



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II **GENERAL AUDIENCE** *Wednesday, 21 February 1979*

1. Today, too, I wish to refer to the subject of the third Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate: to evangelization, it is a fundamental subject, a subject that is always topical. The Conference, which ended its work at Puebla on 13 February, bears witness to this. It is, moreover, the subject "of the future"; the subject that the Church must live continually and prolong in the future. The subject, therefore, constitutes the permanent perspective of the Church's mission.

To evangelize means making Christ present in the life of man as a person, and at the same time in the life of society. To evangelize means doing everything possible, according to our capacities, in order that man "may believe"; in order that man may find himself again in Christ, in order that he may find again in him the meaning and the adequate dimension of his own life. This finding again is, at the same time, the deepest source of man's liberation, St Paul expresses this when he writes: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1). So, liberation, then, is certainly a reality of faith, one of the fundamental biblical themes, which are a deep part of Christ's salvific mission, of the work of Redemption, of his teaching. This subject has never ceased to constitute the content of the spiritual life of Christians. The Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate bears witness that this subject returns in a new historical context; therefore it must be taken up again in the teaching of the Church, in theology, and in the apostolate. It must be taken up again in its own depth, and in its evangelical authenticity.

There are many circumstances that make it such a relevant subject today. It is difficult, here, to mention them all. Certainly it is recalled by that "universal desire for dignity" on the part of man, of which the Second Vatican Council speaks. The "theology of liberation" is often connected (sometimes too exclusively) with Latin America; but it must be admitted that one of the great contemporary theologians, Hans Urs von Balthassar, is right when he demands a theology of liberation on a universal scale. Only the contexts are different, but the reality itself of the freedom "for which Christ set us free" (cf. Gal 5:1) is universal. The task of theology is to find its real significance in the different concrete historical and contemporary contexts.

2. Christ himself links liberation particularly with knowledge of the truth: "You will know the truth,

and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32). This sentence testifies above all to the intimate significance of the freedom for which Christ liberates us. Liberation means man's inner transformation, which is a consequence of the knowledge of truth. The transformation is, therefore, a spiritual process, in which man matures "in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24). Man, inwardly mature in this way, become a representative and a spokesman of this "righteousness" in the various environments of social life. Truth is important not only for the growth of human knowledge, deepening man's interior life in this way; truth has also a prophetic significance and power. It constitutes the content of testimony and it calls for testimony. We find this prophetic power of truth in the teaching of Christ. As a Prophet, as a witness to truth, Christ repeatedly opposes non-truth; he does so with great forcefulness and decision and often he does not hesitate to condemn falsehood. Let us re-read the Gospel carefully; we will find in it a good many severe expressions — for example, "white-washed tombs" (Mt 23:27), "blind guides" (Mt 23:16), "hypocrites" (Mt 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29) which Christ utters, aware of the consequences that are in store for him. So this service of truth as participation in Christ's prophetic service is a task of the Church, which tries to carry it out in the various historical contexts. It is necessary to call by their name injustice, the exploitation of man by man, or the exploitation of man by the State, institutions, mechanisms of systems and regimes which sometimes operate without sensitivity. It is necessary to call by name every social injustice, discrimination, violence inflicted on man against the body, against the spirit, against his conscience and against his convictions. Christ teaches us a special sensitivity for man, for the dignity of the human person, for human life, for the human spirit and body. It is this sensitivity which bears witness to knowledge of that "truth which makes us free" (Jn 8:32). It is not permitted for man to conceal this truth from himself. It is not permitted to "falsify it". It is not permitted to make this truth the object of a "tender". It is necessary to speak of it clearly and simply. And not to "condemn" men, but to serve man's cause. Liberation also in the social sense begins with knowledge of the truth.³ Let us stop at this point. It is difficult to express in a short speech everything involved in this great subject, which has many aspects and, above all, many levels. I stress: many levels, because it is necessary, in this subject, to see man according to the different elements of all the riches of his personal and at the same time social being; his "historical" and at the same time, in a certain way, "supertemporal" being. (History, among other things, bears witness to this "supertemporality" of man). The being that the "thinking reed" is (cf. B. Pascal, *Pensées*, 347) — everyone knows how frail a reed is — just because it is "thinking" always goes beyond itself; it bears within it the transcendental mystery and a "creative restlessness" which springs from the latter. We will stop for the present at this point. The theology of liberation must, above all, be faithful to the whole truth about man, in order to show clearly, not only in the Latin-American context but also in all contemporary contexts, what reality is this freedom "for which Christ set us free". Christ! It is necessary to speak of our liberation in Christ; it is necessary to proclaim this liberation. It must be integrated in the whole contemporary reality of human life. Many circumstances, many reasons, demand this. Just in these times, in which it is claimed that the condition of "man's liberation" is his liberation "from Christ", that is, from religion, just in these times the reality of our liberation in Christ must become, for us all, more and more evident and more and more full.⁴ "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to

bear witness to the truth." (Jn 18:37). The Church, looking to Christ who bears witness to the truth, must always and everywhere ask herself, and in a certain sense also the contemporary "world", *how to make good emerge from man*, how to liberate the dynamism of the good that is in man, in order that it may be stronger than evil, than any moral, social evil, etc. The third Conference of the Latin-American Episcopate bears witness to the readiness to undertake this effort. We want not only to recommend this effort to God, but also to follow it for the good of the Church and of the whole human family.

To faithful coming from Uganda am particularly happy today to extend a welcome to the Ugandans living in Rome. Your presence here is part of your participation in the centenary of the evangelization of your country. Your presence likewise gives me the opportunity to express again my esteem and love for the Church in your land, and to render praise and thanksgiving to God, who through the power of the Holy Spirit has brought forth abundant fruits of holiness and justice in the lives of generations of Ugandans. And on this important occasion may all of you be renewed in the joy and strength of life in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

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