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A King of Cups

Gregorio José Rodríguez Carrillo, Bishop of Cartagena

In November 1819, after the battles of Vargas' Swamp and Boyacá (in July and August 1819), and just before the constitution of the Republic of Colombia (at Angostura in 1819), the bishop of Cartagena issued a political message. He did so from the relative safety of a Royalist stronghold, as Cartagena did not fall to the patriots until October 1821, more than a year after Bolívar, in his August 1820 siege of the city, had attempted to gain a bloodless surrender of the plaza. His message is a clear example of the rhetoric of the high clergy loyal to the Crown, as churchmen in the Americas were split over the question of republicanism. In general, the ecclesiastical hierarchy sided with the Crown, while parish priests and the orders adopted a variety of positions, from Royalist to neutral to fiercely pro-independence; some even wrote out catechisms to demonstrate biblical supports for Republican ideals. In this same year, 1819, for example, Bolívar's then vice president, Francisco de Paula Santander (who managed the business of governing while Bolívar managed the war), issued a decree demanding that priests explain to their parishioners that supporting the patriots was not a heresy. Some priests were so fervent in their republicanism that they went so far as to describe the Spanish Conquest itself, three hundred years previous, as an illegitimate usurpation of "natural rights" given by God.

Writing more than ten years after Napoleon forced Charles IV and his son Ferdinand to formally cede their claims to the Spanish throne—a move they insisted was illegitimate—the bishop understood the nature of the crisis: Whom to obey in the absence of the king? In 1814 Ferdinand had returned to the throne and had repudiated the Liberal (but promonarchy) Constitution of 1812. For local elites living in theaters of war such as New Granada and Venezuela—or, to the south, Buenos Aires and the captaincy of Chile—that repudiation became a point of no return. The patriot armies were now seeking independence, and they were republicans. For the bishop, on the other hand, Ferdinand's return is to be celebrated by all Spaniards—he is a father to all, "whatsoever one's education, condition, or class." Those who disagreed were "Robespierres of Venezuela," "traitors," "insatiable monsters." Bolívar, above all, he excoriates as an upstart who cannot feed even a single battalion for one month yet puts himself up as a lord and treats his followers as "slaves." Again, the

date of Bishop José Gregorio's message is significant. Bolívar's 1813 decree of "war to the death," his declaration of terror, is in full force (see part V). The war will not end until Bolívar signs a treaty with the Liberal Spanish general Pablo Murillo in 1820.

Spaniards of the Kingdom:

. . . I see torn and in pieces the most sacred bonds of religion, of society, of politics, which should bind us eternally with an unalterable cordiality, due to the harmful influence that the enemy has thrown among you. The principles of the sacred religion we profess should identify us more and more as the greatest of all alliances, even if you were not as you are a great family under the direction of the common father and Lord of all the Spains, Ferdinand VII, great, high, powerful, virtuous and loved by all peoples and protected by God. Each of us should not want for himself more than he should want for others; nor should he do unto others more than that which he would wish done unto him. It was on this principle that in creation God established all the harmony and accord of civilized humankind, later sanctified by the human blood of the Redeemer. The Divine Master imbued with this principle all the spirit of Christianity. You will love God above everything else, and your neighbor as yourself. See here, brothers, the sum of all the prophets and the gospels. And is there anything else that conforms more to the innate desires of the human heart? Who, despite their roughness and boorishness, cannot know the weight of this truth? Who among you would want to be murdered and have taken the fruit of your efforts, your sweat, and your toil, while being in peace, within the holiness of your home, and the arms of your family? Who among you wishes for such an insult, regardless of your studies, your condition, your class? And if no one wishes it for themselves, why is it that so many engage and practice this disgrace of reason with fellow Spaniards, with fellow servants of King Ferdinand, with fellow Christians and sons of God, under the vain and frivolous pretext that they were not born in their parish? What is the delirium of these inhumane men? What insanity? What barbarity? What fury out of the abyss and out of hell? Who has inspired such blasphemous and sacrilegious moralities, so contrary to the glory of your character, of your religion, and of your laws? The traitors? Oh, monsters insatiable for human blood! Oh, new Robespierres from Venezuela! Oh, Neros a thousand times more barbaric than Agrippina the murderer! Hypocrites! What centaurs could cause as much harm to their nation as has been caused by your cruel envy and insatiable ambition? Brothers and companions, let us move aside the veil of this mystery of inequity that has enveloped you in its shadows, and begin to see things as they are and in their true image. The treacherous traitors,

