

JUSTICE AND PEACE IN A NEW CARIBBEAN
PASTORAL LETTER OF THE
ANTILLES EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
MARTINIQUE, NOVEMBER 21, 1975

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN JESUS CHRIST,
WE ARE THE BISHOPS OF THE ANTILLES

1 We who are speaking to you through this joint letter are the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Antilles. Our Bishops Conference includes all the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) as well as Bermuda, the Bahamas, the Dutch Antilles and Surinam. The Bishops from the French-speaking territories of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Cayenne attend our meetings as observers. In the Conference itself there are 14 dioceses with a joint responsibility for 1,300,000 Catholics in a total population of just under 7,000,000.

SHARING CONCERNS

2. We are happy that the publication of this joint letter on social and economic matters coincides with the ending of the Holy Year and also the 10th anniversary of the closing of the Vatican Council. We have just finished our annual meeting here in Martinique and have been discussing several problems concerning our Church and the region as a whole. We want to take this opportunity of sharing some of our concerns with you in the hope that we may be able to work more closely together to build a better and more just society through the Caribbean.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S ROLE?

3. On reading this letter some will complain that the Church is once again meddling in politics. Remembering Our Lord's words "**Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar; and to God what belongs to God**"¹, they will argue that the Church's role is a purely spiritual one. It should therefore keep to the sacristy and not get involved in matters that do not concern it. This is a serious accusation, and so we want to try and answer it right at the start. Hopefully our reply will give a clear idea of what we consider to be one of the most important tasks facing our Church today.

POLITICS AND THE CHURCH

JUSTICE AND THE WORD OF GOD

4. In 1971 the Synod of Bishops which brought together in Rome representatives of all the Bishops in the Catholic Church, published a document called **Justice in the World**. The most important sentence of this document runs as follows:

¹ *Matthew, 22:21*

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”²

These are strong and clear words. They mean that we cannot separate action for justice or liberation from oppression from proclaiming the Word of God. The expression of our religious faith must go hand in hand with our active promotion of justice.

MISSION OF THE CHURCH

5. It follows immediately from this that the work of the Church cannot be confined to the sacristy or the sanctuary. On the contrary it is the Church’s vocation **“to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted.”³** Christ clearly proclaimed that this was his own mission.⁴ It must therefore also be the mission of the Church He founded.

GOD AS LIBERATOR AND DEFENDER

6. Even a simple knowledge of the Bible makes it clear that, in the Old Testament, God revealed himself time and again as the liberator of the oppressed and the defender of the poor. The point is repeatedly stressed that it is worthless to offer prayers and sacrifices to God unless, at the same time, one defends the rights of the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the labourer — all those whom today we would call the under-privileged⁵.

PRACTICAL CONCERN FOR THOSE IN NEED

7. In the New Testament Christ sets love for one’s neighbour as the condition for salvation. In two of his best known parables, He shows how this love of neighbour consists in a practical concern for those in need and is the means by which we express our Love for God. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the one who showed love to his neighbour and was therefore justified before God was neither the priest nor the lawyer who both passed by on the other side, but **“the one who took pity on him”** and proved his concern by immediate action.⁶ Similarly, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, the standard for the final judgement of all mankind is quite simply: Were you concerned about people in trouble or need? And the reason is clearly stated: **“I tell you solemnly, whatever you did to the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me”⁷**.

TO LOVE ONE’S NEIGHBOUR AND PROCLAIM JUSTICE

8. This is essential to the message of salvation preached by Jesus Christ and no Christian can ignore it. The Synod of Bishops sums it up as follows:

“According to the Christian message, therefore, man’s relationship to his

² **Justice in the World**, Synod of Bishops, 1971 (Catholic News Publication, Trinidad) p. 29

³ *ibid.*, p. 28

⁴ *Luke*, 4:16.22

⁵ See for example *Isaiah* 58:1-12 or *Amos* 5:7-17

⁶ *Luke*, 10:29-37

⁷ *Matthew*, 25:35-46

neighbour is bound up with his relationship to God; his response to the love of God, saving us through Christ, is shown to be effective in his love and service of men. Christian love of neighbour and justice cannot be separated.”⁸

The task of the Church follows on immediately from this:

“The mission of preaching the Gospel dictates at the present time that we should dedicate ourselves to the liberation of man even in his present existence in the world.....

This is the reason why the Church has the right, indeed the duty, to proclaim justice on the social, national and international level, and to denounce instances of injustice, when the fundamental rights of man and his very salvation demand it.”⁹

DIFFERENT POLITICAL ROLES IN THE CHURCH

9. It does not follow from this that the Church as an institution, has to become involved in party politics or, still less, form its own political party. Following the synod of Bishops we stress that it is not our duty, as Bishops to offer **“concrete solutions in the social, economic and political spheres”** but rather to defend and promote **“the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person”**.¹⁰ All Christians are called to spread the Kingdom of God and, as we have already noted, this cannot be done without a firm commitment to this world and its problems. But the Church is made up of both clergy and laity and each has a different role to play. Normally it will not be the task of bishops, priests or religious to become actively involved in politics though there may be exceptional situations where such an involvement will be necessary. On the other hand, direct political action is not only a task but also a duty for the laity in the Church. It is one that carries a heavy responsibility.

