

# **TRUE FREEDOM AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN**

## **A Christian Perspective**

### **Pastoral letter of the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference**

**Dominica, 2 February, 1982**

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ:

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. We, Roman Catholic Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, wish once again to speak to all Roman Catholics in the territories of our Conference, and indeed to all men and women in the Caribbean who share our desire for the full human development and authentic liberation of our Caribbean peoples.

2. Many of you recall that in 1975, when we Bishops met in Martinique, we issued a Pastoral letter entitled 'Justice and Peace in a New Caribbean'. That Letter was well received. It has been widely read, reprinted several times in the Caribbean, and translated into French, Dutch and Spanish. It is still read and used as a most useful introduction to Catholic Social Teaching, which is so important and also so much neglected, and we trust it will continue to be of value.

3. But we realise that in the past seven years new situations have developed and new problems have arisen in our region. In addition, new emphases have come about in Catholic Social Teaching. It is on this account that, wishing to continue the dialogue we began, we now speak to you again.

#### **II. THE CARIBBEAN TODAY**

##### **Improvements**

4. Since 'Justice and Peace' was published we are glad to note that there has been some political advance as well as some improvements in the quality of life in the Caribbean.

5. Dominica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, Belize and Antigua and Barbuda have all taken their places in the community of nations, and one result of Caribbean nations attaining to independence has been that they have been able to make their voices heard, in union with those of other developing countries, and have been able to obtain benefits, restricted though these may still be, e.g. those of the LOME Convention between the European Community and the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Countries. It was, in fact, this Convention which led to special grants being made to countries severely hit by hurricanes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Ex. 17

6. There has been a continuous growth in the level of aspirations of Caribbean peoples towards dignity and human worth. Despite serious political and economic problems facing the regional integration movement, Caribbean peoples at the grass-roots level have drawn closer together. The generosity and concern of the region as a whole in face of hurricane and volcanic devastation in several Caribbean islands are but one manifestation of this fraternal spirit, with its deep Christian roots. However, it is urgent that we intensify the level of co-operation between our countries in the Caribbean.

We welcome the formation of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States and we look forward to frequent meetings of Caricom Heads of Government.

7. Despite many difficulties, some progress has been made in the search for social and economic betterment, in some countries more than in others. Tourism has made considerable progress in some places. This not only aids the economy but can help to broaden the world view of our people. However, it is a precarious industry. Moreover, it brings with it not only economic and cultural benefits but moral and social ills as well. There has been some development in industrialisation, but if it is to be significant, massive investment is still required. Efforts are continuing, also, to advance along the long road to improved agriculture and land reform.

### **Disappointments**

8. On the other hand, there has been acute disappointment and frustration in the region because many of the hopes for better social and economic life have not been realised. Poverty and the wide gap between rich and poor continue to be a serious source of disharmony and challenge to the message and witness of Christ, in view of the preferential option the Church should have for the poor and oppressed. Special emphasis was laid on this by the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean who met at Puebla.<sup>2</sup>

We are grieved to see that so many in our region are still living in degrading poverty, and in miserable housing conditions, uncertain where their next meal is to come from. Many children are still suffering from malnutrition while many women have to carry an appalling burden with little or no support from the fathers: they have to care for a house and children while at the same time having to go out to work in order to support themselves and those dependent upon them.

9. As developing nations, we have been especially hard hit by the problems of inflation and especially by the increased cost of oil products. Though attempts have been made to secure less unjust trading conditions from developed countries, what has been secured still falls far short of justice and we remain the victims of distorted world monetary and trading systems which favour international capitalism, so, e.g. the price we receive for our exports is out of all proportion to what we have to pay for the manufactured goods we import.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pb. 1134 sequ.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. L. Ex. 17

10. The decrease in the possibility of emigration for the less advanced in society and the move away from agriculture to the towns have led to increased unemployment with its frustrating and degrading consequences. Many of our young people, especially, find it impossible to find work and some have recourse to marijuana as a form of escape. Young girls are tempted to prostitution in an effort to support themselves and some women who seek employment find that jobs are offered dependent upon sexual favours granted to employers. It is scarcely surprising that many react against Society as they experience it. But unfortunately, a number adopt an alternative mode of life which puts them at odds with other people.

### **Abuses**

11. In some of our countries, as in other parts of the world, the powers of Government are being abused. Governments favour certain sections and groups; human rights are denied; bribery and corruption have become all too easily accepted as a norm in public and professional life; deep divisions have led to hatred, violence and even murder.

