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## A SIGN OF HOPE FOR OUR WORLD (4)

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Continuing with the publication of the Canadian Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Eradication of Poverty, I invite you to work all the harder for the welfare of the poor. If we really want to, we can reach this objective.

### INTEGRATED SOCIAL PROGRAMMES

« Today, more than ever, Christians are called upon to follow in the footsteps of the prophets, in the footsteps of Jesus, by performing an extremely delicate, often controversial, but nonetheless essential service: denouncing social sin that oppresses and impoverishes their brothers and sisters. We remain convinced that the proper emphasis should be placed on the eradication of structural injustice, one sure cause of poverty. Personal conversion and true repentance through the promotion and practice of social change, inspired by the Gospel, can further this goal. As we approach a new millennium, it appears that the planet is becoming increasingly polarized into two distinct new groups: "service" workers and "knowledge" workers. Spurred by the often invisible forces of globalisation, will the privileged minority of "knowledge workers" come to see their marginalised brothers and sisters as irrelevant or as obstacles to their future aspirations? Will an even more deprived social sector be created, consisting of persons totally excluded from the market and economic participation? The moral quality of economic growth can also be measured by how it is shared. The Church continues to express grave doubts and criticism whenever the neoliberal economic agenda heightens the polarisation between rich and poor, or excludes the latter from their true benefits. »

### A NEW ETHIC

« The main issue in the coming years will be how to distribute equitably the wealth of the world that has been created, as we maintain the ecological balance that should be the inheritance of all peoples. To meet this seemingly immense challenge, what is called for is a new global ethic in this era of globalisation. It is no longer logical to blindly equate economic liberalism with social advancement. The present catastrophic state of the world eloquently shows what happens when neoliberal economic policies impoverish women and men. Instead, economic democratisation, genuine redistributive reforms and the resulting strengthening of civil society should be the primary goals. »

### FOLLOWING THE PATHS TO SOLIDARITY

« Over the course of many years, the Canadian bishops have developed and proposed to the members of Christian communities a pastoral methodology for addressing social problems. These guidelines are rooted in the conviction that the People of God must commit to solidarity with the poor and their organisations in order to transform the world. The methodology also recognises that poor people themselves, as part of their quest for respect and dignity, must take centre stage, organise themselves, and become the architects of authentic solutions to their plight. This pastoral methodology includes the following steps: being present with and listening to the poor; developing a critical analysis of the economic, political and social structures that cause poverty; making judgements in the light of Gospel principles; stimulating creative thought and action regarding alternative visions and models for social and economic development; and acting in solidarity with community-based movements. Given the current situation, Canadians need to be committed to a deep solidarity with the new victims of global economic restructuring: for example, the fishery workers and the coal miners who watch

their entire industries shut down; the industrial worker whose job is exported to a low-wage zone; the office worker who is declared "redundant" because of new technology or government downsizing. By taking up the path of solidarity with the poor, we acknowledge their importance in the effort to create a new, more humane social order. »

#### **SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLES OF THE SOUTH**

« Among the agents of social change there are a number of international development organisations. The significant contribution of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) is worthy of note. Founded in 1967 by the Canadian bishops and devoted to public education as well as international solidarity, the CCODP has established policies and programmes with its partner organisations in the South aimed at combating poverty and redistributing resources - in short, putting people first!<sup>1</sup> Since the CCODP and its partners count on the solidarity of Canadian donors and matching funds from the federal government, their goals are in jeopardy as the federal government reneges on its target levels of international development assistance. Canadian aid as a percentage of our GNP is actually projected to fall by 50 percent between 1991 and 1998. Beyond aid, however, is the urgent need to redesign the unequal structures of the international free market system. Pope John Paul II, in the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12), has called for the substantial reduction, if not outright cancellation, of the \$1.8 trillion international debt of poor countries in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000. Ensuring that debt forgiveness will not spawn a new round of indebtedness or other disproportionate demands on the poor will require new attitudes and practices in public finance. »

#### **TRIP TO BOGOTÀ, COLOMBIA**

At the request of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum and the Latin-American Bishops' Council (CELAM), I shall be going to Bogotá, Colombia, between November 18 and 23, to attend the meeting of presidents and executive directors of Episcopal Commissions on Social Affairs for the Americas and the Caribbean, in preparation for the Synod of Bishops on the Americas (1997) and the celebration of the Year of Charity (1999). This session has been convened to examine the main social, economic, and political trends of our part of the world and to prepare documents that are pertinent to these issues. One of the three objectives of the Synod for the Americas is to highlight the problems of justice and the international economic relations among American nations, by taking into account the enormous inequalities existing between North, Central, and South America. I ask for your prayers and those of the Edmundston Diocese Church. Have a good week!

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