

## **VIII**

SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

### **PASTORAL LETTER**

#### **OF THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE ORDINARIES OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE JULY 1966**

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness” (II Tim. 3, 16). The written Word of God is meant to instruct us, to expose our errors, to correct our faults, to educate us in holy living. It is in this way, says St. Paul, that the man of God will be made “complete, equipped for every good work” (ibid) and each noble task that comes will find him ready for it. “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control” (II Tim. 1, 7). The spirit of the Gospel is not one that shrinks from danger. It is a call to conscience of every man, a summons to tireless action, persevering love of all men for God and in God, and the self discipline which is the guarantee of both. It is these which will fit the man of God for the duties of his Christian calling, making him equal to any work and ready for any sacrifice.

#### **COUNCIL TEACHING ON HUMAN DIGNITY**

The Gospel call to action, in love and in discipline, has recently come to us in a modern and quickened form, the solemn decrees of an Ecumenical Council; two thousand five hundred Fathers, from every corner of the globe, meeting under the presidency of the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; in the presence, furthermore, of representatives of the major Christian Churches, have issued sixteen decrees, covering every facet of Christian belief and Christian living. These great documents will be our norm of action for many decades. They will be read, minutely discussed, and their directives put into practise wherever there is a Christian community, and that is, literally, everywhere on earth. Their broad principles will have to be applied to local conditions; what is of import in one country will not necessarily apply to another. It will be for the bishops, in collaboration with the clergy, religious and laity, to glean from the decrees what fits the political, social, economic and religious conditions of their own countries, to make them known, to strive to see them put into practise.

#### **APPLICATION TO SOUTH AFRICA**

This Plenary Session of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, deems it an appropriate occasion to introduce to the people of South Africa one of the most timely and topical of the Decrees, that entitled the Pastoral Constitution on the Church

in the Modern World, and to draw attention to certain of the Chapters, which are of particular significance to South Africa and its special problems.

“The pivotal point” of the Pastoral Constitution is “man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will” (Preface, 3). It could be called the charter of dignity of the human person, a compendium of his rights and his obligations in the twentieth-century world. It begins with man “created to the image of God, made master of all earthly creatures, that he might subdue them, and use them to God’s glory” (Cf. Eccl 17, 3-10). It shows him as divided within himself, the centre of a battle between good and evil, light and darkness; it views him as member of the community of mankind, in his relationship with his fellowmen, as founder and head of a family, as the subject of cultural development, “the purpose of all socio-economic life”; it outlines his participation in the political life of the community, his attitude to war, his share in the fostering of peace, and the concord of nations. The Constitution covers a vast field. In this pastoral letter we must limit ourselves to a few paragraphs, taken almost entirely from one Chapter, that on The Community of Mankind; they form only a small portion of the entire document, and are necessarily taken out of context. If this is borne in mind, their significance will be neither exaggerated nor diminished. Above all, it should be remembered that the Fathers of the council are addressing the people of the entire world.

#### COUNCIL MESSAGE ADDRESSED TO ALL

The message of this Constitution is addressed ‘not only to the sons of the Church, and to all who invoke the name of Christ, but to the whole of humanity; for the council yearns to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today... It offers to mankind the honest assistance of the Church in fostering that brotherhood of all men which corresponds to this destiny of theirs. Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ himself, under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgement, to serve and not to be served” (Preface, pp. 2-3). It is in the same spirit of humility and service, of solidarity and compassion, that the Bishops fulfil their charge of bearing to the people of South Africa the message of the Church in the modern world. If there should be any to whom this message gives offence, or causes sorrow, we beg forgiveness of them. And yet, with St. Paul, we must remind them that they are called upon to share with us the tribulations of the Gospel message (II Tim. 1, 9). In all of us “godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret”. (II Cor. 7, 10). If all is not well with us, let us join forces, Christian and non-Christian, to face with honesty and courage the common evil. Let us be equally honest and courageous in fostering all that is good. We congratulate and thank, in particular, our fellow-Christians of other communions, who have inspired us by their witness.

#### ABUNDANCE AND POVERTY

“Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power”, says the Council Document (Introd. Para. 4) “Yet a huge proportion of the world’s citizens is still tormented by hunger and poverty... Never before today has man been so keenly aware of freedom, yet at the same time, new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance. Although the world

of today has a very vivid sense of unity and of how one man depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into apposing camps by conflicting forces. For political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, and with them the peril of a war, which would reduce everything to ashes. Significant differences crop up too between races and between various kinds of social orders... as well as collective greed existing in nations and other groups” (Introd. Para 8).