12. Strong attempts continue to be made to subject our region to harmful foreign influences which threaten our peace. Politically, there are efforts to involve our territories in the international power struggle. Economically, there is a constant drive to promote the consumer mentality and to make luxuries appear as necessities. This emphasises purely materialistic goals, fosters a competitive and aggressive spirit and distracts our people's minds from humanising, spiritual and eternal values.

13. In addition, attempts are being made to impose upon our people the ideology of atheistic Marxism as well as the harmful influence of exploitative capitalism. We wish to emphasise that both are alien to the strong religious and social sentiments of our people.

### **III. THE TASK OF THE CHURCH**

14. Paul VI wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation "On Evangelization in the Modern World":

*"There is no authentic evangelisation so long as one does not announce the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God."* n. 22

It is the task of the Church and, therefore, in a special way ours, as Bishops, to proclaim the message brought by Jesus Christ her Founder, the good news that he offers us liberation from the effects of sin and the promise of eternal life. But as Paul VI tells us later in the same Exhortation:

*"Between evangelisation and human advancement - development and liberation - there are in fact profound links: (God's) plan of salvation touches in a special way the very real situation of injustice which exists and the real need to restore justice"*

and he adds —

“how can one proclaim the new commandment of charity without promoting, in justice and peace, the authentic advancement of man?” cf. n. 3 1.

15. Faced, then, by the many injustices and examples of human degradation which we have noted above, we feel it is important for us to supplement the points we made in our earlier letter on Justice and Peace in 1975 and to outline more clearly relevant points in the social teaching of the Church as sound and positive guidelines for following out God’s will today.

#### **Liberation from ... for ...**

16. Let us stress most insistently how dynamic a process is *Christian Liberation*. Christ came to liberate men from all forms of bondage: *from* personal and social sinfulness and *from* everything that tears apart the human individual and society (Lk. 4:18). But this liberation of mankind *from* evil is also a liberation *for* progressive growth through a new relationship with God and with other human beings. This reaches its culmination in the perfect communion of heaven, when God is all in all.<sup>4</sup>

17. Much of the evil in this world is the result of sin, the result of human greed for wealth and power, the result of cruel disregard for other human beings. Indeed our very society has become so infected with immoral principles that it becomes hard to shake ourselves free from them and avoid their consequences. We must, therefore, root out sin, not only that men may attain eternal happiness with God, but also to make this world the kind of place Christ wishes it to be, a place where justice and Christian love prevail. We destroy the meaning of the liberation Christ won for us on the cross if we forget that the very centre of the Gospel teaching on liberation is that it should transform men and women into active subjects of their own development, both as individuals and as members of a Christian community. It is equally destructive of Christian liberation to disregard dependence and the forms of bondage which violate the basic rights that come from God our Creator and Father.<sup>5</sup>

18. To sum up, like Christ the Church is not willing to restrict her mission solely to the religious field and to dissociate herself from man’s temporal problems (Mt. 25:35). Neither can she restrict her message simply to purely temporal problems. She reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual vocation and insists that her contribution to liberation is incomplete if she neglects to proclaim salvation in Christ. It is through following out the salvation won by Christ, and all that this means, that true liberation is to be achieved.<sup>6</sup>

#### **IV. THE DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

19. Sacred Scripture teaches that men and women were created “*in the image of God*”, that they are capable of knowing and loving their Creator, and that they are appointed by God to be master of the things of creation, so that they may subdue them and use them for God’s glory. (cf. Gen. 1. 26)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pb. 482

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pb. 485

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E.N. 32, 34

<sup>7</sup> Cf. L. Ex. 4 & 25

20. Again, Christ by his manifestation of the Father and of His love, gives man a full revelation of what he really is and to what sublime heights he is called. He who is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1.15) is Himself the perfect man. To the sons and daughters of Adam he has restored the divine likeness which has been disfigured from the first sin onwards. For since His incarnation, *the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man and woman*. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by His human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.<sup>8</sup>

21. But this is not all. Those who have been baptised have been ‘born again’ of water and the Holy Spirit (Jn. ch. 3). They have come to have the life brought by Christ (Jn. ch. 6, 10 & 15). By becoming brothers and sisters of Christ, who is the Son of God, they have become themselves *the adopted children of God*, members of the family of God, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. ch. 8). Indeed they come to share in the divine nature. (II Peter 1,4).

22. In his first encyclical letter “Redemptor Hominis” John Paul II has this striking statement:

“How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he ‘gained so great a Redeemer’ (Exultet at the Easter Vigil) and if God ‘gave His only Son’ in order that man should not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:16)

and these words give full meaning to another statement of the Pope:

“Society is made for men ... The human person may never be sacrificed for political interests, national or international, whatever they may be ... The principle to follow is not that of allowing economic, social and political forces to prevail over man, but for the dignity of the human person to be put above everything else.”

