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The Epiphany, God's Revelation and Self-Gift to All Peoples

The Epiphany of the Lord

6 January 1980

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Dear sisters and brothers, today the Christmas season culminates with a feast that illuminates the whole world with the brightness of the sun. It is the Epiphany. In today's gospel we find things that coincide with our own situation and so can shed light on the path of our national history. The gospel tells us that when the Magi lost their way in Jerusalem, they asked, «Where is the king who is to be born?» Then the gospel tells us, «Herod was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him» (Matt 2:2,3). After consulting, the Magi set out again in their search.

We could say that there was a crisis in the process. Like every crisis, that one could be resolved for the best by those who were sincerely seeking a solution in good faith. For those who were seeking a perverse solution, however, it ended up in sclerotic obstinacy. The disappearance of the star and the need to inquire in Jerusalem were part of the process by which the Magi discovered the right path again, which led them at last to the profound joy they had been seeking. Festered in Herod's heart, on the other hand, were the ambitions of royalty, and he feared, along with others, any political vision that might deprive him of power. In their fright they planned the murder of that child.

In our country today we also find a crisis in the process, and like the Magi, it is time for all of us Salvadorans to ask in good faith, «Where will we find the King that we seek, the true Savior of our country?» We will find him only if we consult the word of God and if we live by faith. Right now, in this liturgy of the Epiphany, the Lord is giving us the marvelous, luminous keys of the solution.

«Epiphany» is a Greek work that means «manifestation». The mystery of the Nativity is a mystery of a God who becomes present in the world and manifests himself to all peoples. It is not enough just to know him in the silence of Christmas Eve, in the company of the humble shepherds and the intimacy of Mary and Joseph. Christ is born to save all peoples, and so he needs to make himself known, to manifest himself. He needs to be «epiphany». That is the meaning of today's celebration.

As the gospel reminds us today, then, we see in those Magi the beginning of a very long procession, and those of us reflecting on this message, here in the cathedral or in other communities, are part of the same procession. We are the Magi of today, of 1980. We are what the Magi were twenty centuries ago: the beginning of recognition of Christ. Blessed are the individuals, blessed are the peoples who keep finding him!

The purpose of the feast of the Epiphany is the manifestation of God so that people will adore him, recognize him, and trust in him because only in him can there be salvation. That's why I was saying that this feast day, which invites all peoples to worship the true Liberator, can be the day for resolving the crisis of our country. It can be the day when the word of God enlightens those who are sincerely seeking a solution. May the Lord grant that this feast of the Epiphany be a star for our people. May our consultation with the word of God shed light on our paths so that we truly emerge from the crisis, so that the process comes to a final resolution.

I want to tell you, though, that on this feast of the Epiphany, as on all our liturgical feasts and Sundays of the year, we come to our cathedral not out of a passing political curiosity. The history of our country is indeed interesting since Sunday after Sunday we find ourselves at different junctures! If politics were our main business on earth, our human journey would be impossibly variable, inconsistent, and inconstant. It would be like that of the opportunists who vacillate with every turn of events. But I repeat: the church does not live from juncture to juncture. The church, guided by the star of faith, moves serenely toward a destination beyond the projects of earth. She pursues goals that will remain, even when the tides of politics have receded.

How inconsistent human beings are when they rely on human means! Those who had trusted in the cabinet that just resigned and thought it would solve every problem must feel disillusioned—it failed completely. Those who trusted in some other regime may feel deflated, perhaps even victims of vengeance. Let us not live by these criteria, sisters and brothers, but let us learn rather how to shine on them eternal light. The Epiphany inspired a wonderful hymn for the church's liturgy, the one that assures King Herod: «Why are you fearful, O Herod? The one who is coming to give us an eternal kingdom will not take from you a temporal one»¹. This is the greatness of Christianity: we don't live by the fleeting fluctuations of earth. That's why I insist that our beloved Christian communities keep strong above all their faith in Christ and his transcendence so that from there they can shed light on what is immanent and transitory.

If we are mistaken in a political judgment, it doesn't matter. Human beings are fallible. What is important is to not be mistaken in matters of faith. What is important is being faithful to the word of the Lord, who directs every turn of events. What is important is having men and women so interiorly renewed in their hearts that their faith inspires them to serve the people through politics and temporal affairs. That is what I ask of the Lord, «Lord, give us politicians and government officials who are people with faith». No matter how profound the change of structures may be, it will be of no use at all unless the new structures are managed by people of faith, by people who know the relative value of junctures and structures and the eternal value of the kingdom of God.

Coming now to shine as brilliantly as the sun and to guide the steps of the Magi—and the journey of all men and women—are the faith and the joy that are born in their hearts at having found Christ, for they know that he never fails them. Their joy stays afloat in every crisis and even in every failure because they know that in the end they can never fail if they have placed their confidence in the One who can save us.

That is why I want to give today's homily a title that I hope is an inspiration for all those who are making this reflection: «The Epiphany: Revelation and Self-Gift of God to All Peoples».

¹ *Crudelis Herodes*, a hymn at vespers on the Feast of the Epiphany.

Let us try to grasp the spirit of this feast day. This is Epiphany: it is revelation and self-gift. God reveals himself and gives himself to all peoples. I will therefore develop this idea with three reflections: first, the Magi as the first fruits of the universal call; second, what God offers and gives to all peoples; and third, the Magi as an example of those who seek and find true liberation.

