

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION «IUSTITIA ET PAX»

**STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM :
SOME CONTRIBUTIONS
OF THE CHURCH**

*The Decade of Action to Combat Racism
and Racial Discrimination (1973-1983)*

Working Document n. 4

2nd Edition



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PRESENTATION

At the end of 1973 the 28th General Assembly of the United Nations formally observed the 25th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and proclaimed the beginning of the “Decade of Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.” Pope Paul VI’s message to the President of the General Assembly on that occasion paid tribute to the efforts of the U N in promotion of human rights.

In referring to the new initiative planned by the Assembly, the Pontiff expressed his “Lively interest” and “deep satisfaction” and indicated the full support of the Holy See in the following terms:

This preeminently human undertaking will once again find the Holy See and the United Nations in close accord – albeit on different levels and with different means – in a common effort to defend and protect the freedom and dignity of every man of every group, without distinction of race, color, language, creed or any particular social condition¹.

As we stand at the halfway mark in this decade, what is the state of this joint action and, in particular, the contribution of the Holy See?

After a brief summary of the meaning and the goals of the decade and the way in which the Church has given witness of its active, presence, we shall analyze the Church’s contribution under three aspects:

¹ Paul VI, Message to the United Nations on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December, 1973; AAS LXV (1973), pp. 673–7; English translation, *The Teachings of Pope Paul VI* (1973), p. 320.

- the principal contribution of the Church involves stressing and educating the moral and religious sense of the fundamental equality of all men and women, and in correlation to that, unequivocally denouncing judgments, actions, and institutions which deny or place obstacles against this equality;
- within the general horizon of its own mission and the limits of its competency, however, the Church is also directly interested in all programs and initiatives aimed at unmasking and eliminating racial discrimination in all fields;
- lastly, the initiatives undertaken by the Holy See as a qualified member of the organized international community cannot be considered as separate from the manifold initiatives of Christian communities throughout the world and the personal involvement of Christians within the framework of organized society.

1. THE MEANING AND THE GOALS OF THE DECADE

1.1. The United Nations obviously did not wait until 1973 to tackle the problem of racial discrimination. One of the principal objectives mentioned in the UN *Charter*, drafted shortly after a world war where national-socialist racism was a dominant factor, is to promote “*respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion*” (art. 1, par. 3). In the major world discussions which have followed since this Charter, and especially in the case of decolonization and the right which peoples have to decide their own destiny, the awareness of racial discrimination or of the more or less intensely racial hue of other forms of discrimination has been very much alive. On 21 December 1965, the 20th UN General Assembly approved and opened for signature and ratification “The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.”

1.2. The progress made in *decolonization* and the entry of a number of ex-colonies into the family of the United Nations made the situation of those peoples who had remained outside the movement especially intolerable for the world community. The institutional manifestation of racial discrimination, in particular under the systematic form of *apartheid*, revealed the central moving force of this type of discrimination with respect to others, reduced the black populations of southern Africa to a state of abject subjection, wrent the African continent as such, and sowed the seeds of violence and war on the domestic, regional, and international scene. Moreover, numerous events throughout the world revealed differing degrees of racial tension or led to the creation of the

conditions which prompted the surfacing of such tensions: e.g. large scale migrations; distrust or persecution of ethnic national, language, or religious minorities; economic and social disparity. All of that was revealed and further accentuated by a growing awareness which went hand in hand with initial efforts aimed at the united development of all peoples.

1.3. This led to a decision to mobilize world public opinion and all possible positive social forces, whether public or private, on the national, regional, and international level to join in an energetic and organized campaign to erase the evil of racism and prevent it from surfacing under new forms. *The Program adopted for the Decade* defined the goals and objectives in these words:

8. The ultimate goals of the Decade are to promote human rights and fundamental freedom for all, without distinction of any kind on grounds of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin, especially by eradicating racial prejudice, racism and racial discrimination; to eliminate the persistence of racist policies and to counteract the emergence of alliances based on mutual espousal of racism and racial discrimination; to resist any policy and practices which lead to the strengthening of the racist discrimination; to identify, isolate, and dispel the fallacious and mythical beliefs, policies and practices that contribute to racism and racial discrimination; and to put an end to racist regimes.

9. To this end, appropriate measures should be taken to implement fully United Nations instruments and decisions concerning the elimination of racial discrimination, to ensure support for all peoples striving for racial equality, to eradicate all forms of racial discrimination, and to pursue a vigorous worldwide campaign of information designed to dispel racial prejudice and to enlighten and involve world public opinion in the struggle against racism and racial discrimination, emphasizing, inter alia, the education of youth in the spirit of human rights

and fundamental freedoms and in the dignity and worth of the human person...²

1.4. Numerous and diverse initiatives and activities were promoted *during the first half of the Decade*: seminars, special reports, world and regional conferences, etc. All of the Agencies of the United Nations actively participated and special committees were either established or reactivated. After the formal adoption of a Convention on 30 November 1973, special action on *apartheid* produced the following results: the creation of a special Committee; a Security Council compulsory embargo on the sale of weapons to South Africa; the proliferation of special reports and conferences, notably a World Conference in Lagos in August 1977; the establishment of a special assistance fund; and, in addition to the “Day for the Eradication of Racial Discrimination” (21 March, since 1966) the celebration of an “International Year for the Campaign Against Apartheid” which began on 21 March 1978. The World Conference on Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, held in Geneva from the 14th to the 25th of August 1978, drew up a general evaluation of what has been done so far and made an effort to inject new vigor into the program.

