

The Church and Popular Political Organizations

*Third Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Romero,
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Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, 1978*

To our beloved brothers and sisters, the auxiliary bishop of San Salvador, the priests, religious, and laity of the archdiocese of San Salvador and the diocese of Santiago de María; to you and to all men and women of good will: the peace of Jesus Christ, our divine Savior.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE TRANSFIGURATION, AND OF THE MEMORY OF PAUL VI

We, the archbishop of San Salvador and the bishop of Santiago de Maria, had already been thinking of sending this pastoral letter to our dioceses to mark our return from our *ad limina* visit to Rome and as an act of homage to our divine Savior on our patronal feast of the transfiguration.

Never did we imagine, however, that the sudden death of his Holiness Paul VI, now of happy memory, would give both these events a new significance. Who could have imagined the eloquent coincidence of Paul VI's death and our own titular feast of the transfiguration! The final message of his lucid teaching --- the short address he had written to be read at the angelus of August 6 --- now becomes for us a cherished family heirloom because it was inspired by the divine Patron of El Salvador: *That body transfigured before the astonished gaze of his disciples, his Holiness said, is the body of Christ our Brother, but it is also our body summoned to glory. The light that floods over it is, and will be, our share in that inheritance of splendor. We are called to share this glory because we are sharers in the divine nature.* From this vision of transcendence that illuminated the last day of his mortal life, the pontiff turned his gaze back to earth in anxious concern for the poor. And he made an appeal to the world for social justice as he reflected that economic and social circumstances would prevent many from enjoying a well-earned rest during the traditional summer holidays.

Our audience with the supreme pontiff of the Church, together with his wise pastoral advice, gained, through his death, the solemn character of a last testament. The same pattern of turning toward the absolute and eternal, together with a concern for the ordinary needs of our people, *confirmed* our episcopal service when, on that unforgettable June 21, he spoke to us with the tenderness of a father. He was already aware of the approach of death, but he spoke with the firmness and clarity of a prophet who had long known, and known well, the historical situation of El Salvador. He exhorted its pastors to guide and strengthen its people along the paths of justice and love for the gospel. We feel, then, that the light with which our letter seeks to illuminate the pathway for our dioceses is the true light of the gospel and of the Church's magisterium. We feel that the transfiguration of Christ, which, in a great pope's last hour, illuminated the divine vocation of men and women and exposed the unjust inequalities of this world, has the strength and brightness to offer us --- through an analysis of the events that are threatening to drown us in a sea

of bitterness and confusion --- an effective answer to the questioners who look to us for a way out of the difficult situation through which the country is currently passing.

In Accord with the Universal Magisterium

The Father offers us the divine Transfigured One as the Son in whom he is well pleased and tells us to listen to him as Savior and Teacher of the world.

The Church, which is the extension of the teaching and salvation of Christ, would be wrong to remain silent when faced with concrete problems. The testimony of the Second Vatican Council, always the point of reference for the teaching of Pope Paul VI; its application to Latin America through the documents of Medellin; the recent popes, many Latin American episcopates, and our own tradition in the Church of El Salvador, show us that the Church has always made its presence felt when society clearly seemed in a *sinful situation* (Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #1), in need of the light of the word of God and the word of the Church in history. This prophetic mission of the Church in defense of the poor, who have always had a special place in the heart of the Lord (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #12), numbers among its apostles in Latin America such men as Fray Antonio de Montesinos, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, Bishop Juan del Valle, and Bishop Antonio Valdivieso who was assassinated in Nicaragua because of his opposition to the landowner and governor, Contreras.

To these eloquent testimonies of the Church, both universal and local, we join today our own humble voice. In obedience to the exhortation of his Holiness, we hope that it will serve to guide and encourage the beloved people we serve as pastors.

Our True Intention

We realize that we risk being misunderstood or condemned, through malice or naivety, as inopportune or ignorant. It is, however, our honest intention to dispel the inertia of the many Salvadorans who are indifferent to the suffering in our land, especially in rural areas. It is true that there is some awareness in society of the plight of urban workers and of independent merchants harassed by acts of arson, and even of the crowded slums and shantytowns. Nevertheless we are concerned about the indifference shown by many urban groups to rural hardship. It seems to be accepted as inevitable that the majority of our people be weighed down by hunger and unemployment. Their sufferings, injuries, and deaths seem to have become routine. They no longer make us ask *Why is this happening? What should we do to avoid it?* How can we answer the question the Lord put to Cain, *What have you done? Listen to the sound of your brother's blood, crying out to me from the ground* (Genesis 4:10).

The Duty and Danger of Speaking Out

It is also our intention to clarify yet again the attitude of the Church to human situations that, by their very nature, involve economic, social, and political problems. *The Church is meddling in politics*, we keep hearing, as if that were proof that it had abandoned its mission. And the Church is also misrepresented and slandered in order to discredit and silence it because the interests of a

few are not compatible with the logical consequences that follow from the Church's religious and evangelical mission in the human, economic, social, and political spheres.

The Church's prophetic mission in the world is also mentioned on our patronal feast day when Peter, who was a witness of the transfiguration, compares it to *a lamp for lighting a way through the dark* (2 Peter 1:19), something to which Christians ought to pay attention if they are not to be seduced by *cleverly invented myths* and the opinions of this world (2 Peter 1:16).

We are well aware that what we have to say, as with every attempt to sow the seed of the gospel, will run the risk of the seed in the parable of the sower: there will be those, even those of good will, who will not understand, because the misery of the poor and, above all, of the *campesinos* is remote from them and tragically forms a part of the history of their country to which they have become accustomed. There will also be those who will *look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding* (Matthew 13:14). There will be those, too, who prefer the darkness to the light because their actions are evil (John 3:19). However, thank God, we are sure we can also count on some honest and brave souls who will be ready to draw near to the light, who will not conform themselves to this world (Romans 12:2), and who will cooperate in *the birth pains* of a new creation (Rom. 8:22).

Two Themes: Popular Organizations and Violence

The situation in our country and the questions of our Christians, especially of rural worker families, make it our duty to clarify as far as possible these two problems: the problem of what are called *popular organizations*, which should perhaps be given a name that more accurately reflects their nature and aims, and the problem of violence, which is daily in greater need of the distinctions and classifications of sound Christian moral teaching.

We shall, therefore, divide our pastoral letter into three parts: (1) the situation of popular organizations in El Salvador; (2) the relationship between the Church and popular organizations; (3) the Church's teaching on violence.

Our Limitations Necessitate Dialogue

Because these problems have assumed a new form, we understand the disquiet that causes many, particularly *campesinos*, to ask: *What are we to make of these popular organizations, which are independent of the government, especially when, alongside and bitterly antagonistic toward them, government organizations are growing up? Does being a Christian mean one has to join some popular organization seeking radical changes in our country? How can one be a Christian and accept the demands of the gospel and yet join some organization that neither believes in nor has sympathy with the gospel? How ought a Christian to resolve the conflict between loyalty to the gospel and the demands of an organization when it may not be in accordance with the gospel? What is the relationship between the Church and these organizations?*

On the question of violence, Salvadorans are asking where, in the situation of our country, the line should be drawn between what is and is not permissible in the light of the law of Christ. As pastors, we have a duty to give a Christian answer, an answer of the Church, to these problems that

trouble so many consciences. We are, however, also aware of our limitations. Vatican II recognized them when it warned the laity not to think that *pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give a concrete solution* (*Gaudium et Spes*, #43).