The Magi as the first fruits of a universal call

First of all, the Magi are the first fruits of every people and all peoples; they are the first fruits of a universal call. Right there in the second reading Saint Paul tells us how happy he feels to be the apostle to the Gentiles. We should remember the enormous division that existed between Jews and Gentiles. It was obvious even in the worship at the temple of Jerusalem, where a large wall marked off the court of the Gentiles. The Jewish people were the chosen children of God, the children of Abraham, those who were going to be saved, and they could not associate with Gentiles, the foreigners they called «dogs». But Saint Paul tells us that «Christ has broken down that wall and made the two peoples into one» (Eph 2:14). Paul announces this great mystery with utter clarity in the letter we read today: «This mystery that had not been revealed to earlier generations was made known to me, just as it is now being revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit», that is, to those responsible for preaching Christ. What is the mystery? «That the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel» (Eph 3:5-6). This is great news!

Dear brothers and sisters who fill this cathedral, we are Gentiles! We do not belong to the Jewish race. We are descendants of primitive pagans who populated these lands hardly five centuries ago, but God was always thinking of us. Who could have told Christopher Columbus that on these virgin lands, teeming with forests and animals and Indians, there would arise our cathedrals, our sanctuaries, our churches, and a Christian civilization? This is the great mystery, that you Indians of America are also called to partake of the birthright of Christ! Likewise, all you Africans and Asians and all the world's peoples are called to share in the heritage of Christ!

The Magi possibly started out from those same Asian lands—maybe even from the problematic Iran—attracted by the news that reached their ears from Jews who had migrated to other lands or perhaps from Jews who had brought Gentiles to the great feasts in the temple of Jerusalem. There they might have heard that an Old Testament prophet had foretold that a star would rise from the house of Jacob. The origin of the star is in prophecy; we cannot find a natural explanation for it. It was part of the traditions of those peoples who knew about stars. The Magi had also heard reports about a king who would arise from the lineage of David and Abraham in Bethlehem: «You, Bethlehem, land of Ephrathah, are not the smallest of tribes because from you shall come the one who is to rule my people, Israel» (Micah 5:1). Another of the oracles of the prophet Micah announces that this kingdom, born in the tiny town of Bethlehem, will extend to «the ends of the earth» (Micah 5:3). Perhaps that was what the Magi had heard, and that was the star they observed in their small dawning of faith. When they heard the news about some angels and shepherds, they set out in search of the Lord.

The gospel speaks about «wise men from the East», and in the light of the feast of the Epiphany we know that a great prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled: «The nations shall walk in your light, and the wealth of the nations shall be brought to you. The dromedaries from Midian and Ephah shall come from Sheba, bringing you incense to burn on your altars» (Isa

60:3,5-6). All these images of the prophets were announcing a mysterious universal kingdom in the midst of a world fractured into petty kingdoms and empires. The prophecies inspired dreams in those with noble hearts: «Where will this great king be born?» When those wise men, guided perhaps by their astrological science, were seeking the one who was to be born, they were simply the first fruits of the fulfillment of the promise.

That's why this feast of the Epiphany is a grand event: it is the day when we celebrate the destruction of that wall that separated the Jews as a chosen people and the other nations as illegitimate offspring. It is the day when the faith has passed beyond tribal lineage. Those who are going to be the people of God are no longer only the children of Abraham according to the flesh; they are children of Abraham because they have the faith of Abraham. And here we have the first fruits, the Magi; though born in the distant East, they also are children of Abraham because they have found the same faith and have found the King.

It seems that what the apostle Saint Matthew wants to explain in this gospel is how Christ was revealed to the Gentiles and how he came to be known and loved and followed by them more than by the Jews. Herod and the Jews who were around his throne were able to indicate where the child would be found, but they showed little interest. Actually, Herod did show some interest: he wanted to know where the child would be born so that he could go and kill him. «He came to his own people, and his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him», even if they were Gentiles, «he gave the power to become children of God» (John 1:11-12).

What God offers and gives to all peoples

And so my second reflection is this: What is being offered by this Christ who is born and manifests himself and makes himself known to the first fruits of the Gentiles? What will he give to all those who come to know him and have the good fortune of following him and loving him? What is God offering and giving to all the nations? I suggest three things, or rather I will reflect on three kinds of things because they are three colossal gifts and should not be confused. First, there are the individual gifts; second, the social gifts; and third, a church that administers these gifts of the Lord.

The individual gifts are mentioned in today's readings. In the gospel we read how the Magi asked, «Where is the newborn king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage» (Matt 2:2). I find in these words a wonderful expression of people who desire to be faithful to their vocation. This is the first gift that God gives, a vocation. Ask yourselves, sisters and brothers, especially you, my dear young people and children: «Is this my star? Where is the full realization of my life? Where does the Lord want me?» We all have a vocation. No woman or man is born without a vocation from God. We all have a place in history, and we realize our own personalities by recognizing that place and developing ourselves there. Let us seek our happiness by always asking what God desires of us.

