

# CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

## INSTRUCTIONS OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM AND LIBERATION

Printed and distributed by the  
Catholic Hospital Association of India  
to all those who are interested in  
people's freedom and liberation.

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INSTRUCTION ON  
CHRISTIAN FREEDOM AND LIBERATION

*"The truth makes us free"*

INTRODUCTION

**The yearning  
for Liberation**

1. Awareness of man's freedom and dignity, together with the affirmation of the inalienable rights of individuals and peoples, is one of the major characteristics of our time. But freedom demands conditions of an economic, social, political and cultural kind which make possible its full exercise. A clear perception of the obstacles which hinder its development and which offend human dignity is at the source of the powerful aspirations to liberation which are at work in our world.

The Church of Christ makes these aspirations her own, while exercising discernment in the light of the Gospel which is by its very nature a message of freedom and liberation. Indeed, on both the theoretical and practical levels, these aspirations sometimes assume expressions which are not always in conformity with the truth concerning man as it is manifested in the light of his creation and redemption. For this reason the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has considered it necessary to draw attention to "deviations, or risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living".<sup>1</sup> Far from being outmoded, these warnings appear ever more timely and relevant.

<sup>1</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* (*Libertatis Nuntius*), Introduction: AAS 76 (1984), pp. 867-877.

**Purpose  
of the Instruction**

2. The Instruction "*Libertatis Nuntius*" on  
*Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*  
stated the intention of the Congregation to

publish a second document which would highlight the main elements of the Christian doctrine on freedom and liberation. The present Instruction responds to that intention. Between the two documents there exists an organic relationship. They are to be read in the light of each other.

With regard to their theme, which is at the heart of the Gospel message, the Church's Magisterium has expressed itself on many occasions.<sup>2</sup> The present document limits itself to indicating its principal *theoretical* and *practical* aspects. As regards applications to different local situations, it is for the local Churches, in communion with one another and with the See of Peter, to make direct provision for them.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of freedom and liberation has an obvious ecumenical dimension. It belongs in fact to the traditional patrimony of the Churches and ecclesial communities. Thus the present document can assist the testimony and action of all Christ's disciples, called to respond to the great challenges of our times.

**The truth  
that makes us free**

3. The words of Jesus: "The truth will make you free" (*Jn* 8:32) must enlighten and guide all theological reflection and all pastoral decisions in this area.

This truth which comes from God has its centre in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.<sup>4</sup> From him, who is "the way, and the truth,

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* and the Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* of the Second Vatican Council; the Encyclicals *Mater et Magistra*, *Pacem in Terris*, *Populorum Progressio*, *Redemptor Hominis* and *Laborem Exercens*; The Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*; the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*. Pope John Paul II dealt with this theme in his *Opening Address to the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Bishops at Puebla: AAS* 71 (1979), pp. 187-205. He has returned to it on numerous other occasions. The theme has also been dealt with at the Synod of Bishops in 1971 and 1974. The Latin-American Episcopal Conferences have made it the immediate object of their reflections. It has also attracted the attention of other Episcopal Conferences, as for example the French: *Libération des hommes et salut en Jésus-Christ*, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 1-4: *AAS* 63 (1971), pp. 401-404.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Jn* 4, 42; 1 *Jn* 4, 14.

and the life" (*Jn* 14:6), the Church receives all that she has to offer to mankind. Through the mystery of the Incarnate Word and Redeemer of the world, she possesses the truth regarding the Father and his love for us, and also the truth concerning man and his freedom.

Through his Cross and Resurrection, Christ has brought about our Redemption, which is liberation in the strongest sense of the word, since it has freed us from the most radical evil, namely sin and the power of death. When the Church, taught by her Lord, raises to the Father her prayer: "Deliver us from evil", she asks that the mystery of salvation may act with power in our daily lives. The Church knows that the redeeming Cross is truly the source of light and life and the centre of history. The charity which burns in her impels her to proclaim the Good News and to distribute its life-giving fruits through the sacraments. It is from Christ the Redeemer that her thought and action originate when, as she contemplates the tragedies affecting the world, she reflects on the meaning of liberation and true freedom and on the paths leading to them.

Truth beginning with the truth about redemption, which is at the heart of the mystery of faith, is thus the root and the rule of freedom, the foundation and the measure of all liberating action.

**Truth,  
the condition  
for freedom**

4. Man's moral conscience is under an obligation to be open to the fullness of truth; he must seek it out and readily accept it when

it presents itself to him.

According to the command of Christ the Lord,<sup>5</sup> the truth of the Gospel must be presented to all people, and they have a right to have it presented to them. Its proclamation, in the power of the Spirit, includes full respect for the freedom of each individual and the exclusion of every form of constraint or pressure.<sup>6</sup>

The Holy Spirit guides the Church and the disciples of Jesus Christ "into the full truth" (*Jn* 16:13). The Spirit directs the course of the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Mt* 28, 18-20; *Mk* 16, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 10.



centuries and "renews the face of the earth" (*Ps* 104:30). It is he who is present in the maturing of a more respectful awareness of the dignity of the human person.<sup>7</sup> The Holy Spirit is at the root of courage, boldness and heroism: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (*2 Cor* 3:17).

## CHAPTER I

### THE STATE OF FREEDOM IN THE WORLD TODAY

#### *I. Achievements and dangers of the modern liberation process*

##### **The heritage of Christianity**

5. By revealing to man his condition as a free person called to enter into communion with God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has evoked an awareness of the hitherto unsuspected depths of human freedom.

Thus the quest for freedom and the aspiration to liberation, which are among the principal signs of the times in the modern world, have their first source in the Christian heritage. This remains true even in places where they assume erroneous forms and even oppose the Christian view of man and his destiny. Without this reference to the Gospel, the history of the recent centuries in the West cannot be understood.

##### **The modern age**

6. Thus it is that from the dawn of modern times, at the Renaissance, it was thought that by a return to antiquity in philosophy and through the natural sciences man would be able to gain freedom of thought and action, thanks to his knowledge and control of the laws of nature.

<sup>7</sup> PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 78-80: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 70-75; *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, 12: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 278-281.

Luther, for his part, basing himself on his reading of Saint Paul, sought to renew the struggle for freedom from the yoke of the Law, which he saw as represented by the Church of his time.

But it was above all in the Age of the Enlightenment and at the French Revolution that the call to freedom rang out with full force. Since that time, many have regarded future history as an irresistible process of liberation inevitably leading to an age in which man, totally free at last, will enjoy happiness on this earth.

**Toward  
the mastery  
of nature**

7. Within the perspective of such an ideology of progress, man sought to become master of nature. The servitude which he had experienced up to that point was based on ignorance and prejudice. By wresting from nature its secrets, man would subject it to his own service. The conquest of freedom thus constituted the goal pursued through the development of science and technology. The efforts expended have led to remarkable successes. While man is not immune from natural disasters, many natural dangers have been removed. A growing number of individuals is ensured adequate nourishment. New means of transport and trade facilitate the exchange of food resources, raw materials, labour and technical skills, so that a life of dignity with freedom from poverty can be reasonably envisaged for mankind.

**Social and political  
achievements**

8. The modern liberation movement had set itself a political and social objective. It was to put an end to the domination of man by man and to promote the equality and brotherhood of all. It cannot be denied that in this sphere, too, positive results have been obtained. Legal slavery and bondage have been abolished. The right of all to share in the benefits of culture has made significant progress. In many countries the law recognizes the equality of men and women, the participation of all citizens in political life, and equal rights for all. Racism is rejected as contrary to law and justice. The formulation of human rights implies a clearer awareness of the dignity of all human

beings. By comparison with previous systems of domination, the advances of freedom and equality in many societies are undeniable.

**Freedom  
of thought  
and of decision**

9. Finally and above all, the modern liberation movement was supposed to bring man inner freedom, in the form of freedom of thought and freedom of decision. It sought to free man from superstition and atavistic fears, regarded as so many obstacles to his development. It proposed to give man the courage and boldness to use his reason without being held back by fear before the frontiers of the unknown. Thus, notably in the historical and human sciences, there developed a new notion of man, professedly to help him gain a better self-understanding in matters concerning his personal growth or the fundamental conditions for the formation of the community.

**Ambiguities  
in the modern process  
of liberation**

10. With regard to the conquest of nature, or social and political life, or man's self-mastery on both the individual and collective level, anyone can see that the progress achieved is far from fulfilling the original ambitions. It is also obvious that new dangers, new forms of servitude and new terrors have arisen at the very time that the modern liberation movement was spreading. This is a sign that serious ambiguities concerning the very meaning of freedom have from the very beginning plagued this movement from within.

**Man threatened  
by his domination  
of nature**

11. So it is that the more man freed himself from the dangers of nature, the more he experienced a growing fear confronting him. As technology gains an ever greater control of nature, it threatens to destroy the very foundations of our future in such a way that mankind living today becomes the enemy of the generations to come. By using blind power to subjugate the forces of nature, are we not on the way to destroying the freedom of the men and women of tomorrow? What forces can protect man from the slavery of his own domination? A

wholly new capacity for freedom and liberation, demanding an entirely renewed process of liberation, becomes necessary.

**Dangers  
of technological  
power**

12. The liberating force of scientific knowledge is objectively expressed in the great achievements of technology. Whoever possesses technology has power over the earth and men. As a result of this, hitherto unknown forms of inequality have arisen between those who possess knowledge and those who are simple users of technology. The new technological power is linked to economic power and leads to a concentration of it. Thus, within nations and between nations, relationships of dependence have grown up which within the last twenty years have been the occasion for a new claim to liberation. How can the power of technology be prevented from becoming a power of oppression over human groups or entire peoples?

**Individualism  
and collectivism**

13. In the field of social and political achievements, one of the fundamental ambiguities of the affirmation of freedom in the age of the Enlightenment had to do with the concept of the subject of this freedom as an individual who is fully self-sufficient and whose finality is the satisfaction of his own interests in the enjoyment of earthly goods. The individualistic ideology inspired by this concept of man favoured the unequal distribution of wealth at the beginning of the industrial era to the point that workers found themselves excluded from access to the essential goods which they had helped to produce and to which they had a right. Hence the birth of powerful liberation movements from the poverty caused by industrial society.

Certain Christians, both lay persons and pastors, have not failed to fight for a just recognition of the legitimate rights of workers. On many occasions the Magisterium of the Church has raised its voice in support of this cause.

But more often than not the just demands of the worker movement have led to new forms of servitude, being inspired by concepts which ignored the transcendental vocation of the human person and attributed



to man a purely earthly destiny. These demands have sometimes been directed towards collectivist goals, which have then given rise to injustices just as grave as the ones which they were meant to eliminate.

**New forms  
of oppression**

14. Thus it is that our age has seen the birth of totalitarian systems and forms of tyranny which would not have been possible in the time before the technological leap forward. On the one hand, technical expertise has been applied to acts of genocide. On the other, various minorities try to hold in thrall whole nations by the practice of terrorism. Today control can penetrate into the innermost life of individuals, and even the forms of dependence created by the early-warning systems can represent potential threats of oppression.

