Many Brazil Problems Persist Despite 10-Day Bishops' Talk

By James Cotter
Special Correspondent

Sao Paolo, Brazil — (RNS) — More than 200 bishops, representing the largest Roman Catholic nation in the world, met here for 10 days to review the problems highlighted in a poll of some 12,000 Brazilian priests.

The meeting ended as it had begun, with controversial issues still unresolved on such subjects as optional celibacy, authority in the Church and the role of the priest in society.

The purpose of the meeting was to establish dialogue between Brazil's priests and bishops.

The meeting faced heroic challenges. Brazil has lost an estimated 700 priests in recent years. This is a critical problem in a country where the ratio of Catholics to priests is over 5,000 to one. Optional celibacy (reportedly favored by 80 per cent of Brazil's priests) and the ordaining of married clergymen are two elements which figure predominantly in what is being called the clergy crisis.

Other elements involve authority and dialogue in the relationship between priests and bishops, permission to work and earn needed additional income, the role of the priest in society, isolation in seminary training and the entire spectrum of human inter-personal problems.

"One of the fundamental themes being discussed during this assembly of Brazilian bishops is the document from the clergy expressing all their opinions, aspirations and concerns," Cardinal Rossi explained. "After having gathered all this information according to regions, the Episcopacy is going to give an answer to this document."

The facts were known. The time was spent. The survey of the priests was read and re-read and the answer to these questions came forth after 10 days of consultation and dialogue. "No comment."

The bishops announced that questions raised by the Brazilian priests in their survey would be sent to Rome for further study by the Pope. They made no statement on the thorny issue of optional celibacy other than to acknowledge that it was a "serious problem."

Requests for seminary reform, permission for priests to earn needed income as workers, married clergy and other "controversial" questions regarding authority were rejected by the Brazilian bishops. This was clearly interpreted as a victory for conservative forces within the Brazilian Church which had earlier been evaluated as moving slightly left of center.

Another central issue discussed at the Brazilian Bishops' Assembly was the tenuous relationship between Church in that country and the government, which has been deporting priests judged as subversive because of their opposition to the current suspension of civil rights and repression of dissent.

A document criticizing the government was introduced at the assembly but was reportedly defeated by a vote of 135 to 60. Aside from being a fairly accurate barometer of conservative and liberal factions within the Brazilian Church, this episode also indicated that there will be no head-on confrontation with the government over implementation of the Medellin guidelines for socio-economic restructuring. These guidelines, considered "radical" by some sectors of opinion in Latin America, were developed a year ago at the Latin American bishops' meeting in Medellin, Colombia.

Prior to the Brazilian Bishops' Assembly, five cardinals met for two hours with Brazilian President Arturo da Costa e Silva in the nation's capital city of Brasilia. This was interpreted by many sources as an attempt by the government to reach some type of compromise with the Church for the purpose of strengthening popular support and easing Church-State tensions.

Biafran Lives Imperiled

Father Dermot Doran, C.S. Sp., right, a pioneer in organizing the religiously sponsored airlifts which helped keep 2.5 million Biafrians alive for the past year, told a press conference in New York that all the Biafran lives are now in imminent danger because of reduction in relief shipments. Joint Church Aid, which organizes the relief shipments, has the supplies and the planes and the men to transport them — the supplies are moved into the relief centers throughout the country from the airport by bicycle, left — but the airlift has been curtailed because of harassment by Nigerian jet fighters. (RNS)

Priest's Biafra Plea:

'Merchants of Death' Must Be Blocked

By JOSEPH McLELLAN

New York — (RNS) — The United Nations and individual governments must act immediately to stop the "merchants of death" who are selling arms to the parties in the Nigeria-Biafra war, Father Dermot Doran, C.S.Sp., said here.

Father Doran was one of the pioneers in organizing the religiously sponsored airlifts which have helped to keep 2.5 million people alive in Biafra for the past year.

He noted that the problem now is not one of getting food and medical supplies or the planes and men to transport them, as it was in earlier stages of the airlift operation. It is a political-military problem, he said. "We have thousands of tons of supplies . . . within an hour's flying time of Biafra. We can't get it through."

He insisted that a way must be found to end the blockade of Biafra and permit daytime flights, now impossible because of Nigerian jets.

Relief flights by the religious agencies, which have organized under the name Joint Church Aid, have been severely curtailed since June 5 when Nigerian MIG jets shot down a Red Cross relief plane. The Red Cross has suspended flights entirely since that date. The continuing religiously sponsored flights average about 100 tons of supplies per night — about one third of the minimum needed to keep everyone alive.

Father Doran, just back from a trip to Biafra, confirmed recent reports that the death rate related to malnutrition is rising rapidly there, particularly among children. Some figures given for the current death rate have estimated that it may be as high as 1,000 per day. The Irish missionary's estimate was less precise but consistent with such figures.

"Death is much quicker this time than it was last year," he said. "The children's resistance has been weakened.

"We had these children almost saved. We were keeping them alive. Now we see them slipping through our fingers."

The governments of the world so far "have hidden behind the relief efforts of the Red Cross and the Churches," Father Doran charged. "They have used this as a front for their own inactivity."