Although the problems we shall address are old ones, they have often taken quite new forms in the recent history of our country. Therefore, because of the novelty of the subject and the natural limitations of its authors, our pastoral letter quite deliberately offers no more than the Christian principles on which a solution must be based. It is a call to the whole people of God to reflect on these matters in local Churches, in communion with their pastors and with the universal Church, in the light of the gospel, and in fidelity to the true identity of the Church.

This is not an attempt to evade the seriousness of the problem. We are following the spirit of the Church's magisterium, which Paul VI in his letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, defined as follows: *It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words, and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment, and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church. ... It is up to these Christian communities, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christians and all men and women of good will, to discern the options and commitments that are called for in order to bring about the social, political, and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed* (*Octogesima Adveniens*, #4).

In order to make community reflection easier, we are offering, in a separate pamphlet, three clarifying notes. They are not integral parts of the text of this letter, but simply additional notes intended to arouse thought and to stimulate study. They deal with (1) the national context in which the Church fulfills its mission; (2) the word of God on human misery; (3) the most recent teaching of the Church. One can find fault with these notes; nonetheless we think the study of them very useful if the problems touched on in this letter are to be better understood in relation to the situation in this country, and from a biblical and ecclesial perspective. For it is only by listening, starting from the facts and their analysis, to the cries of the poor, and by hearing the word of Jesus and of his Church, that we can find a solution, and a pastoral response, to the problems we are going to discuss.

For this reflection we also recommend that you keep in mind the first two pastoral letters of the archbishop of San Salvador, *The Easter Church* and *The Church, the Body of Christ in History*. These focus explicitly on the nature and mission of the Church, to both of which we shall make reference only when it is essential to our central theme.

PART ONE: THE SITUATION OF POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS IN EL SALVADOR

Within the context of our national situation, the proliferation of popular organizations is one of those phenomena of which Vatican II makes mention when, calling upon Christians to reflect and discern, it says: *The People of God ... motivated by this faith, labors to decipher authentic*

signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs, and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age (Gaudium et Spes, #11).

In this pastoral letter we have no intention of studying the origins, history, and objectives of these organizations. We want simply, in this section, to restate the right to organize and to denounce the violation of that right in our country. In the next section we shall deal with the relationship between the Church and the popular organizations.

The Right to Organize

The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which this country is a signatory, and article 160 of our Constitution, proclaim the right of all citizens to assemble and to form associations.

This right, whose proclamation is one of the achievements of our civilization, has been repeatedly affirmed by the Church: *From the fact that human beings are by nature social*, said Pope John XXIII in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, *there arises the right of assembly and association (Pacem in Terris, #23)*. The Second Vatican Council reminded us once again that *among the basic rights of the human person is to be numbered the right of freely founding labor unions. . . . These should be able truly to represent [workers] (Gaudium et Spes, #68)*. For our own continent Medellin recalled that *in the intermediary professional structure the peasants' and the workers' unions, to which the workers have a right, should acquire sufficient strength and power (Medellin Documents, Justice, #12)*.

The Violation of This Right in El Salvador

Unfortunately there is an enormous difference between legal declarations and reality in our country. Various political, trade union, worker, rural, cultural, and other associations do exist here. Some of them enjoy legal recognition, others do not. Some of them --- with or without legal recognition --- are able to function freely, others are not. However, we do not now want to concentrate on the legal aspect of formal recognition. We are more interested in examining the practical freedom of any human group to exercise its natural right of association and the support and cooperation it can expect from an authority genuinely concerned with the common good *whereby men, families, and associations more adequately and readily may attain their own perfection (Gaudium et Spes, #74)*.

It is here, faced with the absence of this real freedom, that we have to denounce the violation of this human right of association proclaimed by our Constitution and by an international declaration of human rights accepted by our country.

We note, specifically, under this heading, the following three abuses:

Discrimination among Citizens

The first conclusion of any impartial analysis of the right of association must be that groups in agreement with the government or protected by it have complete freedom. Organizations, on the

other hand, that voice dissent from the government-political parties, trade unions, rural organizations --- find themselves hindered or even prevented from exercising their right to organize legally and work for their aims, just though these may be. It is, then, a situation in which the fundamental right mentioned above is violated.

Harm Done to the Majority

This discrimination results in yet another violation of our democratic rights --- for let us not forget that the meaning of the Greek word *demos* is the totality of the citizens. It is a fact, and one for which there is daily fresh evidence, that economically powerful minorities can organize in defense of their interests and very often to the detriment of the great majority of the people.

They can mount publicity campaigns, even in opposition to the government; they can influence important items of legislation, as in the case of agrarian reform and the Law for the Defense and Guarantee of Public Order. By contrast, other groups among the mass of the people meet only difficulties and repression when they try, in an organized way, to defend the interests of the majority.

This situation inflicts at least two serious injuries on our people; it infringes upon their dignity, their freedom, and their equal right to participate in politics and it leaves without protection those who need it most. *The aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation [are] two forms of human dignity and liberty*, said Pope Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens* (#22). There is indeed, in this state of affairs, a blatant inequality between citizens as regards participation in politics depending on whether they belong to the powerful minority or to the poor majority, and whether or not they enjoy official approval.

With regard to the lack of protection for those who need it most, let us recall that, as we said in our message of January 1, historically, genuine laws were made to protect the weakest, those who, without the law, are prey to the powerful. The protection of the weakest was also the historical origin of the different groupings among the majority, the modern unions of urban and rural workers. What forced them to unite in the first place was not just their civil right to participate in the political and economic management of their country, but the simple basic need to survive, to exercise their right to make their conditions of life at least tolerable. It is here, in this basic exigency, that the need for legislation and the need for organization coincide. The absurd response to this basic need is --- without any attempt to distinguish between true and false --- indiscriminate repression. *Clandestine forces of subversion* is the term used to describe those who are trying to improve society and its laws, so that its benefits and ideals do not exclude those who also contribute to producing the wealth --- great or little --- of the country.

Conflict among Campesino Groups

Though we do not want to go into great detail, we cannot at this point ignore the tragedy in this country of organizations, composed mainly of *campesinos*, at odds with one another. Recently they have even engaged in violent conflict. It is not --- solely or ultimately --- ideologies that have divided them and brought them into conflict.

The members of these organizations do not, for the most part, think differently about peace, work, or the family. The most serious aspect of the situation is that rural Salvadorans are being divided by the very thing that most deeply unites them: the same poverty, the same need to survive, to give something to their children, to provide bread, education, and health care for their families.