### **Human Rights**

23. We have stressed the dignity of every man and woman, each with an immortal soul endowed with freedom. But precisely because of this dignity and power, each one has the duty freely to serve God and to follow the path asked of him or her by God as well as the God-given right to the conditions necessary to achieve this. Therefore, when a person is deliberately and unlawfully deprived of these conditions, there is injustice.

So John Paul II writes:

“It is necessary to call by their name injustice, the exploitation of man by man, or the exploitation of man by the State, institutions, mechanisms or systems and regimes which sometimes operate without sensitivity. It is necessary to call by name every social injustice, discrimination, violence, inflicted on man against the body, against the spirit, against his conscience and against his convictions. Christ teaches us a special sensitivity

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. G. & S. 22

for man, for the dignity of the human person, for human life, for the human spirit and body.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Address 21 February, 1979

And the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean meeting at Puebla stated emphatically in their final document:

*“Every attack on human dignity is simultaneously an attack on God Himself of whom man is the image”*<sup>10</sup>

24. Denial or neglect of the dignity and rights of individual men and women lies at the root of many of our problems today. The rights of women, in particular, are often set aside. But there is another problem, too - the tragedy that so many fail not only to recognise the human dignity of others but also to appreciate sufficiently their own worth. Lack of self-appreciation and the underrating of local culture and products remain a sad legacy of slavery and colonialism.

## **V. RIGHT TO SHARE IN THE WORKS OF CREATION**

25. An important right of every human being is to share in the works of creation. The Puebla Document insists:

*“By virtue of their origin and nature, by the will of the Creator, worldly goods and riches are meant to serve the utility and progress of each and every human being and people.*

Thus each and everyone enjoys a primary, fundamental and absolutely inviolable right to share in the use of these goods, in so far as that is necessary for the worthy fulfilment of the human person. All other rights, including the right of property and free trade, are subordinate to that right. As John Paul II stated in his opening address at Puebla: “There is a social mortgage on all private property” (I If, 4). To be compatible with basic human rights, *the right of ownership must be primarily a right of use and administration; and though this does not rule out ownership and control, it does not make these absolute or unlimited.* Ownership should be a source of freedom for all, but never a source of domination or special privilege. We have a grave and pressing duty to restore this right to its original use and primary aim”.<sup>11</sup>

### **Just Wages**

26. In practice, if there is to be an equitable distribution of the works of creation, justice demands that a man who works hard should be able to earn a wage sufficient to ensure a truly human life and to face up to his family responsibilities with dignity.<sup>12</sup> This means that he should be able to put aside something in savings or in the purchase of land or other property, or in improving his professional skill. Women should receive a wage equal to that of men for similar work.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Pb. 306

<sup>11</sup> Pb. 492, Cf. L. Ex. 14 & 19

<sup>12</sup> Cf. L. Ex. 19

<sup>13</sup> M. M. 71, cf. L. Ex. 10 & 19

27. While investors should obtain a fair return for their investment, often the fruit of hard-earned savings, the problem can be that they demand a return in accord with a high rate of interest in the 'money market' and this may prevent the payment of a just wage.

28. In most of our countries, the level of wages is being left to negotiation between trade unions and employers. Too often such negotiations are conducted in a spirit of strife and bitterness. There is need in employer/employee relations for a mutual respect for each other's human dignity,<sup>14</sup> for a due respect by employers for the natural right of the employees to a decent standard of living in return for honest work<sup>15</sup> and for an understanding by trade unions of the limitations imposed by the economic state of the country. The unions should also bear in mind not only the benefit of their own members but also that their demands for their members may have a damaging effect upon other fellow workers and the nation.<sup>16</sup> Where necessary, it is important that Governments should intervene with legislation to fix a minimum wage and also to control prices.

29. When socio-economic disputes arise, efforts should be made to come to a speedy settlement by negotiation. A strike can be the necessary, though always ultimate, means for the defence of the workers' own rights and the fulfilment of their just demands. Because a strike can cause so much inconvenience, and even suffering to many innocent people, justice demands that it be used only as a last resort in matters of grave concern. It can be a wise provision that strikes should only take place after a secret ballot by the workers.<sup>17</sup> Workers on strike do have the right to publicise their protest and to seek support of others by use of the picket line; but they do not have the right to prevent entrance to the workplace by the use of violence.

