

ECCLESIOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE:  
A STUDY OF HOW THE CONGREGATION FOR THE  
DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH AND LEONARDO  
BOFF UNDERSTAND THE HIERARCHY

Thesis

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of the  
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
The Degree  
Master of Arts in Theological Studies

by

Mark Richard Delisi

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

July 2, 1993

Approved by:

---

**Faculty Advisor**

---

**Faculty Reader**

---

**Faculty Reader**

---

**Chairperson**

## ABSTRACT

### ECCLESIOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE: A STUDY OF HOW THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH AND LEONARDO BOFF UNDERSTAND THE HIERARCHY

Delisi, Mark, Richard  
University of Dayton, 1993

Advisor: Dr. Dennis Doyle

The study centers on an investigation and comparison of how liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) view the hierarchy in their respective church visions. Boff, who resigned from the Franciscan order last June, has been under CDF scrutiny since the early 1980s when the congregation called him to Rome for a conversation concerning his book Church: Charism & Power. The CDF has criticized several positions Boff takes with regard to structural changes in the institutional church. The purpose of the investigation is to uncover the positions of both the CDF and Boff, including their underlying methodological and ecclesiological presuppositions. Critical analysis of these positions will foster conclusions concerning the compatibility or irreconcilability of the two understandings.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those involved in the direction and preparation of this work. I am grateful to Dr. Dennis Doyle, my advisor, who spent considerable time guiding my efforts while allowing me the freedom to discover my own insights. I would also like to thank Bro. Alex Tuss, whose perseverance in reviewing each chapter and suggesting changes was truly remarkable. My special appreciation goes out to Fr. James Heft, whose own love of theology and God continues to inspire me. Finally, I'd like to pay special tribute to my parents and my family. Words simply cannot express the gratitude I feel for their support during my years at the University of Dayton.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER	
I. LEONARDO BOFF'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE HIERARCHY.....	10
Liberation Methodology	
Christology/Ecclesiology	
Concept of Revelation/Doctrine	
Summary	
II. THE CONGREGATION'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE HIERARCHY.....	45
Methodology	
Christology/Ecclesiology	
Revelation/Doctrine	
Summary	
III. CONVERGENCE OR DIVERGENCE?: A COMPARISON OF BOFF AND THE CONGREGATION .....	75
Criticism 1: Relationship Between Church and Hierarchy	
Criticism 2: Relativism	
Summary	
Discussion of Divergence/Convergence	
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	111

## INTRODUCTION

Important developments in Roman Catholicism arose from Vatican II's radical rethinking of the Church and its relationship to the world. The documents of Vatican II instigated a rapid and somewhat haphazard evolution in theological reflection. In response to Vatican II, the bishops of Latin America called for an episcopal conference in Medellin, Colombia in 1968. The Medellin conference promulgated the first comprehensive understanding of Vatican II documents for Latin America.<sup>1</sup> The documents of Medellin, and the preliminary theological work conducted prior to both Medellin and Vatican II, generated new theological thinking: liberation theology.

The rise of liberation theology, instituted by Vatican II and through Medellin, serves as a backdrop to the present study. Application of the documents of Vatican II and Medellin led to heated and sometimes caustic disputes over what represents authentic interpretation and, therefore, proper application of these documents. A particularly torrid example of these disputes can be seen in the controversy surrounding Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). Specifically, Boff's application of liberation theology's method to ecclesiology ignited strong opposition from the CDF. This study pursues an appreciation of the controversy between Boff and the CDF by investigating each side's understanding of the hierarchy. An investigation of Boff and the CDF necessitates understanding a brief history of the Congregation and a biography of Boff, a chronology of important events during the

history of the debate, an explication of the criticisms leveled at Boff by the CDF, and finally, a discussion of the structure and thesis which guide the investigation.

### **History of the Congregation<sup>2</sup>**

As one of the oldest congregations of the Roman Curia, some scholars trace the CDF to the 12th century and Innocent III (1198-1216). Other scholars posit the Congregation's origins further back, with Lucius III (1181-85). During his papacy, Innocent III provided support to bishops in southern France fighting newly formed sects. The Pope formed an inquisitorial tribunal, termed the *Romana Inquisitio*, to investigate the sects. In later years, pontiffs appointed judges outside of Rome with "delegated authority to exercise inquisitorial jurisdiction concurrently with the local bishops" (945). The loose organization of these tribunals leads many scholars to postulate the authentic beginning of the Congregation with Paul III's bull of July 21, 1542, *Licet ab Initio*. Through *Licet*, Paul III "created a new Roman commission, staffed it with cardinals and other officials, and vested it with the highest powers of surveillance to maintain and defend the integrity of the faith and to examine and proscribe errors and false doctrine" (945). The Congregation later grew in scope and size, but "never had anything in common with the Spanish Inquisition" (945). Pontiffs applied numerous names to the Congregation, and Sixtus V, who entitled it the Congregation for the Holy Inquisition, built the Palace of the Holy Office. (945). Benedict XIV, who, while still a cardinal, became the CDF's first prefect, called it the Congregation for the Universal Roman Inquisition.

The Congregation's jurisdiction covers the entire Catholic population, including other cardinals. Other functions than the CDF's primary charge of safeguarding the

doctrine of the faith and morals include: "To examine new teachings, to censor books, to deal with delicts against faith and the dignity of the Sacrament of Penance, and to probe and settle doubts and questions of law and of fact relating to matrimonial cases involving the 'privilege of the faith'" (945) A cardinal heads the Congregation, and holds the title of prefect. The assessor follows the prefect in ranking and is allied with the commissary, or head of the judiciary, who is served, in turn, by two associate judges. (945) The Order of Preachers fills the positions of commissary and his associate judges. Other members of the Congregation include "an international body of consulters chosen by the pope from among learned and experienced theologians and expert canonists" (945). In addition, the Congregation employs the services of experts (*periti*) when necessary. The CDF's members observe strict rules of secrecy, and "violation of this obligation entails *ipso facto* excommunication reserved for the pope personally" (945).

This brief introduction to the history of the Congregation gives an understanding of its makeup and function. The history, while not specifically referred to again, provides an important backdrop for the present Congregation. Similarly, a short biography of Boff facilitates an understanding of his life and certain influences.

### **Biography of Leonardo Boff<sup>3</sup>**

Boff was born in Concordia, Santa Catarina, Brazil in 1938. He considers his father, a school teacher who identified himself with the poor in Concordia, to be a great influence, especially in helping Boff to "see the world from the perspective of the poor and oppressed" (125). Ordained a Franciscan priest, Boff obtained graduate degrees in philosophy from Curitiba, Brazil in 1961 and in theology from Petropolis, Brazil in 1965. He received his doctoral degree in theology at the Ludwig Maximilian Universitat in



Munich, where he studied under Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, the present prefect of the CDF. Boff also took courses at Wurzburg, Louvain, and Oxford. He became a professor of systematic theology at the Petropolis Institute for Philosophy and Theology, and, until his recent resignation from the Franciscans, was an advisor to the Brazilian Conference of Bishops and the Latin American Confederation of Religious (125).

Boff notes two experiences which greatly influenced his life and the development of his theology. These experiences include ministering in a Petropolis slum where, he says, the citizens "simply live by competing with the swine and the vultures for what they can find in the garbage dumps," and trips into the diocese of Acre-Purus in the heart of the Amazon jungles (125). The Acre-Purus excursions afforded Boff the interaction with a people whose life, according to him, "is summed up in the struggle for survival: how to withstand the violence of nature, of the rain forest and surging rivers, of wild animals and diseases" (126). For the people of Acre-Purus, Boff continues, "faith and life, God and suffering, are one" (126). Boff's integration of an excellent European education with direct experience of the poor in Petropolis and work with the indigenous peoples of Acre-Purus drives his liberation perspective of theology and ecclesiology.

The biography of Boff and the history of the Congregation combine to give a better perspective on the dispute. The Congregation's extended history influences its manner of safeguarding the faith. Similarly, Boff's experiences in Brazil influence his understanding of the faith and its implications on church structure. This backdrop enriches a chronological review of the dispute between Boff and the CDF.

### **Chronology of Events**

On April 19, 1981, Boff published the book Igreja: Carisma e Poder which was translated as Church: Charism and Power in 1985. The publication of Boff's book on ecclesiology marks the beginning of the controversy between Boff and the CDF. Harvey Cox, writing on the conflict between Boff and the CDF, describes the book and Boff's hopes for it:

Boff...hoped of course that the volume would find an audience, but he was not unduly optimistic. After all, the book was a potpourri of disparate writings with only a minimal unifying theme. Some parts were transcriptions of talks he had given at conferences and discussion groups. Others had already appeared in religious magazines....neither the title nor the subject matter seemed to invite widespread public debate. Collections of essays on ecclesiology rarely make the best seller lists. (The Silencing 21)

Collections of essays on ecclesiology do, however, gain the attention of Rome, and on May 15, 1984, Boff received a letter from Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger<sup>4</sup>, prefect of the CDF, summoning him to Rome. Boff met with Ratzinger on September 7, 1984, and the Congregation silenced Boff for a period of one year, beginning on May 9, 1985. The CDF allowed for an early curtailment of the silence, and Boff regained full speaking and writing activities on March 29, 1986.

On June 28, 1992, Boff announced his resignation from the priesthood and the Franciscan Order. *LatinAmerica Press* published a translation of Boff's letter<sup>5</sup> explaining his resignation. This letter describes actions taken by the CDF between the lifting of Boff's silence in 1986 and his resignation:

I was removed from the staff of the magazine *Revista Eclesiastica Brasileira* and the editorial board of *Editora Vozes* publishing house. Rome put me under a special statute, outside of canon law, which obliged me to submit all my writings to a double censorship prior to publication: to the Franciscan Order and to a bishop who was authorized to give an imprimatur. ("Boff Explains" 7)

Boff comments that he "accepted everything and [he] submitted to everything," but "between 1991 and 1992 the circle closed even more" ("Boff Explains" 7). He describes these years:

I was dismissed from the magazine *Vozes* (the oldest cultural magazine in Brazil, which dates from 1904). Censorship was imposed on all publications of *Editora Vozes*. I was again required to submit every article or book I wrote to prior censorship. And this censorship was zealously applied. I was prohibited from teaching theology for an undetermined time. ("Boff Explains" 7)

Boff explains how the Congregation's actions led to his resignation from the priesthood and the Franciscans: "I feel as though my back were against a wall. I cannot go any further. To retreat would mean sacrificing my own dignity and giving up the struggle of so many years" ("Boff Explains" 7).

Boff's resignation brings the history of the tensions with the CDF to its most recent point. Each side has published and spoken little on the matter since the resignation. The chronology of the events on each side leads to a discussion of the defining points in the CDF's criticism of Boff.

### **The Congregation's Criticism of Boff**

The Congregation takes issue with Boff's book: Church: Charism and Power in a letter reprinted under the English title "Doctrinal Congregation Criticizes Brazilian Theologian's Book."<sup>6</sup> The CDF criticizes Boff for ecclesiological and doctrinal relativism, and for an improper understanding of the prophetic role and sacred power. The CDF finds "certain options in Boff's book [which] appear to be unsustainable" (685). More seriously, relativism leads to "the destruction of the authentic meaning of the sacraments and of the word of faith," and Boff's writings "endanger the sound doctrine of

the faith" (687). Chapter three of this study examines these criticisms in detail and provides a comparison of each side's positions.

The Congregation's criticism of Boff touches on issues other than relativism and improper understandings of prophecy and sacred power. As Cox notes, "the dispute between [Boff and the CDF] goes deeper. It is about the very *nature* of that church, and *what* its work in the different worlds should be" ("The Silencing" 141). The inquiry in the ensuing chapters looks at these foundational issues.

### Thesis

This study of Boff and the Congregation centers on articulating each side's understanding of the hierarchy. The scope and the conclusions reached, however, go beyond the two conceptions of the hierarchy. Deeper issues surface which influence these understandings and necessitate a look beyond each side's position on the hierarchy to delineate the divergent understandings of method, Christology, ecclesiology and revelation and doctrine. An appreciation of the underlying presuppositions of Boff and the CDF provides a more comprehensive view of the differences between the two sides. Boff and the CDF elaborate broadly different views of the hierarchy's place in the church, its relationship to the laity, its mission and its relationship to the church. These different views arise from divergent understandings of the underlying issues.

This investigation, then, poses three questions: What primary theological positions underlie the Congregation's criticism of Boff? How would Boff's understanding of the hierarchy respond to the criticisms posed by the CDF? And finally, given answers to the above questions, can the two positions be reconciled at some level, or do the understandings differ on a fundamentally irreconcilable level? These questions

facilitate the discussion in chapter three, which concentrates on comparing each side's understanding of hierarchy through an appreciation of each side's presuppositions. Chapters one and two independently investigate the positions of Boff and the CDF.