What is happening is that, in order to escape from their common poverty, some are corrupted by the benefits offered by pro-government organizations. In return they are employed in various repressive activities that regularly include informing on, threatening, kidnapping, torturing, and even, in some cases, killing their fellow *campesinos*. Others, active in organizations independent of the government or opposed to it, strive to find more satisfactory ways of escaping their precarious situation. Finally special attention should be paid to those groups of Christian communities that have so often been the target of misrepresentation and manipulation. These groups meet to reflect on the word of God, which, if it is a word incarnate in real situations, always awakens the Christian conscience to its duty to work for a more just society through the various political choices suggested by that faith and conscience.

Why the Right to Organize and Why Especially for the Rural Poor?

It is very sad to have to present to the divine Patron of our nation on this titular feast a rural population that, paradoxically, is organized to divide and destroy itself. So, thinking for the moment chiefly of the *campesinos*, and recalling the fundamental right of all men and women to organize, we invite you to lift your minds and hearts to our divine Savior. He is the ultimate basis of all the rights and all the duties that regulate human relationships.

He is not a God of death or of fratricidal confrontation. He did not give us a social nature so that we should destroy ourselves in mutually hostile organizations, but so that we could complement our individual limitations with the strength of all, united in love. Under the law of his justice and his commandment of love, human rights ought to be exercised in such a way that they do not become the cause of fratricidal strife. The right to organize is not absolute: it does not make unjust ends or methods legitimate. It is a right to join forces in order to achieve, by just means, ends that are also just and conducive to the common good.

The right to organize must be exercised on the basis of the dignity of the individual. The criterion for organizing, whether at the political, cultural, or trade union level, is the defense of legitimate interests, whether or not they are contained in a specific piece of legislation or an interpretation of it.

Again, in regard to the right to organize, we uphold the national Constitution when it recalls the limits imposed by morality and rejects anarchical theories of the use of rights. Our intention, in demanding that the right of association be enjoyed by all Salvadorans, with particular emphasis on the rural population, is certainly not to defend terrorist groups or support anarchist movements and irrational, subversive ideologies. We have in the past often denounced the fanaticism of violence or class hatred, and we have reiterated the principle of the Christian moral teaching that the end does not justify criminal means and that there is no freedom to do evil. We therefore defend the right to

make just demands and denounce the dangerous and evil-minded oversimplification that seeks to misrepresent them and condemn them as terrorism or unlawful subversion.

No one dare take away, least of all from the poor, the right to organize, because the protection of the weak is the principal purpose of laws and of social organizations.

That is why we have said that we want, in this letter, to stress the right of *campesinos* to form organizations. They are the ones who, today, encounter the greatest difficulty in exercising this right.

Historically, poor land-workers are the class with which society has least concerned itself. Pope John XXIII, who was never ashamed of his poor, rural origin, advocated the changes necessary so that poor land-workers no *longer regard themselves as inferior to others* (*Mater et Magistra*, #125). And he warned that *farmers should join together in fellowships*. . . . *For today it is unquestionably true that the solitary voice speaks, as they say, to the winds* (*Mater et Magistra*, #146).

The Second Vatican Council reminded us that poor land-workers do not simply want better living conditions but also *to take part in regulating economic, social, political, and cultural life*. During his journey to Colombia, Pope Paul VI solemnly affirmed to the *campesinos* of Mosquera, *You are aware of your needs and your sufferings, and, like many others in the world, you are not going to accept that these conditions continue forever without being able to bring about the needed remedies*. He reminded them that they belong to the human family without discrimination, to the fellowship of humankind (August 1968).

Medellin reemphasized this right (cf. Medellin Documents, *Justice*, #11-12) and it has been reiterated since then by several Latin American hierarchies: Colombia, July 1969; Honduras, January 1970; Peru, December 1975; and others. Our own episcopal conference has also spoken out clearly in defense of the *campesino* right of association. In line with the position taken up by our own hierarchy, we have no hesitation in reaffirming the right of men and women living in the countryside to form associations, and, indeed, encouraging the formation of such associations. In so doing we do not speak, as pastors, with a particular political view but with the Christian view that the poor should have sufficient strength not to be the victims of the interests of a minority, as they have been in the past.

Medellin made it quite clear that, in the particular situation of Latin America, it is an *eminently Christian task* and, therefore, part of the *pastoral policy* of the Latin American hierarchy *to encourage and favor the efforts of the people to create and develop their own grassroots organizations for the redress and consolidation of their rights and the search for true justice* (Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #20-27).

PART TWO: THE CHURCH AND THE POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS

A New Problem

Our subject here is not the attitude of the Church to the different political parties: that has already been examined and is well known. The issue is how the Church should see and perform its particular mission within the process of organization that is now taking place at such speed among the people, primarily among the rural poor. It might well be thought that this proliferation of *popular organizations* is for us one of the *signs of the times* that challenge the Church to exercise its power and duty of discernment and guidance in the light of the word of God that has been given to it to be applied to the problems of history.

We have already said that there is a new challenge here, not only for the Church, but also for the organizations themselves and society in general. Therefore common reflection, with the help of the Holy Spirit and in communion with the bishops responsible, as recommended in the passage quoted above from Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens*, will be a sure path to understanding and to keeping an evangelical balance between the identity and duty of the Church and the social and political concerns of the people. We shall first make three statements of principle and then apply them to our situation.

Three Statements of Principle

We can consider the relationship of the Church to the popular organizations at two different levels, practical and theoretical.

At the practical level, much depends on the de facto historical situation. That is to say, when the Church has to make judgments or advise people looking for guidance based on the gospel about immediate political commitments, the Church must study each situation from a pastoral point of view, show respect for the rightful plurality of solutions, and not identify itself with any one of them, because the Church has to respect the freedom to make specific political choices.

At the theoretical level, in regard to the relationship between the Church and any organization that has as its objectives social and political justice, we want to lay down three principles.

The Church's Own Nature

The first principle we take as it stands from the Second Vatican Council: *Christ, to be sure, gave his Church no proper mission in the political, economic, or social order. The purpose which he set before it is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light, and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law (Gaudium et Spes, #42).*

These more religious aspects of the mystery of the Church can be studied in the archbishop of San Salvador's first two pastoral letters. They are not the main subject of this one, although we

have them very much in mind in order to maintain the true nature and mission of the Church in its relationship with other human organizations.

In his exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI describes the two chief religious bonds that give cohesion and its own particular style to the community that is the Church: *Those who sincerely accept the Good News, through the power of this acceptance and of shared faith, therefore gather together in Jesus' name in order to seek together the Kingdom, build it up and live it. They make up a community which is in its turn evangelizing. . . . Such an adherence, which cannot remain abstract and unincarnated, reveals itself concretely by a visible entry into a community of believers. Thus those whose life has been transformed enter a community which is itself a sign of transformation, a sign of newness of life: it is the Church, the visible sacrament of salvation. But entry into the ecclesial community will in its turn be expressed through many other signs which prolong and unfold the sign of the Church. In the dynamism of evangelization, a person who accepts the Gospel as the Word which saves normally translates it into the following sacramental acts: adherence to the Church, and acceptance of the Sacraments, which manifest and support this adherence through the grace which they confer* (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #13, 23).

Thus, one must not lose sight of this specific task of the Church: evangelization. The word of God creates a Church community united in itself and with God by means of sacramental signs, chief of which is the Eucharist. This is why the council said that *the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race* (*Lumen Gentium*, #1).