### **The Farmers**

30. One group of workers who play a major part in developing the riches of creation are the farmers.<sup>18</sup> Yet they are often quite unjustly looked down upon and they often receive a very poor return for their arduous work. Such failure to improve the lot of rural workers has led to an increase of the trek to the towns and aggravated the problems of urbanisation. It will be well, then, to recall some of the points made by Pope John XXIII in his letter 'Mater et Magistra' in 1961.<sup>19</sup> He stressed the need adequately to develop essential public services in rural areas, including good roads, transportation and means of communication, as well as religious, medical, educational, recreational and buying facilities. He also noted the need for a Government to develop a prudent agricultural policy including special economic help, price protection, taxation proportionate to the capacity to pay and appropriate insurance.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. L. Ex. 8

<sup>15</sup> Cf. L. Ex. 7

<sup>16</sup> Cf. L. ex. 20

<sup>17</sup> Rerum Novarum 31, G. & S. 68, L. Ex. 20

<sup>18</sup> Cf. L. Ex. 5 & 21

<sup>19</sup> M. M. 123-127

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G. & S. 66



## Consumerism

31. Justice suffers if those who work honestly do not have a sufficiency. Yet there is the danger of another lamentable extreme when people make an idol of riches. Urged on by high pressure advertising and a desire to keep up with, or to excel, their next-door neighbours they make the acquisition of material possessions the be-all and end-all of their lives. It is important, therefore, to remember that the present-day spirit of consumerism is opposed to the spirit of Christ. We recall the parable of the rich man who heard the words “Thou fool, this night do they require your soul of you”. (Lk. 12,20) and also the words “You cannot give yourself to God and. to money”. (Lk. 16, 13). The relentless pursuit of material possessions also leads to another sad situation — viz: the cruel contrast which arises between luxurious wealth, sometimes increased by corrupt practices, and extreme poverty.

## VI. EXPLOITATIVE CAPITALISM AND MARXIST COMMUNISM

32. The Bishops at Puebla noted how the idolatry of wealth is concretised in two opposite forms which have a common root: one which they call ‘liberal capitalism’ — i.e. that kind of exploitative capitalism which seeks profit relentlessly and rejects any outside control. The other, a reaction against this form of capitalism, is Marxist communism. This is a form of socialism which is atheistic, which denies the God-given rights of the individual and which calls for the nationalisation of all the means of production. Both are forms of what can be called “institutionalised injustice”.<sup>21</sup>

33. In describing exploitative capitalism, the Bishops call it the idolatrous worship of wealth in *individualistic* terms and they go on to use the same quotation from the letter of Paul VI on the ‘Development of Peoples’ which we ourselves used in our letter on ‘Justice and Peace:’

“It considers profit as the key motive for economic progress, competition as the supreme law of economics and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right that has no limits and carries no corresponding social obligation.” n.26<sup>22</sup>

It is true that in many countries of the world, efforts have been made, with some success, to bring under control those who cling to an exploitative capitalist outlook, but the fact remains that this outlook still exists and its powerful and damaging effects are being experienced in our own region.

34. Speaking of Marxist collectivism, the Puebla Document says: — “With its materialistic presuppositions, it leads to the idolatrous worship of wealth — but in *collectivist* terms.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Pb. 495 cf. L. Ex. 11

<sup>22</sup> Pb. 542

<sup>23</sup> Pb. 543

“The driving force behind its dialectic is class struggle.

Its objective is a classless society, which is to be achieved by the dictatorship of the proletariat, but in the last analysis this really sets up the dictatorship of the party.”<sup>24</sup>

35. Both exploitative capitalism and Marxist communism look upon human beings merely as means of production as ‘hands’ or ‘cogs’, and on this account they are both equally destructive of human dignity. Indeed it is the deliberate policy of Marxist communism to foment discord and class war which inevitably causes human suffering.

36. The Bishops at Puebla conclude by repeating what was said at the earlier Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellin in 1968: that while the system of exploitative capitalism and the temptation of the Marxist system might 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 relentless pursuit 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. (cf. Medellin Justice 10).<sup>25</sup> In his latest encyclical, Pope John Paul II strongly stressed the primacy of labour over capital, because only the individual is a person and capital is a collection of things subject to man:

“Everything contained in the concept of capital in the strict sense is only a collection of things . Man, as the subject c work and independent of the work he does — man alone is person. This truth has important and decisive consequences.”<sup>26</sup>

37. *In face of this situation, the Church rejects both these opposing systems in order to opt solely for the human being.* What is at stake is not just economic development and the amassing of material wealth but what is called “integral human development” i.e. that every person should have the means and the freedom for full development.

