The Church and Culture since Vatican II

The Experience of North and Latin America

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Evangelization in Latin America’s Present and Future
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PART ONE

PASTORAL OVERVIEW OF THE REALITY THAT IS LATIN AMERICA

The aim of this historical overview is:

— To situate our own evangelization in continuity with the evangelization carried out over the past five centuries. The pillars of that past evangelization still perdure, providing a radical Catholic substrate in Latin America. After Vatican II and the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Medellin, this substrate was still further enlivened by the Church’s increasingly clear and deepening awareness of its fundamental mission, namely, evangelization.

— To examine with a pastoral eye some of the aspects of the present socio-cultural context in which the Church is carrying out its mission, and also the pastoral reality that confronts evangelization as it is operative today and as it moves into the future.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: MAJOR MILESTONES IN THE EVANGELIZATION OF LATIN AMERICA

The Church has been given the mission of bringing the Good News to human beings. To carry out this mission effectively, the Church in Latin America feels that it is necessary to know the Latin American people in their historical context and their varied circumstances. The Latin American people
must continue to be evangelized as heirs to a past, protagonists of the present, fashioners of a future, and pilgrims journeying toward the definitive Kingdom.

Evangelization is the very mission of the Church. The history of the Church is fundamentally the history of the evangelization of a people that lives through an ongoing process of gestation, and that is born and integrated into the life of nations over the ages. In becoming incarnate, the Church makes a vital contribution to the birth of nationalities and deeply imprints a particular character on them. Evangelization lies at the origins of the New World that is Latin America. The Church makes its presence felt in the origins and in the present-day reality of the continent. And, within the framework of its own proper mission and its realization, the Church seeks to contribute its services to a better future for the peoples of Latin America, to their liberation and growth in all of life's dimensions. The Medellín Conference itself re-echoed the statement of Paul VI that the vocation of Latin America was to "fashion a new and genial synthesis of the ancient and the modern, the spiritual and the temporal, what others bequeathed to us and what is our own original creation" (Med-Intro.: 7).

In the sometimes painful confluence of the most varied cultures and races, Latin America forged a new mixture of ethnic groups as well as modes of thinking and living that allowed for the gestation of a new race that overcame the hard and fast separations that had existed previously.

The generation of peoples and cultures is always dramatic, enveloped in a mixture of light and shadow. As a human task, evangelization is subject to the vicissitudes of history; but it always tries to transfigure them with the fire of the Spirit on the pathway of Christ, the center and meaning of universal history and of each and every person. Spurred on by all the contradictions and lacerations of those founding epochs, and immersed in a gigantic process of domination and cultural growth that has not yet come to an end, the evangelization that went into the making of Latin America is one of the relevant chapters in the history of the Church. In the face of difficulties that were both enormous and unprecedented, the creative response was such that its vigor keeps alive the popular religiosity of the majority of our peoples.

Our radical Catholic substrate, with its flourishing, vital forms of religiosity, was established and animated by a vast legion of missionaries: bishops, religious, and lay people. First and foremost, there is the labor of our saints: Toribio de Mogrovejo, Rosa de Lima, Martín de Porres, Pedro Claver, Luis Beltrán, and others. . . They teach us that the weakness and cowardice of the people who surrounded and sometimes persecuted them were overcome; that the Gospel in all its plenitude of grace and love was lived, and can be lived, in Latin America as a sign of spiritual grandeur and divine truth.

And then there were the intrepid champions of justice and proponents of the gospel message of peace: e.g., Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolomé de
las Casas, Juan de Zumárraga, Vasco de Quiroga, Juan del Valle, Julián Garcés, José de Anceita, Manuel Nóbrega, and all the others who defended the Indians against conquistadores and encomenderos—even unto death, as in the case of Bishop Antonio Valdivieso.* They prove, with all the force of actual fact, in what way the Church promotes the dignity and freedom of the Latin American person. And that is a reality thankfully acknowledged by John Paul II when he first stepped on the soil of the New World: "... those religious who came to announce Christ the Savior, to defend the dignity of the native inhabitants, to proclaim their inviolable rights, to foster their integral betterment, to teach brotherhood as human beings and as children of the same Lord and Father God" (HSD).

The evangelizing work of the Church in Latin America is the result of a unanimous missionary effort on the part of the whole people of God. We have the countless initiatives of charity, social assistance, and education; and we have the exemplary original syntheses of evangelization and human promotion by the missions of the Franciscans, Augustinians, Dominicans, Jesuits, Mercedarians, and others. We have the evangelical sacrifice and generosity of numerous Christians. Here women, by their abnegation and prayer, played an essential role. Inventiveness in teaching the faith was evident, along with a vast array of resources that brought together all the arts, ranging from music, song, and dance to architecture, painting, and the theater. This whole pastoral display of ability was associated with a time of great theological reflection and dynamic intellectual thinking that gave rise to universities, schools, dictionaries, grammars, catechisms in a variety of native languages, and extremely interesting historical accounts of the origins of our peoples. And then there was the extraordinary proliferation of lay organizations and confraternities, which came to serve as the vital heart and soul of the religious life of believers. They are the remote but fruitful source of the present-day community movements in the Latin American Church.

It is true that in its work of evangelization the Church had to bear the weight of its lapses, its acts of complicity with the earthly powers, its incomplete pastoral vision, and the destructive force of sin. But we must also recognize that evangelization, which makes Latin America a "continent of hope," has been far more powerful than the dark shadows that unfortunately accompanied it in the historical context through which it had to live. For us Christians today, this challenges us to measure up to our history at its best and to be capable of responding with creative fidelity to the challenges of our Latin American epoch.

After that era of evangelization in our lands, which was so decisive in

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*Unfortunately, the problem of the African slaves did not attract sufficient evangelizing and liberation-oriented attention from the Church.
the formation of Latin America, there came a cycle of stabilization, weariness, and routinism. This was followed by the great crises in the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, which brought bitter experiences and persecutions to the Church. It was subjected to bouts of uncertainty and conflict that shook it to its very foundations. Overcoming this harsh test, the Church undertook a mighty effort and managed to rebuild and survive. Today, especially since Vatican II, the Church has been undergoing renewal and, with a vigorous evangelizing spirit, it has been paying heed to the needs and hopes of the peoples of Latin America. The energy that in past centuries brought its bishops together in Lima, Mexico City, São Salvador de Bahia, and Rome, has now manifested its vitality in the conferences of the Latin American Episcopate in Rio de Janeiro and Medellín. Those conferences activated the Church’s energies and prepared it for the challenges of the future.

Since Medellín in particular, the Church, clearly aware of its mission and loyally open to dialogue, has been scrutinizing the signs of the times and is generously disposed to evangelize in order to contribute to the construction of a new society that is more fraternal and just; such a society is a crying need of our peoples. Thus the mutual forces of tradition and progress, which once seemed to be antagonistic in Latin America, are now joining each other and seeking a new, distinctive synthesis that will bring together the possibilities of the future and the energies derived from our common roots. And so, within this vast process of renewal that is inaugurating a new epoch in Latin America, and amid the challenges of recent times, we pastors are taking up the age-old episcopal tradition of Latin America and preparing ourselves to carry the Gospel’s message of salvation hopefully and bravely to all human beings, but to the poorest and most forgotten by way of preference.

Throughout the course of a rich historical experience, filled with bright moments and dark shadows, the great mission of the Church has been its committed involvement in faith with the human being of Latin America: with that person’s eternal salvation, spiritual victory, and full human development.

Taking inspiration from that great mission of yesteryear, we want to draw closer to the reality of today’s Latin Americans with a pastoral eye and a Christian heart in order to understand and interpret it. Starting off from that reality, we want to proceed to analyze our pastoral mission.

CHAPTER II

PASTORAL OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT

2.1. Introduction

As pastors, we journey with the people of Latin America through our history. There are many basic elements that are shared in common, but there
are also shadings and differences peculiar to each nation. Starting off from the Gospel, which presents Jesus Christ doing good and loving all without distinction (Acts 10:38), and from our vision based on faith, we place ourselves in the reality of the Latin American as it finds expression in that human being's hopes, achievements, and frustrations. Our faith prompts us to discern the summonses of God in the signs of the times; to bear witness to, announce, and promote the evangelical values of communion and participation; and to denounce everything in our society that runs counter to the filiation originating in God the Father and the brotherhood rooted in Jesus Christ.

As pastors, we single out the successes and failures of recent years. In presenting this reality, we are not trying to dishearten people but rather to stimulate all those who can do something to improve it. The Church in Latin America has tried to help human beings to move on "from less human situations to more human ones" (PP: 20). It has made every effort to summon people to ongoing individual and social conversion. It asks all Christians to work together to change unjust structures and to communicate Christian values to the general culture in which they are living. It asks them to take cognizance of the successes achieved, to take heart from them, and thus to continue contributing to more and better successes.

We are happy to spell out some of the realities that fill us with hope:

-Latin Americans have an innate tendency to accept and shelter people; to share what they have with others; to display fraternal charity and generosity, particularly among the poor; and to share the distress of others in need. Latin Americans place high value on the special ties of friendship rooted in the family, the role of godparents, and the bonds thus created.

-Latin Americans have increasingly taken cognizance of their dignity as human beings and of the desire for political and social participation, despite the fact that in many areas these rights are crushed underfoot. There has been a proliferation of community organizations, such as cooperative movements, especially among the common people.

-There is growing interest in autochthonous values and in respecting the originality of indigenous cultures and their communities. There is also great love for the land.

-Ours is a young people; and where they have had opportunities to develop their abilities and organize, they have proved that they can win out and regain possession of their just rights and claims.

-The significant economic progress that has been experienced by our continent proves that it would be possible to root out extreme poverty and improve our people's quality of life. If that is possible, it becomes an obligation (PP: 76).

-We can see a growth in the middle class, though it has suffered decline in some areas.
The forward strides in education are clear to be seen. But in our many pastoral encounters with our people we also note what Pope John Paul II noted when he visited peasants, laborers, and students. It is the deeply felt plaint—fraught with anxieties, hopes, and aspirations—of those whose voice we wish to be: "The voice of those who cannot speak or who have been silenced" (AO).

So we place ourselves within the dynamic thrust of the Medellín Conference (Med-PC:2), adopting its vision of reality that served as the inspiration for so many pastoral documents of ours in the past decade.

The real situation in our countries was lucidly reflected in the words of Paul VI: "We all know in what terms many bishops spoke during the recent Synod of Bishops. Bishops from every continent, particularly those from the Third World, spoke in pastoral accents that echoed the voices of millions of the Church's children who make up those peoples. We know only too well that all the energy and effort of those peoples are invested in the struggle to overcome the things that condemn them to live on the margin of life: hunger, chronic diseases, illiteracy, impoverishment, injustice in international relations and particularly in commercial interchanges, situations of economic and cultural neocolonialism that are sometimes as cruel as political neocolonialism, etc. The Church, said the bishops once again, has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, among whom are many of the Church's own children; the duty to help bring this liberation forth in the world, to bear witness to it and make sure that it is total. None of this is alien to evangelization" (EN:30).

2.2. Sharing People's Anxieties

We are concerned about the anxieties of all those who make up the people, whatever their social condition may be. We are concerned about their loneliness, their family problems, and the lack of meaning in the lives of many of them. Today we wish in particular to share the anxieties that stem from their poverty.

Viewing it in the light of faith, we see the growing gap between rich and poor as a scandal and a contradiction to Christian existence (OAP:III, 2). The luxury of a few becomes an insult to the wretched poverty of the vast masses (PP:3). This is contrary to the plan of the Creator and to the honor that is due him. In this anxiety and sorrow the Church sees a situation of social sinfulness, all the more serious because it exists in countries that call themselves Catholic and are capable of changing the situation: "They have a right to have the barriers of exploitation removed, . . . against which their best efforts at advancement are dashed" (AO).

So we brand the situation of inhuman poverty in which millions of Latin
Americans live as the most devastating and humiliating kind of scourge. And this situation finds expression in such things as a high rate of infant mortality, lack of adequate housing, health problems, starvation wages, unemployment and underemployment, malnutrition, job uncertainty, compulsory mass migrations, etc.

Analyzing this situation more deeply, we discover that this poverty is not a passing phase. Instead it is the product of economic, social, and political situations and structures, though there are also other causes for the state of misery. In many instances this state of poverty within our countries finds its origin and support in mechanisms which, because they are impregnated with materialism rather than any authentic humanism, create a situation on the international level where the rich get richer at the expense of the poor, who get ever poorer (OAP:III, 3). Hence this reality calls for personal conversion and profound structural changes that will meet the legitimate aspirations of the people for authentic social justice. Such changes either have not taken place, or else they have been too slow in coming in the concrete life of Latin America.

This situation of pervasive extreme poverty takes on very concrete faces in real life. In these faces we ought to recognize the suffering features of Christ the Lord, who questions and challenges us. They include:

—the faces of young children, struck down by poverty before they are born, their chance for self-development blocked by irreparable mental and physical deficiencies; and of the vagrant children in our cities who are so often exploited, products of poverty and the moral disorganization of the family;

—the faces of young people, who are disoriented because they cannot find their place in society, and who are frustrated, particularly in marginal rural and urban areas, by the lack of opportunity to obtain training and work;

—the faces of the indigenous peoples, and frequently of the Afro-Americans as well; living marginalized lives in inhuman situations, they can be considered the poorest of the poor;

—the faces of the peasants; as a social group, they live in exile almost everywhere on our continent, deprived of land, caught in a situation of internal and external dependence, and subjected to systems of commercialization that exploit them;

—the faces of laborers, who frequently are ill-paid and who have difficulty in organizing themselves and defending their rights;

—the faces of the underemployed and the unemployed, who are dismissed because of the harsh exigencies of economic crises, and often because of development-models that subject workers and their families to cold economic calculations;

—the faces of marginalized and overcrowded urban dwellers, whose lack of material goods is matched by the ostentatious display of wealth by other segments of society;
the faces of old people, who are growing more numerous every day, and who are frequently marginalized in a progress-oriented society that totally disregards people not engaged in production.

We share other anxieties of our people that stem from a lack of respect for their dignity as human beings, made in the image and likeness of God, and for their inalienable rights as children of God.