The real troublemakers in the war, he asserted, "are the people who are supplying the arms to the Nigerian government and, to a lesser extent, those who are supplying arms to Biafra." He noted that Russia and England are known to be the chief suppliers of arms to Nigeria and said that France seems to be the chief supplier of Biafra, perhaps through indirect channels.

Subtle Violence Hit By African Bishops

Kampala, Uganda — (NC) — The bishops of Africa have deplored what they call subtle forms of violence on their continent — those of discrimination and of exploitation.

In two declarations issued at the conclusion of the first All-African Bishops' Symposium, the bishops linked these forms of violence to the more obvious forms of "open warfare and guerilla fighting."

Stating that Africa "stands in such great need of peace," the bishops spoke against "the subtler violence of political oppression, of denial of fundamental human rights, of discrimination based on color or resulting from the abuse of tribalism. All these violations of justice are the seeds of strife, the enemies of peace."

The bishops termed the efforts of world organizations to aid the people of the so-called "third world"—the developing nations— insufficient. They said that "the intolerable scandal is that the rich become even richer through the exploitation of the poverty of the poor."

They added that the "third world is the victim of crying injustices which are often kept in existence by the egoism of rich nations."

'No Boundaries To Christianity,' Pope Declares

Castel Gandolfo — (RNS)—Inspired by his historic visit to Africa, Pope Paul VI has stressed that the Christian faith knows no geographical boundaries, but must be spread by a "living voice," from person to person.

In the first general audience, (Aug. 6) since his return from Kampala, Uganda, Pope Paul asked: "How would the Gospels be spread if there were no missions?"

He said that scientific discoveries spread by themselves easily enough and other ideas are spread "with astonishing speed" through the press, radio and television.

"How is it then, that faith in Christ and in His salvation does not have this virtue of spontaneous diffusion?" he asked. "Faith must be brought, must be announced by the living voice, from person to person.

"There will always be a need for those who throw themselves into the evangelizing adventure, for no other reason than the earth is large and most of it does not know or recognize Jesus Christ as savior and teacher."

Christianity "has no geographical, ethnical or cultural limits," he said. "It is rigorously unique in its essential content but it differs from community to community in that it can be expressed in every form of healthy human culture," he said.

Theater Manager Gets Fine For Showing Smut

Fayetteville, N.C. — (RNS) — The manager of a newly-opened "art theater" here was convicted in District Court of wilfully and unlawfully exhibiting obscene motion pictures after several crusading clergymen, accompanied by two members of the police vice squad, sat through a double feature.

James Lester Pritchett, 62, manager of the theater was sentenced by District Judge Joe Dupree to two years' labor, suspended for three years provided he pays a $500 fine and does not show an X-rated film for three years.

The rating is one the Motion Picture Association of America gives to pictures to which minors are not admitted. Judge Dupree ordered the films in question, "For Single Swingers Only" and "Little Girls," held by the court until the case is heard by a jury.

Jewish Youth Losing Identity Rabbi Says

Haifa, Israel — (RNS) — "Pervading uneasiness" exists in both Israel and the United States over the loss of Jewish identity by young people and intellectuals, the president of the American Jewish Congress said here.

Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld of Cleveland made his comment during an address to the seventh annual American Israel dialogue which has for its theme the transmission of Jewishness.

"In Israel," he said, "the love affair with Western technology and pop culture threatens to obliterate the Jewish past except for its remainders in spoken Hebrew.

"In America there has never been so much ignorance of the Jewish heritage as there is today."

"Jewishness," he said, must mean more than spoken Hebrew or a numerical majority of Jews. It must have its origin in the Jewish past and it must grow out of 4,000 years of Jewish history —a history in which we have conceived ourselves as a people whose goals are larger than the people itself."

American Judaism is becoming increasingly similar to U.S. Protestantism while Israel is becoming an increasingly secular society, according to Prof. Harold Weisberg, an American philosopher.

In his address to the meeting, Prof. Weisberg described Jewish life in the U.S. as "WASP Judaism"—a new brand of Judaism which resembles the typical white Anglo-Saxon Protestant. The resemblance, he said, was "not so much in theology as in life style."

Bishops Seek Extension Of Voting Rights Act

Washington — (NC) — Black voters of the South must be given time as well as legal support to free themselves from the repressive structures which have held them down for over a century," said Father John McCarthy of the U.S. Catholic Conference.

On behalf of the U.S. Bishops' Department of Social Development, Father McCarthy urged the subcommittee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary (Aug. 4) to extend the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Father McCarthy noted that statistics indicate that in some areas, Negroes "are still excluded from full participation in the democratic process."

"Obviously, 100 years of exploitation and intimidation cannot be overcome in five short years and it might even be presumptuous to assume that they could be completely overcome in another five years. Inbred fears and prejudices die slowly," and black voters need time to free themselves, Father McCarthy asserted.

"The American people do not want to go backwards," he continued.

As previous testimony documented, "the forces which once oversaw the disenfranchisement of Negroes are still ready to enact retrogressive legislation," Father McCarthy recalled.

"These elements must not be given the opportunity to undermine any of the tenuous accomplishments of the last four years. The simple extension of the Voting Rights Act as it stands will be the most sure and expeditious way of preventing this from happening," he said.

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