What else did the Magi do when they found the child? «They bowed down and worshiped him» (Matt 2:11). That is faith. Only faith could reveal to them that a child sitting in his mother's lap was a God, a Redeemer, the King they were seeking. Their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were expressions of faith, the first fruits of the Christian liturgy. We use incense on our altars, gold for our chalices, and myrrh as well, a sign of the redemption that

asks for sacrifice from the people. Our preaching will not be without myrrh, without bitterness, without detachment. That's why it is so difficult for them to understand it.

What else do the Magi receive? The gospel states it explicitly: «When they saw the star again, they were filled with immense joy» (Matt 2:10). That is the great thing missing in our time: joy. There is no joy because there is no faith and because we have not known God, who is the source of joy. This is one of the signs of being close to God, even in the midst of the difficulties of history: being happy because the Lord is near. That's what the Magi felt.

Saint Paul fills in this picture of personal gifts in today's second reading. He says that we have become «coheirs» of the promises that God made to Abraham (Eph 3:6a). The promises are ours once we have faith. We become children of God, Christ will redeem us, and we'll have eternal life. It is not an illusion. The poor folks who have no faith don't understand it, but for us it is the force that motivates our struggles and our efforts; it is why we work harder on earth than anybody. We hope for a reward that will be greater than any dreamed of by those who have no faith and no hope.

Saint Paul writes, «This is the great mystery that I reveal to you, that you Gentiles are members of the same body» (Eph 3:6b). The Gentiles were now being incorporated into Christ. Through the baptism the missionaries brought to these lands, our own indigenous ancestors also became members of Christ, and we are his members as well. What matters now is not race but being a member of Christ. «Now there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or master, not even man or woman. One thing alone matters: being a member of Christ» (Gal 3:28). This is the great equality that Christianity preaches. It is the equality that our problematic national situation so desperately needs: the equality of the children of God.

Saint Paul says that we are «fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel» (Eph 3:6c). Let us love the Gospel more every day since it is the sign that the procession of the Magi continues among us today because we allow ourselves to be carried by the word of the Gospel.

In a nutshell, sisters and brothers, all of us, each of you and myself as well, should be able to feel these gifts of a personal type in the depths of our personality. I invite you today to engage in an exercise similar to that of the Magi. The Council says that all persons have within themselves the secret chamber of conscience, where God comes down to speak with each person and where each person decides his or her destiny. Let us descend today, as the Magi did, to our inner selves, and there we will find Christ, in our hearts. Let us seek him within ourselves, not «out there», and then we will see that we can talk about the role we must play in this historic hour of El Salvador. We have much to give because God is in each one of us.

Then there are the gifts of a social nature, which Isaiah describes beautifully in today's first reading. Addressing «the people who were walking in darkness», he tells them, «Arise and shine, Jerusalem, for your light arrives! The glory of the Lord dawns on you. Darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples, but upon you the Lord shines!» (Isa 60:1-2). The greatest gift that God can give to a people is their faith. Sad is the situation of the people who have no faith and walk in darkness. «Darkness covers them, but on you a bright light shines!»

«The nations come to your light, kings to your resplendent dawn» (Isa 60:3). Blessed are the nations that have Christian leaders! Blessed are the nations whose kings adore the Lord

and King of history and discover in him what God wants for his people: that they not be tyrants over their nations but administrators of the will of the Lord, who desires happiness and light for all.

What other gifts are there of a social nature? There is the universal unity of which Isaiah speaks: «See how all the peoples bring to you their sons and daughters and their riches in recognition of your singular sovereignty» (Isa 60:4-5). Let us reflect that the Catholic faith is infused into the nations not to take away their cultural attributes and ways of being but to purify them and elevate them and give them divine, eternal value. The church in El Salvador doesn't want to impose on us uniformity with the church of Rome or the church of Asia or the church of anywhere else. She respects the gifts of Salvadorans, and being Salvadoran herself, she promotes the history, the values, the fruits, and the labors of Salvadorans. As Salvadoran Christians, we are able to declare, «We are true citizens. Our faith does not make us aliens. To the contrary, it purifies what is great and what is good in every race and every people». That is why the church sends out missions and teaches her missionaries not to practice any kind of imperialism over other peoples and not to impose foreign cultures, but to share with others this faith that purifies the cultures of all peoples.

The liberators who want to impose on us ideologies brought from other places betray our national identity. The church will never betray the people in the same way they're betrayed by an ideology inspired by Marxism or some other doctrine alien to the character of our people. Thanks be to God, Christianity is alive in the depths of the Salvadoran soul, and Christianity provides the seeds for the true advancement and liberation of the Salvadoran people. What Christian faith gives our peoples is a universal unity that respects the great variety of natural traits.

A third consideration is this: what does God give us as a result of the promises we heard in the readings today? He gives us a church responsible for administering these gifts of God to the nations. On this day I am delighted by the figure of Mary holding the child Jesus in her arms and showing him to the worshiping Magi. For me it is a beautiful image of the church giving Christ to the nations. Mary and the church are one and the same. Mary is a magnificent image of the church, and the church sees in Mary the model of what all redeemed souls should be. That is the aim of the church's work. That is why the church and Mary are present in this gift of God's epiphany. It is a way of telling people, «If you want to find Christ, don't stray from the church». Saint Paul told us today that this mystery of God giving himself to all peoples «was revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit» (Eph 3:5). That means it was revealed through the ministers of the church. Through the church the nations will know God and so be redeemed in Christ's redemption.