As Paul VI wrote:

“Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete and integral, that is it has to provide the good of every man and of the whole man.”<sup>27</sup>

Each must have an opportunity for human fulfilment i.e. to develop personal talents and to follow out the duty of living his or her life in accordance with God’s will.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pb. 544

<sup>25</sup> Pb. 550

<sup>26</sup> Cf. L. Ex. 12

<sup>27</sup> P.P. 14

<sup>28</sup> P.P. 15 sequ.

### **The “either-or” Mentality**

38. One of the problems that face us in the Caribbean is what may be called the ‘either-or’ mentality. As a result many see the choice as *either* exploitative capitalism *or* extreme Marxist collectivism and this polarisation is being encouraged by international influences and developments. Fear of Marxism keeps many from facing up to the oppressive reality of exploitative capitalism. One could say that some people, faced with the danger of one clearly sinful system, forget to denounce and combat the established reality of another equally sinful system. (Puebla 92 quoting John Paul II). And it is particularly sad that often those who take the side of the poor and fight for justice are, quite unjustly, labelled Communists.

39. While it is for each nation to determine its own policy within the limits of justice, we recall what we made clear in our previous letter, that exploitative capitalism and Marxist communism *are not the only options*.<sup>29</sup> It is possible totally to reject uncontrolled exploitative capitalism with all the injustice to which it leads while accepting private — sector enterprise with proper legislative control as well as systems which allow for, and actually encourage, men and women to work to help themselves and fully to develop their powers.

### **Worker Participation**

40. The Second Vatican Council urged that active participation of everyone in running the enterprise should be promoted and companies exist where workers share not only in the profits but also in the management and ownership of the undertaking. Pope John Paul treats specially of this in his recent Encyclical ‘*Laborem Exercens*’.<sup>30</sup> Again in the agricultural sector, men are more satisfied and work all the harder when they themselves own the land which they sow, reap and develop.

### **Government Control**

41. On the other hand, it is possible totally to reject atheistic Marxism and complete collectivism (i.e. a complete nationalisation of the means of production) which destroy human liberty, while accepting a policy which in this region is sometimes called ‘Socialist’.<sup>31</sup> So it is possible to opt for a measure of Government control in industrial matters; indeed such control is today very generally accepted. It is possible too, and sometimes desirable, to opt for nationalisation of certain key industries and public utilities. Pius XI wrote in ‘*Quadragesimo Anno*’:

“It is rightly contended that certain forms of property must be reserved to the State, since they carry with them a power too great to be left to private individuals without injury to the community at large.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> J. P. 36 cf. L. Ex 14

<sup>30</sup> G. & S. 68, L. Ex. 14

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J.P. 31

<sup>32</sup> Q.A. 114cf. G. & S. 71

42. In our own region many Governments provide extensive social service for education, health services and community development financed by a system of heavy taxation on industry and commercial enterprises and the well-to-do. They also enforce labour legislation and price and currency control. This curbs what might be the abuses of exploitative capitalism and helps to make the distribution of wealth less inequitable. We may note that such control is especially necessary in regard to Trans-national Corporations which though they may develop industry are too often extremely self-centred in their activities.<sup>33</sup>

## VII. GOVERNMENTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

43. We have spoken of how human rights can be destroyed by exploitative capitalism and by atheistic Marxist communism. We now turn to the true role of Governments and note the harm that comes from the unjust use of the powers of Government.

44. Individuals, families and various groups cannot just live independently without some form of properly constituted authority. It is therefore obvious that the political community and public authority are based upon human nature and hence a part of God's plan for mankind. Love of country and of our fellow countrymen should therefore encourage all to work for the common good and to take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of others and of the general welfare.<sup>34</sup>

But there is clearly the need for the Government to promote and protect the common good and to safeguard the rights of all the citizens. There can be a need for balancing-up and care must be taken to see that individual needs and aspirations are provided for, especially in the case of those who are less well able to fend for themselves, such as women, children and the less well-off.<sup>35</sup>

45. Today Governments are expected not only to provide social services and infrastructure but also to stimulate economic growth. Indeed the responsibility of a Government is so great that the happiness and well-being of the citizens will depend very largely on the dedication, efficiency and high standard of integrity of those elected to office.

