Thus, Philippe considers himself excused since the condition of his vow has not been fulfilled. But he is only excused, he has not been freed: the obligation stands, the vow speaks for itself, the oath is not silent. The condition may still be fulfilled: a great prince may still take up this crusade and summon Philippe to follow him. And unless Philippe obeys, he will be guilty of breaking his oath and vow, something We believe he could not accept.

¹ Setton, II, p. 235
Therefore, though old and sick in body, We are contemplating to go to war against the Turks, for the Catholic Faith; to depart on this crusade; to summon Burgundy to follow Us who are king and pontiff and to require him to keep his oath and promise. There will be no excuse: if the Vicar of Christ who is greater than a king or an emperor goes to war, the duke will be obliged by his vow not to remain at home.

If Philippe agrees to Our wish, he will not come without a great and strong company. Many will follow this noble prince. The King of France will be ashamed not to send [at least] 10,000 soldiers since he has [already] promised 70,000. Many volunteers will come from Germany, England, and Spain. The Hungarians cannot fail to come as it is in their own vital interest. And when they see such great preparations, the Venetians will not refuse their fleet. In Asia, Caramannus and others who fear Mehmed’s power will undoubtedly take up arms. The Epirotes, the Albanians, the Bosnians, the Rascians, the Wallachians, and the Bulgarians will rear their horns when they see the Christians reclaim Greece with so large forces. Who does not know that the Roman Pontiff can destroy the Turkish people if he is joined by the Venetians and Hungarians, followed by the Duke of Burgundy, and assisted by the King of France? [Sect. 5-7]

Pius’ decision to go on the crusade in person has appeared enigmatic to some, and it has been conjectured that it reflected genuine shock at the apathetic response to his congress and at the extent to which this derived from suspicion of his motives. It may have derived from hopes of replicating what Capistrano had achieved at Belgrade in 1456, and sharing that preacher’s kudo.1 Undoubtedly, the idea of pope and cardinals going on a crusade appealed to Pius’ sense of drama, but his decision was actually – as shown in the oration itself - based on a quite rational and clearheaded assessment:

- The only way to mobilize a crusade alliance between a sufficient number of European princes was to ensure the personal participation of the Duke of Burgundy.

- Since the duke had, in the famous Oath of the Pheasant, made his participation conditional on the participation of a higher-ranking prince whose leadership the duke could honourably follow, it was necessary to provide the leadership of such a higher-ranking prince.

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1 Housley: Pope, p. 230
• Since neither the King of France nor the emperor nor the King of Bohemia were willing, the only higher-ranking prince left in Europe was the pope himself.

Therefore, Pius’ solution was not the flight of a dramatic and fervent imagination, but the child of necessity.

3. Date, place, audience, and format

The follow-up letter to the Doge of Venice was sent on 8 March 1462, and the six cardinals had discussed the matter between them for some days before giving the pope their assent. So, the meeting where the pope delivered the oration “Existimatis fortasse” was probably held around the 1st of March which is the date assigned to the oration for the purpose of the present edition.

The place was probably the pope’s private apartment in the Apostolic Palace in Rome.

The audience was a small group of six loyal cardinals, and the format was an informal address from the pope to this group.

4. Text

This oration was not included in the official compilation of Pope Pius II’s orations from 1462, but only in his Commentarii.

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1 Who as a Hussite heretic could not in any case lead a crusade of Christian nations
2 For the textual transmission of Pius II’s, see Collected Orations of Pope Pius II, vol. 1, ch. 5
3 An early draft of an oration beginning with the word “Existimavimus” is contained in the BAV / Chis.J.VII.251, ff. 255r-258r. It is seemingly an oration to a group of cardinals (viri fratres) in which the pope describes the failure of the Congress of Mantua, reaffirms’ his determination to proceed with the crusade project, and asks the cardinals for their advice on how to proceed. It does not mention Pius’ idea of holding the Duke of Burgundy to his crusade oath by announcing his own personal participation in the crusade. Apparently this oration was not held, but its existence confirms that though the pope did not speak publicly on the crusade from October 1460 (his return to Rome from Mantua) to March 1462 he was still very much concerned with the matter. The text was most likely written in 1461
4 For the orations included in the Commentarii, see Collected Orations of Pope Pius II, vol. 1, sect. 5.1.4.
4.1. Manuscripts

The two principal manuscripts containing the Commentarii, with the oration, are:

- **Roma / Biblioteca dell’Accademia dei Lincei**
  Corsinianus 147, ff. 239r-240v (S)

- **Roma / Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana**
  Reg. lat. 1995, ff. 345v-348v (R)

Of these, the Reginensis contains the first version of the Commentarii and the Corsinianus the final version, both made under Pius’ personal supervision.

