

## Church, García call for unity on the debt issue

by Robyn Quijano

While the Latin American Parliament met in Lima, Peru on Jan. 17, a few miles away in Callao, cardinals and bishops were meeting to discuss "Reconciliation, and the New Evangelization." The meeting of representatives of the continent's democracies, did not discuss theological matters, but the bishops did discuss politics, what they called the principles of grand politics, from which the Church cannot be absent: the fight for true liberation, that is, for the dignity of man in the image of God.

The deputies and bishops agreed on crucial issues: The continent must unite, if it is to survive, and there must be an immediate solution to the debt crisis, based on the dignity of man and his inalienable right to life. Much of this had been said before in summits, and political conferences since the debt bomb nearly exploded in 1982. But this time, the Catholic Church is deployed to organize on the principles laid out at the Extraordinary Synod in Rome in December: The debt problem is a problem of economic ethics, and peace will only be brought to the region through economic development.

A "crusade" has been launched both by the Vatican and Peruvian President Alan García to assure the survival of the populations threatened by the current, usury-centered economic order.

The Peruvian President, who has met with Pope John Paul II twice since his election last April, addressed the delegates of the continent's democracies: "All isolated efforts by our countries will not have the same results as if we unite efforts and undertake a great continental crusade. . . . Without Latin America there can be no democratic revolution in Peru, but only better administration of its poverty; but technological revolution and unbounded development for our people and their aspirations will only take place to the degree we can forge with other Latin American peoples a homogeneous concept of continental revolution. And the key to that

revolution is the unity of our America, unity without which any national effort would be ephemeral, perhaps episodic, or would rest on a precarious foundation."

He called for creation of a "Latin American Executive," the first step toward which must be a summit of the continent's heads of state, he insisted.

"If America already has its parliament," said García, "it now needs a meeting of Presidents which can take on the substantive problems, the first of these being the foreign debt and the second being disarmament. . . . It is impossible for us to continue looking at one another in enmity, in rivalry, remaining a continent in which consciousness of its own unity has not yet been born. . . . As long as we are not united, each day that passes is one more day of treason against the people of Latin America."

Through the unequal exchange of Ibero-America's raw material exports for capital goods, the continent's foreign debt "has already been paid many times over," said García. The debt today "reflects and encompasses the subordinate, dependent, and colonial history of Latin America. Without a total, absolute and final response to the problem of the foreign debt, democracy is mere appearance, mere formality."

García also called for a common currency, for more intra-regional trade, and for "an economic and monetary entity . . . which, little by little, makes us free . . . of conditions such as credits with strings attached [like those of the] the supranational and supracontinental IMF [International Monetary Fund]. . . ."

When Pope John Paul II addressed a group of former Ibero-American Presidents on Dec. 6, he also called for economic unity of the continent "to confront the grave problem of injustice and misery." "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. . . . Let the 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. . . . I vow that the children of that beloved continent of hope, faithful to their noblest traditions and their Christian roots" may achieve that unity.

García's continued organizing for a Presidents' summit thus has crucial Vatican backing. Panamanian President Eric Delvalle returned from the inaugural ceremony of Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo, a Christian Democrat, to declare that preparations for García's proposed presidential summit are "well underway," and will be of "transcendent historical importance." He emphasized that a preliminary meeting of foreign, and possibly finance, ministers of the continent is slated for March 6-9, to be held in Punta del Este, Uruguay. He added, "An important number of countries are openly interested in the meeting, although now is not the moment to name them."

Delvalle's caution reflects awareness of an attack against the summit and its sponsors that is being pushed by forces both within and outside Ibero-America.

### **Argentina vs. IMF**

The Argentine General Confederation of Workers (CGT) which held a general strike on Jan. 24, released the following communiqué: "Until the [Argentine] government takes a clear and dignified position as the President of Peru took with valor and patriotism, the position of the Argentine workers will be constant resistance to the looting of the product of our labors and of our goods. Our drama is common to all our brothers in what should be the great Latin American fatherland, and we take this initiative so that the year 2000, that is, tomorrow, will find us free and united, promoting the mobilization of all the workers of Latin America."

The CGT declared before the strike: "We are going to strike for 24 hours to take off the straitjacket we have been locked in by the IMF, with the acquiescence of the government."

CGT president Saul Ubaldini spoke to 1,000 strike delegates, calling on workers "to fight to confront the IMF," since the labor movement "does not take orders from Rockefeller." He said that the cost of living has gone up 59% since June, but the government is offering only 5% wage increases. He emphasized that the strike was to reactivate the productive apparatus, not just for wages.

Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín, who promised before he was elected not to starve his population, capitulated to IMF dictates, and has lost popular support. And the model of Alan García, who fulfilled his electoral promises and stood up to the IMF, has captured the imagination of the Argentines. A week before the strike, posters appeared throughout Argentina, with a small Argentine child saying, "Beloved Fatherland, give me a President like Alan García."

In other nations like Mexico and Venezuela, where oil price drops have wiped out billions of expected export earnings, making the criminal levels of austerity already imposed on the populations inadequate for required interest payments, the President who blasted the injustice of collapsing terms of trade, and began paying only 10% of his nation's export earnings for the debt, is the model of what can be done.

Leaders of nations that have paid the debt with hunger, appear as cowards and even traitors in the light of the new crusade. In this context, the Vatican's battle against immorality in economics, against Adam Smith and the invisible hand, as well as against Marxism and theology of liberation, has sparked a shift toward optimism, and a clarity on how to move the IMF fight forward in the continent's largely Catholic population.

The final document of a Venezuelan bishops' conference held in early January, insists: "The State, despite the reduction in oil [revenues], has the dollars and bolivars to promote economic development where the Venezuelan people would have access to creative labor which dignifies it, instead of [the state] succumbing to pressures to pay the foreign debt."

The bishops also linked the crisis of unemployment with capital flight. "It is said that in foreign banks there are deposited some \$35 billion belonging to Venezuelans . . . the equivalent of the country's foreign debt. There can be no doubt that this flight capital is directly related to unemployment and lack of investment in Venezuela. The decision on its use was neither then nor now exempt from moral obligation. This money, returned, could open up many sources of employment and encourage production of goods and services."

"The exaggerated capitalist criteria of our businessmen are also noteworthy. They want profits of over 50% on their investments. This favors disinvestment and thus, unemployment." Banks are not investing all their deposits. "Most of the national territory and natural resources are waiting for the talent which puts the requisite capital and labor at the service of the human person," concludes the document.

### **Foreign debt and Social Darwinism**

Colombian Cardinal López Trujillo declared at the Callao conference on Reconciliation on Jan. 17, that the Catholic Church has launched "a great crusade for peace and dialogue. We are soldiers, defending these principles, and Pope John Paul II is our great standard bearer," he said. The Cardinal also addressed the problem of foreign debt, saying that "If the road is not opened to dialogue, and if the rich countries are not sensitive to the problems of the poor countries, the world runs the grave danger that the law of 'Social Darwinism' be fulfilled, the law that establishes that in the animal world only the strongest in the fight for life survive."

In contrast the Cardinal preached an end to the "Epicurean" model, and a "reconciliation with God," in which a total conception of man, man making his own history, must prevail.