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The Reconciliation of All in Christ Is God's Project for the True Liberation of Peoples

**Fourth Sunday of Lent
16 March 1980**

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Dear sisters and brothers, Lent is a spiritual pilgrimage toward the resurrection of Easter. Let us not forget that we are preparing ourselves to celebrate the central mystery of our faith, the paschal mystery, our redemption. We celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ not as a historical event but as something happening now, something that touches our present lives. Christ is going to die, and Christ is going rise. He lives and dies continually in this dynamic movement of redemption which we all need. That's why every year Lent is like the church's springtime, so that Easter should signify the flowering of virtues and holiness in the Christian people.

Baptism and penance are the themes that are recommended to our reflection during this season. Our people are already baptized, thank God, but even without being baptized again, let us prepare to renew the great dignity that is ours through baptism, which conforms us to the death and resurrection of Christ. On Holy Saturday night we will stand beside the tomb of Christ, now emptied, and renew the baptism by which we have died with him so that we can rise with him to eternal life.

The other Lenten elements, reconciliation and penance, are important because we have not made good use of our freedom and our dignity. The gifts God gave us through redemption we have preferred to use in an unwholesome way. Lent is a time to reflect on what the true goods are to which we must be converted again. We must see God as the father of the prodigal son we just read about and understand that his love is always waiting for his children to return. When God's great desire to save us encounters the misery of repentant sinners, then we have the great embrace called reconciliation. That is the theme of this Sunday's readings; we are called to be reconciled.

How providential this Lenten message is, sisters and brothers, in its call to conversion! And we are especially called to reconciliation in our present situation, where reconciliation is truly more needed than ever. There is tremendous violence, tremendous hatred, tremendous selfishness. Everyone thinks they have the truth; everyone blames others for all the evils. We have become «polarized»—that's the word being used to describe the reality we're experiencing. Without being aware of it, we have become individually polarized, bound to a pole of fixed ideas, incapable of reconciliation, filled with mortal hatred. That is not the reality God wants. As never before, our society is in need of God's great love and great reconciliation. As pastor I invite you to hear my words, sisters and brothers; they are only a rough, imperfect

echo, but don't mind the instrument. Take heed of what the infinite love of God commands: Be converted! Be reconciled! Love one another! Become a people of the baptized, a family of God's children!

Some people think that my preaching is political and provokes violence, and they make me out to be the cause of all the evils in the republic, but they forget that the voice of the church is not inventing the evils that exist in the world; it is simply shedding light on them. Light illumines what exists already; it does not create it. The great evils exist, and the word of God seeks to undo those evils. It must point them out and denounce them so that people will return to the right paths.

From today's reading, sisters and brothers, I am going to take the precious theme of reconciliation. The title of my homily this Sunday will be «The Reconciliation of All in Christ Is God's Project for the True Liberation of Peoples». I would ask you to take note that this is the heart of our preaching. If later I offer information about the reality of our church and our nation, that is not the principal message. They are simply the realities that we will illuminate with this central theme. So I ask you to be aware that the main part of a pastor's preaching is this Gospel message, this catechesis, this Lenten summons, this project that God proposes for the life of our people and of each one of us. I repeat, then, that the nucleus or the theme of the homily is that the reconciliation of all in Christ is the project of true liberation. The three reflections with which I will develop this idea are these: first, the history of Israel as a project of reconciliation; second, the parable of reconciliation in today's gospel; and third, the reconciliation of all in Christ as the church's constant objective in offering her collaboration in this time of crisis. The church can have no other mission than the one Christ brought to the world: reconciling all people in himself.

The history of Israel as a project of reconciliation

First, then, the history of Israel is a project of reconciliation. We should keep in mind that the first reading of each Sunday of Lent is a passage from the Old Testament. It recounts the sacred history by which God prepared his people for the promised redemption. If we want to know the meaning of redemption, we must know what is in the Old Testament: the voice of the prophets, the promises of God to the patriarchs, the initiatives God took, the deeds of the people of Israel. We can sum up the whole of the Old Testament in terms of creation, sin, and reconciliation.

Creation is an act of God, who out of love creates us to be his children and to be happy. He makes us free, in his image and likeness. But human beings did not know how to use their freedom; they broke off relations with God, which is sin. Adam left Paradise to earn his bread through the sweat of his brow, and the woman was sentenced to suffer the pains of childbirth. From that moment on the man and the woman were exiles. They longed to return, but returning was painful. The whole history of Israel is the story of humanity's return to God after breaking away. The whole marvelous book of Exodus tells how the people left slavery in Egypt and journeyed toward the Promised Land; it is a symbol of pilgrimage, of return, of the search for reconciliation. Then came the moment of the fullness of history that Saint Paul told us about today: «God came in Christ to reconcile all people» (2 Cor 5:19a). Blessed are those who find Christ for they have reached the goal of their aspirations: reconciliation. No reconciliation with God is possible except in Christ, who is the trustee of God's love and forgiveness.

Creation, sin, and reconciliation are the context within which we must read all the pages of the Old Testament. All the stages of Israel's history are a long history of infidelity and repentance. This is a history in which God is compared to a husband who has a wife who is unfaithful; despite her sins, he always forgives her out of love and seeks reconciliation.

In the course of this Lent, if you've noticed, we have seen reconciliation exemplified in famous biblical figures. After the sin of Adam, the history of salvation began to take the shape of a people in the nomad named Abraham. When it seemed impossible, God brought a people to birth, and he made them a promise, as we saw two Sundays ago. God passed between the immolated victims in the form of fire, and he swore to Abraham that his promises would be kept forever: through his people all the nations would be blessed, and through them would come the redemption the world was waiting for. During the time of the patriarchs the people had no certainty about the future; they lived believing in the land God had promised them, though they didn't know where it was. They seemed crazy but they weren't crazy; they were people of faith: «God has promised it! He will make it happen!»

When the people became slaves in Egypt, it seemed that the promises had died, but there in Egypt the promise of God took on new life with another famous hero, Moses. He delivered the people from slavery in Egypt and led them through the desert for forty years, with marvelous wonders. The liturgy this Sunday, which is the fourth in Lent, shows us the people entering into the Promised Land. God was fulfilling his promises. This Sunday we celebrate with the Israelites: God had delayed but finally God came. So many centuries had passed, but now they had arrived. After crossing the Jordan River they set up a monument in Gilgal with stones from the river, and they celebrated the first Passover in the Promised Land. Since purification was necessary, they carried out the bloody purification of circumcision: the men were circumcised, as God had asked of Abraham. Then they were ready to celebrate the first Passover with fruits of the earth. There was no longer any need for the miraculous manna, for now the people were to eat from the land God had given them.

There is a wonderful relationship here, brothers and sisters, with our own situation in El Salvador, where the land is being fought over. Let us not forget that the land is closely tied to the blessings and promises of God. Israel now had its own land, as God had promised the patriarchs: «I will give you this whole land». Freed from slavery and led through the desert by Moses and Joshua, the people finally had their land; they therefore celebrated a grand thanksgiving liturgy, the first Passover of Israel. That event summons us to celebrate with equal gratitude, and to adore and acknowledge the God who saves us for he has also rescued us from slavery. The God in whom we place all our hope for liberation is the God of Israel, who on that day received the first celebration of Passover.

