

Steel 61

Chapter 61: Papal Response

The Supreme Pontiff was an elderly man in his early sixties who was of Italian descent. Currently, the man sat upon the Throne as he listened to grave news regarding the arrest and execution of a duo of the Church's Inquisitors within the Barony of Kufstein. In his hand was a letter written by Berengar; During the time it took for Father Antonio to return to the Vatican to make his report, Berengar had used his printing press to distribute flyers in the German language accusing the Church of attempting to usurp his family's lands. By now, these propaganda pamphlets had spread throughout all of Tyrol and parts of Bavaria and the other Austrian counties.

Pope Simeon II rubbed his temples intensely, trying desperately to decrease his growing headache. He had no idea how the young regent had managed to write so many of these pesky things and distributed them so quickly. The Pope exhaled heavily before voicing his thoughts aloud.

"This boy is certainly bold. I will give him that... You said he had a message for me?"

Father Antonio was kneeling before the pope. Beside him were several Cardinals who acted as the Holy Father's advisors. Father Antonio quickly responded to the Pope and began to inform him of Berengar's message word for word. After the frightening display of authority Berengar had used to intimidate the priest, father Antonio had engrained the young Regent's words into the very depths of his mind.

"Lord Berengar told me that When you return to the Vatican inform the Holy Father, that he may have the power to Excommunicate me and to brand me a Heretic, but ultimately when I finally perish from this world it is under the Judgement of God, not the Pope that will determine whether or not I enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

The Pope's expression stiffened as he heard these words; Berengar was clearly challenging his authority as the personal representative of God on Earth. The young Lord's words were essentially daring the Holy Father to act in such a manner and prove how worthless such a punishment was.

A nearby Cardinal had a furious expression on his face as he could no longer hold back the anger burning in his heart.

"Blasphemy! You all heard what Father Antonio said; the boy does not recognize the Authority of the Church! He must be brought to heel, and quickly before such blasphemous ideas spread to the rest of the German nobility! God wills it!"

Half of the Cardinals in the room immediately responded in the same manner

"God wills it!"

However, another Cardinal quickly countered the impassioned outcry of the man who called for Berengar's demise.

"How do you suppose we do that? He has already stated he does not care if he is excommunicated and branded a heretic! All of the Holy orders are currently fighting wars at the moment. The Teutonic Order is fighting in the East against the Rus; the Hospitallers are in North Africa waging Holy War against the Saracens to reclaim Alexandria for Christendom! The Spanish orders are all waging Reconquista! Even if we could spare the men, how would that look to the other German noblemen? Many of them would certainly rally behind Berengar. If we march into Kufstein now, we will only be justifying his behavior, which is exactly what the boy wants!"

Quickly the Cardinals began to bicker among themselves like a bunch of children as every one of them spat out a different idea on how to handle the scenario. It had been a long time since any Lord in Europe, especially one with a lowly position like Berengar, had slapped the church in the face in such a manner. It was an outright rejection of their power and authority over Christendom and a total humiliation to the Inquisition. Under normal circumstances, the Church would call for a Crusade to wipe out the heresy within Kufstein. However, since all of the surviving Holy Orders were currently expanding Christian influence elsewhere, they could not afford to send an army into the Alps at the moment.

Eventually, the Holy Father had enough of the infighting among his Cardinals and declared his solution to the issue.

"Enough! We will excommunicate Berengar, brand him a Heretic, and deny his accusations against us. Then we will paint the picture that he is a vile, wicked, and sinful man who engages in debauchery on a daily basis. As for invading Kufstein, we will leave that option on the table in case he misbehaves again in the future. Do you really believe the people will obey the rule of a man who the Church has labeled as a disciple of Satan?"

The room fell quiet with this declaration, those who were thirsty for the Blood of Berengar, and the people of Kufstein quietly calmed themselves and accepted the Pope's words as law. If the boy wanted to be a Tyrant, they would show him that he cannot rule so easily without the support of the common people. Unfortunately for them, they were making a huge mistake, as the local Church in Kufstein was plagued with corruption, and like most Churches, embezzled a large portion of the money they received from tithes.

Under Berengar's reforms, he had brought a great degree of prosperity to the common people within his domain. Combine this with the fact that the people in his territory were becoming literate and reading the Bible independently; there was a growing sense of distrust with the Catholic Church within the Barony of Kufstein. It would not be long before these views spread across Tyrol and, by extension, Austria. After all, Berengar's spy networks were growing by the day. His views of the Church and its role in society were quite popular among many nobility who were dissatisfied with the Church's interference with their secular rule over their dynastic lands.

As such, by excommunicating Berengar, declaring him a Heretic, and attempting to sabotage his reputation, the Vatican had unwittingly taken the first step to the Reformation of the Church within the German Speaking regions and the removal of Papal Authority. When Berengar heard the Church's response to his actions, he was reported to have a wicked grin on his face as if everything was going according to plan.