

# Justice

Latin American Bishops

Medellín, Colombia

September 6, 1968

## 1. Pertinent facts

1. There are many studies of the Latin American people.<sup>1</sup> All of these studies describe the misery that besets large masses of human beings in all of our countries. That misery, as a collective fact, expresses itself as injustice which cries to the heavens.<sup>2</sup>

What has perhaps not been sufficiently said is that in general the efforts which have been made have not been able to assure that justice be honored and realized in every sector of the respective national communities. Often families do not find concrete possibilities for the education of their children. The young demand their right to enter universities or centers of higher learning for both intellectual and technical training; women demand their right to a legitimate equality with men; peasants demand better conditions of life; or if they are workers, they demand better prices and security in buying and selling; the growing middle class feels frustrated by the lack of expectations. Professionals and technicians have begun an exodus to more developed countries; small businessmen and industrialists are pressed by more powerful interests and many large Latin American industrialists are gradually coming to be dependent on international business enterprises. We cannot ignore this phenomenon of almost universal frustration of legitimate aspirations which creates the climate of collective anguish in which we are already living.

2. The lack of socio-cultural integration, in the majority of our countries, has given rise to the superimposition of cultures. In the economic sphere, systems have flourished which consider solely the potential of groups with great earning power. This lack of adaptation to the characteristics and to the potentials of all of our people, in turn, gives rise to frequent political instability and the consolidation of purely formal institutions. To all of this must be added the lack of solidarity which, on the individual and social levels, leads to the committing of serious sins, evident in the unjust structures which characterize the Latin American situation.

## II. Doctrinal Bases

3. The Latin American church has a message for all people on this continent who "hunger and thirst after justice." The very God who creates us in his image and likeness, creates the "earth and all that is in it for the use of all people and all nations, in such a way that created goods can reach all in a more just manner,"<sup>3</sup> and gives them power to transform and perfect the world in solidarity.<sup>4</sup> It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his Son in the flesh, so that he might come to liberate everyone from the slavery to which sin has subjected them<sup>5</sup>: hunger, misery, all oppression and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness.

Thus, for our authentic liberation, all of us need a profound conversion so that "the kingdom of justice, love and peace," might come to us. The origin of all disdain for humankind, of all injustice, should be sought in

the internal imbalance of human liberty, which will always need to be rectified in history. The uniqueness of the Christian message does not so much consist in the affirmation of the necessity for structural change, as it does in an insistence on the conversion of men and women which will in turn bring about this change. We will not have a new continent without new and reformed structures, but, above all, there will be no new continent without new people, who know how to be truly free and responsible according to the light of the Gospel.

4. Only by the light of Christ is the human mystery made clear. In the economy of salvation the divine work is an action of integral human development and liberation, which has love for its sole motive. Human beings are "created in Christ Jesus,"<sup>6</sup> fashioned in him as a "new creature."<sup>7</sup> By faith and baptism they are transformed, filled with the gift of the Spirit, with a new dynamism, not of selfishness, but of love which compels them to seek out a new, more profound relationship with God, their fellow humans, and created things.

Love, "the fundamental law of human perfection, and therefore of the transformation of the world,"<sup>8</sup> is not only the greatest commandment of the Lord; it is also the dynamism which ought to motivate Christians to realize justice in the world, having truth as a foundation and liberty as their sign.

5. This is how the church desires to serve the world, radiating over it a light and life which heals and elevates the dignity of the human person,<sup>9</sup> which consolidates the unity of society<sup>10</sup> and gives a more profound reason and meaning to all human activity.

Doubtless, for the Church, the fullness and perfection of the human vocation will be accomplished with the definitive inclusion of each person in the Passover or Triumph of Christ, but the hope of such a definitive realization, rather than lull, ought to "vivify the concern to perfect this earth. For here grows the body of the new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age."<sup>11</sup> We do not confuse temporal progress and the Kingdom of Christ; nevertheless, the former, "to the extent that it can contribute to the better ordering of human society, is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God."<sup>12</sup>

The Christian quest for justice is a demand arising from biblical teaching. All people are merely humble stewards of material goods. In the search for salvation we must avoid the dualism which separates temporal tasks from the work of sanctification. Although we are encompassed with imperfections, we are people of hope. We have faith that our love for Christ and our brothers and sisters will not only be the great force liberating us from injustice and oppression, but also the inspiration for social justice, understood as a whole of life and as an impulse toward the integral growth of our countries.