Countries such as ours, where there is frequently no respect for such fundamental human rights as life, health, education, housing, and work, are in the position of permanently violating the dignity of the person.

To this are added other anxieties that stem from abuses of power, which are typical of regimes based on force. There are the anxieties based on systematic or selective repression; it is accompanied by accusations, violations of privacy, improper pressures, tortures, and exiles. There are the anxieties produced in many families by the disappearance of their loved ones, about whom they cannot get any news. There is the total insecurity bound up with arrest and detention without judicial consent. There are the anxieties felt in the face of a system of justice that has been suborned or cowed. As the Supreme Pontiff's point out, the Church, by virtue of "an authentically evangelical commitment" (OAP: III, 3), must raise its voice to denounce and condemn these situations, particularly when the responsible officials or rulers call themselves Christians.

Then there are the anxieties raised by guerilla violence, by terrorism, and by the kidnappings carried out by various brands of extremists. They, too, pose a threat to life together in society.

In many of our countries lack of respect for human dignity also finds expression in the lack of social participation on various levels. We want to allude, in particular, to labor unionization. In many places labor legislation is either applied arbitrarily or not taken into account at all. This is particularly true in countries where the government is based on the use of force. There they look askance at the organizing efforts of laborers, peasants, and the common people; and they adopt repressive measures to prevent such organizing. But this type of control over, or limitation on, activity is not applied to employer organizations, which can exercise their full power to protect their interests.

In some cases the over-politicization of labor unions at the top level distorts the aim of these organizations.

In recent years we have also seen deterioration in the political sphere. Much harm has been done to the participation of citizens in the conduct of their own affairs and destiny. We also frequently see a rise in what can be called institutionalized injustice (Med-P: 16). And by employing violent means, extremist political groups provoke new waves of repression against segments of the common people.
The free-market economy, in its most rigid expression, is still the prevailing system on our continent. Legitimated by liberal ideologies, it has increased the gap between the rich and the poor by giving priority to capital over labor, economics over the social realm. Small groups in our nations, who are often tied in with foreign interests, have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by these older forms of the free market to profit for themselves while the interests of the vast majority of the people suffer.

Marxist ideologies have also spread among workers, students, teachers, and others, promising greater social justice. In practice their strategies have sacrificed many Christian, and hence human, values; or else they have fallen prey to utopian forms of unrealism. Finding their inspiration in policies that use force as a basic tool, they have only intensified the spiral of violence.

In many instances the ideologies of National Security have helped to intensify the totalitarian or authoritarian character of governments based on the use of force, leading to the abuse of power and the violation of human rights. In some instances they presume to justify their positions with a subjective profession of Christian faith.

Our countries are going through cycles of economic crisis, despite the trend toward modernization and strong economic growth accompanied by varying degrees of hardship. These cycles intensify the sufferings of our people when a cold-hearted technocracy applies developmental models that extort a truly inhuman price from those who are poorest. And this is all the more unjust insofar as the price is not shared by all.

2.3. Cultural Aspects

Latin America is made up of different races and cultural groups characterized by varied historical processes; it is not a uniform, continuous reality. But there are elements that make up what might be called a common cultural patrimony of historical traditions and the Christian faith.

Unfortunately, the development of certain cultures is very precarious. In practice, values that are part of the rich, age-old tradition of our people are disregarded, marginalized, and even destroyed. But fortunately we also see the beginnings of a new valuation of our native cultures.

Due to dominant influences from abroad or the alienating imitation of imported values and lifestyles, the traditional cultures of our countries have been distorted and attacked. Our identity and our own specific values are threatened.

Hence we share our people’s anxieties over the subversion of values that is at the root of many of the ills mentioned above:

—Individualistic materialism, the supreme value in the eyes of many of our contemporaries, works against communion and participation, posing ob-
stacles to solidarity; and collectivist materialism subordinates the person to the State.

—Consumptionism, with its unbridled ambition to "have more," is suffocating modern human beings in an immanentism that closes them off to the evangelical values of generosity and austerity. It is paralyzing them when it comes to solidarity communication and fraternal sharing.

—The deterioration of basic family values is disintegrating family communion, eliminating shared and responsible participation by all the family members and making them an easy prey to divorce or abandonment. In some cultural groups the woman finds herself in a position of inferiority.

—The deterioration of public and private integrity is evident. We also find frustration and hedonism leading people into such vices as gambling, drug addiction, alcoholism, and sexual licentiousness.

We must also consider education and social communication as transmitters of culture.

—Education has made great strides forward in recent years. School attendance has increased, though the drop-out rate is still high. Illiteracy has also diminished, though not enough in areas inhabited by indigenous peoples and peasants.

Despite these advances, however, there are also deformations that have depersonalized many people. This is due to manipulation by small power-groups who are trying to safeguard their own interests and inculcate their own ideologies.

—The aforementioned cultural traits are being strongly influenced by the media of social communication. Political, ideological, and economic power-groups succeed, through these media, in subtly penetrating both the environment and the lifestyle of our people. Information is manipulated by various authorities and groups. This is done particularly through advertising, which raises false expectations, creates fictitious needs, and often contradicts the basic values of our Latin American culture and the Gospel. The improper exercise of freedom in these media leads to an invasion of the privacy of persons, who generally are defenseless. Operating twenty-four hours a day, these media penetrate every area of human life: the home, work sites, places of recreation, and the streets. They also effect a cultural change that gives rise to a new idiom (EN: 42).

2.4. The Underlying Roots of These Realities

We want to point out some of the underlying roots of these phenomena so that we can offer our help and cooperation in bringing about needed changes. Here we adopt a pastoral perspective that focuses more directly on the needs of the people.
a. We see the continuing operation of economic systems that do not regard the human being as the center of society, and that are not carrying out the profound changes needed to move toward a just society.

b. One of the serious consequences of the lack of integration among our nations is that we go before the world as small entities without any ability to push through negotiations in the concert of nations (MPLA:8).

c. There is the fact of economic, technological, political, and cultural dependence; the presence of multinational conglomerates that often look after only their own interests at the expense of the welfare of the country that welcomes them in; and the drop in value of our raw materials as compared with the price of the finished products we buy.

d. The arms race, the great crime of our era, is both the result and the cause of tensions between our fellow countries. Because of it, enormous resources are allotted for arms purchases instead of being employed to solve vital problems (MPLA:8).

e. There is a lack of structural reforms in agriculture that adequately deal with specific realities and decisively attack the grave social and economic problems of the peasantry. Such problems include access to land and to resources that would enable them to improve their productivity and their marketing.

f. We see a crisis in moral values: public and private corruption; greed for exorbitant profit; venality; lack of real effort; the absence of any social sense of practical justice and solidarity; and the flight of capital resources and brain power. All these things prevent or undermine communion with God and brotherhood.

g. Finally, speaking as pastors and without trying to determine the technical character of these underlying roots, we ourselves see that at bottom there lies a mystery of sinfulness. This is evident when the human person, called to have dominion over the world, impregnates the mechanisms of society with materialistic values (HSD:3).

2.5. The Basic Setting: A Continent with Serious Demographic Problems

We note that almost all of our countries have experienced an accelerating rate of population growth. The vast majority of our population is composed of young people. Internal and external migrations bring with them a sense of uprooting. The cities are growing in a disorganized fashion; they are in danger of becoming uncontrollable megalopolises. It becomes harder every day to provide such basic services as housing, hospitals, schools, and so forth; and this increases social, cultural, and economic marginalization. The increase in those seeking work has outstripped the capacity of the present economic system to provide employment. And there are governments and international in-
stitions that implement or support birth-control policies that are opposed to family morality.

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Excerpt from Part Two: God's Saving Plan for Latin America, Chapter II: What Does Evangelizing Mean?

2. THE EVANGELIZATION OF CULTURE

2.1. Culture and Cultures

The new and important pastoral contribution of Evangelii Nuntiandi lies in Paul VI's summons to face up to the task of evangelizing culture and cultures (EN: 20).

The term "culture" means the specific way in which human beings belonging to a given people cultivate their relationship with nature, with each other, and with God in order to arrive at "an authentic and full humanity." It is the shared lifestyle that characterizes different peoples around the earth, and so we can speak about "a plurality of cultures" (GS: 53; EN: 20).

So conceived, culture embraces the whole life of a people. It is the whole web of values that inspire them and of disvalues that debilitate them; insofar as they are shared in common by all the members, they bring them together on the basis of a "collective consciousness" (EN: 18). Culture also embraces the forms in which these values or disvalues find configuration and expression — i.e., customs, language, societal institutions and structures — insofar as they are not impeded or suppressed by the intervention of other, dominant cultures.

In the context of this totality, evangelization seeks to get to the very core of a culture, the realm of its basic values, and to bring about a conversion that will serve as the basis and guarantee of a transformation in structures and the social milieu (EN: 18).

The essential core of a culture lies in the way in which a people affirms or rejects a religious tie with God, that is, in its religious values or disvalues. These values or disvalues have to do with the ultimate meaning of life. Their roots lie in the deeper zone where human beings formulate answers to the basic, ultimate questions that vex them. The answer may be a positively religious orientation on the one hand, or an atheistic orientation on the other hand. Thus religion or irreligion is a source of inspiration for all the other areas of a culture — family life, economics, politics, art, etc. They are either freed to seek out some transcendent meaning, or else they are locked up in their own immanent meaning.
Evangelization in Latin America

Evangelization takes the whole human being into account, and so it seeks to reach the total human being through that being's religious dimension.

Culture is a creative activity of human beings. Thus it is in line with the vocation given to them by God to perfect all creation (Genesis), and hence their own spiritual and corporeal qualities and capabilities (GS:53, 57).

Culture is continually shaped and reshaped by the ongoing life and historical experience of peoples; and it is transmitted by tradition from generation to generation. Thus human beings are born and raised in the bosom of a given society, conditioned and enriched by a given culture. They receive a culture, creatively modify it, and then continue to pass it on. Culture is a historical and social reality (GS:53).

Cultures are continually subjected to new developments and to mutual encounter and interpenetration. In the course of their history they go through periods in which they are challenged by new values or disvalues, and by the need to effect new syntheses of their way of life. The Church feels particularly summoned to make its presence felt, to be there with the Gospel, when old ways of social life and value-organization are decaying or dying in order to make room for new syntheses (GS:5). It is better to evangelize new cultural forms when they are being born than when they are already full-grown and established. This is the global challenge that confronts the Church today because we truly can "speak of a new age in human history" (GS:54). Hence the Latin American Church seeks to give new impetus to the evangelization of our continent.

2.2. The Pastoral Option of the Latin American Church: To Evangelize Culture Today and for Tomorrow

*The aim of evangelization.* Christ sent his Church to announce the Gospel to all human beings, to all peoples (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). Since every human being is born into a culture, the Church in its evangelizing activity seeks to touch, not only the individual, but also the culture of a people (EN:18). Using the power of the Gospel, it tries "to reach and transform the criteria of judgment, the determining values, the points of interest, the lines of thought, the sources of inspiration, and the models of human life that are opposed to the Word of God and the plan of salvation. Perhaps we could put it this way: the work of evangelization is not to be a decorative veneer; it is to be done in a vital, in-depth manner so that it touches the very roots of human culture and cultures" (EN:19–20).

*Pastoral option.* The evangelizing activity of our Latin American Church must have as its overall goal the ongoing evangelical renewal and transformation of our culture. In other words, the Gospel must penetrate the values and
criteria that inspire our culture, convert the human beings who live by these values, and, insofar as it is necessary, change the structures in which they live and express themselves so that they may be more fully human.

If we are to do this, it is of the utmost importance that we pay heed to the religion of our peoples. Not only must we take it on as an object for evangelization. Insofar as it has already been evangelized, we must also accept it as an active, evangelizing force.

2.3. The Church, Faith, and Culture

Love for peoples and knowledge of their culture. To carry out and expand its evangelizing activity realistically, the Church must truly know the culture of Latin America. But even before that, it starts off with a profound attitude of love for peoples. Thus, basing its work not only on a scientific approach but also on the connatural effective understanding that comes with love, it will be able to learn and discern the specific modalities of our culture as well as its crises and historical challenges; and it will then be able to make common cause with our culture within the context of Latin America's history (OA: 1).

Here is one important criterion that must guide the Church in its effort to know our culture: it must note the overall direction in which the culture is heading rather than its side-pockets bound up with the past, its expressions that are operative today rather than those that are merely part of folklore.

The task of evangelizing our continent's culture must be organized against the backdrop of an established cultural tradition, now being challenged by the process of cultural change that has been affecting Latin America and the world in modern times and is now reaching its moment of crisis.

Faith's encounter with cultures. When the Church, the People of God, announces the Gospel and peoples accept it in faith, it becomes incarnate among them and assumes their cultures. This gives rise, not to an identification between the two, but to a close bond between them. On the one hand the faith transmitted by the Church is lived out on the basis of a presupposed culture. In other words, it is lived by believers who are deeply attached to a culture, and hence “the construction of the kingdom cannot help but take over elements from human culture and cultures” (EN: 20). On the other hand the principle of incarnation embodied in the old adage of St. Irenaeus remains valid in the pastoral realm: “what is not assumed is not redeemed.”

The general principle of incarnation breaks down concretely into several specific criteria:

Cultures are not vacuums devoid of authentic values, and the evangelizing work of the Church is not a process of destruction; rather, it is a process
of consolidating and fortifying those values, a contribution to the growth of the "seeds of the Word" present in cultures (GS: 57).

The Church is even more interested in assuming the specifically Christian values that it encounters among peoples already evangelized, and that are lived out by those peoples in their own cultural forms.

In its evangelization, the Church begins with those seeds sown by Christ and with those values that are the fruit of its own evangelization.

All this implies that the Church—of course the local Church—makes every effort to adapt itself. It tries to translate the gospel message into the anthropological idiom and symbols of the culture in which it immerses itself (EN: 53, 62–63; GS: 58; DT: 420–23).

When the Church proclaims the Good News, it denounces and corrects the presence of sinfulness in cultures; it purifies and exorcises their disvalues, thus establishing a critique of cultures. In the announcing of the Kingdom of God, the opposite side of the coin is the critical denunciation of various forms of idolatry, that is, of values that have been set up as idols or values that a culture has taken to be absolute when in fact they are not. The Church’s mission is to bear witness to "the true God and one Lord."

