



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
MEXICO AND THE BAHAMAS

MEETING WITH THE WORKERS IN MONTERREY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 31 January 1979

Peasants, Clerks and, above all, Workers of Monterrey,

Thank you for all that I have been able to hear. Thank you for all that I can see. Many thanks to one and all.

I thank you heartily for this warm and cordial welcome to your industrial city of Monterrey. Your existence revolves around it, and your daily work to earn a living for yourselves and for your children takes place in it. It is also a witness to your sorrows and to your aspirations. It is your work, the work of your hands and your intelligence; and in this sense it is a symbol of your pride as workers, and a sign of hope for new progress and for an increasingly human life.

I am happy to be among you as your friend and brother; as a fellow worker in this city of Monterrey, which is for Mexico something similar to what Nueva Hutta means in my distant and beloved Krakow. I do not forget the difficult years of the World War in which I myself had direct experience of physical work such as yours, of daily toil and its dependence, its heaviness and monotony. I shared the necessities of the workers, their rightful demands and their legitimate aspirations. I know very well the need that work should not alienate and frustrate, but should correspond to man's higher dignity.

I can testify to one thing: in the most difficult moments, the Polish people found in their faith in

God, in their confidence in the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, in the ecclesial community united around its pastors, a light greater than the darkness, and an unshakeable hope.

I know that I am speaking to workers who are aware of their state as Christians, and who want to live this state with all its dynamism and consequences.

For this reason, the Pope wishes to make some reflections to you which concern your dignity as men and as sons of God. From this double source will spring the light to give shape to your personal and social existence. In fact, if the spirit of Jesus Christ dwells in us, we must feel priority concern for those who do not have enough food, clothes, housing, and those who do not have access to cultural goods. Since work is the source of one's livelihood, collaboration with God in improving nature, a service for brothers which ennoble man, Christians cannot fail to take an interest in the problem of the unemployment of so many men and women, above all, young people and heads of households, whom unemployment leads to discouragement and despair.

Those who have the fortune to work, wish to do so in more human and secure conditions, to participate more justly in the fruit of the common effort as regards wages, social insurances, and the possibilities of cultural and spiritual development. They want to be treated as free and responsible men, called to take part in the decisions that concern their lives and their future. It is their fundamental right freely to create organizations to defend and promote their own interests and to contribute responsibly to the common good. The task is an immense and complex one. It is complicated today by the world economic crisis, the disorder of unjust commercial and financial circles, the rapid exhaustion of some resources, and the risks of irreversible contamination of the biophysical environment.

To take a real part in the united effort of humanity, the Latin-American peoples rightly demand that there should be returned to them their rightful responsibility over the goods that nature has bestowed on them, and general conditions that will enable them to carry out a development in conformity with their own spirit, with the participation of all the human groups that make them up. Bold and renewing innovations are necessary in order to overcome the serious injustices inherited from the past and to meet the challenge of the prodigious transformations of mankind.

The new realities call for new attitudes at all levels, national and international, and on the part of all social groups and of all systems. Unilateral denunciation of the other and the easy pretext of alien ideologies, whatever they may be, are more and more ridiculous excuses.

If mankind wishes to control an evolution that is slipping from its hand, if it wants to avoid the materialistic temptation that is gaining ground in a desperate flight forwards, if it wants to ensure true development for men and for peoples, it must radically revise the concepts of progress which, under different names, have let spiritual values waste away.

The Church offers her aid. She does not fear forceful denunciation of attacks on human dignity. But she keeps her essential energies to help men and human groups, contractors and workers, in order that they may become aware of the immense reserves of goodness they have within them, which they have already caused to yield fruit in their history, and which must give new fruit today.

The working-class movement, to which the Church and Christians have made an original and different contribution, particularly in this continent, claims its rightful responsibility in the construction of a new world order. It has the common aspirations of freedom and dignity. It has developed the values of solidarity, brotherhood and friendship. In the experience of sharing, it has brought forth original forms of organizations, improving substantially the fate of many workers, and contributing, although people do not always want to admit this, to making a mark in the industrial world. Relying on this past it will have to commit itself to looking for new ways, it will have to renew itself and contribute even more decisively to constructing the Latin America of the future.