However, on accepting this word of God, Christians find that it is a living word that brings with it awareness and demands. That is to say, it makes them aware of what sin and grace are, and of what must be resisted and what must be built up on earth. It is a word that demands of our consciences and of our lives not only that we judge the world by the criteria of the kingdom of God, but that we act accordingly. It is a word of God that we must not only hear but put into practice.

This is what the Church has been doing in its pastoral work: gathering men and women around the word of God and the Eucharist. We cannot give up the right to do this. It is a duty demanded of us by the very nature of the Church. To this level of pastoral work belong our attempts to set up and encourage basic ecclesial communities. These are the organized communities that arise around the word of God, a word that brings persons together, makes them aware, and makes demands upon them, and around the Eucharist and the other sacramental signs, to celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, celebrating at the same time our human effort to open ourselves to the gift of a greater humanity. Of these basic ecclesial communities Paul VI said: *They spring from the need to live the Church's life more intensely, or from the desire and quest for a more human dimension such as larger ecclesial communities can only offer with difficulty. . . . These communities will be a place of evangelization, for the benefit of the bigger communities, especially the individual Churches. And ... they will be a hope for the universal Church* (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #58).

These communities have to be maintained and strengthened because they are the vital cells of the Church. They embody the whole concept of the Church and its unique mission. Pastors and lay ministers must take care that this identity and mission be maintained in all its purity and

autonomy so that these communities are not confused with other organizations and, above all, are not manipulated by them.

It is very important that pastors and others engaged in pastoral work should keep in mind the comments of Paul VI and the other bishops at the 1974 Synod of Bishops when they pointed out dangers that were likely to turn these communities aside from their ecclesial pursuits and evangelical objectives. We want to draw particular attention, in line with our theme, to the warning *not [to] allow themselves to be ensnared by political polarization or fashionable ideologies, which are ready to exploit their immense human potential* (Evangelii Nuntiandi, #58).

The Church is also fully aware, through its own experience, that the typical ecclesial community can also arouse in Christians an explicitly political vocation. We have said that the word of God, which nourishes the ecclesial community, is a word that makes persons aware and makes demands upon them, and that this word must not only be heard but also put into practice. This demand and action in response to it can awaken political commitment in a Christian. Moreover, Vatican II states: *Great care must be taken about civic and political formation, which is of the utmost necessity today for the population as a whole, and especially for youth, so that all citizens can play their part in the life of the political community. Those who are suited or can become suited should prepare themselves for the difficult, but at the same time, the very noble art of politics, and should seek to practice this art without regard for their own interests or for material advantages* (Gaudium et Spes, #75).

However, when political vocations appear in the ecclesial community, the Church has no special role in determining the specific means to be chosen to achieve a more just society. While respecting the autonomy of politics, it will continue to maintain its own properly ecclesial character as outlined above.

The Church at the Service of the People

The second principle that we must lay down is that the Church has a mission of service to the people. Precisely from its specifically religious character and mission *come a function, a light, and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law* (Gaudium et Spes, #42).

It is the role of the Church to gather into itself all that is human in the people's cause and struggle, above all in the cause of the poor. The Church identifies with the poor when they demand their legitimate rights. In our country the right they are demanding is hardly more than the right to survive, to escape from misery.

This solidarity with just aims is not restricted to particular organizations. Whether they call themselves Christian or not, whether they are protected by the government, legally or in practice, or whether they are independent of it and opposed to it, the Church is interested only in one thing: if the aim of the struggle is just, the Church will support it with all the power of the gospel. In the same way it will denounce, with bold impartiality, all injustice in any organization, wherever it is found. By virtue of this service that it is the Church's duty to render, through its faith, to the thirst for justice, it was stated at Medellin that the direction to be taken by pastoral policy in Latin

America was to encourage and favor the efforts of the people to create and develop their own grassroots organizations for the redress and consolidation of their rights and the search for true justice (Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #27).

The Church is well aware of the complexity of political activity. However, and we repeat it, it is not, nor ought it to be, an expert in this sort of activity. Nevertheless it can and must pass judgment on the general intention and the particular methods of political parties and organizations, precisely because of its interest in a more just society. The economic, social, political, and cultural hopes of men and women are not alien to the definitive liberation achieved in Jesus Christ, which is the transcendent hope of the Church (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #29-36).

No less can the Church shirk the task of defending the weak and those in real need, whatever the nature of the groups or individuals who support their just causes. As Paul VI remarked: *It is well known in what terms numerous bishops from all the continents spoke of this at the [1974] synod, especially the bishops from the Third World, with a pastoral accent resonant with the voice of the millions of sons and daughters of the Church who make up those peoples. Peoples, as we know, engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neocolonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism. The Church, as the bishops repeated, has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are its own children --- the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization (Evangelii Nuntiandi, #30).*

In this service of solidarity with the just causes of the poor, we have not forgotten the duties of the poor themselves and the demands on them to show respect for others. When we have mediated in conflicts, when we have denounced attacks on dignity, life, or liberty, and on other occasions when we have shown this solidarity, we have always tried to be just and objective and we have never been moved by, nor have we ever preached, hatred or resentment. On the contrary, we have called for conversion. We have pointed to justice as the indispensable basis of the peace that is the true objective of Christians. Among its services to the people the Church has performed countless works of charity for the welfare and Christian education of the poor, works that give the lie to those who accuse it of only agitating and never acting.

The Role of the Struggle for Liberation in Christian Salvation

This is the third principle that, at the theoretical level, guides our reflection on relations between the Church and popular organizations. These organizations are forces for the achievement of social, economic, and political justice among the people, especially among the rural poor. The Church, as we have said, fosters and encourages just attempts at organization and supports whatever is just in their demands. The Church's service to these legitimate efforts for liberation would not, however, be complete if it did not bring to bear on them the light of its faith and its hope, and point out their place in the overall plan of the salvation brought by our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

The overall plan of the liberation proclaimed by the Church:

- 1) involves the whole person, in all dimensions, including openness to the absolute that is God, and to that extent it is linked to a certain understanding of human nature --- an understanding that cannot be sacrificed to the demands of any particular strategy, tactic, or short-term expedient;
- 2) is centered on the kingdom of God and, although its mission is not limited to religion, it nevertheless reaffirms the primacy of humanity's spiritual vocation and proclaims salvation in Jesus Christ;
- 3) proceeds from a scriptural vision of human nature, is based on a deep desire for justice in love, implies a truly spiritual dimension that has as its final aim salvation and happiness with God;
- 4) demands a conversion of heart and mind, and is not satisfied with merely structural changes;
- 5) and excludes violence, considering it *unchristian and unscriptural*, ineffective and out of keeping with the dignity of the people (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #33-37).

