



The Holy See

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TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
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**THIRD GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF THE LATIN AMERICAN EPISCOPATE**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Puebla, Mexico

Sunday, 28 January 1979

Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate, This hour that I have the happiness to experience with you is certainly an historic one for the Church in Latin America. World opinion is aware of this, as are the faithful members of your local Churches, and especially you yourselves are aware of it, you who will be the protagonists and leaders of this hour. It is also an hour of grace, marked by the drawing near of the Lord, by a very special presence and action of the Spirit of God. For this reason we have confidently invoked that Spirit, at the beginning of our work. For this reason also I now wish to implore you, as a brother to very beloved brothers: all the days of this Conference and in everyone of its acts, let yourselves be led by the Spirit, open yourselves to his inspiration and his impulse, let it be he and no other spirit that guides and strengthens you. Under the guidance of this Spirit, for the third time in the last twenty-five years you, the bishops of all the countries representing the Episcopate of the Continent of Latin America, have gathered together to study more deeply together the meaning of your mission in the face of the new demands of your peoples. The Conference that is now opening, convoked by the revered Paul VI, confirmed by my unforgettable predecessor John Paul I, and reconfirmed by myself as one of the first acts of my pontificate, is linked with the Conference now long past, held in Rio de Janeiro, which had as its most notable result the birth of CELAM. But it is linked even more closely with the second Conference, of Medellin, of which it marks the tenth anniversary. In these last ten years, how much progress humanity has made, and, with humanity and at its service, how much progress the Church has made! This third Conference cannot disregard that reality. It will therefore have to take as its point of departure the conclusions of Medellin, with all the positive elements that they contained, but without ignoring the incorrect interpretations at times made and which call for calm discernment, opportune criticism, and clear choices of position. You will be guided in your debates by the Working Document, prepared with such care so as to constitute the constant point of reference. But you will also have at hand Paul VI's Apostolic

Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. With what care the great Pontiff approved as the Conference's theme: "The present and the future of evangelization in Latin America"! Those who were close to him during the months when the Assembly was being prepared can tell you this. They can also bear witness to the gratitude with which he learned that the basic material of the whole Conference would be this text, into which he put his whole pastoral soul, as his life drew to a close. Now that he has "closed his eyes to this world's scene" (*Testament of Paul VI*), this document becomes a spiritual testament that the Conference will have to scrutinize with love and diligence, in order to make it the other obligatory point of reference, and in order to see how to put it into practice. The whole Church is grateful to you for the example that you are giving, for what you are doing, and what other local Churches will perhaps do in their turn. The Pope wishes to be with you at the beginning of your labours. and he is thankful to the Father of lights from whom comes down every perfect gift (cf. James 1:17), for having been able to be with you at yesterday's Solemn Mass, under the maternal gaze of the Virgin of Guadalupe, as also at the Mass this morning. I would very much like to stay with you in prayer, reflection and work: be sure that I shall stay with you in spirit, while the "anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28) calls me elsewhere. I wish at least, before continuing my pastoral visit through Mexico and before my return to Rome, to leave you as a pledge of my spiritual presence a few words, uttered with the solicitous care of a Pastor and the affection of a Father; words which are the echo of my main preoccupations regarding the theme you have to deal with and regarding the life of the Church in these beloved countries. It is a great consolation for the universal Father to note that you come together here not as a symposium of experts, not as a parliament of politicians, not as a congress of scientists or technologists, however important such assemblies may be, but as a fraternal encounter of Pastors of the Church. And as Pastors you have the vivid awareness that your principal duty is to be Teachers of the Truth. Not a human and rational truth, but the Truth that comes from God, the Truth that brings with it the principle of the authentic liberation of man: "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32); that Truth which is the only one that offers a solid basis for an adequate "praxis".