I was saying that there is a theological connection between reconciliation and the land, and I want to emphasize this idea, sisters and brothers, because it seems to me very apt. Not having land is a consequence of sin. When Adam left Paradise, he was a man without land as the result of sin. Now Israel, pardoned by God, has returned to the land and can eat of the fruits and the grains of the earth. God gives his blessing in the form of land.

The land contains much of God, and therefore it groans when the unjust monopolize it and leave no space for others. Agrarian reform is a theological necessity. A country's land cannot remain in the hands of just a few; it must be given to all so that all can share in the blessings God gives through the land. Each country has its own promised land in the territory

allotted to it by geography, but we should always bear in mind that the land is a sign of justice and reconciliation; we should never forget this theological reality. There will be no true reconciliation between our people and God as long as there is no just distribution, as long as the goods of our Salvadoran land do not bring benefits and happiness to all Salvadorans.

We need to recognize that this land is sacred since it contains something of God. In chapter two of the prophecy of Hosea there is a superb explanation of this idea I am trying to clarify. God complained that Israel was unfaithful because it had forgotten that it had received the earth and the fruits thereof from God. God compared the treacherous nation to a spouse who prostituted herself and went about with elegant adornments, forgetting that her husband could take all those things away from her. God spoke to Israel, «I am your husband, and I have given you the land, but you are acting as though I did not exist. I will therefore take away all I have given you. When you feel yourself naked and distraught in your misery, you will realize that it was I who gave you everything, and you will return, and I will receive you with love». This is the tenderness of God: tireless in forgiving and tireless in loving.

But this tender God wants us to understand that earthly goods must be used to draw close to him and to be reconciled among ourselves. Very similar to that chapter from Hosea is a precious chapter from the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, when he speaks about his sinful waywardness and his conversion: «How foolish I was!» he wrote. «I was seeking after the beauty I saw in creatures, and I was forgetting that that beauty was given to creatures by God. I wanted that beauty instead of God, and I forgot that the God who gave that beauty dwelt within me. So I lived outside myself, forgetting that I had all that wealth of beauty and truth within me»¹.

What a marvelous description of a sinner! Sinners are people who live outside themselves and don't realize that they carry God within themselves. That is why they search desperately, prostituting everything and forgetting that all comes from God. If they only realized that it is God who gives them their estates, their ranches, their cattle, and everything else, they would not use them selfishly as instruments of exploitation and injustice. Rather, they would use them as Israel did in the Passover ceremony at Gilgal: they would harvest the grain as they praised the God who has given them the land and the fruit of the land, and they would share it with their brothers and sisters in a true Passover feast. Then there would be true reconciliation among us around the fruits of the earth—reconciliation instead of quarrels.

All the bishops of Brazil have just published a wonderful pastoral letter. Numbering more than two hundred, they give a beautiful testimony of unity as they instruct the people God has entrusted to them. In the pastoral, which is called *The Church and the Land*,² the bishops analyze the tremendous problem of social injustice in that continent-sized country Brazil. According to them, the lands of Brazil can be divided into those that are exploited and those that are worked. On the lands used for exploitation human beings don't matter; only money does³. On the lands used for work the people labor to feed themselves and to bring forth

¹Archbishop Romero is quoting from memory the famous passage of Saint Augustine: «Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created». *Confessions*, X, 27; PL. 32, 795.

² *The Church and the Problems of the Land*, Eighteenth Assembly of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops, Itaicí, Brazil. 14 February 1980.

³ *Ibid.*, 83.

crops for their sustenance⁴. The letter analyzes the problem in the light of God's word. God has created the earth and all things for humanity and for the happiness of all⁵.

The bishops then make several excellent pastoral commitments: first, to examine the church's possessions to see whether, while addressing others, the church is also committing social injustice⁶; second, to denounce situations of injustice and violence that are provoked by the unjust distribution of the land⁷; and third, to support the just initiatives of workers' organizations⁸. These are very important pastoral commitments that we are trying to practice here as well.

The Brazilian bishops state the following: «Taking care not to subtract from the initiatives of the people, our pastoral action aims to encourage conscientious, critical participation of workers in labor unions, associations, commissions, and other forms of cooperation so that they develop truly autonomous, free organizations that defend and coordinate the just demands of their members and the whole working class»⁹.

The bishops of Brazil support the organizations but only in their just demands, and they always let the people take the initiative. A church would be wrong to tell organizations paternalistically what they must do. They are autonomous; they are the voice of the people. What the church tells people is simply: «Use your critical sense. Organize as you see best. Don't remain isolated». But she will then also tell them: «I won't get involved in your initiatives, but I will still denounce your injustices». We have done that also here, thank God. Our desire to promote organizing among the people does not mean that we take the side of any organization. We are not committed to any organization. We maintain the church's autonomy so that we can defend what is just in all organizations and also condemn the unjust violence, the injustices, and the immature actions of those who worship their organization and abuse their power.

The bishops of Brazil declare, «We support the struggle of the *campesinos* for a true agrarian reform that will provide them access to land and the conditions they need to cultivate it»¹⁰. Sisters and brothers, the church is not opposed to an authentic agrarian reform that truly benefits *campesinos*; rather, she fully supports it. If criticisms are made among us, it is not because we're against the agrarian reform; it is because we want it to be truly authentic and effective; we don't want it to be contaminated with bloodshed and subject to the suspicions that the people have regarding the government. (Applause) But let it be quite clear that we are following the teaching of the Bible and the social doctrine of the church when we say that the church «supports the struggle of the *campesinos* for a true agrarian reform that will provide them access to land and the conditions they need to cultivate it», as the bishop of Brazil said so clearly. (Applause)

The church also looks upon you, dear workers, with affection and defends your legitimate aspirations. In the words of the bishops of Brazil, the church commits herself to «defending the legitimate aspirations of urban workers. Many of them, because of the injustice

⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁶ Ibid., 95.

⁷ Ibid., 96.

⁸ Ibid., 97.

⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰ Ibid., 99.

in the rural areas, have had to emigrate from the countryside in order to earn their living in the city. The church defends the dignity of the human person especially as regards the right to decent housing and a just wage»¹¹.

In the Old Testament the people of Israel arrived in their land and took possession of it. They celebrated Passover by no longer eating manna that came down from heaven; rather now they cultivated food by their own free labor in their own country and their own fields. This is what God is telling us in the Old Testament, which was a project of integral reconciliation, the very thing we would like for our own country.

The parable of Christian reconciliation

In the second part of my reflection today, then, I want to examine the beautiful passage from today's gospel, which I call «the parable of Christian reconciliation». I don't know if there's a more beautiful passage in the entire gospel. The whole of Luke's gospel is beautiful but especially the part we read today about the two sons. The younger son took his inheritance and squandered it, but despite that the loving father waited for him to return. As we read about the reconciliation at the end of the parable, we should consider how beautiful life would be for us if, despite our sins, we were always aware of God's project to reconcile us to himself.

