

# VATICAN CRITICIZES BRAZILIAN BACKER OF NEW THEOLOGY

*New York Times, 3/21/85*

## Condemnation of 'Liberation' Doctrine Says an Attack on Hierarchy Is a Threat

**By E. J. DIONNE Jr.**

Special to The New York Times

ROME, March 20 — The Vatican today condemned the teachings of a Brazilian exponent of liberation theology, saying the theologian's views endangered "the healthy doctrine of the faith."

In an 11-page document, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said the Rev. Leonardo Boff's sharp cri-

---

*Text of document is on page 6.*

---

tique of the hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church could lead "to the destruction of the authentic sense of the sacraments and of the word of faith."

Father Boff, a Franciscan priest, could suffer church sanctions should he refuse to alter his teachings, but a Vatican official said it was too early to speculate on the outcome of the case.

### 'No Threat,' Official Says

"There's no threat, hidden or implied, in the document," the official said.

The theology of liberation, a body of teachings that is popular in Latin America, often draws on Marxist analysis in emphasizing the church's special commitment to the poor.

The Vatican official said the congregation's document, dated March 11 but not made public until today, could be seen as part of an effort by Pope John Paul II to reassert traditional Catholic teaching after the wave of experimentation that followed the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65.

### Support for Boff in Brazil

The document was expected to arouse considerable reaction in Latin America, particularly in Brazil, where the church hierarchy has been generally supportive of the Franciscan friar.

In Rio de Janeiro, Father Boff said

---

**Continued on Page 6, Column 5**

# Excerpts From Vatican Document

ROME, March 20 (AP) — Following are excerpts from a document on the Rev. Leonardo Boff issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith today and translated by The Associated Press from the Italian:

Notification on the book "The Church: Charisma and Power — Study of Militant Ecclesiology" by Father Leonardo Boff.

The book intends to assist in the solving of problems of Latin America and in particular Brazil. That intention on one hand calls for serious attention to the concrete situations to which the book refers, and on the other hand — corresponding realistically to its goal — the need to include them in the great task of the universal church, which interprets, develops and applies, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the common heritage of the one and only Gospel, given by God one time only for our faith.

In that way, the unique faith of the Gospel creates and builds, over the centuries, the Catholic Church, which

remains one throughout the different ages and in the differences between the many individual churches.

For this the true theological discussion cannot content itself only in the interpretation and animation of the reality of a particular church, but rather must try to penetrate the sacred meaning in the words of God entrusted to the church and authentically interpreted by the magisterium.

## Certain Options Unsustainable

Examined in the light of the criteria of authentic theological method — here only briefly mentioned — certain options of Boff's book are unsustainable. Without trying to analyze all of them, there is evidence here of definite ecclesiastical options: the structure of the church, the conception of the dogma, the exercise of the sacred power and prophecy.

The author severely criticizes "the doctrinal comprehension of the revelation." It is true that Boff distinguishes between dogmatism and dogma, accepting the second and rejecting the first.

According to him, the dogma in its

formulation is valid only "for a determined time and determined circumstances. In another moment of the same dialectic process, the text must be able to be surpassed, to give space to the other text of today's faith."

The resulting relativism from those affirmations becomes explicit when Boff speaks of doctrinal positions that contradict each other contained in the New Testament. Consequently, "the truly Catholic attitude," would be "that which remains fundamentally open in all directions."

## Boff Charges 'Dogmatism'

In Boff's perspective, the authentic Catholic conception of the dogma falls under the verdict of "dogmatism." He writes, "As long as this type of dogmatic and doctrinal understanding of the revelation and of the salvation of Jesus Christ endures, one will always have to take into account irremediably the repression of the freedom of divergent thought within the church."

To this assertion it must be said that the opposite of relativism is not verbalism or ultraconservatism. At the end of the revelation is God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who invites us to communion with Him — all the words refer to the Word.

But in the always analogic and limited words of the Scripture and of the authentic faith of the church, based on the Scripture, the truth about God and man is expressed in a manner worthy of the faith. Regarding the ever-present necessity to interpret the language of the past, far from sacrificing the truth, it makes it accessible and develops the richness of the authentic texts.

A "serious pathology" from which, according to Boff, the Roman Catholic Church must liberate itself, comes from the hegemonic exercise of sacred power, which, besides turning the church into an asymmetric society, also deforms itself.

## 'Expropriation' Criticized

Boff affirms that there was a historical process of expropriation of the means of religious production on the part of the clergy and to the detriment of the Christian people, who were seen as unable to decide, teach, etc.

Further, the sacred power was also seriously deformed, falling itself into the same defects as profane power in terms of domination and centralization. To remedy these defects, Boff proposes a new model church, in which the power is conceived without



United Press International

The Rev. Leonardo Boff

theological privileges and purely as a service answering the needs of the community.

One cannot undervalue the reality of the sacraments and the Word of God, reducing them to components of the scheme of "production and consumption," reducing the communion of the faith to a mere sociological phenomenon.

The sacraments are gifts from God, no one "produces" them, everyone within themselves receives the grace of God, the signs of eternal love.

