



*Towards  
an economy  
of solidarity*

FILE 32830

Message by  
His Holiness John Paul II  
on the occasion of his visit to the Headquarters of the  
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Santiago, Chile, 3 April 1987



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*His Holiness John Paul II visited the Headquarters of the Commission in Santiago, Chile, on 3 April 1987, in response to an invitation made to him by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, Norberto González.*

*From the "Raúl Prebisch" Conference Hall of this regional Commission of the United Nations, after the welcoming speech of Mr. González, the Pope delivered an address on the ethical aspects of economic and social development.*

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**WELCOMING ADDRESS BY  
MR. NORBERTO GONZALEZ,  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF ECLAC**

Your Holiness:

We are deeply honoured to welcome you to this Regional Headquarters of the United Nations and extremely grateful for the signal honour bestowed on ECLAC in directing a message to the member countries of our Organization from this building.

The United Nations has as its fundamental tasks the preservation of peace, the protection of human rights, and the furtherance of the economic and social development of its member States. Your Holiness's special concern for these tasks, and the confidence placed in your actions by the peoples and governments of the world, give a special significance to your presence here with us.

As far as economic and social development is concerned, here in Latin America we are currently facing challenges of an unprecedented nature and magnitude. Human dignity is being undermined by inequality, underemployment and poverty. These are very long-standing problems in our societies, but now they have assumed an even more dramatic and painful character as a result of the economic crisis related to the external debt. Behind the present situation and the ways in which it might be approached there are ethical considerations of transcendental significance, and for this reason it is of the greatest importance to us to hear Your Holiness's message.

With regard to peace, it is a matter of rejoicing that in recent decades the curse of armed conflict between countries of the region has been avoided. However, tensions and strife persist between some countries, while others still maintain disputes. Here, too, the voice of Your Holiness helps us to seek peace and understanding. Our whole region owes you its deepest gratitude for your recent mediation in a dispute between two member countries of our Organization.

At this moment when we are seeking new paths to peace, development, justice and equity, we await with unbounded interest the message you have for us, which will beyond all doubt be a source of inspiration and guidance to peoples and governments and, need I say, to all those who share the ideals and principles of the United Nations.





## ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

### POPE JOHN PAUL II

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure for me to be having this meeting in the Santiago headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and I should like to begin by expressing my most cordial greetings and thanks to all those present, especially the Executive Secretary of ECLAC for having been so good as to invite me and for his kind words of welcome.

I should also like to extend my greetings to all the staff of this Commission, which is the main office of the United Nations in the region, to the representatives of other organizations, agencies and bodies, and to all the distinguished guests.

My presence here today represents the continuation and reaffirmation of the attitude of support and collaboration which my well-remembered predecessors displayed with respect to the United Nations Organization and which I myself wished to make clear from the beginning of my pontificate.

Your most important purpose is to study the economic and social situation of the region, to formulate and suggest economic policies, and to carry out international co-operation projects for the benefit of this vast area of our planet, of which we are joyfully preparing to celebrate the quincentenary of its first evangelization.

The mere enumeration of your tasks makes it possible to understand the great interest which the Church has in your work. We share a common problem which we approach from different yet nevertheless necessarily complementary viewpoints. Thus, what is of concern to you in your work is also the subject of concern and continual preoccupation for the Church, whose mission is centered on serving Man in all his dimensions, as a creature of God and as the beneficiary of salvation in Christ. It is in the light of natural divine law and the social doctrine of the Church that I wish to reflect this afternoon with you on some topics of particular urgency which affect us all.

Your studies show that although the individual economies of the region display different features, the crisis suffered by the region as a whole between 1981 and 1985 has been the deepest and most serious in the last half century, and although there have been some signs of recovery more recently, a dramatic fact nevertheless remains: during this period of time the per capita gross domestic product of the region dropped disturbingly in real terms, whereas the population increased considerably and the burden of the external debt became still more onerous. You also noted that, as was to be expected, the sectors hit hardest by the crisis were the poorest ones and that the phenomenon of critical poverty tends to repeat itself, as you said, in a discouraging "vicious circle". It is true, of course, that your diagnosis was not one of totally unrelieved gloom. I am glad to know that you do glimpse some possibilities of readjustment and progress: the same ones which you incorporated, with encouraging optimism, in the formula of a "virtuous circle" of production, employment, growth and equity which would operate in the opposite direction.