It is good to keep this great doctrine in mind because the idea is abroad that the hierarchy and the magisterium can be ignored and that the church is just of the people. Certainly, the people are the object of our labors, and it was for the people that Christ founded the church. «But the church», says the Council, is the seed of the kingdom of God that saves all people» (LG 5). The church is God's instrument for announcing his kingdom to all nations.

Beloved Christian communities, I sincerely want you to have clarity about this idea and to cherish it with a holy pride. Being docile to and in communion with the bishop and the pope is not a betrayal of the people; rather, it is a guarantee to the people that God's kingdom is coming to them. (Applause) Please, dear Catholic sisters and brothers, and beloved ecclesial

communities above all, don't stray from the holy apostles and prophets and their teaching. The church received from the Holy Spirit the charge to announce to all peoples that they are called to be redeemed in Christ and to receive all the great gifts of redemption.

The day when a priest or a community or a catechist or a pastoral agent prefers the caprice of the people over the inspiration of the church's teaching, then they are no longer church. They are preaching something very earthly, very human. If people truly want a connection with the teaching that came down from heaven through Christ Jesus, if they want to share in the life and holiness that Christ brought into the world, then they have to use the channel that Christ made available. He told his disciples, «Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me» (Luke 10:16). Christ wants to unite the ministry of his church with our happiness, which results from fidelity to God. I only ask you to pray hard to the Lord so that this church will truly be a faithful servant and so that all of us, as sinful as we are, will experience a strong conversion that makes us ever more faithful instruments in the church of a God who desires to save the world.

The Magi as an example of those who seek and find the Lord

Finally, I offer my third reflection about why God reveals himself and gives himself through the Epiphany. The Magi are an example of those who seek and find the Lord². Not everyone finds the Lord, but the Magi are a marvelous example for us. I think they give us the key for finding happiness in this life. All of you who feel intensely about this time of political crisis in the country should view yourselves in the mirror of the Magi. Even if you're not thinking about the feast of the Epiphany, even if you're not Christian but simply want to get the country out of the mess it's in, I believe you will find in this Christian example of the Magi an example of the politics that will make our country happy and provide the way for it to be redeemed.

First is their detachment, their willingness to move. The Magi saw the star, felt God's call, and set out on the road. This is important. I think many people talk about change in El Salvador, but they don't want to change anything, especially the ones who are most culpable. Those who wield economic power don't want to give up their possessions in order to seek the country's happiness, and so it won't be found. Those who make a god of power want to keep their power; they don't want to share it with the citizens who perhaps are more fit than they are to look out for the good of the people. (Applause) Then there are those who say they have started out on the journey, but that is not enough! What are the political parties and the people's organizations seeking with their tactics? Have they freed themselves of their own ways of thinking so that they can engage in dialogue and join with others in seeking what our country needs? Do they worship themselves, or do they worship the people? (Applause)

This detachment is necessary. The Magi would never have discovered the happiness of knowing the King of the universe if they hadn't left behind their comforts, their palaces, and their thrones (if they really were kings) and if they hadn't set out on what was a long and difficult journey, especially in those days.

But the Magi had a second quality besides detachment: it was their searching, their humble seeking. No one should pretend to know everything. The Magi arrived in Jerusalem and

² The formulation given at the beginning of the homily is: «The Magi as an example of those who seek and find true liberation».

lost their way; they felt the need to inquire of no one less than Herod. He didn't know anything himself and had to consult with the scriptural experts. No one has the truth except God, so that those who want to walk in the path of truth must be humble and seek the truth along with others. In a dialogue we don't impose our way of thinking; by dialogue we find in the views of others what is lacking in our own. In their search the Magi asked, «Where is the king who is to be born?» (Matt 2:2). When we are seeking something as great as the good of our country—or as in the case of the Magi, knowledge of the King of the universe—we do well to kill our self-love and seek the good of the people and the good of the Lord.

Finally, there was a third quality in the Magi besides detachment and seeking, and it was adoration. When they found Christ, they acted as humble men do before the majesty of God. They laid down their crowns and gifts, and bowing down they worshiped him (Matt 2:11). Only this child could be adored; only Christ is the Lord. Blessed are those who fall on their knees before the only One to whom all must bow down! This is a most salutary attitude in the face of the idolatries of our society, which I have often denounced. For now we need only remember that many worshipers of wealth and money will never be capable of adoring God because they are too busy adoring their riches. Meanwhile, the worshipers of power are manipulating the consciences of others in order to satisfy their own ambitions for power. And then there are those who worship their own ideologies, who think only in terms of «my party alone» or «my organization alone». Such idolatries frustrate the saving power of the one God, who alone can save us.

Life of the church

Here, then, dear brothers and sisters, we have the Gospel criteria for living in ecclesial community and for examining the national reality from the perspective of that community.

As regarding some of our church events this week, I want to share in the joy of the community of Tonacatepeque, which last Sunday had beautiful first communion and confirmation celebrations. The offering procession was very original; it resembled the procession of the Magi as they brought the fruits of the earth to the altar as their generous gifts. I also rejoice with the Renewal in the Spirit movement, which brought together more than eight thousand Christians for a massive meeting in the National Gymnasium. Last Sunday the Marriage Encounter movement also had a lovely celebration of the feast of the Holy Family, during which they evaluated their ministry to families and planned for the future. There was also a marvelous ceremony of the catechumenal movement last Sunday, though I wasn't able to attend.

