

To: Kim Lawton
From: MacHarg, Ken
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Pope denounces danger of Protestant sects in Latin America

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Quito, Ecuador--Pope John Paul II has strongly denounced the "danger" of various Protestant "sects" to the Roman Catholic church in Latin America. The pontiff sent a message to a conference of Latin American church leaders meeting to discuss the expansion of non-Catholic groups in Latin America, saying that Protestants and others were spreading like "an oil stain" and "threaten to pull down the structures of faith in numerous countries,"

"The object of the conference was to study strategies to confront the propagation of the sects and new religious movements," according to a Vatican communique on the conference.

European experts and Catholic representatives from throughout Latin America participated in the conference in early September in Petropolis, Brazil.

On the same theme, Pope John Paul II told visiting bishops from Brazil that "certain sects are destroying the faith of the people, at times in a violent manner." He charged that protestant groups are attacking "the mystery of the Eucharist, the Holy Virgin, the ecclesiastical structure of the church, the primacy of the Pope, and the expressions of popular piety."

The Pontiff also expressed his concern about "the psychological pressure exercised by certain sects on new believers, that promise to help them financially and cure their health problems."

He condemned those who he said continue to receive the sacrament in the Catholic church but contribute money to other churches, "cults" or philanthropic organizations.

The pope said that the origin of this phenomenon is "a panorama of religious and doctrinal ignorance" that leaves the people "at the mercy of pernicious influences in a society where moral permissiveness reigns."

The Pope encouraged the Brazilian bishops to redouble their evangelism efforts which he said had been timid and uncertain.

He called on the Latin American Catholic Church to go door to door, street to street, and to be present in all places and by all means.

In their September meeting, the Latin American church leadership called on the family to carry out its role as the "first school of evangelism" to assure that its members understand

the Catholic faith. It said that ignorance of the faith is where the "sects" find fertile ground.

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