When dealing with this parable, rather than preach I would like us just to sit in silence and remember that that story of the son is our own personal story. Each one of you, and myself as well, can see in the parable of the prodigal son something of our own history, which always comes back to what we were saying about the Old Testament. The God of love invites us to live in his house, but we capriciously and crazily run away, trying to enjoy a life without God, which is sin. Even so, God patiently waits until the day when his son returns home. When the son, overcome with misery and abandoned by others, remembers that there is no greater love than God's, he returns. Though the son expects to find God resentful and rejecting, he finds him instead welcoming him with outstretched arms, ready to throw a party to celebrate his return.

I urge you, sisters and brothers, to read this parable in your homes, in a church, or in some silent place, but always thinking about yourselves and the many times in your lives when you have foolishly abandoned God with the illusion of finding happiness far from the Father. As long as you have money and health and opportunities to advance, you will have friends who offer you everything, but then what we thought was «our everything» or «our god», whether it was money or power, comes to an end. We realize that we were only worshiping idols, and we experience a harsh awakening before the reality: «Ah, that wasn't a god! Ah, money couldn't give me every satisfaction! Ah, I couldn't do what I wanted with the power I had!» How foolish we feel! At that moment we are like the prodigal son who was longing to eat the grain they threw to the swine. The prodigal son felt that the hogs were happier than he was because they were being fed and he wasn't being given even the leftover scraps of food (Luke 15:16). Feeling shame at eating in the same trough as the hogs, he would secretly grab some husks and beans and then hide away like a mortified pig, dining on his own misery. Which of us has not felt this disgust at our own lives after sinning? Who has not felt empty and piggish, without God, with friends, without anything?

¹¹ Ibid., 110.

But then he reflects, «How many hired workers in my father's house are happy and eating well while I am here dying from hunger! I will get up, and I go to him and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as a hired worker or a servant". I will be happier there than I am here» (Luke 15:17-19). He had no idea of the love of the father who was waiting for him. When the father saw him arrive, he didn't let him speak but drowned out his words with an embrace. He ordered the servants to dress him elegantly and to prepare a great feast. But then the older son, resentful and in need of reconciliation, reproached his father: «This son of yours»—(he doesn't even call him his brother)—«has squandered his money, and now when he returns, you welcome him this way. But I have always served you». (Luke 15:29-30). The son was resentful, but the father responded to him with affection, «Son, you are here with me always. You have enjoyed my possessions as if they were yours. You will still live in this home as he does, but your brother was dead and has risen! Let us rejoice!» (Luke 15:31).

Here in El Salvador we really need to meditate on this parable of the prodigal son. Given the left's condemnation of the right and the right's hatred of the left, there seems to be no possibility of reconciliation. Those in the middle say, «Wherever the violence comes from, give it to them both!» And so we live in polarized groups. It may be that even members of the same group don't love one another because there can be no love where there exists great prejudice and hatred of the other. We need to break down those barriers. We need to realize that there is one Father who loves us all and who is waiting for us to return. We need to learn to pray the Our Father and to tell God, «Forgive us as we also forgive» (Luke 11:4).

This is the message that Christ teaches us this Sunday in this parable of reconciliation. At the same time that Christ was teaching the parable to the people, he was himself the victim of calumny, being accused of eating with sinners: «See how he eats with sinners» (Luke 5:29-30). Nothing is more opposed to reconciliation than the pride of those who feel pure and clean. Such people think they have the right to accuse others of being the cause of every injustice, but they cannot look within themselves and see that they also have played their part in the country's disorders.

Let us then look toward Christ, the only who can claim to be pure and sinless; he comes in the name of purest love to save us all. Let us not forget this morning those precious words describing him: «God made the one who had not sinned the expiation of our sins so that we might be united to him and receive the salvation of God» (2 Cor 5:21). That is Christianity: believing in Christ, who had not sinned but who became a sinner in the midst of sinners to gain pardon for sinners. God accepted that sacrifice and in him pardoned the sins of all humanity. There can be no reconciliation now except by clinging to Christ, or as today's second reading says, «God reconciles us to himself through Christ. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself» (2 Cor 5:18a,19b).

Christ is not just some «thing», dear sisters and brothers. Christ is the presence of God's reconciliation. Blessed are those who find Christ because they have found the God who forgives! In Christ God comes close to us. Christ has given us a standard: «I was hungry and you gave me to eat». When someone comes to your house asking for water, it is Christ who comes, if you see with the eyes of faith. When a sick person is longing for a visit, Christ tells you, «I was sick or in prison and you came to visit me» (Matt 25:35-36). So many people today are ashamed to give testimony in favor of the innocent. What terror has been sown among our people so that friends will even betray friends when they see them in trouble! If only we could

see Christ in the needy, in the tortured, in the prisoner, in the murder victim; if only we could see Christ in every human form dumped so disgracefully along our highways, we would discover that it was Christ who was dumped there, and we would gather that precious treasure with tenderness; we would kiss him and never be ashamed of him.

What a great need there is to awaken in people today—especially those who torture and kill and prefer capital over human beings—an awareness that all those earthly millions are worthless compared to humanity. The human person is Christ, and when we see and treat the human person with faith, we are face to face with Christ the Lord.

We find Christ also in our churches. Christ is here this morning, sisters and brothers, as he tells us in his Gospel, «I am in the midst of you» (Matt 28:20). And shortly it will be Christ who gives himself in the consecrated host, offering himself to those who come to receive him. Christ is adored, Christ is heard, Christ is felt in the presence of the community of his people.

Dear sisters and brothers—especially those of you in the Christian communities, especially my beloved priests, religious communities, and catechists—let us get used to spreading abroad this idea that there can be no reconciliation in this country without Christ Jesus. The project of God is to reconcile all people in Christ, who is the cornerstone from whom comes the force for the whole building project. Our great pastoral task is trying to discover that Christ, so that if I make reference to earthly or political matters, my purpose is solely to turn the reflection toward Christ. I would like you to understand me well so that no one has a mistaken idea of what these Masses are. Far from being political meetings, they aim to bring the people closer to Christ and to God. People understand that. I am greatly consoled by the many testimonies I receive, saying that people come to church on Sunday truly for the purpose of seeking Christ. But we must also remember the realities of crime in our land because Christ is there also, rejecting the whole of it. (Applause)

Reconciliation as the way the church continues to serve the world.

Finally, my third thought in this reflection—whose principal theme is reconciliation as God's project to save the world—is that reconciliation continues to be the way that the church serves the world. I feel myself very much church at this moment when I am speaking about God's reconciliation in Christ.

The second reading is a magnificent expression of the church in Saint Paul's time. He speaks to the Corinthians in the same way that I can speak to you baptized folks here, who are the saints of San Salvador. It is you who form the people of God. I address to you the same words Paul spoke to the Corinthians, «God has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. For this reason we act as envoys of Christ, as though God himself were making his plea through us. We ask you in the name of Christ to be reconciled with God» (2 Cor 5: 18b, 19c-20). These words of the Bible become real today in this homily pronounced in the basilica. We do nothing else. Those Christians did not look on Paul as a god, just as you should not look on your poor pastor as a god either. Paul and I are only sinful instruments, but through us God urges you to be reconciled.