POLITICAL ACTION OF THE LAITY

10. In his most recent statement on social matters, Pope Paul VI describes politics as **“a demanding manner – but not the only one – of living the Christian commitment to the service of others”**¹¹ ‘He then repeats the appeal already made in his letter on **The Development of Peoples**, to all Christians to become active in politics.

“Laymen should take up as their own proper task the renewal of the temporal order. If the role of the hierarchy is to teach and to interpret authentically the norms of morality to be followed in this matter, it belongs to the laity, without waiting passively for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which they live.”¹²

⁸ **Justice in the World**, op. cit. p. 35

⁹ *ibid.*, p.35

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.36

¹¹ **Social Problems** (*Octogesima Adveniens*) Paul VI, 1971 ¶46

¹² *ibid.*, ¶48 and **Development of Peoples** (*Populorum Progressio*) 1967, ¶81

CARIBBEAN POLITICS AND THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS

11. We believe these words are of extreme importance to the Caribbean today. How many committed and dedicated Christians are active in the political life of our region? To what extent are our political programmes and activities inspired by and based on the teachings of Christ in the Gospel? And if our various governments are not following Christian principles of justice, equality and freedom for all, are not we ourselves the Churches with all their members, to blame? What improvement can we expect until all Christians take their political obligations seriously? These include not only the duty to vote, but also active membership in a political party, a trade union or some other group or organisation dedicated to the welfare of the community. It is through such direct political involvement that Christians must show their commitment to the service of others.

THE CHURCH'S OWN EXAMPLE

WORDS AND ACTIONS

12. Christ not only taught by word but also by example. He identified Himself with the poor and oppressed by Himself becoming poor and oppressed. In the same way, the most effective witness the Church can give to its concern for justice is in its own life style. Its words must always be matched by its actions.

WE WANT TO CONFESS IN FRANKNESS AND HUMILITY

13. We want to confess here in all frankness and humility, that the record of our Church in this respect has not always been as good as it should have been. In spite of the example of many dedicated priests and religious who have lived among the poor and fully shared in their hardships, too often the Church we represent has seemed to be on the side of the wealthy and powerful. And in order to maintain a position of privilege, it has sometimes closed its eyes to wrongs and injustices crying out for redress. In the colonial past the Church sometimes acted as if it were a part of the establishment condoning either openly or by its silence the existing order. And in the post-colonial era the Church in some places has not accepted the need for change with sufficient alacrity and good will. Our Church has also been guilty on occasion of acts of racial discrimination and of perpetuating social and class divisions. For these commissions and omissions of the past and present we the Bishops of the Antilles Conference humbly beg pardon from God, the Lord and Judge of history, and from you, the people of the region.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

14. But because we may not always have lived up to the high ideals of the Gospel, this does not mean that we must neglect our duty to proclaim them and, at the same time make ever greater efforts to practice what we preach. For the challenge which faces us today in the newly emerging world of the Caribbean is perhaps greater and more critical than ever before. It is therefore more important than ever that each and every Christian should dedicate himself to effective action in the cause of justice, if the Gospel message of love and peace is to retain any credibility at all.¹³

¹³ See **Justice in the World**, op. cit., p.35

MORE THAN RELIEF WORK IS NOW NEEDED

15. It is true that the Catholic Church in the region has a long record of charitable works of which it may feel justifiably proud. Its schools, hospitals and orphanages are many and well known. But in the modern world such works and organisations are no longer in themselves sufficient. While they have certainly relieved the sufferings of many, they have had little or no effect on unjust social structures and may, in some cases, have even strengthened these. The corporal works of mercy will always remain an obligation for any Christian and the Church must always be ready to come to the help of those in need. But much more than relief work is now required. Just as the Church took the initiative in several parts of the region to promote co-operatives and credit unions, so now efforts must be renewed to get to the real root of problems and work for a change in the unjust social and economic structures that are the cause of so many modern ills.

IDENTIFICATION WITH THE POOR

16. Today the Gospel demands that the Church, following in the footsteps of its Lord and Master, identify itself with the poor and oppressed, and make their struggle its own. This much more exacting role was recognised and accepted by the Caribbean Conference of Churches which states in the preamble to its Constitution:

“We are deeply concerned to promote the human liberation of our people and are committed to the achievement of social justice and the dignity of man in our society.”¹⁴

We too accept this task as our own. And we address our first call to the members of our own Churches in the region. Let us strive to put our own house in order so that we may become a more effective witness to justice in the region.

LIVING WHAT WE PROCLAIM

17. Our Church should be the Church of all, but especially of the poor and defenceless. May this emphasis be reflected in all our apostolic works and actions. May it also be reflected in the lives of our bishops, priests and religious many of whom have taken a vow of poverty but live in relative ease and comfort compared with those around them. We call especially on members of our religious orders to give a true witness to evangelical poverty by their right use of buildings cars, journeys abroad, and so on. But, above all, may this emphasis be reflected in the way we proclaim and live the Gospel message we have outlined above. May our Church become known as a fearless defender of human rights and justice whatever this may cost in material or political terms. May people look to us, not just for charitable handouts, but for support in their legitimate struggle against all forms of injustice and oppression. For as long as these persist in our societies in any degree whatsoever, Christ is suffering again in his Mystical Body which is the Church. And we, as members of that same Body and Church, must be directly involved.

