

Pope: Foreign debt threatens the peace

by Benjamín Castro

In a speech delivered April 6 to the foreign diplomatic corps in Argentina, just hours after arriving in that country, Pope John Paul II called for an "ethical judgment of the international debt," which defines the responsibility of all the parties involved, and not just that of the debtor nations.

The pontiff went on to say that in the view of the Catholic Church, beyond the "national and regional selfishness" which must be overcome, the most radical threat to peace stems from "the foreign debt of many developing countries." The Pope stated that this viewpoint had been specifically outlined in a recent document issued by the pontifical commission *Justitia et Pax*, written to call the attention of the entire international community to this "urgent" problem.

Building the peace

During his address to the diplomatic corps, Pope John Paul II recalled the peace accord achieved between Argentina and Chile thanks to the 1982 mediation of the Catholic Church in those nations' conflict over the Beagle Islands. However, he added: "The climate of true peace does not consist merely of the simple absence of war," but "of a conscious and effective will to seek the good of all peoples." The pontiff appealed to all nations to define their foreign policy from that perspective, to always think in terms of making a "specific contribution to the international common good."

Shortly thereafter, in his speech to the political representatives of the Argentine nation at the presidential palace in Buenos Aires, the Pope asserted his authority to pronounce on matters of economics and policy-making. Although "the Church recognizes, respects, and encourages the legitimate autonomy of the temporal powers, and specifically in politics," he stated, "the Christian message is the bearer of good tidings for all, even for the political, economic, and legal world."

Hence, the Pope proposed to the "political, economic, and legal world" the creation of "new forms of cooperation," on the basis of which "political power should have as its purpose the realization of the common good." The task of the Church is that of "safeguarding the transcendent nature of the human individual," since the Church is the "expert in humanity," as defined by Pope Paul VI.

Later, during visits to the cities of Bahía Blanca, Córdoba, and Mendoza, Pope John Paul II made the same vibrant appeal to Catholics: "Conflicts have injustice as their origin. . . . The Pope calls on you to take a clear position, without ambiguities, in the face of situations that wound the dignity of man: injustice, lies, demagoguery, which deform the face of real peace." He added, "You also must reject all that which degrades and dehumanizes: drugs, abortion, torture, terrorism, divorce, inhuman living conditions, and degrading work."

He added: "Can lasting peace exist in a world regulated by social, economic, and political relations which favor one group or country to the detriment of others. . . ? Families are divided and incapable of overcoming conflicts in this basic cell of all social harmony. . . . Can true peace exist when men, women, and children can not live without their full human dignity?"

In Bahía Blanca, the Pope lashed out against the "inferior" status to which the "rural world" has been confined, a state of "social exile" due to the international economic crisis. The Pope's message to the "rural world" in Bahía Blanca, was the complement to his homily a few days earlier before the largely unemployed copper workers of Concepción, Chile, where he defined unemployment as "a moral disorder" of society.

Of all the topics taken up by Pope John Paul II in this pastoral visit, the divorce question takes on particular relevance in Argentina. The government of Raúl Alfonsín has promoted the legalization of divorce, thereby attempting to polarize Argentine society around a debate which the Pope characterized as "demagoguery, sterile allegations, mutual recriminations that do not always lead to positive solutions."

The Alfonsín government has sown a whole series of such conflicts, attempting to distract the citizenry from the destruction of the national economy perpetrated by the government in the service of the foreign banks and payment of foreign debt. Hence, the papal judgment that "The spread of divorce in society is accompanied by a reduction in public morality in all sectors," in the framework of his messages and speeches on the pursuit of the "common good," had the immediate effect of lifting Argentines above the controlled environment of internecine squabbles created by the Alfonsín regime.

The success of John Paul's efforts, including his defusing of the civil-war scenario for Chile on the first leg of the trip, can be gauged by Moscow's unusually frantic reaction. Both Soviet radio and the weekly English-language *Moscow News* have denounced a purported "alliance between the Pope, the CIA, and President Reagan," and have accused John Paul II of "supporting reactionary leaders of the Argentine Catholic Church, nostalgic about the previous military dictatorship." Said one longtime observer of Soviet media behavior, "Never have they covered a trip abroad by the Pope in such a totally negative and hostile manner."