Many areas of reflection shed light on an investigation of Boff and the CDF. One particular area, however, especially illuminates the debate: each side's understanding of the relationship between the Church and the world. Boff and the Congregation hold widely different views on church-world relationships, and these views color each side's understanding of method, Christology, ecclesiology, revelation and doctrine. These understandings weigh heavily on each side's appreciation of the hierarchy. Ultimately, the debate centers on the changing perceptions of the Church and the world brought about through Vatican II. Given this fundamental influence, an understanding of the ensuing discussion, and an appreciation of the CDF's history as well as of Boff's life and influences, the core of the investigation can begin by looking at Boff's understanding of the hierarchy.

1. Two articles provide background and information on the Medellin Conference and its reception of Vatican II. These are: Segundo Galilea, "Latin America in the Medellin and Puebla Conferences: An Example of Selective and Creative Reception of Vatican II." in The Reception of Vatican II, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A Komonchak (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987); and David Abalos, "The Medellin Conference," Cross Currents 19 (Spring 1969) 113-132.
2. All citations in this section are taken from The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, 1967, pp. 944-946.
3. All citations in this section are taken from Dean William Ferm's book: Profiles in Liberation: Thirty-Six Portraits of Third-World Theologians. Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988.
4. This study concentrates on works published by the Congregation. Additional understanding of the Congregation may, however, result from an examination of works published by its prefect, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Vittorio Messori presents a particularly interesting perspective on Ratzinger's views in his interview of the prefect, The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984). Other works by Ratzinger worth looking at include: Church: Ecumenism and Politics (New York: Crossroad, 1988), and The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on God in the Trinity (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979). Two articles authored by Ratzinger also provide an indication of his thought: "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," Origins 15 (Nov. 14, 1985): 370-376; and, "God and Freedom: Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life," Origins 19 (Feb. 8, 1990): 591-596.
5. The letter was originally published in *Tempo e Presenca*, May-June, 1992.
6. Origins 14 (April 4, 1985): 683-687.

## CHAPTER I LEONARDO BOFF'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE HIERARCHY

### Introduction

The tension between Leonardo Boff and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith arises from divergent views concerning theology, ecclesiology, and methodology. One of these points involves the two parties' understanding of the hierarchy. Uncovering Boff's understanding of the hierarchy facilitates a deeper search for the underlying principles that guide this understanding. This search then leads to a better understanding of the problems between Boff and the CDF. A look at Boff's understanding of the hierarchy begins with a central facet of this understanding: the notion of charism.

Boff's centrally locates the hierarchy in his understanding of charism. Charism "is a manifestation of the Spirit's presence in the members of the community, causing everything that they are and do to be done and ordered for the good of all" (Church 158). Each member of the community brings a specific charism to the community. These charisms, in turn, fuel the growth and health of the community. Boff holds that the Holy Spirit gifts members of the church community with charisms which, while individually manifested, exists for the good of all members. In Boff's understanding, the hierarchy functions as one charism among many. Boff calls the hierarchical charism the charism of unity:

The specific function of the hierarchy (those who are in leadership roles) is not accumulation but integration, making way for unity and harmony among the various services....This charism of unity implies all other charisms....

This model of organization...will foster a spirit which, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, will revitalize the traditional and hierarchical institutions of the Church.

(Church 164)

The charism of unity functions as the primary charism. In Boff's understanding, the hierarchical leaders, including "the presbyters (the elders) the bishops (episkopoi), and the deacons are the vehicles, or vessels, of the charism of unity, of oneness, in the community" (Ecclesiogenesis 94).

The notion of charism serves as a beginning point in the discussion of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy. By emphasizing the *functional* nature of the hierarchy, Boff moves away from a view of the hierarchy which sees it as ontologically based in church structure. This emphasis has implications for other aspects of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy. The CDF dislikes Boff's emphasis on functionality, and takes issue with aspects of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy which build on the notion of charism. These aspects include Boff's understanding of the place of the hierarchy in the church and the hierarchy's relationship to the laity. To understand the tensions between Boff and the CDF, then, primarily entails a better grasp of both party's specific understanding of the hierarchy. These understandings build on underlying presuppositions. In Boff's case, these principles include his methodology, his Christology and understanding of church origins, and his concept of dogma and revelation. Exposing these areas facilitates an explanation of their influence on Boff's understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Liberation Methodology**

Boff utilizes liberation theology's method,<sup>1</sup> and this theology provides a backbone to all of his conclusions about the hierarchy. His liberation methodology divides into five key areas: the importance of experience, culture and the "social dimension" in



theology; his understanding of faith; the notion of praxis; the critical attitude he employs in his methodology; and his understanding of integral liberation. An overview of these five areas provides a matrix for comprehending Boff's methodology and its influences on his understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Experience, Culture, the "Social Dimension"**

Latin American liberation theology begins its reflection with the experience and cultural situation of the Latin American people. The people formulate questions which, when posed to their faith, challenge theology for answers and direction. The experience of the people, their struggles, their questions, guided by cultural norms, serve as the starting point of Boff's methodology. According to Boff, this experience "is not properly a particular experience" (God's 34). He emphasizes the interrelationship of Christianity and culture, of theology and experience:

...experience is the primary reality. Its translation into concepts is secondary....

The culture pervades every theological discourse. Every theological discourse is cultural discourse....

Thus we can no longer take God as a universally accepted starting point.... We are secularized. The world - the saeculum - is the focal point that orients our understanding.... (Liberating 19-20,26)

An important question arises as to the specific cultural and experiential locus Boff favors. The answer to this question lies in his adamant call to start with the oppressed, the marginalized, the economically poor Latin American people.<sup>2</sup> His "hermeneutic locus is situated on the periphery of the prevailing system rather than imbedded in it" (Liberating 65). Boff argues that a method not applied from the periphery may result in conclusions aligned with progressive forces in society. He comments that "not infrequently progressive, secularizing, enlightenment theologies, critical in the extreme, mask conservative political positions and function to ideologically reinforce the status quo"

(Faith 145). Hence, liberation theology attempts to root itself not in the center, with its emphasis on the status quo, but in and with the periphery. Boff's roots his method in a "periphery consciousness," which guides all subsequent thought and discourse.

Boff's orientation to the experience and culture of marginalized Latin Americans influences his view of the human person. Just as theological reflection and Christian discourse reside in a particular cultural and experiential milieu, so too does the human person find himself or herself encompassed by a social dimension. This dimension "pervades the human person," a person "enmeshed in a given infrastructure and the conditioning influence of sex, race, culture, religion, class, age-group, and profession" (Liberating 28, 136). These "conditioning influences" form an important part of how the human person views reality, and, as such, Boff emphasizes their importance in shaping theological discourse.

### **Faith**

The world of the economically poor and marginalized of Latin America provides the locus for starting theological reflection in Boff's method. From this starting point, he appropriates the secular, cultural and social influences on humanity, Christianity, and theological discourse. This appropriation does not, in Boff's understanding, reduce the mystical, transcendent or irreducible nature of religion and humanity. His method begins with the experience of the marginalized but does not end with this experience. Faith joins with experience to form a second facet of Boff's methodology.

Boff's understanding of faith provides an important balance in his methodology.

He distinguishes between what faith is and explications of faith:

...saying that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is faith; saying that God is one nature and three Persons is an explication of faith. We welcome faith with open

hearts; explications of faith can be debated and even rejected. Faith is response to divine revelation; explications of faith are the responses of reason to the question raised by faith. (Trinity 2).

Faith informs the social dimension of theology and human living with a transcendent "mystical" dimension. He elaborates:

Faith does have one facet turned toward society. But that facet is not the whole of faith. The original or central facet of faith is turned toward the eternal dimension of existence, and it is in light of that orientation that faith contemplates politics, economics, and society as potential routes to the Reign of God or departures from those routes. (Faith on the Edge 6)

Sociological understandings of the questions posed by the marginalized present an incomplete picture of the problems. Boff warns that overemphasis on the sociological aspects of liberation theology, what he terms "sociologism," leads to a "refusal to recognize an irreducible element in religion: the encounter of the human being with the absolute" (Faith 34). Faith opens the way to the irreducible element in religion and humanity and complements the sociological dimension. Boff utilizes a notion of faith which transcends history. Faith "embraces and covers the whole of life" (Liberating 153). In encompassing all of life "faith must hand down a verdict on persons and society...it must move outside the limits of history. The ultimate meaning of life can only be transhistorical" (Faith 158). Faith conditions the response to the questions which arise from the marginalized and which demand theological answers. The cultural and social dimensions of these questions combine with mystical and trans-historical dimensions. In Boff's methodology, faith plays a vital role in assuring that both the formulation of and response to the questions of Latin American poor contain more than secular elements. Faith safeguards the reference to the Absolute, to the transcendence of each person.

Boff's methodology contains a dialectical interplay between the social and

transcendent. Boff sees overemphasis of either dimension as detrimental to the method's vitality. He places importance on an understanding of the world and God which does not set the two apart:

We are seeing with increasing clarity that God and world are not simply two opposed realities like transcendence and immanence, eternity and time, Creator and creature. This sort of metaphysic of representation belongs to a static vision of things. But if we introduce categories such as history, process, freedom, and so on, then dynamism, interplay of relationships, and dialectics of mutual inclusiveness make their appearance. The world emerges not as a mere otherness from God, but as the receptacle for God's self-communication. (Trinity 112-113)

An investigation of both the social and the transcendent in the lives of the marginalized provides a richer set of questions for theological reflection as well as better balanced answers to these questions. Hence, Boff emphasizes the human person as "the basic dimension which does not give us warrant for objectifications which deny either God or the world," especially "in the dimension of [the person's] historicity" (Trinity 30). An understanding of God arises from the people's experience throughout history.<sup>3</sup> This combination of the social and the transcendent in the human person contains "the burning question" for liberation theology, a question concerned with "the relationship between faith and social justice, between evangelization and liberation, between spirituality and politics" (Faith 57).

### **Concrete Praxis**

The interplay of the social dimension and the faith dimension in Boff's method relates to another key aspect of Boff's methodology: the idea of praxis. Formulating the questions from the social contexts of the marginalized through the eyes of faith incorporates a theological discourse which leads to further discussion of how to answer these questions. This discourse then leads into some type of action. The action involves

a combination of theory and practice intertwined in what Boff terms praxis.

The questions which arise from the marginalized of Latin America often focus on a certain indignation or oppression experienced in the community. Through the eyes of faith, and in conjunction with an understanding of social forces and cultural conditions in the community, theology attempts to give answers to these questions. The community gives priority to answers which not only explain the suffering, but which also direct the community toward action aimed at alleviating the oppression. Boff terms this action praxis, and it flows from the social and faith dimensions which come before it:

Now Christianity is embodied in a social practice - a practice born of meditation on the Word of God, and taking its inspiration in the activity of God coupled with that of human beings. As social activity this new Christian practice is necessarily born in the world of the profane. But its placenta is the Gospel. Thus it is textured in sacred space and secular. (When 83)

The three part, cyclical nature of Boff's methodology now becomes apparent. From the dialectical poles of the faith context and social situation come answers to the questions raised in the community. The community then translates these answers into various forms of action aimed at alleviating the situations of injustice or indignation. Often, as the community engages in praxis, additional repression results, generating further questions which refuel the tripartite theological reflection and community action. Analysis using the social sciences, faith and the irreducible nature of humanity and religion, and concrete praxis aimed at alleviating community suffering form a three-part framework in Boff's methodology.

### **Dialectical Criticism**

Further analysis of Boff's method shows an underlying critical attitude which pervades this methodological framework. To understand Boff's method requires going

beyond the visible structure to this less-visible, but equally present and important critical stance which permeates the method. In attempting to answer the questions which arise from the experience of the oppressed in Latin America, Boff's method employs a critique of prevailing economic, social and political structures. He argues that criticism uncovers elements of structural sin contributing to oppression of the marginalized: "If theology means to be able to identify the presence of sin and grace in society, it will be obliged to undertake the most rigorous possible analysis of the mechanism and functioning of that society" (When 75-76). Boff employs Marxist thought in carrying out this analysis of society. He reflects that "many currents of liberation thought...typically distance themselves from Marxism's philosophical presupposition of dialectical materialism...[and] use the scientific side of Marxism" (Faith 62). Boff elaborates on this Marxist analysis:

Today's social analysis has two basic tendencies: the *functionalistic* tendency, which sees society principally as an organic whole (generally the view of the powers that be), and the *dialectical* tendency, which contemplates society as a set of forces in tension and conflict owing to their diverse interests (generally the view of the powerless). (Faith 61)

A dialectical tendency pervades the entire tripartite structure of Boff's methodology.

