

# Brazil: no letup in insurgency

## *“Red Bishops” exploit the Papal visit, Cynthia Rush reports*

The international press has expended a good deal of time and newsprint recently to attempt to explain and analyze the 12-day visit of Pope John Paul II to Brazil, the world's most populous Catholic country. Almost all the articles published have however missed the essential point of the Pontiff's trip, and its implications for the rest of Latin America.

What the analysts have failed to grasp is that while Brazil is nominally the largest Catholic country in the world, it is not Catholic in the sense of apostolic Christianity as we know it. Various forms of “popular” syncretic religions, such as African spirit cults and variations of voodoo predominate among Brazil's nominally Catholic population.

The worship of such pagan cults as “candomblé” or “macumba” is by no means limited just to the poorer, uneducated masses, and it is not uncommon to hear Brazilians describe themselves as practitioners of macumba and “Catholics too.” “Many Brazilian churchmen have opted simply to tolerate macumba within the church as a way of reaching people who might not otherwise be touched by Catholicism . . .” reported the *Christian Science Monitor* on July 9.

### **Brazilian “fundamentalism”**

It is this salient characteristic of Brazilian society which makes it ripe for the kind of religious “fundamentalist” upsurge which has already thrown Iran back into the Dark Ages, and has been orchestrated in Central America by Khomeini's counterparts, the Jesuit Order's “Theology of Liberation” faction.

While Brazil is not the only country in Latin America targeted for the Iran treatment, it is perhaps the most important because of its size and population and the effects that such a catastrophe would have on the rest of the continent.

For decades, cultural relativists have focused their attention on Brazil, studying and profiling its Indian populations, languages, and syncretic religions. Their findings were to provide vital information in determin-

ing how to maintain the degradation of the Brazilian population and expand it throughout the developing-sector populations.

While Jacques Soustelle carried out his studies of Mexico's Aztec culture in the 1930s, his cohort Claude Levi-Strauss performed similar studies in Brazil from his post at the University of São Paulo. Levi-Strauss's most famous book, *Triste Tropiques*, is a detailed anthropological and linguistic profile of the Amazon Indians.

Today the Society of Jesus and its liberationists have no purpose but to bring Soustelle's and Levi-Strauss's cultural relativist dreams into being. The radicals of the Brazilian National Bishops Council (CNBB) rely on the profile of the country's syncretic religions, and the history of messianic uprisings dating back to the early part of the 20th century, to mobilize the Brazilian population into a fundamentalist revolt.

Their aim is not only to wipe out all traces of progress or industrialization in an already impoverished nation, but to extend chaos to the rest of the Latin American continent.

### **What did the Pope do?**

This is the situation into which Pope John Paul II walked on June 29, and for which he was clearly unprepared. Judging from the enthusiastic response of such radical spokesmen as São Paulo's archbishop Evaristo Arns and his colleague Leonardo Boff, the liberationists feel that the Pontiff's visit was a real plus for their cause.

Equally revealing was the remark which the *éminence grise* of the Figueiredo regime, Gen. Golbery do Couta e Silva, was heard to mutter toward the end of the Pope's trip. Golbery reportedly said that “the unexpected had happened” during the visit, implying that it had been a bad idea to invite the Pontiff to Brazil.

What really happened?

### **Contradictions abound**

At two points during his visit, the Pope made strong statements unequivocally directed at the “Theology of Liberation” faction within the Brazilian Church.

In a meeting with 300 bishops on July 10 in the city of Fortaleza, the Pope warned “your vocation prohibits you directly and in total clarity, from taking part in anything that appears to be politically partisan, subject to whatever ideology or system.”

Even stronger was the telegram sent just before his departure from Brazil to the Ecclesiastic Grass Roots Communities (CEB), the apparatus used by many radical priests to mobilize masses of the urban poor in political and social protest. The CEB's, the Pope

warned, must follow the guidelines laid down by Pope Paul VI. "The danger of intromission in politics is particularly insistent. Such an intromission could come about in the very genesis of the communities which are formed without a view of the Church but with criteria and objectives of political ideology. . . ." The Pope repeatedly emphasized that the CEB's should not become politicized, but rather serve as expressions of "charity within the community and solidarity with the most needy."