I.1. To be watchful for purity of doctrine, the basis in building up the Christian community, is therefore, together with the proclamation of the Gospel, the primary and irreplaceable duty of the Pastor, of the Teacher of the faith. How often Saint Paul emphasized this, convinced as he was of the seriousness of the accomplishment of this duty (cf. 1 Tim 1:3-7; 18-20; 4:11, 16; 2 Tim 1:4-14). Over and above unity in love, unity in truth is always urgent for us. The beloved Pope Paul VI, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, said: "The Gospel entrusted to us is also the word of truth. A truth which liberates and which alone gives peace of heart is what people are looking for when we proclaim the Good News to them. The truth about God, about man and his mysterious destiny, about the world... The preacher of the Gospel will therefore be a person who even at the price of personal renunciation and suffering always seeks the truth that he must transmit to others. He never betrays or hides truth out of a desire to please men, in order to astonish or to shock, nor for the sake of originality or a desire to make an impression... We are the pastors of the faithful people, and our pastoral service impels us to preserve, defend, and to communicate the truth regardless of the sacrifices that this involves" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 78).

I.2. From you, Pastors, the faithful of your countries expect and demand above all a careful and zealous transmission of the truth concerning Jesus Christ. This truth is at the centre of evangelization and constitutes its essential content: "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22). From the living knowledge of this truth will depend the vigour of the faith of millions of people. From it will also depend the strength of their support of the Church and of their active presence as Christians in the world. From this knowledge there will derive choices, values, attitudes and modes of behaviour capable of orienting and defining our Christian life and of creating new people, and hence a new humanity, for the conversion of the individual and social conscience (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18). It is from a solid Christology that there must come light on so many doctrinal and pastoral themes and

questions that you intend to study in these coming days. I.3. And then we have to confess Christ before history and the world with a conviction that is profound, deeply felt and lived, just as Peter confessed him: "You are the Christ the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). This is the Good News in a certain sense unique: the Church lives by it and for it, just as she draws from it everything that she has to offer to people, without any distinction of nation, culture, race, time, age or condition. For this reason "from that confession of faith (Peter's) the sacred history of salvation and of the People of God could not fail to take on a new dimension" (John Paul II, *Homily at the Solemn Inauguration of His Pontificate*, 22 October 1978). This is the one Gospel, and "even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed", as the Apostle wrote in very clear terms (Gal 1:8). I.4. In fact, today there occur in many places—the phenomenon is not a new one—"re-readings" of the Gospel, the result of theoretical speculations rather than authentic meditation on the word of God and a true commitment to the Gospel. They cause confusion by diverging from the central criteria of the faith of the Church, and some people have the temerity to pass them on, under the guise of catechesis, to the Christian communities. In some cases either Christ's divinity is passed over in silence, or some people in fact fall into forms of interpretation at variance with the Church's faith. Christ is said to be merely a "prophet", one who proclaimed God's Kingdom and love, but not the true Son of God, and therefore not the centre and object of the very Gospel message. In other cases people claim to show Jesus as politically committed, as one who fought against Roman oppression and the authorities, and also as one involved in the class struggle. This idea of Christ as a political figure, a revolutionary, as the subversive man from Nazareth, does not tally with the Church's catechesis. By confusing the insidious pretexts of Jesus' accusers with the—very different—attitude of Jesus himself, some people adduce as the cause of his death the outcome of a political conflict, and nothing is said of the Lord's will to deliver himself and of his consciousness of his redemptive mission. The Gospels clearly show that for Jesus anything that would alter his mission as the Servant of Yahweh was a temptation (cf. Mt 4:8; Lk 4:5). He does not accept the position of those who mixed the things of God with merely political attitudes (cf. Mt 22:21; Mk 12:17; Jn 18:36). He unequivocally rejects recourse to violence. He opens his message of conversion to everybody, without excluding the very Publicans. The perspective of his mission is much deeper. It consists in complete salvation through a transforming, peacemaking, pardoning and reconciling love. There is no doubt, moreover, that all this is very demanding for the attitude of the Christian who wishes truly to serve his least brethren, the poor, the needy, the emarginated; in a word, all those who in their lives reflect the sorrowing face of the Lord (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 8). I.5. Against such "re-readings" therefore, and against the perhaps brilliant but fragile and inconsistent hypotheses flowing from them, "Evangelization in the present and future of Latin America" cannot cease to affirm the Church's faith: Jesus Christ, the Word and the Son of God, becomes man in order to come close to man and to offer him, through the power of his mystery, salvation, the great gift of God (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19 and 27). This is the faith that has permeated your history and has formed the best of the values of your peoples and must go on animating, with every energy, the dynamism of their future. This is the faith that reveals the vocation to harmony and unity that must drive away the dangers of war in this continent of hope, in which the Church has been such a powerful factor of integration. This is the faith, finally, which the faithful people of Latin America through their religious practices and popular piety express with such vitality and in such varied ways. From this faith in Christ, from the bosom of the Church, we are able to serve men and women, our peoples, and to penetrate their culture with the Gospel, to transform hearts, and to make systems and structures more human. Any form of silence, disregard, mutilation or inadequate emphasis of the whole of the Mystery of Jesus Christ that diverges from the Church's faith cannot be the valid content of evangelization. "Today, under the pretext of a piety that is false, under the deceptive appearance of a preaching of the Gospel, some people are trying to deny the Lord Jesus", wrote a great Bishop in the midst of the hard crises of the fourth century. And he added: "I speak the truth, so that the cause of the confusion that we