4.2. Editions and translations

Three important editions of the Commentarii are:


  [With an Italian translation]

  [With an English translation]

4.3. Present edition

For principles of edition (incl. orthography) and translation, see Collected Orations of Pope Pius II, vol. 1, ch. 9-10.

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1 For other editions, see the General Bibliography in Collected Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II, vol. 1, ch. 11
Text:

The present edition of the oration is based on the two principal manuscripts listed above, with the Corsinianus as the lead version.

Pagination:

Pagination is from the lead manuscript.

5. Sources

In this text, only two direct and indirect quotations have been identified, one from the Bible (Psalms) and one from Classical Sources (Virgil’s Aeneid).

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¹ On Piccolomini’s use of sources in general, see Collected orations of Pope Pius II, ch. 8.


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### 7. Sigla and abbreviations

**R** = Roma / Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana / Reg. lat. 1995  
**S** = Roma / Biblioteca dell’Accademia dei Lincei / Corsinianus 147  

**Abbreviations**

**CO** = Pius II: *Commentarii rerum memorabilium quae suis temporibus contigerunt* [1464]


MPL = Migne, Jacques-Paul: Patrologia latina. 217 vols. 1841-1865

RTA = Deutsche Reichstagsakten


II. TEXT AND TRANSLATION

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1 omit. S
2 crassarentur R
3 quamquam R
4 et add. R
1. Pius’ inactivity in the crusade matter

[1] Brethren, maybe you believe, as most others, that We have been neglecting the common weal, since after Our return from Mantua¹ We have neither made preparations for nor spoken about the expedition to drive out the Turks and defend the Christian religion, although the enemy has pressed us ever more. We do not deny that We have remained silent. And it is evident that We have done nothing against the enemies of the Cross. However, the cause of our silence was not negligence, but a kind of despair. It was the means that failed Us, not the courage. Often We have been pondering whether We could use this or that way to gather the Christian forces against the Turks and to help the Christian people from falling prey to the Turks. We have spent sleepless nights² speculating, and tossing from side to side We bemoaned the calamities of our time. We were ashamed to be doing nothing while the Turks molested now Hungary, now Dalmatia with continuous warfare and made savage attacks wherever they wanted to. We seemed to be seeing the faces of all turned against Us, scolding Us for Our negligence because We did not come to the assistance of the Law of the Gospel that was being destroyed, and allowed the Christian name to perish while We Ourselves were living in peace and quiet. Our soul swelled, Our bile was stirred up, and Our old blood boiled, and We wanted to immediately declare war against the Turks and fight for religion with all Our might.

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¹ Pius came back to Rome in October 1460, i.e. a year and a half before he gave the oration “Existimatis fortasse”
² Vergilius: Aeneis, 9.166

¹ em.; corrodendi R, S
2. Failure of previous strategy

[2] But when We measure Our resources against those of the enemies, [We see] that the Roman Church cannot vanquish the Turks on its own. No wise man attacks one who is stronger. Anyone who chooses to make war must either be superior or equal [to the enemy]. We are much weaker than the Turks unless the Christian kings join arms. We are considering how to bring that about. We are examining the ways, but none suitable presents itself. If We think of gathering an assembly, Mantua¹ shows Us that it is a foolish thought. If We send legates to ask the kings for help, people mock them. If We impose tithes on the clergy, they appeal to a future council.² If We issue indulgences and promise spiritual gifts to those who contribute money, We are accused of greed, and people believe that it is all a matter of amassing money.³

¹ The Congress of Mantua, held from July 1459 to January 1460
² In spite of the papal bull, Execrabilis, forbidding – under the pain of excommunication - appeals to a future council which Pius II issued in January 1460
³ This was a general opinion in – e.g. - Germany, held among many others by the very influential Gregor Heimburg, one of the strongest critics of Pius, the Papacy, and the crusade


\textsuperscript{1} extorquere R
Nobody trusts our words. We are like merchants who have stopped answering their creditors: We have lost our credibility. All We do is interpreted in the worst way, and since all kings are greedy and all ecclesiastical prelates are slaves to money, they judge Our disposition on the basis of their own. Nothing is more difficult than extracting money from the greedy. We have turned Our mind in all directions, but We find nothing certain, nothing solid, and nothing substantial. What shall We do in this difficult situation? Shall We walk into certain danger and give Ourselves up to the enemy? Or shall We begin on some fool’s errand? It would be extreme folly to labour in vain and get shame in return. So, for a long time We have been perplexed and anxious and Our soul refused to be comforted, seeing everything going from bad to worse without even the smallest hope for success.