46. Governments then have all all-important function and important responsibilities. They have the right and duty to exercise their authority. But they must be guided by certain principles:

- a. A properly constituted Government derives its authority ultimately from God and is bound to rule in accordance with the law of God, the Supreme Law-giver. It cannot, therefore, rightfully claim authority for enactments, which are in defiance of God's law.<sup>36</sup> Also to be authentic a Government must have the substantial support of the people.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. J.P. 31

<sup>34</sup> Q.A. 114 cf. G & S. 71

<sup>35</sup> G. & S. 74

<sup>36</sup> G. & S. 74

- b. The duty of those in power is to serve the community, not to seek self-aggrandisement and personal gain. They must work for the common-good, not just for the interests of themselves or of their party.
- c. The State exists for the benefit of the individual person and family — not the individual and family for the benefit of the State.
- d. Too often human rights are seen as something conceded by the State. This is not so. As we have explained above (Sec. IV) every individual human being by his very nature has rights which come from God and it is the duty of Governments to respect these rights. A Government which overrides these God-given rights is defying God and loses its claim to authenticity.
- e. Today in the actual socio-political situation in the world in order to exercise power, a government must have a mandate from the people and must rule not only in accordance with the law of God, but also in conformity with the expressed will of the people. The most effective form of government is one in which the people know that they themselves have a share because they are actually given an opportunity freely to express their views on current issues and know that attention will be given to what they say.<sup>37</sup>
- f. The mandate of a government should be ratified by the holding of properly conducted elections at prescribed intervals, and should be sustained by constant and widespread consultation with the people. When a Government clings to power in defiance of the popular will, it creates misery and frustration and is destructive of the national spirit.
- g. The existence of an impartial independent and fearless judiciary is clearly essential for the well-being of any country.
- h. In accordance with the important principle of “subsidiarity” the central government should avoid over-centralisation and monopoly of control and give due scope to lesser bodies and private initiatives.<sup>38</sup>

47. It is clearly no easy thing for a Caribbean Government to carry out its task today in view of the social and economic problems that have to be faced and we commend those who have given dedicated political service to their countries in face of great odds. These are true servants of their countries and worthy of the highest praise.

48. But, unfortunately, too many of those who have entered politics have been far more intent on personal gain than on serving the people. Consequently a number of politicians have fallen far short of what we expected of them with great damage to their countries. We have clear examples in the region of those who exercise the role of government riding roughshod over human rights. There are ministers who cling to political power when they have lost the confidence of the people. They monopolise and

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<sup>37</sup> G. & S. 75

<sup>38</sup> Q.A. 79 cf. L. Ex. 18

pervert the means of communication, reject criticism and limit employment to party members and favourites. Some governments even encourage or connive at violence. Indeed violence has assumed such proportions in our region that we shall presently treat especially of this.

49. We also note with concern that in some countries of the Caribbean “national security” is being given an absolute value. This results in human rights and basic freedoms of individuals and of whole sections of the community being restricted and even denied. We therefore draw attention to the words of Pope John Paul II during his visit to the Philippines:

“Legitimate concern for the security of a nation, as demanded by the common good, could lead to the temptation of subjugating to the State the human being and his or her dignity and rights. Any apparent conflict between the exigencies of security and of the citizens’ basic rights must be resolved according to the fundamental principle - upheld always by the Church - that social organisation exists only for the service of man and for the protection of his dignity, and that it cannot claim to serve the common good when human rights are not safeguarded”.

(L’Osservatore Romano Eng. Ed. 23/2/81)

### **VIII. POLITICAL INTOLERANCE AND VIOLENCE**

50. Political action should aim at the advancement of a nation. It calls for the contribution of the ablest members of the community and also for national unity and co-operation.

51. We wish, therefore, to warn against the tendency for political parties or systems to require a blind loyalty from their supporters and for people to agree to such a demand. This leads to individuals becoming uncritical and passive. But it can also lead to intolerance, divisiveness and even hatred. In some of our countries, politics has become debased by being associated with physical violence leading to the senseless loss of many lives. In addition, degrading and inhuman treatment has become a matter of concern in the region. There have been increasing reports of police brutality and of detention of prisoners without charge or trial. Governments have maintained themselves in power by postponing elections or by manipulating the electoral process and muzzling a free press. In addition, there has been the growth of the phenomenon of structural violence and of exploitative systems using the powers of government to suppress human rights.

52. In face of these disturbing trends in which so many of our people have suffered unjustly, let us recall this statement from the Puebla Document:

“Faced with the deplorable reality of violence, we wish to express our view clearly. Condemnation is always the proper judgement on physical or psychological torture, kidnapping, the persecution of political dissidents or suspect persons, and the exclusion of people from public life because of their ideas. If these crimes are committed by the authorities entrusted with the task of

safe-guarding the common good, then they defile those who practise them, notwithstanding any reasons offered.”<sup>39</sup>

53. The Church is just as decisive in rejecting terrorist as well as guerrilla violence. These become cruel and uncontrollable once unleashed. Nor can criminal acts be justified as the way to liberation. Violence inexorably engenders new forms of oppression and bondage, which usually prove to be more serious than the ones from which people are allegedly being liberated. But most importantly, violence is an attack on life, which depends on the Creator alone. We must also stress that when an ideology appeals to violence, it thereby admits its own weakness and inadequacy.<sup>40</sup>