are suffering may be known to all. I cannot keep silent" (Saint Hilary of Poitiers, *Contra Auxentium*, 1-4). Nor can you, the bishops of today, keep silent when this confusion occurs. This is what Pope Paul VI recommended in his opening discourse at the Medellin Conference: "Talk, speak out, preach, write. United in purpose and in programme, defend and explain the truths of the faith by taking a position on the present validity of the Gospel, on questions dealing with the life of the faithful and the defence of Christian conduct ... " (Pope Paul VI's, *Address to the Bishops of Latin America at the Medellin Conference*, 24 August 1968: AAS 60 [1968] 643). I too will not grow weary of repeating, as my duty of evangelizing the whole of mankind obliges me to do: "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development" (John Paul II, *Homily at the Solemn Inauguration of His Pontificate*, 22 October 1978). I.6. You are teachers of the Truth, and you are expected to proclaim unceasingly, but with special vigour at this moment, the truth concerning the mission of the Church, object of the Creed that we profess, and an indispensable and fundamental area for our fidelity. The Church was established by the Lord as a fellowship of life, love and truth (*Lumen Gentium*, 9) and as the body, the *Pleroma* and the sacrament of Christ, in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells (*Lumen Gentium*, 7). The Church is born of our response in faith to Christ. In fact, it is by sincere acceptance of the Good News that we believers gather together in Jesus' name in order to seek together the Kingdom, build it up and live it (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 13). The Church is "the assembly of those who in faith look to Jesus as the cause of salvation and the source of unity and peace" (*Lumen Gentium*, 9). But on the other hand we are born of the Church. She communicates to us the riches of life and grace entrusted to her. She generates us by baptism, feeds us with the sacraments and the word of God, prepares us for mission, leads us to God's plan, the reason for our existence as Christians. We are her children. With just pride we call her our Mother, repeating a title coming down from the centuries, from the earliest times (cf. Henri de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Eglise*). She must therefore be called upon, respected and served, for "one cannot have God for his Father, if he does not have the Church for his Mother" (Saint Cyprian, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 6, 8), one cannot love Christ without loving the Church which Christ loves (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 16), and "to the extent that one loves the Church of Christ, he possesses the Holy Spirit" (Saint Augustine, *In Ioannem tract.*, 32,8). Love for the Church must be composed of fidelity and trust. Stressing, in the first discourse of my pontificate, my resolve to be faithful to the Second Vatican Council and my desire to dedicate my greatest care to the ecclesiological area, I called on people to take once again into their hands the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* in order to "meditate with renewed and invigorating zeal on the nature and function of the Church, her way of being and acting... not merely in order that the vital communion in Christ of all who believe and hope in him should be accomplished, but also in order to contribute to bringing about a fuller and closer unity of the whole human family" (John Paul II, *First Radiomessage Urbi et Orbi*, 17 October 1978). Now, at this surpassing moment in the evangelization of Latin America, I repeat the call: "Assent to this document of the Council, seen in the light of Tradition and embodying the dogmatic formulae issued a century ago by the First Vatican Council, will be for us, pastors and faithful, a clear signpost and urgent incentive for walking—let us repeat—the paths of life and history" (*ibid.*). I.7. There is no guarantee of serious and vigorous evangelizing activity without a well-founded ecclesiology. The first reason is that evangelization is the essential mission, the distinctive vocation and the deepest identity of the Church, which has in turn been evangelized (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14-15; *Lumen Gentium*, 5). She has been sent by the Lord and in her turn sends evangelizers to preach "not their own selves or their personal ideas, but a Gospel of which neither she nor they are the absolute masters and owners, to dispose of it as they wish" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15). A second reason is that "evangelization is for no one an individual and isolated act; it is one that is deeply ecclesial (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 60), which is not subject to the discretionary power of individualistic criteria and perspectives but to that of communion with the Church and her pastors (cf. *ibid.*). How could there be authentic evangelizing, if there were no ready and sincere