If the Church, in its support for any group in its efforts to achieve liberation in this world, were to lose the overall perspective of Christian salvation, *it would lose its fundamental meaning. Its message of liberation would no longer have any originality and would easily be open to monopolization and manipulation. . . . It would have no more authority to proclaim freedom as in the name of God (Evangelii Nuntiandi, #32).*

On the other hand, by cultivating faith and hope in this overall plan of Christ's salvation, the Church preaches the real reasons for living, and it puts forward the most solid grounds possible to help persons become aware of themselves as truly free and ready to work with serene confidence for the liberation of the world. Acting in this way the Church *is trying more and more to encourage large numbers of Christians to devote themselves to the liberation of men. It is providing these Christian 'liberators' with the inspiration of faith, the motivation of fraternal love, a social teaching which the true Christian cannot ignore and which he must make the foundation of his wisdom and of his experience in order to translate it concretely into forms of action, participation, and commitment (Evangelii Nuntiandi, #38).*

The Charism of Paul VI

To end this statement of principles, which should help us to understand more readily the relationship that should exist between the Church and organizations working for social justice, our thoughts turn once more in grateful reverence to the memory of Pope Paul VI. We give thanks for the charismatic clarity of his teaching and for the pastor's love he showed for us, the people of El Salvador.

His teaching, endowed with a remarkable ability to explain the theology of the Church's relationship with the world, has clarified our own reflections. It has led us forward, guiding us by means of many documents on social and ecclesiological questions. We invite the whole community

of our dioceses to join us in our reflections so that our teaching, commitment, and action in this delicate area may be more precise.

The pastoral love that the pope enjoined on us as his last wish for El Salvador quickens our pastoral instincts in our desire to reach a balanced understanding of and support for the justice that our people is seeking with eagerness and hope.

Application of the principles

Using the three ecclesiological criteria explained above, we are in a position to judge the relationship of the Church to the social groups that organize to struggle for justice in the political sphere. From these principles we should be able to work out what these organizations can hope for, or even demand, from the Church in accordance with its missions and what cannot be expected because it is outside the Church's competence.

Let us therefore continue our dialogue by applying the principles to various problems presented by the Church's relationships with the popular organizations.

A Relationship of Origination

Some Popular organizations are known to be of Christian inspiration and even have names that reflect it. Their historical origin is closely linked with the life and activity of some Christian community. This fact, which is not exclusive to our period or our country, has been maliciously distorted here to the point of identifying the Church with certain popular organizations. The Church has been held responsible for the particular means chosen by these organizations with full autonomy and on their own responsibility to achieve their aims.

We have already explained that this relationship of origination is possible and natural when we talked about the power of the word of God, which nourishes the Christian faith of the ecclesial community, to awaken consciousness and make demands. In many *campesinos* this word has encouraged the parallel growth of an active awareness of both faith and the justice that faith demands, and this may also lead to a political calling.

Faith and Politics: United but not identified

This is where the problem arises: faith and politics ought to be united in a Christian who has a political vocation, but they are not to be identified. The Church wants both dimensions to be present in the total life of a Christian and has emphasized that faith lived out in isolation from life is not true faith. However, one also has to be aware that the task of the faith and a particular political task cannot be identified. Christians with a political vocation should strive to achieve a synthesis between their Christian faith and their political activity, but without identifying them. Faith ought to inspire political action but not be mistaken for it.

It is important to be very clear about this when the same persons who belong to ecclesial communities also belong to popular political organizations. If they do not bear in mind this distinction between the Christian faith and their political activity, they can fall into two errors: they

can substitute for the demands of the faith and Christian justice the demands of a particular political organization, or they can assert that only within a particular organization can one develop the requirements of Christian justice that spring from the faith.

What can and what cannot be demanded of the Church?

Thus, when Christians organize themselves into any sort of association, be it political party, trade union, or popular organization, they ought to be well aware of precisely what belongs to the realm of the faith and what to the realms of politics, and respect the autonomy of each. A political organizations ought to have a clear notion of what can be asked, or even demanded of the Church, and of what cannot be demanded, because it would be asking for something the Church cannot give and would be seriously compromising the legitimate autonomy of politics.

What we have said to clarify the nature and mission of the Church also makes clear what any organization, Christian in inspiration or not, can ask of the Church. It can expect the Church to advocate civil rights, such as the right of association, the right to strike, the right to demonstrate, and the right to free speech. No organization, even if Christian in inspiration or name, can, however, require that the Church as such or any feature or activity clearly recognizable as ecclesiastical (such as religious ceremonies, preaching, processions, etc.), be turned into direct means of propaganda for political ends. We have already said that the Church, for its part, is always ready to make use of the only power it possesses --- the power of the gospel --- to throw light on any kind of activity that will be establish justice.

Loyalty to the Christian faith

This brings us to another problem that we want to delineate as clearly as possible. To struggle for justice in a popular organization it is not necessary either to be a Christian or explicitly to accept faith in Christ. One can be a good politician or work hard to bring about a more just society without being a Christian, provided that one respects, and take account of, the human and social value of the individual.

Those, however, who claim to be Christians, and who organize as such, have the duty of confessing their faith in Christ and, in their social and political activity, of using methods that are consonant with their faith.

We well understand that at times it is difficult to distinguish what is specifically Christian from what is not. And Christianity, being a historical religion, meets new situations that require new answers. Hence it is understandable that confusion arises in a new situation. One thing must, however, be quite clear: that what is final and absolute for a Christian, even for one involved in political activity, has to be faith in God and the need to achieve justice according to the norms of the kingdom of God.

We also understand that political activity tends to absorb, indeed to monopolize, a person's interest. This is a perfectly normal phenomenon of human enthusiasm. However, there arises at times a tension between two loyalties, loyalty to the faith and loyalty to the organization. At times it will not be easy to live out this tension. Here too, as with everything that is new, it will be

necessary to learn by trial and error. It is, however, our pastoral duty, even taking into account the difficulties we have outlined, to remind you that, however great this tension between the two loyalties, the final and definitive loyalty of a Christian can never be to a human organization, no matter what advantages it may offer, but to God and to the poor, who are the *least of the brethren* of Jesus Christ. .

Authenticity, not manipulation

We therefore urge Christians who belong, organization with just social, political, and economic aims to profess their faith openly so that they can grow in it. Yet, in their theoretical convictions and concrete applications, they must not fall into the temptation of pride and intransigence, as though the legitimate political choice to which their faith has led them were the only way of working whole-heartedly for justice.

We also remind them of the duty of expressing their faith in loyal solidarity with the Church and openness to the transcendence of God through the sacramental signs of his grace, through prayer and meditation on the Word of God. This is the only way to ensure that a commitment to justice and the Christian political vocation grow in tandem. This mutual interaction between an explicit faith and dedication to justice will be the guarantee that one's faith is not vain, but is accompanied by works, and at the same time that the justice one is seeking is indeed the justice of the kingdom of God.

However, if some Christians, their Christian faith to take up a stance in favor of the poor, sadly have come to lose that faith and now think it useless, we urge them to be sincere and not to exploit the faith, which they no longer share, in order to achieve political objectives, no matter how just.

Not Every Christian Has a Political Vocation

A Christian cannot be forced to join a specific political party or organization. It must be remembered, on the one hand, that every human activity has, and cannot avoid having, political repercussions in the broad sense and so constitutes an inescapable degree of political involvement, a certain capacity for deciding between different political courses and, above all, a strong critical sense. On the other hand, it must be remembered that not every Christian has a political vocation --- that is to say, the qualities and the desire necessary to fight for justice by specifically political means.

