



Neminem Vestrum

On The Persecution Of Armenians

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX

February 2, 1854

To the Venerable Brothers the Archbishop Primate and the Bishops and to the Beloved Sons, Priests and Religious, and to all the Faithful of the Catholic Nation of Armenia in the Province of Constantinople.

Venerable Brothers and Dearly Beloved Sons, Greetings and Apostolic Blessing.

You know, venerable brothers and beloved sons, the paternal affection which the popes of old showed you in honoring your illustrious nation of Armenia with so many titles. You also know how eager they were to recall that same nation to Catholic unity. Nor are you ignorant of the fruits which Our predecessors in the papacy reaped from this zeal toward your country. They were filled with great joy when they could effect the return of many Armenians to the profession of Catholic unity, people who have persevered strong and unmoved in their faith. It is also clear to you that the Armenian Catholics have suffered many hardships, to their supreme glory and honor. They did this in grievous times when their very lives hung in the balance, yet they preserved and professed the Catholic faith and unity in whose love and devotion they suffered so much. This Apostolic See never ceased to offer vigorous assistance to the Armenians, so that it could deliberate and assist their spiritual needs in every way, according to their own rite. And because the episcopal hierarchy of the Armenian bishops, already restored in those regions which were removed from the heat of persecution, can be preserved, this Holy See is inclined to spare itself no deliberations in its great anxiety and concern for the spiritual welfare of the Armenians living in Constantinople and in the outlying provinces where the bishops could hardly take a stand; in this way We shall provide for the salvation of those same people. For this reason, this Holy See took care to ordain priests for your nation through the work of Our Urban College and to add souls to those students of religious congregations who are charged to diligently procure the spiritual welfare of the Armenians.

2. You know very well, venerable brothers and beloved sons, that, when circumstances first permitted, this Apostolic See established the bishop of the

Armenians with episcopal dignity in the city of Constantinople. After the Armenian Catholics were given a certain freedom in religious matters through the clemency of the Turkish emperor, religious affairs could thus thrive and flourish in a greater way along with the mutual harmony of souls. The archiepiscopal primatial see was established at this point in that same city for the Armenian Catholics. They were given their own archbishop, as the apostolic letters of Our predecessor Pius VIII, show clearly.[1] Everyone knows the special and untiring cares Our predecessor Gregory XVI used to establish the order of that large diocese and to bring about and foster daily the welfare and the prosperity of the Armenian Catholics. When We became Pope, We immediately strove to improve the situation of the Armenian Catholic nation, embracing all the while the whole Christian world in Our mind and thoughts. Through the efforts of Innocent, Archbishop of Sidon, whom We sent as Our extraordinary representative to the supreme ruler of the Turks to express Our friendship and Our respects to that ruler, We have hardly forgotten to repeatedly commend to that powerful Ottoman emperor the Armenians and the other eastern Catholic nations living under his authority. As it is Our supreme desire to bring about the greater welfare of your Armenian nation, We entrusted to Our venerable brother a careful investigation of the condition in which the Armenian nation dwells. We also instructed him to refer everything to Us so that, having weighed matters carefully, We might know what is the best advice for Us to give to provide for your increasing spiritual welfare. Therefore, after Our venerable brother accomplished the task delegated to him, he gave Us an accurate report. We have studied various decrees edited by the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, the cardinals of Our Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Among others, one condemned the so-called Connational Society, by which many future harms were foreseen. Therefore, what We write in this just apostolic letter will conclude the matters which Pius VIII intended to accomplish. We have also established five other bishops of the Armenian rite, among whose dioceses a great part of the ancient and great city of Constantinople has been divided.