Dialectical criticism, in Boff's view, provides important answers for the marginalized and their questions. This criticism views the established structures of society, government and church with a basic skepticism and attempts to understand how these structures affect the marginalized in society. Boff limits the use of dialectical social analysis, relating it to the whole of his liberation methodology:

...the theologian can use this Marxist contribution *only in the moment of the knowledge of conflicting social reality*...the theologian [then] enters upon the specific activity of theology itself - a reading (of this Marxist social analysis) in the light of faith, that is, under the lens of the Scriptures, the magisterium, the social teaching of the Church and so on. (Faith 78)

Boff utilizes critique of social reality as a tool in his methodology. All areas of the methodological process incorporate this tool, but, "by no means," says Boff, "does the theology of liberation become the slave to its analytical tool" (When 76).<sup>4</sup>

Understanding Boff's methodological framework and tool of dialectical criticism leads to a fuller picture of his methodology. The methodology cannot be understood, however, apart from its purpose. To what end does Boff use the method of liberation theology and its tool of dialectical critique? The end lies in what Boff terms integral liberation.

### **Integral Liberation**

A look at the reality of the marginalized in Latin American reveals abject poverty, squalor, and general lack of the basic necessities for millions. Violence, oppression, and disregard for human rights fuel the poverty of Latin America's poor, adding to their misery. Almost "200 million poor" live in Latin America ("Latin" 3). This statistic, based on economic indicators, combines with oppression and violent political conflict to reveal a picture of massive human rights abuses on the continent. According to the Andean Commission of Jurists-Colombian Section, in 1992 Colombia experienced an "average of 12 people a day killed in political violence, up from 10 a day in 1991" ("Greater" 6). The commission reports that, since 1988, "Colombian democracy has produced more victims each year than were produced under the 16 years of military dictatorship in Chile" ("Greater" 6). In Brazil the annual report of the Land Ministry Commission (CPT) gives an account of conditions in the country's rural area. The report documents "38 assassinations stemming from land conflict and nearly 14,000 people working in conditions of virtual slavery...mainly in the coal mines of Mato Grosso do

Sul" ("Violence" 7). Similar reports come from the other Latin American countries. The civil war in Peru claimed nearly "3000 lives," and "the assassinations of 50 journalists in Mexico was a glaring indictment of human rights abuses in that country" ("Latin" 3).

*Latinamerica Press*, a weekly publication which covers Latin American issues, says that "street children, campesinos, the poor, people detained without trial, delinquents and battered women are several groups on which human rights activists are now focusing" ("Latin" 3). The economic poverty combines with violence and oppression in Latin America:

Human rights groups in the region insist that economic oppression is now the most serious violation against the right to live with dignity. They contend that the unjust distribution of wealth forces the poor to protest and struggle for better lives. The response by governments and private institutions to the struggle of the poor has been repression, imprisonment, persecution, torture or death, according to the groups. ("Latin" 3)

Boff places his method at the service of the people experiencing this poverty and oppression. As such, the method becomes a means of reflection on the community's reality. The method also serves to offer concrete action (praxis) for changing the community's situation of poverty and oppression. The community directs this combination of reflection and action toward what Boff terms integral liberation.

Integral liberation includes two facets. First, the community hopes and works toward a release from social and economic poverty and oppression, what Boff terms historical liberation. This liberation involves "a revolutionary process that will destroy an iniquitous situation which generates structural sinfulness and will elaborate an alternative project which facilitates fraternal love and the practice of justice" (*Liberating* 153). The praxis decided upon by the community constitutes historical liberation.

Integral liberation's second facet takes on a wider and deeper scope than the historical



liberations. Each action successfully enacted to counter the poverty or injustice experienced by the community "anticipates and paves the way for definitive liberation in the kingdom" (Liberating 152). The community places hope in and works toward a greater eschatological liberation. Boff defines the eschatological as "no more than a means of elevating history and our human commitments, a way of always keeping up our journey without stopping or establishing fixed positions in regard to anything here below" (God's, 72). Boff elaborates on the notion of eschatological liberation:

...it is God who motivates and penetrates human action in such a way that liberation can be called God's liberation....

...Historical liberations anticipate eschatology but they do not establish the eschatological state, for that would amount to the end of history. History lies open to an unforeseen future. It can advance toward the kingdom, retreat, or even lose the right track. (Liberating 152, 155)

According to Boff, this greater liberation contains the historical liberations but eschatological liberation exists mainly as a "God project." Boff terms the combination of historical with eschatological liberation integral liberation. The goal of the community centers on integral liberation of all. Boff warns of the importance of understanding both sides of liberation:

It is important to keep this perspective in view: the struggle for economic, political, and educational liberation goes beyond the scope of these areas. They have a theological dimension. Besides concretizing social liberation as such, they concretize the liberation given by God. (Salvation 17)

The goal of the community remains in dialectical tension between liberations achieved and a liberation yet to come. Boff's method emphasizes praxis and historical liberative action, but the method also maintains a view toward the eschatological liberation that is God's gift to the whole of creation.

Boff's methodology links faith and liberation. He comments that "Christians seek liberation, but they seek liberation deriving from their very faith, for it is this faith that

leads them and stirs them to their liberation commitment" (Liberation 61). Boff links his entire methodology to work toward and hope for integral liberation of the community. The dialectic between faith and the social sphere, the praxis-orienting community action, and the tool of dialectical criticism all serve an integral liberation of the marginalized of Latin America.

### **Methodological Underpinings of Boff's View of the Hierarchy**

How does Boff's methodology contribute to his understanding of the hierarchy? This question prompts a closer look at Boff's understanding of the hierarchy, moving beyond the brief explication of charism given in the introduction. Specifically, Boff's emphasis on the marginalized and on the goal of integral liberation influence his understanding of the hierarchy. Explication of the influence of these two areas on Boff's understanding of the hierarchy follows.

Boff's methodology emphasizes "doing" theology amid the poor and marginalized of Latin America, and he views the organization of the hierarchy from the vantage point of these people. He perceives the need for a "clergy [which] moves into the midst of the people, toward persons already activated by the Spirit" (Ecclesiogenesis 25). Boff's specification of where the clergy live and work represents an important notion in his view of the hierarchy. His methodology emphasizes an option for the poor, in which theology attempts to hear and respond to the needs of marginalized people. Boff comments that ideally "it is the hierarchy that makes this option. It is by this means that the hierarchy seeks to insert itself into the world of the poor" (When 24).

Boff envisions a hierarchy which places itself among the poor precisely because his methodology calls for a "periphery consciousness." To be more in tune with the poor

and their needs, the hierarchy should immerse itself in those needs. The ideal for Boff would be what he terms a Church of the poor: "of course, the Church has always been concerned for the people - the poor, slaves, and the proletariat. But its concern...never *began* with the people, with their aspirations, with their capacity to transform things" (Faith 9). He says "the church, like the other liberation movements on the continent, must operate and incarnate itself in that society" (God's 220). A hierarchy that lives among the people better appreciates their capacity to transform a situation of poverty and oppression through Boff's cyclical liberation methodology .

In conjunction with this positioning of the hierarchy, the influence of Boff's methodology appears in his understanding of the function of the hierarchy. The discussion of charism in the introduction explained the hierarchy's function as one of fostering unity in the community. But the question remains: unity for what? The idea of integral liberation in Boff's methodology influences his answer to this question.

Boff utilizes his methodology to foster an integral liberation of the poor and marginalized of Latin America. In this approach, the hierarchy centers its unifying efforts on the notion of integral liberation, and "the mission of the Church is defined in a particular way as a commitment to the liberation of the oppressed" (When 20). Boff denies that integral liberation should encompass the totality of the hierarchy's charism of unification: "The mission of the Church...evangelizes all dimensions of human existence, then: the interior dimension...;the interpersonal dimension...;and the social dimension...." (When 80). The unification of the community's charisms, however, must serve the process of liberation. Boff proposes an understanding of the hierarchy "that fosters unity from its mission of liberation...[a] mission [which] reflect[s] and live[s]

faith in a liberating manner, committed to the humble, struggling for their dignity”

(Church

121-122). He explains the hierarchy's function as one of unifying the community in its work toward integral liberation.

In summary, Boff's methodology influences his understanding of the function and position of the hierarchy in the church community. His vision sees a hierarchy living and working among the poor communities, whose role centers on the unification of charisms around the goal of integral liberation. These two facets of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy provide an understanding on which further discussion will build. However, the importance lies not in the surface explanation of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy, but in how the underlying principles inform this understanding. Boff presupposes a starting point and goal for theological reflection that influences his understanding of the place and function of the hierarchy in the church. His tensions with the CDF arise in part because the congregation does not share this starting point and goal. A more detailed understanding of the differences, proposed in chapter three, builds upon this initial understanding of Boff's methodology. Two fundamental principles remain to be explained: Boff's liberation Christology, especially in relation to church origins, and his understanding of revelation and dogma. Elaboration of these principles leads to knowledge of their influence on further aspects of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy.

**Christology/Ecclesiology**

This study of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy entails several levels of discussion. The more narrow focus concentrates on his specific view of the hierarchy. Through this focus, one can place Boff's view of the hierarchy against a wider backdrop

of underlying principles. These principles themselves vary in importance in their relationship to Boff's understanding of the hierarchy. Of these principles, Boff's understanding of Jesus Christ assumes a place of primary importance. In fact, in any discussion of Christianity, the various issues must intersect the realm of Christology. Simply put, Christian discourse reflects, either implicitly or explicitly, on an understanding of Jesus Christ. His living, dying, and rising sustain the whole of Christianity.

How theologians think about Jesus Christ and encounter Jesus Christ influences their exposition of other areas, including ecclesiology, the sacraments, the liturgy, etc. Discussion of Boff's Christology concentrates on how Boff understands the link between Jesus Christ and the origins of the church. Boff's conception of the link between Jesus Christ and the church helps to foster a more productive way of looking at the controversy between Boff and the CDF. Misunderstanding the connections between Boff's Christology and his theology could lead to a simplistic reading of his view of the hierarchy. This could then lead to a false analysis of the issues of tension between Boff and the CDF. For example, criticism leveled at Boff by the CDF says his "interpreting the reality of the sacraments, of the hierarchy, of the word and the whole life of the church in terms of consumption, of monopoly, expropriation...is equivalent to subverting religious reality" ("Doctrinal" 686). While Boff does apply the ideas of production and consumption in his criticism of church structure and church participation, other factors, like his understanding of the origins of the church, play a role in this criticism. Further discussion of the specific issues of controversy between Boff and the CDF will occur in chapter three. The study of his Christology will focus on his understanding of church

origins and center on two areas: specific emphases Boff takes from Jesus' life and ministry, and specific emphases Boff takes from Jesus' resurrection and sending of the Spirit. Following this discussion, a summary section will tie together the influence of Boff's Christology and understanding of church origins on his understanding of the hierarchy.<sup>5</sup>

### **Important Emphases in Jesus' Life and Ministry**

Boff formulates his Christology in the milieu of the oppressed and poor in Latin America. This atmosphere influences an important link between the exigencies of the Latin American situation and what Boff accentuates in the life and ministry of Jesus. Boff's Christology includes three areas of emphasis: Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom, Jesus' identification with the poor and oppressed, and Jesus' will for the Church. A grasp of these three areas provides the background necessary for recognizing the links between Boff's understanding of the hierarchy and his Christology.

Boff understands Jesus' mission as one of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. He maintains that "Christ did not begin by preaching himself but the kingdom of God" (Jesus 52). Boff expands on his understanding of the Kingdom of God: "'Kingdom of God' signifies the realization of a utopia cherished in human hearts, total human and cosmic liberation. It is the new situation of an old world, now replete with God reconciled with itself" (Jesus 63). Boff relates this understanding of the kingdom specifically to the process of integral liberation. He seeks to connect the aim of his methodology, integral liberation, with the aim and interest of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God. Boff says that "the fundamental project of Jesus is to proclaim and be the

instrument of...liberation *from* every stigma (including suffering, division, sin, and death) and liberation *for* real life, for open-ended communication of love, grace, and plenitude in God" (Jesus 281). Boff connects Jesus' project with the community praxis of the marginalized in Latin America and ties Jesus' identification with the poor to the situation of the marginalized of Latin America.

Boff accentuates the sections of scripture which emphasize Jesus' love and compassion for the poor. Jesus associates with people considered to be outcast, the lowest of the low. "To these," says Boff, "Jesus feels himself especially called" (Jesus 73). Boff remarks that:

[Jesus] committed himself to the poor of his times and always came to their defense, avoiding no arguments or conflicts, defending the man born blind, the lepers, the prostitutes, the women who perfumed his feet, the sick, and all those considered public sinners by the accepted standards of his times...The Lord had a choice and he chose the poor and humble. (God's 113, 233)

Boff's stress on both Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom and his association with the poor serves to create links between the marginalized of Latin America and Jesus. He spoke of a kingdom of right relationship and liberation, says Boff; therefore any work toward that liberation links in some way to the aim of Jesus (Jesus 78). He also identified with the poor, says Boff; therefore, the poor and marginalized of Latin America have an intrinsic worth in Jesus' eyes (Jesus 76) These two links anticipate a discussion of how Boff understands another historical link with Jesus: the church.

