



The Holy See

VIAGGIO APOSTOLICO IN URUGUAY, CILE E ARGENTINA

DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II AI DELEGATI DELLA COMMISSIONE ECONOMICA PER L'AMERICA LATINA E I CARAIBI (CEPAL)*

Santiago del Cile - Venerdì, 3 aprile 1987

1. It is a great pleasure for me to meet you in the Chilean headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. I wish, first of all, to express my most cordial greeting and gratitude to all those present, especially to the Executive Secretary of ECLAC for inviting me and for his warm words of welcome.

I likewise greet the entire staff of this building - the main centre of the United Nations in the region - the representatives of the bodies, agencies and entities, and all the distinguished guests.

My presence here today extends and reaffirms the support and collaboration which my predecessors of happy memory have offered the United Nations Organization, and which I myself have tried to give from the beginning of my pontificate.

2. Your most important purpose is to study the socio-economic situation of the region, to formulate and suggest economic policy and to carry out projects of international cooperation for the good of this vast area of the planet, whose fifth centenary of initial evangelization we are preparing to celebrate.

The simple description of your task makes obvious the Church's great interest in it. We share the same problem from different perspectives, which are, however, complementary. In effect, that which concerns you is also an object of anxiety and continual vigilance for the Church, whose

mission is centered in the service of the human being in the fullness of his dimensions, as a creature of God and destined to salvation in Christ. This evening I wish to reflect with you, in the specific light of the divine natural law and the Church's social teaching, on some particularly urgent topics which affect us all.

Your studies indicate that, despite the diversity of the national economies, the crisis suffered generally between 1981 and 1985 has been the most serious and profound one of the last half century: and that, although there are signs of recovery in the most recent period, a tragic fact remains: during this span of time the per capita gross national product of the region has fallen alarmingly in real terms while the population has grown considerably, and paying the foreign debt has become more exacting. You also point out that, as was foreseeable, the sectors most seriously affected by the crisis are the poorest ones and that the phenomenon of critical poverty tends to "repeat itself", as you say, in a discouraging "vicious circle». Certainly you have not limited yourselves to a purely negative diagnosis. I am happy to know that you see possibilities of readjustment and progress, the very ones which, with daring hope, you include in the formula of a "virtuous circle» in the opposite direction, consisting of production, employment, growth and equity

4. However, the general outlook definitely seems bleak. I am sure that, like me, you discover behind the concise language of figures and statistics the living and sorrowful face of each person, of each needy and marginalized human being, with his pains and joys, his frustrations, anguish and hope for a better future.

It is the person, the total person, each individual in his unique and unrepeatable being, created and redeemed by God, this is the one who comes into view with his individual countenance, his indescribably concrete poverty and marginalization, behind the generality of the statistics. Ecce homo...!

5. Before this perspective of suffering, I cannot but direct a call to the public authorities, to private enterprise, to as many people and institutions of the whole region as can hear me, and of course to the developed nations: I invite them to accept this formidable moral challenge which was expressed one year ago in the Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*, in the following terms: "to work out and set in motion ambitious programmes aimed at the socio-economic liberation of millions of men and women caught in an intolerable situation of economic, social and political oppression" (n. 81). In this regard and in line with this principle, the first problem arises concerning the roles of the State and private enterprise. As a doctrinal presupposition, I will limit myself to recalling a well-known postulate of the Church's teaching on social matters: the relationship of subsidiarity. The State must not supplant the initiative and responsibility which the individuals and the smaller social groups are capable of assuming in their respective fields: on the contrary, the State should foster actively these environments of freedom: at the same time it ought to order their activity and watch over their adequate insertion into the common good.

Very different forms of relationship between public authority and private initiative can fit in this framework. In the face of the tragedy of extreme poverty, it is of the utmost importance that there should exist a mentality of decided cooperation. Work together, integrate your efforts, do not place ideological factors or group interests ahead of the needs of the poorest people.

6. The challenge of poverty is so great that in order to overcome it, we must make the greatest possible use of private enterprise, with its potential effectiveness, its Capacity to use resources efficiently and the abundance of its energies for renewal. The public authority, for its part, cannot abdicate the direction of the economic process, using its ability to mobilize the nation's strengths to cure the characteristic deficiencies of developing economies, in short, from its ultimate responsibility for the common good of the entire society.

However, State and private enterprise are ultimately composed of people. I want to emphasize the ethical and personal dimension of the economic participants. My call, then, takes the form of a moral imperative: foster solidarity above all! Whatever your function may be in the fabric of socio-economic life, construct an economy of solidarity in the region! With these words I propose for your consideration what I called in my recent Message for the World Day of Peace: "a new relationship, the social solidarity of all" (n. 2). On this point, I wish to repeat here today the conviction expressed in the recent document of the Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax" regarding the international debt: "cooperation which goes beyond collective egoism and vested interests can provide for an efficient management of the debt crisis and, more generally, can mark progress along the path of international economic justice" (Introd.).

7. Solidarity as a basic attitude implies, in economic decision-making, feeling the poverty of others as one's own, intimately appropriating the misery of those on the margins of life and, therefore, acting with rigorous consistency.