3. While We relied on expressed faith that Our paternal concern could make the new ecclesiastical province of Armenia prosper, with great sorrow We have learned that harmful dissensions of souls in your country have already been introduced by the enemy and grow stronger every day. There are many who foster dissensions of this kind or who disguise those counsels by which this Apostolic See wished to greatly help your country. We can never adequately deplore that blazing discord of souls in which both disputing parties began to discuss and dispute openly in writings published for everyone concerning the country's religious matters. The enemy in turn cultivated these writings, especially in harsh words and pronouncements which are totally inconsistent with Christian love. They clearly oppose those things which are sought to protect mutual harmony, and bring to light those things which are unknown and unwanted by this Apostolic See. We thus wanted these matters to be made clear through the repeated letters of that Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Each one of you knows what scandals resulted from this, with discernible harm to your country. You also know with what zeal We hastened to remove all contentions and dissensions from you

and to totally eradicate their seeds. We were certainly blessed with great happiness because Our first cares produced the desired result. Anthony, your archbishop of Constantinople, and Julian, archbishop of Petra in pagan lands, as well as Our apostolic delegate there for the faithful of the Latin rite, came to Us. After they explained everything, they came to an agreement among themselves and published what they had determined with Our approval. Moreover, We wish that all the orders of your nation would have obeyed Our wishes with the same swiftness according to the prescriptions of Our Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. We wish they would have trusted Our advice and arrangements, which seek the common good of each and every one of you. Would that We were not compelled to mourn such losses which have abounded among you-especially, to Our great sadness, from the dissension of souls.

4. Therefore as these fatal contentions and disagreements did not cease, We ordered Our Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to prepare as quickly as possible an accurate account of both the older and the more recent concerns of the Armenian nation. We also ordered the cardinals of the same congregation to diligently examine them in various meetings for the wisdom particular to each one of them. We Ourselves presided at one of these meetings, since We were greatly troubled over an issue of this sort. After hearing the opinions of the cardinals, We indicated what We thought about the principal issues. We have continually asked God, who is rich in mercies, to help and favor Our humble work for the good of your souls with the all-powerful assistance of His divine grace. As nothing is more important to Us than to advance your peace and prosperity, We took care to accomplish those things which would lead to such a happy ending. Therefore, knowing that the harm to your nation would be greatly increased because of the aforementioned published writings, We ordered that the principal ones be prohibited and condemned in a special examination. We have also strongly disapproved of all similar things, either before or after the condemned writings came to light, whether they were written in Armenian, Armenian dialect, Italian, French, or some other language, since they proposed especially a common hatred totally against Christian love. We have turned all Our attention to promoting a more correct and accurate education of the clergy in the seminary of Constantinople.

5. In order that the religious communities might enjoy better order, We instructed Our Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to issue an appropriate decree, which We order all parties to observe diligently. In order to remove entirely every controversy and suspicion concerning the doctrine of the Mechitharist monks of Venice, We want you to know that those same monks sent Us a splendid profession of Catholic faith and doctrine, using all the necessary signatures. This declaration brought Us great consolation and totally satisfied Our wishes. They eloquently acknowledged and freely received the regulations and decrees which the popes and the sacred congregations published or would publish -- especially those which prohibit *communio in divinis* (communion in holy matters) with schismatics. They declare clearly and openly: "Part of their nation whose good and welfare the

institute looks after principally and solely is unfortunately found apart from communion with the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church. For that reason, they declare that they recognize and embrace as their brothers those whom the Holy Roman Apostolic Church recognizes as its sons. They acknowledge that they condemn the error of the schismatic Armenians and recognize that they are outside of the Church of Jesus Christ. They profess that they will never cease to pray, to preach, and to care either in words or deeds or writings that those who stray might return to the one and only fold of Jesus Christ, who is alone the highest shepherd and head and whose center is the pope, the successor of Peter, prince of the apostles." We also indicate to you that they have accepted other suitable advice from Us so that every fear might be plainly put aside concerning the colleges in which these same monks educate the Armenian youth. We ordered that the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith issue appropriate instructions so that the principal task begun by Our predecessors and by Us might progress prosperously, the ordinary hierarchy of the bishops might be led to the desired conclusion, and the election of both the archbishop primate and the other holy bishops (his suffragans) might be held. We also ordered these instructions to be conveyed to the archbishop and the other bishops.