54. Our responsibility as Christians is to promote and make use of non-violent strategy in the effort to re-establish justice in economic and socio-political relations. This is in accordance with the teaching of Vatican II, which applies to both national and international life:

“We cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights, and who resort to methods of defence which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided that this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community.”<sup>41</sup>

Here we may recall how much was achieved for human liberation and development through the active non-violent programmes of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

## **IX. POLITICAL COUPS**

55. In several of our countries there have recently been successful, or attempted, coups and some of our countries can easily be vulnerable to such action.

56. We think it well then to set forth some general principles: We wish first of all to recall how strongly Pope Paul VI condemned violence as a means to effect changes of government. So speaking in Bogota in 1968 he said:

“We must say and reaffirm that violence is not in accord with the Gospel, that it is not Christian and that sudden or violent changes of structures would be deceitful, ineffective in themselves and certainly not in accord with the dignity of the people.”

And in 1975 he wrote:

“The Church cannot accept violence, especially the force of arms — which is uncontrollable once it is let loose — and indiscriminate death as the path to liberation, because she knows that violence always provokes violence and irresistibly engenders new forms of oppression and enslavement which are often harder to bear than those from which they claimed to bring freedom”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Pb. 531

<sup>40</sup> Pb. 532

<sup>41</sup> Pb. 533

<sup>42</sup> E.N. 37

57. How serious therefore is the responsibility in conscience of those who, faced by circumstances of great tyranny, would have recourse to violence to effect a change of government. For, besides the almost inevitable loss of life and human suffering that would ensue, violence is likely to provoke a reaction of violence. And how often has a political coup simply replaced one tyranny by another!

58. In the interests of public order, a political coup may lead to the acceptance of those who come to power as a “de facto” government, i.e. a government which is accepted as having actual control. But a coup, as such, does not give legitimacy to the new government. Might is not to be identified with right. Genuine legitimacy can only come from the free support of the people and from respect by the government for the rights of the people. The obligation, therefore, remains for the new government to enlist the genuine participation of the people and to restore their rights and not simply those of sectors of the population which may favour them.

59. The traditional means of peaceful political change through free and fair elections has come under assault in the Caribbean. Such elections, however, remain the well-tested model and a recognised right even though they do not always guarantee good government.

## **X. PERSONAL VIOLENCE**

60. What has been said about violence has its application to the sad deterioration found in some places in interpersonal relations. Envy, jealousy and political divisions have led to hatred and to a disregard for the value of human life which has not stopped short of murder.

Again we insist on the value of each human person, on the right to life of each one, including that of the unborn, on the right to live peacefully without oppression, on each one’s right to hold and express his personal opinion and on the duty of others to respect this right, just as they would wish others to respect their own right to do the same. Violence tends to provoke retaliation and those who have recourse to violence bear guilt not only for the evil they do but also for the evil they may provoke in turn. Serious blame lies, also, with those who make arms available. Without such a supply of arms, the violence we have come to know would never have been possible.

## **XI. CONCLUSION**

61. No one who considers the situation in the Caribbean can deny how serious are the problems that face us. How much need there is for the influence of Christ to become really effective among us. How much need there is for men and women to be liberated from personal sinfulness and from the devastating effects of sin. How much need there is for all men and women of good will to be more united and to work for a more just and prosperous society in which all will share in the benefits and in which the dignity of every human person will be respected and all will enjoy a decent standard of living. How much need for our people to live in happiness and harmony instead of being divided by hatred and enmity. How much need for governments to rule in accordance with the law of God and in active consultation with their people. How much need for them to work together



with governments of other developing countries to present our case and secure something at least of the benefits which we justly demand. How much need for them to work together in matters concerning the Caribbean especially in making it a zone of peace.

### **Our Role as Christians**

62. Every Christian is sent to be an apostle of unity, of hope and of salvation. As Bishops we have set out the Christian principles we consider particularly relevant to the situation. It will be largely for the laity to make effective plans to have these basic principles accepted and put into practice, and if all of us who call ourselves Christian really put our Christian principles into practice the effect will be stupendous. We Bishops wish to assure our laity that we realise that it is not easy to stand up for what is right and to work for justice. We know that you are vulnerable to ridicule and rejection. We also know that in some territories of the Caribbean you expose yourselves to the danger of loss of employment, loss of protection for yourselves and your families. We wish to express our solidarity with you and to offer you all the support and protection which we can give you.