## INTERDEPENDANCE

In spite of all these conflicts, men have an innate sense of unity and interdependence, for all men are naturally one: “Man’s social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on each other”. Man, by his very nature, must have the company of his fellow men. It is only through constant commerce with them, through brotherly dialogue, through the give and take of social routine, that his talents are sharpened, his personality developed, to fit him for his destiny both in time and eternity. The social exchange knows of no impediment of colour, creed or class. On the contrary; where there are equalities of education, economic condition, and the rest, close intercommunion becomes all the more necessary, and all the more fruitful. The poet has said “The quality of mercy is not strained... it is twice blest; it blesseth him that gives and him that takes”. (Merchant of Venice, Act VI).

## NATURAL RIGHT OF FREE ASSOCIATION

The natural right of free association among men is unassailable; it cannot be either diminished or taken away on racial grounds, on the pretext that such association will damage the common good; indeed, the very opposite is true; it is the prohibition of easy inter-communion among all peoples of the state which offends against the common good. Happy those nations and those peoples which refuse to rest until every injustice has been eradicated, or at least seen for what it is; happier still those which satisfy not only the claims of justice, but of mercy as well; for love of our fellowmen, for God and in God, goes far beyond the demands of justice.

“There is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person” says the Vatican council (n. 26). This natural dignity is in no way dependant upon whether he be rich or poor, white or black, cultured or ignorant.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Solely because he is a human person, he is entitled to “everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing and shelter: the right to choose a state of life freely, and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information...to protection of privacy, and to rightful freedom in matters religious too” (n. 26).

These are principles which have been frequently pro-founded in the teaching of the Church in various places and forms; the Bishops of Southern Africa have also referred to them previously in joint pastoral letters. However, coming now, as they do, from the supreme assembly of the Catholic Church, we find it necessary to reiterate that it

is a grave violation of the dignity of the human person to prevent anyone, on grounds of race or nationality, from choosing his own mode of living, to restrict his choice of employment, his right of free movement, his place of residence, his free establishment of a family. If any laws make the exercise of these rights unnecessarily difficult or impossible, all legal means should be used to have them changed.

## GRADUAL CHANGE

It may be necessary at times to make changes in the social order gradually, in the interests of public order, for the good of the entire people, and not merely of a section. The Vatican Council very wisely states that “when the exercise of rights is temporarily curtailed on behalf of the common good, it should be restored as quickly as possible” (n. 75).

It will be fitting here to make mention of the prominence given in the Document to the role of the family as the basic society, the foundation upon which the community is built. All policy should, in consequence, be directed toward the strengthening of the family life of the people. In view of this, we feel compelled once more to deplore any system of migratory labour involving the enforced separation of husband and father from wife and children over long periods, especially where the situation cannot be regarded as temporary. Such a system is not only unjust, but must result in grave injury as a whole.

## STRIKING PROGRESS

We appreciate and praise all that has been done, and is now being done, to raise the standard of living of the less-developed groups in South Africa, particularly in the fields of housing, education, health and social welfare. Striking progress has been made, at great expense, in all these spheres, over the past few years. Much, however, remains for us all to do for the betterment of the lot of the unskilled worker, whose wage is generally far below that necessary for the proper maintenance of a family; for it should not be forgotten that he is not merely a cog in the industrial or commercial machine, but a human being, with human needs and human interests. Here, perhaps, more than anywhere else, justice must be accompanied and supplemented by compassion.

“The Council lays stress on reverence for man... Everyone must consider his every neighbour without exception as another self”. With this in view, the Council condemns everything which offends against the dignity of the human person, “such as sub-human living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these, and others of their like, are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practise them, than to those who suffer from the injury” (n. 27)

## DISCRIMINATION

In stressing the essential equality of men, the Council says that it is true that “all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources”. But, “with respect to the fundamental rights of the

person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honoured". (n. 29). The Council, rightly, does not unduly stress racial or colour discrimination over other forms; it is neither more nor less serious than the rest. But in racially pluralistic countries, like South Africa, racial prejudice takes on a crucial prominence. It is for this reason that this Plenary Session finds it necessary to reiterate the vigorous condemnation of the Vatican Council: "Discrimination is to be eradicated as contrary to God's intent".