6. All these things show how concerned We are for your spiritual welfare and with what paternal Christian charity We consider your Armenian nation. We now exhort you above all to clothe yourselves as the chosen ones of God with kindness, humility, modesty, and patience. Bound by a tight mutual bond of harmony and love, put off all rivalries, contentions, envy, anger, and dissensions. Follow peace and holiness in everything; be of the same mind and the same opinion. Carefully preserve the unity of spirit in the bond of peace which the Lord Jesus recommended and prescribed so often. We trust that you will follow these loving counsels of Ours because of your filial devotion toward Us and this Holy See. Taught by sad experience, you know how many catastrophes your illustrious nation endured because of spiritual discord. Matters would have progressed favorably and successfully if everyone had been bound in a mutual harmony of wills and if, loving one another, they would have walked in the love of God. Therefore, remember the misfortunes you suffered because of discord and seriously consider that "every city or house divided among itself will not stand."^[2] Keep in mind the warning of the apostle, "that if you go on biting and tearing one another to pieces, take care! You will end up in mutual destruction."^[3] Let nothing be of greater concern to you in the future than, with singular care and zeal, to cherish Christian concord of spirit and to keep the peace. You all remember with what paternal care Our predecessor Pius VIII pressed this harmony upon you. He concluded his apostolic letter establishing the archiepiscopal primatial see of Constantinople with these words of St. Leo the Great: "The unity of the whole body makes one health and one beauty; and this unity of one body requires unanimity, but principally demands the harmony of the priests." Gregory XVI repeated this salutary advice in order to encourage all of you to preserve this mutual harmony of spirit.

7. Now We address Ourselves principally to you, venerable brothers, the bishops of

this ecclesiastical province of Constantinople. Continually exhort and enkindle the faithful entrusted to your care to mutual harmony, peace, and love, using unity of spirit and repeated efforts of word or deed or example. Break and suppress any dissension. Meet diligently all parts of your episcopal duty in the supreme harmony of spirit, will, and opinion. "Take care of the flock of God which is in your midst. Watch over it willingly as God would have you do, not under constraint . . . nor lording it over the clergy; but be examples to your flock." [4] First of all, do not spare anything, neither cares, nor advice, nor efforts, to preserve safe and sound the deposit of our divine faith in your dioceses. Take care to educate the clergy piously, forming them accurately to every virtue and ecclesiastical spirit. Educate them especially in the sacred disciplines, keeping them free from every foreign danger. Let the faithful be instructed more each day in the salutary teaching of the Catholic faith and in its holy precepts, and let them be strengthened by the gifts of grace so that, avoiding evil and doing good, they may grow in the wisdom of God. They will thus progress more quickly on the paths of the Lord and enter the way which leads to life. Thus moral decency, integrity of life and virtue, religion, and piety will grow each day, flourishing and dominating in the souls of all. Keep before your eyes the example of the Prince of shepherds who showed himself "meek and humble of heart and left us an example to follow in His footsteps. Venerable brothers, strive zealously on a spirit of forgiveness and kindness to bring back to the straight path of truth and justice those unfortunate people who stray. Explain, beseech, and reprove with all goodness, patience, and teaching, according to the apostle's directive. "Kindness in correction often prevails more than harshness, exhortation more than threats, love more than power." [5] Meanwhile if you take the side of harshness and severity when the seriousness of the disease prescribes sharp remedies and milder ones have already been tried in vain, consider the guilty person according to the prescription of the holy canons. Temper your judgment with mercy, your zeal with kindness, and your harshness with leniency. This especially befits the pastors of the Church, who should show themselves to their subjects as a mother in piety and a father in discipline.

8. We also address all of you, beloved sons, both secular and religious priests. You have given yourselves to the Lord in ministry, as a part of your inheritance. Be subject to each of your bishops, as is fitting. Mindful of your vocation and dignity, strive to maintain them and protect them in seriousness of character and holiness of life, so that you might lead the people to a greater love and veneration of your order and bring about each day an increased growth for the Church. Therefore, you should carefully avoid everything which is prohibited to the clergy, everything which does not befit them. Never allow anything which could present a scandal to others. Take care to show yourselves more and more as a good example in word and unfeigned love, in learning, faith, and chastity. When you are busy in the homes of the people, either from necessity or the compulsion of your sacred ministry, strive to sustain the dignity and greatness of churchmen in all your deeds, so that you might be the good fragrance of Christ, shining with every virtue.

9. Also keep in mind the decree of Our congregation of August 20 of last year and

published by Our order; take care to obey it religiously. All clergymen, both secular and religious, should pray unceasingly. Pray to God without fail that he might always more favorably bestow the abundant gifts of his heavenly grace upon you and the Christian people. Do not cease to refine the study of the religious literature and sacred disciplines with which you might respond to those who seek the law from you and with which you can teach the commandments of God to those who are ignorant and in error.