1.5. Even though appreciable results have been achieved, the *overall evaluation* presents a somewhat *uncertain and ambiguous picture*. Are the multiplication and rapid succession of initiatives the sign of a movement which is expanding or of a movement which is running out of breath? Public opinion in many countries is not so much stimulated as it is exhausted by a campaign perceived as a just cause but which often provides the occasion for selective indignation or the airing of vested interests. A broadside attack against racism in all its forms and its manifold causes is not to be

² UN General Assembly, Resolution 3057 (XXVIII), nos. 8-9, 2 November 1973.

considered as an exemption from a detailed analysis of its inherent complexity and the basic diversity of individual situations. The hasty association of distinct factors creates obstacles and hampers differentiated approaches which efficient action calls for. What is definitely in order, therefore, is a lucid reexamination in order to avoid any impasse situation. It would be better to distinguish the strict sense (e.g. color, physical type, degree of cultural development) from the wide sense which encompasses all forms of discrimination. After all, the tension arising from ethnic pluralism in many nations is quite different from racial tension. Along much the same line, while racism is often characterized by a certain aspect of domination, there are other kinds of domination independent of any racist consideration.

2. THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SEE: SOME LANDMARKS

2.1. With regard to racism as well as other social evils, the Church and the Holy See have developed their thought and directed their action through constantly changing conditions in history. Suffice it to consider a few particularly significant steps by way of example.

2.2. It was undoubtedly the initial *encounter with the indigenous populations of the Americas* which gave rise to the first global assessment of the phenomenon which we today call racism or racial discrimination. Confronted with the detestable behaviour of explorers and widespread confusion in thinking, Paul III, from the beginning, called upon the best available theological support and laid down, for the benefit of the Indians, the permanent foundations of Christian universalism: a common vocation to participate in the divine life of Jesus Christ, a vocation which in turn presupposes, enlightens, and strengthens a common participation in the dignity and the rights which are inherent to human nature.

...since these Indians, real human beings, are not only suited for the Christian faith but, according to what We have learned, rush to embrace the faith, We desiring to provide them with all necessary assistance, hereby decide and declare, in virtue of Our Apostolic Authority, that it is forbidden to deprive of their liberty and use of their goods the above mentioned Indians or any other peoples who, even though outside the faith, will come to encounter Christians in the future. On the contrary, We decide and declare that they can freely and licitly use and cultivate their freedom and possessions and acquire the same; they

are not to be bound into slavery; Indians and other peoples are to be invited to embrace the faith of Christ by the preaching of the Gospel and by the example of a good life...³.

2.3. We know with what energy, in a different context and some centuries later, Pope Pius XI condemned *the idolatry of racism spurred on by national-socialism*, with its myth of blood and race⁴. Here again the rebuttal while drawn from Revelation, is far from overlooking an in depth consideration of the meaning of man and is further reinforced by an invitation to sue all intellectual disciplines to fight the evil on all levels. Since this type of racism claimed to be based on solid scientific foundations, Pope Pius XI wrote to Cardinal Ruffini, the then Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Seminaries and Universities, asking him to ensure that professors employ “all their means to provide biology, history, philosophy, and juridical as well as moral sciences with the arms necessary to refute firmly and competently the untenable assertions”⁵.

2.4. The renewed effort to respond to the aspirations and the needs of the world, which characterized the Second Vatican Council and the pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI, led the accent to be placed on *the aspiration to equal dignity on the part of men*,

³ Bull *Veritas Ipsa*, 1537, Utz. A., “La doctrine sociale de l’Eglise a travers les siècles”, Herder-Beauchesne, Basle, Rome, Paris, 1969, Vol. I, p. 397. English translation by PCJP from original French text.

⁴ Encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*, 14 March 1937; AAS XXIX (1937), pp. 145–67.