A false liberation from the constraints of society is sought in recourse to drugs which have led many young people from all over the world to the point of self-destruction and brought whole families to sorrow and anguish.

**Danger  
of total destruction**

15. The recognition of a juridical order as a guarantee of relationships within the great family of peoples is growing weaker and weaker. When confidence in the law no longer seems to offer sufficient protection, security and peace are sought in mutual threats, which become a danger for all humanity. The forces which ought to serve the development of freedom serve instead the increase of threats. The weapons of death drawn up against each other today are capable of destroying all human life on earth.

**New relationships  
of inequality**

16. New relationships of inequality and oppression have been established between the nations endowed with power and those without it. The pursuit of one's own interest seems to be the rule for international relations, without the common good of humanity being taken into consideration.

The internal balance of the poor nations is upset by the importation

of arms, which introduces among them a divisive element leading to the domination of one group over another. What powers could eliminate systematic recourse to arms and restore authority to law?

**Emancipation  
of young nations**

17. It is in the context of the inequality of power relationships that there have appeared movements for the emancipation of young nations, generally the poor ones, until recently subjected to colonial domination. But too often the people are frustrated in their hard-won independence by unscrupulous regimes or tyrannies which scoff at human rights with impunity. The people thus reduced to powerlessness merely have a change of masters.

It remains true that one of the major phenomena of our time, of continental proportions, is the awakening of the consciousness of people who, bent beneath the weight of age-old poverty, aspire to a life in dignity and justice and are prepared to fight for their freedom.

**Morality and God:  
obstacles to liberation?**

18. With reference to the modern liberation movement within man himself, it has to be stated that the effort to free thought and will from their limits has led some to consider that morality as such constitutes an irrational limit. It is for man, now resolved to become his own master, to go beyond it.

For many more, it is God himself who is the specific alienation of man. There is said to be a radical incompatibility between the affirmation of God and of human freedom. By rejecting belief in God, they say, man will become truly free.

**Some agonizing  
questions**

19. Here is the root of the tragedies accompanying the modern history of freedom. Why does this history, in spite of great achievements, which also remain always fragile, experience frequent relapses into alienation and see the appearance of new forms of slavery? Why do liberation movements which had roused great hopes result in

regimes for which the citizens' freedom,<sup>8</sup> beginning with the first of these freedoms which is religious freedom,<sup>9</sup> becomes enemy number one?

When man wishes to free himself from the moral law and become independent of God, far from gaining his freedom he destroys it. Escaping the measuring rod of truth, he falls prey to the arbitrary; fraternal relations between people are abolished and give place to terror, hatred and fear.

Because it has been contaminated by deadly errors about man's condition and his freedom, the deeply-rooted modern liberation movement remains ambiguous. It is laden both with promises of true freedom and threats of deadly forms of bondage.

## II. *Freedom in the experience of the People of God*

### **Church and freedom**

20. It is because of her awareness of this deadly ambiguity that through her Magisterium the Church has raised her voice over the centuries to warn against aberrations that could easily bring enthusiasm for liberation to a bitter disillusionment. She has often been misunderstood in so doing. With the passage of time however it is possible to do greater justice to the Church's point of view.

It is in the name of the truth about man, created in the image of God, that the Church has intervened.<sup>10</sup> Yet she is accused of thereby setting herself up as an obstacle on the path to liberation. Her hierarchical constitution is said to be opposed to equality, her Magisterium to be opposed to freedom of thought. It is true that there have been errors of judgment and serious omissions for which Christians have been responsible in the course of the centuries;<sup>11</sup> but these objections disregard the true nature of things. The diversity of charisms in the

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, XI, 10: AAS 76 (1984), pp. 905-906.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, 17: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 296-297; Discourse of 10 March 1984 to the Fifth Conference of Jurists: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 11 March 1984, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, XI, 5: AAS 76 (1984), p. 904; JOHN PAUL II, Opening Address at *Euchar*: AAS 71 (1979), p. 189.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 36.

people of God, which are charisms of service, is not opposed to the equal dignity of persons and to their common vocation to holiness.

Freedom of thought, as a necessary condition for seeking the truth in all the fields of human knowledge, does not mean that human reason must cease to function in the light of the Revelation which Christ entrusted to his Church. By opening itself to divine truth, created reason experiences a blossoming and a perfection which are an eminent form of freedom. Moreover, the Second Vatican Council has recognized fully the legitimate autonomy of the sciences,<sup>12</sup> as well as of activities of a political nature.<sup>13</sup>

**The freedom  
of the little  
ones and the poor**

21. One of the principal errors that has seriously burdened the process of liberation since the Age of the Enlightenment comes from the widely held conviction that it is the progress achieved in the fields of the sciences, technology and economics which should serve as a basis for achieving freedom. This was a misunderstanding of the depths of freedom and its needs.

The reality of the depth of freedom has always been known to the Church, above all through the lives of a multitude of the faithful, especially among the little ones and the poor. In their faith, these latter know that they are the object of God's infinite love. Each of them can say: "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (*Gal* 2:20b). Such is the dignity which none of the powerful can take away from them; such is the liberating joy present in them. They know that to them too are addressed Jesus' words: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (*Jn* 15:15). This sharing in the knowledge of God is their emancipation from the dominating claims of the learned: "You all know ... and you have no need that any one should teach you" (*1 Jn* 2:20b, 27b). They are also aware

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, 41.



of sharing in the highest knowledge to which humanity is called.<sup>14</sup> They know that they are loved by God, the same as all other people and more than all other people. They thus live in the freedom which flows from truth and love.

**Resources  
of popular piety**

22. The same sense of faith, possessed by the people of God in its hope-filled devotion to the Cross of Jesus, perceives the power contained in the mystery of Christ the Redeemer. Therefore, far from despising or wishing to suppress the forms of popular piety which this devotion assumes, one should take and deepen all its meaning and implications.<sup>15</sup> Here we have a fact of fundamental theological and pastoral significance: it is the poor, the object of God's special love, who understand best and as it were instinctively that the most radical liberation, which is liberation from sin and death, is the liberation accomplished by the Death and Resurrection of Christ.

**Salvific  
and ethical dimension  
of liberation**

23. The power of this liberation penetrates and profoundly transforms man and his history in its present reality and animates his eschatological yearning. The first and fundamental meaning of liberation which thus manifests itself is the salvific one: man is freed from the radical bondage of evil and sin.

In this experience of salvation, man discovers the true meaning of his freedom, since liberation is the restoration of freedom. It is also education in freedom, that is to say, education in the right use of freedom. Thus to the salvific dimension of liberation is linked its ethical dimension.

**A new phase  
in the history  
of freedom**

24. To different degrees, the sense of faith, which is at the origin of a radical experience of liberation and freedom, has imbued the culture and the customs of Christian peoples.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Mt 11, 25; Lk 10, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 48: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 37-38.

But today, because of the formidable challenges which humanity must face, it is in a wholly new way that it has become necessary and urgent that the love of God and freedom in truth and justice should mark relations between individuals and peoples and animate the life of cultures.

For where truth and love are missing, the process of liberation results in the death of a freedom which will have lost all support.

A new phase in the history of freedom is opening before us. The liberating capacities of science, technology, work, economics and political activity will only produce results if they find their inspiration and measure in the truth and love which are stronger than suffering: the truth and love revealed to men by Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER II

### MAN'S VOCATION TO FREEDOM AND THE TRAGEDY OF SIN

#### *I. Preliminary approaches to freedom*

##### **A spontaneous response**

25. The spontaneous response to the question: "What does being free mean?" is this:  
a person is free when he is able to do whatever

he wishes without being hindered by an exterior constraint and thus enjoys complete independence. The opposite of freedom would therefore be the dependence of our will upon the will of another.

But does man always know what he wants? Can he do everything he wants? Is closing in on oneself and cutting oneself off from the will of others in conformity with the nature of man? Often the desire of a particular moment is not what a person really wants. And in one and the same person there can exist contradictory wishes. But above all man comes up against the limits of his own nature: his desires are greater than his abilities. Thus the obstacle which opposes his will does not always come from outside, but from the limits of his own being. This

is why, under pain of destroying himself, man must learn to harmonize his will with his nature.

**Truth  
and justice,  
rules of freedom**

26. Furthermore, every individual is oriented toward other people and needs their company. It is only by learning to unite his will to the others for the sake of true good that he will learn rectitude of will. It is thus harmony with the exigencies of human nature which makes the will itself human. This in fact requires the criterion of truth and a right relationship to the will of others. Truth and justice are therefore the measure of true freedom. By discarding this foundation and taking himself for God, man falls into deception, and instead of realizing himself he destroys himself.

Far from being achieved in total self-sufficiency and an absence of relationships, freedom only truly exists where reciprocal bonds, governed by truth and justice, link people to one another. But for such bonds to be possible, each person must live in the truth.

Freedom is not the liberty to do anything whatsoever. It is the freedom to do good, and in this alone happiness is to be found. The good is thus the goal of freedom. In consequence man becomes free to the extent that he comes to a knowledge of the truth, and to the extent that this truth—and not any other forces—guides his will. Liberation for the sake of a knowledge of the truth which alone directs the will is the necessary condition for a freedom worthy of the name.

## *II. Freedom and liberation*

**Freedom  
for the creature**

27. In other words, freedom which is interior mastery of one's own acts and self-determination immediately entails a relationship with the ethical order. It finds its true meaning in the choice of moral good. It then manifests itself as emancipation from moral evil.

By his free action, man must tend toward the supreme good through lesser goods which conform to the exigencies of his nature and his divine vocation.

In exercising his freedom, he decides for himself and forms himself. In this sense man is *his own cause*. But he is this only as a creature and as God's image. This is the truth of his being which shows by contrast how profoundly erroneous are the theories which think they exalt the freedom of man or his "historical praxis" by making this freedom the absolute principle of his being and becoming. These theories are expressions of atheism or tend toward atheism by their own logic. Indifferentism and deliberate agnosticism go in the same direction. It is the image of God in man which underlies the freedom and dignity of the human person.<sup>16</sup>

**The call  
of the Creator**

28. By creating man free, God imprinted on him his own image and likeness.<sup>17</sup> Man hears the call of his Creator in the inclination and aspiration of his own nature toward the Good, and still more in the word of Revelation, which was proclaimed in a perfect manner in the Christ. It is thus revealed to man that God created him free so that by grace man could enter into friendship with God and share his life.

**A shared freedom**

29. Man does not take his origin from his own individual or collective action, but from the gift of God who created him. This is the first confession of our faith, and it confirms the loftiest insights of human thought.

The freedom of man is a shared freedom. His capacity for self-realization is in no way suppressed by his dependence on God. It is precisely the characteristic of atheism to believe in an irreducible opposition between the causality of a divine freedom and that of man's freedom, as though the affirmation of God meant the negation of man, or as though God's intervention in history rendered vain the endeavours of man. In reality, it is from God and in relationship with him that human freedom takes its meaning and consistency.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, VII, 9; VIII, 1-9: *AAS* 76 (1984), pp. 892 and 894-895.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Gen* 1, 26.