¹⁴ See **Caribbean Conference of Churches: Report of the Inaugural Assembly**, Kingston, Jamaica, 1973, p.74

LOOKING AT THE REGION

MUCH PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

18. Tremendous advances have taken place in the Caribbean over the past 18 years since our Bishops' Conference was first established. During that period many of our countries have attained political independence. We would like to offer our special congratulations and prayers to the people of Surinam which achieves independence on November 25th, four days after the publication of this letter. And throughout the region we are happy to see that some strides are being made towards building a new life and society for our peoples. Different attitudes and values are being cultivated in an attempt to break away from the dependency of the past and develop a new Caribbean man who is self-reliant and free.

A NEW SENSE OF NATIONHOOD

19. New experiments are being carried out in the field of education in the development of agriculture and in the exploitation of the region's resources. In particular, some countries are claiming and taking practical steps to ensure that their natural resources are locally owned or controlled and therefore exploited for the benefit of national rather than foreign interests. This is a wholly legitimate aspiration which we fully support. We also share the concern of the Caribbean Conference of Churches over the activities of multinational corporations within the region¹⁵ and fully support its resolution on economic justice:

“We hold the right to self-determination in economics as well as in politics to be a sacred trust, and we therefore consider the continuing domination of the West Indies economies by external interests to be totally unacceptable to the Christian conscience.”¹⁶

NEW CULTURAL, ARTISTIC AND RELIGIOUS FORMS

20. We note that attempts are being made to forge cultural and artistic patterns that are a genuine expression of West Indian identity. We are glad that our Church too is trying to play its part in this quest by seeking forms of liturgical worship, of pastoral practice and even of theological thinking that are more local and therefore better suited to the needs of the area. We are glad also that all the Churches have been part of the regional search for unity that we commented on publicly during our annual meeting last year. It is now just over two years since the Caribbean Conference of Churches was launched in Jamaica. As Roman Catholic Bishops, we are particularly pleased that our own Church set a worldwide precedent by joining this ecumenical body from the moment of its creation. We pledge ourselves to do all we call to make this Caribbean Conference of Churches a more effective instrument for the betterment of all men, women and children in the Caribbean.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.111

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.106

SOME PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

21. It would however be unrealistic and dishonest to close our eyes to the very considerable problems the region faces in its struggle to build a better life for its peoples. We wish to record our concern at the current threats to the territorial integrity of Belize. We pray that the justifiable hopes of its people for self-determination will soon be realised. We are also concerned about the sad plight of many West Indian nationals, who out of necessity, have emigrated to neighbouring countries such as, for example, the Bahamas, in search of work but without obtaining the necessary legal permits. We ask that their status be regularised so that they may be able to live and work in peace. And, in general, as our Caribbean countries search for closer unity among themselves, we beg the more prosperous nations to show greater willingness to come to the help of those that are poorer and less able to fend for themselves. For the purposes of this letter we have, after some thought and consultation, singled out four problems or areas of concern for special comment. Though they do not apply equally to all our countries, we believe they have a particular relevance for many of them at the present moment. They urgently require the co-operation of all Christians and men of good will to examine them for themselves and see what contribution they can make towards their solution. May these words of ours, however inadequate, encourage them to do this. The four problem areas are:

- i) The meaning of true development;
- ii) Socialism and a new society;
- iii) Family structures;
- iv) Racial discrimination.

TRUE DEVELOPMENT

THE SEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

22. There is scarcely a country in the world today that is not deliberately and actively pursuing its own development. In fact, we classify all countries in the world according to whether they already possess development or are still seeking it. Even in our own region we distinguish, in CARICOM, between the More Developed Countries and the Less Developed countries. It was not without reason that Pope Paul VI, in a now famous phrase, described development as **“the new name for peace”**¹⁷ The fact that nations are now able to plan for their own development is perhaps one of the most significant scientific breakthroughs of our age. But it places a heavy load of responsibility on the shoulders of the planners and the politicians who make the decisions. What sort of development should we be aiming at? What kind of society do we want to build?

23. The teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on development is clearly set out by the present Pope in his Encyclical Letter on **The Development of People**, which was written in 1967. In carefully chosen words he declares that:

¹⁷ **Development of Peoples**, op. cit., ¶87

“Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete, integral; that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man.”¹⁸

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WHOLE MAN

24. A first criterion for true development, therefore, is that it be **“of the whole man”**. In other words, the whole of his person and not just the material or physical part of his existence must be developed. For man does not live by bread alone and is more valuable for what he is than for what he has or does. It therefore follows that:

“Increased possessions is not the ultimate goal of nations nor of individuals... The exclusive pursuit of possessions becomes an obstacle to individual fulfilment and to man’s true greatness. Both for nations and for individual men, avarice is the most evident form of moral under-development.”¹⁹

DANGERS OF A PURELY MATERIAL OUTLOOK

25 To seek a purely material prosperity is a real temptation for any developing nation and, it seems to us, that here in the Caribbean we are especially vulnerable in this respect. We tend too easily to try and imitate the life styles and consumption habits of the more affluent countries which have exercised in the past and still continue to exercise such a strong influence over the region. This is harmful and disruptive since, when expectations outstrip all chances of fulfilment, a person becomes quite unsuited to live in the existing society. Perhaps this is one of the chief causes for the high rate of emigration from our region and the crippling brain-drain that is its result.