## Book Stresses Prophecy

The book denounces the hierarchy and institutions of the church. As explanation and justification of that attitude the book stresses the role of charisma and in particular, prophecy.

There is no doubt that all the people of God take part in the prophetic mission of Christ. Christ fulfilled his prophetic mission not only through the hierarchy, but through the laity as well. But it is equally clear that the prophetic denunciation in the church, to be legitimate, must continue to serve the church itself. Judgment of authenticity of the prophetic denunciation belongs to the hierarchy.

In making public the above, the congregation feels obligated to declare that the options of Leonard Boff analyzed here endanger the sound doctrine of the faith, which this Congregation must promote and protect.

The Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, approved this notification and ordered its publication.

# Vatican Criticizes Brazilian Exponent of Liberation Theology

Continued From Page 1

he accepted the Vatican's criticism because "I prefer to walk with the church rather than to walk alone with my theology." But the priest, noting that no sanctions had been applied against him, said he was determined to continue his theological work.

The Vatican statement — signed by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and approved by the Pope — was an unusually sharp defense of church authority, a cause that has become central to John Paul's pontificate.

The document is thus likely to have ramifications not only in Latin America, but also in Western Europe and the United States, where many Catholics have challenged teachings that the Vatican and more traditionalist members of the church regard as part of official doctrine.

The Vatican official who discussed the statement today said it should not be surprising that its language was so strong.

"The idea that the Catholic Church should lay down and play dead and pretend that it believes what it doesn't believe is off the wall," the official said. He asked that his name not be used.

In September, the congregation issued a 36-page essay condemning certain aspects of liberation theology. Four days later, Father Boff appeared before the congregation to defend his most recent book, "The Church: Charisma and Power," the work the Vatican criticized today.

## Analyzed Church Structure

What made Father Boff's book — and the Vatican's response to it today — especially important was the theologian's attempt to extend liberation theology's analysis to the very structure of the Roman Catholic Church.

Up to now, much of the discussion of the theology has focused on its social teachings, on the validity for Catholics of the idea of "class struggle" and on the extent to which Marxist analysis can contribute to theological reflection.

The document criticizing Father Boff noted that he had been given an opportunity to clarify his teachings in September. The document said the conversations had taken place in "a fraternal atmosphere."

But it added that despite the priest's "good intentions and repeated attestations of fidelity to the church and the magisterium," or teaching authority, the congregation had determined that he had not "substantially overcome" the Vatican's initial objections.

Father Boff's book, which was published in 1981, is often searing in its critique of the structure of power within the church. "He makes Rome sound like a four-letter word," the Vatican official said.

## Choices Called Unsustainable

In declaring that some of Father Boff's choices were "unsustainable," the congregation document emphasized that it made its criticism "without pretending" to offer a full treatment of the theologian's book.

To the consternation of the Vatican, Father Boff used an analysis with Marxist overtones of what he called the church's "system of religious production."

The church, the priest wrote, "has formed its own ruling class with all power in the hands of the Pope, bishops and priests."

"The great virtues of the holy Catholic person," he wrote at another point, "are obedience, ecclesiastical submission and humility, all in reference to the church."

And in a passage that referred to the process he is now undergoing, Father Boff declared: "The prophet, the reformer who, in the name of faith, criticizes or proposes a change in the power relations within the church is subjected to every type of symbolic violence

(canonical proceeding) and never is sacral holiness in the church.

## 'Must Accept the'

The document released a sharp issue with this and said the theologian choose to be prophetic accept the hierarchy and tions, but also positive ward consolidating its union."

Referring to prophetic document went on to t supreme criteria to ju ordinary exercise but a ness belongs to the hie

It rejected the notion the church's inner life t volving the materiali "production and consu

"The sacraments are material," their admin production, and their consumption," the d "The sacraments are p no one 'produces' th within themselves rece of God, the signs of ete

## Accused of 'Rel'

In a passage that cou tant implications for among different Chris the document criticized "relativism" in his ana tantism and Catholicism

The document said th to the "dialectic" betw branches of Christianit misunderstood the chu on the Roman Catholic church of God in the w

One Vatican concern a theology has been the c what are known as "b ties" across Latin Ar groups of mainly impo tians often operate with local bishops and form th social base for liberatio

Father Boff placed g on these communities a form for a "new church toward greater internat

"The communities n with the monopoly of s religious power" the Br wrote, "and the inaugu religious and social proc turing both the church

## Fear of Breakawa

Pope John Paul, how expressed his concern t munities might develop away church.

On his visit last month of a four-country tour of — the Pope warned ag opment of "a double h double magisterium."

peatedly called on Cath to the official teaching

The congregation's flected this concern. It s of diversity in the church universal church reali lives in the particular ch

warned that threats to ch to the decay of its com

"The true theologica the document declared, tent itself only in the inte animation of the reality church, but rather mus trate the sacred meanin of God entrusted to the authentically interpreted terium."