#### Man's free choice

30. Man's history unfolds on the basis of the nature which he has received from God and in the free accomplishment of the purpose toward which the inclinations of this nature and of divine grace orient and direct him.

But man's freedom is finite and fallible. His desire may be drawn to an apparent good: in choosing a false good, he fails in his vocation to freedom. By his free will, man is master of his own life: he can act in a positive sense or in a destructive one.

By obeying the divine law inscribed in his conscience and received as an impulse of the Holy Spirit, man exercises true mastery over himself and thus realizes his royal vocation as a child of God. "By the service of God he reigns".<sup>18</sup> Authentic freedom is the "service of justice", while the choice of disobedience and evil is the "slavery of sin".<sup>19</sup>

#### Temporal liberation and freedom

31. This notion of freedom clarifies the scope of temporal liberation: it involves all the processes which aim at securing and guaranteeing the conditions needed for the exercise of an authentic human freedom.

Thus it is not liberation which in itself produces human freedom. Common sense, confirmed by Christian sense, knows that even when freedom is subject to forms of conditioning it is not thereby completely destroyed. People who undergo terrible constraints succeed in manifesting their freedom and taking steps to secure their own liberation. A process of liberation which has been achieved can only create better conditions for the effective exercise of freedom. Indeed a liberation which does not take into account the personal freedom of those who fight for it is condemned in advance to defeat.

<sup>18</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, 21: AAS 71 (1979), p. 316.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Rom* 6, 6; 7, 23.

### III. *Freedom and human society*

#### **The rights of man and his "freedoms"**

32. God did not create man as a "solitary being" but wished him to be a "social being".<sup>20</sup>

Social life therefore is not exterior to man: he can only grow and realize his vocation in relation with others. Man belongs to different communities: the family and professional and political communities, and it is inside these communities that he must exercise his responsible freedom. A just social order offers man irreplaceable assistance in realizing his free personality. On the other hand, an unjust social order is a threat and an obstacle which can compromise his destiny.

In the social sphere, freedom is expressed and realized in actions, structures and institutions, thanks to which people communicate with one another and organize their common life. The blossoming of a free personality, which for every individual is a duty and a right, must be helped and not hindered by society.

Here we have an exigency of a moral nature which has found its expression in the formulation of the *Rights of Man*. Some of these have as their object what are usually called "*the freedoms*", that is to say, ways of recognizing every human being's character as a person responsible for himself and his transcendent destiny, as well as the inviolability of his conscience.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Man's social dimension and the glory of God**

33 The social dimension of the human being also takes on another meaning: only the vast numbers and rich diversity of people can express something of the infinite richness of God.

Finally, this dimension is meant to find its accomplishment in

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gen 2, 18, 23, "It is not good that man should be alone" ... "This is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones": in these words of Scripture, which refer directly to the relationship between man and woman, one can discern a more universal meaning. Cf. Lev 19, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. JOHN XXIII, Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, 5-15: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 259-265; JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Dr Kurt Waldheim, Secretary General of the United Nations, on the occasion of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights: AAS 71 (1979), p. 122; The Pope's Speech to the United Nations, 9: AAS 71 (1979), p. 1149.

the Body of Christ which is the Church. This is why social life, in the variety of its forms and to the extent that it is in conformity with the divine law, constitutes a reflection of the glory of God in the world.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV. *Human freedom and dominion over nature*

Man's call  
to master nature

34. As a consequence of his bodily dimension, man needs the resources of the material world for his personal and social fulfillment. In this vocation to exercise dominion over the earth by putting it at his service through work, one can see an aspect of the image of God.<sup>23</sup> But human intervention is not "creative"; it encounters a material nature which like itself has its origin in God the Creator and of which man has been constituted the "noble and wise guardian".<sup>24</sup>

Man, the master  
of his works

35. Technical and economic transformations influence the organization of social life; they cannot help but affect to some extent cultural and even religious life.

However, by reason of his freedom man remains the master of his activity. The great and rapid transformations of the present age face him with a dramatic challenge: that of mastering and controlling by the use of his reason and freedom the forces which he puts to work in the service of the true purposes of human existence.

Scientific discoveries  
and moral progress

36. It is the task of freedom then, when it is well ordered, to ensure that scientific and technical achievements, the quest for their effectiveness, and the products of work and the very structures of economic and social organization are not made to serve projects which would deprive them of their human purposes and turn them against man himself.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE, *Ad Macedonium*, II, 7-17 (PL 33, 669-673); CSEL 44, 437-447).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Gen* 1, 27-28.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Redemptor Hominis*, 15: AAS 71 (1979), p. 286.

Scientific activity and technological activity each involve specific exigencies. But they only acquire their properly human meaning and value when they are subordinated to moral principles. These exigencies must be respected; but to wish to attribute to them an absolute and necessary autonomy, not in conformity with the nature of things, is to set out along a path which is ruinous for the authentic freedom of man.

#### *V. Sin, the source of division and oppression*

Sin, separation  
from God

37. God calls man to freedom. In each person there lives a desire to be free. And yet this desire almost always tends towards slavery and oppression. All commitment to liberation and freedom therefore presupposes that this tragic paradox has been faced.

Man's sin, that is to say his breaking away from God, is the radical reason for the tragedies which mark the history of freedom. In order to understand this, many of our contemporaries must first rediscover a sense of sin.

In man's desire for freedom there is hidden the temptation to deny his own nature. Insofar as he wishes to desire everything and to be able to do everything and thus forget that he is finite and a created being, he claims to be a god. "You will be like God" (*Gen 3:5*). These words of the serpent reveal the essence of man's temptation; they imply the perversion of the meaning of his own freedom. Such is the profound nature of sin: man rejects the truth and places his own will above it. By wishing to free himself from God and be a god himself, he deceives himself and destroys himself. He becomes alienated from himself.

In this desire to be a god and to subject everything to his own good pleasure, there is hidden a perversion of the very idea of God. God is love and truth in the fullness of the mutual gift of the Divine Persons. It is true that man is called to be like God. But he becomes like God not in the arbitrariness of his own good pleasure but to the



extent that he recognizes that truth and love are at the same time the principle and the purpose of his freedom.

**Sin,  
the root of human  
alienation**

38. By sinning, man lies to himself and separates himself from his own truth. But seeking total autonomy and self-sufficiency, he denies God and denies himself. Alienation from the truth of his being as a creature loved by God is the root of all other forms of alienation.

By denying or trying to deny God, who is his Beginning and End, man profoundly disturbs his own order and interior balance and also those of society and even of visible creation.<sup>25</sup>

It is in their relationship to sin that Scripture regards all the different calamities which oppress man in his personal and social existence.

Scripture shows that the whole course of history has a mysterious link with the action of man who, from the beginning, has abused his freedom by setting himself up against God and by seeking to gain his ends without God.<sup>26</sup> Genesis indicates the consequences of this original sin in the painful nature of work and childbirth, in man's oppression of woman and in death. Human beings deprived of divine grace have thus inherited a common mortal nature, incapable of choosing what is good and inclined to covetousness.<sup>27</sup>

**Idolatry  
and disorder**

39. Idolatry is an extreme form of disorder produced by sin. The replacement of adoration of the living God by worship of created things falsifies the relationships between individuals and brings with it various kinds of oppression.

Culpable ignorance of God unleashes the passions, which are causes of imbalance and conflicts in the human heart. From this there inevitably come disorders which affect the sphere of the family and society:

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 13 § 1.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 13: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 208-211.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Gen* 3, 16-19; *Rom* 5, 12; 7, 14-24; PAUL VI, *Sollemnis Professio Fidei*, 30 June 1968, 16: AAS 60 (1968), p. 439.

sexual license, injustice and murder. It is thus that Saint Paul describes the pagan world, carried away by idolatry to the worst aberrations which ruin the individual and society.<sup>28</sup>

Even before Saint Paul, the Prophets and wise men of Israel saw in the misfortunes of the people a punishment for their sin of idolatry; and in the "heart full of evil" (*Eccles* 9:3),<sup>29</sup> they saw the source of man's radical slavery and of the forms of oppression which he makes his fellowmen endure.

**Contempt for God  
and a turning  
toward creatures**

40. The Christian tradition, found in the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, has made explicit this teaching of Scripture about sin.

It sees sin as contempt for God (*contemptus Dei*). It is accompanied by a desire to escape from the dependent relationship of the servant to his Lord, or still more of the child to its Father. By sinning, man seeks to free himself from God. In reality he makes himself a slave. For by rejecting God he destroys the momentum of his aspiration to the infinite and of his vocation to share in the divine life. This is why his heart is a prey to disquiet.

Sinful man who refuses to accept God is necessarily led to become attached in a false and destructive way to creatures. In this turning toward creatures (*conversio ad creaturam*) he focuses on the latter his unsatisfied desire for the infinite. But created goods are limited; and so his heart rushes from one to another, always searching for an impossible peace.

In fact, when man attributes to creatures an infinite importance, he loses the meaning of his created being. He claims to find his centre and his unity in himself. Disordered love of self is the other side of contempt for God. Man then tries to rely on himself alone; he wishes to achieve fulfilment by himself and to be self-sufficient in his own immanence.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Rom* 1, 18-32.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Jer* 5, 23; 7, 24; 17, 9; 18, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE, *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 28 (PL 41, 435; CSEL 40/2, 56-57; CCL 14/2, 451-452).

**Atheism,  
a false emancipation  
of freedom**

41. This becomes more particularly obvious when the sinner thinks that he can only assert his own freedom by explicitly denying God.

Dependence of the creature upon the Creator, and the dependence of the moral conscience upon the divine law, are regarded by him as an intolerable slavery. Thus he sees atheism as the true form of emancipation and of man's liberation, whereas religion or even the recognition of a moral law constitute forms of alienation. Man then wishes to make independent decisions about what is good and what is evil, or decisions about values; and in a single step he rejects both the idea of God and the idea of sin. It is through the audacity of sin that he claims to become adult and free, and he claims this emancipation not only for himself but for the whole of humanity.

**Sin  
and unjust structures**

42. Having become his own centre, sinful man tends to assert himself and to satisfy his desire for the infinite by the use of things:

wealth, power and pleasure, despising other people and robbing them unjustly and treating them as objects or instruments. Thus he makes his own contribution to the creation of those very structures of exploitation and slavery which he claims to condemn.

### CHAPTER III

## LIBERATION AND CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

**Gospel, freedom  
and liberation**

43. Human history, marked as it is by the experience of sin, would drive us to despair if God had abandoned his creation to itself.