NEED TO FIGHT AGAINST MATERIAL GREED AND LEAD A SIMPLE LIFE

26. Can anything be done? We believe the chief remedy must be a complete revolution for each of us in our attitude to material goods. A never-ending search for more and more consumer goods can only serve to degrade us. We are in danger of becoming slaves: slaves of high-pressure salesmanship, especially by radio and television, which makes us feel in want when we have enough; slaves to greed which drives us to accumulate possessions that begin as luxuries and end up as necessities; slaves of snobbery which judges a man by what he has and not by what he is. The scandal of this situation is not only that some waste money on luxuries while others lack necessities, but also that we are creating a society which equates progress with the acquiring of status symbols such as luxurious houses, larger cars and expensive electronic gadgets. We call upon Christians to set their face against this tide of consumerism and to preach to the world by the simplicity of their lives. And we call upon our governments:

“To discriminate among those things that are held out to them; they must be able to assess critically and eliminate those deceptive goods which would only bring about a lowering of the human ideal, and to accept those values

¹⁸ *ibid.*, ¶14

¹⁹ *ibid.*, ¶19

that are sound and beneficial, in order to develop them alongside their own, in accordance with their own genius.’²⁰

NOBODY SHOULD BE EXCLUDED FROM THE BENEFITS OF DEVELOPMENT

27. The second criterion for true development is that it be **“for all men”**. We are disturbed to see in the Caribbean a distribution of wealth and opportunity that is still very unequal. And, while little scientific research has been carried out on this point, we are not satisfied that the gap between the wealthy and the poor in our countries is being closed with sufficient determination. It is evident there are several categories of people who are largely excluded from the development process. We are thinking, in particular, of certain types of agricultural workers, the unemployed, the old, and some of the dwellers in our city slums. While in some of our countries the trade union movement is powerful and has achieved much, there is always a danger that it will become inward-looking and do no more than cater to a small group of already privileged workers. There are many members of our society who have no one to bargain for them. It is therefore the duty of the State to ensure that they have a fair share in the benefits of development and that the gap which exists between wealthy and poor is consistently and continually diminished.

WHAT WE CAN DO, ESPECIALLY IN OUR SCHOOLS

28. Clearly, all members of our Church have a serious responsibility to work for the type of development described above. There are many ways in which they will be able to do this. Here we wish to underline just one. Throughout the region the Catholic Church is still very active in the field of education. Our current Directory states that we run 104 high schools with over 47,000 students and 698 primary schools with 244,000 students. What sort of education are we giving now to all these students entrusted to our care? Does it encourage a narrow individualism, a race to acquire possessions and honours, a blind acceptance of the old system? Or does our education try to form a new man, critically aware of the needs around him amid eager to search and help build a better world for all?²¹ We strongly recommend that these questions be taken seriously in our schools and that positive attempts be made to educate our students for justice where this is not being done. For if we fail in this, we will be failing in our duty both towards them and society as a whole.

SOCIALISM AND A NEW SOCIETY

A NEW SOCIETY

29. There are clear signs in our region that an increasing number of countries are dissatisfied with the type of social and economic structures they have inherited from a colonial past. Some are engaged in a deliberate attempt to build a new type of socialist society. Others, perhaps less radical, are taking measures to protect themselves against a system whose excesses have given rise to so much inequality and division.

²⁰ *ibid.*, ¶41

²¹ See **Justice in the World**, p.38

THE EXCESSES OF CAPITALISM

30. Over forty years ago Pope Pius XI denounced what he called **“the international imperialism of money”**.²² In recalling this, Pope Paul also strongly condemns a system which:

“considers profit as the key motive for economic progress, competition as the supreme law of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right that has no limits and carries no corresponding social obligation.”²³

HAS THE CHURCH CONDEMNED SOCIALISM?

31. But while the Church has clearly and strongly condemned the excesses of capitalism, many Roman Catholics believe that it has equally strongly condemned all forms of socialism and that it is therefore impossible to be both a good Catholic and a true socialist. It is consequently very important that the true teaching of the Church on this matter be clearly understood. At the same time we wish to make it clear that we are not advocating socialism in any form as either necessary or even desirable for any particular country. Such a decision could only be arrived at by the inhabitants of the country concerned.

32. The current teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on socialism has been fully set out in the latest pronouncement on social problems made by Pope Paul in 1971 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the publication of the first great social Encyclical, **Rerum Novarum**.²⁴ We strongly recommend all to study this document carefully since in a letter like this, all we can do is comment briefly on the following four points.

THE GOODS OF THE WORLD BELONG TO EVERYONE

33. In the **first place**, the Church has never defended an absolute right to private property. The only absolute right it does defend is that of the universal purpose of created things and the consequent right of every individual to possess what is necessary for himself. The Vatican Council states this principle well:

“God intended the earth and all it contains for the use of all men and peoples, so created goods should flow fairly to all, regulated by justice and accompanied by charity.”²⁵

Pope Paul adds to this:

“All other rights whatsoever, including those of property and of free commerce, are to be subordinated to this principle. They should not hinder but on the contrary favour its application. It is a grave and urgent social duty to redirect them to their primary finality.”²⁶

²² *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pius XI, 1931, ¶109

²³ *Development of Peoples*, op. cit. ¶26

²⁴ *Social Problems*, op. cit.