transformed into evil and lying foxes, have fooled your docility, telling you that they need nothing from you; that it is only America's freedom that has compelled them to take up arms; that it is only toward this sacred ideal that they sacrifice their fortune, their calm, their peace, and their amenities; that war against tyrants must be eternal; and that they will willingly perish for the independence of their country. And you believe them? And you ascertain that they speak to you in good faith and what they say is a clear truth? Oh! How you fool yourselves! Oh! And how you innocently run toward sacrifice! Those who want nothing of you want it all; they want your property, however limited it might be, they want your liberty, they want your obedience, they want your respect, they want your peace, they want your life, your blood, your ruin, and your eternal damnation. This is all these measly uninterested men want. Look at their ventures, to see if this is not true: some want to be demagogues, others to share power among three, while others want to be dictators; this one, Landaman; the other, King; and yet this other, Caesar. And what resources do these shirtless men have to aspire to such power, however meagerly rich they may be? To leave such a position of penury for one of such splendor? To maintain a civil war that pits one against the other, and destroys towns and provinces like wild beasts? Then it is that this is a lie, it is falseness, it is deceit, and it is a hypocrisy of the highest kind to claim that they want nothing from you, that what they aspire to is independence in your territory, freedom and equality for all citizens, and the downfall of tyranny and despotism. And in order for you to better understand the evidence of this truth I lay out before you, which of these traitors can equip and maintain just one battalion for even a month, using their own possessions, their own revenue, their own savings, their own home? None, not even Bolívar when he owned the goods of a virtuous Spaniard, diligent and hard working, which he acquired with his own sweat and blood. And if, being the wealthiest of all traitors, even he could not equip a battalion and maintain it for one month, how will he be able to maintain a division, no matter how small? So it is that to do so they will need to ransack towns, destroy families, plunder homes, and not leave anything in the country or towns that they can pillage. Add to this that, not having any possessions of his own, given that he squandered them going to Paris to turn from Christian to atheist, from man to beast, from American Spaniard sweet in his customs to an awful and barbaric Robespierre, without you he is a true beggar, a rogue and a hustler, that has nothing with which to eat or dress or live. And if this is as clear as sunlight in a bright and serene day, how much will he need you to play the part of King, Caesar, Sovereign, which is the only role he wants to play in this comedy. And if this is not so, tell me:

when has he taken up a rifle and fought amid you in the ranks? When has he fought head-on in battle? When has he striven to perish with you who only fight for his cause, and not fled cowardly, trading a general's hat and military jacket for a peasant's nightdress to escape from danger? Your King Bolívar is a spider lord that throws you to the storm while remaining on the banks, to the flames as he blows from afar. You fall, your children die, your towns burn, your fields are destroyed, and that king of cups claims that he needs nothing from you, that all he does is for your own good, your liberty, your equality, and your independence? Oh, tremendous liar! Oh, unabashed deceiver! Oh, unblushing and shameless contortionist! So you want nothing from the Americans and already you are their king? And you treat them as your slaves? Oh, innocent children! Oh, lost young children! And you die physically, morally, and eternally to prolong for two more weeks, two more months, this fabulous comedy by King Bolívar? Oh, deplorable disgrace for you! Oh, cruel condemnation! Oh, everlasting ignominy! Illustrious men: what can be made of a swindling King, without house or home? And this is for whom you rebel against the great Ferdinand? And it is for him you slander your name and that of future generations? And it is for him that you put out the flame of your ancestors? . . .

Bolívar, vain, arrogant, brazen, conceited, impious, without religion, wants to deprive King Ferdinand of the crown inherited from his ancestors, and which God has preserved in the midst of great dangers through a series of miracles. I, an elder Christian, am pleased that His Majesty holds it, possesses it, and rules it for many years, and to sustain this order I will do as much as my strengths will allow, and I am so pleased by this divine disposition that it brings me more happiness that His Majesty be king than if I were to be in his place. And I will tell you a hyperbole: that if it were my will and I were free to do so, I would donate [the crown] to His Majesty, convinced as I am that he is like Saul, better than the rest of his people. Bolívar, hypocrite, liar, has cheated you by saying that he wants nothing more from you than equality, independence, the essential rights of all men. And when he saw you in this troublesome situation, he did not think of you but only of himself, of his kingdom and his crown. I tell you that never, not even for one instant, have there ever been free men, equal men, independent men. Adam obeyed God, his sons obeyed Adam, his grandchildren and descendants their primitive parents. There were kings, there were republics, the first were rulers, while the second, chiefs of the latter. People obeyed constantly one and others without that chimerical liberty. There were classes, there were orders, there were distinctions that not everyone could attain. And in your republic, who is in charge? Schemers, liars, contortionists. Are

you the same as them? And do you sit together at the same table? And do you wear the same brocade? And do you attend their councils? And have they married your daughters or have your sons married theirs? So it is they do not recognize you as equal, so it is that they aspire to certain superiority, so it is that they want power, and if anyone disputes this, thus they will kill them as he [Bolívar] killed Piar.

. . . Issued in Cartagena of Indies, on November 29, 1819.

Gregorio José, Bishop.

Translated by Ana María Gómez López and Ann Farnsworth-Alvear