3. Towards a new strategy

But remaining silent, day and night, We became more and more convinced that We must take counsel for the common welfare, and then one remedy came to mind which We consider to be very powerful – indeed there may be no other. Listen now, as We explain it briefly. Afterwards you will give your opinions on Our plan.

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1 Psalms, 76, 3: renuit consolari anima mea
[5] Philippus, Burgundiae dux, quo anno Constantinopolis amissa est, votum vovit publice Deo iturum se contra Turcos et bellum cum eis gesturum et hostem Mahumetum ad singulare certamen provocaturum, si vel Fridericus imperator vel Carolus Franciae vel Ladislaus Hungariae rex vel magnus alius quivis princeps, quem se sequi non dedeceret, ad hoc ipsum bellum proficisceretur. Nullus adhuc inventus est ex nominatis, qui se tanto proelio accinixerit. Excusatum sese Philippus existimat, quia non est impleta voti conditio. Excusatus est, non absolutus: stat obligatio, loquitur {240r} votum, nec tacet juramentum. Potest adhuc satisfieri conditioni, potest princeps magnus aliquid huic expeditioni se accingere ac Philippum, ut se sequatur, accire. Nisi paruerit, reus erit juramenti et voti violati, quod laturam ejus mentem haudquaquam arbitramur.
3.1. Involving the Duke of Burgundy

[5] In the year that Constantinople was lost,¹ Duke Philippe of Burgundy² made a public vow to God that he would go to war against the Turks and challenge our enemy, Mehmed³, to a duel⁴ if only Emperor Friedrich⁵ or King Charles of France⁶ or King Ladislaus of Hungary⁷ or some other great prince whom he could honourably follow would also go to this war. Until now, none of these has been found willing to take up this great fight. Thus, Philippe considers himself excused since the condition of his vow has not been fulfilled. But he is only excused, he has not been freed: the obligation still stands, the vow speaks for itself, the oath is not silent, for the condition may still be fulfilled: a great prince may still take up this expedition and summon Philippe to follow him. And unless Philippe then obeys, he will be guilty of breaking his oath and vow, something We believe he could not accept.

¹ May 1453
² Philippe III le Bon (1396-1467): Duke of Burgundy 1419 to his death
³ Mehmed II the Conqueror (1432-1481): Ottoman sultan who ruled first for a short time from August 1444 to September 1446, and later from February 1451 to his death. In 1453 he conquered Constantinople and brought an end to the Byzantine Empire
⁴ Philippe made this vow at the famous Feast of the Pheasant in February 1454
⁵ Friedrich III of Habsburg (1415-1493): Duke of Austria (as Friedrich V) from 1424. Elected King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor in 1440, crowned in Rome in 1452
⁶ Charles VII (1403-1461): King of France from 1422 to his death. Disinherited in 1420 by his father, in the Peace of Troyes, he settled in Bourges from where he gradually regained the French territories occupied by the English. In 1429, by the agency of Jeanne d’Arc, he was crowned King of France in Reims
⁷ Ladislaus the Posthumous (Habsburg) (1440-1457): Archduke of Austria from 1440, King of Hungary from 1444 and King of Bohemia from 1453 to his death


1 quamuis R
2 est suspecta : suspecta est R
3.2. Pius’ personal participation

[6] Therefore, though old and sick in body, We are considering going to war against the Turks for the Catholic Faith, to depart on this crusade, to summon Burgundy to follow Us who are both king and pontiff, and to require him to keep his oath and promise. There will be no excuse: if the Vicar of Christ who is greater than a king or an emperor goes to war, the duke will be obliged by his vow not to remain at home.