Undoubtedly, however, the general picture is a sombre one. I am sure that you can see behind the concise technical language of figures and statistics, just as I do, the *living and painful face of each person*, of each indigent and marginalized human being, with his frustrations, his anxieties, and his hopes for a better future.

It is mankind, the whole of mankind, every man in his quality of a unique and unrepeatable being created and redeemed

by God, that is to be seen with his unmistakable face, *his unspeakably concrete poverty and marginality*, behind the overall figures of the statistics. *Ecce homo...!*

Faced with this painful picture, I cannot but appeal to the public authorities, to private enterprise, to all those persons and institutions in the whole region who can hear me, and of course also to the more highly developed nations, to respond to the *formidable moral challenge* made a year ago in the encyclical *Libertatis conscientia*, in the following terms: "the formulation and implementation of bold action programmes aimed at achieving the economic and social liberation of millions of men and women whose situation of economic, social and political oppression is intolerable" (para. 81).

In this respect, and as a matter of principle, I wish to put to you first of all the problem relating to the competition between the State and private enterprise. As a doctrinal assumption, I shall limit myself to recalling a well-known postulate of the teaching of the Church on social matters: the *relationship of subsidiarity*. The State must not take over initiatives and responsibilities which individuals and the smaller social groups are capable of assuming in their respective fields: on the contrary, it should actively favour those areas of liberty while at the same time supervising their actions and making sure that they fit properly into the scheme of the common good.

Within this general framework, there is room for very diverse forms of correlation between the public authority and private enterprise. In the face of the drama of extreme poverty, it is vitally important that there should be a mentality of *decided co-operation* between the two social forces. Work together, integrate your efforts, never put ideological or group interests before the indigence of the poorest!

The challenge of poverty is so great that in order to overcome it the fullest advantage must be taken of the dynamism and creativity of private enterprise, its potential for effective action, its capacity for the efficient allocation of resources, and the fullness of its renovative energy. The public authorities, for

their part, cannot abdicate their responsibility for the supreme direction of the economic process, their capacity to mobilize the forces of the nation, to correct certain shortcomings which are characteristic of developing economies, and, in short, their ultimate responsibility for the well-being of society as a whole.

But in the final analysis the State and private enterprise are both made up of *persons*. I should like to place special emphasis on this ethical and personal dimension of the economic agents. My appeal, then, takes the form of a moral behest: show solidarity above all else! Whatever your function in the fabric of economic and social life, help to build an *economy of solidarity* in the region! With these words I put forward for your consideration what I called in my last message on World Peace Day "a new type of relationship: the social solidarity of all" (para. 2). In this connection, I should like to repeat to you here the conviction expressed in the recent document of the Pontifical Commission "Justitia et Pax" on the external debt: "Cooperation which surmounts collective selfishness and individual interests could make possible the effective handling of the debt crisis and, in more general terms, represent progress along the road to international economic justice" (Introduction).

Solidarity, as a *basic attitude*, means feeling the poverty of others as keenly as if it were one's own when taking economic decisions, sharing in one's own heart the misery of the marginalized sectors, and acting strictly in keeping with this approach.

It is not just a question of professing good intentions, but also of showing a decided will to seek effective solutions at the technical level of the economy, with the clear-sightedness that comes from love and the creativity that springs from solidarity.

I believe that all our best hopes for the region lie in this *economy of solidarity*. The most suitable economic mechanisms are something like the body of the economy; the dynamic spark which gives them life and makes them effective—their "internal mystique"—should be solidarity. Indeed, this is the significance



of the repeated teaching of the Church regarding the priority of the person over structures and of man's moral conscience over the social institutions which are its expression.

For me, your technical reports have a dual message. On the one hand, there is the fact that no fundamental solutions to the problem of extreme poverty are to be glimpsed without a substantial increase in production and consequently a *sustained boost in the economic development* of the whole region. On the other hand, there is the fact that this solution, because of the length of time it would take and its internal dynamics, is *totally insufficient* in view of the urgent needs of the most underprivileged sectors. The situation of the latter is clamouring for extraordinary measures, urgent succour, and aid that cannot be further delayed. *The poor cannot wait!* Those who have nothing cannot wait for relief to trickle down to them as a result of the generalized prosperity of the rest of society.

I am well aware that within the enormously complex structure of economic activity these two imperative needs are extremely difficult to combine in such a way that they do not cancel each other out but instead mutually strengthen each other. I am a Pastor and have no technical solutions to offer in this respect: these are your responsibility as experts in this matter. As the spiritual father of so many underprivileged children, however, I am convinced that the proper articulation of these needs in a coherent economic policy is possible —*must be possible*— through the convergence of so many wills imbued with moral solidarity and, by that same token, technically creative.