That is why Christ said, «Whoever hears you hears me, and whoever despises you despises me» (Luke 10:16). I feel more sorrow than anger when people insult me and malign me. I feel sad for those poor blind folk who cannot see beyond the person. (Applause) They

should know that I feel no rancor or resentment. I am not offended by all those anonymous, rage-filled messages that arrive at my door or are announced in the press or are felt in the heart. My sorrow does not come from a sense of superiority but from gratitude to God, and it makes a plea to God: «Lord, open their eyes. Lord, let them be converted. Lord, let them experience the joy of reconciliation with you instead of feeling the bitter hatred that is in their hearts». (Applause)

I am going to include the ecclesial news for this week in this third point because what we are attempting to do in our ecclesial ministry, along with collaborators of the archdiocese, is nothing more than what Saint Paul just told us, «God has given us a ministry of reconciliation» (2 Cor 5:18b). My beloved priests, religious, faithful, catechists, Christian communities: let us never abandon this ideal of being a church which is an instrument that helps men and women to be reconciled with God. (Applause) And let us never, as the bishops in Brazil said, try to supplant the political work of politicians with our pastoral work¹². Let us first of all be pastors creating a church of reconciliation, and in that way we will be much more effective, even when touching on earthly politics, than we would be by getting involved as if we were politicians and tried to do what the politicians must do.

The church is a missionary of reconciliation, and her task is to tell one and all, despite their different options: «Love one another, and be reconciled with God». Don't let your own desire for this country, which may be different from what someone else wants, be so deep-rooted that you feel that you are the only owner of the country and the only one with solutions. People have a right to their opinions. Let us respect them, and as church let us try to radiate the Gospel light of justice, love, and reconciliation. This is the church we are seeking to form in all our pastoral work.

Life of the church

This coming Wednesday, March 19, is the feast of Saint Joseph. Let us not forget that he is the great patron of the universal church and that today we very much need his kind protection. I send my early greetings to the parishes of San José Villanueva and San José Cortéz, as well as to the religious communities that have Saint Joseph as their patron or have great devotion to him. I especially greet all the religious named José and Josefina who work in our diocese.

I also want to thank everyone on the part of the church for the testimonies of solidarity that have come my way because of the peace prize I was awarded last Sunday. The governing junta, the university, particular groups, and various friends have sent me telegrams and letters which pay me great honor and which I offer to God as a prayer for all of them¹³.

We also see as a work of the church, and a very fruitful one, all that is being done to repair YSAX. We send greetings of admiration to Father Pick; he is a quiet worker and doesn't want us to mention his name, but he's a superb radio technician. «Very soon now», he tells me, «we'll be able to hear the station again». (Applause) Our radio station YSAX has awoken much solidarity, for which I am profoundly thankful. I believe our new station will broadcast fresh voices of encouragement. And God forbid it, but even if a new attack closes down the radio, we know that they will never be able to kill it completely. (Applause)

¹² *The Church and the Problems of the Land*, 98.

¹³ «Testimonies of Solidarity Sent to the Archbishop» in *Orientación* (23 March 1980).

From among the testimonies of solidarity I'm going to cite especially this letter from Nahuatl, the popular Salvadoran group. They inform me that they're going to help us financially, and they've already made a contribution: «Our help began on Sunday, February 24, during our performance at the installation of the union board of directors at Foremost. The members of the union supported the idea and agreed to take up a collection for our radio station. Also, the directors of the trade union federation FENASTRAS told us that they were interested in a similar campaign». A group of railroad workers also delighted me by sending economic assistance and a very thoughtful letter which states, «We want to tell you that we are with you and that you can count on our support in your preaching for justice. The integral liberation of human beings has God as its essential foundation, and we will reach that liberation only by breaking the chains of sin. The voice of the church is the voice of faith and of hope, and it illuminates for us the path of life through the Gospel. Your harvest is great, archbishop, because you have not sown on sterile land, and your seed is good because you have sown the seed of God»¹⁴. (Applause)

As we make our church an instrument of reconciliation, we have renewed the vicars in their position. The vicars are those priests who are in charge of a sector of parishes. We have ten vicariates in the whole archdiocese, and the vicars in each have been named. For the vicariate of Mejicanos, Father Juan Macho Merino; for La Resurrección, Father Victoriano González, a Redemptorist; for El Calvario, Father Federico Sanggiano; for La Asunción, Father Carlos Mejía; for Soyapango, Father José Luis Burguet; for Quezaltepeque, Father Octavio Cruz and Father Trinidad Nieto as vicar and pro-vicar; for Cuscatlán, Fathers Edmundo Brizuela and Father Jorge Benavides; for La Libertad, Father Benito Tobar and Father Xavier Aguilar; for La Merced, Fathers Roberto Torruella and Teodoro Alvarenga. So there we have all the dioceses except Chalatenango, which has an episcopal vicar, Father Fabián Amaya. All the departments, then, have a vicarial organization that assists the pastoral ministry of the diocese.

This week the new priests' senate was also named. The senate is a group of priests chosen by their fellow priests to represent them in dialogue with the bishop; the bishop himself names a small number of them. Those named by the priests were Fathers Sigfredo Salazar, Salvador Interiano, Ricardo Ayala, Octavio Cruz, Óscar Martel, Juan Macho Merino, Francisco Estrada, Carlos Mejía, Roberto Torruella, and Luis Burguet. Those named by the bishop are Father Luis Burguet¹⁵, Father Jesús Delgado, Father Luis Van de Velde, Father Benito Tobar, and Father Jorge Benavides. Notices have been sent to them, but they may be receiving this news first by radio. I'm happy for them and congratulate them. Let us hope that, by being named to the senate, they are able to give a new impulse to this archdiocese which badly needs priests entirely committed to the ministry of reconciliation, the same way Saint Paul was.

The pastoral commission is composed of all those vicars plus those in charge of other pastoral commissions. Our diocese was represented in the congress of ecclesial base communities in Brazil by a solid delegation from here, led by Father Fabián Amaya and Father Octavio Cruz. They returned very satisfied and will soon give us their reports.

¹⁴ «Testimonies of Solidarity Sent to the Archbishop» in *Orientación* (30 March 1980).

¹⁵ Father Burguet is named twice by the archbishop.

Vincentian Father Juan Martínez has been named the new pastor of Lourdes, and he will be ministering in the barrio of Lourdes along with some Vincentian theology students. Father Mateo Quijada, who was working there as pastor, has been assigned to the parish of Cristo Redentor, with special responsibility for El Carmen.

