

want to see what it means for God to be in judgement on the world look at the poor; that is where Christ is judging, and judging by the standard of the love of God. Here we have a visibility of the risen Christ: the love which gives judgement for the poor. The second sign is the Church and its sacraments, in which we celebrate the coming of the Kingdom of love which contrasts with our world and into which our world is being transformed; and yet, as we saw earlier, this is a celebration that belongs intrinsically to this world of sin.

The kingdom to which we are dedicated in our baptism, which is founded on the new bodily life of the resurrection of Christ, is a life in which we will encounter Christ neither in the poor nor in the sacraments. For there will be neither poverty nor the sacred symbols of religion in the coming Kingdom. The Church will have withered away, poverty will be no more. Then we will be fully and bodily present to our risen Lord, sharing in his transformed humanity and in his divinity for eternity.

The Destabilising Poverty Crisis

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Together with the Catholic Bishops of the United States (in their first draft of the pastoral letter on the economy) I would like to affirm:

‘Every perspective on economic life ... must be shaped by two questions:

— What does it do *for* people?

— What does it do *to* people?

The poor have a special claim on our concern because they are particularly vulnerable...’

This World Conference is at the same time an opportunity and a responsibility. It is an opportunity to take up again one of the most difficult of world debates: the relation between the North and the South. And it is a responsibility because even though this Conference is one of

analysis and dialogue we must take steps so that its influence goes beyond this level. We have reached a point in history where debate and dialogue without international action have become an offence and an insult to those who are suffering in North and South because of international economic policies. This morning I would like to speak of the meaning and the validity of the topic that was given to me. We all, rich nations and poor, want poverty to be the centre of world concern. But, in my view, the reasons for our concern are fundamentally different. And it is this that I would like to develop in the first part of my presentation.

Visualizing the destabilising poverty crisis

There are many experts participating in this Conference who know more statistics on poverty than I do. But I would like to affirm some facts that will help us visualize what is happening in the world economy:

1. Robert McNamara, in one of his last annual addresses to the Board of the World Bank, declared that eight hundred million people in the Third World countries live in conditions of absolute poverty, 'a condition of life so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, high infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any rational definition of human decency'.
2. According to the Overseas Development Council of the United States, half of the world's population lives in countries where the per capita income is the equivalent of \$400 or less per year (the United States per capita income, for instance, is \$12,530).
3. According to FAO, the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization, four hundred and fifty million people are malnourished or facing starvation in the world today, despite abundant harvests worldwide.
4. According to the Overseas Development Council, the average life expectancy for people in Third World countries is 48 years (the United States average, for instance, is 74 years).
5. According to the 1984 World Development Report, fifteen out of every hundred children born in Third World countries will die before the age of five, and hundreds of thousands of survivors will be stunted physically or mentally.
6. According to information received by the Department of Social Development and Peace of the United States Catholic Conference, in 1984, austerity measures adopted by Bolivia in order to obtain a loan from the International Monetary Fund, caused 'the price of the daily bread to the poor' to be doubled overnight. 'Kerosene, the fuel of the poor, for light and cooking, went up 300%. Public transportation in urban and rural areas skyrocketed from 40% to 100%. But that was only last year, 1984. According to a São Paulo newspaper, by the end of

March 1985 the annual rate of inflation in Bolivia had reached 8.216%, or 22.5% for every day of the year, including Saturdays and Sundays. 7. In Brazil, thousands of poor rural workers were displaced in favour of producers of soybeans to feed cattle in Europe and Asia. Five million came to São Paulo.

Flying here from South Africa last night I imagined the millions of refugees looking for food. They are not like the barbarians who invaded Europe in the fifth century. But they are the starving who come North in the direction of Rome, Paris and Berlin. And perhaps they will arrive before the end of the twentieth century. These statistics are a daily reality for me. My own country, Brazil, is the eighth economy of the world and the fifth largest exporter of armaments. But the great majority of its one hundred and thirty million people suffer from serious social problems. In São Paulo alone there are 650,000 unemployed, each with an average of five dependents. As there is no unemployment insurance, this means that over three million people face hunger and housing problems. Inflation is over 230% a year. This means that even those who are employed become constantly poorer. There are twenty million abandoned and undernourished children in a country that not only has the means to feed all its own children but also hundreds of millions in other countries.

São Paulo is Brazil's largest and richest city. It is responsible for the major portion of Brazil's industrial production. Its metropolitan area has over fifteen million people. Close to five million people, however, live in extreme poverty, earning less than sixty-five dollars a month.

Every economist who works with the international economic system can tell us what it does *for* people. In this Conference I think we must emphasize what it is doing *to* people. In my way of thinking the whole question is in the title of my presentation. Are the poor of the First and Third World destabilising the economic system? Or is the system destabilising the life of the poor?

The organizers of this Conference have spoken of the world's wish to make the poverty crisis the centre of concern. Is this because of reasons of solidarity and justice? Or is it because of fear? Is poverty important again to the rich nations because they are afraid the Third World will not pay its debt? That the banks will fail? That industry in the Third World will be nationalized? That there will be violence against embassies of rich countries? That the Third World will revolt against trilateral domination of the world economy?

It is not a secret to anyone here that riots and loss of life have spread through the Third World as a consequence of the policies of the International Monetary Fund. These policies have led in the past and may lead again to military dictatorships. An elected president can go only so far in cutting off the means for his people to survive. A military government with its armed forces can insure that an austerity program is

followed.

Dare we answer the question: What has the international economic system done *to* the people?