⁵ Letter dated 13 April, 1938. The letter lists a series of these untenable assertions. For example: “It is necessary to employ all possible means to protect and foster the vigor of the race and the purity of blood; all that which helps to achieve that goal is, by that very fact, both just and permissible... The primary source and supreme precept in the whole legal order is racial instinct.” English translation by PCJP from original French text.

women and peoples, and its concrete translation in every aspect of existence. This aspiration arises from the very background of the inequality which it reveals and which it renders ever more unacceptable. In this context the major Council texts and more recent pontifical documents on social issues also deal with the question of racial discrimination but within the wider framework of the forms of discrimination which afflict humanity. These documents positively highlight the roots of the equal dignity of all human beings as they appear in the light of Revelation and reflection on the human condition, which is also further clarified by Revelation. In a progressive way and without losing sight of the necessary balance of this broader perspective, the raising of racial discrimination issues became more and more insistent, especially in 1967 with *Populorum Progressio*⁶, in 1969 in the message to African Peoples which Paul VI delivered before the Ugandan House of Parliament⁷, and in 1971 with *Octogesima Adveniens*⁸. In 1971, Paul VI chose as a theme for the World Day of Peace “Every Person Is My Brother” in accord with the International Year Against Racism celebrated by the United Nations. In 1966, the Holy See signed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and every two years submits a report of the Magisterium’s activities in that field.

2.5. It was in direct line with these position statements that Paul VI gave his *moral support to the Decade* for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination in the text mentioned earlier. The Holy See had not to vote on the principle or the program of the Decade since it was not a member of the United Nations

⁶ *Populorum Progressio*, nos. 47, 63, AAS LIX (1967), pp. 280, 288. English translation, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis (1967), pp. 34, 44.

⁷ “Message to the Church and to the Peoples of Africa,” 1 August 1969, AAS LXI (1969), pp. 580–6.

⁸ *Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 16, AAS LXIII (1971), p. 413. English translation, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis (1971), p. 23.

which adopted the initiative in the course of the 28th General Assembly. But after delivering his address in 1973, Paul VI showed his personal support for the Decade on a number of significant occasions. In 1974 he received the Special UN Committee on *Apartheid* in an audience and set forth the Church's basic and perennial doctrine on the equal dignity of all women and men. While his direct concern was to avoid limiting the scope of his remarks to the specific problem of *apartheid*, he did not hesitate to present the Group with judicious recommendations as to the work underway⁹. In his address to the Diplomatic Corps on 14 January 1978 Pope Paul VI focused on human rights.

He explicitly mentioned southern Africa and, frankly but with tact, developed direct considerations as to the concepts and structures which had to be changed¹⁰.

The contribution offered by the Holy See also took the form of sending official delegations to key events planned for the Decade: e.g. the International Conference on Namibia and Human Rights (Dakar, 5-8 January 1976), the Lagos Conference on Action Against *Apartheid* (August 1977), the World Conference in Geneva on Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (August 1978). Lastly, the Holy See plays a role in the work undertaken by UNESCO where particular attention is paid to cultural and ethnic issues and where a Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice is under preparation.

⁹ Address to the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid, 22 May 1974, AAS LXVI (1974), pp. 342–6.

¹⁰ Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 14 January 1978, AAS LXX (1978), pp. 168-174. English translation, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 26 January 1978, no. 4, pp. 6-7.

3. THE MAIN CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH: THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS SENSE OF EQUALITY

3.1. In the aforementioned address to the Diplomatic Corps (14 January 1978) Paul VI introduced his reflections on the equal dignity of all human beings which is so seriously lacerated by racial discrimination with the following words:

We would like to draw attention here, more than to its juridical and political aspect, to the religious and moral meaning of the equal dignity of all men¹¹.

We will see that the Holy See is directly interested in all the aspects of the issue. However, its primary concern within the framework of direct participation in the manifold efforts to combat racism is *to bolster and promote the full sense of being human*. An essential element in the whole question would be missing if we do not have the direct enlightened dynamism of those consciences that are truly committed by an acute awareness of the fundamental equal dignity of all men and women. Such consciences come to the fore in a spontaneous movement which rejects any sort of practice or attempted justification contrary to real equality. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kurt Waldheim, pointed this out at the end of his inaugural address to the Geneva Conference on Racism (14 August 1978):

¹¹ AAS LXX (1978), p. 172; English translation, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 26 January 1978, no. 4, p. 7.

In the final analysis, as indispensable as they may be, laws are never sufficient by themselves to combat racism. Racial discrimination plunges its roots not only into organized society but also into the hearts and spirits of individuals, men and women¹².

Hesitation and aberrations are often the offspring of an uncertain conscience.

3.2. *The sciences are not by themselves sufficient* to overcome this uncertainty. They are useful and we saw how Pius XI recommended that they be used to reveal the false scientific claims advanced by national-socialist racism and to refute its untenable propositions. The sciences help to dissipate much of the false evidence which people advance whenever they try to justify racist behavior or postpone the implementation of necessary changes. At present, these same scientific disciplines are converging evermore in an affirmation of the equality of all persons. What they do confirm, however, is limited in fact and in principle by the very nature of their method. The tendency to stress the convergence between the sciences and the highest expressions of philosophy, morals, and religions should not let us forget the different spheres in which these disciplines have their proper place. For the former or the latter to surrender to an artificial concordism would not serve the best interests of the common cause to which each contributes on his respective level¹³.

¹² Information Service - United Nations, Geneva: Press Release RE/23, SG/SM/359, August 1978, p. 7. English translation by PCJP from French.