63. There is a danger that many will ask — “What can I do?” But if only members of the Church both as individuals and in co-operation with others would stand up for Christian principles, practising and insisting upon justice, practising the self-sacrificing love Christ asked of us, denouncing corruption and partiality, it would be amazing how much would be achieved.

64. In our previous letter we stressed the need for persons of integrity and high religious motivation to be active members of a political party, of a trade union or of some other group or organisation dedicated to the welfare of the community. We now wish to reiterate this call. What some of our countries lack is good government, and good government will never come as long as involvement in politics is shunned by those who by their integrity could contribute to transform political life.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Power of the Spirit**

65. It is at once the weakness and the strength of Christianity that it relies on moral influence. Compliance with Christian principles is not brought about by force, but by high motivation and commitment. It is by the Christian community uniting in power of the Spirit to make the world the kind of place Christ wanted it to be that the world will be renewed. With increasing devotion to Christ, with love for all men, especially the most deprived for His sake, with a deep desire for justice, in a spirit of willing self-sacrifice aided by the prayers of Mary, our Mother, let us go forward together.

Let us be mindful of the words of Scripture:

“I can do all things in Him who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13) and again: “Everyone begotten of God conquers the world, and the power that has conquered the world is this faith of ours” (I Jn. 5:4).

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<sup>43</sup> J.P. 10 & 11

In You, O Lord, and in your power we put our trust. We know that our trust will not be in vain.

Dominica

February 2, 1982

(Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord)

- +*Anthony Pantin, Archbishop of Port of Spain, President, AEC*
- +*Arnold Boghaert, C.Ss.R., Bishop of Roseau, Vice President, AEC*
- +*Samuel Carter, S.J., Archbishop of Kingston*
- +*Kelvin Felix, Archbishop of Castries*
- +*Lawrence Burke, S.J., Bishop of Nassau*
- +*Sydney Charles, Bishop of St. George's in Grenada*
- +*Edgerton Clarke, Bishop of Montego Bay*
- +*Antoine Demets, Titular Bishop of Cadossia*
- +*Willem Ellis, Bishop of Willemstad*
- +*Anthony Dickson, Bishop of Bridgetown-Kingstown*
- +*Richard Lester Guilly, S.J., former Bishop of Georgetown*
- +*Brian Hennessy, C.R., Bishop of Hamilton, Bermuda*
- +*Robert Hodapp, S.J., Bishop of Belize*
- +*Donald Reece, Bishop of St. John's-Basseterre*
- +*Benedict Singh, Bishop of Georgetown*
- +*Aloysius Zichem, C.Ss.R., Bishop of Paramaribo*

## NOTES

### Abbreviations

- QA*      *Quadragesimo Anno*      Encyclical Letter of Pius XI, 1931
- M.M.*      *Mater et Magistra*      Encyclical Letter of John XXIII, 1961
- G.&S.*      *Guadium et Spes*      Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of Vatican II, 1965.
- P.P.*      *Populorum Progressio*      Encyclical Letter of Paul VI on Development of Peoples, 1967
- O.A.*      *Octogesima Adveniens*      Apostolic letter of Paul VI to Cardinal Roy, 1971
- E.N.*      *Evangelii Nuntiandi*      Pastoral Exhortation of Paul VI on Evangelization, 1975
- Pb.*      Final document of the general conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean meeting at Puebla. Five Bishops from the Antilles Conference attended this meeting. The final document reasserted and elaborated Catholic teaching on a number of subjects including social matters and though the situation in the Caribbean is not always the same as that in Latin American countries, many of the points in the Puebla document have great relevance for the Caribbean situation.
- L.Ex.*      *Laborem Exercens*      Encyclical Letter of John Paul II on human work dated September 1981. The Pope stresses that a proper understanding of human work is the key, probably the essential key to the whole social question. Through work, man, acting in the image of God, the Creator, becomes master of the earth. Work enables a man to realise his humanity and develop his personality and because of the human dignity of the worker his work has a dignity and cannot be treated as a sort of merchandise or treated on the same level as the material means of production. So labour, which is personal, has precedence over capital which consists of the natural resources placed at man's disposal and of what labour has developed. This point is basic to the ethical and social question. The letter also treats of worker solidarity, trade unions, employment, wages and worker participation and the spirituality of work. Where such points are dealt with in this Pastoral Letter, cross references are given to the Encyclical.
- J.P.*      *Justice and Peace in a New Caribbean.* Pastoral letter of the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Antilles, 1975.
- N.B.*      As this Pastoral Letter is meant to be a document for study, reflection and the planning of action, reference has been made not only to the source of quotations but also to relevant passages in other documents of the Church.