It is ten years since my predecessor Paul VI went to Colombia. He wished to bring to the peoples of Latin America the consolation of the Common Father. He wished to open to the Universal Church the riches of the Churches of this continent. Some years afterwards, celebrating the eightieth anniversary of the first social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, he wrote: "The social teaching of the Church, with all its dynamism, accompanies men in their quest. Even if it does not intervene to give authenticity to a determined structure or to propose a prefabricated model, it does not confine itself just to recalling some general principles. It evolves by means of a reflection that matures in contact with the changing situations of this world, under the impetus of the Gospel as a source of renewal, since its message is accepted in its totality and in its requirements. It develops with the sensitivity characteristic of the Church, marked by a disinterested will for service and attention to the poorest. It is nourished, finally, by a rich experience of many centuries, which enables it to assume in the continuity of its permanent concerns the bold creating innovation that the present situation of the world requires." They are the words of Paul VI.

Dear Friends: in obedience to these principles the Church wishes to draw attention today to a serious phenomenon that is very topical: the problem of migrants. We cannot close our eyes to the situation of millions of men who, in their search for work and for livelihood have to leave their country and often their family. They have to cope with the difficulties of a new environment that is not always pleasant and welcoming, an unknown language, and general conditions that plunge them into solitude, and sometimes, social exclusion for themselves and for their wives and children; even when advantage is not taken of these circumstances to offer lower wages, to reduce social insurance and welfare benefits, and to give housing conditions unworthy of a human being. There are occasions on which the principle put into practice is that of obtaining the maximum performance from the emigrant worker without looking to the person. Faced with this phenomenon, the Church continues to proclaim that the principle to follow in this, as in other fields, is not that of allowing economic, social, and political factors to prevail over man, but, on the contrary, for the dignity of the human person to be put above everything else, and for the rest to be

conditioned by it.

We would create a world unpleasant to live in if we aimed only at having more, and did not think first and foremost of the person of the worker, his conditions as a human being and a son of God who is called to an eternal vocation, if we did not think of helping him to be more.

Certainly, on the other side, the worker has obligations to carry out loyally, since otherwise there cannot be a just social order.

I make a forceful appeal to the public authorities, contractors and workers, to reflect on these principles and to deduce the consequent lines of action. It must also be recognized that there is no lack of examples of those who put into practice, in an exemplary way, these principles of the social doctrine of the Church. I rejoice at this. I praise those in charge, and encourage others to imitate their example. This will be to the advantage of the cause of harmony and brotherhood among social groups and nations. It will be to the advantage even of the economy. Above all, it will be to the advantage of the cause of humanity.

But let us not stop just at man. The Pope brings you yet another message. It is a message for you, workers of Mexico and Latin America: Open up to God. God loves you. Christ loves you. The Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, loves you. The Church and the Pope love you and call upon you to follow the irresistible force of love, which can overcome everything and can build-up. When nearly two thousand years ago God sent us his Son, he did not wait until human efforts had eliminated all types of injustice. Jesus Christ came to share our human condition, with its suffering, its difficulties, its death. Before transforming daily existence, he managed to speak to the hearts of the poor, to free them from sin, to open their eyes to a horizon of light and to fill them with joy and hope. Jesus Christ, who is present in your churches, in your families, in your hearts, in your entire lives, does the same today. Open all doors to him. Let us all, united in these moments, joyfully celebrate the love of Jesus and his Mother. Let no one feel excluded, in particular the most underprivileged, since this joy comes from Jesus Christ and is not offensive for any sorrow. It has the savour and the warmth of the friendship offered to us by him who suffered more than we, who died on the cross for us, who prepares an eternal dwelling for us by his side, and who already in this life proclaims and affirms our dignity as men, as sons of God.

I am with worker friends and I would like to stay with you far longer. But I must conclude. To you present here, to your companions in Mexico, and to all your fellow-countrymen working outside their native country, to all the workers of Latin America, I leave my greeting as a friend, my blessing and my memory.

My brotherly embrace for all of you, for your children and the members of your family.

