

Dateline Mexico by Hugo López Ochoa

Bishops condemn foreign debt

Ibero-America's Catholic Church slams the varied faces of neo-liberalism: NAFTA, the U.N., the IMF, and Pronasol.

The Catholic bishop from Chimbote, Peru, Luis Bambarén, issued a dramatic appeal to the "advanced sector" to forgive Ibero-America's foreign debt, now at more than \$400 billion, and called the debt "immoral" because it has increased through usurious interest rates and is paid "with the hunger" of the people. Bambarén emphasized that the debt was preventing development, and was condemning more than 200 million poor, 40% of those children, to misery.

Monsignor Bambarén was addressing the closing session of the International Congress on Demography and Social Justice, held April 19-23 by the Mexican Bishops Conference (CEM). At the same time, the CEM held its own 54th Plenary Assembly, at whose opening CEM Vice President and Cardinal Jesús Posadas Ocampo charged that the reappearance of such diseases of poverty as cholera "are in essence due to the structural adjustments prescribed by the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and World Bank," and "dramatically symbolize the growing impoverishment and economic and social marginalization of all of Latin America" caused by "the neo-liberal policy that dominates in the region today."

The two events also served as forums for violent attacks by the Mexican bishops against both the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Mexican President Salinas's National Solidarity Program (Pronasol), the latter a so-called self-help program for the poor with which Salinas hopes to disguise the genocide being carried out against the Mexican people through imposition of IMF-

World Bank prescriptions.

These denunciations, taken as a whole, point to an important distancing by the Ibero-American church hierarchy from the line of Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who, in the context of the Fourth Conference of the Latin American Bishops (CELAM) held in Santo Domingo Oct. 12-28, 1992, openly backed the IMF's adjustment program and Salinas's "solidarity" doctrine. At the time, this provoked intense debate within the church, which now appears to be recognizing that any such concession to "savage capitalism" would mean suicide.

These statements also suggest an implicit rejection of the neo-liberal doctrine of pseudo-Catholic Michael Novak by the Ibero-American church, which purports to separate economics from morality. Thus, the Mexican bishops charged that "monetarist theses" are "dictatorial forms" with "no moral guidelines." The bishops stressed that the objective of all economics should be "the integral development of man."

Cardinal Posadas Ocampo, in referring to Salinas's Pronasol program, insisted that "while solidarity to the church means unity of effort for the common good, neo-liberal solidarity is mere alms-giving." The auxiliary bishop of Mexico City, Abelardo Alvarado Alcantara, added that Pronasol "does not represent a clear response to the problems of poverty which millions of Mexicans suffer, nor does it promote the equal redistribution of wealth."

Even the Vatican representative to the U.N., Msgr. Renato Martino, pre-

sented an indirect attack on Salinas's Pronasol: "International solidarity must focus on man . . . in all his dimensions . . . integrally, as Paul VI said in *Populorum Progressio*. . . . Any other solidarity, for other purposes, is no longer solidarity."

On NAFTA, the bishop of Ciudad Juárez said that such a treaty would condemn Mexican businessmen "to becoming mere adjuncts to foreign companies," and that it is especially along the border that one can clearly see that "the Mexican countryside is bankrupt" because of the vast migration of Mexican farmers from the interior of the country toward the *maquiladoras* (foreign-owned assembly plants) along the U.S. border, where the work "is exploitative, difficult, and excessively ill-paid." This could be the future of Mexico under NAFTA, he warned, "which would be terrible."

The general framework of this Catholic offensive against the neo-liberal new order was defined by Pope John Paul II on March 15, when he declared that it was unacceptable to propose "reducing at any cost the number of invitees to the banquet of life; what must be done is to increase the means and to distribute the wealth with greater justice, so that all can partake equally of the goods of Creation."

At the congress on demography, representatives of the Holy See charged that the U.N. sought to manipulate the "International Year of the Family" (1994) by justifying "marriage" between homosexuals, as part of a campaign to destroy the family as a moral institution. The Mexican bishops also went after "anti-natalist imperialism," which make economic aid to poor nations conditional on their acceptance of population control policies. "Where there is an oversupply of coffins and an undersupply of cribs, society can have no future," they concluded.