3.3. Broadening the alliance

[7] If Philippe agrees to Our wish, he will not come without a great and strong company. Many will follow this noble prince. The King of France will be ashamed not to send [at least] 10,000 soldiers since he has [already] publicly promised 70,000. Many volunteers will come from Germany, England, and Spain. The Hungarians cannot fail to come as it is in their own vital interest. And when they see such great preparations, the Venetians will not refuse to send their fleet. In Asia, the Karaman¹ and others who fear Mehmed’s power will undoubtedly take up arms. The Epirotes, the Albanians, the Bosnians, the Rascians,² the Wallachians, and the Bulgarians will raise their horns when they see the Christians reclaim Greece with so large forces. Who does not know that the Roman Pontiff can destroy the Turkish people if he is joined by the Venetians and Hungarians, followed by the Duke of Burgundy, and assisted by the King of France?³

¹ The ruler of the Turkish tribe and princedom of Karaman, potential allies of the West against the dominant Osman Turks
² The Serbians
³ The emperor, Friedrich III is not mentioned. Evidently Pius had given up hopes for his involvement in the crusade
[8] Sed habenda est ante omnia certitudo de Venetis et eorum exploranda consilia, qui mores Turcorum potentiamque novere et, quibus viribus quibusque artibus superandi sint, non ignorant. Frustra Burgundis Gallisque hanc expeditionem suaserimus, nisi concurrant Veneti, quibus maria patent. His nostra inprimis aperienda sententia. Si non approbant, vana fuit cogitatio nostra. Si laudant, Francum ac Burgundum missa legatione hortabimur, ne desint Christianae religioni. Ex Franco auxilia postulabimus, Burgundum ex voto requiremus, quibus, ut par est, consentientibus propositum {348r} et iter nostrum publicabimus.

[9] Inter Christianos dissidentes quinque annorum indutias servari mandabimus. Parentes caelesti benedictione donabimus, rebelles anathemate feriemus. Episcopos, abbates atque omnis ordinis ecclesiastici viros ea in hoc opus auxilia jubeamus impendere, quae commode praestare possint. Inobedientes excommunicabimus et tamquam ignis aeterni mancipia donabimus Diabolo. Reliquos Christi fideles, ut opem pro suis facultatibus afferant, indulgentiarum largitionibus et gratis spiritualibus alliciemus. Et quis erit, qui audito pontificis motu non moveatur?
3.4. Importance of Venice

[8] But above all, we must be certain of the Venetians, and their intentions must be explored, for they know the Turkish conditions, and their power, and the forces and strategies needed to defeat them.¹ The seas lie open to the Venetians, so if they do not join up, it would be pointless to persuade the Burgundians and the French to join this crusade. Therefore, We must first approach the Venetians on this matter. If they do not approve it, our plan is futile. But if they do approve it, We shall send a legation to France and Burgundy and exhort them not to fail the Christian religion. From France We shall demand aid, and from Burgundy the fulfilment of his vow. If they agree to Our plan, as they ought to, We shall publicly announce it and Our course.

3.5. Mobilizing Christianity

[9] We shall demand that all Christians who fight each other observe a five year truce. Those who obey We shall grant Heaven’s blessing; those who disobey We shall strike with a curse. We shall require bishops, abbots, and ecclesiastics of all ranks to contribute what they reasonably can to this undertaking. Those who do not obey We shall excommunicate and consign to the Devil as slaves of the eternal fire. The other Christian faithful We shall invite, with promises of indulgences and spiritual graces, to contribute according to their means.

Who will not be moved when he hears about the pope’s undertaking?

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¹ Pius already had reason to believe that the Venetians would join a crusade
Nisi fallimur, haec unica via est, quae dormientes Christianos valeat excitare et regum ac populorum corda movere. Vulgata deliberatio quasi tonitru magnum excutiet somnum et ad tuendam religionem fidelium mentes eriget. Non arma, non equi, non homines aut naves deerunt. Terra marique facile struemus bellum, postquam certa res fuerit Romanum pontificem cum sacro senatu recto itinere communem salutem quaerere, nec alienum desiderare argentum, qui non modo suum aurum, verum etiam et ipsum corpus pro Christi nomine sit expositurus. Haec nobis in mentem venere. An ingenio nostro inventa sint, an deus inspiraverit vos judicate.
3.6. Conclusion

[10] Unless We are mistaken this is the only way to rouse the sleeping Christians and move the hearts of princes and peoples. When the plan is announced it will like a thunderclap end the great sleep and stir up the faithful to defend religion. There will be no lack of arms, horses, men, or ships. We shall easily prepare for war on land and at sea when it becomes known that the Roman Pontiff together with the Sacred Senate\(^1\) is going ahead for the sake of the common welfare, and that he does not desire anybody’s money, since indeed he intends not only to expend his own funds, but to offer even his own body for the sake of Christ.

This is what We have been thinking of. It is now up to you to judge whether it is something We have imagined on Our own or whether it has been inspired by God.

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\(^1\) The College of Cardinals