But the divine promises of liberation, and their victorious fulfilment in Christ's Death and Resurrection, are the basis of the "joyful hope" from which the Christian community draws the strength to act resolutely and effectively in the service of love, justice and peace. The

Gospel is a message of freedom and a liberating force<sup>31</sup> which fulfils the hope of Israel based upon the words of the Prophets. This hope relied upon the action of Yahweh, who even before he intervened as the "goel",<sup>32</sup> liberator, redeemer and saviour of his People had freely chosen that People in Abraham.<sup>33</sup>

## I. *Liberation in the Old Testament*

### **The Exodus and the liberating acts of Yaweh**

44. In the Old Testament, the liberating action of Yahweh which serves as model and reference for all others is the Exodus from Egypt, "the house of bondage". When God rescues his People from hard economic, political and cultural slavery, he does so in order to make them, through the Covenant on Sinai, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). God wishes to be adored by people who are free. All the subsequent liberations of the people of Israel help to lead them to this full liberty that they can only find in communion with their God.

The major and fundamental event of the Exodus therefore has a meaning which is both religious and political. God sets his People free and gives them descendants, a land and a law, but within a Covenant and for a Covenant. One cannot therefore isolate the political aspect for its own sake; it has to be considered in the light of a plan of a religious nature within which it is integrated.<sup>34</sup>

### **The law of God**

45. In his plan of salvation, God gave Israel its Law. This contained, together with the universal moral precepts of the Decalogue, religious and civil norms which were to govern the life of the people chosen by God to be his witness among the nations.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, Introduction: AAS 76 (1984), p. 876.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Is* 41, 14; *Jer* 50, 34. "Goel": this word implies the idea of a bond of kinship between the one who frees and the one who is freed. Cf. *Lev* 25, 25, 47-49; *Rth* 3, 12; 4, 1. "Padah" means "to obtain for oneself". Cf. *Ex* 13, 13; *Deut* 9, 26; 15, 15; *Ps* 130, 7-8.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Gen* 12, 1-3.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, IV, 3: AAS 76 (1984), p. 882.



Of this collection of laws, love of God above all things<sup>35</sup> and of neighbour as oneself<sup>36</sup> already constitute the centre. But the justice which must govern relations between people, and the law which is its juridical expression, also belong to the sum and substance of the biblical law. The Codes and the preaching of the Prophets, as also the Psalms, constantly refer to both of them, very often together.<sup>37</sup> It is in this context that one should appreciate the biblical law's care for the poor, the needy, the widow and the orphan: they have a right to justice according to the juridical ordinances of the People of God.<sup>38</sup> Thus there already exist the ideal and the outline of a society centered upon worship of the Lord and based upon justice and law inspired by love.

#### **The teaching of the Prophets**

46. Prophets constantly remind Israel of the demands made by the Law of the Covenant.

They condemn man's hardened heart as the source of repeated transgressions, and they foretell a New Covenant in which God will change hearts by writing on them the Law of his Spirit.<sup>39</sup>

In proclaiming and preparing for this new age, the Prophets vigorously condemn injustice done to the poor: they make themselves God's spokesmen for the poor. Yahweh is the supreme refuge of the little ones and the oppressed, and the Messiah will have the mission of taking up their defence.<sup>40</sup>

The situation of the poor is a situation of injustice contrary to the Covenant. This is why the Law of the Covenant protects them by means of precepts which reflect the attitude of God himself when he liberated Israel from the slavery of Egypt.<sup>41</sup> Injustice to the little ones and the poor is a grave sin and one which destroys communion with God.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Deut* 6, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Lev* 19, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Deut* 1, 16-17; 16, 18-20; *Jer* 22, 3-15; 23, 5; *Ps* 33, 5; 72, 1; 99, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Ex* 22, 20-23; *Deut* 24, 10-22.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Jer* 31, 31-34; *Ez* 36, 25-27.

<sup>40</sup> *Is* 11, 1-5; *Ps* 72, 4. 12-14; *Libertatis Nuntius*, IV, 6: *AAS* 76 (1984), p. 883.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Ex* 23, 9; *Deut* 24, 17-22.

### The "Poor of Yahweh"

47. Whatever the forms of poverty, injustice and affliction they endure, the "just" and the "poor of Yahweh" offer up their supplications to him in the Psalms.<sup>42</sup> In their hearts they suffer the servitude to which the "stiff-necked" people are reduced because of their sins. They endure persecution, martyrdom and death; but they live in hope of deliverance. Above all, they place their trust in Yahweh, to whom they commend their cause.<sup>43</sup>

The "poor of Yahweh" know that communion with him<sup>44</sup> is the most precious treasure and the one in which man finds his true freedom.<sup>45</sup> For them, the most tragic misfortune is the loss of this communion. Hence their fight against injustice finds its deepest meaning and its effectiveness in their desire to be freed from the slavery of sin.

### On the threshold of the New Testament

48. On the threshold of the New Testament, the "poor of Yahweh" make up the first-fruits of a "people humble and lowly" who live in hope of the liberation of Israel.<sup>46</sup>

Mary, personifying this hope, crosses the threshold from the Old Testament. She proclaims with joy the coming of the Messiah and praises the Lord who is preparing to set his People free.<sup>47</sup> In her hymn of praise to the divine mercy, the humble Virgin, to whom the people of the poor turn spontaneously and so confidently, sings of the mystery of salvation and its power to transform. The *sensus fidei*, which is so vivid among the little ones, is able to grasp at once all the salvific and ethical treasures of the *Magnificat*.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Ps 25; 31; 35; 55; *Libertatis Nuntius*, IV, 5: AAS 76 (1984), p. 883.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Jer 11, 20; 20, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ps 73, 26-28.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ps 16; 62; 84.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Zeph 3, 12-20; *Libertatis Nuntius*, IV, 5: AAS 76 (1984), p. 883.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Lk 1, 46-55.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, 37: AAS 66 (1974), pp. 148-149.

## II. Christological significance of the Old Testament

In the light  
of Christ

49. The Exodus, the Covenant, the Law, the voices of the Prophets and the spirituality of the "poor of Yahweh" only achieve their full significance in Christ. The Church reads the Old Testament in the light of Christ who died and rose for us. She sees a prefiguring of herself in the People of God of the Old Covenant, made incarnate in the concrete body of a particular nation, politically and culturally constituted as such. This people was part of the fabric of history as Yahweh's witness before the nations until the fulfilment of the time of preparation and prefigurement. In the fullness of time which came with Christ, the children of Abraham were invited to enter, together with all the nations, into the Church of Christ in order to form with them one People of God, spiritual and universal.<sup>49</sup>

## III. Christian liberation

The Good  
News proclaimed  
to the poor

50. Jesus proclaims the Good News of the Kingdom of God and calls people to conversion.<sup>50</sup> "The poor have the good news preached to them" (*Mt* 11:5). By quoting the expression of the Prophet,<sup>51</sup> Jesus manifests his messianic action in favour of those who await God's salvation.

Even more than this, the Son of God who has made himself poor for love of us<sup>52</sup> wishes to be recognized in the poor, in those who suffer or are persecuted:<sup>53</sup> "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me".<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Acts* 2, 39; *Rm* 10, 12; 15, 7-12; *Eph* 2, 14-18.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Mk* 1, 15.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Is* 61, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *2 Cor* 8, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Mt* 25, 31-46; *Acts* 9, 4-5.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, IV, 9: *AAS* 76 (1984), p. 884.

### **The Paschal Mystery**

51. But is it above all by the power of his Paschal Mystery that Christ has set us free.<sup>55</sup>

Through his perfect obedience on the Cross and through the glory of his Resurrection, the Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world and opened for us the way to definitive liberation.

By means of our service and love, but also by the offering up of our trials and sufferings, we share in the one redeeming sacrifice of Christ, completing in ourselves "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (*Col* 1:24), as we look forward to the resurrection of the dead.

### **Grace, reconciliation and freedom**

52. The heart of the Christian experience of freedom is in justification by the grace received through faith and the Church's sacraments.

This grace frees us from sin and places us in communion with God. Through Christ's Death and Resurrection we are offered forgiveness. The experience of our reconciliation with the Father is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. God reveals himself to us as the Father of mercy, before whom we can come with total confidence.

Having been reconciled with him,<sup>56</sup> and receiving this peace of Christ which the world cannot give,<sup>57</sup> we are called to be peacemakers among all men.<sup>58</sup>

In Christ, we can conquer sin, and death no longer separates us from God; death will finally be destroyed at our resurrection, which will be like that of Jesus.<sup>59</sup> The "cosmos" itself, of which man is the centre and summit, waits to be "set free from its bondage to decay and to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (*Rom* 8:21). Even now Satan has been checked; he who has the power of death

<sup>55</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Opening Address at Puebla*, I, 5: AAS 71 (1979), p. 191.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Rm* 5, 10; 2 *Cor* 5, 18-20.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Jn* 14, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Mt* 5, 9; *Rm* 12, 18; *Heb* 12, 14.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. 1 *Cor* 15, 26.



has been reduced to impotence by the death of Christ.<sup>60</sup> Signs are given which are a foretaste of the glory to come.

**Struggle against  
the slavery of sin**

53. The freedom brought by Christ in the Holy Spirit has restored to us the capacity, which sin had taken away from us, to love

God above all things and remain in communion with him.

We are set free from disordered self-love, which is the source of contempt of neighbour and of human relationships based on domination.

Nevertheless, until the Risen One returns in glory, the mystery of iniquity is still at work in the world. Saint Paul warns us of this: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (*Gal 5:1*). We must therefore persevere and fight in order not to fall once more under the yoke of slavery. Our existence is a spiritual struggle to live according to the Gospel and it is waged with the weapons of God.<sup>61</sup> But we have received the power and the certainty of our victory over evil, the victory of the love of Christ whom nothing can resist.<sup>62</sup>

**The Spirit  
and the Law**

54. Saint Paul proclaims the gift of the New Law of the Spirit in opposition to the law of the flesh or of covetousness which draws man

toward evil and makes him powerless to choose what is good.<sup>63</sup> This lack of harmony and this inner weakness do not abolish man's freedom and responsibility, but they do have a negative effect on their exercise for the sake of what is good. This is what causes the Apostle to say: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (*Rom 7:19*). Thus he rightly speaks of the "bondage of sin" and the "slavery of the law", for to sinful man the law, which he cannot make part of himself, seems oppressive.

However, Saint Paul recognizes that the Law still has value for man and for the Christian, because it "is holy and what it commands

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Jn 12, 31; Heb 2, 14-15*.

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The Lord Jesus himself spelled out the precepts of the New Law in the Sermon on the Mount: by the sacrifice he offered on the Cross and by his glorious Resurrection he conquered the power of sin and gained for us the grace of the Holy Spirit which makes possible the perfect observance of God's law<sup>67</sup> and access to forgiveness if we fall again into sin. The Spirit who dwells in our hearts is the source of true freedom.

Through Christ's sacrifice, the cultic regulations of the Old Testament have been rendered obsolete. As for the juridical norms governing the social and political life of Israel, the Apostolic Church, inasmuch as it marked the beginning of the reign of God on earth, was aware that it was no longer held to their observance. This enabled the Christian community to understand the laws and authoritative acts of various peoples. Although lawful and worthy of being obeyed,<sup>68</sup> they could never, inasmuch as they have their origin in such authorities, claim to have a sacred character. In the light of the Gospel, many laws and structures seem to bear the mark of sin and prolong its oppressive influence in society.