So there is nothing insulting in the fact that evangelization invites peoples to abandon false conceptions of God, anti-natural patterns of conduct, and aberrant manipulations of some people by others.

The specific task of evangelization is to "proclaim Christ" (EN: 53). This does not mean that cultures are to be invited to remain under the grip of an ecclesiastical regime. Instead they are to be invited to accept in faith the spiritual lordship of Christ, for they will not be able to attain their full measure outside of his truth and grace. Thus through evangelization the Church tries to make sure that cultures will be renovated, elevated, and perfected by the active presence of the risen Christ, the center of history, and of his Spirit (EN: 18, 20, 23; GS: 58, 61).

2.4. Evangelization of Culture in Latin America

We have indicated above the fundamental criteria governing the work of the Church in evangelizing cultures.

Our Church, for its part, carries out this work in the particular human area known as Latin America, whose historical and cultural process has already been described (see Part One).

So let us briefly review some of the principal items already established in Part One of this document so that we may be able to single out the challenges and problems posed to evangelization by the present moment of history.

*Types of culture and stages in the cultural process.* The origin of present-day Latin America lies in the encounter of the Spanish and Portuguese peo-
pies with the pre-Columbian and African cultures. Racial and cultural intermingling has profoundly marked this process, and there is every indication that it will continue to do so now and in the future.

This fact should not prompt us to disregard the persistence of indigenous cultures or Afro-American cultures in a pure state, nor the existence of groups who are integrated into the nation in varying degrees.

Subsequently, during the last two centuries, new waves of immigrants have flowed into Latin America, and particularly into the southern cone of our continent. These immigrants brought their own characteristics with them, which basically were integrated with the underlying cultural stratum.

In the first epoch, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, were laid the bases of Latin American culture and its solid Catholic substrate. In that period evangelization was deep enough for the faith to become a constitutive part of Latin America's life and identity. It provided Latin America with a spiritual unity that still persists, despite later splintering into separate nations and divisions on the economic, social, and political planes.

So our culture is impregnated with the faith, even though it frequently has lacked the support of a suitable catechism. This is evident in the distinctive religious attitudes of our people, which are imbued with a deep sense of transcendence and the nearness of God. It finds expression in a wisdom of the common people that has contemplative features and that gives a distinctive direction to the way our people live out their relationship with nature and their fellow human beings. It is embodied in their sense of work and festiveness, of solidarity, friendship, and kinship; and in their feel for their own dignity, which they do not see diminished by their own lives as simple, poor people.

Preserved more vividly as an articulation of life as a whole among the poor, this culture bears in particular the seal of the heart and its intuitions. Rather than finding expression in scientific categories and ways of thinking, it is more likely to find expression in artistic forms, in piety as a lived reality, and in solidary forms of social life.

From the eighteenth century on, this culture began to feel the impact of the dawning urban-industrial civilization, with its physico-mathematical brand of knowledge and its stress on efficiency. The impact was first felt by the mestizo culture, and then gradually by various enclaves of indigenous peoples and Afro-Americans.

The new urban-industrial civilization is accompanied by strong tendencies toward personalization and socialization. It produces a sharpened acceleration of history, demanding great efforts at assimilation and creativity from all peoples if they do not want to see their cultures left behind or even eliminated.

Urban-industrial culture, which has as a consequence the intense proletarianization of various social strata and even peoples, is controlled by the great
powers in possession of science and technology. It is a historical process that tends to make the problem of dependence and poverty more and more acute.

The advent of urban-industrial civilization also entails problems on the ideological level, threatening the very roots of our culture. For in terms of real-life history and its workings, this civilization comes to us imbued with rationalism and inspired by two dominant ideologies: liberalism and Marxist collectivism. In both we find a tendency, not just to a legitimate and desirable secularization, but also to "secularism."

Within this basic historical process we see arising on our continent certain particular but important phenomena and problems: increased migration and displacement of the population from rural to urban areas; the rise of various religious phenomena, such as the invasion of sects, which should not be disregarded by evangelizers simply because they may seem to be marginal; the enormous influence of the media of social communication as vehicles of new cultural guidelines and models; the yearning of women to better their situation, in line with their dignity and distinctiveness, within the overall framework of society; and the emergence of a laborer's world that will be decisive in the new configuration of our culture.

_Evangelizing activity: challenges and problems._ The data given above also point to the challenges that must be faced by the Church. The problems are manifestations of the signs of the times, pointing toward the future where culture is now heading. The Church must be able to discern these signs if it is to consolidate the values and overthrow the idols that are feeding this historical process.

_The coming world culture._ This urban-industrial culture, which is inspired by the scientific-technological outlook, driven by the great powers, and characterized by the aforementioned ideologies, proposes to be a universal one. Various peoples, local cultures, and human groups are invited or even constrained to become an integral part of it.

In Latin America this tendency again brings to the fore the whole problem of integrating indigenous ethnic groups and realities into the political and cultural fabric of our nations. For our nations find themselves challenged to move toward greater development, to win new hands and lands for more efficient production, so that they can become a more integral and dynamic part of the accelerating thrust of world civilization.

This new universality has different levels. First, there is the level of scientific and technical elements, which are the instruments of development. Second, there is the level of certain values that are given new emphasis: e.g., labor and the increased possession of consumer goods. And then there is the whole matter of "lifestyle" as a whole, which entails a particular hierarchy of values and preferences.
Finding themselves at this critical juncture in history, some ethnic and social groups draw back into themselves, defending their own distinctive culture in and through a fruitless sort of isolationism. Other groups, on the other hand, allow themselves to be readily absorbed by lifestyles introduced by the new world culture.

In its work of evangelization, the Church itself moves ahead by a process of delicate and difficult discernment. By virtue of its own evangelical principles, the Church looks with satisfaction on the impulses of humanity leading toward integration and universal communion. By virtue of its specific mission it feels that it has been sent, not to destroy cultures, but to help them consolidate their being and identity. And it does this by summoning human beings of all races and peoples to unite in faith under Christ as one single People of the universal God.

The Church itself promotes and fosters things that go beyond this catholic union in the same faith, things that find embodiment in forms of communion between cultures and of just integration on the economic, social, and political levels.

But the Church, as one would expect, calls into question any “universality” that is synonymous with uniformity or levelling, that fails to respect different cultures by weakening them, absorbing them, or annihilating them. With even greater reason the Church refuses to accept universality when it is used as a tool to unify humanity by inculcating the unjust, offensive supremacy and domination of some peoples or social strata over other peoples and social strata.

The Church of Latin America has resolved to put fresh vigor into its work of evangelizing the culture of our peoples and the various ethnic groups. It wants to see the faith of the Gospel blossom or be restored to fresh life. And with this as the basis of communion, it wants to see it burgeon into forms of just integration on all levels—national, continental Latin American, and universal. This will enable our peoples to develop their own culture in such a way that they can assimilate the findings of science and technology in their own proper way.

*The city.* In the transition from an agrarian culture to an urban-industrial one, the city becomes the moving force behind the new world civilization. This fact calls for a new type of discernment on the part of the Church. In general, it should find its inspiration in the vision of the Bible. On the one hand the Bible has a positive view of the human tendency to create cities, where human beings can live together in a more corporate and humane way; on the other hand it is highly critical of the inhumaness and sinfulness that has its origin in urban life.

In the present situation, therefore, the Church does not favor as an ideal the creation of huge metropolises, which become inhuman beyond all repair.
Nor does it favor an excessively accelerated pace of industrialization that will
cost today's generations their own happiness and require inhuman sacrifices.

The Church also recognizes that urban life and industrial change pose
unprecedented problems. They undermine traditional patterns of behavior and
institutions: the family, the neighborhood, and work life. And hence they also
undermine the living situation of the religious human being, the faithful, and
the Christian community (OA: 10).

These characteristics are aspects of what is called "the process of secular-
ization," which is evidently bound up with the emergence of science and
technology and the increase in urbanization.

There is no reason to assume that the elemental forms of religious aware-
ness are exclusively bound up with agrarian culture. The transition to an urban-
industrial civilization need not entail the abolition of religion. But it obviously
poses a challenge because it entails new forms and structures of living that
condition religious awareness and the Christian life.

So the Church is faced with a challenge. It must revitalize its work of
evangelization so that it will be able to help the faithful live as Christians amid
the new conditioning factors created by the urban-industrial society. And it
must realize that these new factors do have an influence on the practice of
holiness, on prayer and contemplation, on interhuman relationships (that have
now become more functional and anonymous), on people's work life, produc-
tion, and consumption.

Secularism. The Church accepts the process of secularization insofar as
it means the legitimate autonomy of the secular realm. Taking it in this sense
(GS: 36; EN: 55), it regards it as just and desirable. But the fact is that the
shift to an urban-industrial society, viewed in terms of the real-life process of
western history rather than in the abstract, has been inspired by the ideology
that we call "secularism."

Secularism essentially separates human beings from God and sets up an
opposition between them. It views the construction of history as purely and
exclusively the responsibility of human beings, and it views them in merely
immanent terms. The world "is explained solely on its own terms, without
any necessary reference to God. God, then, is superfluous, if not a downright
obstacle. So in order to recognize the power of human beings, this brand of
secularism ends up bypassing God, or even denying God altogether. The re-
sult seems to be new forms of atheism—an anthropocentric atheism that is
practical and militant rather than abstract and metaphysical. And bound up
with this atheistic secularism we find a consumer civilization, a hedonism
exalted as the supreme value, a will to power and domination, and discrimi-
nation of all sorts. These are some of the other inhuman tendencies of this
'humanism'" (EN: 55).

Committed to its task to evangelize people and to arouse faith in God,
the provident Father, and in Jesus Christ, who is actively present in history, the Church finds itself in a radical confrontation with this secularistic movement. It sees it as a threat to the faith and the very culture of our Latin American peoples. Hence one of the fundamental commitments in the new drive toward evangelization must be to revivify and reorganize the proclamation of the content of evangelization, basing our efforts on the very faith of our peoples. Our aim is that they themselves will be able to incorporate the values of the new urban-industrial civilization into a new vital synthesis, which will continue to be grounded on faith in God rather than on the atheism that is the logical consequence of the movement toward secularism.

Conversion and structures. We have alluded to the inconsistency that exists between the culture of our people, whose values are imbued with the Christian faith, and the impoverished condition in which they are often forced to live by injustice.

Undoubtedly situations of injustice and acute poverty are an indictment in themselves, indicating that the faith was not strong enough to affect the criteria and the decisions of those responsible for ideological leadership and the organization of our people’s socio-economic life together. Our peoples, rooted in the Christian faith, have been subjected to structures that have proved to be wellsprings of injustice. These structures are linked with the expansion of liberal capitalism, though in some areas they have been transformed under the inspiration of Marxist collectivism; but they arise out of the ideologies of the dominant cultures, and they are inconsistent with the faith that is part of our people’s culture.

The Church thus calls for a new conversion on the level of cultural values, so that the structures of societal life may then be imbued with the spirit of the Gospel. And while it calls for a revitalization of evangelical values, it simultaneously urges a rapid and thoroughgoing transformation of structures. For by their very nature these structures are supposed to exert a restraining influence on the evil that arises in the human heart and manifests itself socially; and they are also meant to serve as conditioning pedagogical factors for an interior conversion on the plane of values (Med-P: 16).

Other problems. Within this general situation and its overall challenges are inscribed certain specific problems of major importance that the Church must heed in its new effort at evangelization. They include the following:

—Starting off from a sound knowledge of the cultural conditions of our peoples and a solid penetration into their lifestyle, the Church must organize an adequate catechesis. And there must be enough native pastoral workers of varied sorts to satisfy the right of our peoples not to stay immersed in ignorance about the faith or at the most rudimentary levels of knowledge.

—There must be a critical yet constructive examination of the educational system established in Latin America.
Using past experience and imagination, the Church must draw up criteria and approaches for a pastoral effort directed at city life, where the new cultural styles are arising. At the same time the Church must also work to evangelize and promote indigenous groups and Afro-Americans.

The Church must establish a new evangelizing presence among workers as well as intellectual and artistic elites.

Humanistically and evangelically the Church must contribute to the betterment of women, in line with their specific identity and femininity.

3. EVANGELIZATION AND THE PEOPLE’S RELIGIOSITY

3.1. Basic Statements about this Notion

By the religion of the people, popular religiosity, or popular piety (EN: 48), we mean the whole complex of underlying beliefs rooted in God, the basic attitudes that flow from these beliefs, and the expressions that manifest them. It is the form of cultural life that religion takes on among a given people. In its most characteristic cultural form, the religion of the Latin American people is an expression of the Catholic faith. It is a people’s Catholicism.

Despite the defects and the sins that are always present, the faith of the Church has set its seal on the soul of Latin America (HZ:2). It has left its mark on Latin America’s essential historical identity, becoming the continent’s cultural matrix out of which new peoples have arisen.

It is the Gospel, fleshed out in our peoples, that has brought them together to form the original cultural and historical entity known as Latin America. And this identity is glorifying reflected on the mestizo countenance of Mary of Guadalupe, who appeared at the start of the evangelization process.

This people’s religion is lived out in a preferential way by the “poor and simple” (EN: 48). But it takes in all social sectors; and sometimes it is one of the few bonds that really brings together the people living in our nations, which are so divided politically. But of course we must acknowledge that there is much diversity amid this unity, a diversity of social, ethnic, and even generation groups.

At its core the religiosity of the people is a storehouse of values that offers the answers of Christian wisdom to the great questions of life. The Catholic wisdom of the common people is capable of fashioning a vital synthesis. It creatively combines the divine and the human, Christ and Mary, spirit and body, communion and institution, person and community, faith and homeland, intelligence and emotion. This wisdom is a Christian humanism that radically affirms the dignity of every person as a child of God, establishes a basic fraternity, teaches people how to encounter nature and understand work, and pro-
vides reasons for joy and humor even in the midst of a very hard life. For the
common people this wisdom is also a principle of discernment and an evan-
gelical instinct through which they spontaneously sense when the Gospel is
served in the Church and when it is emptied of its content and stifled by other
interests (OAP: III, 6).