²⁵ *Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* 1966 ¶69

²⁶ *Development of Peoples*, op. cit., ¶23

NECESSARY AND SUPERFLUOUS POSSESSIONS

34. It follows from this that any society in which a few control most of the wealth and the masses are left in want is a sinful society. We believe that those who own superfluous possessions are obliged in justice to share them with those who are in want. As Pope Paul says:

“The more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others.”²⁷

As Christians we should give an example in this matter, asking ourselves seriously and honestly and bearing in mind the poverty of our countries, what should be considered necessary and what superfluous. Further we believe that Christians have a duty to work to change society so that wealth is more fairly divided among all and to support by authentic participation initiatives by governments to this end.

WHAT SORT OF SOCIALISM IS CONDEMNED?

35. **Secondly**, the Catholic Church does not condemn indiscriminately all forms of socialism. In the past it denounced three particular aspects of socialism, namely: the denial of God and the spiritual, the insistence on the need for class warfare, and the suppression of all types of private property. In so far as these are to be found in some forms of socialism, a true Christian cannot accept them. But today there are other forms of socialism in the world and the very word “socialism” is used in many different ways. Past Church statements referring to socialism must therefore be understood in the light of these new developments.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES MUST COME TO THEIR OWN DECISIONS

36. Pope Paul makes this point quite clear and shows, at the same time, where a Christian’s duty lies.

“In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution that has universal validity.”²⁸

And, further on, he speaks about **“a legitimate variety of possible options”** and the fact that **“the same Christian faith can lead to different commitment”**.²⁹ The important conclusion to be drawn from this is that:

“It is up to the Christian communities to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection norms of judgement and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church.”³⁰

²⁷ **Social Problems**, op. cit., ¶23

²⁸ *ibid.*, ¶4

²⁹ *ibid.*, ¶50

³⁰ *ibid.*, ¶4

37. **Thirdly**, we must ask how such an analysis is to be carried out. The same document suggests the following guidelines. When looking at socialism, or marxism or capitalism for that matter, it is important to distinguish carefully between (a) basic aspirations, b) ideologies or systems of thought, and (c) concrete historical movements.³¹

SOCIALISM AS BASIC ASPIRATIONS, AN IDEOLOGY, OR A POLITICAL MOVEMENT

38. As a set of **basic aspirations**, such as seeking for a more just society or greater independence and equality, there is nothing wrong with socialism at all. On the contrary, such aspirations are profoundly Christian and should be supported by any one claiming to be a follower of Christ. But socialism can also be an **ideology** pretending to give a complete and self-sufficient picture of man. The obvious example is marxism which, in this respect, is unacceptable to the Christian. We cannot accept any ideology which denies God or the supernatural destiny of man, promotes violence or absorbs individual freedom into the collectivity of the state.³² Finally, socialism can be a **concrete historical movement** as we find it, for example, in some of the political parties of this region. Can a Christian support such movements and parties? The answer will depend on (a) how closely these are linked to atheistic and materialist ideologies, and (b) what methods are employed by them to achieve their basic aspirations. Christians can support parties and movements which call themselves socialist in so far as those safeguard:

“the values, especially those of liberty, responsibility and openness to the spiritual, which guarantee the integral development of man.”³³

39. **The fourth** and final point we wish to make about socialism is to examine briefly, in the context of the Caribbean today, each of the three values just mentioned as guaranteeing the integral development of man and therefore the types of socialism that can be accepted by Christians.

BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS

40. No socialist system can be justified in destroying the basic rights of the individual as set out, for example, in the **United Nations Declaration of Human Rights** or the Constitutions of many of our countries. We have in mind the fundamental freedoms men have struggled and died for throughout history: freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of education, freedom of religion, freedom of travel, freedom of election, and so on. Far from destroying these, any true socialism acceptable to Christians will struggle to defend and even enhance them. For it will have the added duty of trying to ensure that these basic rights are exercised in the interests of all in such a way that one man's freedom does not become another man's servitude. We are concerned that in some countries of our region, these rights are being tampered with, if not brazenly suppressed. We are thinking especially of the right to vote in free and honest elections, the right to dissent without fear of victimization, the right to express

³¹ For this and following section see **Social Problems**, op. cit., ¶31

³² *ibid.*, ¶26

³³ *ibid.*, ¶31

flaws publicly, and the right to fair and equal protection under the law.

RESPONSIBILITY TO SHARE AND PARTICIPATE

41. To have responsibility is both a right to be claimed and a duty to be exercised. A society which claims to be truly socialist should aim at giving all its members, but especially the workers and farmers directly engaged in production, a responsible share in the very processes of production. This entails not only sharing in ownership but also participating in decision-making at all levels. Workers' participation in industry has long been a central theme in Christian social teaching.³⁴ Under socialism it becomes a strict requirement since it is in the name of the farmers and workers that all socialist revolutions are carried out. Yet there is always the danger that a new privileged class of elite will emerge to replace the old and that the state of the workers will remain just as oppressive as before. This danger needs to be watched carefully in the Caribbean today, otherwise we will find we have merely changed one set of masters for another.