As organizations dedicated to charity and welfare, Caritas and the Ecumenical Humanitarian Aid Commission have been very busy these days. The major task they have right now, a matter of great urgency, is assisting the many refugees who are arriving from zones where they claim it is no longer possible for them to live. That is why the office of our vicar general denounced this anomalous situation before the governing junta. Some 189 persons, including at least 56 children under age ten, have taken refuge in the parish center of San José de la Montaña and in Domus Mariae. The refugees come from Cinquera, Chalatenango, Cojutepeque, Monte San Juan, the villages of El Carmen and San Antonio in the town of El Carmen, and the village of La Bermuda in Suchitoto. According to their testimony, these persons had to abandon their homes after a large number of National Guard troops and ORDEN members burned their houses and crops and killed villagers in cold blood in front of their children and parents. The situation is such that, even when they find refuge in the capital, their lives are not safe, for the country is passing through very critical, violent moments, as some of you have realized.

We ourselves feel alarmed at the slaughter, the persecution, and the disappearances. The violations of human rights have not ceased; to the contrary, they have steadily and rapidly increased, especially the last few weeks. We therefore make this plea: in the name of Christ we want this repression to stop, and we want the safety of our *campesinos* to be guaranteed. The Ecumenical Humanitarian Aid Commission has also made the same plea, asking that people's safety be guaranteed.

In this regard I want to ask you, sisters and brothers, to help us with this charitable work because we have no idea how great the need will be if this repression doesn't cease. There are villages, they say, that have no people left in them, and if there happens to be no bloodshed, that is the only reason. But there is terror and there is desolation.

Here also in the city there are great needs. We have been asked for help by the coordinating committee of the vendors in the San Miguelito markets. I ask you to help us to provide this assistance which is so badly need among our people.

I'm happy to announce to you that the Catholic schools are developing a pastoral ministry closely attuned to the needs of the diocese and to the guidelines we are trying to follow.

I'm happy also with the vitality of our seminaries. At the minor seminary there was a gathering that made evident the sincere intentions of all those young people who are beginning their preparation for the priesthood. And last Sunday I spent time with another group of young people, not seminarians, who held a gathering that gives us much hope for the life of the church. They are young folk who are truly committed to the faith and to the service of the people.

In the cathedral I celebrated, with other priests, the Mass for the members of FENASTRAS who were murdered. The wake for them was held there as well.

Today in Aguilares is the commemoration of the anniversary of the death of Father Grande. At eleven o'clock there will be a solemn concelebration. Starting yesterday, there has also been a vigil in the village of Tejutla; it will end with a solemn Mass today at three in the afternoon.

Our religious life is also a source of reconciliation in our church. One of the Good Shepherd Sisters, Mother María Margarita Jonnieux, is close to death; she is a woman outstanding for her commitment. She did not want to leave her residence, which is inside the prison, because she feels that that place has been her whole life; she has worked there serving those women who are deprived of their freedom. What a wonderful example of the life of the church!

Also, I marvel at the work being done by the Belgian Sisters in Mejicanos, whom I visited. Mother María, affectionately known Madre Mariche, is doing excellent social work with children and parents. The sisters have formed a true educational community around the kindergarten and are also carefully administering Domus Mariae and all its equipment.

Another Belgian community in Santiago Texacuangos is providing valuable medical assistance to that area. Very skilled persons have made the convent into a veritable clinic that attends to the whole of that community.

Also some happy news: the Missionaries of Charity are working with us here and have recently been authorized by the Ministry of Justice to work in the prisons. They will begin with the prison in Santa Tecla. I am grateful to the priests as well as to the Ministry of Justice, which can rest assured that the priests will always be working in this ministry of reconciliation and bringing people closer to God.

This week our church has also been subjected to persecution. The house of the priests of Zacamil was searched. As a result, the following letter was sent to the Minister of Defense by our vicar general:

At one o'clock in the morning of March 12, two trucks of the Armed Forces stopped in front of the residence of the Belgian priests who work in the parish in the Colonia Zacamil. Uniformed agents of the National Guard and others who appeared to be soldiers got off the truck; they were more or less forty in number. Using megaphones, they gave the priests thirty seconds to open the door. Since no one was inside, the soldiers broke the lock, entered the house, and searched it. When our legal advisers inspected the house the following day, they found it in complete disorder. The operation lasted an hour, and they left at two-fifteen in the morning, taking with them various documents. They also took photographs inside the house, according to witnesses. In view of what happened and under instructions of the archbishop, we write this letter to denounce this action which offends against freedom of worship and the inviolability of one's residence. This action is another proof that the church is being persecuted through her ministers. We believe that even during a state of siege there are other more civilized ways to treat the Catholic Church, which encompasses the immense majority of Salvadorans. (Applause)

Regarding the case of the church of El Rosario, a very false version was published in *El Mundo*¹⁶. We therefore want to state the following:

In relation to the communiqué issued by the Armed Forces and published in *El Mundo* on March 10, the religious of the church of El Rosario in San Salvador make the following clarification:

First, we are the first to repudiate the frequent occupations of our church. We believe that such actions are neither useful nor expedient, and in any case we are the ones most directly harmed by them. In the same way as with embassies, ministries, schools, factories, and vehicles, the actions are forced on us, and like the proprietors or administrators of other places, we have been obliged to forego the normal use of the property in order to avoid greater dangers.

Second, after careful reflection we can honestly state that no members of the armed institutions have ever been attacked from the premises of this church property.

Third, with regard to the events of March 9, those who saw and heard what happened state the following: At about eleven-ten at night the front of the church was fired upon from a taxi and from other points. The gunfire took the watchmen posted in the area by surprise; thinking they were under attack, they repelled the supposed aggression. A little later, around eleven-thirty, well-equipped members of the military tried to dislodge the occupants of the church with heavy gunfire, which lasted for about twenty minutes. They then withdrew.

Fourth, the main purpose of this church, like all churches, is to be a place of prayer and spiritual reflection—let there be no doubt about that. But the history of the universal church and the most recent history of this country show that churches have also served to defend lives in danger, among other noble functions. We therefore condemn the repeated aggressions against this church, some with fatalities, and we hope they do not recur. We hope instead that the conflicts will be resolved by dialogue and negotiation.

Finally, we want to state that we do not make this clarification in order to enter into polemics or to defend the occupation of any building. Rather, we do so moved by our love for the Salvadoran people and for the truth. This is what we were taught by Christ the Teacher, whom we try to follow and imitate¹⁷.

In like manner, what happened here in the basilica we can also label persecution. This is how it was described:

On Monday, March 10, at six o'clock in the morning, a suitcase was found between the altar of Santa Marta and one of the columns supporting the cupola of the basilica. There are well-founded suspicions that the doors to the basilica had been forced, leaving the basilica open around two in the afternoon. The National Police were immediately advised for fear that it might be a bomb. The police experts arrived and proceeded to open the suspicious suitcase, which they did quickly and with no problem. Inside the suitcase were no fewer than seventy-two sticks of dynamite, enough to blow up the whole basilica and even the entire block. This attempted attack is an act that all citizens, regardless of their politics or

¹⁶ «Attack on the National Police Reported», *El Mundo* (10 March 1980). This newspaper report begins by saying: «An attack against the National Police was launched last night from the church of El Rosario...»

