



## **Incredibili**

on Persecution in New Granada

Encyclical of Pope Pius IX

September 17, 1863

To the Venerable Brothers Anthony, Archbishop of Santa Fe de Bogota, and his Suffragan Bishops in the Republic of New Granada

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

We are afflicted with incredible grief and groan together with you, venerable brothers, to learn of the nefarious and horrible ways in which the government of the republic of New Granada impedes, disturbs, and tears asunder the Catholic Church. Indeed words can scarcely express the many sacrileges with which the same government inflicts grievous injuries on Us and this Apostolic See; it strives to trample and destroy our most holy religion along with respect for its rights, doctrine, worship, and ministers. In particular, two years ago this same government passed abominable laws and decrees which greatly oppose the Catholic Church, her doctrines, her authority, and her rights. These iniquitous laws and decrees prohibit, among other things, sacred ministers from exercising their ecclesiastical ministry without the consent of the government. All properties of the Church have been confiscated and sold. Thus, with their own property having been yielded up, parishes, religious communities of both men-and women, the clergy, hospitals, houses of refuge, religious brotherhoods, benefices, and chaplaincies are despoiled, even of the right of patronage. These same unjust laws and decrees attack the legitimate right of the Church to acquire and possess property. They also declare liberty for non-Catholic sects. Furthermore, all the religious communities of both men and women have been banished from the territory of New Granada and their very existence interdicted. Forbidden also is the promulgation of all letters and every papal rescript. If any refuse to obey these ordinances, the penalty for all clergy is exile, for the laity, imprisonment without trial. Moreover it has been ordained by these detestable laws and decrees that both higher and lower clergy suffer exile if they refuse to obey the law concerning the confiscation of the goods of the Church. Furthermore, ecclesiastics may not go about the duties of their sacred ministry unless they have first sworn that they will abide by the constitution of the republic of New Granada and all its laws which are

so adverse to the Church. All who refuse to take such an impious and illicit oath suffer the punishment of exile. These and many other unjust acts, which it is wearisome to mention individually, are promulgated against the Church by the government of New Granada and stand opposed to all divine and human laws.

#### Attacks on the Church by the Government of New Granada

2. Because of your renowned religious spirit and virtue, you have, both in word and in writing, consistently resisted many iniquitous and sacrilegious attempts and decrees of this government; you have fearlessly defended the cause of the Church and its rights. Because of your resistance, the fury of this government has not ceased to rage against you, against all of your clerics who are mindful of their proper office and vocation, and against all things which pertain to the Church. For this reason almost all of you have been most miserably treated, arrested by the military, forcibly separated from your flocks, thrown into prison, driven into exile, and sent away to regions with a pestilential climate. Priests and monks, rightly resisting the wicked decrees of the government, have either been put in jail, driven into exile where they died, or forced to live in the jungle. All nuns were furiously and cruelly driven from their convents by the governments and reduced to indigence; but they were taken into the homes of the faithful, who were moved by their sad condition, much to the displeasure of the government which threatened to expel them from these homes and disperse them. Hence with holy churches and monasteries stripped, plundered, polluted, and transformed into military barracks, and with their sacred furniture and ornaments stolen, the worship of sacred things is taken away and the Christian people are orphaned of their legitimate pastors and miserably deprived of all the divine aids of our religion. They are in great peril of losing eternal salvation, to Our and your great grief. Would not anyone, animated by Catholic and human sensibilities, grieve when he sees with what cruel persecution the government of New Granada attacks the Catholic Church, its doctrine, its authority, and its clergy, and how it inflicts great wrongs and outrages on Our supreme authority and that of the Apostolic See?

#### Some Clerics Sided with the Government

3. And what is most deplorable is that some ecclesiastics did not hesitate to obey and support the perverse laws and counsels of the government and to take the illicit oath of obedience. This caused Us and you great sorrow and scandalized and grieved all good people.