¹³ The general remarks made by Paul VI on the importance and the limits of human sciences in *Octogesima Adveniens* (nos. 38-40; AAS LXIII (1971), pp. 427-8) are so true here. While affirming the equality of all men, scientific disciplines are far from a unanimous position in terms of basing that equality on a common origin on the empirical level where they could claim to locate or identify such an origin. While legitimately stressing the economic, political, and cultural causes for differences between human groups, some sciences are

3.3. In this sense, *philosophy, morals, and religion* play an irreplaceable role of witness and instruction since they concentrate on the origin, the nature, and the destiny of man at a level which is beyond the reach of scientific investigation and the means at its disposal. Without underestimating the ceaseless effort to overcome the inequalities fostered by biological or cultural history, the aforementioned disciplines do not wait for the final result to be achieved before demanding unconditional respect for human life. They can do so, because they base this fundamental obligation on a much more decisive level than simply the observance of the customs or the always fragile and ambiguous consensus at a given time. They are better prepared to distinguish inequalities to be uprooted from those inherent differences which do not affect fundamental equal dignity but which are the manifestation of internal richness and validly diverse expressions.

3.4. The *Christian doctrine concerning man* for its part has developed on the basis of and in the light of Revelation, by means of continuous contact with the aspirations and experiences of people, with special attention to the poor.

The Council expressed the permanent doctrine of the Church on this point in renewed language. Subsequent documents have reiterated and echoed this. Therefore, it is sufficient at this point

overly hasty in excluding those causes which may stem from basic biophysiological heritage. Nor do detailed economic, political, or cultural analysis unanimously account for these differences or the complex processes which characterize their appearance.

To these limits in fact, we also have the limits of right or competency. The human sciences by their very methodology abstain from expressing the final word on man or his destiny, and from defining universal moral precepts which would assume the nature of an unconditional obligation for the individual conscience.

to quote the key formulation of the Council and add the most recent text by Pope Paul VI.

3.5. All men are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God's image; they have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all men and it must be given ever greater recognition.

Undoubtedly not all men are alike as regards physical capacity and intellectual and moral powers. But forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, Language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design¹⁴.

For those who believe in God, all human beings, even the Least privileged, are sons of the universal Father who created them in his image and guides their destinies with thoughtful love. The fatherhood of God means brotherhood among men: this is a strong point of Christian universalism, a common point, too, with other great religions and an axiom of the highest human wisdom of all times, that which involves the promotion of man's dignity.

For a Christian, no man is excluded from the possibility of being saved by Christ and of enjoying the same destination in the Kingdom of God. It is therefore inconceivable for those who accept the Gospel message, even taking into account physical, intellectual or moral differences, to deny fundamental human equality in the name of the alleged superiority of a race or ethnic group¹⁵.

¹⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 29, pars. 1-2; AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 1048-9. English translation, *Vatican Council II*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., p. 929.

¹⁵ Paul VI, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 14 January 1978, AAS LXX (1978), p. 172; English translation, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 26 January 1978, no. 4, p. 7, par. 2.

It is very important to highlight the internal dynamism which characterizes these texts.

3.5.1. The Christian doctrine on man is permanently anchored in the mysteries of Creation and Salvation in Jesus Christ. From them it receives its fundamental stability, and by a constant contemplation of these mysteries draws forth an ever youthful vitality.

3.5.2. For those who live seriously this simple yet profound doctrine, the rejection of all forms of racial discrimination is an immediately evident reality: *“the fatherhood of God means the brotherhood of all.”*

3.5.3. Christian universalism is *“a point in common with other great religions.”*

3.5.4. It is also *“an axiom of the highest human vision of all times.”* Such wisdom, moreover, is by no means a privilege reserved to the erudite who propose elaborate formulas. It is very often perceived and concretely embodied in the lives of everyday people. The Church has always had the highest regard for human experience and for the use of reason to deepen and to give form to this experience. The Church is convinced that, far from being discredited or disturbed, the activities and expressions of human intelligence are promoted by the light of the Gospel and by recourse to religious language in a secularized world. The illumination and deep living out of the faith give human wisdom that which it is struggling to achieve. They unharness its inherent dynamism. They usher it into diverse cultures. They assist it in recognizing by its own light what is basic to human beings, the common human nature.

3.5.5. We should also remember that by stressing the transcendent origin of human beings, created by God, and the divine

assumption and fulfillment of his history, Catholic doctrine in no way mitigates the intrinsic value of humanity's efforts to work for justice. On the contrary, Catholic doctrine promotes and enhances said efforts¹⁶.

3.6. This is therefore the spiritual and doctrinal heritage which the Holy See contributes in dialogue with officials and institutions in the world community. The Holy See acts solely by means of fraternal persuasion. Excluding no one and here identifying itself with none of the currents which legitimately arise during international conferences when attention turns to the concrete decisions, defining activities on a level which less directly involves freedom of conscience. The original position maintained by the Holy See in such conferences is determined to a great extent by the very logic of the key contribution which constitutes its proper mission and which it is expected to offer.