¹⁷ «Clarification of the Religious of the Church of El Rosario in San Salvador», 12 March 1980, in *Orientación* (16 March 1980).

their ideology, must condemn and repudiate with all their might. What was the intention of the authors of this frustrated attack? Did they want to destroy a work of art? Did they want to deprive the Salvadoran people of one of their treasured sanctuaries? Did they want to kill countless innocent women and men, bringing even greater sorrow and mourning to the Salvadoran family? This disgraceful attack can only have originated with infirm minds and hearts that are devoid of the most elementary human feelings. The previous day a Mass had been celebrated by Archbishop Romero for the eternal rest of Doctor Mario Zamora Rivas. That same day the Christian Democratic Party held its national assembly, attended by leaders from all around the country. Those attending the assembly would presumably take part in the Eucharistic celebration since Doctor Zamora had been one of the outstanding leaders of the Christian Democratic Party. We must thank God that the mechanism for activating the seventy-two sticks of dynamite did not work, thus frustrating this criminal attack. (Applause)

My only comment is that instead of feeling fear we should feel confidence. God takes care of us. (Applause) Nothing bad can happen to those who trust in God. (Applause)

Of a different sort is the persecution of Father Samuel Orellana, the pastor of Mejicanos, who has been threatened by some popular political group that accuses him of being a collaborator. I want to tell all the political groups that all of us priests are engaged in a ministry of reconciliation. Please try to respect the priests' work, and don't put their lives in danger with threats and accusations about which there is no certainty.

I've been informed that the Armed Forces have received reports that there are weapons in the San José de la Montaña Seminary and in other churches, and they say they're going to search those places. I hope that is not true because I tell them, by my priestly honor, that there are no arms there. If they don't believe me, they can go immediately to all the churches, but they won't find the reported arms. (Applause)

I also want to include in this list of denunciations and persecutions the surprising deportation of Demetrio Olasiregui, the young man whom you met here recently, the one who connected us with Radio Noticias del Continente of Costa Rica. What happened to him was inevitable. They threatened him, saying that if he kept transmitting news outside the country he would have to pay the consequences. A little later they called Immigration, and he was removed from the country. Thank God, he's now in Costa Rica and no doubt listening to us. We want to tell him that we remember him here with gratitude and that this radio station continues to broadcast. (Applause)

In this wave of persecution we also feel in close solidarity with the priests' cooperative, where a bomb exploded causing considerable damage¹⁸.

Events of the week

Trying to build up this church of reconciliation amid all these activities and persecutions, we now direct our sight toward the world around us. Please don't take this as meddling in politics. Naturally our views will touch on political matters, but we treat them principally from a Christian perspective.

¹⁸ *El Independiente* (12 May 1980).

The predominant note continues to be the repression. Once again the Lord asks Cain, «Where is Abel, your brother?» When Cain replies that he is not his brother's keeper, the Lord tells him, «Your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth! Therefore you are cursed by this earth that has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the soil, it will not reward you with fruitfulness. You shall be a homeless wanderer on earth». Words from the fourth chapter of Genesis (Gen 4:9-12). And this slaughter continues to be the main concern of the church. This is what obliges her to raise her voice unceasingly and untiringly week after week as one crying out in the desert. For the church there is nothing as important as human life and the human person, above all the poor and the oppressed who, besides being human beings, are also divine beings since Jesus said that he takes whatever is done for them as done for himself (Matt 25:40). All that bloodshed and death are beyond any kind of politics. They touch the very heart of God. If there is bloodshed, then nothing can be fruitful, neither the agrarian reform, nor the nationalization of the banks, nor any of the other promised measures. (Applause) Let us not forget those words God spoke to Cain, «The land soaked in blood can never be fruitful» (Gen 11-12a). Likewise, reforms soaked in blood can never be fruitful. No one can be against the reforms. I already said that in the body of this homily. They are part of God's revelation about the mystery of divine reconciliation and of sharing the earth in justice. We are not against these reforms.

This week some people have criticized me harshly, saying that the views I expressed last Sunday about the reforms were very negative. We have to know that things are to be measured not by the quantity of words but by the density of reasoning. I stated that the reform was necessary and that we agree with it, but we criticized what we thought were negative aspects, and we did so precisely to save the reform and make it really and truly what the people need. The only thing we are against is the bloodshed accompanying the reform. But the true reformers do not want bloodshed; rather, the blood is being spilt by the enemies of the reform. Human life is the fundamental theme of my preaching: nothing matters more to me than human life! (Applause) Human life is something very serious and very profound, and its violation is worse than that of any other human right because it is the life of God's children and because all this bloodshed negates love, awakens old hatreds, and makes reconciliation and peace impossible. What is most needed today is a halt to the repression!

I want to inform you that the national university and the University Simeón Cañas, UCA, are publishing a document on this matter, one that other impartial bodies in the country will no doubt endorse¹⁹. It is a document of profound and serene reflection that I recommend to you. The authorities and the people should pay attention to it and study it. The conclusion of the document says this:

The road that will lead to the triumph of democracy on this continent is not the systematic and savage crushing of a people who are struggling for their freedom. (Applause) Nor is it the destruction of union offices and dynamite attacks against radio stations, universities, and churches. Nor is it the murder of political and trade union leaders, the massacre of hundreds of *campesinos*, the terrorizing of towns, the invasion of villages, the burning of buildings, or constant acts of harassment. Nor is it ideological disinformation and the conjuring of a communist menace. None of these tactics is going

¹⁹ «Stop the Repression: Joint Manifiesto of the Universidad de El Salvador, the UCA, and the MIPTES», March 1980, *ECA*, 377-378 (1980) 399-402.

to help El Salvador find the least violent road of salvation. (Applause) If we still have not yet seen the ghastly effects of foreign intervention²⁰, it is because the people's organizations are not responding aggressively to the constant provocations to which they are being subjected. For all these reasons we are obliged to issue an urgent appeal for a halt to the repression. If we truly desire the reforms, we cannot simultaneously desire the destruction of those who have been struggling for them and who are supposed to be the ones who will most benefit from them. The repression preceded the reforms, and it accompanies them. For some of those who hold power, the repression appears to be more important than the reforms themselves. The reforms have been born drenched in the blood treacherously spilt by murderers who go unpunished. What is most urgent in El Salvador is to put an end to this shedding of blood²¹.

That is the first and most basic responsibility of our government.

Speaking about repression, I have a dense report from Legal Aid about the events that occurred from March 6, the day when both the reforms and the state of siege were decreed, through Monday, March 10. We have all the events registered and duly documented. I want to stress this because somebody said that I am inventing things here. I want to tell you that no one has ever proved that I have ever told a lie in all the things I have said during all these years. (Applause) It is just that the facts are so unbelievable that they appear to be lies, such as the following: during those four days there were murdered in various parts of the country forty-three *campesinos*, eleven workers, twenty-two students (including ten in San Miguel and four in San Vicente), two professionals, and five non-identified persons—all of them from the poorer sectors²².

At the same time the non-poor sector has also suffered criminal attacks that have taken victims, such as the two detectives and the member of ORDEN who were killed last weekend. Those killings must also be repudiated. I will not stain myself with blood by taking sides.

