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Liberation Theology Based on Marxism Incompatible with Church -- Vatican



Photo by Terrance J. Brennan

Unique Gift

Jack and Adelaide Salerno, right, of Utica, were among more than 90 persons who headed northward from Rochester via bus to Montreal last Saturday for the visit of Pope John Paul II. The Courier-Journal sponsored the tour that was a wedding anniversary present from sons Dick and wife, Kay, left, of Rochester; and Ed and wife, Sue of Syracuse (not pictured). The Salernos celebrated their 50th anniversary on June 30. Another Courier-sponsored papal tour leaves this Friday for Toronto.

Canadians Jubilant At 1st Papal Visit

Quebec -- Pope John Paul II became the first pontiff ever to visit Canada when he arrived here to a huge and colorful welcome Sunday.

Later in the day, at an outdoor Mass attended by some 250,000 persons, the pope urged the faithful not to accept "a divorce between

faith and culture. You are being called at the present time to a new missionary effort."

In addition to the multitude at the outdoor Mass at Laval University, he was greeted by hundreds of thousands of cheering Canadians lining the streets of Quebec City as he made his

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Bishop Lauds Catechists

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My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On Sunday, September 16, we will celebrate Catechetical Sunday in our diocese. This year's theme, "Rich in Compassion," is taken directly from the Responsorial Psalm and centers on the person and role of the catechist as a believer and proclaimer of God's abundant compassion.

At the heart of the Christian message, Jesus proclaimed that our God is a loving, forgiving, merciful God. Jesus expressed this truth in both his words and his actions. As followers of Jesus, catechists should permeate their teaching to children or adults with these same virtues and strive to instill in the hearts of those they teach the desire to be sensitive to and respond to the needs of others.

Please join with me in a prayer of thanksgiving for the many people throughout our diocese who have accepted the Lord's call to be proclaimers of his rich compassion through their ministry as catechists. May we all be blessed with hearts open to serving and praying for one another,

Your brother in Christ,

+ Matthew H. Clark
Bishop of Rochester



Smiling

Former refugee Viu Thi Pham has reason to smile, thanks to the efforts of a diocesan parish. Story, other photos, Page 3.

Vatican City (NC) -- A major Vatican statement ordered by Pope John Paul II said branches of liberation theology which use "concepts uncritically borrowed from Marxist ideology" are incompatible with Catholicism.

The document, issued Sept. 3, criticized the theory of class struggle and other theories which put liberation from material poverty above liberation from sin.

The currents of liberation theology using Marxist concepts reduce theology to a political program, the document said. By applying the doctrine of class struggle they often regard church authorities as part of the oppressor class, added the document.

The liberation theology text was issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the church agency responsible for monitoring theological orthodoxy. The document also was released in Washington Sept. 3 by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The document, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation,'" intends to draw attention to the "risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought."

The text was approved "by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, who ordered its publication," the document said.

The document said that there is a valid theology of liberation which reflects on the biblical theme of freedom in light of humanity's spiritual slavery caused by sin and the consequences of this in the social order. It also strongly reaffirmed church social teachings on the need to overcome injustice caused by the vast gap between rich and poor in Third World countries and the economic imbalances between the developed and underdeveloped countries.

The document did not name any theologian and did not issue a general condemnation of all liberation theology. Instead it defined what aspects of some branches of liberation theology are incompatible with Catholicism.

A leading liberation theologian whose thought incorporates aspects of Marxism, Brazilian Franciscan Father Leonardo Boff, was scheduled to discuss his writings Sept. 7 with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the doctrinal congregation. In April the Peruvian bishops said they were formally studying the works of Peruvian Father Gustavo

Gutierrez, another leading liberation theologian.

Both theologians have said that they draw on Marxist social analysis to help them understand the causes of poverty, but that Marxism does not influence their theological reflections.

Liberation theology sprang up in Latin America in the 1960s as a theological reflection on the material poverty of people and the need to provide concrete aid to the poor as part of the evangelization process. Since then its influence has spread to other Third World regions.

An uncritical use of Marxist concepts to analyze social situations is unacceptable in a Christian theology because all of Marxism is tied to its atheistic and materialistic philosophy, the Vatican document said.

It said theologians are obliged to submit any method of analyzing social reality to a theological critique to determine its suitability for Catholic use.

"This preliminary critical

study is missing from more than one 'theology of liberation,'" the document said.

Regarding Marxism, "a preliminary critique is all the more necessary since the thought of Marx is such a global vision of reality that all data received from observation and analysis are brought together in a philosophical and ideological structure," it added.

"This is the case with 'class struggle.' This expression remains pregnant with the interpretation that Marx gave it, so it cannot be taken as the equivalent of 'severe social conflict,'" it said.

The Marxist concept of class struggle means use of violence as this struggle is seen as the driving force of history without which social change is impossible, said the document.

For many liberation theologians "participation in the class struggle is presented as a requirement of charity itself. The desire to love everyone here and now, despite his class, and to go meet

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Did Vatican Leave Door Open a Bit?

Vatican City (NC) -- The Sept. 3 Vatican document criticizing branches of liberation theology adds an official, but not final, church chapter to the ongoing controversy over incorporating aspects of Marxist social analysis into Christian thinkings.

The document, although strongly stating that Marxist doctrine and Catholicism are incompatible, leaves the door open for theologians who can prove they have extrapolated aspects of Marxism from its atheistic and materialistic philosophical underpinnings.

The document said that extracting these elements of Marxism is "difficult, and perhaps impossible."

The 10,000-word document criticizes only "concepts uncritically borrowed from Marxist ideology" and concepts used "in an insufficiently critical manner."

This means that some elements of Marxism are usable but under strict conditions, said Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, at a Sept. 3 press conference. The doctrinal congregation issued the liberation theology document.

"The system of Marx has developed in opposition to Christianity, in opposition to the thirst for God and for His hope. This does not exclude the presence of some valid and useable elements. But this requires a much stronger vigilance and a much more conscious critique" than for elements borrowed from many other non-Christian philosophies, said Cardinal Ratzinger.

The cardinal did not list, when asked, the useable elements of Marxism. Instead, he said a Christian should use a two-fold criteria: the element should correspond scientifically to reality and it should not have an ideological stamp.

The issue of Christian use of Marxist elements has been heavily debated since the early 1970s, especially in Latin America. Theologians there began using aspects of Marxism to analyze regional socio-economic and political problems, giving rise to various currents of liberation theology. Also, politically active groups of priests and religious began supporting Marxist movements and Marxist-influenced governments, causing tensions with church authorities, as with the situation in Nicaragua.

Among the contributors to the debate have been the U.S. bishops, who issued a lengthy pastoral letter in 1980 which said the theories of Marx "are clearly incompatible" with religious beliefs. Yet the bishops left the door open for Christians to cooperate with Marxists on specific socio-political issues such as achieving world peace and helping alleviate global poverty.

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