¹⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 34, 39, 43, AAS LVIII (1966), pp. 1052, 1056, 1061. English translation, *Vatican Council II*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., pp. 933–4, 938, 943–5.

4. THE HOLY SEE'S PARTICIPATION IN SOME MORE CONTINGENT ASPECTS OF THE COMMON EFFORT

4.1. The Holy See is actively present in the organized international community as a qualified partner ready, willing, and able to ensure *active and dedicated participation* in all Conferences to which it is invited. An “*expert in humanity*” by all means, but not as if its role were to dictate doctoral teaching and thereby proudly exempt itself from a detailed analysis of the complex and practical difficulties in the issues under discussion. What justifies the qualified presence of the Holy See at international conferences before others and in its own regard is that the unavoidable proclamation of the Christian understanding of the human person is coupled with an open attitude to research and further study. In a concrete and responsible fashion, this helps to introduce this idea into the reality of the discussion. In return, it helps the Church to be receptive to the issues and experiences which lead the Church itself to deepen its own doctrine.

4.2. The requirements of study and action in the discussion on racism *have expanded the field of investigation to include all forms of discrimination*. In effect, it is difficult to isolate racial discrimination whether you look at it from a strictly scientific point of view or if you analyze it concretely in terms of those who consider themselves to be the victims and those who are accused of perpetrating racist practices. Racism is the fruit of many factors in civilization. Therefore, there is a tendency to group together in an almost ritual enumeration the more tangible manifestations which provoke a violent reaction or which go to make up the background for prac-

tical racial discrimination, e.g. color, language, ethnic origin. The circle then rapidly expands to include all attacks on the equality among men and women and between peoples, e.g. political, economic, social, cultural, and religious discrimination. These easily assume the pale of racism, even though unconsciously, and thereby receive a renewed impassioned impetus or even more simply they create situations favorable for the flourishing of racism. The fact that the 28th General Assembly of the United Nations launched the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination in conjunction with the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is quite significant indeed: it stressed the fact that human rights cannot be divided and that an effective campaign on one particularly threatened aspect requires a similar effort on all fronts.

4.3. *The contribution of the Holy See has always been towards maintaining a broad and open perspective.* By tackling the problem from a moral and religious position it forcefully brings into the open the common root of aggressiveness and sin which in the last analysis nourish and support all forms of discrimination. Together with racial or ethnic discrimination, in his message to the President of the 28th General Assembly, Paul VI deplored:

... obstacles to the self-determination of peoples; the repeated violations of the sacred right to religious liberty in its various aspects and the absence of an international agreement supporting this right and specifying its consequences; the repression of the freedom to express wholesome opinions; the inhumane treatment of prisoners; the violent and systematic elimination of political opponents; other forms of violence, and attacks on human life, especially on life in the womb¹⁷.

¹⁷ Paul VI, "Message to the United Nations on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 10 December 1973,

Speaking in much the same terms to the members of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid, Paul VI said:

“The subject of our consideration today has vast ramifications and it is not possible to speak of all of of them. The theme we have touched upon calls to mind also the need to terminate class struggle and hatred at every level and in every form. The rights of minorities call out for protection as do the rights of the poor, the handicapped, the incurably ill and all those who live at the margin of society and are without voice. Above all the precious right to life - that most fundamental of all human rights - must be affirmed anew, together with the condemnation of that massive aberration which is the destruction of innocent human life; at whatever stage it may be, through the heinous crimes of abortion or euthanasia¹⁸.

4.4. Keeping in mind the entire range of political, economic, cultural, religious and racial discrimination also offers another advantage. It is an open invitation for all persons and all human groups *to remain constantly aware of their own failings* in those areas. Through this self-awareness, the struggle against racism would gain in real strength and moral credibility what it loses in inflexibility, in partiality or in pharasaic complacency.

4.5. *The interaction* between the manifold forms of aggression and discrimination *does not mean that confusion reigns supreme*. Even though all of these forms are able to generate and nourish racist tendencies and can assume a more or less racist hue, they by no means lose their specific nature. Each and every one requires an approach appropriate to itself and a suitable treatment in proper meetings and institutions. It would be neither honest nor realistic to group them all together and label them indistinctly under the

AAS LXV (1973), pp. 673–7; English translation, *The Teachings of Pope Paul VI* (1973), pp. 319–20.

¹⁸ AAS LXVI (1974), p. 346.

general heading of racism in an attempt to benefit from the phenomenon of impassioned decrial and rejection which racism provokes. In reality, such an indiscriminate mixing together creates frigid reactions and obstacles which effectively hamper resolute common action.

4.6. The effort to keep these forms distinct one from another likewise helps us to discern better *the specificity of expressions of racial discrimination*, to identify those situations where they are dominant and active, especially where the rough edges have been honed down by institutional measures such as *apartheid*. In this way we can give to the action required that moral unanimity which is so necessary to apply an effective and constructive pressure rather than violence.