RESPONSIBILITY TO CONTRIBUTE ESPECIALLY BY HARD AND HONEST WORK

42. The right to be treated responsibly carries with it the duty to behave responsibly. This applies to all activities and levels of society but is especially relevant to the way in which we do our work. In a socialist society men should work not so much for themselves as for others. And so a high degree of motivation and effort are required. Yet we recall how the Caribbean Conference of Churches at its inaugural Assembly spoke of the “**negative attitude**” to work to be found in the Caribbean.³⁵ We agree this has to be understood sympathetically in the light of numerous factors, historical and other, that have contributed to it. But neither socialism nor any other form of society can thrive in a climate of laziness, favouritism, dishonesty, petty thieving and time wasting. We are alarmed to note that such things seem to have become all too common in many parts of our region. The Christian has a clear duty to set an example of what hard, honest work should be.

TRUE SOCIALISM REQUIRES AN ABSENCE OF CORRUPTION AND A PRESENCE OF MORAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES

43. Finally, the integral development of man calls for “**openness to the spiritual**”. From what has already been said, it is obvious that a socialist society, to be acceptable, needs to put very strong emphasis on the overall level of morality in society, not only with regard to work but every other aspect of living together. Such an attempt would seek to eliminate all forms of corruption. But more than this is involved. We live in an increasingly materialistic world where many countries are tempted to adopt purely material goals. We have already explained above how the Christian concept of development goes beyond mere material welfare.”³⁶ We now wish to emphasise that it calls for the fostering of genuinely spiritual values. In the words of Pope Paul, it requires:

³⁴ See for example **Mother and Teacher** (*Mater et Magistra*) 1961, ¶¶91-96 in which John XXIII develops the earlier thought of Pius XII

³⁵ **Caribbean Conference of Churches**, op. cit., p.99

³⁶ See ¶24 ¶25

“a new humanism which will enable modern man to find himself anew by embracing the higher values of love and friendship, of prayer and contemplation. This is what will permit the fullness of authentic development, a development which is for each and all the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human.”³⁷

The contribution that can and should be made by the Churches in developing such a humanism is incalculable. If they rise to, the challenge, as we hope and pray they will, then, far from being dismissed as irrelevant to the modern world, they will be seen as essential to its true growth and progress.

FAMILY STRUCTURES

THE QUALITY OF FAMILY LIFE

44. There is hardly need for us to emphasise that the quality of a society will depend to a large extent on the quality of its family life and relationships. This has been the constant teaching of the Church, repeated on many occasions. It is also the reason why it continues to advocate **“a monogamous and stable family”**.³⁸ But family structures are not the same in all parts of the world. Because of its historical development and the great cultural diversity of its peoples, family patterns in the Caribbean present special problems that call for delicate treatment.

OUR PAST STUDIES OF FAMILY LIFE AND STRUCTURES

45. It was in view of this and at the specific request of our regional organisation of priests, that we agreed at our 1972 meeting, to sponsor a study of the attitudes and values inherent in different forms of conjugal union and family life in the Caribbean in order to help the Church in its pastoral ministry. The first part of this study was carried out and a report on it submitted to us at our 1973 meeting.³⁹ We decided to circulate the recommendations made for further consideration and discussion, especially at our two regional seminaries.

46. We are not yet satisfied that our research has been complete and admit that there are still many problems we feel unable to answer. However we believe it is now appropriate to make a brief interim statement in the hope of being able to publish a full letter on this subject at some later date. We wish to make the following points hoping that they may be of some help to those engaged in pastoral work.

CHURCH’S TEACHING HOLDS

a) We reaffirm our belief in the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family and our conviction that every attempt to implement it will improve the quality of our societies. We have nothing but praise for those of our people who have, in the face of enormous difficulties, been able to reach and maintain the high ideals of Christian marriage.

³⁷ **Development of Peoples**, op. cit., ¶20

³⁸ *ibid.*, ¶36

³⁹ This Report was published in full in the December, 1973 *GISRA*

COUPLES LIVING IN NON-LEGAL UNIONS

b) Nevertheless, in view of the conditions obtaining in our Caribbean region, we wish to extend special sympathy and understanding to couples living in non-legal unions. We recognise that such couples are often not fully to blame for the situation in which they find themselves. While hoping they may one day receive the Sacrament of Marriage, let us never exclude them from our Church communities, but rather reach out to help them in every possible way.

NON-MARRIED MOTHERS

c) In particular, we feel that special pastoral care and attention should be devoted to non-married mothers who stand in so much need of the church's help and strength. At the same time we make a strong appeal to the fathers of the children to show a true sense of Christian responsibility.

CHILDREN BORN OUT OF WEDLOCK

d) If it has not already done so our Church should eliminate all discriminatory practices and attitudes towards the children of non-legal unions. We urge the Governments of the region to do the same and to abolish the term "illegitimate".

MARRIAGE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

(e) Let us spare no effort to deepen family relationships and understanding through marriage guidance and counselling. This should be directed especially towards young couples either about to get married or just recently married and to divorces and victims of broken homes. Our priests and religious should look on this work as one of their principal ministries and should spare no effort to equip themselves accordingly.

