

## Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

### A 'Theolib' revolution for Brazil?

*São Paulo Archbishop Evaristo Arns is in the vanguard of anti-papal ranks in Ibero-America.*

For the first time in Ibero-American Church history, a Cardinal has publicly and fervently supported the Communist-Gnostic regime of Fidel Castro in Cuba. In a letter to Castro on the 30th anniversary of the Cuban revolution and published in the Cuban daily *Granma*, São Paulo Archbishop Evaristo Cardinal Arns wrote, "Cuba can feel proud of itself for being, on a continent so impoverished by the foreign debt, an example of social justice." He added, "Christian faith discovers in the conquests of the revolution the mark of the reign of God."

Commenting on the Brazilian municipal elections of November 1988, and above all blessing the electoral victories of the communist and pro-terrorist Workers Party, the Cardinal asserted, "On the one hand, the popular victory achieved in the last elections renews the political framework. . . . On the other hand, we know that victory does not yet mean our freedom, and we are forced to confront every kind of pressure and difficulty created by the owners of great capital in our own country."

Thus, Cardinal Arns is increasingly taking up the role previously occupied by Mexico's "Red Bishop" Sergio Méndez Arceo, in favor of the Soviet Union's subversive operations in Ibero-America. It is noteworthy that the courier who brought Arns's letter to Castro was the Dominican Fray Betto, admirer and companion of terrorist Carlos Marighela who, during the late 1960s, perfected the methods of urban guerrilla warfare under the guidance of both Cuban and Soviet

intelligence services.

The Brazilian Cardinal hasn't limited himself to letter-writing. Together with such theologians of liberation as Leonardo Boff—censured by the Vatican—and Fray Betto, the self-proclaimed ambassador of the Theology of Liberation to the socialist countries, he is preparing for a protagonist's role in a new "Sandinista" revolution imported from Nicaragua. Betto, an intimate friend of Castro's and of the Nicaraguan government, is an influential adviser to Luiz Ignacio da Silva (a.k.a. "Lula"), the head of the Workers Party (PT) and a presidential candidate. At the same time, Arns's own support for the PT in the last elections was so overt that the PT's victories in the country's major cities was entirely due to the mobilizations carried out by the Theology of Liberation's so-called grass-roots communities (*comunidades de base*).

Cardinal Arns is apparently a long-standing correspondent of Fidel Castro's. For example, in 1985, he sent him a letter backing the Cuban leader's plan to restructure the continent's foreign debt. The "Castro Plan," was first launched through an interview with Fray Betto, and later presented to a Ibero-American labor conference on the foreign debt organized in Havana that same year. From that point onward, the PT and Arns have become the main propagandists for the Castro Plan, which differs from Henry Kissinger's own debt proposals only in name. Arns is also an intimate of Venezuelan social democrat, President Carlos Andrés Pérez.

Arns's expressed political viewpoints represent, in terms of the internal life of the Catholic Church, a counterattack on the reforms that John Paul II and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger have been promoting in Brazil to halt the perverse influence of the Theology of Liberation. Among other things, the Pope had hoped to divide in thirds the gigantic archdiocese of São Paulo, which has heretofore been the stronghold of Cardinal Arns.

The counter-challenge to the Pope was made public in a Jan. 23 statement by Clodovis Boff, brother of Leonardo, when he stated, "The people and the *comunidades de base* will continue, with Ratzinger or without Ratzinger."

Everything suggests that the closeness to Cuba promoted by Cardinal Arns and Fray Betto is intended to inaugurate in Ibero-America the *Ostpolitik* now being cooked up for Eastern Europe in certain corridors of the Roman Curia. According to *O Estado de São Paulo*, the Marxist-Christian Dialogue grouping is acting under the protection—or at least with the complacency—of Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, Vatican secretary of state. "Boff and Fray Betto's initiative in favor of dialogue with the communist countries is nothing new in the Church and, if it isn't finding open support at the Vatican, it has an illustrious example guiding its steps. That model is the charisma and untiring action of the secretary of state," commented *O Estado* on Jan. 20.

Fray Betto himself confirmed this when, in an interview with *O Estado*, he admitted that the results of his trips to the socialist countries are well known to the Vatican secretary of state and that, "In some countries like the Soviet Union, I have met Vatican representatives and held very fraternal talks with them."