Worldwide poverty can be seen as a threat, as a challenge or as a great hope for change. If we put this international poverty crisis in the centre of our concern because we are terrified that the poor of Sao Paulo, of New York or of Dublin are looking for vengeance, we will never solve this problem. Fear will overcome us. Each country and each social group will put up barriers to safeguard what they consider their 'economic rights'.

Unfortunately, fear is the greatest force in making the rich (countries or social groups) want to concern themselves about the crisis of poverty. There will be insignificant reforms of the economic system and when there is a little less poverty, the fear will pass and international poverty will be put on the black burner again until another crisis appears.

II. How to make the poverty crisis the centre of world concern?

If we are determined to face the problem of world poverty we have to work together on the most concrete of levels, that is the *economic* and the *political*.

On the economic level the greatest problem is the *debt* of the Third World to the First World. There is a real debt and there is also a manufactured debt. In 1976 the Third World paid 5% in interest. But in 1980 the interest had risen to 21%. Last year, the Third World owed a trillion dollars and paid interest of more than one hundred billion! Every time the United States raises its interest rates thousands die in the Third World because money that would be used for health care and food is sent outside these countries to pay the debt.

This fact has even changed the economic system of the United States. It no longer maintains its world position because of its production. In 1984 the United States owed one hundred and thirty billion dollars in the balance of trade. But the country remains wealthy because of the flow of interest that comes from the world's poor countries. United States capitalism has become so dependent on sales financed by the expansion of credit that it is hardly exaggerated to say that its very survival is in question.

Every school of economics has one or more answers to the international debt problem. We must choose an answer that not only alleviates the crisis at this moment, but that prevents it from happening again.

Connected with the problem of the debt is that of the multinationals. These companies have, for several decades now, expanded in all the main branches of our industry. We have paid dearly in royalties and profits that have left the Third World for the First. But

now the multinationals have expanded their presence in agriculture. Agribusiness is interested, in the first place, in *exports*. Food is exported from countries where the majority are undernourished to the countries of the First World. In Brazil, for example, 21% of the land is in the hand of small farmers and 43% is owned by agribusiness (government data in 1975). But the small farmers produce 73% of the food consumed in Brazil and agribusiness produces 6%! If Brazil were a country of small farmers there would be no more hunger. The national priorities of the Third World must be determined by the basic needs of the majority in each country.

On the political level our criteria must be the defence of the life of the poor majority. We have to act so that the people have *food*. When Pope John Paul II visited Brazil, the poor in the north of the country held up signs that said: 'Holy Father, the people are hungry!' This is the first and greatest problem: the great international political powers must work to see that the poor have food. The problem of the Third World is not between capitalism and communism. We are not in an ideological struggle between East and West. We are *hungry*. We are *ill*. We are *homeless*. We are *illiterate*. We want to live. We want our children to be nourished in mind and body.

And this leads to a second point on the political level. The fear the First World has of political alternatives in the Third World. The organizers of this Conference have said that alternatives must be identified; must be given legitimacy and must be set in motion. I could not agree more. Political and economic alternatives are the hope of the Third World and, in the long run, they will be the salvation of the First World.

Why must the most powerful nation in the world see a threat in little Nicaragua? Greater São Paulo has *five* times the population of Nicaragua. How is it that one tiny country can cause such fear in the United States Government? It is the fear of an alternative. It has been identified but it will not receive legitimacy or be set in motion. It is to be wiped out because it pinched the toe of the giant.

If the First World has no alternatives to offer in the present poverty crisis, we in the Third World beseech you to *at least* respect our own choices of alternatives. We have an old political joke in Brazil: We are at the brink of an abyss and now we have taken a great step forward. International poverty is an abyss. And the fear of national alternatives in the Third World is exactly this great step forward.

III. New frontiers : an international injustice?

The wealth of the nations has always been seen in the context of ever newer frontiers. In colonial times, Europe knew great wealth because of the 'new' worlds that it explored in East and West. And the United States

became wealthy as it conquered frontiers in North America. Today there are few colonies in the old sense of the term. And few countries in the First and Second Worlds still have frontiers to conquer. But the concept has remained in economics and politics. The Third World, no longer as colonies, but as ideological blocs, is the 'new frontier' for the wealthy countries. Our raw materials and our cheap labour become the incubators of new wealth for the already wealthy.

I have been told, even by European theologians, that if this system causes hunger and death in Brazil, that is just too bad. Those people have to die so that the system can go on. But I do not accept this. I *cannot* accept it. An economic system cannot be judged only by what it does *for* people but also by what it does *to* people. An economic system cannot have as a by-product the creation of a sub-race or the death of millions.

And the worst of this situation is that anyone who calls attention to it is considered subversive. But subvert only means to turn a situation around and look at it from the other side. I respectfully submit to you that this situation *has* to be looked at from the other side.

IV. The poor are not a threat!

The poor are not a threat. They are an appeal to change an unjust system. To treat the poor of the world as potential communists is a great injustice. They have been discriminated against economically and politically and now they are discriminated against ideologically! The poor are not the *cause* of the failure of the system. They are the result. The poor of the Third World have long suffered under authoritative governments. They are not looking for another authoritative system to suffer under. They do not ask to be rich. They ask to be able to survive.

On the philosophic level this question is easy to answer. Human dignity requires that an international economic system be just to all. Philosophy deals with what *should* be. Unfortunately, we have seen that wealthy nations do not do what they *should* do. They do what they think is most advantageous for themselves. I would like to end this presentation with a quote from Willy Brandt:

Morally there is no difference between the death of someone in a war, and his or her death by the indifference of others. What limits our response to the challenge of this world situation? It is surely not the lack of technological solutions; these are already largely at our disposal. What we must question is why there is no clear general awareness of this reality, and no political will to set in motion the necessary solutions.