

CELAM urges a just economic order and integration for Ibero-America

by Carlos Méndez

The 25th Ordinary Assembly of the Latin American Bishops Council (CELAM), held in Mexico on May 1-7, dealt an important, if not final, defeat to the Heideggerian Theology of Liberation, whose hosts mobilized in support of Samuel Ruiz, the bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas who is the real "commander" behind the narco-terrorist Zapatista insurgency in Mexico. The "liberationists" had hoped to impose one of their own as the next president of CELAM, but failed. Elected to the post instead was the archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Madariaga.

Monsignor Rodríguez Madariaga came out openly against Theology of Liberation, as did also the direct representatives of the Vatican at the Ibero-American assembly, in particular Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. The defeat of Theology of Liberation in Mexico means, among other things, that CELAM is now in a position to significantly contribute, "in communion and faith with the Holy See," to carrying out Pope John Paul II's call to help in the realization of the economic integration of Ibero-America and to create a new and more just international economic order.

Contributing to this process is the fact that the "liberationists" have also suffered a defeat in Brazil, where the newly elected president of the Brazilian National Bishops Conference (CNBB), the largest in Ibero-America, is Don Lucas Moreira Neves, cardinal primate of Brazil and archbishop of Salvador, Bahía. Among other things, Don Lucas Moreira Neves is one of the bishops who has been most outspoken for a more just international economic order. In April 1994, he urged that Christianity celebrate its second millennium by forgiving the debt of the Third World's poorest countries (see *Documentation*).

In his call, Cardinal Moreira Neves was only emphasizing what Pope John Paul II has already said. In referring to the Jubilee of the Year 2000, the pope declared that the occasion should be seized upon to pardon the debts of debtor nations, as the Jews used to do during the years of the Jubilee. Similarly, the pope has insisted that it is necessary to battle the destructive role of what he called "the structures of sin," an image necessarily evoked by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. The pope has also convoked a Synod of the Americas, which in the near future will gather

together all the bishops of North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean; the pope has doubtless included the economic question on its agenda.

Against economic injustice

In their message, "Latin America: Rise and Walk" (see *Documentation*), the new leaders of CELAM refer to the injustice caused by the international economic institutions, and state that "the origin of these evils is doubtless to be found in the heart of man and in the unjust systems which emerge from sin. We denounce, as one of the principal causes of such inequality, 'economism,' that is, the reification of the forces of the market and of the power of money, forgetting that the economy should be at the service of man, and not the reverse."

In early May, the new president of CELAM, Tegucigalpa Archbishop Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, declared in Mexico City that "if the decade of the '80s was considered lost for Latin America, the '90s can be seen as worse for the countries of the region, with greater impoverishment caused by the hasty adoption of neo-liberal schemes which, by their genetic makeup, breed inequity." He further charged that "the international institutions are applying economic adjustment programs that asphyxiate our peoples. . . . Despite the obvious failure of such adjustments, the institutions insisted on forging governments to adopt them and, in some places, as in Honduras, we are already in the second round."

In his recent encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II charged that there is "a conspiracy against life," and that one of its most obvious elements is that "the same economic models often adopted by States, including because of influences and conditionalities of an international nature . . . produce and favor situations of injustice and violence in which the human life of entire populations is degraded and harmed."

In the section "Toward a Third Millennium" of their Message, the new CELAM leaders commit themselves to work with two initiatives of Pope John Paul II, his convocation to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and the Synod of the Americas.

The Synod of the Americas

Regarding the Synod of the Americas, Pope John Paul II

told the CELAM bishops that “we already see it on the horizon” (see *Documentation*).

The first time that the pope spoke of this synod was on Oct. 12, 1992, at the opening of the General Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Santo Domingo. Addressing himself to the bishops gathered there, the pope said that “this General Conference should consider the opportunity that, in the not too distant future, a meeting of representatives of bishops councils from across the American continent could be held—which could have the character of a Synod—in which, within the framework of the new evangelization and as an expression of episcopal communion, the relative problems of justice and solidarity among all the nations of America could be addressed.”