Because this cultural reality takes in a very broad range of social strata,
the common people’s religion is capable of bringing together multitudes. Thus
it is in the realm of popular piety that the Church fulfills its imperative of
universality. Knowing that the message “is not reserved for a small group of
initiates or a chosen, privileged few, but is meant for all” (EN: 57), the Church
accomplishes its task of convening the masses in its sanctuaries and religious
feasts. There the gospel message has a chance, not always pastorally utilized,
of reaching “the heart of the masses” (EN: 57).

The people’s religious life is not just an object of evangelization. Insofar
as it is a concrete embodiment of the Word of God, it itself is an active way
in which the people continually evangelize themselves.

In Latin America this Catholic piety of the common people has not ade-
quately impregnated certain autochthonous cultural groups and ones of Afri-
can origin. Indeed in some cases they have not even been evangelized at all.
Yet these groups do possess a rich store of values and “seeds of the Word” as
they await the living Word.

Though the popular religiosity has set its seal on Latin American cul-
ture, it has not been sufficiently expressed in the organization of our societies
and states. It has left standing what John Paul II has once again called “sinful
structures” (HZ: 3). The gap between rich and poor, the menacing situation
faced by the weakest, the injustices, and the humiliating disregard and subjec-
tion endured by them radically contradict the values of personal dignity and
solidary brotherhood. Yet the people of Latin America carry these values in
their hearts as imperatives received from the Gospel. That is why the religi-
osity of the Latin American people often is turned into a cry for true libera-
tion. It is an exigency that is still unmet. Motivated by their religiosity, how-
ever, the people create or utilize space for the practice of brotherhood in the
more intimate areas of their lives together: e.g., the neighborhood, the village,
their labor unions, and their recreational activities. Rather than giving way
to despair, they confidently and shrewdly wait for the right opportunities to
move forward toward the liberation they so ardently desire.

Due to lack of attention on the part of pastoral agents and to other com-
plicated factors, the religion of the people shows signs of erosion and distor-
tion. Aberrant substitutes and regressive forms of syncretism have already
surfaced. In some areas we can discern serious and strange threats to the reli-
gion of the people, framed in terms that lay excessive stress on apocalyptic
fantasies.
3.2. A Description of the People's Religiosity

We can point to the following items as positive elements of the people's piety: the trinitarian presence evident in devotions and iconography; a sense of God the Father's providence; Christ celebrated in the mystery of his Incarnation (the Nativity, the child Jesus), in his crucifixion, in the Eucharist, and in the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Love for Mary is shown in many ways. She and "her mysteries are part of the very identity of these peoples and characterize their popular piety" (HZ: 2). She is venerated as the Immaculate Mother of God and of human beings, and as the Queen of our individual countries as well as of the whole continent. Other positive features are: veneration of the saints as protectors; remembrance of the dead; an awareness of personal dignity and of solidarity brotherhood; awareness of sin and the need to expiate it; the ability to express the faith in a total idiom that goes beyond all sorts of rationalism (chant, images, gesture, color, and dance); faith situated in time (feasts) and in various places (sanctuaries and shrines); a feel for pilgrimage as a symbol of human and Christian existence; filial respect for their pastors as representatives of God; an ability to celebrate the faith in expressive and communitarian forms; the deep integration of the sacraments and sacramentals into their personal and social life; a warm affection for the person of the Holy Father; a capacity for suffering and heroism in withstanding trials and professing their faith; a sense of the value of prayer; and acceptance of other people.

For some time now the religion of the people has been suffering from a divorce between elites and the common people. This indicates that there has been a lack of education, catechesis, and dynamic activity, due to a lack of proper pastoral concern on the part of the Church.

The negative aspects that we can point to are varied in origin. Some are of an ancestral type: superstition, magic, fatalism, idolatrous worship of power, fetishism, and ritualism. Some are due to distortions of catechesis: static archaism, misinformation and ignorance, syncretistic reinterpretation, and reduction of the faith to a mere contract with God. Some negative aspects are threats to the faith today: secularism as broadcasted by the media of social communication; consumptionism; sects; oriental and agnostic religions; ideological, economic, social, and political types of manipulation; various secularized forms of political messianism; and uprooting and urban proletarianization as the result of cultural change. We can state that many of these phenomena are real obstacles to evangelization.

3.3. Evangelizing the People's Religiosity: The Process, Attitudes, and Criteria

Like the Church as a whole, the religion of the people must be constantly evangelized over again. In Latin America, where the Gospel has been preached
and the general population baptized for almost five hundred years, the work of evangelization must appeal to the "Christian memory of our peoples." Evangelization will be a work of pastoral pedagogy in which the Catholicism of the common people is assumed, purified, completed, and made dynamic by the Gospel. In practice this means renewing a pedagogical dialogue based on the last links that the evangelizers of yesteryear had forged in the heart of our people. To do this, we must know the symbols, the silent nonverbal language of the people. Only then can we engage in a vital dialogue with them, communicating the Good News through a renewed process of informational catechesis.

Guided by the light of the Holy Spirit and imbued with "pastoral charity," the agents of evangelization will know how to elaborate a "pedagogy of evangelization" (EN: 48). Such a pedagogy demands that they love the people and be close to them; that they be prudent, firm, constant, and audacious. Only then can they educate this precious faith, which is sometimes in a very weakened state.

Concrete forms and pastoral processes must be evaluated on the basis of the criteria that characterize the Gospel as lived in the Church. Everything should help to make the baptized more truly children of God in the Son, more truly brothers and sisters in the Church, and more responsible missionaries in spreading the Kingdom. That is the direction which the maturing of the people's religion should take.

3.4. Tasks and Challenges

We face an urgent situation. The shift from an agrarian to an urbanized, industrial society is subjecting the people's religion to a decisive crisis. As this millennium draws to a close in Latin America, the great challenges posed by the people's piety entail the following pastoral tasks:

a. We must offer adequate catechesis and evangelization to the vast majority of the people who have been baptized but whose popular Catholicism is in a weakened state.

b. We must mobilize apostolic movements, parishes, base-level ecclesial communities, and church militants in general so that they may be a "leaven in the dough" in a more generous way. We must re-examine the spiritual practices, attitudes, and tactics of church elites vis-à-vis the common people's religiosity. As the Medellín Conference pointed out: "Given this type of religious sense among the masses, the Church is faced with the dilemma of either continuing to be a universal Church or, if it fails to attract and vitally incorporate such groups, of becoming a sect" (Med-PM: 3). We must develop in our militants a mystique of service designed to evangelize the religion of their people. That task is even more to the point today, and it is up to elites to accept the spirit of their people, purify it, scrutinize it, and flesh it out in a
prominent way. To this end elites must participate in the assemblies and public manifestations of the people so that they may offer their contribution.

c. We must proceed to put more planned effort into transforming our sanctuaries so that they might be "privileged locales" of evangelization (HZ: 5). This would entail purifying them of all forms of manipulation and commercialism. A special effort in this direction is demanded of our national sanctuaries, which stand as symbols of the interaction between the faith and the history of our peoples.

d. We must pay pastoral attention to the popular piety of the peasants and the indigenous peoples, so that they might enjoy growth and renewal in line with their own proper identity and development and in accordance with the emphases spelled out by Vatican II. This will ensure better preparation for more generalized cultural change.

e. We must see to it that the liturgy and the common people's piety crossfertilize each other, giving lucid and prudent direction to the impulses of prayer and charismatic vitality that are evident today in our countries. In addition, the religion of the people, with its symbolic and expressive richness, can provide the liturgy with creative dynamism. When examined with proper discernment, this dynamism can help to incarnate the universal prayer of the Church in our culture in a greater and better way.

f. We must try to provide the religiosity of the common people with the necessary reformulations and shifts of emphasis that are required in an urban-industrial civilization. The process is already evident in the big cities of the continent, where the Catholicism of the people is spontaneously finding new forms of expression and enriching itself with new values that have matured within its own depths. In this respect we must see to it that the faith develops a growing personalization and a liberative solidarity. The faith must nurture a spirituality that is capable of ensuring the contemplative dimension, i.e., gratitude to God and a poetic, sapiential encounter with creation. The faith must be a wellspring of joy for the common people and a reason for festivity even in the midst of suffering. In this way we can fashion cultural forms that will rescue urban industrialization from oppressive tedium and cold, suffocating economicism.

g. We must support the religious expressions of the common people en masse for the evangelizing force that they possess.

h. We must assume the religious unrest and excitement that is arising as a form of historical anxiety over the coming end of the millennium. This unrest and excitement must be framed in terms of the lordship of Christ and the providence of the Father, so that the children of God may enjoy the peace they need while they struggle and labor in time.

If the Church does not reinterpret the religion of the Latin American people, the resultant vacuum will be occupied by sects, secularized political
forms of messianism, consumptionism and its consequences of nausea and indifference, or pagan pansexualism. Once again the Church is faced with stark alternatives: what it does not assume in Christ is not redeemed, and it becomes a new idol replete with all the old malicious cunning.

4. EVANGELIZATION, LIBERATION, AND HUMAN PROMOTION

In this section we shall discuss evangelization in terms of its connection with human promotion, liberation, and the social doctrine of the Church.

4.1. A Word of Encouragement

We fully recognize the efforts undertaken by many Latin American Christians to explore the particularly conflict-ridden situations of our peoples in terms of the faith and to shed the light of God’s Word on them. We encourage all Christians to continue to provide this evangelizing service and to consider the criteria for reflection and investigation; and we urge them to put special care into preserving and promoting ecclesial communion on both the local and the universal levels.

We are also aware of the fact that since the Medellín Conference pastoral agents have made significant advances and encountered quite a few difficulties. Rather than discouraging us, this should inspire us to seek out new paths and better forms of accomplishment.

4.2. The Social Teaching of the Church

The contribution of the Church to liberation and human promotion has gradually been taking shape in a series of doctrinal guidelines and criteria for action that we now are accustomed to call “the social teaching of the Church.” These teachings have their source in Sacred Scripture, in the teaching of the Fathers and major theologians of the Church, and in the magisterium (particularly that of the most recent popes). As is evident from their origin, they contain permanently valid elements that are grounded in an anthropology that derives from the message of Christ and in the perennial values of Christian ethics. But they also contain changing elements that correspond to the particular conditions of each country and each epoch.*

Following Paul VI (OA: 4), we can formulate the matter this way: attentive to the signs of the time, which are interpreted in the light of the Gospel and the Church’s magisterium, the whole Christian community is called upon

*See the explanatory note at the start of Gaudium et Spes, which explains why that conciliar Constitution is called “pastoral.”
to assume responsibility for concrete options and their effective implementation in order to respond to the summons presented by changing circumstances. Thus these social teachings possess a dynamic character. In their elaboration and application lay people are not to be passive executors but rather active collaborators with their pastors, contributing their experience as Christians, and their professional, scientific competence (GS: 42).

Clearly, then, it is the whole Christian community, in communion with its legitimate pastors and guided by them, that is the responsible subject of evangelization, liberation, and human promotion.

The primary object of this social teaching is the personal dignity of the human being, who is the image of God, and the protection of all inalienable human rights (PP: 14–21). As the need has arisen, the Church has proceeded to spell out its teaching with regard to other areas of life: social life, economics, politics, and cultural life. But the aim of this doctrine of the Church, which offers its own specific vision of the human being and humanity (PP: 13), is always the promotion and integral liberation of human beings in terms of both their earthly and their transcendent dimensions. It is a contribution to the construction of the ultimate and definitive Kingdom, although it does not equate earthly progress with Christ's Kingdom (GS: 39).

If our social teachings are to be credible and to be accepted by all, they must effectively respond to the serious challenges and problems arising out of the reality of Latin America. Human beings who are diminished by all sorts of deficiencies and wants are calling for urgent efforts of promotion on our part, and this makes our works of social assistance necessary. Nor can we propose our teaching without being challenged by it in turn insofar as our personal and institutional behavior is concerned. It requires us to display consistency, creativity, boldness, and total commitment. Our social conduct is an integral part of our following of Christ. Our reflection on the Church's projection into the world as a sacrament of communion and salvation is a part of our theological reflection. For "evangelization would not be complete if it did not take into account the reciprocal appeal that arises in the course of time between the Gospel on the one hand and the concrete personal and social life of human beings on the other" (EN: 29).

Human promotion entails activities that help to arouse human awareness in every dimension and to make human beings themselves the active protagonists of their own human and Christian development. It educates people in living together, it gives impetus to organization, it fosters Christian sharing of goods, and it is an effective aid to communion and participation.

If the Christian community is to bear consistent witness in its efforts for liberation and human betterment, each country and local Church will organize its social pastoral effort around ongoing and adequate organisms. These organisms will sustain and stimulate commitment to the community, ensuring
the needed coordination of activities through a continuing dialogue with all
the members of the Church. Caritas and other organisms, which have been
doing effective work for many years, can offer valuable help to this end.

If they are to be faithful and complete, theology, preaching, and cate-
chesis must keep in mind the whole human being and all human beings. In
timely and adequate terms they must offer people today "an especially vigor-
ous message concerning liberation" (EN: 29), framing it in terms of the "over-
all plan of salvation" (EN: 38). So it seems that we must offer some clarifying
remarks about the concept of liberation itself at this present moment in the
life of our continent.

4.3. Discerning the Nature of Liberation in Christ

At the Medellin Conference we saw the elucidation of a dynamic process
of integral liberation. Its positive echoes were taken up by Evangelii Nuntiandi
and by John Paul II in his message to this conference. This proclamation im-
poses an urgent task on the Church, and it belongs to the very core of an
evangelization that seeks the authentic realization of the human being.

But there are different conceptions and applications of liberation. Though
they share common traits, they contain points of view that can hardly be brought
together satisfactorily. The best thing to do, therefore, is to offer criteria that
derive from the magisterium and that provide us with the necessary discern-
ment regarding the original conception of Christian liberation.

There are two complementary and inseparable elements. The first is
liberation from all the forms of bondage, from personal and social sin, and
from everything that tears apart the human individual and society; all this
finds its source to be in egotism, in the mystery of iniquity. The second ele-
ment is liberation for progressive growth in being through communion with
God and other human beings; this reaches its culmination in the perfect com-
munion of heaven, where God is all in all and weeping forever ceases.