#### IV. *The New Commandment*

**Love, the gift  
of the Spirit**

55. God's love, poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, involves love of neighbour. Recalling the first commandment, Jesus im-

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *1 Tim* 1, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *Rom* 13, 8-10.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Rom* 13, 1-7.

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Rom* 8, 2-4.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *Rom* 13, 1.



mediately adds: "And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (*Mt* 22: 39-40). And Saint Paul says that love is the fulfilment of the Law.<sup>69</sup>

Love of neighbour knows no limits and includes enemies and persecutors. The perfection which is the image of the Father's perfection and for which the disciple must strive is found in mercy.<sup>70</sup> The parable of the Good Samaritan shows that compassionate love, which puts itself at the service of neighbour, destroys the prejudices which set ethnic or social groups against one another.<sup>71</sup> All the New Testament witnesses to the inexhaustible richness of the sentiments which are included in Christian love of neighbour.<sup>72</sup>

#### Love of neighbour

56. Christian love, which seeks no reward and includes everyone, receives its nature from the love of Christ who gave his life for us:

"Even as I have loved you ..., you also love one another" (*Jn* 13: 34-35).<sup>73</sup> This is the "new commandment" for the disciples.

In the light of this commandment, Saint James severely reminds the rich of their duty,<sup>74</sup> and Saint John says that a person who possesses the riches of this world but who shuts his heart to his brother in need cannot have the love of God dwelling in him.<sup>75</sup> Fraternal love is the touchstone of love of God: "He who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (*1 Jn* 4:20). Saint Paul strongly emphasizes the link between sharing in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ and sharing with one's neighbour who is in need.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Rom* 13, 8-10; *Gal* 5, 13-14.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Mt* 5, 43-48; *Lk* 6, 27-38.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *Lk* 10, 25-37.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. for example *1 Th* 2, 7-12; *Ph* 2, 1-4; *Gal* 2, 12-20; *1 Cor* 13, 4-7; *2 Jn* 12; *3 Jn* 14; *Jn* 11, 1-5. 35-36; *Mk* 6, 34; *Mt* 9, 36; 18, 21 ff.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Jn* 15, 12-13; *1 Jn* 3, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Jas* 5, 1-4.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *1 Jn* 3, 17.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *1 Cor* 11, 17-34; *Libertatis Nuntius*, IV, 11: *AAS* 76 (1984), p. 884. St. Paul himself organizes a collection for the "poor among the saints at Jerusalem" (*Rm* 15, 26).

**Justice  
and charity**

57. Evangelical love, and the vocation to be children of God to which all are called, have as a consequence the direct and imperative

requirement of respect for all human beings in their rights to life and to dignity. There is no gap between love of neighbour and desire for justice. To contrast the two is to distort both love and justice. Indeed, the meaning of mercy completes the meaning of justice by preventing justice from shutting itself up within the circle of revenge.

The evil inequities and oppression of every kind which afflict millions of men and women today openly contradict Christ's Gospel and cannot leave the conscience of any Christian indifferent.

The Church, in her docility to the Spirit, goes forward faithfully along the paths to authentic liberation. Her members are aware of their failings and their delays in this quest. But a vast number of Christians, from the time of the Apostles onwards, have committed their powers and their lives to liberation from every form of oppression and to the promotion of human dignity. The experience of the saints and the example of so many works of service to one's neighbour are an incentive and a beacon for the liberating undertakings that are needed today.

*V. The Church, People of God of the New Covenant*

**Toward the fullness  
of freedom**

58. The People of God of the New Covenant is the Church of Christ. Her law is the commandment of love. In the hearts of her mem-

bers the Spirit dwells as in a temple. She is the seed and the beginning of the Kingdom of God here below, which will receive its completion at the end of time with the resurrection of the dead and the renewal of the whole of creation.<sup>77</sup>

Thus possessing the pledge of the Spirit,<sup>78</sup> the People of God is led towards the fullness of freedom. The new Jerusalem which we

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *Rom* 8, 11-21.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. *2 Cor* 1, 22.

ferently await is rightly called the city of freedom in the highest sense.<sup>79</sup> Then, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (*Rev* 21:4). Hope is the certain expectation "of new heavens and of a new earth where justice will dwell" (2 *Pet* 3:13).

**The final meeting  
with Christ**

59. The transfiguration by the Risen Christ of the Church at the end of her pilgrimage in no way cancels out the personal destiny of each individual at the end of his or her life. All those found worthy before Christ's tribunal for having, by the grace of God, made good use of their free will are to receive the reward of happiness.<sup>80</sup> They will be made like to God, for they will see him as he is.<sup>81</sup> The divine gift of eternal happiness is the exaltation of the greatest freedom which can be imagined.

**Eschatological hope  
and the commitment  
for temporal liberation**

60. This hope does not weaken commitment to the progress of the earthly city, but rather gives it meaning and strength. It is of course important to make a careful distinction between earthly progress and the growth of the Kingdom, which do not belong to the same order. Nonetheless, this distinction is not a separation; for man's vocation to eternal life does not suppress but confirms his task of using the energies and means which he has received from the Creator for developing his temporal life.<sup>82</sup>

Enlightened by the Lord's Spirit, Christ's Church can discern in the signs of the times the ones which advance liberation and those that are deceptive and illusory. She calls man and societies to overcome situations of sin and injustice and to establish the conditions for true free-

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Gal* 4, 26.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. 1 *Cor* 13, 12; 2 *Cor* 5, 10.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. 1 *Jn* 3, 2.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 39, § 2.

dom. She knows that we shall rediscover all these good things—human dignity, fraternal union and freedom—which are the result of efforts in harmony with God's will, "washed clean of all stain, illumined and transfigured when Christ will hand over to the Father the eternal and universal kingdom",<sup>83</sup> which is a Kingdom of freedom.

The vigilant and active expectation of the coming of the Kingdom is also the expectation of a finally perfect justice for the living and the dead, for people of all times and places, a justice which Jesus Christ, installed as supreme Judge, will establish.<sup>84</sup> This promise, which surpasses all human possibilities, directly concerns our life in this world. For true justice must include everyone; it must bring the answer to the immense load of suffering borne by all the generations. In fact, without the resurrection of the dead and the Lord's judgment, there is no justice in the full sense of the term. The promise of the resurrection is freely made to meet the desire for true justice dwelling in the human heart.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LIBERATING MISSION OF THE CHURCH

#### **The Church and the anxieties of mankind**

61. The Church is firmly determined to respond to the anxiety of contemporary man as he endures oppression and yearns for freedom.

The political and economic running of society is not a direct part of her mission.<sup>85</sup> But the Lord Jesus has entrusted to her the word of truth which is capable of enlightening consciences. Divine love, which is her life, impels her to a true solidarity with everyone who suffers. If her members remain faithful to this mission, the Holy Spirit, the source of freedom, will dwell in them, and they will bring forth fruits of justice and peace in their families and in the places where they work and live.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 39, § 3.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Mt* 24, 29-44, 46; *Acts* 10, 42; *2 Cor* 5, 10.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 42, § 2.



## I. For the integral salvation of the world

### The Beatitudes and the power of the Gospel

62. The Gospel is the power of eternal life, given even now to those who receive it.<sup>66</sup> But by begetting people who are renewed,<sup>67</sup> this power penetrates the human community and its history, thus purifying and giving life to its activities. In this way it is a "root of culture".<sup>68</sup>

The Beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus express the perfection of evangelical love, and they have never ceased to be lived throughout the history of the Church by countless baptized individuals, and in an eminent manner by the saints.

The Beatitudes, beginning with the first, the one concerning the poor, form a whole which itself must not be separated from the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>69</sup> In this Sermon, Jesus, who is the new Moses, gives a commentary on the Decalogue, the Law of the Covenant, thus giving it its definitive and fullest meaning. Read and interpreted in their full context, the Beatitudes express the spirit of the Kingdom of God which is to come. But, in the light of the definitive destiny of human history thus manifested, there simultaneously appear with a more vivid clarity the foundations of justice in the temporal order.

For the Beatitudes, by teaching trust which relies on God, hope of eternal life, love of justice, and mercy which goes as far as pardon and reconciliation, enable us to situate the temporal order in relation to a transcendent order which gives the temporal order its true measure but without taking away its own nature.

In the light of these things, the commitment necessary in temporal tasks of service to neighbour and the human community is both urgently demanded and kept in its right perspective. The Beatitudes prevent us from worshipping earthly goods and from committing the injustices

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Jn* 17, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Rm* 6, 4; 2 *Cor* 5, 17; *Col* 3, 9-11.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18 and 20: *AAS* 68 (1976), pp. 17 and 19.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Mt* 5, 3.

which their unbridled pursuit involves.<sup>90</sup> They also divert us from an unrealistic and ruinous search for a perfect world, "for the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31).

**The proclamation  
of salvation**

63. The Church's essential mission, following that of Christ, is a mission of evangelization and salvation.<sup>91</sup> She draws her zeal from the divine love. Evangelization is the proclamation of salvation, which is a gift of God. Through the word of God and the Sacraments, man is freed in the first place from the power of sin and the power of the Evil One which oppress him; and he is brought into a communion of love with God. Following her Lord who "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15), the Church desires the salvation of all people.

In this mission, the Church teaches the way which man must follow in this world in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Her teaching therefore extends to the whole moral order, and notably to the justice which must regulate human relations. This is part of the preaching of the Gospel.

But the love which impels the Church to communicate to all people a sharing in the grace of divine life also causes her, through the effective action of her members, to pursue people's true temporal good, help them in their needs, provide for their education and promote an integral liberation from everything that hinders the development of individuals. The Church desires the good of man in all his dimensions, first of all as a member of the city of God, and then as a member of the earthly city.

**Evangelization  
and the promotion  
of justice**

64. Therefore, when the Church speaks about the promotion of justice in human societies, or when she urges the faithful laity to work in this sphere according to their own vocation, she is not going

<sup>90</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 37.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 17; Church's Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 1; PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14: AAS 68 (1976), p. 13.

beyond her mission. She is however concerned that this mission should not be absorbed by preoccupations concerning the temporal order or reduced to such preoccupations. Hence she takes great care to maintain clearly and firmly both the unity and the distinction between evangelization and human promotion: unity, because she seeks the good of the whole person; distinction, because these two tasks enter, in different ways, into her mission.

**The Gospel  
and earthly realities**

65. It is thus by pursuing her own finality that the Church sheds the light of the Gospel on earthly realities in order that human beings may be healed of their miseries and raised in dignity. The cohesion of society in accordance with justice and peace is thereby promoted and strengthened.<sup>92</sup> Thus the Church is being faithful to her mission when she condemns the forms of deviation, slavery and oppression of which people are victims.