There are other means of carrying on this struggle --- for example, by education for liberation (Medellin), or by evangelization aware of human rights and the process of the liberation of peoples (cf., *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #30, 31).

Politics, as a vocation, as a legitimate human and Christian dimension of life, has no right to be considered the only possible way to perform the inescapable duty of every Salvadoran to work for the establishment of a more just order in our country.

We are not saying this to encourage inactivity or idleness, but so that all of you will think about your vocation to devote your life to the service of others.

Clergy and Laity in Collaboration with the Hierarchy

We now want to address ourselves to our beloved clergy and to those respected lay persons who, like the clergy, work closely with the hierarchy and therefore need a special commission or authorization that makes them, through this work, to some degree representatives of the teaching and ministry of the Church among the people.

It is with great joy that we affirm that the work of our clergy and laity is daily becoming more involved with, and committed to, the cause of our divine Pastor, and of the world in which we live. Our pastoral activity is becoming continually more aware of the total liberation demanded of us by the gospel, and by the authoritative teaching of the bishops of the universal Church and that of the Latin American bishops assembled at Medellin.

It is becoming increasingly clearer that the call to conversion addressed to all is more effective and authentic when it follows the gospel strategy of taking the good news of salvation first to the poor, while reminding them too of the demands of their conversion (Luke 4: 1-8).

This is our pastoral approach. It received its most authoritative and direct support from Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and its practical application to our dioceses in the San Salvador pastoral week (January 5-10, 1976). We cannot stray from this approach without being unfaithful to our consciences, to the hopes of the people, and, above all, to the word of the Lord.

For this reason we urge our beloved clergy and laity to guard the evangelical purity of this approach and, in guarding it, not to be afraid of the boldness it will often demand of us. We well understand the risks involved in this purity and boldness. It is normal, and indeed frequently happens, that priests and their closest lay collaborators, precisely because they want to preach a realistic and committed gospel, should have a keen awareness of political problems and, as citizens, should feel more drawn toward one political party or popular organization than to another. Likewise it is understandable that, when they are asked, they will work to guide, in a Christian perspective, the political activities of Christians striving for justice. It is, however, our duty to remind them that, in whatever priestly or pastoral work they are asked to perform by individuals, political parties, or other organizations, they should make it their first concern to be animators and guides in faith and in the justice that faith demands in accordance with the general Christian principles we have already dwelt on.

This is the priceless, necessary, and irreplaceable service we have to offer the world. In dealing with the detailed problems resulting from day-to-day political activity, politicians and experts are usually better qualified to make analyses and suggest solutions. In any case, the priest's task is to provide the stimulus that comes from the Spirit of the Lord. This must be related to actual situations but it must also be an authentic stimulus in faith. The priest's main task is to keep alive the gospel standards of thought and action, to remind the faithful, as Jesus did, of the love of the Father for all, and to urge them on to follow Jesus in implanting the kingdom of God on earth. The fulfillment of this task will always be partial and limited, but the inspiration and help that a priest can give toward it will be of immeasurable value for the faith of the whole Church. It will bring together, without identifying the two or reducing one to the other, the dimension of faith and the

need for justice. It will ensure --- so we believe as Christians --- that real advances in justice are in accordance with God's plan, without which no social progress can be genuine or lasting.

If, in an exceptional case, a priest were asked to work more closely in the political process -- and the case would be exceptional because the priest would be acting in a supplementary role that has nothing to do with the normal vocation and ministry of a priest --- it would be for the bishop, after a frank discussion with the priest in the light of faith, to make a Christian judgment on the apostolic value of the work in question.

Lay persons who have been taken into the service of the Church by reason of a special hierarchical commission --- catechists, celebrants of the word, and others --- must not forget that this makes them conspicuous representatives of the hierarchy and of its ministry and teaching. Just as priests and bishops ought to be, so too are they a sign of the unity of all the Church's children, in the local and in the universal Church. This responsibility, which gives them a leading and unifying role within the people of God, ought to make them careful about sympathizing with, or joining, any popular organization. If playing an active role within an organization deprives them of the credibility and efficiency among the people of God that they need for pastoral work, then there is a strong pastoral reason why they ought, after serious reflection before the Lord, to choose between the two activities.

Non-Christian Organizations

Our reflections on the Church and popular organizations have so far been concerned chiefly with organizations that are professedly Christian. We have not, however, forgotten that many of our Salvadoran brothers and sisters are active in organizations that do not profess to be Christian. Much of what has already been said about Christian organizations in their relationship with the Church is equally true of non-Christian organizations. The fundamental criteria have already been stated: support for the human right of association, especially when the situation in the country leads one to think of such organizations as among the most important means for establishing justice; support also for the freedom that every individual has to make their own choices and not be forced to join this or that group; support for the just ends of any organization; support for the autonomy of the political and social activities of organizations, just as the Church requires any person or organization to respect the autonomy of its own nature and its mission, and not to use it or subordinate it to the aims of some other organization. The Church also has the right and duty to exercise, in relation to any organization, Christian or not, its prophetic function of encouraging what is in keeping with the revelation of God in the gospel and of denouncing all that is in contradiction to this revelation and constitutes the sin of the world.

There is, however, a further connection, more fundamental and based on faith, between the Church and popular organizations even if they do not profess to be Christian. The Church believes that the action of the Spirit who brings Christ to life in human beings is greater than itself. Far beyond the confines of the Church, Christ's redemption is powerfully at work. The strivings of individuals and groups, even if they do not profess to be Christian, derive their impetus from the Spirit of Jesus. The Church will try to see them in this way in order to purify them, encourage and incorporate them, together with the efforts of Christians, into the overall plan of Christian redemption.

We are well aware that, despite our intentions and all our efforts to provide adequate guidance to the political dimension of the faith of our brothers and sisters, especially of the rural population, there are still many questions waiting to be answered. Much thinking remains to be done. We must do it together, pastors and people of God, never separated from our union in Christ. We must do it in the light of our faith and of the social situation of our country.

PART THREE: THE JUDGMENT OF THE CHURCH ON VIOLENCE

In connection with the subject of popular organizations, the problem of violence arises spontaneously because, in the efforts of these groups to obtain their social, political, and economic objectives, violence is often regarded as a suitable means. That is why our pastoral mission now obliges us to offer principles from the Church's moral teaching to guide the thinking of our communities.

We shall consider the following points: (1) different types of violence; (2) the Church's moral judgment on violence; (3) its application to the situation in El Salvador.

The Reality and the Ideal

How painful it is to have to offer to our divine Savior, together with the hopeful prayers of his people gathered together in the light of his transfiguration, the horrifying spectacle of the situation in our country, stained as it is with so much blood, so many attacks on the dignity, the liberty, and even on the lives of our citizens. We live, nationally, in an explosive situation, heavy with the fruits of violence. We often see demonstrations end with the shedding of the blood of the demonstrators and sometimes of members of the security forces. In many places recently, especially in the countryside, there have been violent conflicts, sometimes on the scale of a military operation, extending over wide areas. There are many households that grieve for the victims of kidnappings, murder, torture, threats, arson, and so on.

