

A MOMENT OF DIGNITY

The Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference of Chile*

1. We have listened to the President of the Republic inform the country about the Report on Political Imprisonment and Torture, the fruit of some diligent work by a Commission, led by Monsignor Sergio Valech and made up of a dedicated group of persons.

2. We know, through the experience we had as a Church during the years referred to in the Report, that reviving painful experiences has not been easy for anyone, and particularly for those who were victims of traumatic episodes that wounded them to their very soul and had painful repercussions on their family and social life.

3. Political imprisonment and torture produced an existential breakdown that was very difficult for the victims to overcome. Because of this, we will repeat the message of the Latin American bishops in 1979: "Physical and psychological torture, kidnapping, the persecution of political dissidents or those suspected of being political dissidents and their exclusion from public life because of their ideas are always to be condemned". (Puebla Document, N° 531). They wound not only the victims but also the soul of our civilised co-existence.

4. Vatican Council II declared that "all the crimes against life itself (..), everything that violates the integrity of a human being, such as mutilation, physical or mental torture, including attempts at spiritual coercion, (..) all the things that offend human dignity are blemishes that while they certainly deface human civilisation in fact debase those who commit them more than those who suffer the injustice " (GS 27). Because of this we cannot also forget the shame and repentance of those responsible for the suffering of others, because sometimes they acted under pressure and also because they have been burdened with this great weight on their conscience for such a long time.

5. The look at our past confirms a sad truth about our faith. The mystery of iniquity exists. Human beings, as has been shown at painful moments in history, are capable of turning their worst feelings and actions against their neighbour. It is an experience that makes it the more urgent for us to admit within us the Gospel of Our Lord, so as to always become close to others with our heart and our feelings.

6. Our past, seen truly through the eyes of justice, is a road that should fill us with compassion and forgiveness: to strengthen our encoun-

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ter as sons of the same God the Father and of the same land, to gaze with dignity towards the future and to be able to cement together a co-existence on a solid base that is directed towards the common good of all Chileans.

7. We value the step taken by those people, who have opened their memory and their hearts to share their painful history in this report. We regret and repudiate, once again, the injustice that they have suffered, and, as shepherds of souls, we are available, in the same way as yesterday, to welcome them and help them on their road.

8. This is a moment for national dignity. This is what we feel and we invite all Chileans, especially those who have greater responsibilities in public life, to welcome this step with their heads held high, with serenity and without pettiness, and with all of us looking for the good of our country.

9. During this time of Advent, which prepares us for remembering the historic birth of the Son of God in the midst of humanity and invites us to fix our gaze on the horizon of eternal life, we call for forgiveness and ask Him to accompany us on this process of reconciliation and encounter, to nourish our feelings of brotherhood, and to bless us with the precious gift of Peace. We entrust these intentions to Santa Maria de la Esperanza, the Mother of Chile.

THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF CHILE

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