Traditionally, several sides emerged in the debate over Jesus' will for the church. They range from an understanding that says Jesus directly intended the structures of the church, to an understanding which places less emphasis on a direct link between Jesus and the specific forms of church that followed his death and resurrection. A clear

understanding of the word 'church' in Boff's ecclesiology helps us grasp his interpretation of Jesus' will for the church. Boff elaborates on this point:

If by "church" we mean grace, liberation, the irruption of the Spirit, the new creation, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of God, then Christ willed the church....

But if by "church" we understand the visible institution, its sacramental organization, its hierarchical ministerial institution, its sociological structures a[t] the service of the grace of the kingdom...then this question takes on a very different look. (Ecclesiogenesis 47)

Analysis in this section concentrates on Boff's understanding of Jesus' will for the Church-as-institution.

Boff denies that Jesus directly willed the Church-as-institution in its present form.

Boff does not deny, however, that Jesus willed some type structure and church organization:

If we ask ourselves...what type of institutional form Jesus willed for his church, we can reply: Jesus willed, and continues to will, that form for his church which the apostolic community, enlightened by the Holy Spirit and confronted with the urgencies of its concrete situation, decided and in all responsibility assumed. (Ecclesiogenesis 60)

This understanding allows Boff to remove the *particular* form the church took from Jesus' will. The apostles formulated the institutional form the church would take :

The Church-as-institution was not based...on the incarnation of the Word, but on faith in the power of the apostles, inspired by the Spirit, who enabled them to transfer eschatology to time, the time of the church, and to translate the doctrine of the Kingdom of God into the doctrine of the church, that kingdom's imperfect, temporal realization. (Ecclesiogenesis 58)

The Church-as-institution was "born of a decision," which, "will continue to exist only if Christians...renew this decision and incarnate the Church in ever new situations" (Church 147). In Boff's understanding, church structure arose from a specific decision of followers of Jesus who organized the church within a specific cultural and historical milieu. The Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, implemented Jesus' general intentions concerning church structure.



In emphasizing elements of Jesus' life and ministry that affect the present situation in Latin America, Boff includes Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, Jesus' identification with the poor and outcaste, and the understanding that Jesus willed a Church-as-institution whose specific structure was determined by the apostles. This third element directly impacts the discussion of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy. He seeks an understanding of church origins that allows for flexibility in the Church-as-institution. Boff's combines his understanding of Jesus' will for the institutional church with emphases taken from Jesus' resurrection and sending of the Spirit to complete his analysis of church origins.

### **Important Emphases in Jesus' Resurrection and Sending of the Spirit**

The underlying theme of this investigation of Boff's Christology centers on the origins of the church and its relationship to Jesus Christ. The previous discussion looked at Boff's understanding of Jesus' will for the Church-as-institution. However, the Church-as-institution represents one aspect of the larger concept of church. A full overview of Boff's Christology and its relationship to church origins requires knowledge of the wider relationship between Christ and the church. Specifically, analysis focuses on Boff's ideas concerning the cosmic dimension of Christ after the resurrection and his understanding of the Holy Spirit.

An important aspect of Boff's Christology involves his understanding of the resurrection and its implications for the church. Boff remarks that "continuity [between Jesus and the Church] is constituted by the resurrection, through which Christ continues his presence" (Ecclesiogenesis 50). Boff calls this presence the "cosmic dimension of Christ, filling the world and human history from its very beginnings" (Jesus 182).

Post-resurrection, Christ exists in a transformed state: "To say that the risen one is now a spiritual body is equivalent to saying Jesus of Nazareth, in his concrete, personal reality now exists transfigured and transformed into the very life of God" (Faith 153). The presence of Jesus' life and ministry now becomes manifest and present to all. Boff stresses the presence made possible by the resurrection. This presence takes special form with Christ's sending of his Spirit and the formation of the church.

The Holy Spirit holds an important place in Boff's understanding of the origins of the church. Boff understands the church to have originated at Pentecost:

The Church must be thought of not so much as beginning with the risen Christ, now in the form of the Spirit, but rather as beginning with the Holy Spirit, as the force and means by which the Lord remains present in history and so continues his work of inaugurating a new world. The Church is the sacrament, sign, and instrument of the now living and risen Christ, that is, the Holy Spirit. (Church 150)

Boff appears to identify Christ with the Holy Spirit. But a closer look at other writings reveals a concern to distinguish between the two. In these writings he nuances the relationship:

By calling the third Person 'Spirit' we are referring to something common to all three: each of them is Spirit, since as John's Gospel says, 'God is Spirit' (John 4:24). But the third Person is Spirit in a special way, being, as the Latin Fathers interpreted, the one that unites Father and Son as the link of love between them. (Trinity 189)

Boff says that "it is the power in Jesus yet at the same time different from Jesus, that the apostolic community was to call the presence of the Holy Spirit" (Trinity 33). The church's origin at Pentecost assures the presence of a pneumatic element in the church's institutional structure. Boff's emphasis on the Holy Spirit joins with an emphasis on baptism. Through baptism, "we possess the Spirit of Christ" (Liberating 195). Through baptism, the faithful gain "rights" in the organization and structure of the church. Boff

develops the idea of a Spirit-based church and the idea of the rights of the baptized to formulate arguments for a new understanding of church structure. A brief summary precedes the discussion of how Boff's Christology and understanding of church origins affects his understanding of the hierarchy.

Boff spells out "a Christology thought out and vitally tested in Latin America" (Jesus 43). With such a starting point, Boff emphasizes those points that speak to the Latin American situation. From Jesus' life and ministry he focuses on Jesus' emphasis on the Kingdom and Jesus' identification with the poor. These two aspects link the life of Jesus with the poor and oppressed in Latin America, affirming their liberative praxis and their struggles as a poor people. In addition, Boff looks at the historical Jesus' will for the church. He describes a Church-as-institution arising from a historically and culturally conditioned decision of the Apostles. Jesus did not will a specific form of the institution. He willed a form the apostles deemed necessary for their present situation. This aspect of Boff's Christology points to an intention in his Christological search: the explanation of church origins. An overview of how Boff understands Jesus resurrection and sending of the Spirit yields further clarification of Boff's understanding of church origins. He emphasizes the cosmic, universal nature of Christ after the resurrection. The church, in Boff's understanding, begins with the sending of the Spirit on Pentecost, and he emphasizes the availability of this Spirit to all the faithful through baptism. Integrating these two ideas, Boff talks of a "Church...born of the whole, complex Christological event, with the resurrection and the activity of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles' decision discharging a vital role" (Ecclesiogenesis 60).

Several important aspects of Boff's Christology and understanding of church origins reside in this section. Important work remains, however, to bring out exactly what influence these underlying principles have on Boff's understanding of the hierarchy. As mentioned earlier, Boff formulates a Christology and an understanding of church origins that imply change in current church structure. An explication of this change, especially its implications on the hierarchy, follows.

### **Christological - Church Origin Underpinings of Boff's View of the Hierarchy**

Boff's understanding of the hierarchy presupposes a need for fundamental change in church structure. This need arises from what Boff perceives to be "a fundamental obstacle to communitarian life: the current structure of participation in the church" (Ecclesiogenesis 30). Current church structures foster a situation, according to Boff, "in which the layman and laywoman...are denied their potential for decision-making and creation of religious content" (Ecclesiogenesis 31). The following section will accomplish three things: clarify the problems Boff perceives with the current structure, explain Boff's proposed changes in the structure, especially in relation to the hierarchy, and point out the relationship between these changes and the principles behind the changes, i.e. Boff's Christology and view of church origins.

### **Problems with Current Structure**

Boff finds problems in church structure which arise from abuses of authority and power. The current church structure, in Boff's estimation, too heavily concentrates ecclesial authority in the hierarchy. Boff elaborates:

The centralization of decision making within the Church is well known, the fruit of a long historical process, crystallized in various forms that were perhaps valid at one time but which today conflict with our consciousness of the rights and dignity of the human person. (Church 34)

Boff criticizes a church that "from a sociological perspective...operates out of an authoritarian system" (Church 40). He comments "from a sociological point of view" on what he perceives as "an undeniable division and inequality in the Church: one group produces symbolic goods and another consumes them" (Church 43). This "inequality" has consequences for "the layman and laywoman at the heart of the particular church [who] are denied their potential for decision making and creation of religious content" (Ecclesiogenesis 31). To change this perceived imbalance, Boff calls for a "declericalization" of the church and a "new institutional type of Church" (Ecclesiogenesis 2, 32).

### **Changes in the Structure**

Boff's call for a new institutional type forgoes "the expansion of an existing ecclesiastical system, rotating on a sacramental, clerical axis, [in favor of] the emergence of another way of being church rotating on the axis of the word and the laity" (Ecclesiogenesis 2). This reorganization implies a fundamental shift in the nature of authority in the church. Boff defines several phases to this shift. One aspect involves incorporation of more lay involvement in decision making. Through increased lay involvement, says Boff, "more equal relationships may develop, allowing greater participation by all in both the production and benefit of religious "goods" (Church 117). This increased lay involvement fosters a new relationship between the laity and hierarchy, another facet in Boff's shift in the nature of authority in the church. In this relationship, "the hierarchy becomes a member of the ecclesia discens and the laity becomes a member of the ecclesia docens. Each one is teacher and disciple of the other and all are followers of the Gospel" (Church 139). Boff advocates a "democratization"

of the church which remedies the inequalities outlined above. His "idea of democracy" differs from a democratic state in that "ecclesial power is understood as derived from and sharing in the power of the Spirit and the risen Christ, active in the community, and not simply derived from the people alone" (Church 155). The introductory discussion of charism noted that the hierarchy will maintain the charism of unity in the church. As a unifying presence, however, "the hierarchy is only one charismatic state in the Church" among the other charisms (Church 157). Boff proposes a model of church organization, called the Basic Ecclesial Community, or CEB, as the best "possibility for greater participation and balance in the various ecclesial functions" (Church 128).<sup>6</sup>

The CEBs organize as small groups of mainly poor, primarily lay people. In their meetings, the people discuss and pray over various topics of community concern. Often the discussion focuses on their poverty or a particularly oppressive situation. For Boff, these groups represent an authentic church community where "differences and hierarchy arise within the unity of, and in function of, the community" (Ecclesiogenesis 27). These communities assume a "basic equality of all persons," and, in these communities, Boff describes a "difference between hierarchy and laity [that] is not primary but secondary. It can obtain only within a basic equality and at the service of and for the purpose of equality - not over the people and independently of the people" (Ecclesiogenesis 92). The communities represent a concrete manifestation of Boff's model of church structure. The CEBs "provide practice in the democratic exercise of power...stimulat[ing] participation from the bottom up" ("A New" 135). With the "bottom up" structure, Boff emphasizes lay participation and a redefinition of the hierarchy around the idea of charism.

These central themes underlying Boff's understanding of the hierarchy stem from a perceived problem with current church structure. Boff answers this problem with a call for foundational changes in that structure. The call for these changes results from Boff's fundamental position that the Church-as-institution can and should reorganize to meet new historical and cultural demands. Many of the tensions between Boff and the CDF concentrate on this position, and Boff's conclusions concerning lay participation, the charism of unity and the Basic Ecclesial Communities. Understanding Boff's position concerning institutional change requires a study of more than his conclusions concerning change. Boff bases his conclusions on fundamental issues in Christology and ecclesiology. The controversy between Boff and the CDF must be understood through analysis of these underlying issues. The following section develops the links between these underlying concerns and Boff's call for institutional change.

### **Christology and Church Origins Behind the Changes**

Boff's argument for the possibility of changes in church structure rests on his understanding of Jesus' will for the Church-as-institution and the Church's foundations in both Christological and Pneumatological elements. Earlier discussion elaborated on Boff's position that the specific structure of Church-as-institution springs not from the will of Jesus but from a decision of the Apostles guided by the Holy Spirit. From this basis, Boff argues that "if the church was born of a decision of the apostles under the impulse of the Spirit, the power of community decision in the areas of discipline and dogma pertain to the essence of the church" (Ecclesiogenesis 58). Boff's understanding of an institution based in inspired human decision allows him room to say that "the church is not a completely established, definite quantity. It is ever open to new

situational and cultural encounters" (Ecclesiogenesis 59). The church "must continually repeat this apostolic decision and, facing new situations, find those expressions and institutions that truly communicate his message" (Church 152). The discussion of Jesus' will for the Church-as-institution provides additional ground for discussing the tensions between Boff and the CDF concerning church structure.