It is not just a matter of professing good intentions but also of a decided commitment to find effective solutions at the technical level of the economy with the clear-sightedness - of love and creativity, springing from solidarity.

I believe that it is in this economy of solidarity we fix our greatest hopes for the region. The most adequate economic mechanisms are somewhat like the body of the economy; the dynamism which vivifies and renders them effective - their "inner spirit" - must be solidarity. Moreover, this is precisely the repeated teaching of the Church on the priority of the person over the structures and of the moral conscience over the social institutions which express it.

Your technical reports merit, as I see it, a twofold consideration. On the one hand, profound solutions for the extreme poverty are not possible without a substantial increase in production, and, therefore, without a sustained impulse of economic development for the entire region. On the other hand, this solution, because of its long-term nature and internal dynamics, may be entirely

insufficient to meet the immediate needs of the poorest people. Their situation demands extraordinary measures; aid cannot be delayed, subsidies are needed. The poor cannot wait! Those who have nothing cannot wait for help which might come to them as a kind of overflow from the overall prosperity of society.

I am well aware that it is extremely difficult to combine these two imperatives within the enormous complexity of the economic phenomenon in such a way that they do not negate each other but, rather, strengthen one another. The Pastor who is speaking to you has no technical solutions to offer you; this is your task as experts. The common Father of so many poor children is convinced that an adequate formulation of consistent economic policy is possible, must be possible, with so many people morally committed to mutual solidarity and, therefore, technically creative.

8. I am consoled that your latest studies contemplate strategies to join both economic imperatives, the long term one and that of immediate urgency. I am also happy to know that your first priority is to overcome the high rate of unemployment in so many countries of the region.

An unquestionable priority must be given to the policies of reducing unemployment and the creation of new sources of work. This priority, as your reports show, has purely technical reasons to support it as well: there is a reciprocal relationship between the creation of jobs and economic development, a mutual causality, the fundamental dynamics of the "virtuous circle" mentioned earlier.

Allow me, however, to insist on the profoundly moral reason for this priority of full employment. The subsidies of housing, nutrition, health care, etc. which are given to the needy are indispensable: however, the poor person is not actively involved in this praiseworthy, charitable assistance. On the other hand, to offer him work is to put in motion the essential resource of his human activity, in virtue of which the worker becomes the master of his destiny: he integrates himself within society, and also receives those other aids not as alms but, in a certain way, is the living and personal fruit of his own effort.

The studies on the "psychology of the unemployed" vigorously confirm this priority. The unemployed has suffered injury to his human dignity. On becoming once again an active worker, he not only regains a salary, but also that essential dimension of the human condition, work, which in the order of grace, is the Christian's ordinary way towards perfection. Your most recent unemployment statistics for the region are terrifying. Let us not rest until we have made it possible for every inhabitant of the region to have access to this authentic fundamental right which is, for the human person, the right --correlative to the duty - to work!

9. Permanent work with a just pay possesses, more than any subsidy, the intrinsic capability of reversing that circular process which you have called "the repetition of poverty and marginalization".

This is possible, however, only if the worker has at least a minimal level of education, culture and skill, and has the opportunity to provide these for his children as well. You are well aware that this touches upon one, of the nerve centres of the problem: education, the master key to the future, the way to integrate the marginalized, the soul of social dynamism, the right and essential duty of the human person. May the States, intermediate groups, individuals, institutions, and the multiple forms of private initiative concentrate their best efforts in the educational development of the entire region!

The moral causes of prosperity are well known throughout history. They reside in a constellation of virtues: diligence, competence, order, honesty, initiative, frugality, thrift, a spirit of service, keeping one's word, courage; in short to love work well done. Without these virtues, no social system or structure can magically solve the problem of poverty; in the long run, the pattern and the performance of the institutions reflect these habits of the human subjects which are essentially acquired in the educational process and shape an authentic work culture.

10. Finally, allow me to say a word about the important work which the Latin American Demographic Centre, an organism of ECLAC, carries out. I know well that population growth seems to add to the region's problems which we have just described; they feel like a heavy burden. I will repeat to you in this regard the well-known words of Pope Paul VI to the Food and agriculture Organization in 1970:" Certainly in the face of the difficulties to be overcome, there is a great temptation to use one's authority to diminish the number of guests rather than to multiply the bread that is to be shared".

Even within the difficult context of the economy, human life in its deepest and holiest centre, conserves that intangible character which nobody is empowered to manipulate without offending God and damaging the entire society. Let us defend it at all costs against the easy solutions based on destruction. No to the artificial prevention of fertilization! No to abortion! Yes to life! Yes to responsible parenthood!

The demographic challenge, like every human challenge, is ambivalent and must bring us to double that concentration, which I spoke of earlier, of the best strengths of human solidarity and collective creativity, in order to turn the population growth into a formidable power generating economic, social cultural and spiritual development.

II. In this meeting I would have liked to speak to you about many other topics common to ECLAC and the Apostolic See. I chose to focus on the extreme poverty which is at the very centre of your concern: this is a painful sore which affects me deeply as Father and Pastor of so many faithful in the beloved countries of this vast region of the world.

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Paths to Peace p. 511-514.

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