4.7. Were considerations of this nature to be disregarded, the debate on racism could very well work against the just aspirations of many nations and especially the young ones who are trying to develop their own cultural identity and insure the necessary conditions for the protection, expression and affirmation of that identity. The request advanced by those human groups which consider themselves the victims of racist behavior is not a hollow plea for abstract equality, but must be fully recognized in the richness of their individuality. It therefore becomes very important to channel the international reflection underway towards a *positive appreciation of the complementary diversity of peoples*; it is in their particularity with all their component features that they are called to realize their human plenitude in an atmosphere of mutual respect and openness¹⁹. The circumstances do exist under which certain forms of separation are actively sought by ethnic groups in order not to be forced into a life style too totally different from their own tradi-

¹⁹ Cf. Heckel Roger, S.J., *Self-Reliance*, booklet published by the Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax" (1978; reedited 2011).

tions. In itself, for example, a vast Indian reservation, so long as it is freely accepted by the inhabitants, has nothing in common with imposed *apartheid* which is based on the prior expropriation of the best land to the benefit of the dominant minority.

As Paul VI correctly pointed out in his message to the people of Africa, “the negative problem of exclusivist racism is resolved by pluralism, if properly understood”²⁰.

4.8. When thus entering into discussions on this issue, the Holy See fully responds to *each level of participation in accordance with the mission proper to it*. It gives total support in affirming the equal dignity of each person and all peoples. With this condemnation of forms of discrimination which deny this dignity, it gives a decidedly positive . appreciation, for fundamental reasons and not extraneous motives, of the idea of an organized community of nations as indispensable for the promotion of this equality²¹. In this sense, the Holy See has stalwartly supported the United Nations which, despite its evident limits, has given shape and body to this idea and has furthered its progress²².

4.9. Every time the U N in conformity with its vocation, has been able to enrich international law with *conventions* endowed with the instruments of application, especially in the protection of human rights, the Holy See has never failed to highlight the importance of such initiatives:

... represent a sure step forward in the promotion and concrete safeguarding of certain of those rights, and seek to guarantee their careful and faithful application. Their ratification

²⁰ AAS LXI (1969), p. 585.

²¹ Cf. *Pacem in Terris*, chap. 4, AAS LV (1963), pp. 291–6; English translation, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis (1963), Part IV, pp. 33–7.

²² Cf. Paul VI, Address at UN Headquarters, 4 October 1965, AAS LVII (1965), pp. 877–85.

will ensure their effectiveness in both national and international circles. The Holy See gives its moral adherence and offers its support to the legitimate and praiseworthy aspirations to which these documents are directed²³.

Taking one step further, whenever legal and moral conditions so permit, the Holy See will make a formal act of adhesion as in the case of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*²⁴.

4.10. On the other hand, when an international assembly meets to draw up a more detailed operational program with *concrete actions* to be undertaken by its members and institutions, especially in the form of restrictions or sanctions, the Holy See generally prefers to maintain the status of “observer” or “non-participant in the voting procedure.” This is a position which is not to be interpreted as avoiding the issue, but comes from awareness of one’s own limits - the Holy See is neither a “power” nor a “nation,” and wants to give full respect to the specific responsibility of others on the level of technique and specific action. An occasion could arise in which there are a number of ways to achieve a specific goal and the Holy See would want to be able to refrain from siding with one party instead of another. Even in these cases, however, the Vatican delegations actively participate in the proceedings. In well balanced terms which reflected the fact that he was fully aware of his own limits in making a detailed evaluation, Paul VI did not hesitate to encourage the general lines of the action being undertaken when speaking to the Special U N Committee on *Apartheid*:

²³ Paul VI, Message to the UN on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1973, AAS LXV (1973), p. 677. English translation, *The Teachings of Pope Paul VI* (1973), pp. 320–1.

²⁴ A similar position was adopted on the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Helsinki, 1 August 1978.

In the quest for the attainment of this full measure of human dignity, men must indeed proceed in certain circumstances and historical situations with particular prudence and wisdom. The degrees of the gradualness with which they proceed must be in proportion to the urgency; there must be a precise plan with a definite time-table. But the cause is urgent and the hour is Late²⁵.

Another example: in his address to the Diplomatic Corps on 14 January 1978, Paul VI called attention to the contradictory positions in which governments that claim to be inspired by democratic principles drawn from their European and western heritage can place themselves:

It is a question of the attempt to create juridical and political foundations in violation of the principles of universal suffrage and the self-determination of peoples which precisely European and Western culture has helped to affirm and spread in the world²⁶.

The constant practical concern of the Holy See in all of these cases is to promote the search for constructive solutions and to discourage violence. Whenever obstinate refusal to accept necessary reforms leads, unfortunately, to violent revolution, the Holy See expends the means at its disposal in an attempt to limit the growth of hatred, to prevent the self-interested exploitation of dramatic situations, and to guide all towards the search for a just peace.

²⁵ AAS LXX (1974), p. 345.

²⁶ AAS LXX (1978), p. 172; English translation, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 26 January 1978, no. 4, p. 7.