Another underlying aspect of Boff's call for structural change is his assertion of both a Christological and Pneumatological foundation of the church. Boff calls the church the "sacrament, sign, and instrument of the now living and risen Christ, that is, the Holy Spirit" (Church 150). Given further distinctions between the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit, discussed above a picture emerges of Boff's Christological and Pneumatological foundation of the church. Boff discusses a "pneumatic element" in the church that "belongs to the institutional structure of the church" (Church 152). This pneumatic element comes from the risen Christ and his Spirit. Boff argues that "if the pneumatic (risen) Christ knows no limitations, neither may...the Church confine itself to the limitations of its own dogma, its rituals, its liturgy, or its canon law" (Church: Charism, 152). He continues:

In a pneumatological light, the church cannot contemplate itself as a finished reality, something constructed once and for all. As long as there are cultures that have not had their encounter with the gospel, that have not had their Christian experience...the evangelizing mission cannot be said to have been accomplished. (New Evangelization 84).

The church can change its structure, says Boff, because its structure, while divinely willed, is not divinely fixed. Furthermore, baptism constitutes the fundamental connection to these foundations: "By faith and baptism all are directly grafted onto Christ....The recognition of the presence of the risen One and of the Spirit in the hearts of



human beings leads one to conceptualize the church more from the foundation up than from the steeple down" (Ecclesiogenesis 25, 27). The foundation of the church at Pentecost and the importance of baptism represent two more understandings which underlie Boff's call for structural change in the church and its implications for the hierarchy.<sup>7</sup>

This exploration of the link between Boff's understanding of the hierarchy, in relation to structural change in the church, and his underlying Christology and representation of church origins, fosters deeper discussion of the tensions between Boff and the CDF in chapter three. The analysis complements the previous discussion of the methodological influences on Boff's understanding of the hierarchy. These two sections reveal Boff to be concerned with fundamental change in institutional church structure. This change calls for a redefinition of church authority which places new emphasis on the laity and reinterprets the laity's relationship with the hierarchy. Boff calls for a structure designed around Basic Ecclesial Communities with participation based in egalitarian and democratic models. The changes in church structure redefine the role and position of the hierarchy in the church. Boff describes a hierarchy that identifies with the marginalized, and he understands the hierarchy's role as one of unifying various charisms around the goal of integral liberation. Boff elaborates on what unity entails:<sup>8</sup>

The unity is built around three main axes: faith; worship; and organization for inner cohesion, mutual love and mission. These three aspects are embodied in the community itself: gathering to proclaim and deepen its faith; coming together to celebrate the presence of the *magnalia Dei* in history past and present; organized for the harmonious building of its own body, so that it can be of service to others, particularly the poor and those who have not heard its message. (Trinity 106-107)

Boff's understanding of Christology and its relationship to church origins support his views on change in the church and provide another influence on his understanding of the

hierarchy. These ideas and the understandings reached from analysis of Boff's methodology lead into the final area influencing Boff's understanding of the hierarchy: his concept of revelation and doctrine.

### **Concept of Revelation/Doctrine**

An examination of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy remains incomplete without some understanding of his view on revelation and dogma. Like the previous sections on Boff's Christology/Ecclesiology and his methodology, his concept of revelation and doctrine influence his understanding of the hierarchy. An investigation of revelation and doctrine in Boff's theology fosters a clarification of further aspects of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy. This analysis leads to an understanding of the interrelationship between these aspects and Boff's concept of revelation and doctrine.

Boff's analysis of revelation and doctrine again focuses on problems with the present configuration of authority in the church. Boff finds that the present structure arises from "a doctrinal understanding of revelation" (Church 42). He elaborates on this understanding:

God reveals necessary truths...to facilitate the road to salvation....The magisterium presents an absolute doctrine free from any doubt. Any inquiry that is born of life and that calls into question a given doctrine is mistaken. Doctrine substitutes for life, experience, and everything from below. (Church 42)

Boff considers this understanding of revelation to lead to "repression of the freedom of thought within the Church" (Church 42). His understanding of revelation corresponds to a theological method that emphasizes experience, historical investigation, and cultural influences. Boff advocates a historically conditioned reception and appropriation of revelation: "We in Latin America read a divine revelation written in other times - some two thousand years ago - with today's eyes, eyes full of questions, expectations, and

interests springing from our present reality" (The Maternal 189). Boff's understanding of revelation leads to doctrine heavily conditioned by the experience of the community. As such, Boff understands dogma to be in constant need of reappropriation in different times and cultures. He cautions against the ossified understanding of tradition which he perceives in the present system. "The theologians," he writes, "cannot be merely administrators of a doctrinal system from the past...tradition can be conserved only by producing something. Otherwise it will degenerate into traditionalism" (Liberating 21). In Boff's understanding, the experience of the community directs the reception and reformulation of revelation, appropriating dogma that relates to the current historical and cultural environment. Boff's understanding also entails continuity in the doctrine, and he says that as "new things come to be expressed through new explications, then they should be understood as attempts to articulate the same treasure in conjunction with the old (but not outdated) things, whose truth we willingly accept" (Trinity 2). This understanding of revelation and dogma provides further background for Boff's call to structural change in the church.

### **Revelation and Dogmatic Underpinnings to Boff's View of the Hierarchy**

Boff's incorporates his view of revelation and dogma to support the claim that present conditions in Latin America require changes in church structure. A more flexible understanding of the appropriation of revelation allows room for the changes Boff proposes. Situations arising from the culture and experience of the CEBs call for a new understanding of the hierarchy. Boff begins his theology by listening to these claims from the CEBs; then approaches the doctrine for a new understanding in relation to the claims. The CDF, on the other hand, while heeding the claims of the Latin American

situation, would not reappropriate the doctrine in answer to the claims, but answer the claims in the framework of the doctrine. The differences in viewing the hierarchy between Boff and the CDF stem, in part, from the two side's different understandings of doctrine and its utilization by Christians.

Boff's understanding of doctrine allows that, while the present structure may have at one time been necessary, it is not fundamentally unalterable. He asserts that "everything that refers to the divine, to Christ, and to the apostles...is only divine obliquely inasmuch as the *mediation* makes the divine or evangelical present in and through it" (italics mine) (Church 71). He continues, saying that "there is no pure and simple identity between...faith and doctrine. The present concretization is only a mediation and as such it hides as well as makes present" (Church 78). Boff's understanding of revelation and doctrine lead him to contend that "the hierarchy is functional and is not an ontological establishment of classes of Christians" (Church 10). This contention is a major area of tension between Boff and the CDF.

Boff's understanding of revelation and dogma provides a final underlying principle to his view of the hierarchy. This principle completes a three-fold analysis of what underlies Boff's understanding of the hierarchy: his methodology, his Christology and understanding of Church origins, and his conception of revelation and dogma. We can now utilize these presuppositions to formulate a summary of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Summary**

Boff's understanding of the hierarchy entails a radical change in present church structures. In Boff's view, the present organization of the church inadequately addresses

the Latin American situation of poverty, oppression and an increasing dearth of priests. The church's structure, in Boff's estimation, is inadequately prepared for the growing education and participation of the laity. In the push for reorganization, Boff spells out an understanding of the hierarchy that emphasizes its *function* in the community: "Thus it is not a matter of despoiling the bishop and priest of their function....It is only that their functions will take on new tasks, with a new arrangement of relationships among bishop, priest, and layperson" (Ecclesiogenesis 32). Boff's conception of a changeable church structure includes a changeable hierarchical structure. Boff disputes a view of the hierarchy that understands its organization to be immutably placed within the church.

In reconceiving the structure of the hierarchy, Boff emphasizes the idea of charisms. The hierarchy's function resides in the charism of unity: organizing the various charisms of the community toward the good of the church. While no charism ranks higher than another, the hierarchical charism of unity provides a foundational service to the community. Boff conceives of a hierarchy which moves into and among the marginalized of Latin America, displaying a preference for their problems, needs, and hopes. This movement among the people coincides with Boff's call for renewed emphasis of the laity in church organization and decision-making. Boff perceives an imbalance of authority in church structure which fosters a discrimination against lay involvement. Structural adjustments to accommodate increased lay participation transform the relationship between the laity and the hierarchy. Boff calls for a democratization of church structure which places the hierarchy's function in the wider scope of all the functions of the whole community. Finally, he notes that the Basic Ecclesial Communities represent concrete communities based on this structure.

## **Conclusion**

Any effort to understand the controversy between Boff and the CDF must not divorce this brief overview of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy from its underlying framework of methodology, Christology/Church origins, and revelation/dogma. Only with an adequate understanding of the interrelationship between the surface issue of hierarchy and its substratum can true dialogue between the two sides can begin. Chapter three utilizes these underlying issues in its comparison of the two sides. Before commencing with this comparison, however, the Congregation's understanding of the hierarchy must be uncovered. Analysis of this understanding in the following chapter reveals similar underlying presuppositions.

1. To say "liberation theology's method" is somewhat inaccurate, as the methodology varies from culture to culture and, within Latin America, from country to county. Also, other "liberation movements" by women, African-Americans, Asians and others contribute to this theology's methodology. For the present discussion, however, these differences need only be mentioned. The methodology discussed in this chapter represents a basic understanding of liberation theology as Latin America applies and understands it.

An excellent source for other writers in liberation theology is Dean William Ferm's Profiles in Liberation: Thirty-Six Portraits of Third World Theologians (Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988). Ferm provides biographies of the various theologians, with brief synopses of each theologian's thought. Gustavo Gutierrez's book, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973) merits particular attention as the first book that explicitly defines a theology of liberation. Arthur F. McGovern's Liberation Theology and Its Critics (New York: Orbis, 1989) provides accounts of several leading critiques of liberation theology. Another critique of the theology comes in Michael Novak's Will it Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (New York: Paulist, 1986). Finally, Paul E. Sigmund gives a present day assessment of liberation theology in his book, Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

2. Boff's understanding of who the poor and marginalized are includes both "economic" and "spiritual" poverty. He elaborates: "The poor are not only those who lack material goods. They are also those manipulated by society because they cannot fit into its structures: the manipulated, the used, the depersonalized." Boff continues: "On the one hand, a commitment to eliminate poverty (oppression) without an attitude of poverty (humility) would not be true to justice and liberation for the poor. On the other hand, poverty (humility) without a commitment to eliminate poverty (oppression) would be no more than mysticization of the Gospel meaning of poverty" (God's 108).

3. It is important to elaborate on Boff's understanding of experience. He speaks of three moments in the experience of God: "The first moment of the experience of God, under the impact of encounter, is our naming him: Lord God, Rock, Holy One, Father. ... In the second moment of the experience of God we realize the insufficiency of all representations of God. Whatever we say about him is symbolic and figurative. He is beyond every name. ... In the third moment of the experience of God we rehabilitate our images of him. After having affirmed and denied in the first and second moments, respectively, we return critically to reconcile ourselves with the images. We accept them for what they are, representations, not the reality or identification of God" (God's 76-77).

4. The employment of Marxist analysis in liberation theology is one area in which liberation theology methodologies differ. On the one pole, there resides the group that denies the relevance of Marxist thought for theological discussion of liberation, on the other pole is the group that uses Marxism and denies the relevance of faith, revelation, and church in discussing liberation. The CDF is most concerned with this pole and with conclusions, drawn logically from Marxism, which see religion as the "opiate of the people," and as irrelevant to their liberation.

Boff lies between these poles and calls for an employment of Marxist analysis which subjects it to the faith and the church. To understand how Boff "limits the use of dialectical analysis," one must understand his meaning of faith, church, revelation and doctrine. Boff asserts that he employs the analysis in light of these understandings, and in subjugation to them. An assurance of whether, in reality, liberation theologians maintain this relationship between Marxist analysis and faith presents a challenge. Liberation theologians meet the challenge, I think, through the praxis and reflection of the base communities, which are not simply founded as a centers for sociological reflection, but primarily as faith communities. The degree to which a base community founds itself on faith (and as such roots itself in the faith community, the church, and in communion with the entire people-of-God) will determine the "tool-like" or "slave-like" use of Marxist analysis. Differences in the base communities' founding and mission lie at the root of the CDF's criticism of the use of Marxist thought.

For analyses of Marxist thought consult Louis Althusser. For Marx. New York: Random House, 1969; and Thomas Sowell. Marxism: Philosophy and Economics. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985.

5. Clarification of the nature of this section is needed. I intend to establish an understanding of Boff's view concerning church origins (ecclesiology). I chose to establish this understanding, however, through Boff's explanation of Jesus Christ's will for the church (Christology). The title may lead to some confusion, as I intertwine both Boff's Christology and his ecclesiology throughout the discussion, I do not systematically present either area, and I link his Christology and ecclesiology by the narrow topic of the genesis of the church.