An important bit of church news was the visit of Cardinal Luis Lorscheider³, the archbishop of Fortaleza, Brazil. He spent three days with us. He was coming from Nicaragua and was on his way to Costa Rica. No doubt he had been asked by the Holy Father to gather information on what is happening in Central America. I was quite pleased by his approval of the work we're doing. He told me, «I've read your pastoral letters and some of your homilies, and I see that everything is quite correct». This visit of another envoy of the pope has given me new confirmation of the work our archdiocese is doing. (Applause)

³ The cardinal's first name in Portuguese is Aloísio.

So I also felt great joy when I received yesterday a telegram that pays honor to all of you, and present here at our Mass today are the ones who told me the news in person even before I received the telegram. I want to tell you about it with them present so that they'll see how the news was received here in the cathedral. It was a telegram from Stockholm that read, «Archbishop Romero, San Salvador. Swiss Ecumenical Action has decided to award its 1980 Peace Prize to you and your church for your significant contributions to justice, human rights, and reconciliation. Letter to follow». (Applause)

I want to ask your prayers also for some matters of a more personal nature. A great friend of mine died in San Miguel, Don Joaquín Ernesto Cárdenas. He was a writer, a historian, and a great collaborator of the church in San Miguel. Also, the mother of the ambassador to the Holy See, Doctor Prudencio Lach, died here in San Salvador. We extend our condolences to their families and offer our prayers for the rest of their souls.

Our church here, which is in communion with the universal church, found support this week for its work on behalf of peace. There were marvelous summonses to peace this week both by the pope and by some bishops. After the pope heard on television the speech of the Italian president, the socialist Sandro Pertini, he called him by telephone to congratulate him and to offer support for his statements opposing terrorism and the arms race⁴.

Speaking on January first, the World Day of Peace, the pope also made reference to the nightmare of a nuclear war. The Holy Father said that «a nuclear war would reduce cities and towns to a pile of rubble and would expose people to great and unknown dangers, such as genetic mutations»⁵. He went on to say, «War is always aimed at killing. It is incompatible with humanity. The people of the world must be told about the terrible nightmare that would result from nuclear war»⁶. He cited some statistics and said that «the direct or delayed effects of those explosions could bring about the death of from fifty to two hundred million persons. Nuclear war would cause a drastic reduction of the food supply because of the spread of radioactive residues over cultivated land, and it would also produce substantial alterations in the layers of the atmosphere»⁷. We are not experts in matters of war and armaments, but a pastor must look out for the good of humanity and especially his church. He is responsible for lifting up his voice so that people won't be crazy enough to unleash those destructive forces.

The bishops of Brazil, in their celebration of the Day of Peace and in response to various attacks on the church, also made a call for people to live together more fraternally. One cardinal of Brazil, Archbishop Vicente Scherer, was personally attacked and wounded. While in the hospital he said, «They wanted money, but I only had fifty dollars to buy gasoline». Unhappy with that amount, the assailants began to beat and stab the prelate and then drove off in a car. They left him naked, as you know from the newspapers, but thanks to someone who advised the police, he was able to recover⁸.

Our brother, the archbishop of Nicaragua, also commemorated the first of January and the pope's motto: «Truth, the power of peace». He condemned every form of exploitation of

⁴ *El Diario de Hoy* (3 January 1980).

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily for the Feast of the Holy Mother of God, World Day of Peace», 1 January 1980, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (6 January 1980).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *El Diario Latino* (2 January 1980).

people by individuals or by the state. He condemned the manipulation of the communications media as contrary to the freedom of the individual. Archbishop Obando says that «those who return hatred for hatred are not human beings but beasts. Neither hatred nor brutality nor vengeance will bring us peace»⁹.

On January first the bishops of Spain jointly issued a letter referring to the problem of violence: «We feel that it is our duty to write this letter in the interests of bringing peace to our people. May God make our offer to help an effective means for the full attainment of peace»¹⁰. Please pay attention to this. I hope those who feel fond of violence will pay keen attention to what the bishops say: «We address those among us who have come to believe that armed violence is necessary in order to transform the socio-political reality according to their ideals, and we call on them to desist from that position. We cannot accept that the future of our people should result from the imposition of the will of those who use violence simply because they have the strength to do so. Open yourselves, rather, to reasonable criticism, and seek realistic paths for establishing the just order that our people need»¹¹.

On this Epiphany we find the world convulsed, and now there is the international threat posed by Russia's invasion of Afghanistan. In our country as well there has been a spiral of violence that has taken the form of murders, acts of arson, attacks on the headquarters of the Guard, and military operations. All this makes us ask the Lord, as did the Magi, «Where is our Lord, the King of peace?» We find ourselves facing a situation that we need to analyze carefully in order to draw lessons from it.

Events of the week

You all know the facts, but let's sum them up briefly. Remember that in my homily last Sunday I commented that there was a discernible crisis within the government itself; there were accusations that the armed forces and the oligarchy were moving the government to the right. On the night of Sunday the thirtieth we heard the statement issued by a majority of the cabinet and other government officials to the permanent council of the Armed Forces. They conditioned their continued service in and collaboration with the government on the Armed Forces' taking measures to correct the rightward-swing of the government and on their returning to the policies proclaimed on October 15, the same ones to which the ministers had made their commitment.

