

ON THE INDIANS OF SOUTH AMERICA

LACRIMABILI STATU

Encyclical of Pope Pius X promulgated on June 7, 1912.

To the Archbishops and Bishops of Latin America.

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

Being greatly moved by the deplorable condition of the Indians in Lower America, our illustrious predecessor Benedict XIV pleaded their cause, as you are aware, in most weighty words, in his letter "Immensa Pastorum," given on December 22, 1741; and since we also have to deplore in many places almost the same things that he then lamented, we most earnestly recall those letters of his to your memory. For therein, among other things, Pope Benedict complained that although the Apostolic See had done much, and for a long time, to relieve their afflicted fortunes, there were even the "men of the orthodox faith who, as if they had utterly forgotten all sense of the charity poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, presumed to reduce the wretched Indians, without the light of faith, and even those who had been washed in the laver of regeneration, to servitude, or to sell them as slaves to others, or to deprive them of their property, and to treat them with such inhumanity that they were thus greatly hindered from embracing the Christian faith, and most strongly moved to regard it with abhorrence." It is true that soon afterwards the worst of these indignities -- that is to say, slavery, properly so called -- was, by the goodness of the merciful God, abolished; and to this public abolition of slavery in Brazil and in other regions the excellent men who governed those Republics were greatly moved and encouraged by the maternal care and insistence of the Church. And we gladly acknowledge that if it had not been for many and great obstacles that stood in the way, their plans would have had far greater success. Nevertheless, though much has thus been done for the Indians, there is much more that still remains to be done. And, indeed, when we consider the crimes and outrages still committed against them, our heart is filled with horror, and we are moved to great compassion for its most unhappy race. For what can be so cruel and so barbarous as to scourge men and brand them with hot iron, often for most trivial causes, often for a mere lust of cruelty; or, having suddenly overthrown them, to slay hundreds or thousands in one unceasing massacre; or to waste villages and districts and slaughter the inhabitants, so that some tribes, as we understand, have become extinct in these last few years?

2. The lust of lucre has done much to make the minds of men so barbarous. But something also is due to the nature of the climate and the situation of these regions. For, as these places are subjected to burning southern sun, which casts a languor into the veins and as it were, destroys the vigor of virtue, and as they are far removed from the habits of religion and the vigilance of the State, and in a measure even from civil society, it easily comes to pass that those who have not already come there with evil morals soon begin to be corrupted, and then, when all bonds of right and duty are broken, they fall away into all hateful vices. Nor in this do they take any pity on the weakness of sex or age, so that we are ashamed to mention the crimes and outrages they commit in seeking out and selling women and children, wherein it may be truly said that they have surpassed the worst examples of pagan iniquity.

3. For our part, indeed, when reports of these things were first brought to us, we hesitated for some time to give credence to such atrocities, since they certainly seemed to be incredible. But after we had been assured by abundant witnesses -- to wit, by many of yourselves, Venerable Brethren, by the Delegates of the Apostolic See, by the missionaries, and by other men wholly worthy of belief -- we can no longer have any doubt as to the truth of these statements.

4. Now, therefore, having pondered long on this matter, so that, as far as lies in our power, we may endeavor to remedy such great evils, with humble and suppliant prayer we beg of God that He may deign in His goodness to show us some opportune way of healing these wounds. For He Himself, Who is the most loving Maker and Redeemer of all mankind, since He has given us this desire of laboring for the saving of the Indians, will also assuredly give us those things that conduce to this end. Meanwhile, it greatly consoles us to know that those who bear rule in these Republics are making every endeavor to remove this outstanding disgrace and this stain from their States; which endeavors, indeed, we cannot sufficiently praise and approve. Since, however, these regions are far from the seats of Government, and are for the most part not readily accessible, these human endeavors of the civil powers, whether from the craft of the criminals, who can speedily cross the frontiers, or through the inactivity or perfidy of the officials, often do little good, and sometimes come to nothing. But if the work of the Church is added to the work of the State, then at length the desired fruit shall be obtained in greater abundance.

5. Wherefore, Venerable Brethren, we call upon you, before all others, to give special care and thought to this cause, which is in every way worthy of your pastoral office and duty. And leaving the rest to your solicitude and diligence, we particularly urge you to foster and promote all the good works instituted in your dioceses for the benefit of the Indians, and to see that other works likely to contribute to this end may be instituted. In the next place you will diligently admonish your flocks on their most sacred duty of helping religious missions to the natives who first inhabited the American soil. Let them know that they ought to help this work especially in two ways, to wit, by their gifts and by their prayers; and that it is not only their religion, but their country also, that asks this of them. Do you, moreover, take care that wheresoever moral instruction is given, in seminaries, in colleges, in convent schools, and more especially in the churches, Christian charity, which holds all men, without distinction of nation or color, as true brethren, shall be continually preached and commended. And this charity must be made manifest not so much by words as by deeds. Moreover, every opportunity must be taken to show what a great dishonor is done to the Christian name by these base deeds, which we are here denouncing.

6. As for our part, having good reason to hope for the consent and support of the public authorities, we have more especially taken care to extend the field of Apostolic labor in these broad regions, appointing further missionary stations, where the Indians can find safety and succor. For the Catholic Church has ever been a fertile mother of Apostolic men, who, pressed by the charity of Christ, are brought to give their lives for their brethren. And to-day, when so many abhor the faith or fall away from it, the zeal for spreading the Gospel among the barbarous nations is still strong in the clergy and in religious men and holy virgins; and this zeal grows greater and is spread abroad more widely by the power of the Holy Ghost, who helps the Church, His spouse, according to the needs of the time. Wherefore, we think it well to make greater use of those aids which by God's goodness are ready to our hand, in order to deliver the Indians, where their need is greatest, from the slavery of Satan and of wicked men. For the rest, since the preachers of the Gospel had watered these regions, not only with their sweat, but sometimes with their blood, we trust that at length a fair harvest of Christian kindness shall spring forth from their great labors and bear abundant fruit. And now, in order that what you shall do for the benefit of the Indians, whether of your own accord or at our exhortation, may be the more efficacious by the help of our Apostolic authority, we, mindful of the example of our aforesaid predecessor, condemn and declare guilty of grave crime whosoever, as he says, "shall dare or presume to reduce the said Indians to slavery, to sell them, to buy them, to exchange or give them, to separate them from their wives and children, to deprive them of goods and chattels, to transport or send them to other places, or in any way whatsoever to rob them of freedom and hold them in slavery; or to give counsel, help, favor, and work on any pretext of color to them that do these things, or to preach or teach that it is lawful, or to co-operate therewith in any way whatever." Accordingly, we will that the power of absolving penitents in the sacramental tribunal from these crimes shall be reserved to ordinaries of the localities.

7. It has seemed well to us, moved by our paternal affection and following the footsteps of your predecessors, among whom we may specially mention Leo XIII, of blessed memory, to write these things to you, Venerable Brethren, on the case of the Indians. But it will be for you to strive according to your strength to give abundant satisfaction to our desires. You will assuredly be helped in this by those who bear rule in these Republics; nor will you want the work and care of the clergy, especially those devoted to the sacred missions; and, lastly, all good men will be with you, and those who can, with gifts or other offices of charity, will help a cause in which both religion and the dignity of manhood are involved. And, what is the chief thing, the grace of Almighty God will be with you, in token whereof and as a pledge of our goodwill, we most lovingly impart new Apostolic benediction to you, Venerable Brethren, and to your flocks.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the 7th of June, 1912, in the ninth year of our Pontificate.