

Pope supports Ibero-American unity

Pope John Paul II received on Dec. 6 a group of former prime ministers and chiefs of state from Latin America, who were in Rome participating in a conference. His address is given below in translation.

Your Excellencies:

Whenever my thoughts return to the vast regions of Latin America, the sentiment is renewed in my heart, which in that young and beautiful continent can be awakened as something that belongs to it, and that sentiment is hope.

Your reverent visit today brings this special sentiment to my spirit, and the intimate pleasure of knowing the ideal of friendship between your nations and of Latin American unity—an ideal that is worthy of achievement with all efforts and sacrifices, by deliverance and renunciation.

The Church also lives, and very deeply, in Latin America. In the general Conference of the Episcopacy, celebrated in Medellín and Puebla de Los Ángeles, an apostolic and pastoral plan of action, of vast and profound dimensions, has been drawn up, fundamentally orienting to the spiritual invigoration of the brotherhood and unity of all the people of your continent, who have a common cultural, historical, and religious substratum.

Many of the circumstances of the present day prevent the development and renewal of those meetings oriented not only to conserving that which underlies Latin American unity, but to integrating it more fully into the future, in accord with the principles of reciprocity, solidarity, and effective collaboration. There is one action which has been a particular relief in these last years: the return of various Latin American countries to democratic constitutional rule. Permit me to express, in this respect, the anxious desire that this action, reviewed in the history of Latin America, have a new and more profound significance in the sense that this transition is conducive to invigorating and consolidating the ties of cultural, political, and economic unity among your countries, and that thus there may be born a more efficacious cooperation, to confront the grave problem of injustice and misery: At the same time, may it favor the integral promotion of human beings, teaching them of their rights and always respecting their dignity.

One factor of the economic order that today aggravates the situation of poverty and social inequality in vast sectors of the Latin American world, is that of the foreign debt. Concerning this preoccupying question, I wish to reiterate what was expressed at the General Assembly of the United Nations on the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Charter of the United Nations. The question of foreign debt has become expanded into a problem of political cooperation and economic ethics. The economic, social, and human cost of this situation is frequently what places entire countries on the edge of rupture. For the rest, neither the creditor nations nor the debtor nations gain anything, if desperate situations fall apart and become totally uncontrolled. Justice and the interests of all demand that, at the world level, the situation be examined globally, and in all its dimensions, not only economic and monetary, but also social, political, and human.

Thus, to confront the gravity of this problem, it is necessary to put greater vigor and efficacy into the principle of unity and Latin American integration. This is a noble ideal, demanding the efforts of everyone together, to find remedies to the ills that afflict so many persons of that continent. . . . I think of so many youth who are presented with a somber future, lacking in authentic spiritual values, when they are not inducted into the terrible affliction of drug addiction. Also in this area, the necessity is imposed to adopt a plan of legal cooperation on the regional and continental level to achieve the most efficacious means to combat narco-traffic.

On my apostolic visits to your nations, I have seen the depth of the social crisis that affects them, and the danger that they run of a social policy that is intended to overcome the crisis by means of violence, such as occurs in some regions, where certain groups and movements leave a trail of sadness and death where they pass. But on those same visits, I have also been convinced that Latin America is precisely the region of the developing world in which there is a spiritual, social, and cultural reality whose values make it possible to overcome the crisis by the routes the Church inspires with its social doctrine. Let this horizon of hope of a peace that is the fruit of justice, open the minds of the men who govern and of political leaders, to induce them to the indispensable actions to destroy the spiral of violence at its roots.

In this, the end of the Second Millennium, when we are preparing to commemorate the Fifth Centenary of the beginning of the evangelization of Latin America, I vow that the children of that beloved continent of hope, faithful to their noblest traditions and their Christian roots, may walk by the way of reconciliation and fraternity in a common effort to succeed in overcoming the division in favor of the hoped-for unity.

Your Excellencies, in recompense for this visit, I express to you my greatest desire for the happy success of the works you are in the process of realizing, while I invoke upon each of you, your collaborators, families, and the beloved nations which you represent, the blessings of the Lord.