

the end of 1985. By so doing, the Catholic Church is intervening into the core of the international strategic fight today. As Ratzinger told a Rome seminar that took place Nov. 19, 1985, the unpayable international debt burden is a problem as explosive, and potentially as dangerous to human survival, as the threat of thermonuclear confrontation. This was the same seminar in which Ratzinger issued his devastating attack against the "immorality" of "free market" economic ideology, and the legacy of Adam Smith, which he charged with responsibility for the mess of the international economy and financial system today.

The concluding *Pastoral Message* issued by the Synod thus promised that the Church must and would involve itself in the "international debt situation." Even before the *Message* was issued, the Pope was telling Ibero-American heads of state in December to unify their continent as a precondition for coming to grips with its destructive indebtedness. In July of this year, during his historic trip to Colombia, the Pope questioned whether it is just for the world's poorest and most underdeveloped countries to be crippled by a foreign debt that totaled \$970 billion in 1985. He made similar statements during his visits with political leaders in Peru, Ecuador, and Venezuela.

His efforts were echoed by the Latin American Episcopal Conference, which maintained Nov. 15 that "the Latin American debt cannot be paid" at current schedules, and proposed to investigate alternatives to the rule of the International Monetary Fund. The Bishops contended that another way to deal with the debt must be found, unlike the IMF methods which merely serve to create greater impoverishment.

This activity is culminating in the encyclical or pastoral letter which, it was announced Oct. 1, the Pope has commissioned for sometime in the immediate future. The Italian monthly *Trenta Giorni* reported that John Paul had ordered the Vatican to prepare a document examining the moral aspects of the Third World's massive foreign debt. This was later confirmed, on Dec. 11, by Cardinal Cegare of the Justice and Peace commission. Cegare told a Vatican news conference that such an encyclical or pastoral letter would be issued shortly, and that it would be "in the wake of *Populorum Progressio*." This was the 1967 encyclical of Pope Paul VI which had called for the creation of a new international monetary and economic order, in which the IMF would be supplanted by a new international lending institution committed to the development—and not the impoverishment—of the Third World.

### The dignity of man

Speaking the same day, the Pope himself confirmed that he categorically opposes "any policy which contradicts the fundamental dignity and human rights of each person, or group of persons," seeing such a policy as "one which must be rejected." Concerning the debt now suffocating the developing sector, John Paul stated: "The foreign debt of the developing sector must be looked at with new eyes. . . ." Ech-

oing *Populorum*, which coined the phrase that "development is the new word for freedom," John Paul added: "Development is a question of men. Man is the subject of true development, and the aim of true development is man."

Making the same anti-IMF point as the Latin American bishops, the Pope went on to say that one must reject programs which, under the mask of "aid, force communities . . . to accept contraception and abortion as the price for development."

### From 1967 to 1987

All of this is sufficient indication that the coming encyc-

## A papal intervention in Ibero-America

by Valerie Rush

Pope John Paul II's week-long visit to Colombia in July 1986 represented a stunning strategic intervention into the affairs of the Western hemisphere and beyond, an intervention as powerful in the political arena as in the spiritual. Specifically, by openly endorsing the peace efforts of then Colombian President Belisario Betancur on both the domestic front and through the regional Contadora Group peace initiative in Central America, the Pope not only boosted those regional forces committed to the economic development of Central America but, equally important, threw a roadblock into the path of the would-be geopolitical puppetmasters of "Irangate" fame, for whom Central America has served too long as a private preserve.

By pleading for a new international order in which "man is the subject and not the object of economics and politics," John Paul II resurrected the universal standards of morality so eloquently outlined by his predecessor, Paul VI, in his 1967 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*. The Pope went on to give those principles concrete form by denouncing "the new and more subtle form of slavery" that has emerged in this century, the narcotics trade, and in demanding the establishment of "a new order of priorities" in which the right to development is not sacrificed to usury. "What remains clear . . . is the urgency of Latin American solidarity to mutually contribute to our development, and to change unjust relations with the affluent countries, such as the external debt, which has become the eternal debt. . . ."

lical or pastoral will define economic policy as a major point of Vatican activity and intervention for the coming year.