### III. Projections for Social Pastoral Planning

6. Our pastoral mission is essentially a service of encouraging and educating the conscience of believers, to help them to perceive the responsibilities of their faith in their personal life and in their social life. This Second Episcopal Conference wishes to point out the most important demands, taking into account the value judgment which the latest documents of the Magisterium of the Church have already made concerning the economic and social situation of the world of today and which applies fully to the Latin American continent.

### DIRECTION OF SOCIAL CHANGE

7. The Latin American church encourages the formation of national communities that reflect a global

organization, where all of the peoples but more especially the lower classes have, by means of territorial and functional structures, an active and receptive, creative and decisive participation in the construction of a new society. Those intermediary structures--between the person and the state--should be freely organized, without any unwarranted interference from authority or from dominant groups, in view of their development and concrete participation in the accomplishment of the total common good. They constitute the vital network of society. They are also the true expression of the citizens' liberty and unity.

#### a) The Family

8. Without ignoring that unique character of the family, as the natural unit of society, we are considering it here as an intermediary structure, inasmuch as the families as a group ought to take up their function in the process of social change. Latin American families ought to organize their economic and cultural potential so that their legitimate needs and hopes be taken into account, on the levels where fundamental decisions are made, which can help or hinder them. In this way they will assume a role of effective representation and participation in the life of the total community.

Besides the dynamism which is generated in each country by the union of families, it is necessary that governments draw up legislation and a healthy up-to-date policy governing the family.

#### b) Professional Organization

9. The Second Latin American Episcopal Conference addresses itself to all those who, with daily effort, create the goods and services which favor the existence and development of human life. We refer especially to the millions of Latin American men and women who make up the peasant and working class. They, for the most part, suffer, long for and struggle for a change that will humanize and dignify their work. Without ignoring the totalities of the significance of human work, here we refer to it as an intermediary structure, inasmuch as it constitutes the function which gives rise to professional organization in the field of production.

#### c) Business Enterprises and the Economy

10. In today's world, production finds its concrete expression in business enterprises, the industrial as well as the rural; they constitute the dynamic and fundamental base of the integral economic process. The system of Latin American business enterprises, and through it the current economy, responds to an erroneous conception concerning the right of ownership of the means of production and the very goals of the economy. A business, in an authentically human economy, does not identify itself with the owners of capital, because it is fundamentally a community of persons and a unit of work, which is in need of capital to produce goods. A person or group of persons cannot be the properties of an individual, of a society, or of the state.

The system of liberal capitalism and the temptation of the Marxist system would appear to exhaust the possibilities of transforming the economic structures of our continent. Both systems militate against the dignity of the human person. One takes for granted the primacy of capital, its power and its discriminatory utilization in the function of profit-making. The other, although it ideologically supports a kind of humanism, is more concerned with collective humanity and in practice becomes a totalitarian concentration of state power. We must denounce the fact that Latin America sees itself caught between these two options and remains dependent on one or other of the centers of power which control its economy.

Therefore, on behalf of Latin America, we make an urgent appeal to the owners and managers of businesses, to their organizations and to the political authorities so that they might radically modify the evaluation, the

attitudes and the means regarding the goal, organization and functioning of business. All those financiers deserve encouragement who, individually or through their organizations, make an effort to conduct their business according to the guidelines supplied by the social teaching of the Church. That the social and economic change in Latin America be channeled towards a truly human economy will depend fundamentally on this.

11. On the other hand this change will be essential in order to liberate the authentic process of Latin American development and integration. Many of our workers, although they gradually become conscious of the necessity for this change, simultaneously experience a situation of dependence on inhuman economic systems and institutions: a situation which, for many of them, borders on slavery, not only physical but also professional, cultural, civic and spiritual.

