

V Symposium of the Reading of St. Augustine
from the Perspective of Latin America
The Political-Economic Reality

Final Declaration

From the 26th to the 31st of January 1998, in the town of Santa Rosa, outside of Lima, we, a group of Augustinians from diverse countries in Latin America, met for the fifth symposium of the reading of St. Augustine from the perspective of Latin America.

While in the IV Symposium, which took place in São Paulo, Brazil in 1995, we shared with Augustine the anguish of our badly treated and deteriorating environment, in the present symposium we have examined our scandalous political-economic reality. Here, an ever increasing gap separates the great multitude of brothers and sisters suffering critical and extreme poverty from a minority which has accumulated riches even to unacceptable extremes. We have examined the neo-liberal economic system that has abandoned the economy to market laws, which excludes the person or which leaves him or her reduced to a mere instrument at the service of economic growth.

The poor of the Beatitudes, the privileged members of God's Reign, once again have become for us, as they were for our father Augustine in his time, a thermometer of our faith. They call us to question the way we live our commitment to the gospel and our consecrated life. The seeing of different expressions of poverty and blood-stained humanity has constituted in this meeting, a signal of alarm and of personal and communal conversion.

A. We wish to Identify and Denounce some of the elements that are destructive of life and are the foundation of the culture of death:

In the economic order:

i) A globalized world economy dominated by a neo-liberal model that generates an increasingly dehumanizing economic growth, oriented for the benefit of the rich countries with the exclusion of any active participation of poor countries. This helps bring about in the poorer nations a social disintegration leading to great internal migrations of people, an ever increasing gap between the rich and the poor, and an unpayable foreign debt.

ii) A growing economy where structural unemployment is at very high levels, including even in many developed nations, and where manpower is replaced by new technologies aimed at increased production.

iii) The product of these predominant social and economic inequalities include: exclusion of many for reason of culture, intelligence, race, etc; and exclusion of many from health services as well as the means to protect life or insure respect for their rights.

In the Cultural-Ethical Order:

i) Conditions of poverty that produce: chaos and deteriorating quality of life; disintegration of the nuclear family; the impossibility of a basic education and a minimal level of health services; the lack of a dignified, less crowded dwelling place; an increasing and alarming poverty in rural areas, where often land lies vacant and non-productive as a result of the emigration to large cities; increasing violence in the cities derived from the limiting and oppressive conditions in which the poor struggle to survive.

ii) Loss of ethical principals resulting in: decline of the sense and value of life and of truth; loss of respect for human rights; disrespect for people's liberty; massive campaigns of compulsive sterilization; perverse methods of threat and blackmail; impunity for those who have violated human rights; corruption which extends like a cancer through the very fabric of our society; creation of societies based on individualism, narcissism and unfair competition.

In the political order:

i) The disproportionate financial inversion for social needs as opposed to the extremely large amounts designated for the arms race, which is sustained by border conflicts which afflicts the majority of our nations.

ii) The presence of dictatorial populist governments that avoid all types of citizen organization and participation and who change the laws to suit their own ends.

B. The Presence of a Horizon of Hope where we can identify some positive elements:

i) The increased realization of the need for a new political, economic and social order where the human person is given his/her respective value and place.

ii) In spite of the misery, organizations rise up in the civil society and lift their voices in favor of justice, the poor, the environment, life, defense of women, and which place the dignity of the human person as the beginning and end of

all forms of development, valuing his/her infinite creative capacity, received in the gift of creation.

iii) The multitude of places and the diversity of cultures and identities that cover our geography are a challenge to those who love and desire to build their own world, as well as a challenge to work for solidarity and reciprocity.

iv) The values of our Latin American people are still vibrant, in spite of the adverse conditions. They are able to maintain their: human warmth; solidarity; respect and concern for others; religious faith; joy of the "fiesta" in spite of the thousand adversities which surround them and the natural disasters that befall them, such as, in these days, the results of the "El Niño" phenomenon.

C. Through this Symposium, listening to the voice of the gospel as illuminated by Augustine, we have learned to value some of his ethical principals that are in contrast to our difficult yet hope-filled reality, maintaining Christ as the center and founder of justice in the face of all attempts at dehumanizing.

i) The principle of "social charity" which means the priority of the common good over that of individuals which allows us to understand that all the world's goods are for everyone, placing us in solidarity with the excluded members of society.

ii) The principle of "uti" and "frui": use things and enjoy people. When these two terms become inverted everything becomes the object of our ambitions.

iii) The principal of "veritas": the transparent exercise of power, looking for the common good without manipulating public opinion, which forms the basis of authentic democratic life.

iv) The principal of having the capacity of recognizing our faults or errors when we have made mistakes. The humble acceptance of mistakes increases the dignity of the person and is the signal of healthy political life.

v) Interiority: seen as a call to have a contemplative attitude in the face of our reality, feeling the presence of God in these realities, and committing ourselves to change.

vi) Other values, closely linked to those mentioned include: peace, sustained by the principle of justice, as the goal of all society; active patience; never ending tolerance; solidarity; dialogue as the source of communion among the children of God; respect for the diversity and defense of the excluded.

D. We propose:

i) The creation of open systems and programs of consciousness raising, participation and self-esteem looking towards a new political order. Our educational apostolates can promote this through an integral education.

ii) Promote means of social communication as instruments to transmit ethical values that promote the dignity of the person.

iii) Support and participate in an active way the existing commissions of our Order and associate ourselves to movements that are oriented towards the promotion of justice, peace and defense of fundamental human rights.

iv) Promote and develop the critical consciousness of our people, using all the structures that we have as Augustinians, such as: strengthening our pastoral organizations, our work as educators, the use of our means of social communication, and using concrete and creative means as an alternative way of development based on the well being of the human person, solidarity, and an equitable distribution of the goods of the world.

We invite our brothers in Latin America through our communities to discern the signs of God's Reign in the many places where they can be found, by means of an active reflection of what the God of Life asks of us in the middle of the weakest, those who are submerged in poverty. Let us help them to be conscious of the immense richness that they have as children of the Father and inhabitants of the many spaces of our continent that are still open to discovery. Our communities should build educational and collaborative structures that contribute to the generating of a new more participative culture that allows us to look with hope toward the new millennium that is upon us.