5. ACTION ON THE PART OF SOME CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AND SOME CHRISTIANS IN SOCIETY

5.1. In the organized international community the Holy See assures “the representation of the whole of the catholic world”²⁷. It obviously does not do that in the same way that a State represents a specific national population since the Catholic world is universal and the authority which the Holy See exercises over Catholic communities is not like that of a State in terms of nature or the means at its disposal. The Holy See’s interventions in international meetings, however, have more authority to the extent to which they are supported by the action of Christian communities throughout the world and by the influence which Christians exercise under their own responsibility as citizens at various levels of society.

5.2. Even if we were to limit ourselves to the brief period of the Decade which has passed, it would not be possible here to give even a summary presentation of action, initiatives, and accomplishments. Suffice it to give *a few significant examples and general remarks*. We cannot overlook the fact that in the field of racial discrimination as well as in all other areas of social justice Christian communities and their leaders on all levels are vulnerable, like all people and all human groups, to ideas and behavior patterns which are current in the societies in which they live. Their own action must quietly pave its own way amidst numerous constraints which vary from one country to the next: constraints which are

²⁷ *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 7 September 1978, no. 36, p. 4.

due to mentalities or institutions inherited from the past; those which derive from the sociological position of a specific Christian community –at times very weak– or from the field of action in which it can freely operate - at times quite limited; those which arise due to differences and difficulties between Christians; lastly, those which can be ascribed to human frailty or the belated understanding of the social demands of their faith. An awareness of serious past and present deficiencies, delays, contradictions, and timorous action, makes the witness the Church has to offer at one and the same time unpretentious and very strong. The Church is inviting all humankind to undertake a task which first it imposes upon itself.

5.3. The fundamental teaching of the Church on the equal dignity of every person is largely reflected in Christian communities in *an educational perspective* which tends to transfer this teaching into life itself. This concrete insertion in life is an enriching experience for the fundamental teaching as well, since an exchange and comparison of reflections and experiences is stimulating for everyone, including the supreme doctrinal and pastoral authority of the Church. The feedback from communities absorbed in the arduous task of conversion or with seeking the active participation of their members afflicted by racial discrimination endows the common doctrine with a human resonance, a vital penetration, and a new echo.

The first thing we would ask is that all those who have their home in South Africa be looked upon and treated as people, ... This country claims to be a Christian country; one, therefore whose people seek to live by the Gospel of Jesus Christ; this Gospel should be spelled out in the lives of all members of the South African community, by the implementing of the two

Commandments: to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself²⁸.

5.4. The Christian communities generally tend to tackle racial discrimination in the wider context of all the forms of discrimination which nourish it or in which it reveals itself. The necessary doctrinal reminders are becoming increasingly frequent in detailed and exacting action programs. Thus, on 10 February 1977, the plenary assembly of the *South African* Conference of Catholic Bishops issued three declarations which included detailed plans for action to eradicate this evil in the life of the Church as well as in society and its structures. By way of example:

... To strive for the elimination of terms which of themselves or in their South African context, are derogatory and even insulting, even when no slight is intended, such as: "native," "Bantu" (except where this word is unavoidable on official documents), "boy" or "girl" for adults, "nonwhites," "non-Europeans," "location" and "mission" (when used in the sense of parish). And to combat the unnecessary use of racial and national designations that emphasize differences and foster the apartheid mentality.

... To do all in our power to speed up the promotion of black persons to responsible functions and high positions in the church, to encourage them to accept such functions and responsibilities, so that the multicultural nature of the church in South Africa may be clearly recognized, and to provide the training necessary for this purpose.

... To encourage clergy, religious and Lay associations to undertake development work Less exclusively within the Catholic Church and to move towards the whole of society,

²⁸ Open letter from Cardinal McCann to the head of the South African Government, 23 September 1976; (Original text).

showing there the power of the Spirit in union with other Christian churches and in cooperation with Local communities, so as not to further divide people on lines of church affiliation in ordinary citizen and political action, but to promote harmony... It is clear that the black people of the republic have passed the point of no return, and no temporary suppression by violence, only a just sharing of citizenship, can give hope of any safety for the children, black or white, now growing up in the republic, and prevent the horrors of civil war in the future²⁹.

5.5. No one is excluded from this educational effort, and with the patience and charity of Christ the bishops address their message to all. This universalism in no way lessens a resolute commitment on behalf of the victims of injustice; on the contrary, it finds in that very commitment the concrete expression of the truth in which all should live:

People starved of freedom, deprived of their just rights and humiliated in their personal and corporate dignity will not rest until a proper balance of justice is achieved.

We affirm that in this we are on the side of the oppressed and, as we have committed ourselves to working within our church for a clearer expression of solidarity with the poor and deprived, so we commit ourselves equally to working for peace through justice in fraternal collaboration with our other churches, agencies and persons dedicated to this cause³⁰.

5.6. In a very different context, but characterized nonetheless by a sad history in racial affairs, the Church *in the United States of*

²⁹ "Declaration of the Episcopal Conference of South Africa," 10 February 1977. *Origins*, vol. 6, no. 37, 3 March 1977, pp. 581, 583, 584.