I am heartened to note that your most recent studies provide for strategies which link together both types of economic needs: those of the long term and those which are of immediate urgency. I am also pleased to note that you place the priority goal of overcoming the high levels of unemployment registered in so many countries of the region at the very centre of such strategies.

Policies for reducing unemployment and creating new jobs must be given *unquestionable priority*. As your reports show,

such priority is justified even on purely technical grounds, for there is a reciprocal relationship and mutual causality between the creation of jobs and economic development: a relationship which is the fundamental force behind the "virtuous circle" I referred to earlier.

I wish, however, to insist on the *profoundly moral* reasons for giving priority to the generation of maximum employment. Assistance to the most indigent members of society in respect of housing, nutrition, health, etc., is of course an indispensable form of aid, but it does not make its recipients true actors in this admittedly praiseworthy action of giving aid. In contrast, offering work means setting in motion the essential motive forces of human *activity*, so that the worker can become the master of his own future, integrate into society as a whole, and even receive the other forms of aid not as charity but, from some points of view, as the living personal fruits of his own efforts.

The studies on the "psychology of the unemployed" fully confirm this priority. *A man without work is a man who is wounded in his human dignity.* When he once again becomes an active worker he not only receives a wage, but also enjoys that essential dimension of the human condition which is represented by work and which, in the order of grace, is the Christian's usual path towards perfection. Your latest figures on unemployment in Latin America and the Caribbean are deeply disturbing. We must not rest until we have given every inhabitant of the region access to that truly fundamental right—and also duty—of human beings which consists of the right to work!

Stable and reasonably paid work possesses, more than any other kind of assistance, the intrinsic capacity to reverse that evil spiral which you called "the reproduction of poverty and marginality".

This capacity can be achieved, however, only if workers can attain certain minimum levels of education, culture and vocational training and have the opportunity to provide the same for their own children. This brings us to the centre of the whole problem: *education as the key to the future*, as the way to

integrate the marginalized sectors, the factor lying at the heart of social dynamism, and the essential right and duty of human beings. Let all States, intermediate groups, individuals, institutions and all the many forms of private enterprise concentrate their best efforts on the promotion of education in the entire region!

The *moral causes of prosperity* have been well known throughout the course of history. They lie in a combination of virtues: hard work, competence, orderliness, honesty, initiative, boldness, frugality, saving, willingness to serve, fulfilment of one's word: in short, prizing a job well done. No social system or structure can solve the problem of poverty as if by magic without practicing these virtues; in the final analysis, both the design and the functioning of institutions are the reflection of these human habits which are acquired essentially in the process of education and go to make up a true *culture of work*.

Finally, I should like to say a few words about the important work done by ECLAC's Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE). I am well aware that population growth seems to be yet another of the problems of the region which I already referred to, and may appear to be a heavy burden. I should like to repeat to you in this connection, however, the well-known words of Pope Paul VI before the FAO in 1970: "In the face of the difficulties that must be overcome, there is of course a great temptation to use the powers of authority to reduce the number of guests at the banquet of life, rather than seeking to increase the amount of bread to be shared among them".

Even within the problem-ridden context of the economy, human life retains, *in its innermost and most sacred nucleus*, that intangible nature which no one may touch without giving offence to God and harming society as a whole. Let us defend it at all costs against the easy "solutions" based on destruction. No! to the artificial interruption of fertility! No! to abortion! Yes! to life! Yes! to responsible parenthood!

The demographic challenge, like all human challenges, is ambivalent in character and should be tackled by redoubling that

concentration I mentioned earlier of the best forces of human solidarity and collective creativity so as to turn population growth into a formidable factor promoting economic, social, cultural and spiritual development.

I would have liked to speak at this meeting on many other topics which are of interest both to ECLAC and to the Apostolic See. I decided, however, to concentrate on extreme poverty, which lies at the very centre of your concern and which is a painful thorn in my heart as Spiritual Father and Pastor of so many faithful in the dearly beloved countries of this vast region of the world.

I thank you once again for your kind invitation, which I accepted with the greatest pleasure, and I pray to Almighty Father God, to Jesus Christ, the Lord of History, and to the life-giving Holy Spirit, through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of Latin America, to shower enlightenment and energy on you from above when you are dealing with the economic and social progress of the developing countries, in order to make possible that *magnanimous concentration of intelligence, will and creative work* demanded by the present critical position of all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.



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