Additionally, I found rich material in which Boff discusses the origin of the church and its relationship to the Trinity. Boff says that:

Before all else, we should see the church as belonging to the realm of mystery, since in its bosom dwell the incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit as its animating, sanctifying principle, its principle of communion. It is the great sacrament of the risen Christ and of his Spirit, both sent by the Father to build the messianic community - the forerunner of the community in the kingship of the Trinity - around themselves. (Trinity 152)

While I do not explicitly discuss Boff's theology of the Trinity, aspects of it can be perceived in this section, especially in the discussion of Boff's understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Spirit.

6. Penny Lernoux's article, "In Common Suffering and Hope," Sojourners 16 (December 1987): 22-28 offers a comprehensive overview of Base Ecclesial Communities in Brazil.

7. Boff spends considerable time discussing the priestly vocation of the whole Christian community, saying that "this community, whole and entire, is a fundamental sacrament. Whole and entire it is priestly, and directly priestly-the mediation of ordained minister aside-just by the fact of its faith and its baptism" (Ecclesiogenesis 71). This discussion



provides further material for his conclusions regarding the laity and its place within the church.

8. In discussing unity, Boff also relates it to the unity of the Trinity: "The unity of the Trinity, which is always the unity of the three divine Persons, is reflected in the unity of the many who make up one community....[The community] becomes 'the body of the Three' through its continual efforts to become a community of faith, celebration and service" (Trinity 107).

## CHAPTER II THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE HIERARCHY

### INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explained the underlying principles of Boff's understanding of the hierarchy. Comprehending these principles enables a deeper understanding of Boff's positions regarding church structure and the hierarchy. The investigation of Boff and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) focuses now on the Congregation. The CDF finds fault with several areas of Boff's understanding of church structure and the hierarchy. Boff advocates changes in current church structures, especially regarding the hierarchy. He speaks of the present time as one ripe for these changes, and criticizes "those in the hierarchy who do not understand this *kairos*" (Church 57). Boff castigates church leaders who are "not learning the lesson of the signs of the times and so stop working toward the future of the Church" (Church 57). In the light of these accusations, the CDF responds:

In the final analysis it is the church, through the voice of her magisterium, that...decides what can change and what must remain immutable. When [the church] judges that she cannot accept certain changes, it is because she knows that she is bound by Christ's manner of acting. Her attitude, despite appearances, is therefore not one of archaism but of fidelity: it can be truly understood only in this light. (Vatican Declaration 522)

The CDF questions accusations that it has no future vision for the Church. In return, Boff questions how one determines fidelity to "Christ's manner of acting." This questioning necessitates clarification of the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy.

Again,

a proper understanding must delve deeper than the positions of each side to arrive at underlying principles which inform the positions.

An appreciation of the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy focuses on the same underlying areas as Boff's understanding of the hierarchy: methodology, Christology and ecclesiology, and revelation/doctrine. Examination of the CDF's underlying principles, however, establishes a different matrix for its methodology, other emphases in its Christology, a different view of ecclesiology, and a dissimilar view of revelation and doctrine. Disparities between the CDF's underlying principles and Boff's underlying principles result in different views of the hierarchy. A understanding of these differences sets the stage for comprehensive analysis, carried out in chapter four, of the two parties' positions.

### **Methodology**

Unlike Boff, whose method appears explicitly in many writings, the CDF has no treatise spelling out its view of proper theological investigation. Notwithstanding this lack of an explicit method, one can uncover the CDF's understanding of appropriate theological inquiry through a careful reading of Congregation texts for references to poor theological method. Three areas illuminate this more "negative" conception of the CDF's methodology. They include: the CDF's understanding of experience, culture, and history in theological investigation; a disdain for relativism and hesitation concerning dialectical conceptions of theology; and the CDF's understanding of "theologies of liberation," including the meaning of liberation and the use of Marxist theory. An investigation of these three aspects generates a more "positive" understanding of the CDF's method. This method can then be analyzed for its influences on the CDF's understanding of the

hierarchy.

### **Experience, Culture, and History in Theological Investigation**

The Congregation affirms theological investigation which incorporates experience, culture and an historical understanding. However, the CDF checks this affirmation with an overarching concern to properly place these three areas in relation to the faith. This combination of affirmation and restraint becomes apparent with a closer look at the three areas.

**Experience.** Echoing the Second Vatican Council, the CDF encourages the theologian to "decipher the language of the various situations - the signs of the times..." ("Doctrinal" 685). These signs include "evil inequities and oppression of every kind which afflict millions of men and women today, [and] openly contradict Christ's Gospel..."

("Instruction on Christian" 33). The CDF says,

It remains true that one of the major phenomena of our time, of continental proportions, is the awakening of the consciousness of people who, bent beneath the weight of age-old poverty, aspire to a life of dignity and justice and are prepared to fight for their freedom. ("Instruction on Christian" 11)

The CDF calls for attentiveness to these problems and to the "awakening" of the marginalized. In listening to these "signs of the times," however, the CDF warns that the theologian must "be careful to interpret the experience from which he begins in light of the experience of the Church itself" ("Instruction on Christian" 42) The Congregation explains that evaluation of experience "pertains to the pastors of the Church...to discern its authenticity" ("Instruction on Christian" 42). The CDF's position concerning experience and theological investigation reveals both an affirmation and several reservations. The CDF understands that proper theological method heeds the experience of the marginalized and perhaps even begins with this experience, but this method also

"opens this language [of the signs of the times] up to the understanding of the faith"  
("Doctrinal" 685).

Frequently, Boff explains listening to the experience of the marginalized in terms of praxis. This concept also appears in CDF writings. The CDF affirms a certain type of praxis, but also says it must remain in proper relationship to the faith: "A healthy theological method no doubt will always take the praxis of the Church into account and will find there one of its foundations, but that is because that praxis comes from the faith and is a lived expression of it" ("Instruction on Certain" 27). The CDF subordinates experience, or the signs-of-the times, to the faith and experience of the Church, which the magisterium properly interprets. A similar affirmation and subordination occurs with the Congregation's understanding of culture in theological method.

**Culture.** When speaking of culture, the discourse can become somewhat amorphous.<sup>1</sup> What exactly does the CDF mean by culture? While a proper definition of the word incorporates several aspects, the CDF's primary understanding of culture centers on the use of other disciplines in theological method. The Congregation says "it is the theologians task...to draw from the surrounding culture those elements which will allow him to better illumine one or other aspect of the mysteries of faith" ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 120). These elements include knowledge gathered from other disciplines. The CDF continues: "It is clear that scientific knowledge of the situation and of the possible strategies for the transformation of society is a presupposition for any plan capable of attaining the ends proposed" ("Instruction on Certain" 17). At the same time the theologian must understand that: "the human sciences, however valuable their contribution in their own domain, cannot suffice...for they cannot grasp the realities of

faith: the properly supernatural content of these realities is beyond their competence" ("Vatican" 523). The Congregation concedes that culture influences theological method, specifically with theology's use of other disciplines. At the same time, the CDF offers a caveat calling for proper understanding of the extent to which other disciplines influence theological discourse. The Congregation warns that,

when theology employs the elements and conceptual tools of philosophy or other disciplines, discernment is needed. The ultimate normative principle for such discernment is revealed doctrine, which itself must furnish the criteria for the evaluation of these elements and conceptual tools and not vice versa. ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 120)

In the CDF's understanding, proper theological investigation checks data received from the culture, through various disciplines, against the norm of revealed doctrine. The Congregation comments that "use of philosophical positions or of human sciences by the theologian has a value which might be called instrumental, but yet must undergo a critical study from a theological perspective" ("Instruction on Certain" 19). This important point has implications for the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy and ties into the CDF's understanding of revelation and doctrine. The Congregation wishes to place input from other disciplines, whether in the form of scientific conclusions, logical conclusions or intuitions, in proper relation to faith. A similar relationship arises in the CDF's understanding of the church. The Congregation says that "even less can relationships within the church be inspired by the mentality of the world around it" ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 125). The Congregation explains:

The Church...takes from every culture the positive elements she finds there. But inculturation is not simply an outward adaptation; it is an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity and the planting of Christianity in the different human cultures. ("Instruction on Christian" 56)

This aspect of the CDF's understanding of methodology conflicts with Boff's

understanding of theological method and presents a junction for discussion of the two views. Similar ideas concerning church structure arise from the CDF's understanding of historical investigation and its relationship to theology.

**History.** The Congregation notes that "historical disciplines are likewise necessary for the theologian's investigations" (Instruction on the Ecclesial 120). The influence these disciplines have on theology must be carefully bridled. The Congregation warns against liberation theology's utilization of class struggle because in this use:

History...becomes a central notion. It will be affirmed that God Himself makes history. It will be added that there is only one history of salvation and profane history is no longer necessary. To maintain the distinction would be to fall into 'dualism'. Affirmations such as these reflect historicist immanentism. (Instruction on Certain 23)

The CDF contends that "historicist immanentism" leads to "a tendency to identify the Kingdom of God and its growth with the human liberation movement, and to make history itself the subject of its own development;" a tendency the Congregation discourages as an improper theological method ("Instruction on Certain" 23). The CDF also advises against a use of history which sees the church "*only* as a reality interior to history, herself subject to those laws which are supposed to govern the development of history in its immanence" ("Instruction on Certain" 24). The Congregation's understanding of experience, culture and history forms an important part of its methodology. A concern for imbalances in understanding these terms leads the Congregation's warning against relativism and dialectics in theological investigation.

### **Relativism and Dialectical Conceptions in Theology**

The Congregation's understanding of theology's use of historical investigation, experience, and culture reveals a tendency toward affirmation, combined with admonitions against perceived imbalances. A similar pattern arises in the CDF's discussion of relativism and dialectical theological method. In this discourse, however, the CDF discourages use of these ideas more than it approves of them.

The CDF's criticism of Boff includes a reference to several areas of "relativism" in his thought. Further explanation of this critique will follow in the final chapter. A brief synopsis of it, however, allows for further explication of the CDF's methodology. The Congregation criticizes a "relativising logic found... in the conception of doctrine and dogma expressed by L. Boff" ("Doctrinal" 686). Boff affirms that dogma in its formulation holds good only "for a specific time and specific circumstances" (Church 76). The Congregation warns of a "relativism resulting from such affirmations" ("Doctrinal" 686). They explain that the "contrary to relativism is not literalism or immobility. The ultimate content of revelation is God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" ("Doctrinal" 686). The Congregation also sees in Boff's writings about change in church structure "a relativising concept of the church" ("Doctrinal" 685). The accusation of relativism and Boff's response are important areas of disagreement between the two sides. Elaboration of the CDF's understanding of doctrine and revelation and an overview of how the Congregation's methodology influences its understanding of the hierarchy aids an explanation of this area. The present discussion need simply note the Congregation's warning against theological methodology that leads to ecclesial and doctrinal relativism.



In conjunction with a perceived relativism in Boff's ecclesiology and theology, the CDF finds a "dialectical...conception [which] exposes man to arbitrary decision making" ("Doctrinal" 686). The Congregation senses a problem with overstating the influences of historical investigation and experience in theology. They term the interplay of other disciplines and theology a dialectical process, and, while supporting proper relationships

between theology, historical investigation and experience, the CDF calls for a proper usage of the dialectical process:

In order to go on with its function of being the salt of the earth which never loses its savor, the *depositum fidei* (deposit of faith) must be loyally preserved in its purity, without falling along the line of a dialectical process of history and in the direction of the primacy of praxis. ("Doctrinal" 686)

Appreciation of the CDF's understanding of the deposit of faith and doctrine allows for a more complete picture of their warning against relativism and dialectical conceptions. These two ideas add an additional aspect to the CDF's understanding of theological methodology. An explication of the CDF's concerns about "theologies of liberation," rounds out the discussion of the Congregation's methodology.

### **Regarding "Theologies of Liberation"**

The CDF explains its position regarding liberation theology in two articles. The first, an "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation'," was published in 1984, and the second, an "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation," was published in 1986. Both documents contain positive and negative aspects and, taken together, offer valuable insight into the CDF's understanding of liberation theology. The Congregation distinguishes between a "Theology of Liberation" and "theologies of liberation," saying: "From a descriptive standpoint, it helps to speak of *theologies* of

liberation, since the expression embraces a number of theological positions, or even sometimes ideological ones, which are not simply different but more often incompatible with one another" ("Instruction on Certain," 16). An understanding of the CDF's position regarding liberation theology facilitates another area of dialogue in the tensions between Boff and the Congregation. This understanding also enables a fuller appreciation of the CDF's methodology; again, not from what the Congregation explicitly demonstrates as from its warnings against specious theological reasoning. Investigation of two areas of CDF concern, liberation and Marxism, yields an appreciation of the Congregation's views on liberation theology, and a fuller picture of the Congregation's methodology.<sup>2</sup> These areas, in turn, inform the analysis of the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Liberation**

The Congregation opens its first document on liberation theology by saying it is "dictated by the certitude that serious ideological deviations [pointed out by the Congregation] tend inevitably to betray the cause of the poor" ("Instruction on Certain" 4). The Congregation explains three disquieting analyses in liberation theology: an understanding of liberation that doesn't emphasize liberation from sin; the meaning of freedom; and the meaning of poverty - who constitute the poor. A final section demonstrates the CDF's concern with properly balancing several dialectical concepts including: spiritual vs earthly struggle, inner conversion v.. structural conversion, and evangelism v.. human promotion.