In his speech, John Paul II also said that “solutions of a global nature must be sought, establishing a true economy of communion and participation of goods, both in the international and national order. Toward this end, one factor that could notably contribute to overcoming these pressing problems that today affect this continent is Latin American integration.”

Integration: a challenge for CELAM

The pope has recently referred on several occasions to the integration of Ibero-America. On May 4, upon receiving the new ambassador to the Vatican from Venezuela, Alberto Vollmer, Pope John Paul II said that the church “wants to collaborate in the integration of sister nations, helping them to overcome their nationalist vices and promoting fertile dialogue which, beyond the particularisms of a historic community, can facilitate a universal opening to persons and peoples.” This role of the church, the pope emphasized, is especially directed to those peoples “stamped with the same history, the same customs, the same religious faith, all of which are among the most deep-rooted and valuable experiences of the Venezuelan people.”

During an early May press conference in Mexico City, Monsignor Rodríguez Maradiaga said that only with the real, and not just the “poetic,” integration of this part of the hemisphere could the nations of Ibero-America achieve integral development. He said that the role of the bishops and laymen is to work intensively for the real integration of Ibero-America, and to inculcate the Gospel in politics and economics.

This is one of the great challenges to CELAM, he said, adding that “to seek common lines [of action] is not difficult, because our entire continent is overwhelmed with this very serious economic problem; and it is not simply a matter of the foreign debt, but also of the structural economic adjustments imposed by the international credit institutions which have greatly impoverished our peoples. . . . God grant that united, and with the courage and valor to make the necessary changes, we will surpass this moment and be what we should be: a great Latin American people.”

Documentation

Synod of the Americas is on the horizon

The following are excerpts from a letter sent by Pope John Paul II on April 16 to the then-president of the Latin American Bishops Council (CELAM), Cardinal Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez, archbishop of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

1. The joyful celebration of the 40th anniversary of the creation of the Latin American Bishops Council provides me the happy opportunity to address myself once again, with special pastoral concern, to the *pilgrim Churches of Latin America and to their Bishops*.

The memory of the Quincentenary celebrations of the beginning of the evangelization of these lands is alive in my heart as Universal Shepherd, as it is in the hearts of every Shepherd of this “Continent of Hope.” We commemorated that historic event in 1992 in Santo Domingo, with the General Conference of the Latin American Bishops. . . .

As the lasting fruit of the first conference held July 25-Aug. 4, 1955, the Latin American Bishops Council (CELAM) was born, “an organization of contact, reflection, collaboration and service for the Bishop Conferences of Latin America.”

My predecessor Pope Pius XII “benevolently” approved the formation of that providential organization and, in 1958, further created the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, which was entrusted with the job . . . of “efficiently helping the Latin American Bishops Council through the most opportune pastoral means.”

. . . At the end of the last century, in 1899, the Latin American Plenary Council—convoked by my predecessor Pope Leo XIII and held in Rome—constituted “the primary foundation for the development of an ecclesiastical and spiritual life on the continent,” as affirmed by the cardinals and bishops who met in the Rio Conference. That historic Ecumenical Council, whose hundredth anniversary we will celebrate in just a few years, prepared the Churches of Latin America for the new times. But it was to be the General Conference of the Latin American Bishops . . . which paved the way of the new *Evangelization of the Continent*. . . .

. . . The entire Church is ready to enter the third millennium of Christianity with renewed spirit, such that it can more fully participate in the grace that flows from the paschal mystery. The Latin American Church is called, by reason of the great number of its members and by the effective action

of its evangelizers, to bear a special role and responsibility in this task.

. . . We already see on the horizon the future *Synod of the Americas* to which I referred in my Apostolic Letter on the Jubilee of the Year 2000. It will be an *evangelizing event* to take on the challenges which, at the end of this century, will face the Latin American churches, which will be getting ready to enter the third millennium of the Christian era.