What is different between today and 1967, when *Populorum Progressio* was issued, lies not in any particular fault in that exemplary document. Pope Paul's encyclical not only laid out a generic moral policy respecting economics, it went even as far as to discuss the concrete institutional shape which a re-ordered world economic system could take. What was lacking in 1967 was not so much program, as it was a proven willingness to fight for that program.

Consequently, in one of the most ironic aberrations of recent Catholic history, *Populorum Progressio* was seized

by the liberation theologians as, practically, their "founding document." They could do that, because the Vatican at that time was unwilling to launch the internal housecleaning which it so dramatically began in 1986. Without neutralizing, and exposing, its own heretics, the papacy left these same people free to take even the best papal pronouncements and twist them to their wicked designs.

However, 1986, the Year of St. Augustine, has proven conclusively that this is unlikely to happen again. 1987 promises to be a year in which even more productive battles will be waged, both inside the Church, and with respect to the lay world around it.

The Pope's address to Colombia's business leaders emphasized the "practicality" of moral economic practice: "The greatest wealth, the best capital of a country, is its people. . . . Consequently, the center of reference of your economic activity must always be an interest in all human beings."

But he did not fail to present the concept of the *Filioque* as the ultimate criterion of humanity: "Each time you meet a fellow citizen who is poor or in need, if you look at him truly with the eyes of faith, you will see in him the image of God; you will see Christ; you will see a temple of the Holy Spirit, and you will realize that what you have done unto him you have done unto Christ Himself."

### **The 'politics' of human dignity**

Pope John Paul II encapsulated in his intense seven-day visit to Colombia the process launched earlier at the December 1985 Extraordinary Synod in Rome—that is, the crusade for economic and political ethics to guarantee the dignity of man. When Ibero-American bishops and cardinals met in Peru on Jan. 17, 1986, to discuss implementation of the Synod, the theme of economic and political morality was already on the table. Colombian Cardinal López Trujillo spoke from the Lima meeting on the need for genuine dialogue between rich and poor nations to avoid fulfillment of the law of "Social Darwinism, in which only the powerful survive."

The final document of a Venezuelan bishops' conference held earlier that month was more explicit, calling on the Lusinchi government to use the nation's oil resources to promote economic development, "ing to pressures to pay the foreign debt." The Chilean bishops' council in May proposed that all Ibero-American Presidents form a continental common market and monetary system, to try to isolate the continent from an international financial system "which is inefficient and unjust for it and for the Third World."

The general secretary of the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), Colombian Bishop Darío Castrillón, told the press on July 9, immediately following the Pope's departure: "For us, the debt is no longer debt, but has become misery, something central to our concerns. . . . We cannot establish the security of capital on the insecurity of man." One month later, the Mexican archbishop of Monterrey, Adolfo Suárez Rivera, denounced "the foreign debt that is drowning the country. . . . Priority areas are ignored and the maximum burden falls on the weakest."

In November, CELAM met and issued a document on "The gap between rich and poor in Latin America," which insists that, under its current terms, the continent's foreign debt simply "cannot be paid." The document also argues that the International Monetary Fund's austerity strategy could not be universally applied to the debtor nations, since it tends to undermine the very productivity which enables countries to pay their debts.

The Colombian Bishops Conference on Nov. 29, picked up the Pope's July challenge by issuing a document threatening the excommunication of drug traffickers for the "terrible evil" they have wrought in society, and hinting at the same for those who follow in their footsteps. And, on Dec. 3, the Argentine church took the giant step of publicly formalizing its alliance with that country's labor movement in its fight to recapture national economic sovereignty. Pastoral Commission president Monsignor Italo Di Stefano met with CGT labor federation head Saul Ubaldini for two hours, the support of the Church to the CGT's economic demands—including moratorium on the country's \$50 billion foreign debt.

The participation of the Ibero-American Church in the fight for economic justice can be expected through April of next year, when Pope John Paul II will be releasing a long-awaited papal document on Third World debt. The Pope will then travel again to Ibero-America.