While the purpose of the Pope's message escaped no one, statements made on the rest of the trip contradicted it. This was the case particularly in the jungle cities of Salvador and Manaus, the last stops on the tour, where the backward voodoo-worshipping Indian and peasant populations have proved a useful tool for the Jesuit "liberation" cause.

The Church radicals of the CNBB have made a *cause célèbre* of the plight of Brazil's Amazon Indians, who are being exterminated by the crude resource stripping and slave labor projects characterizing the government's Amazon "development" program. The radicals generalize from the government program to argue that industrialization in any form is evil, tantamount to "ethnocide," and are demanding that the Indians be permitted to live out their bestial existence as "noble savages."

The CNBB had been particularly anxious that the Pope visit the jungle cities.

### **Voodoo is popular religion**

In Salvador, the Pope was confronted with 400,000 people, many of them practitioners of both voodoo and Catholicism, by their own admission. "We've got to protect ourselves on all sides," one local voodoo priestess explained.

In Manaus, representatives of several of Brazil's Indian tribes, many of them dressed in native costumes, headdresses, and decorative animal bones through their ears and lips, told the Pope, "Holiness, we are a disappearing people . . . we want rights . . . We support you . . . but how can we smile . . . when we are being massacred and exploited?"

The Pope's response to these petitions was what the Jesuits were waiting to hear.

In Salvador, the Pope endorsed the concept of "popular religion." "It is necessary to cultivate and use popular religiosity for the better evangelization of the people," the Pope said. "It is important not to look down on it nor laugh at it . . . The manifestations of popular religion, when these are purified of the negative values of superstition and magic, are without doubt a useful form so that the masses maintain their faith."

The Pontiff responded to the Indians of Manaus: "May you not suffer the true nightmare of being removed for the benefit of others. May you remain secure in a living space that is the base not only for your survival, but for the preservation of your identity as a human group." While the Pope spoke in Salvador, much of the audience beat drums and chanted "John Paul is our voice."

### **The radicals are optimistic**

The liberationist radicals saw cause for optimism in other actions of the Pope. While the Pontiff did emphasize that the clergy must remain outside the realm of politics, he also said that the Church must be an instrument for promoting social justice, and called on the ruling classes to share their wealth, promote equality of income and civil rights. The Pope's references to terror, torture and repression proved an embarrassment to the ruling Figueiredo regime, but met roars of approval from the millions who turned out on the streets. In city after city, crowds met the Pope with the cry, "John Paul is our voice," and "the Pope is our King."

Nor were the Jesuits disappointed with the Pope's treatment of some of their leading spokesmen. Prior to the trip, rumor had it that the Pope might rebuff or even remove radicals like Cardinal Arns of São Paulo from his post. But the Pope met publicly with and affectionately embraced many of the radical spokesmen, including the infamous grandfather of liberation theology, "the red bishop of the Northeast," Dom Helder Camara. The Pope greeted Camara as the "brother of the poor" in a public appearance viewed by millions on television. Rumors are now circulating that Camara will shortly be made a Cardinal.

*EIR* expects that the Church radicals will now try to leverage the Pope's trip to foment the chaos that could destabilize the Brazilian government. Situations such as that which developed around last April's metalworkers' strike in São Paulo, in which the liberationist faction was deeply involved, are expected to occur with greater frequency and with far more disruptive effects. During that strike, Bishop Claudio Hummes of São Bernardo do Campo, proclaimed:

"Every worker should be a Moses whose mission is to free the workers. Moses unsettled the powerful; he organized his people to overthrow the Pharaoh. The Brazilian Church is at the side of those who fight for freedom, on the side of the people unsettling the powerful." As indicated by Gen. Golbery's earlier comment that the Pontiff's visit brought "the unexpected," the Brazilian government views the potential for destabilization with alarm.