SEX EDUCATION FOR THE YOUNG

(f) In our schools and catechetical work, we must devote special care to sex education of the young. We must remember that this can never consist in mere biological instruction but should always be conducted in a framework of moral and spiritual values. In addition to formal education, provisions must be made for well-informed guidance, and counselling in sex problems for youth. Finally, care must be devoted to helping parents themselves give this education and guidance to their children in their own homes.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

47. As we come to the end of International Women's Year, we wish to applaud all the efforts that have been made to stop actual discrimination and establish relations of equality in rights and of respect for the dignity of womanhood.⁴⁰ We are concerned however that these advances be maintained and that conventions and declarations be translated into positive action. There is all too much evidence that, in many of our

⁴⁰ **Social Problems** op. cit., ¶13

Caribbean societies, young girls and women are still being exploited in a shameful manner not only in conditions of employment but sometimes in terms demanded to obtain or retain it. As long as such practices persist among us we have no right to speak of the achievement of women's liberation.

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

A GREAT WEALTH OF RACES, CULTURES AND TRADITIONS

48. Our area of the Caribbean is distinguished by a great diversity of peoples and races. Even in relatively small islands one finds more than one racial group while, in some countries, there are as many as seven or eight. This variety means that we have a wealth of different cultures and traditions, all contributing to our regional heritage. We look on this wealth and diversity as a special blessing of God.

DIVISIONS AND DISCRIMINATION

49. Unfortunately however these different races do not always live together in harmony. In some countries serious tensions exist between them which are often deliberately aggravated by a whole range of discriminatory practices. Especially where there are two dominant races, these divisions tend to be reflected in political alignments that make it very hard for any national unity to be built up or policy to be pursued. Most, if not all, of the serious problems facing such countries have their origin in racism of this nature. That is why we want to speak however briefly, on this important topic now.

THE GOOD AND THE BAD IN THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT

50. Six years ago we made a public statement on the Black Power movement: We wish to recall that we then rejected a narrow type of racism based on a philosophy of hatred and violence that we, as Christians, cannot accept. But at the same time, we welcomed a broad-minded approach that seeks to create a society where the cultural values of all are equally honoured and respected and in which no one race will be placed in a position of advantage over any other. This we saw as a basically Christian aim and we pledged ourselves to give it all the support we could.

A TRUE CHRISTIAN CANNOT HAVE ANY RACIAL PREJUDICE

51. We wish to renew today the offer we made on that occasion to:

“work together to build bridges of true brotherhood, to enhance a sense of personal dignity among all our people and to establish true social justice in our lands.”⁴¹

We make this offer not only in the context of the Black Power movement, but also with regard to other forms of racism within the area. Recent Church documents have strongly emphasised that there is no place in Christian teaching for racial prejudice of any sort.⁴² In this they are re-echoing the words of St. Paul who proclaimed that, for the follower of Christ:

⁴¹ See, for example **Catholic Standard**, Georgetown, Guyana issue for September 19th, 1969

⁴² **Social Problems**, op. cit., ¶16

NO RACE SUPERIOR TO ANY OTHER

“there is no more distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Jesus Christ.”⁴³

It is both morally and scientifically wrong to consider any one race to be naturally superior or inferior to any other. And in this technological age, when man can exploit atomic energy and walk on the moon, it is utterly ridiculous that the colour of a person's skin should affect the way in which he is treated.

FAIR AND EQUAL TREATMENT FOR ALL

52. In a country where several races live together, special care must be taken by the authorities to ensure that each is given equally fair treatment. Pope Paul explains what this means:

“Within a country which belongs to each one, all should be equal before the law, find equal admittance to economic, cultural, civic and social life, and benefit from fair sharing of the nation's riches.”⁴⁴

It will be the chief concern of the government to make sure that this is put into effect in the public sector and that employment practices in the various branches of government service reflect the true proportion of the races. This is especially important in some countries with regard to the police, the armed forces and the various institutions of education.

THINGS TO DO TO LESSEN RACIAL DIVISIONS

53. There is also much that can be done by the Church in this matter. We must constantly preach and teach that any form of racial prejudice is a direct sin against Christ's command to love our neighbour as ourselves. We must stress and promote the positive values inherent in each culture so that people will come to respect them and those who hold them. It will be useful to encourage serious study into racial origins and the causes of conflict so that people can look at this whole question in a mature and non-emotional manner. In this way members of different ethnic groups will come to discover and appreciate each other. And we must always be ready to denounce without fear any forms of racial oppression or malpractice that come to our notice. Above all, we must take good care that we ourselves in our churches, schools and institutions, take no account of differences of race or colour but treat all equally. We appeal to each Christian and everyone who reads this letter to ask themselves honestly if they have within them any hidden trace of racial prejudice and how this affects the way they speak of and treat members of other races.

⁴³ *Galatians*, 3:28

⁴⁴ **Social Problems**, op. cit., ¶16

CONCLUSION

IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

54. As we come to the end of this letter, we are aware that much has been left unsaid. But the final appeal we wish to make to Catholics is to acquaint themselves with the social teaching of the Church so that, in the light of its principles, they may apply it to the problems of the country and community in which they live. For in so doing, they will be playing their due part to help build a better world in the Caribbean. We feel too that much of this teaching will be acceptable and helpful to other Christians and to all men of good will. The documents in which this teaching is set out are easily available to all who wish to read them. We have been quoting from or referring to most of the more recent ones in the course of this letter. Following the example of the Synod of Bishops, we now list these documents in chronological order indicating the main topics that each treats.