#### Condemnation of the Government of New Granada

4. In this great Catholic calamity and this tremendous ruin of souls, mindful of Our Apostolic office and solicitous of the welfare of the whole Church, We consider the words of the prophet of old as addressed to Us: "Cry, cease not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet and show My people their wicked doings and the house of Jacob their sins." [1] With this apostolic letter, We raise Our voice and lament without

ceasing while reproaching the government of New Granada for the great damage and injustices it has inflicted on the Church, her sacred ministers, her property, and this Holy See. And by Our Apostolic authority We condemn everything which has been decreed, accomplished, or attempted in any way by the government of New Granada or by any of its lower magistrates, either in this matter or in others concerning the Church and her rights. Furthermore, by this same authority We abrogate the laws and decrees themselves with all their consequences and declare them entirely invalid, never to have had any force nor to have any in the future.

### Retractions

And We also implore their leaders, that they may at length open their eyes and see the most grievous wounds suffered by the Church. At the same time, may they recall and seriously consider the censures and punishments which the Apostolic Constitutions and the Decrees of General Councils inflict on all invaders of the rights of the Church. Therefore pitying their own souls may they consider the words "For the strictest judgment awaits those who are leaders." [2] And with all zeal, We also warn and exhort those ecclesiastics who, by supporting the government, have failed miserably in their proper office, to consider their holy vocation. We exhort them further to return quickly to the paths of justice and truth, and to emulate the example of those clerics who, though they also unhappily fell and took the oath demanded by the government, nevertheless, to Our great consolation and that of their bishops, gloried to retract and condemn their oath.

### Defenders of the Church

5. Meanwhile We give you full and well-deserved praise, venerable brothers, who have labored like good soldiers of Christ Jesus, and strenuously fought with remarkable constancy and fortitude, both in word and in writing. You defended the cause of the Church, its doctrine, its rights, and its liberty. You have carefully kept in mind the salvation of your flock and fortified it against the impious machinations of the enemies of man and the dangers besetting the faith. You have borne the gravest wrongs, annoyances, and many trials with episcopal fortitude. Therefore We cannot doubt but that you will continue to defend the cause of our divine religion and to care for the salvation of the faithful with the same zeal and effort, just as you have done up to the present time. This has brought great glory to your name.

6. We also bring due praise to the devoted clergy of the republic of New Granada who, most observant of their vocation, were greatly disturbed for the sake of the Church, truth, and justice, and who suffered most patiently monstrous persecutions of all kinds.

7. We cannot help but admire and praise so many nuns who, though they have been violently driven from their convents and reduced to sad indigence, nevertheless firmly cling to their heavenly Spouse. They bear with Christian virtue

the most miserable conditions in which they live. Never ceasing day or night to pour out their hearts before God, they humbly and zealously pray for the salvation of all, including their persecutors. We also praise the Catholic people of the republic of New Granada of which most in their ancient faith, in obedience, and in reverence for the Catholic Church, for Us, and this Apostolic See, and for their bishops.

#### Seek God's Intervention

8. We, moreover, venerable brothers, do not cease to approach the throne of grace with confidence, to implore the most merciful Father and the God of all consolation with humble and fervent prayers. We ceaselessly ask that He rise and judge His cause, and snatch His holy Church from the great calamities by which she is oppressed here and almost everywhere on earth. We ask that He console her with timely aid and mercifully bestow on her the desired serenity and peace in the midst of so many and such great adversities. We ask further that He pity all according to His great mercy and that by His omnipotence He bring it to pass that all peoples, races, and nations come to know, adore, and fear Him and His only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit. May they love Him with their whole heart, soul, and mind and, religiously observing all divine commands and precepts, may they walk as sons of light in all goodness, justice, and truth.

9. Finally, as an auspice of all heavenly gifts and as a pledge of Our special benevolence for you, We lovingly impart the apostolic benediction to you, venerable brothers, and to the flock entrusted to you.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, on September 17, 1863, the 18th year of Our Pontificate.

#### References:

1. Is 58.1.
2. Wis 8.