This liberation is gradually being realized in history, in our personal
history and that of our peoples. It takes in all the different dimensions of life:
the social, the political, the economic, the cultural, and all their interrela-
tionships. Through all these dimensions must flow the transforming treasure of
the Gospel. It has its own specific and distinctive contribution to make, which
must be safeguarded. Otherwise we would be faced with the situation described
by Paul VI in Evangelii Nuntiandi: "The Church would lose its innermost
significance. Its message of liberation would have no originality of its own.
It would be prone to takeover or manipulation by ideological systems and
political parties" (EN: 32).

It should be made clear that this liberation is erected on the three great
pillars that John Paul II offered us as defining guidelines: i.e., the truth about
Jesus Christ, the truth about the Church, and the truth about human beings.
Thus we mutilate liberation in an unpardonable way if we do not achieve liberation from sin and all its seductions and idolatry, and if we do not help to make concrete the liberation that Christ won on the cross. We do the very same thing if we forget the crux of liberative evangelization, which is to transform human beings into active subjects of their own individual and communitarian development. And we also do the very same thing if we overlook dependence and the forms of bondage that violate basic rights that come from God, the Creator and Father, rather than being bestowed by governments or institutions, however powerful they may be.

The sort of liberation we are talking about knows how to use evangelical means, which have their own distinctive efficacy. It does not resort to violence of any sort, or to the dialectics of class struggle. Instead it relies on the vigorous energy and activity of Christians, who are moved by the Spirit to respond to the cries of countless millions of their brothers and sisters.

We pastors in Latin America have the most serious reasons for pressing for liberative evangelization. It is not just that we feel obliged to remind people of individual and social sinfulness. The further reason lies in the fact that since the Medellín Conference the situation has grown worse and more acute for the vast majority of our population.

We are pleased to note many examples of efforts to live out liberative evangelization in all its fullness. One of the chief tasks involved in continuing to encourage Christian liberation is the creative search for approaches free of ambiguity and reductionism (EN:32) and fully faithful to the Word of God. Given to us in the Church, that Word stirs us to offer joyful proclamation to the poor as one of the messianic signs of Christ’s Kingdom.

John Paul II has made this point well: “There are many signs that help us to distinguish when the liberation in question is Christian and when, on the other hand, it is based on ideologies that make it inconsistent with an evangelical view of humanity, of things, and of events (EN:35). These signs derive from the content that the evangelizers proclaim or from the concrete attitudes that they adopt. At the level of content one must consider how faithful they are to the Word of God, to the Church’s living tradition, and to its magisterium. As for attitudes, one must consider what sense of communion they feel, with the bishops first of all, and then with the other sectors of God’s People. Here one must also consider what contribution they make to the real building up of the community; how they channel their love into caring for the poor, the sick, the dispossessed, the neglected, and the oppressed; and how, discovering in these people the image of the poor and suffering Jesus, they strive to alleviate their needs and to serve Christ in them (LG:8). Let us make no mistake about it: as if by some evangelical instinct, the humble and simple faithful spontaneously sense when the Gospel is being served in the Church and when it is being eviscerated and asphyxiated by other interests” (OAP:III, 6).

Those who hold to the vision of humanity offered by Christianity also
take on the commitment not to measure the sacrifice it costs to ensure that all will enjoy the status of authentic children of God and brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Thus liberative evangelization finds its full realization in the communion of all in Christ, as the Father of all people wills.

4.4. Liberative Evangelization for a Human Societal Life
Worthy of the Children of God

Other than God, nothing is divine or worthy of worship. Human beings fall into slavery when they divinize or absolutize wealth, power, the State, sex, pleasure, or anything created by God—including their own being or human reason. God himself is the source of radical liberation from all forms of idolatry, because the adoration of what is not adorabile and the absolutization of the relative leads to violation of the innermost reality of human persons: i.e., their relationship with God and their personal fulfillment. Here is the liberative word par excellence: “You shall do homage to the Lord your God; him alone shall you adore” (Matt. 4:10; cf. Deut. 5:6ff). The collapse of idols restores to human beings their essential realm of freedom. God, who is supremely free, wants to enter into dialogue with free beings who are capable of making their own choices and exercising their responsibilities on both the individual and communitarian levels. So we have a human history that, even though it possesses its own consistency and autonomy, is called upon to be consecrated to God by humanity. Authentic liberation frees us from oppression so that we may be able to say yes to a higher good.

*Humanity and earthly goods.* By virtue of their origin and nature, by the will of the Creator, worldly goods and riches are meant to serve the utility and progress of each and every human being and people. Thus each and every one enjoys a primary, fundamental, and absolutely inviolable right to share in the use of these goods, insofar as that is necessary for the worthy fulfillment of the human person. All other rights, including the right of property and free trade, are subordinate to that right. As John Paul II teaches: “There is a social mortgage on all private property” (OAP:III,4). To be compatible with primordial human rights, the right of ownership must be primarily a right of use and administration; and though this does not rule out ownership and control, it does not make these absolute or unlimited. Ownership should be a source of freedom for all, but never a source of domination or special privilege. We have a grave and pressing duty to restore this right to its original and primary aim (PP:23).

*Liberation from the idol of wealth.* Earthly goods become an idol and a serious obstacle to the Kingdom of God (Matt. 19:23–26) when human be-
ings devote all their attention to possessing them or even coveting them. Then earthly goods turn into an absolute, and "you cannot give yourself to God and money" (Luke 16:13).

Turned into an absolute, wealth is an obstacle to authentic freedom. The cruel contrast between luxurious wealth and extreme poverty, which is so visible throughout our continent and which is further aggravated by the corruption that often invades public and professional life, shows the great extent to which our nations are dominated by the idol of wealth.

These forms of idolatry are concretized in two opposed forms that have a common root. One is liberal capitalism. The other, a reaction against liberal capitalism, is Marxist collectivism. Both are forms of what can be called "institutionalized injustice."

Finally, as already noted, we must take cognizance of the devastating effects of an uncontrolled process of industrialization and a process of urbanization that is taking on alarming proportions. The depletion of our natural resources and the pollution of the environment will become a critical problem. Once again we affirm that the consumptionist tendencies of the more developed nations must undergo a thorough revision. They must take into account the elementary needs of the poor peoples who constitute the majority of the world's population.

The new humanism proclaimed by the Church, which rejects all forms of idolatry, "will enable our contemporaries to enjoy the higher values of love and friendship, of prayer and contemplation, and thus find themselves. This is what will guarantee humanity's authentic development—its transition from less than human conditions to truly human ones" (PP:20). In this way economic planning will be put in the service of human beings rather than human beings being put in the service of economics (PP:34). The latter is what happens in the two forms of idolatry mentioned above (liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism). The former is the only way to make sure that what human beings "have" does not suffocate what they "are" (GS:35).

Human beings and power. The various forms of power in society are a basic part of the order of creation. Hence in themselves they are essentially good, insofar as they render service to the human community.

Authority, which is necessary in every society, comes from God (Rom. 13:1; John 19:11). It is the faculty of giving commands in accordance with right reason. Hence its obligatory force derives from the moral order (PT:47), and it should develop out of that ground in order to oblige people in conscience: "Authority is before all else a moral force" (Pt:48; GS:74).

Sin corrupts humanity's use of power, leading people to abuse the rights of others, sometimes in more or less absolute ways. The most notorious example of this is the exercise of political power. For this is an area that involves
decisions governing the overall organization of the community’s temporal welfare, and it readily lends itself to abuses. Indeed, it may lead not only to abuses by those in power but also to the absolutizing of power itself (GS: 73) with the backing of public force. Political power is divinized when in practice it is regarded as absolute. Hence the totalitarian use of power is a form of idolatry; and as such, the Church completely rejects it (GS: 75). We grieve to note the presence of many authoritarian and even oppressive regimes on our continent. They constitute one of the most serious obstacles to the full development of the rights of persons, groups, and even nations.

Unfortunately, in many instances this reaches the point where the political and economic authorities of our nations are themselves made subject to even more powerful centers that are operative on an international scale. This goes far beyond the normal range of mutual relationships. And the situation is further aggravated by the fact that these centers of power are ubiquitous, covertly organized, and easily capable of evading the control of governments and even international organisms.

There is an urgent need to liberate our peoples from the idol of absolutized power so that they may live together in a society based on justice and freedom. As a youthful people with a wealth of culture and tradition, Latin Americans must carry out the mission assigned to them by history. But if they are to do this, they need a political order that will respect human dignity and ensure harmony and peace to the community, both in its internal relations and its relations with other communities. Among all the aspirations of our peoples, we would like to stress the following:

—Equality for all citizens. All have the right and the duty to participate in the destiny of their society and to enjoy equality of opportunity, bearing their fair share of the burdens and obeying legitimately established laws.

—The exercise of their freedoms. These should be protected by basic institutions that will stand surety for the common good and respect the fundamental rights of persons and associations.

—Legitimate self-determination for our peoples. This will permit them to organize their lives in accordance with their own genius and history (GS: 74) and to cooperate in a new international order.

—The urgent necessity of re-establishing justice. We are not talking only about theoretical justice recognized merely in the abstract. We are talking also about a justice that is effectively implemented in practice by institutions that are truly operative and adequate to the task.*

*Hedonism, too, has been set up as an absolute on our continent. Liberation from the idol of pleasure-seeking and consumption is an imperative demand of Christian social teaching. We shall consider this issue more fully in Part Three, Chapter I, when we deal with educating people for love and family life (see nos. 582–89 below).
5. EVANGELIZATION, IDEOLOGIES, AND POLITICS

5.1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a growing deterioration in the sociopolitical life of our countries.

They are experiencing the heavy burden of economic and institutional crises, and clear symptoms of corruption and violence.

The violence is generated and fostered by two factors: (1) what can be called institutionalized injustice in various social, political, and economic systems; and (2) ideologies that use violence as a means to win power.

The latter in turn causes the proliferation of governments based on force, which often derive their inspiration from the ideology of National Security.

As a mother and teacher whose expertise is humanity, the Church must examine the conditions, systems, ideologies, and political life of our continent — shedding light on them from the standpoint of the Gospel and its own social teaching. And this must be done even though it knows that people will try to use its message as their own tool.

So the Church projects the light of its message on politics and ideologies, as one more form of service to its peoples and as a sure line of orientation for all those who must assume social responsibilities in one form or another.

5.2. Evangelization and Politics

The political dimension is a constitutive dimension of human beings and a relevant area of human societal life. It has an all-embracing aspect because its aim is the common welfare of society. But that does not mean that it exhausts the gamut of social relationships.

Far from despising political activity, the Christian faith values it and holds it in high esteem.

Speaking in general, and without distinguishing between the roles that may be proper to its various members, the Church feels it has a duty and a right to be present in this area of reality. For Christianity is supposed to evangelize the whole of human life, including the political dimension. So the Church criticizes those who would restrict the scope of faith to personal or family life; who would exclude the professional, economic, social, and political orders as if sin, love, prayer, and pardon had no relevance in them.

The fact is that the need for the Church's presence in the political arena flows from the very core of the Christian faith. That is to say, it flows from the lordship of Christ over the whole of life. Christ sets the seal on the definitive brotherhood of humanity, wherein every human being is of equal worth: “All are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).
From the integral message of Christ there flows an original anthropology and theology that takes in "the concrete personal and social life of the human being" (EN:29). It is a liberating message because it saves us from the bondage of sin, which is the root and source of all oppression, injustice, and discrimination.

These are some of the reasons why the Church is present in the political arena to enlighten consciences and to proclaim a message that is capable of transforming society.

The Church recognizes the proper autonomy of the temporal order (GS: 36). This holds true for governments, parties, labor unions, and other groups in the social and political arena. The purpose that the Lord assigned to his Church is a religious one; so when it does intervene in the sociopolitical arena, it is not prompted by any aim of a political, economic, or social nature. "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" (GS:42).

Insofar as the political arena is concerned, the Church is particularly interested in distinguishing between the specific functions of the laity, religious, and those who minister to the unity of the Church—i.e., the bishop and his priests.

5.3. Notions of Politics and Political Involvement

We must distinguish between two notions of politics and political involvement. First, in the broad sense politics seeks the common good on both the national and international plane. Its task is to spell out the fundamental values of every community—internal concord and external security—reconciling equality with freedom, public authority with the legitimate autonomy and participation of individual persons and groups, and national sovereignty with international coexistence and solidarity. It also defines the ethics and means of social relationships. In this broad sense politics is of interest to the Church, and hence to its pastors, who are ministers of unity. It is a way of paying worship to the one and only God by simultaneously desacralizing and consecrating the world to him (LG: 34).

So the Church helps to foster the values that should inspire politics. In every nation it interprets the aspirations of the people, especially the yearnings of those that society tends to marginalize. And it does this with its testimony, its teaching, and its varied forms of pastoral activity.

Second, the concrete performance of this fundamental political task is normally carried out by groups of citizens. They resolve to pursue and exercise political power in order to solve economic, political, and social problems in accordance with their own criteria or ideology. Here, then, we can talk
about "party politics." Now even though the ideologies elaborated by such
groups may be inspired by Christian doctrine, they can come to differing con-
cclusions. No matter how deeply inspired in church teaching, no political party
can claim the right to represent all the faithful because its concrete program
can never have absolute value for all (cf. Pius XI, Catholic Action and Poli-
tics, 1937).

Party politics is properly the realm of lay people (GS:43). Their lay sta-
tus entitles them to establish and organize political parties, using an ideology
and strategy that is suited to achieving their legitimate aims.

In the social teaching of the Church lay people find the proper criteria
deriving from the Christian view of the human being. For its part the hier-
archy will demonstrate its solidarity by contributing to their adequate forma-
tion and their spiritual life, and also by nurturing their creativity so that they
can explore options that are increasingly in line with the common good and
the needs of the weakest.