She is being faithful to her mission when she opposes attempts to set up a form of social life from which God is absent, whether by deliberate opposition or by culpable negligence.<sup>93</sup>

She is likewise being faithful to her mission when she exercises her judgment regarding political movements which seek to fight poverty and oppression according to theories or methods of action which are contrary to the Gospel and opposed to man himself.<sup>94</sup>

It is of course true that, with the energy of grace, evangelical morality brings man new perspectives and new duties. But its purpose is to perfect and elevate a moral dimension which already belongs to human nature and with which the Church concerns herself in the knowledge that this is a heritage belonging to all people by their very nature.

<sup>92</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 40, § 3.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, '4: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 211-212.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, XI, 10: AAS 76 (1984), p. 901.

## II. A love of preference for the poor

### Jesus and poverty

66. Christ Jesus, although he was rich, became poor in order to make us rich by means of his poverty.<sup>95</sup> Saint Paul is speaking here of the mystery of the Incarnation of the eternal Son, who came to take on mortal human nature in order to save man from the misery into which sin had plunged him. Furthermore, in the human condition Christ chose a state of poverty and deprivation<sup>96</sup> in order to show in what consists the true wealth which ought to be sought, that of communion of life with God. He taught detachment from earthly riches so that we might desire the riches of heaven.<sup>97</sup> The Apostles whom he chose also had to leave all things and share his deprivation.<sup>98</sup>

Christ was foretold by the Prophets as the Messiah of the poor;<sup>99</sup> and it was among the latter, the humble, the "poor of Yahweh", who were thirsting for the justice of the Kingdom, that he found hearts ready to receive him. But he also wished to be near to those who, though rich in the goods of this world, were excluded from the community as "publicans and sinners", for he had come to call them to conversion.<sup>100</sup>

It is this sort of poverty, made up of detachment, trust in God, sobriety and a readiness to share, that Jesus declared blessed.

### Jesus and the poor

67. But Jesus not only brought the grace and peace of God; he also healed innumerable sick people; he had compassion on the crowd who had nothing to eat and he fed them; with the disciples who followed him he practised almsgiving.<sup>101</sup> Therefore the Beatitude of poverty which he proclaimed can never signify that Christians are

<sup>95</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 8, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Lk 2, 7; 9, 58.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Mt 6, 19-20; 24-34; 19, 21.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Lk 5, 11, 28; Mt 19, 27.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Is 11, 4; 61, 1; Lk 4, 18.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Lk 19, 1-10; Mk 2, 13-17.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Mt 8, 6; 14, 13-21; Jn 13, 29.



permitted to ignore the poor who lack what is necessary for human life in this world. This poverty is the result and consequence of people's sin and natural frailty, and it is an evil from which human beings must be freed as completely as possible.

**Love of preference  
for the poor**

68. In its various forms—material deprivation, unjust oppression, physical and psychological illnesses, and finally death—human misery is the obvious sign of the natural condition of weakness in which man finds himself since original sin and the sign of his need for salvation. Hence it drew the compassion of Christ the Saviour to take it upon himself<sup>102</sup> and to be identified with the least of his brethren (cf. *Mt* 25:40, 45). Hence also those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a love of preference on the part of the Church, which since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members has not ceased to work for their relief, defence and liberation. She has done this through numberless works of charity which remain always and everywhere indispensable.<sup>103</sup> In addition, through her social doctrine which she strives to apply, she has sought to promote structural changes in society so as to secure conditions of life worthy of the human person.

By detachment from riches, which makes possible sharing and opens the gate of the Kingdom,<sup>104</sup> the disciples of Jesus bear witness through love for the poor and unfortunate to the love of the Father himself manifested in the Saviour. This love comes from God and goes to God. The disciples of Christ have always recognized in the gifts placed on the altar a gift offered to God himself.

In loving the poor, the Church also witnesses to man's dignity. She clearly affirms that man is worth more for what he is than for what he has. She bears witness to the fact that this dignity cannot be destroyed, whatever the situation of poverty, scorn, rejection or power-

<sup>102</sup> Cf. *Mt* 8, 17.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 12 and 46: *AAS* 59 (1967), pp. 262-263 and p. 280; *Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate at Puebla*, 476.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. *Acts* 2, 44-45.

lessness to which a human being has been reduced. She shows her solidarity with those who do not count in a society by which they are rejected spiritually and sometimes even physically. She is particularly drawn with maternal affection toward those children who, through human wickedness, will never be brought forth from the womb to the light of day, as also for the elderly, alone and abandoned.

The special option for the poor, far from being a sign of particularism or sectarianism, manifests the universality of the Church's being and mission. This option excludes no one.

This is the reason why the Church cannot express this option by means of reductive sociological and ideological categories which would make this preference a partisan choice and a source of conflict.

**Basic communities  
and other  
Christian groups**

69. The new basic communities or other groups of Christians which have arisen to be witnesses to this evangelical love are a source of great hope for the Church. If they really live in unity with the local Church and the universal Church, they will be a real expression of communion and a means for constructing a still deeper communion.<sup>105</sup> Their fidelity to their mission will depend on how careful they are to educate their members in the fullness of the Christian faith through listening to the Word of God, fidelity to the teaching of the Magisterium, to the hierarchical order of the Church and to the sacramental life. If this condition is fulfilled, their experience, rooted in a commitment to the complete liberation of man, becomes a treasure for the whole Church.

**Theological reflection**

70. Similarly, a theological reflection developed from a particular experience can constitute a very positive contribution, inasmuch as it makes possible a highlighting of aspects of the Word of God, the richness of which had not yet been fully grasped. But in order that

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Second Extraordinary Synod, *Relatio Finalis*, II, C, 6: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1985, p. 7; PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 58: *AAS* 68 (1976), pp. 46-49.

this reflection may be truly a reading of the Scripture and not a projection on to the Word of God of a meaning which it does not contain, the theologian will be careful to interpret the experience from which he begins in the light of the experience of the Church herself. This experience of the Church shines with a singular brightness and in all its purity in the lives of the saints. It pertains to the pastors of the Church, in communion with the Successor of Peter, to discern its authenticity.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH: FOR A CHRISTIAN PRACTICE OF LIBERATION

#### **The Christian practice of liberation**

71. The salvific dimension of liberation cannot be reduced to the socio-ethical dimension, which is a consequence of it. By restoring man's true freedom, the radical liberation brought about by Christ assigns to him a task: Christian practice, which is the putting into practice of the great commandment of love. The latter is the supreme principle of Christian social morality, founded upon the Gospel and the whole of tradition since apostolic times and the age of the Fathers of the Church up to and including the recent statements of the Magisterium.

The considerable challenges of our time constitute an urgent appeal to put into practice this teaching on how to act.

#### *I. Nature of the social doctrine of the Church*

#### **The Gospel message and social life**

72. The Church's social teaching is born of the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarized in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice<sup>106</sup> with the problems

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *Mt* 22, 37-40; *Rm* 13, 8-10.

emanating from the life of society. This social teaching has established itself as a doctrine by using the resources of human wisdom and the sciences. It concerns the ethical aspect of this life. It takes into account the technical aspects of problems but always in order to judge them from the moral point of view.

Being essentially orientated toward action, this teaching develops in accordance with the changing circumstances of history. This is why, together with principles that are always valid, it also involves contingent judgments. Far from constituting a closed system, it remains constantly open to the new questions which continually arise; it requires the contribution of all charisms, experiences and skills.

As an "expert in humanity", the Church offers by her social doctrine a set of *principles for reflection* and *criteria for judgment*<sup>107</sup> and also *directives for action*<sup>108</sup> so that the profound changes demanded by situations of poverty and injustice may be brought about, and this in a way which serves the true good of humanity.

#### **Fundamental principles**

73. The supreme commandment of love leads to the full recognition of the dignity of each individual, created in God's image. From this dignity flow natural rights and duties. In the light of the image of God, freedom, which is the essential prerogative of the human person, is manifested in all its depth. Persons are the active and responsible subjects of social life.<sup>109</sup>

Intimately linked to the *foundation*, which is man's dignity, are the *principle of solidarity* and the *principle of subsidiarity*.

By virtue of the first, man with his brothers is obliged to contribute to the common good of society at all its levels.<sup>110</sup> Hence the Church's doctrine is opposed to all the forms of social or political individualism.

By virtue of the second, neither the State nor any society must ever substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals

<sup>107</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 4: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 403-404; JOHN PAUL II, *Opening Address at Puebla*, III, 7: AAS 71 (1979), p. 203.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. JOHN XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, 235: AAS 53 (1961), p. 461.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 25.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. JOHN XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, 132-133: AAS 53 (1961), p. 437.



and of intermediate communities at the level on which they can function, nor must they take away the room necessary for their freedom."<sup>11</sup> Hence the Church's social doctrine is opposed to all forms of collectivism.

**Criteria for judgment**

74. These principles are the basis of *criteria for making judgments* on social *situations, structures* and *systems*.

Thus the Church does not hesitate to condemn *situations* of life which are injurious to man's dignity and freedom.

These criteria also make it possible to judge the value of *structures*. These are the sets of institutions and practices which people find already existing or which they create, on the national and international level, and which orientate or organize economic, social and political life. Being necessary in themselves, they often tend to become fixed and fossilized as mechanisms relatively independent of the human will, thereby paralysing or distorting social development and causing injustice. However, they always depend on the responsibility of man, who can alter them, and not upon an alleged determinism of history.

Institutions and laws, when they are in conformity with the natural law and ordered to the common good, are the guarantees of people's freedom and of the promotion of that freedom. One cannot condemn all the constraining aspects of law, nor the stability of a lawful State worthy of the name. One can therefore speak of structures marked by sin, but one cannot condemn structures as such.

The criteria for judgment also concern economic, social and political *systems*. The social doctrine of the Church does not propose any particular system; but, in the light of other fundamental principles, she makes it possible at once to see to what extent existing systems conform or do not conform to the demands of human dignity.

**Primacy of persons  
over structures**

75. The Church is of course aware of the complexity of the problems confronting society and of the difficulties in finding adequate

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, 79-80: AAS 23 (1931), p. 203; JOHN XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, 138: AAS 53 (1961), p. 439; Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, 74: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 294-295.

solutions to them. Nevertheless she considers that the first thing to be done is to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the individual and to the permanent need for inner conversion, if one is to achieve the economic and social changes that will truly be at the service of man.

The priority given to structures and technical organization over the person and the requirements of his dignity is the expression of a materialistic anthropology and is contrary to the construction of a just social order.<sup>112</sup>

On the other hand, the recognized priority of freedom and of conversion of heart in no way eliminates the need for unjust structures to be changed. It is therefore perfectly legitimate that those who suffer oppression on the part of the wealthy or the politically powerful should take action, through morally licit means, in order to secure structures and institutions in which their rights will be truly respected.