With the clarity which arises from the knowledge of human beings and of their hopes, we must reiterate that neither the combined value of capital nor the establishment of the most modern techniques of production, nor economic plans will serve us efficiently if the workers, the "necessary unity of direction" having been safeguarded, are not incorporated with all of the thrust of their humanity, by means of "the active participation of all in the running of the enterprise, according to ways which will have to be determined with care and on a macro-economic level, decisive nationally and internationally."<sup>13</sup>

#### d) Organization of the Workers

12. Therefore, in the intermediary professional structure the peasants' and workers' unions, to which the workers have a right, should acquire sufficient strength and power. Their associations will have a unified and responsible strength, to exercise the right of representation and participation on the levels of production and of national, continental and international trade. They ought to exercise their right of being represented, also, on the social, economic, and political levels, where decisions are made which touch upon the common good. Therefore, the unions ought to use every means at their disposal to train those who are to carry out these responsibilities in moral, economic, and especially in technical matters.

#### e) Unity of Action

13. Socialization understood and as a socio-cultural process of personalization and communal growth, leads us to think that all of the sectors of society, but in this case, principally the social-economic sphere, should, because of justice and brotherhood, transcend antagonisms in order to become agents of national and continental development. Without this unity, Latin America will not be able to succeed in liberating itself from the neo-colonialism to which it is bound, nor will Latin America be able to realize itself in freedom, with its own cultural, socio-political and economic characteristics.

#### f) Rural Transformation

14. The Second Episcopal Conference wishes to voice its pastoral concern for the extensive peasant class, which, although included in the above remarks, deserves urgent attention because of its special characteristics. If it is true that one ought to consider the diversity of circumstances and resources in the different countries, there is no doubt that there is a common denominator in all of them: the need for the human promotion of the peasants and Indians. This uplifting will not be viable without an authentic and urgent reform of agrarian structures and policies. This structural change and its political implications go beyond a simple distribution of land. It is indispensable to make and adjudication of such lands, under detailed conditions which legitimize their occupation and insure their productivity for the benefit of the

families and the national economy. This will entail, aside from juridical and technical aspects not within our competence, the organization of the peasants into effective intermediate structures, principally in the form of cooperatives; and motivation towards the creation of urban centers in rural areas, which would afford the peasant population the benefits of culture, health, recreation, spiritual growth, participation in local decisions and in those which have to do with the economy and national politics. This uplifting of the rural areas will contribute to the necessary process of industrialization and to participation in the advantages of urban civilization.

#### g) Industrialization

15. There is no doubt that the process of industrialization is irreversible and is a necessary preparation for an independent economy and integration into the modern world-wide economy. Industrialization will be a decisive factor in raising the standard of living of our countries and affording them better conditions for an integral development. Therefore it is indispensable to revise plans and reorganize national macro-economies, preserving the legitimate autonomy of our nation, and allowing for just grievances of the poorer nations and for the desired economic integration of the continent, respecting always the inalienable rights of the person and of intermediary structures, as protagonists of this process.

#### POLITICAL REFORM

16. Faced with the need for a total change of Latin American structures, we believe that change has political reform as its prerequisite.

The exercise of political authority and its decisions have as their only end the common good. In Latin America such authority and decision-making frequently seem to support systems which militate against the common good or which favor privileged groups. By means of legal norms, authority ought effectively and permanently to assure the rights and inalienable liberties of the citizens and the free functioning of intermediary structures.

Public authority has the duty of facilitating and supporting the creation of means of participation and legitimate representation of the people, or if necessary the creation of new ways to achieve it. We want to insist on the necessity of vitalizing and strengthening the municipal and communal organization, as a beginning of organizational efforts at the departmental, provincial, regional and national levels.

The lack of political consciousness in our countries makes the educational activity of the Church absolutely essential, for the purpose of bringing Christians to consider their participation in the political life of the nation as a matter of conscience and as the practice of charity in its most noble and meaningful sense for the life of the community.

#### INFORMATION AND "CONCIENTIZACIÓN"

17. We wish to confirm that it is indispensable to form a social conscience and a realistic perception of the problems of the community and of social structures. We must awaken the social conscience and communal customs in all strata of society and professional groups regarding such values as dialogue and community living within the same group and relations with wider social groups (workers, peasants, professionals, clergy, religious, administrators, etc.).