The outcome is tragic. The people's organizations and those who have mounted any opposition are being liquidated violently. We have reports that at least five hundred refugees have been given lodging and offered protection by charitable organizations. They have fled their towns and villages, sometimes carrying little children and elderly persons over long distances; they have little food and must sleep exposed to the elements. According to well-documented testimonies we possess, there are villages that no longer have inhabitants. For example, this very sad letter reached me from one of those places: «I beg you to ask the people who govern our country to please stop persecuting us now. My family and I have often been threatened, and the only reason is that we had relations with Father Rutilio Grande. We are threatened by the authorities, who say we are guerrillas, and all of this is only because we knew Father Rutilio. I want you to do me the favor of making it known, by all the means you have available, that there are nights when they don't allow us to sleep and there are times

²⁰ The text refers to an earlier paragraph, not read by Romero, which mentions the possible intervention of the United States government. Loc. cit., 402.

²¹ Loc. cit., 402.

²² The Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, the Legal Aid Office of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, and the archdiocesan communications office jointly published a report entitled «The Repression is Growing», in which they document and denounce that between January 1 and March 13, 1980, some 689 persons had been murdered, victims of the oppression being carried out by the security forces, the army, and paramilitary groups of the extreme right. Almost half of those killed were *campesinos*. See ECA 377-378, (1980) 402-403.

when we can't eat in peace. In other words, we are worn down with affliction», and the letter goes on.

Also, on March 11 in Las Vueltas, Chalatenango, they murdered two *campesinos*, Teófilo Guardado and Felipe Alvarenga, and the mayor of that place, who the people say was protecting them and helping them. That same day they destroyed the Imprenta Ungo in San Salvador. On March 12, in the zones around Las Vueltas, they murdered the *campesinos* José Arístides Rivera and Orestes Rivera and their mother as well.

They found the body, showing signs of torture, of José Efraín Arévalo Cuéllar, who had been arrested on March 9 in San Miguel. He was the son of the teacher Efraín Arévalo Ibarra, a political prisoner who disappeared two years ago. I have here a letter from his mother, the widow of Professor Ibarra, who is also well known. She tells me with great sadness that, just as she wept for her husband, now she is weeping also for her son. «At four forty-five in the afternoon of Saturday, March 9, he was arrested by the National Guard behind the church of El Calvario in San Miguel, and he was taken to the Guard's base. He remained in their custody all the time until he appeared murdered on Wednesday the thirteenth. With the hope that you will make my sorrow your own, I send you my gratitude beforehand». Make her sorrow your own, sisters and brothers. It is the sorrow of all of us.

On that same day they captured the youths Osmín Landaverde, Manuel Sánchez, Javier Mejía, and Carlos García from Quezaltepeque.

I want to express my solidarity with others as well. Early in the morning of March 13 bombs destroyed the offices of the newspaper *El Independiente*, the locale of the Human Rights Commission, and the adjoining office of the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of the Disappeared. I have some very interesting letters with regard to all this, but due to lack of time I'm not going to read them. I admire the courage of the director of *El Independiente*, who spoke some eloquent words: «They were able to silence our voice with a censor, but with dynamite they only strengthen it!»²³

I have also received a very courageous letter from the Human Rights Commission, and I thank them for telling me about their distress and their determination. What they say also gives me great courage: «We do not consider these crimes to be isolated events; they are closely linked to all the repressive actions against persons, institutions, and buildings that have been on the increase in our country as a result of the state of siege. The main objective of this mounting repression is to destabilize, neutralize, and devastate the whole of the people's movement, which is seeking to achieve integral liberation from exploitation, misery, and repression, all of which are expressions of the permanent structural violation of the most basic rights of Salvadorans». The commission states that it will continue its brave struggle since dynamite can never stop the people's struggle for their rights. (Applause)

I stand in solidarity also with the mothers of the disappeared, and I thank them for their wonderful letter, which lifts my spirits: «We ask your indulgence and that of all the Catholics listening to us, but we cannot help expressing our indignation at the cowardly attack on our office, which served us at least as a place to weep and to comfort one another for the loss of our loved ones».

²³ Editorial of *El Independiente* (14 March 1980).

There is talk too of forty more victims of repression who have been struck down in Aguilares, but since we always want to give accurate information, we are waiting for confirmation, just as we always do when it is a serious matter like the loss of human life.

On the other side, four members of ORDEN have been murdered, including an agronomist and an aviator²⁴.

There have also been difficulties in the functioning of the agrarian reform. Weapons have been found in places where the reform came as a surprise for the landowners.

Another person captured and beaten was the young man José Guillermo Castro²⁵. He is a great friend of mine, and I sincerely regret that so much time has passed since the police detained him in La Unión as he was returning from a meeting in Panama; nothing is known of his whereabouts. A note was given to me that reads, «Initially the National Police confirmed his arrest to Guillermo's father, but later they said they had not seen him».

I have also received a complaint from the students of the Instituto Centroamericano in Santa Tecla. It states that they were celebrating their feast at eleven in the morning on March 6, «when we were surprised by a strongly armed military contingent who entered the institute without prior notice. This caused panic, distress, and anxiety among all the people inside the institute, and the situation worsened when they began to maltreat the locale and arrest students. In the afternoon the military returned with more weaponry, and they terrorized the staff who were working there, mistreating them physically and psychologically». The students of the institute are protesting, «first, against the assault and the raid executed by this military force; second, against the failure to use legal channels if there was some complaint against their behavior; third, against the Ministry of Education since no authority has condemned this action; fourth, against the general state of anxiety and danger in which we find ourselves; and fifth, against the biased treatment given the incident by the morning newspapers of the country».

Under this heading of violence I want to rejoice at the release of Jaime Hill²⁶, a man with whom we have often expressed our solidarity. I am still concerned about the fate of Mr. Dunn and the other kidnapped persons²⁷. Let us hope that Lent will inspire their captors to grant them their freedom again.

On March 14 the *campesino* Denis Alfredo Rivas Arteaga was arrested in Reubicación, Chalatenango. He was handed over to the Guard, and we fear for his life.

Another few words about other situations and opinions. Certainly the state of siege has helped to reduce the opposition that the right might have mounted against the reform process. Evidence shows that some sectors wanted to oppose the process, but it has been generally accepted. I believe that it's good that people are becoming more concerned about the need to

²⁴ An official of ORDEN was murdered in San Miguel. *El Diario de Hoy* (12 March 1980).

²⁵ «Report of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador» in *Orientación* (16 March 1980).

²⁶ Jaime Hill Argüello was freed by the ERP on 14 March 1980 after being held captive since 31 October 1979. *El Mundo* (15 March 1980).

²⁷ Archibald Garner Dunn, former ambassador of South Africa in El Salvador, was kidnapped by the FPL on 28 November 1979, and Adolfo McEntee was kidnapped by them on 3 December 1979.

move toward true social justice. Nevertheless, the state of siege has its disadvantages. It has not diminished the violence of the security forces, the paramilitary groups, or the guerrilla groups. Meanwhile it has diminished freedom of information, especially as regards repression in the rural areas.