**Sin.** The CDF warns against putting "liberation from sin in second place, and so fail[ing] to give it the primary importance it is due" ("Instruction on Certain" 3-4). The Congregation elaborates the importance of understanding liberation foremost as a

liberation from sin: "The radical experience of *Christian Liberty* is our first point of reference. Christ, our Liberator, has freed us from sin and from slavery to the law and to the flesh....The most radical form of slavery is slavery to sin" ("Instruction on Certain" 9). This liberation must also not overemphasize social sin because "only a correct doctrine of sin will permit us to insist on the gravity of its social effects" ("Instruction on Certain" 12). The Congregation deemphasises social sin: "The acute need for radical reforms of the structures which conceal poverty and which are themselves forms of violence, should not let us lose sight of the fact that the source of injustice is in the hearts of men" ("Instruction on Certain" 31). This movement away from a structural emphasis in liberation generates several other aspects of the Congregation's understanding of liberation. The CDF underscores a proper understanding of *how* liberation comes about and *who* provokes the liberation, stressing that the "radical character of the deliverance brought by Christ and offered to all...[does not] require some change in the political or social condition as a prerequisite for entrance into this freedom" ("Instruction on Certain" 9). The Congregation underscores that "it is from God alone that one can expect salvation and healing. God, and not man, has the power to change the conditions of suffering" ("Instruction on Certain" 10). These ideas concerning liberation influence the CDF's understanding of the meaning of freedom.

**Freedom.** In proposing a proper understanding of freedom, the Congregation warns that "serious ambiguities concerning the very meaning of freedom have from the very beginning plagued [the liberation theology] movement from within" ("Instruction on Christian" 8). The CDF admonishes those who hold the "conviction that it is the progress achieved in the fields of the sciences, technology and economics which should

serve as the basis for achieving freedom" ("Instruction on Christian" 13). As noted above, the Congregation emphasizes a proper relationship among theology, praxis, experience and culture. This concern appears in its understanding of freedom, and the CDF considers "theories which think they exalt the freedom of man or his 'historical praxis' by making this freedom the absolute principle of his being and becoming" erroneous ("Instruction on Christian" 17). These admonitions arise from the Congregation's wish to preserve the "salvific dimension of liberation" which "cannot be reduced to the socio-ethical dimension, which is a consequence of it" ("Instruction on Christian" 42). In conjunction with an understanding of liberation that stresses liberation from sin, the Congregation emphasizes that proper notions of freedom must underscore its gratuitous, God-given and salvific nature. While the other dimensions remain important, the CDF stresses their subordinate character. In understanding liberation and freedom, "the Christian cannot forget that it is only the Holy Spirit...who is the source of every true renewal and that God is the Lord of History" ("Instruction on Certain" 32). Similar concerns undergird the CDF's understanding of the meaning of poverty.

**Poverty.** The previous aspects of the Congregation's understanding of liberation theology yield a picture of how the CDF expresses its criticisms. The CDF accentuates ideas that, in the Congregations estimation, receive insufficient attention in the formation of liberation theology. The Congregation says it detects "several, often contradictory, ways of understanding the Christian meaning of poverty" ("Instruction on Certain" 8). The Congregation explains a definition of poverty that encompasses more than the "social condition of poverty....It also includes the hostility of one's enemies, injustice, failure and death" ("Instruction on Certain" 10). According to the Congregation,

definitions of poverty must go beyond an economic analysis to include the poverty that Jesus declared blessed: a poverty "made up of detachment, trust in God, sobriety and a readiness to share" ("Instruction on Christian" 39). In the light of this wider definition of poverty, the Congregation finds that "the special option for the poor, far from being a sign of particularism or sectarianism, manifests the universality of the Church's being and mission." "This option," says the Congregation, "excludes no one" ("Instruction on Christian" 41). The Congregation warns against a "disastrous confusion between the poor of the Scripture and the proletariat of Marx" ("Instruction on Certain" 24). The Congregation outlines an understanding of poverty and the poor which dovetails with its emphasis on liberation from sin and their ideas concerning freedom. According to the CDF, the poor's "fight against injustice finds its deepest meaning and its effectiveness in their desire to be free from the slavery of sin" ("Instruction on Christian" 27). These understandings of poverty and the poor round out the CDF's ideas concerning liberation. Through its ideas about sin, freedom and poverty, the Congregation wishes to correct a set of imbalances it perceives in liberation theology.

**Balancing Dialectical Concepts.** A deeper understanding of the Congregation's works reveals a correction of perceived imbalances in certain aspects of liberation theology. The Congregation seeks not to abandon the other side's emphases, but to uncover imbalances in these emphases. Whether these imbalances actually exist, especially in Boff's works, remains a topic for chapter four. Three dialectical concepts concern the CDF: spiritual v. earthly struggle; inner conversion v. structural conversion; and evangelization v. human promotion. The Congregation's conclusions concerning sin, freedom, and poverty in liberation theology arise from the CDF's desire to balance these

concepts. The dialectical concepts allow a deeper comprehension, not only of the Congregation's methodology, but also of their understanding of the hierarchy and, in turn, the wider tensions between the CDF and Boff.

The earthly and spiritual, the promotion of humanity and evangelization of humanity, inner conversion v.. structural conversion; all represent historical areas of tension for the church. A truly Catholic position affirms both sides of these concepts without falling into either dualism or myopia. The Congregation warns of a "temptation to reduce the Gospel to an earthly gospel" ("Instruction on Certain" 16). In other areas, the CDF warns against those who "are tempted to put evangelization into parentheses, as it were, and postpone it until tomorrow: first the bread, then the Word of the Lord" ("Instruction on Certain" 15). The CDF continues: "Likewise, [some place themselves] within the perspective of a temporal messianism, which is one of the most radical of the expressions of the Kingdom of God and of its absorption into the immanence of human history" ("Instruction on Certain" 27). These imbalances, the Congregation points out, find their way into certain liberation theology discourses on structural sin and conversion.

Hence, the Congregation calls for correct understanding of the concepts: "[The Church] considers that the first thing to be done is to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the individual and to the permanent need for inner conversion, if one is to achieve the economic and social changes that will truly be at the service of man" ("Instruction on Christian" 45). In proposing this idea, however, the CDF also affirms that "the recognized priority of freedom and of conversion of heart in no way eliminates the need for unjust structures to be changed" ("Instruction on Christian" 45). In a similar vein, the

CDF maintains "both the unity and the distinction between evangelization and human promotion" ("Instruction on Christian" 38). The CDF prioritizes the spiritual over the earthly, inner conversion over structural conversion, and evangelism over human promotion, and sees an important "distinction between earthly progress and the growth of the Kingdom, which do not belong to the same order" ("Instruction on Christian" 34). At the same time, the Congregation affirms that "the work of salvation is seen to be indissolubly linked to the task of improving and raising the conditions of human life in this world" ("Instruction on Christian" 48). The Congregation's efforts to emphasize certain aspects of these dialectical concepts underlie its concerns with liberation theology. These efforts could be interpreted as a perceived exaggeration on one side to correct a perceived imbalance on the other. Here lies fertile ground to discuss the differences between Boff and the CDF. Before doing so, further elaboration remains, including the Congregation's critique of Marxism and a section linking the CDF's methodology with its understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Marxism**

The Congregation views Marxist theory and its application as an indivisible whole, and warn of serious difficulties in separating Marxist social analysis from the conclusions Marxist theory draws concerning religion. In doing so, the CDF diverges from Boff, who affirms the ability to use Marxist social analysis in spite of its atheistic conclusions. Because "the ideological principles come prior to the study of the social reality and are presupposed in it," says the CDF, "no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible" ("Instruction on Certain" 18). The CDF warns throughout its discussion of Marxism that "if one tries to take only one part, say,

the analysis, one ends up having to accept the entire ideology" ("Instruction on Certain" 18). The Congregation sees this acceptance as a serious error because "atheism and the denial of the human person, his liberty and rights, are at the core of the Marxist theory" ("Instruction on Certain" 19). The CDF joins this view of the application of Marxist theory with their understanding of the proper relationship between theology and other disciplines:

It is the light of faith which provides theology with its principles. That is why the use of philosophical positions or of human sciences by the theologian has a value which might be called instrumental, but yet must undergo a critical study from a theological perspective. ("Instruction on Certain" 19)

In addition to overarching concerns with Marxism, the Congregation takes up two specific areas: the use of class critique and what they term political interpretation.

While warning of problems in splitting Marxist theory from its application, the CDF notes that "Marxist thought ever since its origins, and even more so lately, has become divided and has given birth to various currents which diverge significantly from one another" ("Instruction on Certain" 18). The Congregation continues:

To the extent that they remain fully marxist, these currents continue to be based on certain fundamental tenets which are not compatible with the Christian conception of humanity and society. In this context, certain formulas are not neutral, but keep the meaning they had in the original marxist doctrine. This is the case with the 'class struggle.' ("Instruction on Certain" 18)

In the Congregation's estimation, the 'theologies of liberation' have accepted not "the *fact* of social stratification with all its inequity and injustice, but the *theory* of class struggle as the fundamental law of history" ("Instruction on Certain" 22). The Congregation finds that class struggle pervades all of liberation theology's method, and "has come to function in [liberation theology] as a determining principle" ("Instruction on Certain" 26). Class struggle as the determining principle poses serious problems for theological method, says



the CDF, because "theological criteria for truth are thus relativized and subordinated to the imperatives of the class struggle" ("Instruction on Certain" 26). The Congregation cautions against relativism, saying that use of class struggle leads to relativization of truth. The Congregation comments on the Marxist tenets that history is "characterized by *class struggle*....[And] the truth is a truth of class: there is no truth but the truth in the struggle of the revolutionary class" ("Instruction on Certain" 21). The Congregation's critique of the use of class struggle appeals to proper understandings of truth in theological method. This area is an important point of dispute between the CDF and Boff, and arises again with the Congregation's understanding of political interpretation.

The Congregation warns of "a radical politicization of faith's affirmations and of theological judgements" ("Instruction on Certain" 23). This politicization results from the new content liberation theology gives to faith, hope and charity. These virtues "become 'fidelity to history', 'confidence in the future', and 'option for the poor'" ("Instruction on Certain" 23). The congregation seems to affirm some "consequences and political implications of the truths of faith," but these truths must be "respected beforehand for their transcendent value" ("Instruction on Certain" 23). The CDF stresses the need to understand proper priorities in dealing with the dialectical concepts mentioned above. A politicalization can occur which reduces the transcendent value of theological reasoning. This use of political interpretation, what the CDF terms a "hermeneutical criterion," must not become the "principal or exclusive component" of theological method ("Instruction on Certain" 27). The Congregation also finds that the political "hermeneutical criterion is applied to the life and to the hierarchical constitution of the Church" ("Instruction on Certain" 28). The Congregation's disdain for political

interpretation and political involvement appear again in chapter four. These ideas complete an investigation of the CDF's views on Marxism.

The Congregation's concerns with Marxism center on a skepticism about the ability to separate Marxist theory, with its atheistic conclusions, from Marxist social analysis. The interlocking nature of Marxist theory and utilization of the theory for social analysis leads to an overemphasis on class struggle and a hermeneutic utilizing political criterion. These overemphases lead liberation theology to improper conclusions about theological method and changes in church structure. These concerns with Marxism conclude the discussion of the CDF's understanding of liberation theology and its implications for methodology. This discussion also concludes the analysis of the CDF's methodology, and leads into a summary of the Congregation's methodology. This summary sets the stage for a discussion of how the Congregations' methodology influences its understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Summary of Methodology**

The CDF points out how *not* to go about theological investigation and gives an indirect picture of correct methodology through these concerns. A proper relationship between theology and other disciplines comes first. Theology, according to the CDF, must take care to appropriate the wisdom of other fields within and subordinated to the faith. Revealed doctrine is the norm for theological investigation, and care must be taken to avoid a relativism in dealing with dialectical conceptions. The Congregation voices several concerns for liberation theology: a need to emphasize liberation from sin as the primary liberation, an understanding of freedom which stresses its God-given nature and its object, and an understanding of the poor that includes more than the economically

poor. These three areas reveal an attempt to emphasize certain aspects of three dialectical concepts: the spiritual and the earthly, inner and structural conversion, and evangelism and human promotion. Finally, the Congregation voices strong reservations with liberation theology's use of Marxist analysis, specifically with respect to class struggle and political interpretation. With these methodological considerations in mind, the study investigates how the Congregation's methodology influences its understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Methodological Underpinnings to the CDF's Understanding of the Hierarchy**

An understanding of the Congregation's methodology provides for deeper analysis of the CDF's vision of the hierarchy. The CDF indicates deviations in theological methodology that may lead to other problems concerning understandings of revelation, church mission, and the relationship between the church and the world. These problems can lead to misinterpretations of the place and function of the magisterium in the church. Methodology, then, affects the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy in an indirect way. The sections on the CDF's Christology and ecclesiology and understanding of revelation/doctrine allow for a more explicit analysis of the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy. The methodology directly impacts these wider concepts.