reverence for the sacred Magisterium, in clear awareness that by submitting to it the People of God are not accepting the word of men but the true word of God? (cf. 1 Thess 2:13; *Lumen Gentium*, 12). "The 'objective' importance of this Magisterium must always be kept in mind and also safeguarded, because of the attacks being levelled nowadays in various quarters against some certain truths of the Catholic faith" (John Paul II, *First Radiomessage Urbi et Orbi*, 17 October 1978). I well know your attachment and availability to the See of Peter and the love that you have always shown it. From my heart I thank you in the Lord's name for the deeply ecclesial attitude implied in this and I wish you yourselves the consolation of counting on the loyal attachment of your faithful.

1.8. In the abundant documentation with which you have prepared this Conference, especially in the contributions of many Churches, a certain uneasiness is at times noticed with regard to the very interpretation of the nature and mission of the Church. Allusion is made, for instance, to the separation that some set up between the Church and the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is emptied of its full content and is understood in a rather secularist sense: it is interpreted as being reached not by faith and membership in the Church but by the mere changing of structures and social and political involvement, and as being present wherever there is a certain type of involvement and activity for justice. This is to forget that "the Church receives the mission to proclaim and to establish among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God. She becomes on earth the seed and beginning of that Kingdom" (*Lumen Gentium*, 5). In one of his beautiful catechetical instructions Pope John Paul I, speaking of the virtue of hope, warned that "it is wrong to state that political, economic and social liberation coincides with salvation in Jesus Christ, that the *Regnum Dei* is identified with the *Regnum hominis*". In some cases an attitude of mistrust is produced with regard to the "institutional" or "official" Church, which is considered as alienating, as opposed to another Church of the people, one "springing from the people" and taking concrete form in the poor. These positions could contain different, not always easily measured, degrees of familiar ideological forms of conditioning. The Council has reminded us what is the nature and mission of the Church. It has reminded us how her profound unity and permanent up-building are contributed to by those who are responsible for the ministry of the community and have to count on the collaboration of the whole People of God. In fact, "if the Gospel that we proclaim is seen to be rent by doctrinal disputes, ideological polarizations or mutual condemnations among Christians, at the mercy of the latter's differing views on Christ and the Church and even because of their different concepts of society and human institutions, how can those to whom we address our preaching fail to be disturbed, disoriented, even scandalized?" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 77).

1.9. The truth that we owe to man is, first and foremost, a truth about man. As witnesses of Jesus Christ we are heralds, spokesmen and servants of this truth. We cannot reduce it to the principles of a system of philosophy or to pure political activity. We cannot forget it or betray it. Perhaps one of the most obvious weaknesses of present-day civilization lies in an inadequate view of man. Without doubt, our age is the one in which man has been most written and spoken of, the age of the forms of humanism and the age of anthropocentrism. Nevertheless it is paradoxically also the age of man's deepest anxiety about his identity and his destiny, the age of man's abasement to previously unsuspected levels, the age of human values trampled on as never before. How is this paradox explained? We can say that it is the inexorable paradox of atheistic humanism. It is the drama of man being deprived of an essential dimension of his being, namely, his search for the infinite, and thus faced with having his being reduced in the worst way. The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* plumbs the depths of the problem when it says: "Only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Thanks to the Gospel, the Church has the truth about man. This truth is found in an anthropology that the Church never ceases to fathom more thoroughly and to communicate to others. The primordial affirmation of this anthropology is that man is God's image and cannot be reduced to a mere portion of nature or a nameless element in the human city (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 12 and 14). This is the meaning of what Saint Irenaeus wrote: "Man's glory is God, but the recipient of God's every action, of his wisdom and of his power is man"

(Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 20, 2-3). I made particular reference to this irreplaceable foundation of the Christian concept of man in my Christmas Message: "Christmas is the feast of man... Man is an object to be counted, something considered under the aspect of quantity ... Yet at the same time he is a single being, unique and unrepeatable ... somebody thought of and chosen from eternity, someone called and identified by his own name" (John Paul II, *Urbi et Orbi Message for Christmas 1978*, 1 [25 December 1978])

Faced with so many other forms of humanism that are often shut in by a strictly economic, biological or psychological view of man, the Church has the right and the duty to proclaim the Truth about man that she received from her teacher, Jesus Christ. God grant that no external compulsion may prevent her from doing so. God grant, above all, that she may not cease to do so through fear of doubt, through having let herself be contaminated by other forms of humanism, or through lack of confidence in her original message. When a Pastor of the Church proclaims clearly and unambiguously the Truth about man that was revealed by him who "knew what was in man" (Jn 2:25), he must therefore be encouraged by the certainty of doing the best service to the human being. This complete truth about the human being constitutes the foundation of the Church's social teaching and the basis also of true liberation. In the light of this truth, man is not a being subjected to economic or political processes; these processes are instead directed to man and are subjected to him. Without doubt, this truth about man that the Church teaches will go out strengthened from this meeting of Pastors. Your pastoral service of truth is completed by a like service of unity.

II.1 Unity among Bishops Unity will be, first of all, unity among yourselves, the Bishops. "We must guard and keep this unity," the Bishop Saint Cyprian wrote in a moment of grave threats to communion between the Bishops of his country, "especially we Bishops who preside over the Church, in order to give witness that the Episcopate is one and indivisible. Let no one mislead the faithful or alter the truth. The Episcopate is one" (*De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, 6-8). This unity of Bishops comes not from human calculations and strategy but from on high: from serving one Lord, from being animated by one Spirit, and from loving one and the same Church. It is unity resulting from the mission that Christ has entrusted to us, the mission that has been evolving on the Latin-American continent for almost half a millennium, and that you are carrying forward with stout hearts in times of profound changes as we approach the close of the second millennium of redemption and of the Church's activity. It is unity around the Gospel, the Body and Blood of the Lamb, and Peter living in his Successors; all of which are different signs, but all of them highly important signs, of the presence of Jesus among us. What an occasion you have, dear Brothers, for living this unity of Pastors in this Conference! In itself it is a sign and result of an already existing unity; but it is also an anticipation and beginning of a unity that must be more and more close and solid. Begin your work in a climate of brotherly unity: even now let this unity be a component of evangelization.

II.2. Unity with priests, religious and faithful Let unity among the Bishops be extended by unity with priests, religious and faithful. Priests are the immediate collaborators of the Bishops in their pastoral mission, and their mission would be compromised if close unity did not reign between priests and Bishops. Men and women religious are also especially important subjects of that unity. I well know the importance of their contribution to evangelization in Latin America in the past and in the present. They came here at the dawn of the discovery and accompanied the first steps of almost all the countries. They worked continuously here together with the diocesan clergy. In some countries more than half, in other countries the great majority, of the body of priests are religious. This would be enough to show how important it is here more than in other parts of the world for religious not only to accept but to seek loyally an unbreakable unity of aim and action with their Bishops. To the Bishops the Lord entrusted the mission of feeding the flock. To religious it belongs to blaze the trails for evangelization. It cannot be, it ought not to be, that the Bishops should lack the responsible and active, yet at the same time, docile and trusting collaboration of the religious, whose charism makes them ever more ready agents at the service of the Gospel. In this matter everybody in the ecclesial community has the duty of avoiding magisteria other than the Church's Magisterium, for they are ecclesially unacceptable and pastorally

sterile. The laity also are subjects of that unity, whether involved individually or joined in apostolic associations for the spreading of the Kingdom of God. It is they who have to consecrate the world to Christ in the midst of their daily duties and in their various family and professional tasks, in close union with and obedience to the lawful Pastors. In line with *Lumen Gentium*, we must safeguard the precious gift of ecclesial unity between all those who form part of the pilgrim People of God.