It remains true however that structures established for people's good are of themselves incapable of securing and guaranteeing that good. The corruption which in certain countries affects the leaders and the State bureaucracy, and which destroys all honest social life, is a proof of this. Moral integrity is a necessary condition for the health of society. It is therefore necessary to work simultaneously for the conversion of hearts and for the improvement of structures. For the sin which is at the root of unjust situations is, in a true and immediate sense, a voluntary act which has its source in the freedom of individuals. Only in a derived and secondary sense is it applicable to structures, and only in this sense can one speak of "social sin".<sup>113</sup>

Moreover, in the process of liberation, one cannot abstract from the historical situation of the nation or attack the cultural identity of the people. Consequently, one cannot passively accept, still less actively support, groups which by force or by the manipulation of public opinion take over the State apparatus and unjustly impose on the

<sup>112</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18: AAS 68 (1976), pp. 17-18; *Libertatis Nuntius*, XI, 9: AAS 76 (1984), p. 901.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 16: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 213-217.

collectivity an imported ideology contrary to the culture of the people."<sup>14</sup> In this respect, mention should be made of the serious moral and political responsibility of intellectuals.

**Guidelines  
for action**

76. Basic principles and criteria for judgment inspire *guidelines for action*. Since the common good of human society is at the service of people, the means of action must be in conformity with human dignity and facilitate education for freedom. A safe criterion for judgment and action is this: there can be no true liberation if from the very beginning the rights of freedom are not respected.

Systematic recourse to violence put forward as the necessary path to liberation has to be condemned as a destructive illusion and one that opens the way to new forms of servitude. One must condemn with equal vigour violence exercised by the powerful against the poor, arbitrary action by the police, and any form of violence established as a system of government. In these areas one must learn the lessons of tragic experiences which the history of the present century has known and continues to know. Nor can one accept the culpable passivity of the public powers in those democracies where the social situation of a large number of men and women is far from corresponding to the demands of constitutionally guaranteed individual and social rights.

**A struggle  
for justice**

77. When the Church encourages the creation and activity of associations such as trade unions which fight for the defence of the rights and legitimate interests of the workers and for social justice, she does not thereby admit the theory that sees in the class struggle the structural dynamism of social life. The action which she sanctions is not the struggle of one class against another in order to eliminate the foe. She does not proceed from a mistaken acceptance of an alleged law of history. This action is rather a noble and reasoned

<sup>14</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adueniens*, 25: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 419-420.

struggle for justice and social solidarity.<sup>115</sup> The Christian will always prefer the path of dialogue and joint action.

Christ has commanded us to love our enemies.<sup>116</sup> Liberation in the spirit of the Gospel is therefore incompatible with hatred of others, taken individually or collectively, and this includes hatred of one's enemy.

**The myth  
of revolution**

78. Situations of grave injustice require the courage to make far-reaching reforms and to suppress unjustifiable privileges. But those who discredit the path of reform and favour the myth of revolution not only foster the illusion that the abolition of an evil situation is in itself sufficient to create a more humane society; they also encourage the setting up of totalitarian regimes.<sup>117</sup> The fight against injustice is meaningless unless it is waged with a view to establishing a new social and political order in conformity with the demands of justice. Justice must already mark each stage of the establishment of this new order. There is a morality of means.<sup>118</sup>

**A last resort**

79. These principles must be especially applied in the extreme case where there is recourse to armed struggle, which the Church's Magisterium admits as a last resort to put an end to an obvious and prolonged tyranny which is gravely damaging the fundamental rights of individuals and the common good.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, the concrete application of this means can not be contemplated until there has been a very rigorous analysis of the situation. Indeed, because of the continual development of the technology of violence and the increasingly serious dangers implied in its recourse, that which today is termed "passive

<sup>115</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, 20: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 629-632; *Libertatis Nuntius*, VII, 8; VIII, 5-9; XI, 11-14: AAS 76 (1984), pp. 891-892, 894-895 and 901-902.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Mt 5, 44; Lk 6, 27-28. 35.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. *Libertatis Nuntius*, XI, 10: AAS 76 (1984), pp. 905-906.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. *Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate at Puebla*, 533-534. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily at Drogheda*, Sept. 30, 1979: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 1076-1085.

<sup>119</sup> PAUL VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 31: AAS 59 (1967), pp. 272-273. Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical *Nos es muy conocida*: AAS 29 (1937), pp. 208-209.



resistance" shows a way more conformable to moral principles and having no less prospects for success. One can never approve, whether perpetrated by established power or insurgents, crimes such as reprisals against the general population, torture, or methods of terrorism and deliberate provocation aimed at causing deaths during popular demonstrations. Equally unacceptable are detestable smear campaigns capable of destroying a person psychologically or morally.

**The role  
of the laity**

80. It is not for the pastors of the Church to intervene directly in the political construction and organization of social life. This task forms part of the vocation of the laity acting on their own initiative with their fellow-citizens.<sup>120</sup> They must fulfil this task conscious of the fact that the purpose of the Church is to spread the Kingdom of Christ so that all men may be saved and that through them the world may be effectively ordered to Christ.<sup>121</sup> The work of salvation is thus seen to be indissolubly linked to the task of improving and raising the conditions of human life in this world.

The distinction between the supernatural order of salvation and the temporal order of human life must be seen in the context of God's singular plan to recapitulate all things in Christ. Hence in each of these spheres the layperson, who is at one and the same time a member of the Church and a citizen of his country, must allow himself to be constantly guided by his Christian conscience.<sup>122</sup>

Social action, which can involve a number of concrete means, will always be exercised for the common good and in conformity with the Gospel message and the teaching of the Church. It must be ensured that the variety of options does not harm a sense of collaboration, or lead to a paralysis of efforts or produce confusion among the Christian people.

The orientation received from the social doctrine of the Church should stimulate an acquisition of the essential technical and scientific

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76, § 3; Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, 20.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, 5.

skills. The social doctrine of the Church will also stimulate the seeking of moral formation of character and a deepening of the spiritual life. While it offers principles and wise counsels, this doctrine does not dispense from education in the political prudence needed for guiding and running human affairs.

## II. *Evangelical requirements for an indepth transformation*

### **Need for a cultural transformation**

81. Christians working to bring about that "civilization of love" which will include the entire ethical and social heritage of the Gospel

are today faced with an unprecedented challenge. This task calls for renewed reflection on what constitutes the relationship between the supreme commandment of love and the social order considered in all its complexity.

The immediate aim of this indepth reflection is to work out and set in motion ambitious programmes aimed at the socio-economic liberation of millions of men and women caught in an intolerable situation of economic, social and political oppression.

This action must begin with an immense effort at education: education for the civilization of work, education for solidarity, access to culture for all.

### **The Gospel of work**

82. The life of Jesus of Nazareth, a real "Gospel of work", offers us the living example and principle of the radical cultural

transformation which is essential for solving the grave problems which must be faced by the age in which we live. He, who, though he was God, became like us in all things, devoted the greater part of his earthly life to manual labour.<sup>123</sup> The culture which our age awaits will be marked by the full recognition of the dignity of human work, which appears in all its nobility and fruitfulness in the light of the mysteries

<sup>123</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, 6: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 589-592.

of Creation and Redemption.<sup>124</sup> Recognized as a form of the person, work becomes a source of creative meaning and effort.

**A true civilization  
of work**

83. Thus the solution of most of the serious problems related to poverty is to be found in the promotion of a true civilization of work.

In a sense, work is the key to the whole social question.<sup>125</sup>

It is therefore in the domain of work that priority must be given to the action of liberation in freedom. Because the relationship between the human person and work is radical and vital, the forms and models according to which this relationship is regulated will exercise a positive influence for the solution of a whole series of social and political problems facing each people. Just work relationships will be a necessary precondition for a system of political community capable of favouring the integral development of every individual.

If the system of labour relations put into effect by those directly involved, the workers and employers, with the essential support of the public powers succeeds in bringing into existence a civilization of work, then there will take place a profound and peaceful revolution in people's outlooks and in institutional and political structures.

**National  
and international  
common good**

84. A work culture such as this will necessarily presuppose and put into effect a certain number of essential values. It will acknowl-

edge that the person of the worker is the principle, subject and purpose of work. It will affirm the priority of work over capital and the fact that material goods are meant for all. It will be animated by a sense of solidarity involving not only rights to be defended but also the duties to be performed. It will involve participation, aimed at promoting the national and international common good and not just defending individual or corporate interests. It will assimilate the methods of confrontation and of frank and vigorous dialogue.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, ch. V: *ibid.*, pp. 637-647.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, 3: *ibid.*, pp. 583-584; *Address at Loreto* on 10 May 1985: AAS 77 (1985), pp. 967-969.

As a result, the political authorities will become more capable of acting with respect for the legitimate freedoms of individuals, families and subsidiary groups; and they will thus create the conditions necessary for man to be able to achieve his authentic and integral welfare, including his spiritual goal.<sup>126</sup>

**The value  
of human work**

85. A culture which recognizes the eminent dignity of the worker will emphasize the subjective dimension of work.<sup>127</sup>

The value of any human work does not depend on the kind of work done; it is based on the fact that the one who does it is a person.<sup>128</sup> There we have an ethical criterion whose implications cannot be overlooked.

Thus every person has a right to work, and this right must be recognized in a practical way by an effective commitment to resolving the tragic problem of unemployment. The fact that unemployment keeps large sectors of the population and notably the young in a situation of marginalization is intolerable. For this reason the creation of jobs is a primary social task facing individuals and private enterprise, as well as the State. As a general rule, in this as in other matters, the State has a subsidiary function; but often it can be called upon to intervene directly, as in the case of international agreements between different States. Such agreements must respect the rights of immigrants and their families.<sup>129</sup>

**Promoting  
participation**

86. Wages, which cannot be considered as a mere commodity, must enable the worker and his family to have access to a truly human standard of living in the material, social, cultural and spiritual orders. It is the dignity of the person which constitutes the criterion for judging

<sup>126</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 46: AAS 63 (1971), pp. 633-635.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, 6: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 589-592.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 46: AAS 74 (1982), pp. 137-139; Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, 23: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 635-637. Cf. Holy See, *Charter of Rights of the Family*, art. 12, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 25, 1983.



work, not the other way round. Whatever the type of work, the worker must be able to perform it as an expression of his personality. There follows from this the necessity of a participation which, over and above a sharing in the fruits of work, should involve a truly communitarian dimension at the level of projects, undertakings and responsibilities.<sup>130</sup>

**Priority of work  
over capital**

87. The priority of work over capital places an obligation in justice upon employers to consider the welfare of the workers before the increase of profits. They have a moral obligation not to keep capital unproductive and in making investments to think first of the common good. The latter requires a prior effort to consolidate jobs or create new ones in the production of goods that are really useful.