Pastors, on the other hand, must be concerned with unity. So they will
divest themselves of every partisan political ideology that might condition their
criteria and attitudes. They then will be able to evangelize the political sphere
as Christ did, relying on the Gospel without any infusion of partisanship or
ideologization. Christ's Gospel would not have had such an impact on history
if he had not proclaimed it as a religious message: "The Gospels show clearly
that for Jesus anything that would alter his mission as the Servant of Yahweh
was a temptation (Matt. 4:8; Luke 4:5). He does not accept the position of
those who mixed the things of God with merely political attitudes (Matt. 22:
21; Mark 12:17; John 18:36)" (OAP:I,4).

Priests, also ministers of unity, and deacons must submit to the same
sort of personal renunciation. If they are active in party politics, they will run
the risk of absolutizing and radicalizing such activity; for their vocation is to
be "men dedicated to the Absolute." As the Medellin Conference pointed out:
"In the economic and social order . . . and especially in the political order,
where a variety of concrete choices is offered, the priest, as priest, should not
directly concern himself with decisions or leadership nor with the structuring
of solutions" (Med-PR:19). And the 1971 Synod of Bishops stated: "Leaders-
ship or active militancy on behalf of any political party is to be excluded by
every priest unless, in concrete and exceptional circumstances, this is truly
required by the good of the community and receives the consent of the bishop
after consultation with the priests' council and, if circumstances call for it,
with the episcopal conference" ("The Ministerial Priesthood," Part Two, no. 2).
Certainly the present thrust of the Church is not in that direction.

By virtue of the way in which they follow Christ, and in line with the
distinctive function that is theirs within the Church's mission because of their
specific charism, religious also cooperate in the evangelization of the political
order. Living in a society that is far from fraternal, that is taken up with consumptionism, and that has as its ultimate goal the development of its material forces of production, religious will have to give testimony of real austerity in their lifestyle, of interhuman communion, and of an intense relationship with God. They, too, will have to resist the temptation to get involved in party politics, so that they do not create confusion between the values of the Gospel and some specific ideology.

Close reflection upon the recent words of the Holy Father addressed to bishops, priests, and religious will provide valuable guidance for their service in this area: “Souls that are living in habitual contact with God and that are operating in the warm light of his love know how to defend themselves easily against the temptations of partisanship and antithesis that threaten to create painful divisions. They know how to interpret their options for the poorest and for all the victims of human egotism in the proper light of the Gospel, without succumbing to forms of sociopolitical radicalism. In the long run such radicalism is untimely, counterproductive, and generative of new abuses. Such souls know how to draw near to the people and immerse themselves in their midst without calling into question their own religious identity or obscuring the ‘specific originality’ of their own vocation, which flows from following the poor, chaste, and obedient Christ. A measure of real adoration has more value and spiritual fruitfulness than the most intense activity, even apostolic activity. This is the most urgent kind of ‘protest’ that religious should exercise against a society where efficiency has been turned into an idol on whose altar even human dignity itself is sometimes sacrificed” (RMS).

Lay leaders of pastoral action should not use their authority in support of parties or ideologies.

5.4. Reflections on Political Violence

Faced with the deplorable reality of violence in Latin America, we wish to express our view clearly. Condemnation is always the proper judgment on physical and psychological torture, kidnapping, the persecution of political dissidents or suspect persons, and the exclusion of people from public life because of their ideas. If these crimes are committed by the authorities entrusted with the task of safeguarding the common good, then they defile those who practice them, notwithstanding any reasons offered.

The Church is just as decisive in rejecting terrorist and guerrilla violence, which becomes cruel and uncontrolable when it is unleashed. Criminal acts can in no way be justified as the way to liberation. Violence inexorably engenders new forms of oppression and bondage, which usually prove to be more serious than the ones people are allegedly being liberated from. But most importantly violence is an attack on life, which depends on the Creator alone.
And we must also stress that when an ideology appeals to violence, it thereby admits its own weakness and inadequacy.

Our responsibility as Christians is to use all possible means to promote the implementation of nonviolent tactics in the effort to re-establish justice in economic and sociopolitical relations. This is in accordance with the teaching of Vatican II, which applies to both national and international life: "We cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided that this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community" (GS:78).

"We are obliged to state and reaffirm that violence is neither Christian nor evangelical, and that brusque, violent structural changes will be false, ineffective in themselves, and certainly inconsistent with the dignity of the people" (Paul VI, Address in Bogotá, 23 August 1968). The fact is that "the Church realizes that even the best structures and the most idealized systems quickly become inhuman if human inclinations are not improved, if there is no conversion of heart and mind on the part of those who are living in those structures or controlling them" (EN:36).

5.5. Evangelization and Ideologies

Here we shall consider the exercise of discernment with regard to the ideologies existing in Latin America and the systems inspired by them.

Of the many different definitions of ideology that might be offered, we apply the term here to any conception that offers a view of the various aspects of life from the standpoint of a specific group in society. The ideology manifests the aspirations of this group, summons its members to a certain kind of solidarity and combative struggle, and grounds the legitimacy of these aspirations on specific values. Every ideology is partial because no one group can claim to identify its aspirations with those of society as a whole. Thus an ideology will be legitimate if the interests it upholds are legitimate and if it respects the basic rights of other groups in the nation. Viewed in this positive sense, ideologies seem to be necessary for social activity, insofar as they are mediating factors leading to action.

But in themselves ideologies have a tendency to absolutize the interests they uphold, the vision they propose, and the strategy they promote. In such a case they really become "lay religions." People take refuge in ideology as an ultimate explanation of everything: "In this way they fashion a new idol, as it were, whose absolute and coercive character is maintained, sometimes unwittingly" (OA:28). In that sense it is not surprising that ideologies try to use persons and institutions as their tools in order to achieve their aims more effectively. Herein lies the ambiguous and negative side of ideologies.
But ideologies should not be analyzed solely in terms of their conceptual content. In addition, they are dynamic, living phenomena of a sweeping and contagious nature. They are currents of yearning tending toward absolutization, and they are powerful in winning people over and whipping up redemptive fervor. This confers a special "mystique" on them, and it also enables them to make their way into different milieus in a way that is often irresistible. Their slogans, typical expressions, and criteria can easily make their way into the minds of people who are far from adhering voluntarily to their doctrinal principles. Thus many people live and struggle in practice within the atmosphere of specific ideologies, without ever having taken cognizance of that fact. This aspect calls for constant vigilance and re-examination. And it applies both to ideologies that legitimate the existing situation and to those that seek to change it.

To exercise the necessary discernment and critical judgment with regard to ideologies, Christians must rely on "a rich and complex heritage, which Evangelii Nuntiandi calls the social doctrine, or social teaching, of the Church" (OAP:III,7).

This social doctrine or teaching of the Church is an expression of its "distinctive contribution: a global perspective on the human being and on humanity" (PP:13). The Church accepts the challenge and contribution of ideologies in their positive aspects, and in turn challenges, criticizes, and relativizes them.

Neither the Gospel nor the Church’s social teaching deriving from it are ideologies. On the contrary, they represent a powerful source for challenging the limitations and ambiguities of all ideologies. The ever fresh originality of the gospel message must be continually clarified and defended against all efforts to turn it into an ideology.

The unrestricted exaltation of the State and its many abuses must not, however, cause us to forget the necessity of the functions performed by the modern State. We are talking about a State that respects basic rights and freedoms; a State that is grounded on a broad base of popular participation involving many intermediary groups; a State that promotes autonomous development of an equitable and rapid sort, so that the life of the nation can withstand undue pressure and interference on both the domestic and international fronts; a State that is capable of adopting a position of active cooperation with the forces for integration into both the continental and the international community; and finally, a State that avoids the abuse of monolithic power concentrated in the hands of a few.

In Latin America we are obliged to analyze a variety of ideologies:

a. First, there is capitalist liberalism, the idolatrous worship of wealth in individualistic terms. We acknowledge that it has given much encouragement to the creative capabilities of human freedom, and that it has been a
stimulus to progress. But on the other side of the coin it views "profit as the chief spur to economic progress, free competition as the supreme law of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right, having no limits nor concomitant social obligations" (PP: 26). The illegitimate privileges stemming from the absolute right of ownership give rise to scandalous contrasts, and to a situation of dependence and oppression on both the national and international levels. Now it is true that in some countries its original historical form of expression has been attenuated by necessary forms of social legislation and specific instances of government intervention. But in other countries capitalist liberalism persists in its original form, or has even retrogressed to more primitive forms with even less social sensitivity.

b. Second, there is Marxist collectivism. With its materialist presuppositions, it too leads to the idolatrous worship of wealth—but in collectivist terms. It arose as a positive criticism of commodity fetishism and of the disregard for the human value of labor. But it did not manage to get to the root of that form of idolatry, which lies in the rejection of the only God worthy of adoration: the God of love and justice.

The driving force behind its dialectics is class struggle. Its objective is a classless society, which is to be achieved through a dictatorship of the proletariat; but in the last analysis this really sets up a dictatorship of the party. All the concrete historical experiments of Marxism have been carried out within the framework of totalitarian regimes that are closed to any possibility of criticism and correction. Some believe it is possible to separate various aspects of Marxism—its doctrine and its method of analysis in particular. But we would remind people of the teaching of the papal magisterium on this point: "It would be foolish and dangerous on that account to forget that they are closely linked to each other; to embrace certain elements of Marxist analysis without taking due account of their relation with its ideology; and to become involved in the class struggle and the Marxist interpretation of it without paying attention to the kind of violent and totalitarian society to which this activity leads" (OA: 34).

We must also note the risk of ideologization run by theological reflection when it is based on a praxis that has recourse to Marxist analysis. The consequences are the total politicization of Christian existence, the disintegration of the language of faith into that of the social sciences, and the draining away of the transcendental dimension of Christian salvation.

Both of the aforementioned ideologies—capitalist liberalism and Marxism—find their inspiration in brands of humanism that are closed to any transcendent perspective. One does because of its practical atheism; the other does because of its systematic profession of a militant atheism.

c. In recent years the so-called Doctrine of National Security has taken a firm hold on our continent. In reality it is more an ideology than a doctrine.
It is bound up with a specific politico-economic model with elitist and verticalist features, which suppresses the broad-based participation of the people in political decisions. In some countries of Latin America this doctrine justifies itself as the defender of the Christian civilization of the West. It elaborates a repressive system, which is in line with its concept of "permanent war." And in some cases it expresses a clear intention to exercise active geopolitical leadership.

We fully realize that fraternal coexistence requires a security system to inculcate respect for a social order that will permit all to carry out their mission with regard to the common good. This means that security measures must be under the control of an independent authority that can pass judgment on violations of the law and guarantee corrective measures.

The Doctrine of National Security, understood as an absolute ideology, would not be compatible with the Christian vision of the human being as responsible for carrying out a temporal project, and to its vision of the State as the administrator of the common good. It puts the people under the tutelage of military and political elites, who exercise authority and power; and it leads to increased inequality in sharing the benefits of development.

We again insist on the view of the Medellín Conference: "The system of liberal capitalism and the temptation of the Marxist system would appear to exhaust the possibilities of transforming the economic structures of our continent. Both systems militate against the dignity of the human person. One takes for granted the primacy of capital, its power, and its discriminatory utilization in the function of profit-making. The other, although it ideologically supports a kind of humanism, is more concerned with collective humanity, and in practice becomes a totalitarian concentration of state power. We must denounce the fact that Latin America finds itself caught between these two options and remains dependent on one or the other of the centers of power that control its economy" (Med-JU: 10).

In the face of this situation, the Church chooses "to maintain its freedom with regard to the opposing systems, in order to opt solely for the human being. Whatever the miseries or sufferings that afflict human beings, it is not through violence, power-plays, or political systems but through the truth about human beings that they will find their way to a better future" (OAP:III, 3). Grounded on this humanism, Christians will find encouragement to get beyond the hard and fast either-or and to help build a new civilization that is just, fraternal, and open to the transcendent. It will also bear witness that eschatological hopes give vitality and meaning to human hopes.

For this bold and creative activity Christians will fortify their identity in the original values of Christian anthropology. The Church "does not need to have recourse to ideological systems in order to love, defend, and collaborate in the liberation of the human being. At the center of the message of which
the Church is the trustee and herald, it finds inspiration for acting in favor of brotherhood, justice, and peace; and against all forms of domination, slavery, discrimination, violence, attacks on religious liberty, and aggression against human beings and whatever attacks life” (OAP:III, 2).

Finding inspiration in these tenets of an authentic Christian anthropology, Christians must commit themselves to the elaboration of historical projects that meet the needs of a given moment and a given culture.

Christians must devote special attention and discernment to their involvement in historical movements that have arisen from various ideologies but are distinct from them. The teaching of *Pacem in Terris* (PT:55 and 152), which is reiterated in *Octogesima Adveniens*, tells us that false philosophical theories cannot be equated with the historical movements that originated in them, insofar as these historical movements can be subject to further influences as they evolve. The involvement of Christians in these movements imposes certain obligations to persevere in fidelity, and these obligations will facilitate their evangelizing role. They include:

- a. Ecclesial discernment, in communion with their pastors, as described in *Octogesima Adveniens* (OA:4).
- b. The shoring up of their identity by nourishing it with the truths of faith, their elaboration in the social teaching or doctrine of the Church, and an enriching life of prayer and participation in the sacraments.
- c. Critical awareness of the difficulties, limitations, possibilities, and values of these convergences.

5.6. The Dangers of the Church and Its Ministers’ Activity

Being Used as a Tool

In propounding an absolutized view of the human being to which everything, including human thought, is subordinated, ideologies and parties try to use the Church or deprive it of its legitimate independence. This manipulation of the Church, always a risk in political life, may derive from Christians themselves, and even from priests and religious, when they proclaim a Gospel devoid of economic, social, cultural, and political implications. In practice this mutilation comes down to a kind of complicity with the established order, however unwitting.

Other groups are tempted in the opposite direction. They are tempted to consider a given political policy to be of primary urgency, a precondition for the Church’s fulfillment of its mission. They are tempted to equate the Christian message with some ideology and subordinate the former to the latter, calling for a “re-reading” of the Gospel on the basis of a political option (OAP:1,4). But the fact is that we must try to read the political scene from the standpoint of the Gospel, not vice-versa.
Traditional integrist looks for the Kingdom to come principally through a stepping back in history and reconstructing a Christian culture of a medieval cast. This would be a new Christendom, in which there was an intimate alliance between civil authority and ecclesiastical authority.