III.1. Those familiar with the Church's history know that in all periods there have been admirable Bishops deeply involved in advancing and valiantly defending the human dignity of those entrusted to them by the Lord. They have always been impelled to do so by their episcopal mission, because they considered human dignity a Gospel value that cannot be despised without greatly offending the Creator. This dignity is infringed on the individual level when due regard is not had for values such as freedom, the right to profess one's religion, physical and mental integrity, the right to essential goods, to life It is infringed on the social and political level when man cannot exercise his right of participation, or when he is subjected to unjust and unlawful coercion, or submitted to physical or mental torture, etc. I am not unaware of how many questions are being posed in this sphere today in Latin America. As Bishops, you cannot fail to concern yourselves with them. I know that you propose to carry out a serious reflection on the relationships and implications between evangelization and human advancement or liberation, taking into consideration, in such a vast and important field, what is specific about the Church's presence. Here is where we find, brought concretely into practice, the themes we have touched upon in speaking of the truth concerning Christ, the Church and man.

III.2. If the Church makes herself present in the defence of, or in the advancement of, man, she does so in line with her mission, which, although it is religious and not social or political, cannot fail to consider man in the entirety of his being. The Lord outlined in the parable of the Good Samaritan the model of attention to all human needs (cf. Lk 10:29 ff.), and he said that in the final analysis he will identify himself with the disinherited—the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, the lonely—who have been given a helping hand (Mt 25:31 ff). The Church has learned in these and other pages of the Gospel (cf. Mk 6:35-44) that her evangelizing mission has, as an essential part, action for justice and the tasks of the advancement of man (cf. *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops*, October 1971), and that between evangelization and human advancement there are very strong links of the orders of anthropology, theology and love (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 31); so that "evangelization would not be complete if it did not take into account the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 29). Let us also keep in mind that the Church's action in earthly matters such as human advancement, development, justice, the rights of the individual, is always intended to be at the service of man; and of man as she sees him in the Christian vision of the anthropology that she adopts. She therefore does not need to have recourse to ideological systems in order to love, defend and collaborate in the liberation of man: at the centre of the message of which she is the depositary and herald she finds inspiration for acting in favour of brotherhood, justice, and peace, against all forms of domination, slavery, discrimination, violence, attacks on religious liberty and aggression against man, and whatever attacks life (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 26, 27 and 29).

III.3. It is therefore not through opportunism nor thirst for novelty that the Church, "the expert in humanity" (Paul VI, *Address to the United Nations*, 4 October 1965) defends human rights. It is through a true *evangelical commitment*, which, as happened with Christ, is a commitment to the most needy. In fidelity to this commitment, the Church wishes to stay free with regard to the competing systems, in order to opt only for man. Whatever the miseries or sufferings that afflict man, it is not through violence, the interplay of power and political systems, but through the truth concerning man, that he journeys towards a better future.

III.4. Hence the Church's constant preoccupation with the delicate question of property. A proof of this is the writings of the Fathers of the Church through the first thousand years of Christianity (cf. St Ambrose, *De Nabuthae*, c. 12, n. 53: *PL* 14,747). It is clearly shown by the vigorous teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas, repeated so many times. In our own times, the Church has appealed to the same principles in such far-reaching documents as the social Encyclicals of the recent Popes. With