The reasoning of the ministers is clear: «The present command of the Armed Forces is not the command with which the original agreement regarding a new political project was made. The heads of the Ministry of Defense and certain commanders of military posts are in practice exercising military power over the junta and are acting contrary to the proposals of the movement that the junta organized among the young officers»¹². Among other things, the cabinet was asking that the young military officials make it clear who is in charge. This denunciation of a parallel government vying with the junta helps to explain many of the deplorable actions we have seen in these days.

⁹ *El Mundo* (4 January 1980).

¹⁰ Actually, it was a pastoral letter of the bishops of the Basque Country. *Ecclesia* 1965 (1980) 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² «Government Cabinet, Magistrates of the Supreme Court of Justice, and Officials of the Autonomous Institutions Address the Armed Forces through the Mediation of COPEFA», *ECA* 375-376 (1980) 117-119.

On Monday the thirty-first several members of the cabinet asked for the intervention of the archdiocese, so the archdiocese convoked the governing junta and the officials who signed the document to a meeting on January 2. That meeting was held in a friendly, informal manner on January 2, as you can read in today's issue of *Orientación*¹³. It was a simple exchange of impressions. I participated as a representative of the many people who have confidence in the church and in my capacity to represent the archdiocese. My role was to cast the light of the Gospel directly on the situation and to ask that there be a completely frank discussion that would seek out the root cause of the problem. For the sake of what is good for the people, they needed to define the points of convergence and divergence and seek to overcome the existing division.

I asked them to fulfill the commitment they made with the people and not to defraud once again the people who have lived so long with disillusionment. I thanked them for their good will in accepting my invitation. Of course, I take for granted that my intervention can be misinterpreted, but let it be clear that my aim was to provide a pastoral and evangelical service at a critical moment for our country, and I'm satisfied it was so.

My last recommendation to that honorable gathering was that they not act on the basis of emotion or herd instinct but that they listen to their own consciences and that each one, guided by his critical conscience, do what he must do, and we would respect his decision.

But no sooner was this meeting concluded than the radio was broadcasting the response of the Permanent Council of the Armed Forces, which had decided to meet that same afternoon at three o'clock¹⁴. I don't think the council even bothered to send their answer to the ministers; the ministers had to request it.

The resignations followed quickly¹⁵. Our Catholic radio station YSAX made the following commentary on the resignations:

Why did they resign? The minority said, «In order to leave the government free to reassign their posts in the junta's reorganization of the cabinet». In a sense, they were resigning out of courtesy or good political manners. But most of the members of the junta, including ministers, sub-secretaries, and state functionaries, resigned in a negative manner, out of protest.

They resigned as a protest against the High Command of the Armed Forces, which according to them had betrayed the spirit of October 15 and the proclamation of the Armed Forces and which was now serving the interests of the economic oligarchy. The resignation of all these persons was meant as a protest against the Armed Forces for the way in which their High Command is proceeding. That was their intention, and that is how it should be understood.

¹³ «Service Offered by the Church in the Present Crisis of Government», in *Orientación* (6 January 1980).

¹⁴ *La Prensa Gráfica*, (3 January 1980).

¹⁵ On 31 December 1979 the Minister of Labor, Gabriel Gallegos Valdés, resigned. On 2 January 1980 the Ministers of Education and of Agriculture, Salvador Samayoa and Enrique Alvarez Córdova, resigned, along with several high officials. On January 3 the civilian members of the Revolutionary Governing Junta, Guillermo Manuel Ungo and Román Mayorga Quirós, resigned, along with the remaining ministers except for the Minister of Defense, Colonel José Guillermo García. Finally, on January 4 the last remaining civilian in the junta, Mario Antonio Andino, also resigned. *El Mundo* (2 January 1980); *La Prensa Gráfica* (3 and 4 January 1980); *El Diario de Hoy* (5 January 1980).

The resignation is also a refusal to continue participating in an ethically questionable project, one that prefers to repress the people rather than to solve their problems. Those who resigned are thus refusing to keep taking part in a political project that is becoming more anti-popular by the day.

This is the general tone, expressed more or less strongly, in the letters of resignation. These letters censure and reject the maneuvers of some military officials who have been well identified in the course of events, and they call for a sincerely radical political project that truly favors the people.

With these resignations, then, what we have in practical terms is just a military government reduced to two colonels and the one minister who did not want to resign, the Minister of Defense, which is also very significant.

Finally, in the midst of all this we have learned that the Christian Democratic Party has been invited to offer an alternative solution and that it has proposed a series of conditions: first, at the political level; second, at the socio-economic level; and third, at the level of the military. The party states that their plan «would not be contrary to the proclamation of the Armed Forces but would develop it further and make it concrete, nor would it be contrary to the ministerial document of December 28»¹⁶.

This is the way things stand. Given this situation, several questions naturally arise. Has the door that was opened by the coup now been closed? For two months, as YSAX stated, that door was kept open by a group of honest, reputable persons even though it was battered by wind gusts from the left and the right. Is there now no hope? What will happen with the agrarian reform process that was begun? Will the new cabinet continue to implement it? Will the new Minister of Agriculture make it a primary objective, or will he fear the threats of those who opened fire on the house of the ex-minister, Don Enrique Álvarez? That was something no newspaper reported. What will happen with the nationalization of the foreign sales of coffee and sugar? And most importantly, what will happen with the famous abolition of ORDEN? Will it remain active, or will it be resurrected with another name, as was recently announced by a general¹⁷? ORDEN has in fact continued to operate, and it recently renewed its attacks with support from a National Guard post. And what will happen with the pressing problem of political prisoners and disappeared persons?