The right to private property is inconceivable without responsibilities to the common good. It is subordinated to the higher principle which states that goods are meant for all.<sup>131</sup>

**Indepth reforms**

88. This teaching must inspire reforms before it is too late. Access for everyone to the goods needed for a human, personal and family life worthy of the name is a primary demand of social justice. It requires application in the sphere of industrial work and in a particular way in the area of agricultural work.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, rural peoples, especially in the third world, make up the vast majority of the poor.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 68; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, 15: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 616-618; Discourse of 3 July 1980: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 July 1980, pp. 1-2.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 69; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, 12 and 14: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 605-608 and 612-616.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. PIUS XI, Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, 72: AAS 23 (1931), p. 200; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, 19: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 625-629.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. *Document of the Second General Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate at Medellin*, Justice, I, 9; *Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate at Puebla*, 31. 35. 1245.

### III. Promotion of solidarity

#### A new solidarity

89. Solidarity is a direct requirement of human and supernatural brotherhood. The serious socio-economic problems which occur today cannot be solved unless new fronts of solidarity are created: solidarity of the poor among themselves, solidarity with the poor to which the rich are called, solidarity among the workers and with the workers. Institutions and social organizations at different levels, as well as the State, must share in a general movement of solidarity. When the Church appeals for such solidarity, she is aware that she herself is concerned in a quite special way.

#### Goods are meant for all

90. The principle that goods are meant for all, together with the principle of human and supernatural brotherhood, express the responsibilities of the richer countries toward the poorer ones. These responsibilities include solidarity in aiding the developing countries, social justice through a revision in correct terms of commercial relationships between North and South, the promotion of a more human world for all, a world in which each individual can give and receive, and in which the progress of some will no longer be an obstacle to the development of others, nor a pretext for their enslavement.<sup>134</sup>

#### Aid for development

91. International solidarity is a necessity of the moral order. It is essential not only in cases of extreme urgency but also for aiding true development. This is a shared task, which requires a concerted and constant effort to find concrete technical solutions and also to create a new mentality among our contemporaries. World peace depends on this to a great extent.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Cf. JOHN XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, 163: AAS 53 (1961), p. 443; PAUL VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 51: AAS 59 (1967), p. 282; JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse to the Diplomatic Corps* of 11 January 1986: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 January 1986, pp. 4-5.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 55: AAS 59 (1967), p. 284.

#### IV. Cultural and educational tasks

##### **Right to education and culture**

92. The unjust inequalities in the possession and use of material goods are accompanied and aggravated by similarly unjust inequalities in the opportunity for culture. Every human being has a right to culture, which is the specific mode of a truly human existence to which one gains access through the development of one's intellectual capacities, moral virtues, abilities to relate with other human beings, and talents for creating things which are useful and beautiful. From this flows the necessity of promoting and spreading education, to which every individual has an inalienable right. The first condition for this is the elimination of illiteracy.<sup>136</sup>

##### **Respect for cultural freedom**

93. The right of each person to culture is only assured if cultural freedom is respected. Too often culture is debased by ideology, and education is turned into an instrument at the service of political or economic power. It is not within the competence of the public authorities to determine culture. Their function is to promote and protect the cultural life of everyone, including that of minorities.<sup>137</sup>

##### **The educational task of the family**

94. The task of educating belongs fundamentally and primarily to the family. The function of the State is subsidiary: its role is to guarantee, protect, promote and supplement. Whenever the State lays claim to an educational monopoly, it oversteps its rights and offends justice. It is parents who have the right to choose the school to which they send their children and the right to set up and support educational centres in accordance with their own beliefs. The State cannot without

<sup>136</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 60; JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse to UNESCO* of 2 June 1980, 8: AAS 72 (1980), pp. 739-740.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 59.

injustice merely tolerate so-called private schools. Such schools render a public service and therefore have a right to financial assistance.<sup>138</sup>

**Freedoms  
and sharing**

95. The education which gives access to culture is also education in the responsible exercise of freedom. That is why there can

only be authentic development in a social and political system which respects freedoms and fosters them through the participation of everyone. This participation can take different forms; it is necessary in order to guarantee a proper pluralism in institutions and in social initiatives. It ensures, notably by the real separation between the powers of the State, the exercise of human rights, also protecting them against possible abuses on the part of the public powers. No one can be excluded from this participation in social and political life for reasons of sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion.<sup>139</sup> Keeping people on the margins of cultural, social and political life constitutes in many nations one of the most glaring injustices of our time.

When the political authorities regulate the exercise of freedoms, they cannot use the pretext of the demands of public order and security in order to curtail those freedoms systematically. Nor can the alleged principle of national security, or a narrowly economic outlook, or a totalitarian concept of social life, prevail over the value of freedom and its rights.<sup>140</sup>

**The challenge  
of inculturation**

96. Faith inspires criteria of judgment, determining values, lines of thought and patterns of living which are valid for the whole human

community.<sup>141</sup> Hence the Church, sensitive to the anxieties of our age, indicates the lines of a culture in which work would be recognized

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3 and 6; PIUS XI, Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, 28, 38 and 66: AAS 22 (1930), pp. 59, 63 and 68. Cf. Holy See, *Charter of Rights of the Family*, art. 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 25, 1983.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 29; JOHN XXIII, Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, 73-74 and 79: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 294-296.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7; *Gaudium et Spes*, 75. Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate at Puebla, 311-314; 317-318; 548.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19: AAS 68 (1976), p. 18.



in its full human dimension and in which all would find opportunities for personal self-fulfilment. The Church does this by virtue of her missionary outreach for the integral salvation of the world, with respect for the identity of each people and nation.

The Church, which is a communion which unites diversity and unity through its presence in the whole world, takes from every culture the positive elements which she finds there. But inculturation is not simply an outward adaptation; it is an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity and the planting of Christianity in the different human cultures.<sup>142</sup> Separation between the Gospel and culture is a tragedy of which the problems mentioned are a sad illustration. A generous effort to evangelize cultures is therefore necessary. These cultures will be given fresh life by their encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter presupposes that the Gospel is truly proclaimed.<sup>143</sup> Enlightened by the Second Vatican Council, the Church wishes to devote all her energies to this task, so as to evoke an immense liberating effort.

## CONCLUSION

### **The canticle of the Magnificat**

97. *Blessed is she who believed (Lk 1:45).*

At Elizabeth's greeting, the heart of the Mother of God would burst into the song of the

*Magnificat*. It tells us that it is by faith and in faith like that of Mary that the People of God express in words and translate into life the mysterious plan of salvation with its liberating effects upon individual and social existence. It is really in the light of faith that one comes to understand how salvation history is the history of liberation from evil in its most radical form and of the introduction of humanity into the true freedom of the children of God. Mary is totally dependent on her Son and completely directed towards him by the impulse of

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Second Extraordinary Synod, *Relatio Finalis*, 11, D, 4: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1985, p. 7.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20: *AAS* 68 (1976), pp. 18-19.

her faith; and, at his side, she is the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe. It is to her as Mother and Model that the Church must look in order to understand in its completeness the meaning of her own mission.

It is altogether remarkable that the sense of faith found in the poor leads not only to an acute perception of the mystery of the redeeming Cross but also to a love and unshakable trust in the Mother of the Son of God, who is venerated in so many shrines.

**The "sensus fidei"  
of the People of God**

98. Pastors and all those who, as priests, laity, or men and women religious, often work under very difficult conditions for evangelization and integral human advancement, should be filled with hope when they think of the amazing resources of holiness contained in the living faith of the people of God. These riches of the *sensus fidei* must be given the chance to come to full flowering and bear abundant fruit. To help the faith of the poor to express itself clearly and to be translated into life, through a profound meditation on the plan of salvation as it unfolds itself in the Virgin of the *Magnificat*—this is a noble ecclesial task which awaits the theologian.

Thus a theology of freedom and liberation which faithfully echoes Mary's *Magnificat* preserved in the Church's memory is something needed by the times in which we are living. But it would be criminal to take the energies of popular piety and misdirect them toward a purely earthly plan of liberation, which would very soon be revealed as nothing more than an illusion and a cause of new forms of slavery. Those who in this way surrender to the ideologies of the world and to the alleged necessity of violence are no longer being faithful to hope, to hope's boldness and courage, as they are extolled in the hymn to the God of mercy which the Virgin teaches us.

**Dimensions  
of an authentic  
liberation**

99. The *sensus fidei* grasps the very core of the liberation accomplished by the Redeemer. It is from the most radical evil, from sin and the power of death, that he has delivered us in order to restore freedom

to itself and to show it the right path. This path is marked out by the supreme commandment, which is the commandment of love.

Liberation, in its primary meaning which is salvific, thus extends into a liberating task, as an ethical requirement. Here is to be found the social doctrine of the Church, which illustrates Christian practice on the level of society.

The Christian is called to act according to the truth,<sup>144</sup> and thus to work for the establishment of that "civilization of love" of which Pope Paul VI spoke.<sup>145</sup> The present document, without claiming to be complete, has indicated some of the directions in which it is urgently necessary to undertake indepth reforms. The primary task, which is a condition for the success of all the others, is an educational one. The love which guides commitment must henceforth bring into being new forms of solidarity. To the accomplishment of these tasks urgently facing the Christian conscience, all people of good will are called.

It is the truth of the mystery of salvation at work today in order to lead redeemed humanity towards the perfection of the Kingdom which gives true meaning to the necessary efforts for liberation in the economic, social and political orders and which keeps them from falling into new forms of slavery.

**The task  
that lies ahead**

100. It is true that before the immensity and the complexity of the task, which can require the gift of self even to an heroic degree, many are tempted to discouragement, scepticism or the recklessness of despair. A formidable challenge is made to hope, both theological and human. The loving Virgin of the *Magnificat*, who enfolds the Church and humanity in her prayer, is the firm support of hope. For in her we contemplate the victory of divine love which no obstacle can hold

<sup>144</sup> Cf. *Jn* 3, 21.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, *General Audience* of 31 December 1975: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1 January 1976, p. 1. John Paul II took up this idea again in the *Discourse to the "Meeting for Friendship Between People"* of 29 August 1982: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30-31 August 1982. The Latin-American Bishops also alluded to this idea in the *Message to the Peoples of Latin-America*, 8, and in the *Puebla Document*, 1188 and 1192.

back, and we discover to what sublime freedom God raises up the lowly. Along the path which she shows us, the faith which works through love must go forward with great resolve.<sup>146</sup>

*During an audience granted to the undersigned Prefect, His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, approved this Instruction, adopted in an ordinary session of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and ordered it to be published.*

Given at Rome, from the Congregation, March 22, 1986, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of Our Lord.

JOSEPH Card. RATZINGER

*Prefect*

✠ ALBERTO BOVONE

*Titular Archbishop of Caesarea in Numidia  
Secretary*

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Gal 5, 6.



## **COME LORD**

"Do not smile and say  
You are already with us  
Millions do not know you  
and to us who do,  
What is the difference ?  
What is the point of your presence  
if our lives do not alter ?  
Change our lives, shatter  
our complacency.  
Make your word  
flesh of our flesh  
blood of our blood  
and our life's purpose.  
Take away the quietness  
of a clear conscience.  
Press us uncomfortably  
For only thus  
that other peace is made  
YOUR PEACE".

—Helder Camara