The radical thrust of groups at the other extreme falls into the same trap. It looks for the Kingdom to come from a strategic alliance between the Church and Marxism, and it rules out all other alternatives. For these people it is not simply a matter of being Marxists, but of being Marxists in the name of the faith (see nos. 543–46 above).

5.7. Conclusion

The mission of the Church is immense and more necessary than ever before, when we consider the situation at hand: conflicts that threaten the human race and the Latin American continent; violations of justice and freedom; institutionalized injustice embodied in governments adhering to opposing ideologies; and terrorist violence. Fulfillment of its mission will require activity from the Church as a whole: pastors, consecrated ministers, religious, and lay people. All must carry out their own specific tasks. Joined with Christ in prayer and abnegation, they will commit themselves to work for a better society without employing hatred and violence; and they will see that decision through to the end, whatever the consequences. For the attainment of a society that is more just, more free, and more at peace is an ardent longing of the peoples of Latin America and an indispensable fruit of any liberative evangelization.

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Excerpt from Part Three: Evangelization in the Latin American Church, Chapter I: Centers of Communion and Participation

2. BASE-LEVEL ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES (CEBs), THE PARISH, AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

Besides the Christian family, the first center of evangelization, human beings live their fraternal vocations in the bosom of the local Church, in communities that render the Lord’s salvific design present and operative, to be lived out in communion and participation.

Thus within the local Church we must consider the parishes, the CEBs, and other ecclesial groups.

The Church is the People of God, which expresses its life of communion and evangelizing service on various levels and under various historical forms.
2.1. The Situation

In general we can say that in our Latin American Church today we find a great longing for deeper and more stable relationships in the faith, sustained and animated by the Word of God. We see an intensification in common prayer and in the effort of the people to participate more consciously and fruitfully in the liturgy.

We note an increase in the co-responsibility of the faith, both in organization and in pastoral action.

There is more wide-ranging awareness and exercise of the rights and duties appropriate to lay people as members of the community.

We notice a great yearning for justice and a sincere sense of solidarity, in a social milieu characterized by growing secularism and other phenomena typical of a society in transformation.

Bit by bit the Church has been dissociating itself from those who hold economic or political power, freeing itself from various forms of dependence, and divesting itself of privileges.

The Church in Latin America wishes to go on giving witness of unselfish and self-denying service in the face of a world dominated by greed for profit, lust for power, and exploitation.

In the direction of greater participation, there has been an increase of ordained ministries (such as the permanent diaconate), non-ordained ministries, and other services such as celebrators of the Word and community animators. We also note better collaboration between priests, religious, and lay people.

More clearly evident in our communities, as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, is a new style of relationship between bishops and priests, and between them and their people. It is characterized by greater simplicity, understanding, and friendship in the Lord.

All this is a process, in which we still find broad sectors posing resistance of various sorts. This calls for understanding and encouragement, as well as great docility to the Holy Spirit. What we need now is still more clerical openness to the activity of the laity and the overcoming of pastoral individualism and self-sufficiency. On the other hand, the impact of the secularized milieu has sometimes produced centrifugal tendencies in the community and the loss of an authentic ecclesial sense.

We have not always found effective ways to overcome the meager education of our people in the faith. Thus they remain defenseless before the onslaughts of shaky theological doctrines, sectarian proselytism, and pseudospiritual movements.

In particular we have found that small communities, especially the CEBs, create more personal inter-relations, acceptance of God's Word, re-examination
of one's life, and reflection on reality in the light of the Gospel. They accentuate committed involvement in the family, one's work, the neighborhood, and the local community. We are happy to single out the multiplication of small communities as an important ecclesial event that is peculiarly ours, and as the "hope of the Church" (EN: 58). This ecclesial expression is more evident on the periphery of large cities and in the countryside. They are a favorable atmosphere for the rise of new lay-sponsored services. They have done much to spread family catechesis and adult education in the faith, in forms more suitable for the common people.

But not enough attention has been paid to the training of leaders in faith-education and Christian directors of intermediate organisms in the neighborhoods, the world of work, and the rural farm areas. Perhaps that is why not a few members of certain communities, and even entire communities, have been drawn to purely lay institutions or have been turned into ideological radicals, and are now in the process of losing any authentic feel for the Church.

The parish has been going through various forms of renewal that correspond to the changes in recent years. There is a change in outlook among pastors, more involvement of the laity in pastoral councils and other services, ongoing catechetical updating, and a growing presence of the priest among the people, especially through a network of groups and communities.

In the area of evangelization the parish embodies a twofold relationship of communication and pastoral communion. On the diocesan level parishes are integrated into regions, vicarages, and deaneries. And within the parish itself pastoral work is diversified in accordance with different areas, and there is greater opening to the creation of smaller communities.

But we still find attitudes that pose an obstacle to the dynamic thrust of renewal. Primacy is given to administrative work over pastoral care. There is routinism and a lack of preparation for the sacraments. Authoritarianism is evident among some priests. And sometimes the parish closes in on itself, disregarding the overall apostolic demands of a serious nature.

On the level of the local Church we note a considerable effort to arrange the territory so that greater attention can be paid to the People of God. This is being done by the creation of new dioceses. There is also concern to provide the Churches with organisms that will foster co-responsibility through channels suited for dialogue: e.g., priest councils, pastoral councils, and diocesan committees. These are to inspire a more organic pastoral effort suited to the specific reality of a given diocese.

Among religious communities and lay movements we also see a greater awareness of the necessity of being involved in the mission of the local Church and evincing an ecclesial spirit.

On the national level there is a noticeable effort to exercise greater colle-
giality in episcopal conferences, which are continuously being better organized and fitted with subsidiary organisms. Deserving of special mention is the growth and effectiveness of the service that CELAM offers to ecclesial communion throughout Latin America.

On the worldwide level we note the fraternal interchange promoted by the sending of apostolic personnel and economic aid. These relationships have been established with the episcopates of Europe and North America, with the help of CAL; their continuation and intensification offer ample opportunities for interecclesial participation, which is a noteworthy sign of universal communion.

2.2. Doctrinal Reflection

The Christian lives in community under the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the invisible principle of unity and communion, and also of the unity and variety to be found in states of life, ministries, and charisms.

In their families, which constitute domestic Churches, the baptized are summoned to their first experience of communion in faith, love, and service to others.

In small communities, particularly those that are better organized, people grow in their experience of new interpersonal relationships in the faith, in deeper exploration of God's Word, in fuller participation in the Eucharist, in communion with the pastors of the local Church, and in greater commitment to justice within the social milieu that surrounds them.

One question that might be raised is: When can a small community be considered an authentic base-level ecclesial community (CEB) in Latin America?

As a community, the CEB brings together families, adults and young people, in an intimate interpersonal relationship grounded in the faith. As an ecclesial reality, it is a community of faith, hope, and charity. It celebrates the Word of God and takes its nourishment from the Eucharist, the culmination of all the sacraments. It fleshes out the Word of God in life through solidarity and commitment to the new commandment of the Lord; and through the service of approved coordinators, it makes present and operative the mission of the Church and its visible communion with the legitimate pastors. It is a base-level community because it is composed of relatively few members as a permanent body, like a cell of the larger community. “When they deserve their ecclesial designation, they can take charge of their own spiritual and human existence in a spirit of fraternal solidarity” (EN: 58).

United in a CEB and nurturing their adherence to Christ, Christians strive for a more evangelical way of life amid the people, work together to challenge the egotistical and consumeristic roots of society, and make explicit their vocation to communion with God and their fellow humans. Thus they
offer a valid and worthwhile point of departure for building up a new society, “the civilization of love.”

The CEBs embody the Church’s preferential love for the common people. In them their religiosity is expressed, valued, and purified; and they are given a concrete opportunity to share in the task of the Church and to work committedly for the transformation of the world.

The parish carries out a function that is, in a way, an integral ecclesial function because it accompanies persons and families throughout their lives, fostering their education and growth in the faith. It is a center of coordination and guidance for communities, groups, and movements. In it the horizons of communion and participation are opened up even more. The celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments makes the global reality of the Church present in a clearer way. Its tie with the diocesan community is ensured by its union with the bishop, who entrusts his representative (usually the parish priest) with the pastoral care of the community. For the Christian the parish becomes the place of encounter and fraternal sharing of persons and goods; it overcomes the limitations inherent in small communities. In fact, the parish takes on a series of services that are not within the reach of smaller communities. This is particularly true with respect to the missionary dimension and to the furthering of the dignity of the human person. In this way it reaches out to migrants, who are more or less stable, to the marginalized, to the alienated, to nonbelievers, and in general to the neediest.

In the local Church, which is shaped in the image of the universal Church, we find the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ truly existing and operating (LG: 23; CD: 11). The local Church is a portion of the People of God, defined by a broader sociocultural context in which it is incarnated. Its primacy in the complex of ecclesial communities is due to the fact that it is presided over by a bishop. The bishop is endowed, in a full, sacramental way, with the threefold ministry of Christ, the head of the mystical body: prophet, priest, and pastor. In each local Church the bishop is the principle and foundation of its unity.

Because they are the successors of the apostles, bishops—through their communion with the episcopal college and, in particular, with the Roman pontiff—render present the apostolicity of the whole Church. They guarantee fidelity to the Gospel. They make real the communion with the universal Church. And they foster the collaboration of their presbytery and the growth of the People of God entrusted to their care.

It will be up to the bishop to discern the charisms and promote the ministries that are needed if his diocese is to grow toward maturity as an evangelized and evangelizing community. That means his diocese must be a light and leaven in society as well as a sacrament of unity and integral liberation. It must be capable of interchange with other local Churches and ani-
mated by a missionary spirit that will allow its inner evangelical richness to radiate outside.

2.3. Pastoral Lines of Approach

As pastors, we are determined to promote, guide, and accompany CEBs in the spirit of the Medellin Conference (Med-JPP: 10) and the guidelines set forth by Evangelii Nuntiandi (no. 58). We will also foster the discovery and gradual training of animators for these communities. In particular, we must explore how these small communities, which are flourishing mainly in rural areas and urban peripheries, can be adapted to the pastoral care of the big cities on our continent.

We must continue the efforts at parish renewal: getting beyond the merely administrative aspects; seeking greater lay participation, particularly in pastoral councils; giving priority to organized forms of the apostolate; and training lay people to assume their responsibilities as Christians in the community and the social milieu.

We must stress a more determined option for an overall, coordinated pastoral effort, with the collaboration of religious communities in particular. We must promote groups, communities, and movements, inspiring them to an ongoing effort at communion. We must turn the parish into a center for promoting services that smaller communities cannot surely provide.

We must encourage experiments to develop the pastoral activity of all the parish agents, and we must support the vocational pastoral effort of ordained ministers, lay services, and the religious life.

Worthy of special recognition and a word of encouragement are priests and other pastoral agents, to whom the diocesan community owes support, encouragement, and solidarity. This holds true also for their fitting sustenance and social security, within the spirit of poverty.

Among priests we want to single out the figure of the parish priest. He is a pastor in the likeness of Christ. He is a promoter of communion with God, his fellow humans to whose service he dedicates himself, and his fellow priests joined around their common bishop. He is the leader and guide of the communities, alert to discern the signs of the time along with his people.

In the realm of the local Church efforts should be made to ensure the ongoing training and updating of pastoral agents. Spirituality and training courses should be provided by retreat centers and days of recollection. It is urgent that diocesan curias become more effective centers of pastoral promotion on three levels: that of catechetics, liturgy, and services promoting justice and charity. The pastoral value of administrative service should also be recognized. A special effort should be made to coordinate and integrate pastoral diocesan councils and other diocesan organisms. For even though they present
problems, they are indispensable tools in planning, implementing, and keeping up with the pastoral activity in diocesan life.

The local Church must stress its missionary character and its aspect of ecclesial communion, sharing values and experiences as well as fostering the interchange of personnel and resources.

Through its pastors, episcopal collegiality, and union with the Vicar of Christ, the diocesan community ought to intensify its intimate communion with the center of church unity. It should also shore up its loyal acceptance of the service that is offered through the magisterium, nurturing its fidelity to the Gospel and its concrete life of charity. This would include collaboration on the continental level through CELAM and its programs.

We pledge to make every effort to ensure that this collegiality—of which this conference in Puebla and the two previous conferences are privileged instances—will be an even stronger sign of credibility for our proclamation of the Gospel and our service to it; that it will thereby foster fraternal communion in all of Latin America.

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Excerpt from Chapter III: Agents of Communion and Participation

1. LITURGY, PRIVATE PRAYER, POPULAR PIETY

Private prayer and popular piety, present in the soul of our people, constitute evangelization values. The liturgy is the privileged moment of communion and participation for an evangelization that leads to integral, authentic Christian liberation.

1.1. The Situation

a. Liturgy. Liturgical renewal in Latin America is providing generally positive results. This is because we are rediscovering the real place of the liturgy in the Church’s evangelizing mission, because the new liturgical books are encouraging greater comprehension and participation among the faithful, and because pre-sacramental catechesis is spreading.

All this has been inspired by the documents of the Holy See and episcopal conferences, as well as by meetings on various levels in Latin America—regional, national, etc.

This renewal has been facilitated by a common language, a rich cultural heritage, and popular piety.

We sense the need to adapt the liturgy to various cultures and to the situation of our people—young, poor, and simple (SC: 37–40).
The lack of ministers, the scattered population, and the geographical situation of our continent have prompted us to take greater cognizance of the usefulness of celebrations of the Word, and of the importance of utilizing the media of social communication (radio and television) to reach all.

But our observation is that we have not yet given pastoral work devoted to the liturgy the priority it deserves within our overall pastoral effort. Much harm is still being done by the opposition evident in some sectors between evangelization on the one hand and sacramentalization on the other. The liturgical training of the clergy is not being deepened as it should be, and we note a marked absence of liturgical catechesis designed for the faithful.

Participation in the liturgy does not have an adequate impact on the social commitment of Christians. Sometimes the liturgy is used as a tool in ways that disfigure its evangelizing value.