In this situation, where consciences can lose all sensitivity, we have to go on repeating, even if we are a voice crying in the wilderness, *no to violence, yes to peace*.

The Church is quite clear about this ideal, no matter how much calumny and persecution may have tried to distort its message: *We forcefully reaffirm our faith in the productiveness of peace --- this was the voice of the Latin American episcopate at Medellin --- this is our Christian ideal ... not hate and violence, but ... the strong and peaceful energy of constructive works* (Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #15, 19).

Today, in this pastoral letter, we are also fulfilling the final charge laid upon us by Paul VI at the audience during our *ad limina* visit of June 21, 1978. He urged us to show pastoral solidarity with our fellow Salvadorans. He spoke of their efforts to obtain justice and charged us to guide them in the path of a just peace, and to help them resist the easy temptation of violence and hatred.

Different Types of Violence

However, although it is easy enough to put forward the ideal of peace, it is much less easy to deal with the reality of violence, which, historically, seems inevitable so long as its true causes are not eliminated. Normally speaking, and save in pathological cases, violence is not part of human nature. Persons do not find self-fulfillment in humiliating, harming, kidnapping, torturing, or killing others. Violence has other roots, which have to be exposed. To do that we must analyze the different types of violence along the lines suggested by the bishops of Latin America at Medellin.

Institutionalized Violence

The most acute form in which violence appears on our continent and in our own country is what the bishops of Medellin called *institutionalized violence* (Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #16). It is the result of an unjust situation in which the majority of men, women, and children in our country find themselves deprived of the necessities of life.

This violence finds expression in the structure and daily functioning of a socioeconomic and political system that takes it for granted that progress is impossible unless the majority of the people are used as a productive force under the control of a privileged minority. Historically we come across this sort of violence whenever the institutional structures of society operate to the benefit of a minority or systematically discriminate against groups or individuals who defend the true common good.

Those responsible for the institutionalization of violence, and for the international structures that cause it, are those who monopolize economic power instead of sharing it, those *who defend them through violence* and all *those who remain passive for fear of the sacrifice and personal risk implied by any courageous and effective action* (Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #17, 18). This institutionalized violence is firmly and dramatically a fact of life in our country.

The Repressive Violence of the State

Alongside institutionalized violence there frequently arises repressive violence --- that is to say, the use of violence by the state security forces to contain the aspirations of the majority, violently crushing any signs of protest against the injustices we have mentioned.

This is a real form of violence. It is unjust because through it, the state, acting from above and with all its institutional power, defends the survival of the prevailing socioeconomic and political system. It thus prevents the people from having any real chance of using its fundamental right to self-government --- the people being the ultimate source of political power to find a new institutional road toward justice.

Seditious or Terrorist Violence

There is another dangerous kind of violence that some call *revolutionary*, but which we prefer to describe as sedition or terrorism, for the word *revolutionary* does not always have the pejorative

sense we intend here. We are talking of the violence that Paul VI referred to as *the explosive revolutions of despair* (Bogota, August 23, 1968, quoted in Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #17). This form of violence is usually organized and pursued in the form of guerrilla warfare or terrorism and is wrongly thought of as the final and only effective way to change a social situation. It is a violence that produces and provokes useless and unjustifiable bloodshed, abandons society to explosive tensions beyond the control of reason, and disparages in principle any form of dialogue as a possible means of solving social conflicts.

Spontaneous Violence

We call violence spontaneous when it is an immediate, not a calculated or organized, reaction by groups or individuals when they are violently attacked in the exercise of their own legitimate rights in protests, demonstrations, just strikes, and so on. In being spontaneous and not deliberately sought, this form of violence is marked by desperation and improvisation, and so cannot be an effective way of securing rights or bringing just solutions to conflicts.

Violence in Legitimate Self-Defense

Violence can also be used in legitimate self-defense, when a group or an individual repels by force the unjust aggression to which they have been subjected. This violence seeks to neutralize, or at least to bring under effective control --- not necessarily to destroy --- an imminent, serious, and unjust threat.

The Power of Nonviolence

To complete this classification of violence it is only right to include the power of nonviolence, which today clearly has its own eager students and followers. The gospel's advice to turn the other cheek to an unjust aggressor, far from being passivity and cowardice, is evidence of great moral strength that can leave an aggressor morally defeated and humiliated. *The Christian can fight, but prefers peace to war*, was what Medellin said about this moral force of nonviolence (Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #15).

The Church's Moral Judgment on Violence

While we were making our *ad limina* visit, the *Osservatore Romano*, the semiofficial mouthpiece of the thinking of the Holy See, published a valuable article entitled *The Democratic State and Violence* (June 23, 1978). We believe it will be helpful to make use of its arguments to bring up to date the Church's traditional teaching on violence, of which the bishops at Medellin also spoke.

Recourse to violence, remarked the paper, *is a sad habit of humankind, and is one of the most obvious signs both of the imperfection that is part of human nature anywhere and under any system, and also of the constant need to start again from the beginning the work of personal perfection and of social improvement to contain and control the instincts that keep on reappearing in human life and lead to the struggle of person against person.*

However, despite the fact that the Church thinks of any sort of violence as a sign of *the imperfection that is part of human nature*, and despite the fact that it continually emphasizes its preference and its love for the ideal of peace, the Church makes a different judgment on different types of violence. That judgment can range from prohibition and condemnation to acceptance in certain conditions. We shall now recall some moral principles that should bind the conscience of any honorable person:

1) The Church has always condemned violence pursued for its own sake, or wrongly used against any human right, or used as the first and only method to defend and advance a human right. Evil may not be done to promote good.

2) The Church allows violence in legitimate defense, but under the following conditions: (a) that the defense does not exceed the degree of unjust aggression (for example, if one can adequately defend oneself with one's hands, then it is wrong to shoot at an aggressor); (b) that the recourse to proportionate violence takes place only after all peaceful means have been exhausted; and (c) that a violent defense should not bring about a greater evil than that of the aggression --- namely, a greater violence, a greater injustice.

3) Because it is the root of greater evils, the Church has condemned institutionalized violence, repressive violence by governments, terrorist violence, and any form of violence that is likely to provoke further violence in legitimate self-defense.

4) The Medellin document on peace, quoting a text from Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, mentions the legitimacy of *insurrection* in the very exceptional circumstances of an *evident and prolonged tyranny that seriously works against fundamental human rights and seriously damages the common good of the country, whether it proceeds from one person or from clearly unjust structures*. It immediately goes on, however, to warn of the danger of occasioning, through insurrection, *new injustices ... new imbalances ... new disasters --- all of which would justify a condemnation of insurrection* (Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #19).

5) For this reason too the Church has taught --- and the present situation gives tragic relevance to this teaching --- that a government ought to use all its moral and coercive power to guarantee a truly democratic state, one based on a just economic order, in which justice, peace, and the exercise of every citizen's fundamental rights are defended. So the government ought to strive to make *increasingly hypothetical and unreal the situation in which recourse to force by some individuals or groups can be justified by the existence of a tyrannical regime in which the laws, the institutions, and the government, instead of recognizing and promoting fundamental liberties and other human rights, tread them underfoot, reducing their citizens to the condition of an oppressed people* (*Osservatore Romano*, June 23, 1978).