³⁰ *Origins*, vol. 6, no. 23, 25 November 1977, pp. 365, 366, 367.

America has promoted a determined effort to combat all forms of discrimination. The pastoral letter on moral values issued by the Episcopal Conference in November 1976 bears eloquent witness to this effort:

... The members of every racial and ethnic group are beings of incomparable worth; yet racial antagonism and discrimination are among the most persistent and destructive evils in our nation. Those victims of discrimination of whom we are most conscious are Hispanic Americans, Black Americans, and American Indians. The Catholic community should be particularly sensitive to this form of injustice because it, too, has experienced prejudice and discrimination in America based on national origin and religion.

It is sometimes said to be pointless to lecture those who are not personally guilty of causing or directly contributing to racism and other ills of society. But the absence of personal fault for an evil does not absolve one of all responsibility. We must seek to resist and undo injustices we have not caused, lest we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in guilt for it ...

Thanks in great part to law and the courts, we have made progress in recent years in removing some social, political, and cultural structures which supported racism. But we are far from final success. For example, the principles of legitimacy, proportionality and restraint have sometimes been violated within our nation. Racial justice in such areas as housing, education, health care, employment, and the administration of justice must be given high priority. The Church, too, must continue efforts to make its institutional structures models of racial justice while striving to eliminate racism from the hearts of believers by reminding them of what it means to be sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. "There is no Greek or

Jew here, circumcised or uncircumcised, foreigner, Scythian, slave or freeman. Rather, Christ is everything in all of you”³¹.

5.7. Special vigilance must be exercised to combat the racist reactions which ordinarily surface in the case of the phenomena of *migrations*. The episcopates in many countries together with various organizations of Christian communities strive to keep people alert, to condemn behavior which is incompatible with the Gospel, to instruct the faithful, and to launch a plea for action.

5.8. Even though they work to bring about the necessary changes in the structures of civil society, Christian communities are not to be mistaken for a political force as such, nor should these communities overlook the difficulties inherent in the task which can be resolved only by the institutions and organizations of civil society itself. *Christians participate in this task side by side with all citizens*, within the limits of their own personal capacity and competence, under their own responsibility, employing the socio-political analyses required for effective action, and accepting the risks, the incertitude, the experimentation, and the intermittent progress which are part and parcel of all political actions.

³¹ “The Moral Values,” pastoral letter from the bishops of the United States, November 1976.

The universal homage rendered to the work of Paul VI in favor of justice and peace and the hopes expressed by numerous heads of State to John Paul I and John Paul II clearly show that a divided humanity expects very much indeed from the Holy See and the Church to surmount the contradictions which are at the roots of that division. The second half of the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination is one of the occasions, within the framework of an overall effort to create a new world order, where this expectation ought to find a direct response.

The horizon of the first message which John Paul I addressed to everyone from the Sistine Chapel on Sunday, 27 August, is the whole world where the mission of the Church is to promote and advance aspirations in *“the service of truth, of justice, of peace, of harmony, and cooperation within nations as well as rapport among peoples.”* The original and irreplaceable contribution of the Church in all of these concrete causes, however, is first and foremost the *“strengthening of the spirit”* which all expect *“and which alone can assure salvation.”* This requires of the faithful that they really be *“the salt of the earth... the light of the world”* (Mt 5:13 ff), seeking their strength and inspiration in the faith and love of Christ and not succumbing to *“ways of the world”* or *“of easily won applause.”* They must be aware that the proclamation of the Good News is the Church’s primary mission, since it brings to men the Gift of God and satisfies their deeply rooted thirst for love and charity because, in the very depths of their distress, the Gospel is already a hope and a power for renewal:

... We wish to remind the entire Church that its first duty is that of evangelization. Our Predecessor, Paul VI, presented the directions for this in his memorable document: animated by faith, nourished by the Word of God, and strengthened by the heavenly food of the Eucharist, one should study every way,

seek every means “in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2), to spread the word, to proclaim the message, to announce that salvation which creates in the soul a restlessness to pursue truth and at the same time offers strength from above. If all the sons and daughters of the Church would know how to be tireless missionaries of the Gospel, a new flowering of holiness and renewal would spring up in this world that thirsts for love and for truth³².

Two months later John Paul II was called upon to assume his mission and develop the same outlook in his own style. Wherever an atmosphere of fear provokes a rigid and adamant stand in any aspect of social life, and especially where there are examples of racism, openness to Jesus Christ who “*knows what is in man*” will prompt an indispensable renewal of the concrete efforts of all men and women.

Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows “what is in man”. He alone knows it³³.

³² First Message to the World by John Paul I, 27 August 1978; AAS LXX (1978), p. 695; English translation, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 31 August 1978, no. 35, p. 6.

³³ John Paul II, homily pronounced during his inaugural Mass, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 October 1978; English translation, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 2 November 1978, no. 44, p. 12.