

## Dateline Mexico by Marivilia Carrasco

### Bishops denounce IMF policies

*The Ibero-American Catholic bishops conference rejected Liberation Theology, indigenism, and free trade.*

**D**uring the 25th Assembly of the Latin American Bishops Council (CELAM), held in Mexico on May 1-7, the new president, the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, attacked both the cruel economic policies of "international financial institutions," and Liberation Theology, including its indigenist variant.

Thus, Rodríguez Maradiaga shattered the false division which the international oligarchy has sought to impose on the Roman Catholic Church in Ibero-America: Those who denounce neo-liberal (free trade) economics, support Liberation Theology; while those who denounce Liberation Theology, support economic neo-liberalism. In this, he continued the line of his predecessor, Cardinal Nicolás Rodríguez of the Dominican Republic.

Reiterating that the Gospel is One and Indivisible, Rodríguez emphasized in his first press conference as CELAM president on May 3, that "there cannot be a theology for each reality which exists within the Catholic Church; we must find the means to approach these regional cultures, but this does not mean that each one of them needs a special theology."

Asked about so-called "indigenous theology," Rodríguez replied: "It is premature to speak about an indigenous theology. One could almost say that it is an indigenous ideology, or, even indigenist. . . . The ideologies sought to portray as theology, what was ideology. . . . Just because a cultural manifestation exists, it does

not mean that it has already been canonized. There are negative things that are questioned and transformed by the Gospel."

On May 1, at the outset of the meeting, Rodríguez Maradiaga stated that it is "urgent to overcome obsolete and superseded postures of ideological division and confrontation inside the Catholic Church," remarking that as long as the laity and some prelates are not convinced of this, and insist on raising the reductionist views of Liberation Theology, a new Evangelization cannot be carried out. "As long as it is thought that the motor of history is going to be the dialectic which forever requires confrontations between groups, it will never be possible to advance."

In opposition to this, Liberation Theology's defeated candidate for the CELAM presidency, the Archbishop of Mariana, Brazil, Luciano Mendes de Almeida, S.J., (elected first vice president), rose to tell the press that "indigenous theology is a priority for us," as was "Afro-American theology. . . . Because more than half of Brazilians are descendants of Africans, we have to give them the possibility of arriving at their own theology."

Mendes de Almeida's remarks show, in part, what was at stake in the CELAM elections, which took place in the midst of violent attacks by Liberation Theology advocates against Pope John Paul II, and zealous promotion of the Liberation Theology bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Samuel Ruiz, a covert leader of

the Zapatista insurgency.

Rodríguez minced no words on current economic policies. "If the decade of the '80s is considered a lost one for Latin America, the '90s appear worse . . . with greater impoverishment generated by the hasty adoption of neo-liberal economic schemes, which carry inequity in their genetic code."

Instead of fostering development, "the international institutions are applying economic adjustment policies which are asphyxiating our people," he added. "Despite the clear failure of these adjustments, the international financial institutions insist on forcing governments to adopt them." These institutions "don't plan for the long term; they live in the here and now, and are not interested in the future, they only act in favor of their own interests, and in the final analysis, they think that if Latin America rebels, it will die of hunger."

It is their policies which create violence, he said. "Not by metal or concrete walls, as in the North, specifically the United States, will immigration of Latin Americans be contained, but through investments in development programs for our nations."

Ibero-America can only develop through actual, "not poetic," integration, he said. He called on the bishops and laity to work to bring this about, as they seek to infuse the Gospel into politics and economics. "It is not difficult to find common ground, because our entire continent is overwhelmed . . . not merely [by] the foreign debt, but also by structural adjustments to the economy imposed by international credit institutions. . . . Let us hope that, unified, we have the courage and the valor to make the necessary changes, overcome this moment, and be what we should be: a great Latin American people."