6) The Church prefers the constructive dynamism of nonviolence: *The Christian is peaceful and not ashamed of it . . . not simply a pacifist, for he can fight, but prefers peace to war. [The Christian] knows that violent changes in structures would be fallacious, ineffectual in themselves, and not conforming to human dignity* (Medellin Documents, *Peace*, #15).

Application to the Situation in El Salvador

From this general teaching of the Church on violence, we put forward the following applications and guidelines for the situation in our dioceses.

Believe in Peace

We proclaim the supremacy of our faith in peace and we appeal to everyone to make determined efforts to secure it. We cannot place all our trust in violent methods if we are true Christians or even simply honorable persons.

Work for Justice

The peace in which we believe is, however, the fruit of justice: *opus iustitiae pax*. As a simple analysis of our structures shows and as history confirms, violent conflicts will not disappear until their underlying causes disappear. To that extent, as long as the causes of our present distress persist, and as long as the powerful minority persists in its intransigence and refuses to accept even the smallest changes, there will be renewed outbreaks of violence. Further use of repressive violence will unhappily do nothing more than increase the conflict *and make less hypothetical and more real the situation in which recourse to force, in legitimate self-defense, can be justified*. We therefore regard as a most urgent task the establishment of social justice.

Every individual has the potential for a healthy degree of aggression. It is an endowment by nature to enable persons to overcome the obstacles in their lives. Courage, boldness, and fearlessness in taking risks are notable virtues and values among our people. They have to be built into society, not to put an end to lives but so that law and justice may be achieved for all, and especially for those who today are most cut off from their benefits.

Reject the Fanaticism of Violence

The cult of violence, which becomes almost a mystique or religion for some individuals and groups, is doing immeasurable harm to our people. They preach violence as the only way to achieve justice and they propound and practice it as a method to bring justice to this country. This pathological mentality makes it impossible to check the spiral of violence and it contributes to the extreme polarization of different groups within our society.

Use Peaceful Means First

Even in legitimate cases, violence ought to be a last resort. All peaceful means must first be tried. We are living in explosive times and there is a great need for wisdom and serenity. We extend a fraternal invitation to all, but especially those organizations that are committed to the struggle for justice, to move forward courageously and honorably, always to maintain just objectives, and to make use of nonviolent means of persuasion rather than put all their trust in violence.

CONCLUSION

Christ's Aggressive Friends

We want to end our reflections by contemplating the splendid vision of peace offered by the transfigured Lord. It is striking that the five persons chosen to accompany the divine savior in that theophany on Mount Tabor were five men of aggressive temperaments and deeds. Moses, Elias, Peter, James, and John can be described in the terms used of Christians at Medellin, *they are not simply pacifists, because they are capable of fighting, but they prefer peace to war*. Jesus channeled the aggression of their temperaments toward a rich work of construction, of building up justice and peace in the world.

Let us ask the divine Patron of El Salvador to transfigure in the same way the rich potential of this people with whom he has chosen to share his name. To be his instrument for bringing about this transformation in his people is the reason for the Church's existence. That is why we have tried to reaffirm its identity and mission in the light of Christ. Only by being what he wants it to be will the Church be able to give more intelligent and effective service and support to the just aspirations of the people.

This Is My Beloved Son: Listen to Him

The voice of the Father on Mount Tabor is the best guarantee there is for the Church's mission among women and men, which is to point out Christ as the beloved Son of God and only Savior, and to remind them of the supreme duty of listening to him if they want to be truly free and happy.

Let us listen to him! He has much to say to Salvadorans who look to him with confidence at one of the most tragic and uncertain moments of our history.

We believe we are interpreting his divine word as we now, at the end of this pastoral letter, address ourselves to our compatriots:

To all Catholics, to our brothers and sisters of other Churches, and to all persons of good will, we tell you that the Lord is present and that his voice speaks to us also from the misery of our people. Let us hear him: *In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me* (Matthew 25:40). To those who hold economic power, the Lord of the world says that they should not close their eyes selfishly to this situation. They should understand that only by sharing in justice and with those who do not have such power can they cooperate for the good of the country, and will they enjoy the peace and happiness that cannot come from wealth accumulated at the expense of others. *Listen to him!*

To the middle class, who have already assured a minimum of dignity for their lives, Jesus points out that there remain the masses who still do not have enough to live on. He urges them to support the poor and not to be content with simply making their own gains secure. *Listen to him!*

To the professional associations and to the intellectuals, the divine Master, who is the light of all understanding, says that they should use their scientific and technical expertise to investigate the problems of our country and fulfill their professional obligations by looking for solutions to them. They should publicly declare their interest in the welfare of the country and not take refuge in an uncommitted knowledge and science, in a calm seclusion remote from the suffering of the people. *Listen to him!*

To the political parties and popular organizations that have been the main concern of this pastoral letter, Christ, the guide of nations and of history, proclaims that they should learn to put their concern for the poor majority before their own interests, that they should use the political system effectively and with justice, and press honorably and boldly for the beginning of the transformation for which we long. *Obey him!*

To the public authorities, who have the sacred duty of governing for the good of all, Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, addresses a call for a sense of truth, justice, and of sincere service to the people. Therefore:

- 1) Let them pass laws that take into account the majority of Salvadorans who live in the countryside where there are serious problems about land, wages, and medical, social, and educational facilities.
- 2) Let them genuinely widen the narrow area of political discussion and give formal and real hearing to various political voices in the country;
- 3) Let them give an opportunity to organize legally to those who have been unjustly deprived of this human right, especially the rural poor.
- 4) Let them take notice of the people's rejection of the Law for the Defense and Guarantee of Public Order and in its place let them promulgate other laws that in fact guarantee human rights and peace; let them establish adequate channels for civil and political dialogue, so that no one need be afraid to express ideas that may benefit the common good, even if they imply a criticism of the government.
- 5) Let them stop the terrorization of the rural poor and put an end to the tragic situation of confrontation between *campesinos*, exploiting their poverty to organize some under the protection of the government and persecuting others just because they have organized themselves independently of the government to seek their rights and a reasonable standard of living.
- 6) Let them win the confidence of the people with such intelligent and generous initiatives as the following: amnesty for all those prisoners who are accused of having violated the Law of the Defense and Guarantee of Public Order; liberty for the great number who have been imprisoned for political reasons, yet who have not been brought before any court, or have disappeared after being captured by the security forces; and a safe return home for all those who have been expelled from the country, or who are unable to return to it, for political reasons.

We believe that all this is the will of the divine Savior of the world and that the Father's command is: Listen to him!

The Church Promises to Work and Pray

For its part the Church, which in this letter has reasserted its identity and explained its mission, promises to contribute to the general well-being of the country, and pledges its faith in Jesus Christ and its collaboration with all who are ready to make justice reign as the basis of a peace that will bring us real progress.

We turn with filial confidence to the intercession of our queen and mother, the Blessed Virgin of Peace, who is also a Patron of El Salvador. May she obtain for us from the divine Savior of the world an abundance of grace and good will for the transfiguration of our people.