WHAT TO READ AND STUDY

- a) John XXIII, **New Light on Social Problems (Mater et Magistra)** 1961.
(A general updating of the Church's traditional social teaching with special emphasis on rural and international affairs).
- b) John XXIII, **Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)** 1963. (A charter of human rights).
- (c) Vatican Council II, **The Church in the World of Today (Gaudium at Spes)**, 1986.
(Full statement of the Church's social teaching touching a broad range of themes).
- (d) Paul VI, **The Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)**, 1967.
(The right kind of development and Third World problems).
- e) Paul VI, **Social Problems (Octogesima Adveniens)** 1971.
(Guidelines for political action and various social problems).
- f) Synod of Bishops, **Justice in the World**, 1971.
(Justice and the duty of the Christian).

We should also, make mention of regional documents such as the resolutions of the **Caribbean Ecumenical Consultation on Development** held in Trinidad in 1971 and the resolutions of the **Inaugural Assembly of the Caribbean Conference of Churches** held in Jamaica in 1973.

THE CHURCH DOES HAVE SOME ANSWERS

55. People sometimes dismiss religion and the Church as being irrelevant to the modern world and incapable of providing an answer to its problems. We believe that this is due, in no small measure, to the fact that the documents we have just listed still remain unknown to so many Catholics. It is true that some are written in general and even abstract terms. But time and again the Popes have called on Christians to study the ideas in them seriously so that they can apply them to local conditions. If this letter helps us Christians in the Caribbean to do this, then it will not have been written in vain.

WE NEED THE HELP OF ALL THE LAY MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCH

56. Since this letter has been dealing mainly with social, economic and political matters, we are aware that much of the burden for putting it into practice will fall on the shoulders of the lay members of our Church. We wish to assure them here of our fullest and most sincere support. Though the Vatican Council spoke repeatedly about the importance of the laity's role in the Church, it is still sometimes played down or overlooked. May we not be guilty of this fault in our own Caribbean Church. May our laity know and feel that they are just as much members of the Church as we are. May we be able to work together in a spirit of full co-operation, trust and love in our common task of building up the Body of Christ.

NEED FOR BOTH RICH AND POOR TO WORK TOGETHER

57. May we appeal to the members of our laity also to work together among themselves. It is possible that, on reading this letter, the wealthier members of our diocese may feel that we, the Bishops, are fostering class division and aligning ourselves with the poor against them. This is not true. What we really wish to do is to persuade the better off in society to join us willingly, lovingly and courageously so that all of us, rich and poor alike, because of our common Christian convictions, are on the same side in the struggle for a more just and equal distribution of the wealth of our countries. For in this struggle we need to use all the forces available to us and all the talents that God has given us.

MAY OUR LADY OBTAIN US GOD'S HELP TO ACHIEVE OUR GOAL

58. We wish to place this pastoral letter under the special patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and God, to whom many of our dioceses are specially dedicated. As Pope Paul Recently pointed out:

“Mary in fact is one of our race, a true daughter of Eve – though free of that mother's sin – and truly our sister, who as a poor and humble woman fully shared our lot.”⁴⁵

May she obtain from God the assistance we need to achieve the goal so magnificently summed up by Pope Paul VI, which is to build:

“A world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has not sufficient control; a world where freedom is not an empty word and where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ **To Honour Mary**, (*Marialis Cultus*), 1974, ¶45

⁴⁶ **Development of Peoples**, op. cit., ¶47

- + SAMUEL CARTER, Archbishop of Kingston, Jamaica.
President of the Antilles Episcopal Conference
- + Anthony Pantin, Archbishop of Port of Spain, Trinidad.
Vice-President of the A.E.C.
- + Benedict Singh, Bishop of Georgetown, Guyana
Episcopal Secretary of the A.E.C.
- + Robert Hodapp, Bishop of Belize, Belize
- + Brian Hennessy, Bishop of Hamilton, Bermuda
- + Edgerton Clarke, Bishop of Montego Bay, Jamaica
- + Paul Hagarty, Bishop of Nassau, Bahamas
- + Kenneth Turner, Bishop of Lishui, China (in exile)
- + Anthony Dickson, Bishop of Bridgetown-Kingston, Barbados and St. Vincent
Aloysius Zichem, Bishop of Paramaribo, Surinam
- + Willem Ellis, Bishop of Willemstad, Netherlands Antilles
- + Lester Guilly, formerly Bishop of Georgetown, Guyana
- + Stephen Kuypers, formerly Bishop of Paramaribo, Surinam
- + John Holterman, formerly Bishop of Willemstad, Netherlands Antilles
- + Patrick Webster, Archbishop of Castries, St. Lucia
- + Arnold Boghaert, Bishop of Roseau, Dominica
- + Sydney Charles, Bishop of St. George's, Grenada
- + Joseph Bowers, Bishop of St. John's, Antigua
- + Antoine Demets, Titular Bishop of Cadossia
- + Charles Gachet, formerly Bishop of Castries, St. Lucia
- + Maurice Marie-Sainte, Archbishop of Fort-de-France, et Saint-Pierre, Martinique
- + Simon Oualli, Bishop of Basse-Terre et Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe
- + François Morvan, Bishop of Cayenne, French Guiana