



Interview of Leonardo Boff on the *Espaço Público* show on TV Brasil – April 17, 2015

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jniACpLBVQ>

Translation from Portuguese by Tradition in Action

Question: Prof. Boff, in the Pontificate of Benedict XVI we had a more conservative Church; now with Francis, a Church turned more toward her better origins, which are the poor, the end of social exclusion and the fight for the inclusion of the poorest. However, the world, in a general way, is marching toward the right, if I can say so. In Europe and South America these movements are already taking place. Then, I would like ask you: Why is the world doing this at this moment? Have the utopias ended with Capitalism dominating the planet?

Boff: I believe we live in a singular time where we are not just close to a greater dominion of capital or progress, but we are [also] near the abyss. If the devastation of planet Earth continues and global warming continues – and the Pope has repeated this several times – the Earth may continue, but without us. So we are living in times of great urgency, where political problems become relative. Everything has to be turned toward ecology in the sense that all must play a part to guarantee the physical-chemical base of life's sustainability, which has been threatened.

This is for me the great challenge to be analyzed by the States. I am deeply sorry that the majority of the heads of States and decision-makers do not take seriously these questions, which have been reported by renowned scientists. They say that if the Earth shortly experiences, as has occurred in History, a leap, a sudden warming of 4 to 6 degrees [Celsius], none of the known forms of life will subsist. We, who have technology and can create ports and islands of salvation, we also run a great risk of disappearing.

So, I believe that the situation today is totally different. First, because it is global; it encompasses all countries – the life system, the earth system. [Second], a person very attentive to this situation, who is calling more attention to this problem, is Pope Francis.

It is not by accident that he took upon himself [to write] – and it will be published shortly – an encyclical whose objective is how to save life on the planet.

Question: Your participation in this encyclical is quite symbolic. In the World Youth Day there was talk that auxiliaries of the Holy Father were looking for your books in the bookstores of Rio de Janeiro while he was participating in that event. How did you reestablish contact with the Holy See after the whole episode that involved you?

Answer: I believe that, with Pope Francis, springtime came to the Church after a long and dark winter, as the poet says. Very early I saluted him as a Pope of salvation, because the Church was absolutely

demoralized by financial scandals, by pedophiles. No European Cardinal wanted to be a candidate because he would have to face this terrible crisis. They had to pick up someone from outside.

I believe that his name, Francis, is more than a name – it is the symbol of a project: a project of a simple Church, open to everyone, a political project of dialogue with all peoples without discrimination, renouncing that exclusivity of the Church being the only bearer of the truth. All of us must unite, supporting one another in order to serve mankind.

Then, he brought a new atmosphere. And the Church again started to be a spiritual home. In many countries, like Germany where there was an enormous emigration of Catholics as well as in other countries, they are coming back. Today, we feel proud.

Indirectly, through the ambassador of Argentina to the Vatican, I was asked by the Pope to send him material about ecology. He said: “Do not send it to the Vatican, because they will not deliver it to me. Send it to the ambassador who will place it in my hands. Otherwise they will make a *sotto sedere*, they will sit on it and forget to deliver it.”

I sent material three times. He especially asked for a document that I helped to write, which would be a new configuration of the United Nations. Its theoretical nucleus is the common good of the earth and mankind. Not as sustainable development or something like that, but as the common good of the planet earth and mankind. We elaborated a whole conception of a unified planet that distributes the few resources we have in a decent and egalitarian way. I sent all these to him. I hope it was useful.

Question: A listener asked this question: Why was Liberation Theology not accepted by the Vatican? Why were you so persecuted? To what should we attribute this?

Answer: I believe with all sincerity that Cardinal Ratzinger and John Paul II never understood Liberation Theology. They condemned the version presented by the military and the more reactionary groups of Latin America. Then a new head of the Holy Office entered, Cardinal Müller, who said: Liberation Theology is a Catholic theology. Before, they said it was a Marxist theology. We were confused; I almost do not believe it.

For this theology has always understood itself as a Catholic theology made by us, theologians, who have one foot in the *favelas* [Brazilian slums], in the communities, in the fight of the people, and the other foot on top of theology, trying to unite the two sides – the side of injustice and misery with the side of Christian faith and its reflection. Therefore, I would say that today this theology is perennial. It is the most important theology at this moment.

This is so much the case that this Pope represented in Argentina one of the tendencies of this theology, which was the Theology of the Oppressed People or the Theology of the Silenced Culture. This was the Argentine way during the military dictatorship to not use Marxist classifications, of class, etc, in order to explain poverty. He was one of the first to adopt this theology. His professor is still alive today – Juan Carlos Scannone – who says that he [Bergoglio], when he was a student with a Chemistry degree, had already committed to continuously visit the *Vilas Miserias* – which are their *favelas* – and made a personal vow of poverty. In this he has been coherent until today.

Thus, I believe that Liberation Theology has earned respectability today. He [the Pope] invited Gustavo Gutierrez, who is the founder of this theology, to converse. I was in Italy and he invited me, but on that particular day I was opening a large congress of spirituality in Turin. I said: “Holiness, I cannot.” He said:

“Holiness, no! Holiness is the Dalai Lama. I am the Bishop of Rome. It is fine [that you cannot meet me now]; I will call you another time.”

So, he is searching to re-establish [annul] those unjust condemnations that offended so many of the poor, who said: “We are working here in misery, and the Pope works there with the rich. But when we read the Gospel, Jesus is in our side, and we would like to understand this.”