

# Vatican orders closing of Brazilian seminaries

SAO PAULO, Brazil (CNS) — The Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education has ordered the closing of two Brazilian seminaries that taught liberation theology, despite a favorable report on the institutions by a Vatican-appointed investigator.

The Theological Institute of Recife and Northeast Regional Seminary No. 2 have been ordered closed by the end of the year. The seminaries were established by retired Archbishop Helder Pessoa Camara of Olinda and Recife.

According to the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo*, the congregation ordered the closing against the recommendation of Coadjutor Archbishop Vicente Joaquim Zico of Belem do Para, appointed by the Vatican to investigate and report on the seminaries.

The Sept. 5 issue of *Folha de Sao Paulo* reported that Archbishop Zico told Father Humberto Plummer, head of the Recife archdiocesan conference of religious, that he was surprised by the Vatican decision.

Father Plummer told the newspaper that Archbishop Zico "gave a highly favorable written opinion on the two entities and now is worried about all of this, since his positive impression has been transmitted to the bishops and fathers, including me."

Five bishops from northeastern Brazil met in Campina Grande Sept. 5 to analyze the decision and decide what to do with the seminarians, *Folha de Sao Paulo* reported. They are Archbishop Jose Maria Pires of Paraiba and Bishops Luis Gonzaga Fernandes of Campina Grande, Marcelo Pinto Carvalheira of Guarabira, Jose Greire de Oliveira Neto of Mossoro and Tiago Pos-tuma of Garanhuns.

A Sept. 2 United Press International report from Rio de Janeiro said Archbishop Camara criticized the closings as a "very serious" error on the part of the Vatican. In the same report, a bishop from the state of Pernambuco who requested anonymity told UPI that "with the closing of these seminaries, we will no longer have anywhere to train progressive priests."

The Portuguese-language letter ordering the seminaries closed was dated Aug. 12 and was signed by Archbishop Jose Saraiva Martins, secretary of the education congregation, and Monsignor Ivan Peri, undersecretary of the congregation. The

letter was addressed to Archbishop Jose Cardoso Sobrinho of Olinda and Recife.

The letter said the visitations to the seminaries were made Oct. 6-11, 1988, but did not name the person doing the visitations.

"This congregation already had an opinion about both institutions, but, as your excellency and the other interested bishops are well aware, it suspended any decision in this matter until it possessed the results of the apostolic visitation," the letter said.

After studying the visitation report and attached documents, the congregation concluded that Northeast Regional Seminary No. 2, where seminarians live with poor families rather than in a group house, "does not conform to the idea of a major seminary and does not offer the minimal conditions for priestly formation."

The Theological Institute of Recife "does not offer an adequate intellectual formation to future priests, whether diocesan or religious," it said.

The letter did not say what the visitation report recommended.

"We have reached the firm decision that both institutions must be closed as quickly as possible and before the end of this year," the letter said. Archbishop Cardoso Sobrinho was asked to execute the decision.

The letter added that seminarians at the regional seminary "must undergo a new process of vocational discernment and, ascertaining their sincere acceptance of a priestly identity as proposed by the magisterium of the church and the discipline of a major seminary, could perhaps be accepted, if your excellency is in agreement, in the major seminary of the Archdiocese of Olinda and Recife or another major seminary."

The letter said it was the responsibility of religious congregations to provide proper education and formation for religious seminarians.

According to the UPI report, Cardinal Eugenio de Araujo Sales of Rio de Janeiro lauded the Vatican decision, saying that "the direction that these seminaries had taken ended up obliging the Holy See to adopt this measure."

Cardinal Sales said vigilance was needed to determine "which seminaries are functional and which are straying from Catholic principles."



In this 1988 photo, Brazilian bishops Tomas Balduino (left) and Pedro Casaldaliga led a religious procession in Goiania. The bishops and other leaders of the progressive wing of the Brazilian church have promised to keep fighting for political change on behalf of the nation's impoverished multitudes, despite Pope John Paul II's warnings that politics is not the business of priests.

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