10. Beloved sons, seek with a special effort and diligence not what is yours but what is Jesus Christ's. Fulfill piously all the duties of your sacred ministry. Never cease to work together with your bishops in everything in order to obtain the eternal salvation of the faithful. In this way you will promote our holy religion and its teaching, and you will also remove the seeds of discord and bring about a love of Christian harmony and peace for everyone. As all wisdom comes from God, those among you who are wise should never exalt themselves, but rather give humble thanks to the most gracious God, the giver of all good things. They should use learning for their own edification and that of others, for they should seriously consider that God resists the proud but gives His grace to the humble. He will judge more severely whoever has received more than others, for, as St. Gregory the Great wisely warns: "As the gifts increase, the account of those gifts increases. Therefore, everybody should be more humble and quick to serve God as he sees himself more obliged to give account.[6] None of you should ever covet those gifts of others in your ecclesiastical order, gifts from which the spiritual welfare of your neighbor might flow.

11. We are ready to address all of you, dearly beloved sons in Christ, Catholics of the Armenian nation who live in the ecclesiastical province of Constantinople, of every order, age, sex, and condition. We advise and encourage you repeatedly in Our paternal love to put off all hypocrisy, dissension, envy, and disagreement. Maintain harmony and peace among yourselves, supporting one another in love. You should willingly persevere in the profession of the Catholic religion and adhere firmly and consistently to Us and to this See of the blessed Prince of the apostles. Show the love of God and neighbor in deeds. Keep each of God's commandments in those of the Church, doing everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be subject to your bishops and obey them whom the Holy Spirit has established to rule the Church of God. Your salvation is entrusted to them and they will some day have to give account to the eternal Prince of shepherds. Therefore, it is their duty to watch over you and work so that they lead you to the path of salvation. They should strengthen the weak in truth and in suitable teaching. They should also put together the things torn apart, convert the wicked, and distribute the word of life in the food of eternity. Therefore, listen attentively to the voice of those bishops and to their authority. None of you should ever resist his bishop or want to impose any law on him, especially in all of those things which pertain to the episcopal ministry and authority.

12. We address Ourselves to all of you who are preeminent in nobility of birth,

splendor of gifts, authority, and wealth in this Catholic country of Armenia. There could certainly be nothing more useful or notable for your illustrious nation than if all of you use your honor and dignity in such a way that you shine forth in virtue. The Christian people seek from you examples to imitate. We beseech you over and over again in the love of religion and in the pursuit of mutual harmony to follow Our advice. Exert yourselves more ardently each day so that you do not ever wish to do anything either against the Church or against your bishops, as those who are separated from Catholic unity are accustomed to doing. You should also devote yourselves to deliberation and studies, so that the Catholic Church may receive increased growth through them. In this way everybody will follow with due reverence, compliance, and obedience that full and supreme authority which our Lord Jesus Christ gave to Peter and to his successors, the popes: namely to feed, rule, and govern the universal Church and the sacred and venerable authority which the bishops exercise over their flocks, an authority which can never be subject to civil powers. You see how much glory you can accumulate and how rich a reward you can receive from God, the giver of all good things, if you strive to bring about the advantage and prosperity of our most holy religion and if you obey these warnings, wishes, and requests of Ours.

13. Before We conclude this letter in order to remove all ambiguities and doubts, We wish to proclaim openly and clearly Our opinion concerning a matter in which great confusion has arisen and which has stimulated dissensions among you. All of you who have longed to return to Catholic unity that part of your Armenian nation which is still miserably turned toward schism certainly deserve the highest praise. Moreover, this desire clearly corresponds to the most ardent wishes of Our Holy Mother Church, which never ceases to pray and beseech God that all dissident children return to her bosom, and to the untiring efforts of this Holy See, which has worked much for this and never ceases to so labor. As you well know, from the very beginning of Our pontificate We used Our legate to the illustrious emperor of the Turks to send a letter to Our Eastern peoples;^[7] In this letter, We lovingly and zealously aroused these people to return to the profession of Catholic unity.