I make reference also to the resignations of members of the PDC. The people should know the reasons for their decision so that they can judge them by their own criteria. It is said that they resigned because of the repression and the violation of human rights. Their exact words cite «the exacerbated repression that is being increasingly used against the people's organizations and the people in general»²⁸. Another reason they gave was the danger of possible military intervention by the United States—what they call (in quotes) «special anti-subversive warfare»²⁹. Still other reasons given were that the reforms are being accompanied by repression and the participation of the people in the process is unsatisfactory³⁰. Another very good reason is that they don't believe in power sharing that is only apparent and not real. They say that there is no real participation in power; it is only apparently so³¹. This letter of resignation was signed by Roberto Lara Velado, Alberto Arene, Rubén Zamora Rivas, Héctor Silva Jr., Héctor Dada Hirezi, Francisco Díaz Rodríguez, and Dr. Francisco Paniagua Osegueda. (Applause)

I wanted to inform you also that the new ambassador of the United States visited me and brought me President Carter's response to my letter³². Since it is very long, I will give you only a summary.

He states in his letter that the policy of human rights still prevails³³. Naturally, we believe that this is so, but as we've always said, if human rights policy is just a matter of politics, it may not coincide with the church's mission, which is to defend human rights not for political reasons but out of religious conviction. (Applause)

In the letter he expresses his support for the junta, which he claims "offers the best perspectives"³⁴. I would say that this is a political judgment that needs to be discussed.

The letter also states, «The greater part of the economic aid will benefit those most in need». What the letter says regarding military aid is important, so I quote exactly: «The United States recognizes unfortunate actions that the security forces have carried out in the past». The fact that they recognize these actions should make them fearful of giving aid indiscriminately. «We are as concerned as you are», says the letter, «that this subsidy not be used for repression» and that «order be maintained with a minimal use of lethal force».

The letter also speaks of the need for «a less belligerent and less confrontational atmosphere if a program of reform is to be carried out», and it asks that «moral authority be

²⁸«Resignations from the PDC» in *Orientación* (16 March 1980).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Robert E. White, the new ambassador of the United States in El Salvador, delivered the letter to Archbishop Romero; it was written and signed by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in the name of President James E. Carter.

³³ «Cyrus Vance Answers Archbishop Romero in Carter's Name» in *El Mundo* (15 March 1980).

³⁴ The quotations in this paragraph and the following ones are from the original letter.

used to quiet people down»³⁵. It also states that the United States will not interfere in El Salvador's internal affairs. As we've always said, we hope that actions speak louder than words. (Applause)

Finally, I am troubled that the letter mentions «the threat of civil war» and claims that the government's reform is the only alternative. I believe that there are other alternatives, and I want to say to all my dear sisters and brothers that this talk of a coming civil war does not make sense to us. There is a tendency to keep people in panic, and this letter contributes to that. I believe that there are still reasonable solutions, and we have to seek them out sincerely. (Applause)

A work stoppage is announced for tomorrow³⁶. I'm not going to make a political judgment about this, nor am I going to support the Coordinator movement or any other political sector. What I do want to say is that the objective of the stoppage is a legitimate and important one, namely, to call attention to the repression and to try to stop it. That is what we have been proclaiming to the government: the repression must stop if they want to relieve the great distress in our society. And in the name of the church and the Gospel, I plead with both sides that they must not let tomorrow's activities turn into a violent confrontation with bloodshed that brings us even greater causes for grief.

What can we ask for in such a situation, sisters and brothers? The attitude we have tried to promote in this homily is that of reconciliation. I am a minister of this church of reconciliation, and so I was very happy with the proposal made to me that the church must not only denounce what is wrong but must also announce hope. One good reason for hope is that the church's view coincides with the views of many others, and there is therefore a need to begin a sincere dialogue among people with different opinions. I urge everyone, then, not to believe that violence is the only solution, and like Saint Paul, I call everyone to engage in sincere dialogue and to seek reconciliation in God's name.

I call upon you in the oligarchy to collaborate with the process of the people. You are the principal protagonists in this time of change, and the cessation of violence depends in large part on you. We said that reconciliation is closely connected with the land. If you recognize that you are the owners of land that belongs to all Salvadorans, then be reconciled with God and with your fellow citizens. Give up gladly that which will bring peace to the people and peace to your own consciences. (Applause)

I speak to the government as well. There I see two sectors: people of good will who cannot do what they want to do and others who are responsible for the repression since they have power and don't want to yield it. To the first I say, either make your power felt, or bravely confess that you have no power and expose those who are doing the country great harm, using you as a cover. (Applause) To those of you in power who refuse to cooperate with the reforms and instead obstruct them by fomenting repression, I say, do not be obstructive and treacherous at this historical moment for our country. In the name of nobility and love for the

³⁵ The original text says «to quiet passions».

³⁶ The Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses called for a 24-hour general strike at the national level on Monday, March 17, for the purpose of denouncing and condemning the repression against the people and the intervention of the U.S. government in the country's internal affairs. *El Independiente* (15 March 1980).

people, you must free up the hands of those who want to shape the destiny of our people with integrity. (Applause)

I want to tell the Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses that you offer us hope if you continue to mature by being more open and ready to dialogue. In this regard, I felt very happy this week when I received representatives of the Movement of Progressive Professionals and Technicians. These are people who say that they are glad to be able to assist the process of the people as professionals and technicians. They want to devote their professional talents to serving the needs of the country. The objectives they have proposed are these:

First, working for the establishment of a democratic government with a broad popular base; second, helping to strengthen the unity among the people and among the democratic and revolutionary forces; third, contributing to the political awareness of the technical and professional groups; fourth, organizing and incorporating into the process of liberation all the honest members of our associations; fifth, proposing technical options that are beneficial for the majority of the country's people and that demonstrate the reasonableness of a democratic, Salvadoran solution, as opposed to the elitist, demagogical solutions now being imposed with foreign backing; sixth, denouncing both nationally and internationally the critical situation of the people and its causes, and exposing the irrational, repressive ways it is being dealt with; and seventh, denouncing the continual violation of human rights and collaborating with competent national and international organizations for the defense of same»³⁷.

This statement of the Movement of Independent Professionals and Technicians is quite welcome. It offers a basis for the dialogue that the different forces of the people need as they move toward greater maturity and unity in their effort to save our people.

Finally, I make an appeal to the guerrilla groups. I have been criticized for wanting to join together the people's forces and the guerrilla forces into a single grouping. In my mind the difference between them is very clear. Those of you who advocate solving problems by violence, I ask you to be reasonable and to realize that no violent solution can be long-lasting. Human considerations require rational solutions. And above all this, hear the word of God that proclaimed to us today: El Salvador, a land of sisters and brothers, all children of one Father who is waiting for us all with outstretched arms. Let it be so! (Applause)

³⁷ «Manifesto of the Independent Movement of Salvadoran Professionals and Technicians», 6 March 1980, *ECA* 377-378 (1980) 359.