special force and profundity, Pope Paul VI spoke of this subject in his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (cf. nos. 23-24; cf. also John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 106). This voice of the Church, echoing the voice of human conscience, and which did not cease to make itself heard down the centuries in the midst of the most varied social and cultural systems and conditions, deserves and needs to be heard in our time also, when the growing wealth of a few parallels the growing poverty of the masses. It is then that the Church's teaching, according to which all private property involves a social obligation, acquires an urgent character. With respect to this teaching, the Church has a mission to carry out; she must preach, educate individuals and collectivities, form public opinion, and offer orientations to the leaders of the peoples. In this way she will be working in favour of society, within which this Christian and evangelical principle will finally bear the fruit of a more just and equitable distribution of goods, not only within each nation but also in the world in general, ensuring that the stronger countries do not use their power to the detriment of the weaker ones. Those who bear responsibility for the public life of the States and nations will have to understand that internal peace and international peace can only be ensured if a social and economic system based on justice flourishes. Christ did not remain indifferent in the face of this vast and demanding imperative of social morality. Nor could the Church. In the spirit of the Church, which is the spirit of Christ, and relying upon her ample and solid doctrine, let us return to work in this field. It must be emphasised here once more that the Church's solicitude looks to the whole man. For this reason, for an economic system to be just it is an indispensable condition that it should favour the development and diffusion of public education and culture. The more just the economy, the deeper will be the conscience of culture. This is very much in line with what the Council stated: that to attain a life worthy of man, it is not possible to limit oneself to *having more*; one must aspire to *being more* (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 35). Therefore, Brothers, drink at these authentic fountains. Speak with the language of the Council, of John XXIII, of Paul VI: it is the language of the experience, of the suffering, of the hope of modern humanity. When Paul VI declared that development is "the new name of peace" (*Populorum Progressio*, 76) he had in mind all the links of interdependence that exist not within the nations but also outside them, on the world level. He took into consideration the mechanisms that, because they happen to be imbued not with authentic humanism but with materialism, produce on the international level rich people ever more rich at the expense of poor people ever more poor. There is no economic rule capable of changing these mechanisms by itself. It is necessary, in international life, to call upon ethical principles, the demands of justice, the primary commandment which is that of love. Primacy must be given to what is moral, to what is spiritual, to what springs from the full truth concerning man. I have wished to manifest to you these reflections which I consider very important, although they must not distract you from the central theme of the Conference: we shall reach man, we shall reach justice, through evangelization.

III.5. In the face of what has been said hitherto, the Church sees with deep sorrow "the sometimes massive increase of human rights violations in all parts of society and of the world ... Who can deny that today individual persons and civil powers violate basic rights of the human person with impunity: rights such as the right to be born, right to life, the right to responsible procreation, to work, to peace, to freedom and social justice, the right to participate in the decisions that affect people and nations? And what can be said when we face the various forms of collective violence like discrimination against individuals and groups, the use of physical and psychological torture perpetrated against prisoners or political dissenters? The list grows when we turn to the instances of the abduction of persons for political reasons and look at the acts of kidnapping for material gain which attack so dramatically family life the social fabric" (John Paul II, *Message to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization*, 2 December 1978). We cry out once more: Respect man! He is the image of God! Evangelize, so that this may become a reality; so that the Lord may transform hearts and humanize the political and economic systems, with man's responsible commitment as the starting point!

III.6. Pastoral commitment in this field must be encouraged through a correct Christian idea of liberation. The Church feels the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, the

duty to help this liberation become firmly established (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 30); but she also feels the corresponding duty to proclaim liberation in its integral and profound meaning, as Jesus proclaimed and realized it (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 31). "Liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is, above all, liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by him" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 9). Liberation made up of reconciliation and forgiveness. Liberation springing from the reality of being children of God, whom we are able to call Abba, Father (Rom. 8: 15); a reality which makes us recognize in every man a brother of ours, capable of being transformed in his heart through God's mercy. Liberation that, with the energy of love, urges us towards fellowship, the summit and fullness of which we find in the Lord. Liberation as the overcoming of the various forms of slavery and man-made idols, and as the growth of the new man. Liberation that in the framework of the Church's proper mission is not reduced to the simple and narrow economic, political, social or cultural dimension, and is not sacrificed to the demands of any strategy, practice or short-term solution (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 33). To safeguard the originality of Christian liberation and the energies that it is capable of releasing, one must at all costs avoid any form of curtailment or ambiguity, as Pope Paul VI asked: "The Church would lose her fundamental meaning. Her message of liberation would no longer have any originality and would easily be open to monopolization and manipulation by ideological systems and political parties" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 32). There are many signs that help to distinguish when the liberation in question is Christian and when on the other hand it is based rather on ideologies that rob it of consistency with an evangelical view of man, of things and of events (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 35). They are signs drawn from the content of what the evangelizers proclaim or from the concrete attitudes that they adopt. At the level of content, one must see what is their fidelity to the word of God, to the Church's living Tradition and to her Magisterium. As for attitudes, one must consider what sense of communion they have with the Bishops, in the first place, and with the other sectors of the People of God; what contribution they make to the real building up of the community; in what form they lovingly show care for the poor, the sick, the dispossessed, the neglected and the oppressed, and in what way they find in them the image of the poor and suffering Jesus, and strive to relieve their need and serve Christ in them (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 8). Let us not deceive ourselves: the humble and simple faithful, as though by an evangelical instinct, spontaneously sense when the Gospel is served in the Church and when it is emptied of its content and is stifled with other interests. As you see, the series of observations made by *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on the theme of liberation retains all its validity.