We feel distressed also by the Investigatory Commission's statement that they are hurrying their report because, «given the events of the last few days, the mission that was entrusted to us appears to be ineffective. For this reason we believe that it is opportune that we conclude our labors as soon as possible and declare this commission dissolved»¹⁸. In the end, the people are left with their anguish.

Considering all these questions, I would like right now to reaffirm my conviction, as a man of hope, that a new ray of salvation will shine forth, and I want to encourage this conviction in those who are kind enough to hear me. No one has the right to sink into despair. We all have the duty to unite and seek out new channels and keep our Christian hope alive. These events and these questions lead me to make a pastoral appeal, and that is my intent in

¹⁶ *El Mundo* (5 January 1980).

¹⁷ General José Alberto Medrano. *La Prensa Gráfica* (27 December 1979).

¹⁸ *El Diario de Hoy* (4 January 1980).

what I am about to say to you. What must be saved before all else is the process of our people's liberation. The people have begun a movement that has already cost them much blood, and their sacrifices cannot be allowed to go to waste. This movement is in crisis, but it must be saved and it must succeed. That has to be our goal. Considering today's gospel, we would say that the one star guiding our people, our government, and the diverse sectors should be this one: how can we make sure that the people's movement toward social justice does not stagnate or atrophy but instead is saved and advanced?

From this perspective, then, I address my words first of all to those who have power in this country and are responsible for the government, namely, the Governing Junta along with the Armed Forces. There must be a sincere return to and greater clarity about the objective to be pursued. The duty of all authority is to be a moral force which makes the diverse social forces work together for the common good while respecting the freedom and the diversity of the people. This is the great task that lies before us.

I want to remind the government that at this moment there are two foundations on which unity can rest. One is the Armed Forces, which means seeking to orient everything toward saving the Armed Forces; this in no way is being true to the people. (Applause) The other foundation is the common good of the people. There is also a call to unity in the people's organizations. If the government responds to the people's desires, then surely the forces of all sectors will be united to save our people. (Applause)

I want to address some words to the ministers and the other officials who resigned. At first they were accused of being precipitous, of acting out of emotion, of being surprised by some political maneuver for power. Before all else I want to say that we owe them thanks for their service and for the talents they have devoted to helping the people progress. To judge their actions it is necessary to enter into their consciences, but only they can do that. For my part, I believe what they said in their statements about their different reasons for resigning. The minority said that they were leaving their posts out of loyalty, so that the government would be free to choose new persons. But they agreed that they could not continue working since there was a parallel government that had deviated from the initial process and was accompanying the reforms with cudgels. They reaffirmed their desire for change within a peaceful, democratic, and orderly society. The cabinet members and high government officials, such as Ungo and Mayorga Quirós, were for a long time called «traitors» and «sell-outs» by many people, but now that they've resigned, they are seen as fine, honest people. (Applause) In this respect, I want to ratify the judgment I feel these persons deserved from the beginning. Their background was honest and clean, and I was convinced that because of their integrity they would not let themselves be manipulated; they would know how to say «no» at the right time. Let us thank them for their testimony. (Applause)

Those who resigned out of loyalty also offer reasons for hope, which should goad the government to seek a solution along the lines they initially promised. I therefore believe that the Minister of Defense should also resign in all honesty, to make it clear that the true good of the people is the government's aim. (Applause) His remaining in office, besides projecting abroad a poor image of the government and the Armed Forces, may also present a real problem for the government itself. (Applause)

I respect, I truly respect the decision of the ministers who judged these matters from within the government. We can judge from outside, but they experienced those two months

from within and so can judge better. Their judgment is a clear call to stop deceiving the people, which means that they are now called to be ready to support the people in their struggles for their rights. They should not feel that their taking leave of the government is a sign of failure; rather, it is a strategic retreat so that they can return to the task of helping our people advance. (Applause)

I also have some clear words for the Armed Forces. At the heart of the Armed Forces' response to civilians there seems to me to be an exaggerated idolization of the institution itself. You need to be aware, dear soldiers, that every institution, including the army, has to serve the people. The good of the people is what determines the ways in which institutions should change their infrastructures and regulations. Every institution should be ready to accept changes when the good of the people requires them. Absurd tenets of hierarchy should not be allowed to smother the aspiration of the people. We can say the same about laws and other codes, which can turn out to be anachronistic, irrelevant, and senseless if they are not truly adapted to the present time and the actual needs of the people we serve. It is this disinterested service of the people, along with real changes in structures, that will bring about the genuine unity that the Armed Forces are calling for.