4. CELAM, with its program "to serve and integrate" in *communion and faith* with the Holy See, has an important role to play in this *hopeful but difficult* moment. . . .

'Latin America: Rise and walk'

The following are excerpts from the Message of the XXV Ordinary Assembly of CELAM to the Churches and Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, entitled "Latin America: Rise and Walk," held in Mexico City on May 1-7, 1995.

Signs of death

5. But also present in our thoughts and in our prayers have been the undeserved sufferings of the great majority of brothers and sisters who day in and day out fight to survive in this world, so lacking in solidarity.

6. We want to say it out loud: We cannot remain indifferent to such signs of death that appear everywhere: extreme poverty, growing unemployment, uncontrollable violence and such forms of corruption and impunity that millions of families are sinking in anguish and pain. In their desperation, many opt to emigrate in search of new horizons but all too frequently find only rejection and frustration.

7. The origin of these evils is doubtless to be found in the heart of man and in the unjust systems which emerge from sin. We denounce, as one of the principal causes of such inequality, "economism," that is, the reification of the forces of the market and of the power of money, forgetting that the economy should be at the service of man, and not the reverse. . . .

Toward the Third Millennium

11. During these days of profound communion in work and prayer, we have heard about the state of affairs of all of our churches; we have reviewed the project and the structure of CELAM, approving reforms to its statutes; we have prepared recommendations and programs for its immediate future; and we have chosen the bishops who, with generous spirit of service, will lead this body of ecclesiastical communion. . . .

13. Two other initiatives of the Vicar of Christ should encourage our apostolic passion on the dawn of the Third Millennium: his convocation of the *Great Jubilee of the Year 2000* and the *Synod of the Americas*, which in the near future will gather, under the presidency of the pope, all the bishops of North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean. . . .

A step forward in the Brazilian church

by Silvia Palacios

The May 15 election to the presidency of the Brazilian National Bishops Conference (CNBB) of the cardinal primate of Brazil, Don Lucas Moreira Neves, has opened up a new phase in the history of the Catholic Church, not only in Brazil but throughout Ibero-America. Upon assuming his new post, Cardinal Moreira Neves stated that he intends to "be an artisan of unity" within the church.

Although Pope John Paul II's recent nominations for bishop have been deliberately undermining the church's more radical Theology of Liberation faction, the election of Moreira Neves was a surprise for many, and a harsh blow to the radicals. As one respected student of the Brazilian Catholic Church said to *EIR*, "It was so unexpected that it can only be considered an act of the Holy Spirit." As for its universal significance, he added, "this will mean for our continent what the election of Karol Wojtyla to the papacy meant for the former communist nations."

This is quite true. Cardinal Moreira Neves is a very prominent figure in the Vatican and, according to reliable sources, is close to the pope and to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. In advocating a more just international economic order and defense of cultural values, he has stood out as a leader on behalf of humanity's most important causes.

War against satanism

A few years ago, the cardinal declared war on the media for disseminating the "New Age" counterculture. In January 1993, he took on Brazilian television magnate Roberto Marinho, owner of the *O Globo* media empire, over coverage of the ritual satanic murder of Brazilian soap opera actress Daniela Pérez. At the time, the cardinal issued his famous *J'Accuse*, a virtual manifesto that detailed, step by step, the nature of the poison put out on television that turns citizens into "idiots." At the same time, in an interview published in the Jan. 24, 1993 *Jornal do Brasil*, the cardinal reported, "I've visited more than 60 countries and in none of them have I seen television programming as destructive as Brazil's."

Similarly, in his own diocese of El Salvador, Cardinal Moreira Neves has confronted the syncretic "religion" of the Afro-Brazilian cults. After participating in the Special Assembly of the Synod of African Bishops in April 1994, he commented that Christianity should celebrate its second millennium with a worthy act such as pardoning the debts of the poorest Third World nations.