III.7. What we have already recalled constitutes a rich and complex heritage, which *Evangelii Nuntiandi* calls the Social Doctrine or Social Teaching of the Church (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 38). This teaching comes into being, in the light of the Word of God and the authentic Magisterium, from the presence of Christians in the midst of the changing situations of the world, in contact with the challenges that result from those situations. This social doctrine involves therefore both principles for reflection and also norms for judgment and guidelines for action (cf. Paul, VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 4). Placing responsible confidence in this social doctrine—even though some people seek to sow doubts and lack of confidence in it—to give it serious study, to try to apply it, to teach it, to be faithful to it: all this is the guarantee, in a member of the Church, of his commitment in the delicate and demanding social tasks, and of his efforts in favour of the liberation or advancement of his brothers and sisters. Allow me therefore to recommend to your special pastoral attention the urgent need to make your faithful people aware of this social doctrine of the Church. Particular care must be given to forming a social conscience at all levels and in all sectors. When injustices grow worse and the distance between rich and poor increases distressingly, the social doctrine, in a form which is creative and open to the broad fields of the Church's presence, must be a valuable instrument for formation and action. This holds good particularly for the laity: "it is to the laity, though not exclusively to them, that secular duties and activity properly belong" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 43). It is necessary to avoid supplanting the laity and to study seriously just when certain forms of supplying for them retain their reason for existence. Is it not the laity who are called, by reason of their

vocation in the Church, to make their contribution in the political and economic dimensions, and to be effectively present in the safe-guarding and advancement of human rights? You are going to consider many pastoral themes of great significance. Time prevents me from mentioning them. Some I have referred to or will do so in the meetings with the priests, religious, seminarians and lay people.

IV.1. The themes that I indicate here have, for different reasons, great importance. You will not fail to consider them, among the many others that your pastoral farsightedness will indicate to you.

a) *The Family*: Make every effort to ensure that there is pastoral care for the family. Attend to this field of such primary importance in the certainty that evangelization in the future depends largely on the "domestic Church". It is the school of love, of the knowledge of God, of respect for life and for human dignity. The importance of this pastoral care is in proportion to the threats aimed at the family. Think of the campaigns in favour of divorce, of the use of contraceptive practices, and of abortion, which destroy society.

b) *Priestly and religious vocations*: In the majority of your countries, in spite of an encouraging awakening of vocations, the lack of vocations is a grave and chronic problem. There is a huge disproportion between the growing population and the number of agents of evangelization. This is of great importance to the Christian community. Every community has to obtain its vocations, as a sign of its vitality and maturity. Intense pastoral activity must be reactivated, starting with the Christian vocation in general and from enthusiastic pastoral care for youth, so as to give the Church the ministers she needs. Lay vocations, although they are so indispensable, cannot compensate for them. Furthermore, one of the proofs of the laity's commitment is an abundance of vocations to the consecrated life.

c) *Youth*: How much hope the Church places in youth! How much energy needed by the Church abounds in youth, in Latin America! How close we Pastors must be to the young, so that Christ and the Church and love of the brethren may penetrate deeply into their hearts.

At the end of this message I cannot fail to invoke once again the protection of the Mother of God upon your persons and your work during these days. The fact that this meeting of ours is taking place in the spiritual presence of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is venerated in Mexico and in all the other countries as the Mother of the Church in Latin America, is for me a cause for joy and a source of hope. May she, the "Star of evangelization", be your guide in your future reflections and decisions. May she obtain for you from her Divine Son:— the boldness of prophets and the evangelical prudence of Pastors,— the clear-sightedness of teachers and the reliability of guides and directors,— courage as witnesses, and the calmness, patience and gentleness of fathers.

May the Lord bless your labours. You are accompanied by select representatives: priests, deacons, men and women religious, lay people, experts and observers, whose collaboration will be very useful to you. The whole Church has its eyes on you, with confidence and hope. You intend to respond to these expectations with full fidelity to Christ, the Church, and humanity. The future is in God's hands, but in a certain way God places that future with new evangelizing momentum in your hands too. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28: 19).

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