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Prisoner of the Vatican.

As Catholics we have grown accustomed to the Pope and the Vatican State as it is now. But, it has not always been so.

Indeed the present situation exists only since 1929. It can be a surprise to learn that the Popes considered themselves “prisoners of the Vatican” from 1861 to 1929 a period of 68 years.

Because the Vatican state was surrounded by Italy, the Pope could not go anywhere without first passing through some part of Italy.

It was called the “Roman Question.” In 1861 Victor Emmanuel unified Italy under a central rule. The Pope at the time was totally opposed to all of Italy becoming a nation State.

The first Italian parliament met at Turin, but declared Rome as the capital of the new nation of a unified Italy. Part of this was that the Pope lost the Papal States and was reduced to being sovereign of only the Vatican.

In 1871 the Pope in defiance of the Italian parliament summoned the 1st Vatican Council to Rome to try and assert his authority.

Why did the first Italian parliament meet at Turin?

There was a garrison of French soldiers in Rome protecting Pope Pius IX. In 1870 the Franco-Prussian war broke out forcing the French soldiers to be withdrawn from Rome and so leaving the Pope defenseless.

On September 20th 1870 Italian soldiers entered Rome. In spite of this the Pope refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new Italian government.

This ended in stalemate for 68 years until resolved by the creation of the Vatican state in 1929, a state of just 108 acres, the size of an average golf course.

It was the government of Mussolini that signed the Lateran Pacts.

This was an agreement with Pope Pius XI in which the government recognized the Vatican state and the Pope recognized the sovereignty of the Italian government.

As Paul Harvey would have said, “so now you have the rest of the story.”

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