There is still the temptation to move to the right, and the oligarchy has long had the bad custom of manipulating the army as they wish to defend their interests against the people. As long as this is so, everything else will be a myth. But I am convinced that in the Armed Forces there are people who are noble, sincere, and just; there are people who can resist that temptation and can sympathize with the people rather than just think exclusively of their institution. I also want to say that it is not enough just to say you are innocent and not moving toward the right. What we hope to see is deeds. The deeds we have seen so far have spoken of repression and manipulation, a lot of manipulation, on the part of the oligarchy. (Applause)

In this regard, Legal Aid has received various complaints, and these must be acted on in the name of human rights, which will always be the star that guides the church in these matters. On Saturday, December 29, soldiers of the army, the National Guard, and the Treasury Police, along with members of ORDEN, invaded the villages of El Terrero, Conacaste, San José El Amatillo, and other villages in the jurisdiction of Las Vueltas in the department of Chalatenango. Leftist groups had previously killed former members of ORDEN. Such vengeful acts must be condemned, but so must military operations that far exceed the needs of defense. The military occupation lasted until December 31 and resulted in the deaths of the *campesinos* José Alas and Amanda Rodríguez from the village of El Terrero and of Próspero Guardado and Victor Manuel Guardado from the village of La Laguna. The soldiers also arrested Próspero Melgar and Josefina Guardado. A two year old girl and another girl eight years old were taken to an unknown location. The troops also destroyed the houses of several *campesinos*, hacked to death pigs and other domestic animals, and stole corn, beans, clothing, and other things. We request an investigation of these acts, punishment for those guilty of them, and also freedom for those arrested.

Another military operation, in response to the attack on the National Guard, left several dead and many wounded. Also in Divina Providencia parish in the Colonia Atlacatl, the door to the rectory was needlessly forced open and the property searched—again needlessly, since it is the house of the priests.

I also offer some words for the people's political and military organizations. You possess both social and political force. I have already recalled the Medellín text which states that the people must organize and put pressure on the government to do things that often will not be done without the support of social forces (M 2,18). The organizations, which we have defended in our pastoral letters, are legitimate ways for our people to seek participation in politics. But for that very reason I want to reaffirm the appeal I have made: that organizational force not be used abusively. Your organizations should attune their tactics and their strategies to the service of the common good. The call to dialogue that has already been made and that I have often repeated from this pulpit is more timely than ever today. My hope is that all the organizations will be motivated to collaborate in the liberation of the people and that they will take part in a frank dialogue that seeks what is truly good for all people of good will. You have seen the sincerity of the government officials who resigned. I think that that should open your eyes so that you stop being so dogmatic and open yourselves up to dialogue out of love for our dear people.

Among the people themselves there is not really any extreme right or extreme left, and I want to congratulate the people for this. Even though they need the support of social forces, they have not relied on any of those groups that promote violence and mayhem. Our people are very sensible. Our people know how to discern. They know that a false redemption is not true redemption, and they are awaiting those who can offer them the true liberation they need. Considering this, I appeal to all of you who form that huge gamut between the two extremes to seek ways to participate in the shared political tasks of our people. Seek your vocation, and reflect on our reality in the light of God's word. Now is a time when the people have to be ingenious and inspire new initiatives. They need not just follow the established channels; there are other channels into which our profoundly Christian people can be led by Christian inspiration. In saying this I am simply repeating what Medellín recommended: there is a need to raise people's consciousness, a need for people to organize, and a need for people to participate actively so as to be architects of their own destiny instead of just passive spectators (M 2,18). I believe that those who want to govern for the people's own good must rely on the sincere participation of the noble people of El Salvador. They should not simply use the people's name as a ladder for rising to power and then pay no attention to the true people, who are the ones that government must serve.

Finally, I make an appeal to the oligarchy. I repeat to them what I said before: «Do not consider me either judge or enemy. I am only the shepherd, the brother, the friend of this people. I know of their suffering, their hunger, and their anguish». In the name of their voices I raise my own voice to say, «Do not worship your riches. Do not amass them in a way that lets others die of hunger. Share them in order to be happy». Cardinal Lorscheider expressed this to me with a colorful image: «You have to take off your rings so they don't cut off your fingers!» I think everyone understands what he means. Those who don't want to take off their rings are in danger of having their hands cut off. Those who don't want to share out of love and a sense of social justice run the risk of having their wealth taken from them by violence. (Applause)

We have a concrete case to denounce this week. On January 3 it was publicly announced to the workers at GRIVAL and FUTESA that the companies could no longer stay in business; those workplaces would therefore close, leaving more than a hundred families without income¹⁹. I know that the owners of those companies can keep them going; they don't always

¹⁹ *El Mundo* (3 January 1980).

have to make the profits of better times. Instead, why don't they take what they earned previously and contribute to the common sacrifice that is being asked today in the history of El Salvador so that these people stay afloat, so that there is not more hunger and more misery, so that we can keep seeking out paths toward a solution?

Like Herod's Jerusalem, our country is also in a state of alarm. Both rulers and citizens are alarmed as we face the future. But we are a church of hope, and like the Magi we know that the solution can be found. Today we have pointed out several paths that the political experts need to follow if they want to encounter the true Liberator of the people. This is my principal message to all sectors of the country: «Open up space for Jesus Christ. Let the King of peace enter it. Submit to him with the humble hearts of the Magi. If we look for him, then we will truly find the solution for our country».

This is what the feast of the Epiphany means for El Salvador: God has called us to salvation and to happiness, and God cannot deceive us. But God *does* ask us to free ourselves up, to seek him, to be humble, to consult with others, and to be detached even from what we love most so that we can find what is worth most: the Lord and the happiness of our people. Let it be so! (Applause)