

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Pope confronts liberationist bishops

The Pope's statements on the economic crisis and social injustice expose his opponents as only wanting a schism.

Pope John Paul II has fully entered the battlefield of one of the fights announced at the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops that ended in Rome on Dec. 8, 1985. Sitting down at the discussion table with the hierarchy of the Brazilian Church, the Pope went right to the heart of the so-called Theology of Liberation, a modern heretical tendency whose power feeds on the implicit threat of provoking a schism in the Church.

The encounter takes on heightened relevance because the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, will soon make public a new document on the Theology of Liberation. The contents of it were already known to the Brazilian bishops at the Vatican meeting.

During the Extraordinary Synod, the Brazilian bishops, including the president of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, Ivo Lorscheiter, championed the defense of the "Popular Church," refusing to contribute to the Pope's efforts to deal with the crisis of Western civilization. The one exception was the Cardinal of Rio de Janeiro, Eugenio Sales, who located himself on the side of the Augustinian current. He is a recognized enemy of the neo-Nazi sect Tradition, Family, and Property, and was the one who showed the most interest in promoting the meeting between the Pope and the bishops and cardinals on March 12-14.

The Pope opened the meeting by discussing the true meaning of libera-

tion, as previously clarified in the Synod. It is not that the Church should separate itself from humanity's day-to-day problems, but that there is a right way to do this: "In the face of the challenges barely sketched out here, the bishops as pastors of the Church, and the Church as a whole, have a specific role to play which is not identical to, nor a substitute for, the politicians, the economists, the sociologists, or the intellectuals. It is the role of one who by profound conviction knows that he is carrying out a specifically religious task, he is putting into action a true and full humanism, and therefore he is offering a very effective collaboration in the solution of human problems. To state the contrary is to believe that only immediate sociopolitical activity is effective." Referring to the first document on Liberation Theology, the Pope added that: "Purified of elements that could adulterate it with grave consequences for the faith, this Theology of Liberation is not only orthodox but necessary."

In this context, he laid out to the Brazilian bishops and cardinals the great problems in which the Church has a moral role "in the face of the historic moment of Latin America," and in particular "the historic crossroads in which the giant Brazil is living. . . . We have the duty to confront grave problems such as health, housing, jobs, literacy, hunger, and need for wisdom to discern behind all these problems the moral crisis, which, as in the entire world, is the cause and effect of the same [problems]."

Pope John Paul II's words on the economic crisis and injustice reveal that the only interest of the "Liberation Theologists" is to provoke a schism.

At the Extraordinary Synod, Cardinal Ivo Lorscheiter and others, at the same time they defended this theology, called for decentralizing the Brazilian church from the Vatican hierarchy. "Over-centralization—arising from suppression of the principle of subsidiaries—has great drawbacks. The Vatican II Council fought against this, but even today the periphery does not participate," Lorscheiter said emphatically in December 1985 in Rome.

This is the so-called Popular Church, which has sought or created local theologies separate from universal truth. A case in point is the involvement of at least 75 Brazilian bishops in the *Suma teologica*, a continental project to publish a 15-volume Theology from the standpoint of the Latin American Church.

There is also a strong tendency in the Brazilian clergy to resist the *ad limina* visits which the bishops must make to Rome every five years. Things have gone so far that some bishops prefer going to Nicaragua—center of the Popular Church—over the Vatican. One bishop, Pedro Casaldáliga, refused to make the *ad limina* visit, but agreed to stay in Nicaragua for 45 days at the express invitation of Chancellor Miguel D'Escoto, to participate in "prayers for peace."

This tendency was also scored by John Paul II. In his message to the Brazilian bishops, he defended the importance of periodic visits, "first, because each of those pastors comes here not in his own name, as the bearer of individual worries or aspirations, but bearing in his heart and on his shoulders a whole Church: that churchly community which a mysterious design of God entrusted to his citizens."