This task of "concientización" and social education ought to be integrated into joint Pastoral Action at various

levels.

18. The sense of service and realism demands of today's hierarchy a greater social sensitivity and objectivity. In that regard there is a need for direct contact with the different social-professional groups in meetings which provide all with a more complete vision of social dynamics. Such encounters are to be regarded as instruments which can facilitate a collegial action on the part of the bishops, guaranteeing harmony of thought and activities in the midst of a changing society.

The National Episcopal Conference will implement the organization of courses, meetings, etc., as a means of integrating those responsible for social activities related to pastoral plans. Besides priests and interested religious and laymen, invitations could be extended to heads of national and international development programs within the country. In like manner the institutes organized to prepare foreign apostolic personnel will coordinate their activities of a pastoral-social nature with corresponding national groups; moreover, opportunities will be sought for promoting study weeks devoted to social issues in order to articulate social doctrine applying to all our problems. This will allow all of us to affect public opinion.

19. "Key men and women" deserve special attention; we refer to those persons at a decision-making level whose actions effect changes in the basic structures of national and international life. The Episcopal Conference, therefore, through its Commission on Social Action or Pastoral Service, will support, together with other interested groups, the organization of courses of study for technicians, politicians, labor leaders, peasants, managers and educated people of all levels of society.

It is necessary that small basic communities be developed in order to establish a balance with minority groups, which are the groups in power. This is only possible through vitalization of these very communities by means of the natural innate elements in their environment.

The Church--the People of God--will lend its support to the downtrodden of every social class so that they might come to know their rights and how to make use of them. To this end the Church will utilize its moral strength and will seek to collaborate with competent professionals and institutions.

21. The Commission of Justice and Peace should be supported in all our countries at least that the national level. It should be composed of persons of a high moral caliber, professionally qualified and representative of different social classes; it should be capable of establishing an effective dialogue with persons and institutions more directly responsible for the decisions which favor the common good and detect everything that can wound justice and endanger the internal and external peace of the national and international communities; it should help to find concrete means to obtain adequate solutions for each situation.

22. For the implementation of their pastoral mission, the Episcopal Conferences will create Commissions of Social Action or Pastoral Service to develop doctrine and to take the initiative, presenting the Church as a catalyst in the temporal realm in an authentic attitude of service. The same applies to the diocesan level.

Furthermore, the Episcopal Conferences and Catholic organizations will encourage collaboration on the national and continental scene with non-Catholic Christian churches and institutions, dedicated to the task of restoring justice in human relations.

"Caritas" which is a Church organization<sup>14</sup> integrated into the joint Pastoral Plan, will not be solely a welfare institution, but rather will become operational in the developmental process of Latin America, as an institution authentically dedicated to its growth.

23. The Church recognizes that these institutions of temporal activity correspond to the specific sphere of civic society, even though they are established and stimulated by Christians. In actual concrete situations this Second General Conference of Latin American bishops feels it its duty to offer special encouragement to those organizations which have as their purpose human development and the carrying out of justice. The moral force of the Church will be concentrated, above all, to stimulate them, not acting except in a supplementary capacity and in situations that admit no delay.

Finally, this Second Conference is fully aware that the process of socialization, hastened by the techniques and media of mass communication, makes these means a necessary and proper instrument for social education and for a "concientización" ordered to changing the structures and the observance of justice. For the same reason this Conference urges all, but especially laymen, to make full use of mass media in their work of human promotion.

## NOTES

1. See synthesis of this situation in the *Work Paper* of the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops, 1-9.
2. Paul VI, *The Development of Peoples*, 30.
3. Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 69.
4. Genesis 1:26; Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 34.
5. John 8:32-35.
6. Ephesians 2:10.
7. 2 Corinthians 5:17.
8. Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 38.
9. Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 41.
10. Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 42.
11. Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 39.
12. Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 39.
13. Vatican Council II, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 68.
14. Paul VI, *The Development of Peoples*, 46.