## HUMAN UNITY

The human race is one, not only in the natural sphere, but in the supernatural as well: "God has willed that all men should constitute one family, and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God... all men are called to one and the same goal, namely, God himself". (n. 24). Indeed, the whole economy of the redemption of mankind cannot be understood without the essential unity of the human race: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. 15, 22). It is a matter of faith that all men upon this earth, without exception, have their origin in Adam: "The God who made the world and everything in it...made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17, 26); it is a matter of faith that all men, inheriting the sin of Adam, need Redemption; it is a matter of faith that Christ, dying on the Cross, died for all men, redeeming them from sin: "Jesus Christ the righteous...is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world". (I Jn. 2, 2). To the Christian the sequence is obvious: One Creator, one Human Race, one Redeemer. This is the groundwork of our Christian faith; without it, the Redemption can have no meaning.

## RE-EXAMINATION

In the face of this unity, the Christian conscience requires, in the present circumstances, the re-examination of the whole question of racial relationships, with a view to a just solution of the problem, through the co-operation of all Christian communities and persons.

It will be appropriate here to quote from the Encyclical Letter entitled "Peace on Earth", to which the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World owes some of its inspiration. Pope John XXIII, of revered memory, wrote as follows on the relations between individuals and the public authorities:

*"The very nature of the common good requires that all members of the political community be entitled to share in it, although in different ways according to each one's tasks, merits and circumstances. For this reason, every civil authority must take pains to promote the common good of all, without preference for any single citizen or civic group."*

*As our predecessor of immortal memory, Leo XIII, has said: "The civil power must not serve the advantage of any one individual, or of some few persons, in as much as it was established for the common good of all..." If any government does not acknowledge the rights of man or violates them, it not only fails in its duty, but its orders completely lack juridical force". (Pacem in Terris).*

## PATRIOTISM

On the subject of patriotism, the pastoral Constitution on the church in the Modern World says: "Citizens should develop a generous and loyal devotion to their country, but without any narrowing of mind. In other words, they must always look simultaneously to the welfare of the whole human family, which is tied together by manifold bonds linking races, peoples and nations"

True devotion to one's country, which we call patriotism, can have no part with narrow chauvinism, exclusiveness or self-sufficiency. The true patriot sees his own nation as only one of the whole family of nations. This is no colourless "internationalism". On the contrary, love for his own people is deepened and enriched by its close fellowship with other members of the family of nations, to which of necessity it belongs.

The true patriot will rejoice when his own country is praised by others for its justice, its mercy, its impartiality; he will praise the good done wherever he sees it, no matter by whom it is done. He will encourage all who work for the betterment of the fatherland he calls his own.

But this patriotism will not blind him to the faults of his people either – quite the reverse. It will make him see their faults more clearly, deplore them more sincerely. He will not take refuge in comparisons with other countries, where there are faults similar to, or worse than, those in his own land. He will refuse to rest, refuse to keep silence, so long as he sees justice unrequited, or injustice in the ascendant.

#### SOURCE OF AUTHORITY

To those who govern us, we repeat, with respect, the words addressed to the Rulers of the earth at the closure of the Vatican Council last year: "We do honour to your authority and your sovereignty, we respect your office, we recognise your just laws, we esteem those who make them, and those who apply them. But we have a sacrosanct word to speak to you, and it is this: Only God is great. God alone is the beginning and the end. God alone is the source of your authority, and the Foundation of your laws. Your task is to be in the world the promoters of order and peace among men. But never forget this: it is God, the living and true God, who is the Father of men. And it is Christ, His eternal Son, who came to make this known to us, and to teach us that we are all brothers. He it is who is the great artisan of order and peace on earth, for He it is who guides human history, and who alone can incline hearts to renounce those evil passions which beget war and misfortune. It is He who blesses the bread of the human race, who sanctifies its work and its suffering, who gives it those joys which you can never give it and strengthens it in those sufferings which you cannot console". (Message to Rulers, par. 2-3).

#### DIFFERENCES

In conclusion, let us bear in mind the wise admonition of the Vatican Council that "respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political, and religious matters too. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them".

“This love and goodwill, to be sure, must in no way render us indifferent to truth and goodness. Indeed, love itself impels the disciple of Christ to speak the saving truth to all men. But it is necessary to distinguish between error, which always merits repudiation, and the person in error, who never loses the dignity of being a person; ... God alone is the judge and searcher of hearts”. (n. 28).

May the blessing of Almighty God, the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, descend upon you and remain forever.

GIVEN AT PRETORIA ON THE OCCASION OF THE PLENARY SESSION, 12<sup>th</sup>  
– 15<sup>th</sup> July, 1966.