14. May your whole nation respond to heavenly grace. May it reject error and return to the one fold of Christ in a spirit of docility and unity, a spirit clearly absent from all who are not joined with this Holy See of Peter. From this Holy See, rights of holy communion flow to all men^[8] and to it every obedience and honor must be given.^[9] Every church (that is the faithful everywhere) should come together to the See of Peter for greater authority.^[10] Indeed, We would be greatly consoled and the whole church would exult greatly, if your whole nation would return to Catholic unity. You should understand from this, venerable brothers and dearly beloved sons, that We cannot approve the course of those who habitually deal harshly with the schismatics of your nation. In fact We completely and vigorously disapprove of those who pursue with harshness and severity, not with love and good will, those who have turned from fatal schism to Catholic unity.

15. At the same time We cannot tolerate the fact that certain people under the

pretext of promoting Catholic unity, wish that there be no distinction in regard to the errors of the schismatics. They abuse the zeal by which this Holy See took care to protect the ancient and holy rites of the eastern Church. They think -- and We cannot tolerate this -- that what is at present being done by the schismatics is to be wholly maintained. They also want to eliminate many practices which were justly introduced into your Catholic nation in order to show how strongly you abhor heresy and schism and adhere to Catholic unity. Moreover these men also want to remove certain works and ecclesiastical rules which the experience of the ancient canons clearly showed were to be added to discipline. At the same time the Catholic Church, totally unlike the heresies and schisms which are now dead, enjoys eternal life and is endowed with the treasures of heavenly riches. It is the teacher of truth and the guide to salvation, the fruitful parent and nourisher of so many holy works and beautiful institutions by which it fosters religion, piety, humanity, and every virtue. It never ceases to deliberate for the common good, the order, prosperity, and harmony of everybody. You are certainly aware that Our predecessor Gregory XVI published an apostolic letter against the ideas of those men on February 3, 1832, beginning, "Inter gravissimas." It seems truly unique and worthy of admiration that these people who study the rites so much do not hesitate in other articles to turn from the canons of that same eastern Church.

16. Moreover, venerable brothers and dearly beloved sons, We have discussed all these things in this letter because of Our zealous love for your Catholic nation of Armenia, and to dispel every doubt and ambiguity. We hope that with the help of God, according to Our fondest wishes, this harmony and peace will bring your nation every true prosperity, reviving and dominating in all of your souls. In order for you to more easily obtain that salutary and desired peace, We impose, with this letter, perpetual and absolute silence on past questions and controversies, and We totally forbid every disapproval and any speech which can disturb the peace among the Armenian faithful. We also expressly and severely prohibit the heretics or schismatics from consuming those in grace and communion with this Apostolic See. If some people who act incorrectly or arouse suspicions suddenly appear -- and We trust that would never happen -- it will be provided for with due cause. The matter will first of all be clarified by this Apostolic See with the appropriate canonical documents; therefore, after Our declaration and warnings, every disturber regardless of class and order will be guilty of serious fault in the future. They will not in any way be able to excuse themselves and avoid due severity. But the repeated and splendid testimonies of filial piety, love, and obedience toward Us and this Holy See, testimonies which We receive from every order of your Catholic nation of Armenia, arouse in Us great hope that your nation will fill Us with consolation, joy, and happiness. Therefore, relying on this trust, We humbly and strenuously beseech the Father of mercies in every prayer and supplication with thanksgiving that He might always bestow on all of you every beneficial and desired gift. "May the peace of God which surpasses all knowledge keep your heart and minds, and may the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." As a pledge of those things and as a sign of Our very ardent love for you, We lovingly bestow on you the apostolic blessing from the bottom of

Our heart, venerable brothers and dearly beloved sons.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on February 2, 1854, in the eighth year of Our Pontificate.

Endnotes

1. Apostolic Letters of Pius VIII, Quod jamdiu and Apostolatus officium, 6 July 1830.
2. Mt 12.25.
3. Gal 5.15.
4. 1 Pt 5.2-3.
5. Council of Trent, session 13, chap. 1 on Reform.
6. St. Gregory, homily 9 on the Gospels.
7. Letter In Suprema Petri, 6 January 1848.
8. St. Ambrose, epistle 12 to Damasus, nos. 2 and 4.
9. Council of Ephesus, act. 4.
10. St. Irenaeus, adversus haeres., Chap. 3.