## Dispute Halts Lon

LONDON, March 20 Sun, Britain's largest newspaper, was not pu because of a labor dispr from plans to move prin plant and introduce ne

The management of the owned by Rupert Murdo the day's press run was t two print unions that o branch meetings durin time would not promise t today's editions.

## Text of Statement by Boff

Special to The New York Times

RIO DE JANEIRO, March 20 — Following is the text of a statement issued today by the Rev. Leonardo Boff in response to Vatican criticism of his writings, as translated by The New York Times from the Portuguese:

1. Through this document, the highest doctrinal body of the church has spoken authoritatively. As Christian, Franciscan friar and theologian it is for me to listen and adhere. I reaffirm what I have already publicly stated, I prefer to walk with the church rather than walk alone with my theology.

In this spirit I accept the reservations stated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It should be noted that those reservations do not qualify my opinions as heretical, schismatic or impious but as dangerous to its doctrine of faith. It is important to stress that the said document at no time criticizes the theology of liberation or refers to Marxism or Socialism, as was the case in the letter May 15, 1984, addressed to me.

2. I recognize that the attempts to solve problems of the church's reality discussed among theologians be welcomed and even rejected by the church magisterium. At the same time, it must be admitted that such objective problems always demand new efforts and reflection by the theologians in communion with the faith of the church community and its pastors. In any case, the search for truth is an uncoercible need of the human spirit and even more so, of theology.

3. From the point of view of discipline, the Vatican document anticipates no action against my person and activity. Therefore, my theological work will not be interrupted and I wish to continue this with serenity and dedication and obviously now with renewed attention to the questions raised.

## Brazilian Theologian Says He Prefers 'to Walk With the Church'

By MARLISE SIMONS

Special to The New York Times

RIO DE JANEIRO, March 20 — The Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff said today that he accepted the Vatican's criticism of his work because "I prefer to walk with the church rather than to walk alone with my theology."

But Father Boff, responding to the Vatican's 11-page condemnation of his teachings, also pointed out that no disciplinary actions were being taken against him and that he was determined to continue his theological work.

The 44-year-old Franciscan friar, one of Brazil's leading theologians, issued the statement today at the seminary where he works in Petrópolis, 40 miles west of here.

Now that the highest doctrinal body of the church has spoken, Father Boff said, "it is for me to listen and adhere."

## Work 'Will Not Be Interrupted'

"In this spirit I accept the reservations," he said, noting that the criticisms "do not qualify my opinions as heretical, schismatic or impious" but as "dangerous" to church doctrine.

The ultimate disposition of Father Boff's book of essays, "Church, Charisma and Power," is still unclear, ac-

ording to several priests close to him. They said that the Vatican could ask to have it taken out of circulation. Voces, the publishing house, is owned by the Franciscan order.

The Vatican could also ask him to amend the book for a new edition, as it has done in other instances, they said.

In his statement, Father Boff said he wished to continue his work "with serenity and dedication and obviously now with renewed attention to the questions raised."

Despite the Vatican's earlier criticism of his writing, Father Boff had apparently not expected such a sharp announcement this week. In a conversation on Monday night, he said, "In Rome, everything is quiet."

## Ruling's Aim Is Debated

Despite Father Boff's association with the theology of liberation, several key theologians said they believed the Vatican's ruling today should not be construed as a new, direct attack on the teachings, which are widespread throughout Latin America.

They said that over the past few years, the parts of Father Boff's writing that caused the greatest anger in Rome had been those questioning the Vatican's authority and those charging

that the church's vertical structure was authoritarian.

One of the book's essays is titled "The Question of Human Rights Violations Within the Church," another "Can the Power and the Institution of the Church be Transformed?"

The theologians said that this is not part of the essence of Latin America's liberation theology but is a line of debate started by liberal theologians in Europe. Father Boff studied from 1965 to 1970 in Munich, West Germany, where he obtained a doctorate in theology.

The question of the bishops' and Pope's authority, they noted, led also to serious conflict between the Vatican and the church in the Netherlands and to the Vatican's interrogation of the Dutch theologian Edward Schillebeeckx in 1979.

According to a key adviser of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, Father Boff's interrogation in Rome last September "revolved largely around the question of the authority and hierarchy in the church."

"It was no special questioning about the theology of liberation as such or about its Marxist elements," the adviser said. "The issues were those raised by liberal Protestant and then

by liberal Catholic theologians, including Boff."

But several priests said the movement to seek "greater democracy" in the church was related to liberation theology because it sought to bring the church closer to the faithful, with preference for the poor.

In Brazil, the world's largest Roman Catholic nation, several cardinals and numerous bishops have for some time been promoting greater democracy by voluntarily reducing their own power. In a number of places, diocesan meetings take place regularly in which the bishop has a voice but not the last word, and in which decisions are taken through the votes of all parish representatives.

Archbishop José Ivo Lorscheiter, the president of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, reached by telephone, said that the Vatican document would be transmitted to all Brazilian bishops without further debate.

Asked if the Bishops Conference, which includes many supporters of Father Boff, would issue its own position, the Archbishop said: "Boff has already been heard and this is the word of Rome. A discussion of its merits is not necessary."