The failure to observe liturgical norms and their pastoral spirit has also been harmful, leading to abuses that cause disorientation and division among the faithful.

b. Private prayer. The popular religiosity of Latin Americans contains a rich heritage of prayer. Rooted in the native cultures, it was later evangelized by the forms of Christian piety introduced by missionaries and immigrants.

The age-old custom of coming together to pray at festivals and on special occasions is one that we regard as a rich treasure. More recently this prayer-life has been enriched by the biblical movement, new forms of contemplative prayer, and the prayer-group movement.

Many Christian communities that have no ordained minister accompany and celebrate events and feasts by coming together for prayer and song. These meetings simultaneously evangelize the community and imbue it with an evangelizing dynamism.

In large areas family prayer has been the only form of worship in existence. In fact, it has preserved the unity and faith of the family and the common people.

The invasion of the home by radio and TV has jeopardized the pious practices carried out in the bosom of the family.

Even though prayer often arises from merely personal needs and finds expression in traditional formulas that have not really been assimilated, people must not overlook the fact that the vocation of Christians should lead them to a moral, social, and evangelizing commitment.

c. Popular piety. A popular piety, a piety of the common people, is evident among all the Catholic people of Latin America. It is evident on every level and it takes quite a variety of forms. We bishops must not overlook this
piety. It must be scrutinized with theological and pastoral criteria so that its evangelizing potential may be discovered.

Latin America is insufficiently evangelized. The vast majority of the people express their faith predominantly in forms of popular piety.

The forms of popular piety are quite diverse, and they are both communal and personal in character. Among them we find the cultic worship of the suffering, crucified Christ; devotion to the Sacred Heart; various devotions to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary; devotion to the saints and the dead; processions; novenas; feasts of patron saints; pilgrimages to sanctuaries; sacramentals; promises; and so forth.

Popular piety presents such positive aspects as a sense of the sacred and the transcendent; openness to the Word of God; marked Marian devotion; an aptitude for prayer; a sense of friendship, charity, and family unity; an ability to suffer and to atone; Christian resignation in irremediable situations; and detachment from the material world.

But popular piety also presents negative aspects: lack of a sense of belonging to the Church; a divorce between faith and real life; a disinclination to receive the sacraments; an exaggerated estimation of devotion to the saints, to the detriment of knowing Jesus Christ and his mystery; a distorted idea of God; a utilitarian view of certain forms of piety; an inclination, in some places, toward religious syncretism; the infiltration of spiritism and, in some areas, of Oriental religious practices.

Too often forms of popular piety have been suppressed without valid reasons, or without replacing them with something better.

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PART FOUR

A MISSIONARY CHURCH SERVING EVANGELIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA

The Spirit of the Lord prompts the People of God in history to discern the signs of the times and to discover, in the deepest yearnings and problems of human beings, God's plan regarding the human vocation in the building up of society, making it more humane, just, and fraternal.

Thus in Latin America we see poverty as the palpable seal stamped on the vast majority. At the same time, however, the poor are open, not only to the Beatitudes and to the Father's predilection, but also to the possibility of being the true protagonists of their own development.

For Jesus, the evangelization of the poor was one of the messianic signs. For us, too, it will be a sign of evangelical authenticity.
Furthermore, the young people of Latin America wish to construct a better world and, sometimes without even knowing it, they are seeking the evangelical values of truth, justice, and love. Evangelization of them will not only fulfill their generous yearnings for personal fulfillment but also guarantee the preservation of a vigorous faith on our continent.

Thus poor people and young people constitute the treasure and the hope of the Church in Latin America, and so evangelization of them is a priority task.

The Church also calls upon all its children, working within the framework of their own specific responsibilities, to be a leaven in the world and to share in building a new society on both the national and international levels. On our continent in particular, since it is Christian for the most part, people should be a source of growth, light, and transforming power.

CHAPTER I

A PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

1.1. From Medellín to Puebla

With renewed hope in the vivifying power of the Spirit, we are going to take up once again the position of the Second General Conference of the Latin American episcopate in Medellín, which adopted a clear and prophetic option expressing preference for, and solidarity with, the poor. We do this despite the distortions and interpretations of some, who vitiate the spirit of Medellín, and despite the disregard and even hostility of others (OAP: Intro.). We affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation.

The vast majority of our fellow humans continue to live in a situation of poverty and even wretchedness that has grown more acute.* We wish to take note of all that the Church in Latin America has done, or has failed to do, for the poor since the Medellín Conference. This will serve as a starting point for seeking out effective channels to implement our option in our evangelizing work in Latin America’s present and future.

We see that national episcopates and many segments of lay people, reli-

*We referred to this in nos. 15ff. of this document. Here we would simply recall that the vast majority of our people lack the most elementary material goods. This is in contrast to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small minority, frequently the price being poverty for the majority. The poor do not lack simply material goods. They also miss, on the level of human dignity, full participation in sociopolitical life. Those found in this category are principally our indigenous peoples, peasants, manual laborers, marginalized urban dwellers and, in particular, the women of these social groups. The women are doubly oppressed and marginalized.
gious men and women, and priests have made their commitment to the poor a deeper and more realistic one. This witness, nascent but real, led the Latin American Church to denounce the grave injustices stemming from mechanisms of oppression.

The poor, too, have been encouraged by the Church. They have begun to organize themselves to live their faith in an integral way, and hence to reclaim their rights.

The Church's prophetic denunciations and its concrete commitments to the poor have in not a few instances brought down persecution and oppression of various kinds upon it. The poor themselves have been the first victims of this oppression.

All this has produced tensions and conflicts both inside and outside the Church. The Church has frequently been the butt of accusations, either of being on the side of those with political or socioeconomic power, or of propounding a dangerous and erroneous Marxist ideology.

Not all of us in the Latin American Church have committed ourselves sufficiently to the poor. We are not always concerned about them, or in solidarity with them. Service to them really calls for constant conversion and purification among all Christians. That must be done if we are to achieve fuller identification each day with the poor Christ and our own poor.

1.2. Doctrinal Reflection

*Jesus evangelizes the poor.* As the pope has told us, the evangelical commitment of the Church, like that of Christ, should be a commitment to those most in need (Luke 4:18–21; OAP:III,3). Hence the Church must look to Christ when it wants to find out what its evangelizing activity should be like. The Son of God demonstrated the grandeur of this commitment when he became a human being. For he identified himself with human beings by becoming one of them. He established solidarity with them and took up the situation in which they find themselves—in his birth and in his life, and particularly in his passion and death where poverty found its maximum expression (Phil. 2: 5–8; LG:8; EN:30; Med-JU:1,3).

For this reason alone, the poor merit preferential attention, whatever may be the moral or personal situation in which they find themselves. Made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26–28) to be his children, this image is dimmed and even defiled. That is why God takes on their defense and loves them (Matt. 5:45; James 2:5). That is why the poor are the first ones to whom Jesus' mission is directed (Luke 4:18–21), and why the evangelization of the poor is the supreme sign and proof of his mission (Luke 7:21–23).

This central feature of evangelization was stressed by Pope John Paul II:
"I have earnestly desired this meeting because I feel solidarity with you, and because you, being poor, have a right to my special concern and attention. I will tell you the reason: the pope loves you because you are God's favorites. In founding his family, the Church, God had in mind poor and needy humanity. To redeem it, he sent his Son specifically, who was born poor and lived among the poor to make us rich with his poverty (2 Cor. 8:9)" (Address in the Barrio of Santa Cecilia, 30 January 1979).

In her Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), Mary proclaims that God's salvation has to do with justice for the poor. From her, too, "stems authentic commitment to other human beings, our brothers and sisters, especially to the poorest and neediest, and to the necessary transformation of society" (HZ:4).

**Service to our poor brothers and sisters.** When we draw near to the poor in order to accompany them and serve them, we are doing what Christ taught us to do when he became our brother, poor like us. Hence service to the poor is the privileged, though not the exclusive, gauge of our following of Christ. The best service to our fellows is evangelization, which disposes them to fulfill themselves as children of God, liberates them from injustices, and fosters their integral advancement.

It is of the utmost importance that this service to our fellow human beings take the course marked out for us by Vatican II: "The demands of justice should first be satisfied, lest the giving of what is due in justice be represented as the offering of a charitable gift. Not only the effects but also the causes of various ills must be removed. Help should be given in such a way that the recipients may gradually be freed from dependence on others and become self-sufficient" (AA:8).

Commitment to the poor and oppressed and the rise of grassroots communities have helped the Church to discover the evangelizing potential of the poor. For the poor challenge the Church constantly, summoning it to conversion; and many of the poor incarnate in their lives the evangelical values of solidarity, service, simplicity, and openness to accepting the gift of God.

**Christian poverty.** For the Christian, the term "poverty" does not designate simply a privation and marginalization from which we ought to free ourselves. It also designates a model of living that was already in evidence in the Old Testament, in the type known as "the poor of Yahweh" (Zeph. 2:3; 3:12–20; Isa. 49:13; 66:2; Ps. 74:19; 149:4), and that was lived and proclaimed by Jesus as blessedness (Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20). St. Paul spelled out this teaching, telling us that the attitude of the Christian should be that of a person who uses the goods of this world (whose makeup is transitory) without absolutizing them, since they are only means to reach the Kingdom (1 Cor. 7:29–
This model of the poor life is one that the Gospel requires of all those who believe in Christ; so we can call it "evangelical poverty" (Matt. 6:19-34). Religious live this poverty, required of all Christians, in a radical way when they commit themselves by vows to live the evangelical counsels (see nos. 733-35 above).

Evangelical poverty combines the attitude of trusting confidence in God with a plain, sober, and austere life that dispels the temptation to greed and haughty pride (1 Tim. 6:3-10).

Evangelical poverty is also carried out in practice through the giving and sharing of material and spiritual goods. It is not forced on others but done out of love, so that the abundance of some might remedy the needs of others (2 Cor. 8:1-15).

The Church rejoices to see many of its children, particularly the more modest members of the middle class, living this Christian poverty in concrete terms.

In today's world this poverty presents a challenge to materialism, and it opens the way for alternative solutions to a consumer society.

1.3. Pastoral Guidelines

**Objective.** The objective of our preferential option for the poor is to proclaim Christ the Savior. This will enlighten them about their dignity, help them in their efforts to liberate themselves from all their wants, and lead them to communion with the Father and their fellow human beings through a life lived in evangelical poverty. "Jesus Christ came to share our human condition through his sufferings, difficulties, and death. Before transforming day-to-day life, he knew how to speak to the heart of the poor, liberate them from sin, open their eyes to a light on the horizon, and fill them with joy and hope. Jesus Christ does the same thing today. He is present in your Churches, your families, and your hearts" (AWM: 8).

This option, demanded by the scandalous reality of economic imbalances in Latin America, should lead us to establish a dignified, fraternal way of life together as human beings and to construct a just and free society.

The required change in unjust social, political, and economic structures will not be authentic and complete if it is not accompanied by a change in our personal and collective outlook regarding the idea of a dignified, happy human life. This in turn, disposes us to undergo conversion (Med-JV: 1, 3; EN:30).

The gospel demand for poverty, understood as solidarity with the poor and as a rejection of the situation in which most people on this continent live, frees the poor person from being individualistic in life, and from being at-
tracted and seduced by the false ideals of a consumer society. In like manner the witness of a poor Church can evangelize the rich whose hearts are attached to wealth, thus converting and freeing them from this bondage and their own egotism.

*Means.* To live out and proclaim the requirement of Christian poverty, the Church must re-examine its structures and the life of its members, particularly that of its pastoral agents, with the goal of effective conversion in mind.

Such conversion entails the demand for an austere lifestyle and a total confidence in the Lord, because in its evangelizing activity the Church will rely more on the being and power of God and his grace than on “having more” and secular authority. In this way it will present an image of being authentically poor, open to God and fellow human beings, ever at their disposal, and providing a place where the poor have a real chance for participation and where their worth is recognized.

*Concrete actions.* Committed to the poor, we condemn as anti-evangelical the extreme poverty that affects an extremely large segment of the population on our continent.

We will make every effort to understand and denounce the mechanisms that generate this poverty.

Acknowledging the solidarity of other Churches, we will combine our efforts with those of people of good will in order to uproot poverty and create a more just and fraternal world.

We support the aspirations of laborers and peasants, who wish to be treated as free, responsible human beings. They are called to share in the decisions that affect their lives and their future, and we encourage all to improve themselves (AO; AWM).

We defend their fundamental right “to freely create organizations to defend and promote their interests, and to make a responsible contribution to the common good” (AWM:3).

The indigenous cultures have undeniable values. They are the peoples’ treasure. We commit ourselves to looking on them with sympathy and respect and to promoting them. For we realize “how important culture is as a vehicle for transmitting the faith, so that human beings might progress in their knowledge of God. In this matter there can be no differences of race or culture” (AO:2).

With its preferential but not exclusive love for the poor, the Church present in Medellin was a summons to hope for more Christian and humane goals, as the Holy Father pointed out (AWM). This Third Episcopal Conference in Puebla wishes to keep this summons alive and to open up new horizons of hope.
PUEBLA DOCUMENT ABBREVIATIONS

HSD  Homily in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo, 25 January 1979, John Paul II.
MPLA Message to People of Latin America, Puebla Conference.
AO Address to the Indians of Oaxaca and Chiapas, 29 January 1979, Oaxaca, John Paul II.
HZ Homily in Zapopan, 30 January 1979, John Paul II.
MED-PC Medellín document on Poverty of the Church.
DT  *Documento de trabajo*, working document of Puebla Conference.
EN  *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, exhortation of Paul V.
MED-P Medellín document on Peace.
OAP Opening Address at Puebla, John Paul II.
MED-PM Medellín document on Pastoral Care of the Masses.
LG  *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.
PT  *Pacem in Terris*, encyclical of John XXIII.
MED-PR Medellín document on Priests.
RMS Address to Religious Major Superiors, 24 November 1978, John Paul II.
CD  *Christus Dominus*, Vatican II. Decree on the Bishops’ Pastoral Office in the Church.
MED-JPP Medellín document on Joint Pastoral Planning.
SC  *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Vatican II. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.
AA  *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Vatican II. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.
MED-JU Medellín document on Justice.
MED-JV Medellín document on Youth.
AWM Address to Workers in Monterrey, 31 January 1979, John Paul II.