The Congregation admonishes false conclusions drawn from improper theological methods. In its explanation of experience, culture and history, the CDF concludes that "adaptation to civilizations and times cannot abolish, on essential points, the sacramental reference to constitutive events of Christianity and to Christ himself" ("Vatican" 522). In discussing relativism, the CDF points out that "the contrary of relativism is not

literalism or immobility. The ultimate content of revelation is God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who invites us to communion with him" ("Doctrinal" 686). A relativistic methodology may harm this understanding of revelation. With regard to liberation theology, the Congregation warns that: "The feeling of anguish at the urgency of the problems cannot make us lose sight of what is essential nor forget the reply of Jesus to the Tempter: 'It is not on bread alone that man lives, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Mt 4:4; cf Dt 8:3)" ("Instruction on Certain" 15). The Congregation dislikes the concept of class struggle because "the transcendent character of the distinction between good and evil, the principle of morality, is implicitly denied in the perspective of the class struggle" ("Instruction on Certain" 22). The CDF describes a "partisan conception of truth" which arises from a method that emphasizes class struggle ("Instruction on Certain" 26).

Poor theological method leads to erroneous conclusions concerning truth and the content of revelation. These conclusions lead to mistaken conceptions of the hierarchy. The CDF's methodology informs its understanding of revelation and doctrine and Christology and ecclesiology on a primary level. This methodology then indirectly impacts the Congregation's understanding of the hierarchy. A fuller grasp of the CDF's vision of the hierarchy comes with analysis of the CDF's Christology and ecclesiology.

### **Christology/Ecclesiology**

The previous investigation uncovered the Congregation's methodological concerns for proper theological investigation. These concerns guide the Congregation's Christology and its implications for the CDF's ecclesiology. Two aspects of the Congregation's Christology offer fertile ground for a subsequent discussion of the CDF's

view of the hierarchy, including the Congregation's understanding of Christ's will for the church's institutional structure and the idea of apostolic succession. These facets contain several elements related to the CDF's ecclesiology, which will be discussed in an ensuing section. With an appropriation of the Congregation's Christology and its ecclesiological implications, a final section will connect these underlying principles to the Congregation's understanding of the hierarchy.

The CDF affirms that Christ willed an institutional form of the church. Specifically, this institution was to be ordered hierarchically and passed on through apostolic succession. The CDF regards the magisterium "in its service to the word of God," as "an institution positively willed by Christ as a constitutive element of his church" ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 121). The Christian community, according to the CDF, "was deliberately structured hierarchically by its divine Founder" ("The Minister" 232). The CDF's use of the words 'constitutive element' and 'deliberately structured' have implications for their understanding of the hierarchy and their conception of change in the church. The CDF warns that all understandings of change must remain faithful to Christ's will. This view of change and its underlying understanding of Christ's will for the institution form another area of disagreement between Boff and the CDF. The CDF finds Boff's proposed changes tamper with a divinely willed structure. Further elaboration of these ideas comes in the end section connecting the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy to its Christology and Ecclesiology. A similar understanding and point of controversy arises with the CDF's discussion of the apostolic succession.

Christ not only instituted the hierarchy in the church, says the Congregation, but he also intended to keep this structure alive through apostolic succession. The CDF

remarks that "Christ...appointed as ministers of his priesthood his Apostles and through them their successors the bishops" ("In Defense" 111). A larger discourse clarifies this idea:

Catholics...belong to that Church which Christ founded and which is governed by the successors of Peter and the other Apostles, who are the depositaries of the original Apostolic tradition, living and intact, which is the permanent heritage of doctrine and holiness of that same Church. ("In Defense" 99)

The Congregation's understanding of Christ's will for Apostolic succession and its continuity with today's bishops influences the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy. Uncovering this underlying principle provides another important point of controversy between Boff and the CDF. These aspects of the CDF's Christology relate to the Congregation's understanding of ecclesiology.

The Congregation articulates its understanding of ecclesiology in a letter titled "Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion."<sup>3</sup> This letter provides further insight into the ecclesiological principles which inform the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy. These principles relate to the Congregation's ideas concerning Christ's will for the institution and the idea of apostolic succession.

The Congregation's understanding of ecclesiology centers around the idea of communion: "The concept of communion, which appears with a certain prominence in the texts of the Second Vatican Council, is very suitable for expressing the core of the mystery of the Church and can certainly be a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology" ("Some Aspects" 108). Communion ecclesiology "has its root and center in the holy eucharist" ("Some Aspects" 108). The concept of communion can be applied to the relationship between the particular churches and universal church. This concept also helps clarify the universal communion of the faithful. In addition to these facets,

and at the root of the idea, communion "involves a double dimension: the vertical (communion with God) and the horizontal (communion among men)" ("Some Aspects" 108). The CDF bases communion in the episcopate because "Christ instituted the eucharist and the episcopate as essentially interlinked realities" ("Some Aspects" 110). This passage shows how the CDF's understanding of communion ecclesiology relates to its understanding of Christology. The proper way of 'thinking about church' comes through Christ's intentions, and these intentions included the hierarchical structure and apostolic succession. Ecclesiology must include the eucharist and the episcopate. The CDF discusses this point: "For this reason too the existence of the Petrine ministry, which is a foundation of the unity of the episcopate and of the universal church, bears a profound correspondence to the eucharistic character of the church" ("Some Aspects," 110). The congregation links the unity of the episcopate to apostolic succession: "This unity of the episcopate is perpetrated through the centuries by means of the apostolic succession and is also the foundation of the identity of the church of every age with the church built by Christ upon Peter and upon the other apostles" ("Some Aspects 110). The Congregation's elaboration of communion ecclesiology underscores its understanding of Christ's will for the church. The episcopate, unified through apostolic succession, is seen as a "foundation of identity" for the church. The linked ideas from the CDF's Christology and Communion ecclesiology then form a substratum to the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy. These principles stand on the Congregation's methodology because poor methodology leads to erroneous conclusions about Christology, doctrine and ecclesiology. An appreciation of the CDF's Christology and

Ecclesiology allows for an explicit investigation of the Congregation's understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Christological and Ecclesiological Substratum of CDF's Understanding of the Hierarchy**

The Congregation's understanding of Christology, in conjunction with its ecclesiology, forms a view of Christ's intentions for the early church's structure and hierarchy. The CDF's portrayal of these intentions influences its understanding of the hierarchy. This influence shows up in two ways: the Congregation's concern to show the ontological nature of the hierarchy and the CDF's ideas on structural change in the church.

In positing that Christ intended the hierarchical structure of the church, the Congregation concludes that the hierarchy forms an intrinsic part of church organization:

By divine institution it is the exclusive task of these pastors alone, the successors of Peter and the other Apostles, to teach the faithful authentically, that is with the authority of Christ shared in different ways; so that the faithful...must accept their teaching given in Christ's name. ("In Defense" 100)

The CDF sets apart the hierarchy from the faithful saying that "the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood...differ from each other not only in degree but also in essence" ("In Defense" 111). According to the CDF, the "priesthood does not form part of the rights of the individual, but stems from the economy of the mystery of Christ and the church" ("Vatican Declaration" 523). This economy, says the CDF, arises from Christ's will that the hierarchy form an integral part of church structure. The CDF elaborates on the distinction between the hierarchy and the faithful:

By means of [the ministerial priesthood] bishops and priests are 'indeed set apart in a certain sense in the midst of God's people. But this is so, not that they may be



separated from this people or from any man, but that they may be totally dedicated to the work for which the Lord has raised them up. ("In Defense" 111)

This distinction comes from "a permanent designation by Christ" ("In Defense" 112).

Likewise, the CDF comments that apostolic succession "is part of the living tradition which has been for the church from the beginning, and continues to be, her particular form of life" ("The Minister" 231). The permanence of the hierarchical structure has implications for the CDF's understanding of change in church structure.

The Congregation's critique of 'theologies of liberation' recognizes the critique these theologies make of the structures of the church. This critique,

has to do with a challenge to the *sacramental and hierarchical structure* of the Church, which was willed by the Lord Himself. There is a denunciation of members of the hierarchy and the magisterium as objective representatives of the ruling class which has to be opposed. Theologically, this position means that ministers take their origin from the people who therefore designate ministers of their own choice in accord with the needs of their historic revolutionary mission. ("Instruction on Certain" 25)

This section of the text reveals several important concerns the CDF has for change in church structure. The section on the Congregation's methodology examined the Congregation's warning against notions of class struggle. The CDF mentions these notions in the preceding passage. In addition to this aspect, two key positions show themselves. The Congregation holds that Christ willed the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the church, implying that the ministers who form this structure cannot have their "origin from the people." The CDF concludes that any change in the church must take into account that "the church is a society different from other societies, original in her nature and structure" ("Vatican Declaration" 523). The Congregation goes on to affirm that "in the final analysis it is the church, through the voice of her magisterium, that, in these various domains, decides what can change and what must remain

immutable" ("Vatican Declaration" 522). Given its Christology and Ecclesiology, the CDF considers the hierarchy to form part of what remains immutable. A final section on the Congregation's view of revelation and doctrine analyzes the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy, particularly its mission in the church.

### **Revelation/Doctrine**

Analysis of the CDF's view of revelation and doctrine uncovers a third underlying principle which informs its understanding of the hierarchy. This principle, taken in conjunction with Boff's understanding of revelation and doctrine, provides a deeper understanding of the differences between the two sides. The Congregation's understanding of revelation and doctrine demonstrates their effort to position the historical and cultural influences on the two, and their distinction between meaning and expression in doctrine.

The Congregation affirms that "difficulties arise from the historical condition that affects the expression of Revelation" ("In Defense" 110). This condition affects more than the expression of revelation, and the CDF notes that "historical disciplines are necessary for the theologian's investigations [because of] the historical character of revelation itself, which has been communicated to us in 'salvation history'" ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 120). In the face of these difficulties "the depositum fidei...must be loyally preserved in its purity, without falling along the line of a dialectical process of history and in the direction of the primacy of praxis" ("Doctrinal" 686). The CDF's distinction between meaning and expression in doctrinal formulations allows for a preservation of the depositum fidei that remains open to the historical character of revelation and doctrine.

The influence of history and culture on doctrinal expression in no way diminishes the meaning or truth of these expressions. The Congregation elaborates:

Even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions. ("In Defense" 110-111)

In light of the previous statement, the CDF finds that "the meaning of dogmatic formulas remains ever true and constant in the Church, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed" ("In Defense" 111). The CDF explains the interplay between meaning and expression:

The meaning of the pronouncements of faith depend partly upon the expressive power of the language used at a certain point in time and in particular circumstances. Moreover, it sometimes happens that some dogmatic truth is first expressed incompletely (but not falsely), and at a later date, when considered in a broader context of faith or human knowledge, it receives fuller expression. ("In Defense" 110)

The CDF says that "one thing is the deposit of faith, which consists of the truths contained in sacred doctrine, another thing is the manner of presentation, always however with the same meaning and signification" ("In Defense" 111). With more clarity, the CDF says "the meaning of dogmas which is declared by the Church is determinate and unalterable" ("In Defense" 111).

The distinction between expression and meaning allows for proper understanding of historical and cultural influences on revelation and doctrine. These ideas form an outline for comprehending the CDF's understanding of revelation and doctrine. Analysis of the CDF's ideas about revelation and doctrine shows how these ideas influence the Congregation's understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Revelation and Doctrinal Underpinnings of the CDF's Understanding of the Hierarchy**

The ontological nature of the hierarchy in the CDF's understanding forms a basic pillar of church structure. In the Congregation's understanding the church and the hierarchy are related realities, but to what end? The mission of the hierarchy ties into the Congregation's understanding of revelation and doctrine. The magisterium exists to guard the meaning of revelation, which is expressed through doctrine. The Congregation explains that, "by virtue of the divine mandate given to it in the church, the magisterium has the mission to set forth the Gospel's teaching, guard its integrity and thereby protect the faith of the people of God" ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 124). This mission includes "defending the right of the people of God to receive the message of the church in its purity and integrity and not be disturbed by a particular dangerous opinion" ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 125). The obligation of bishops, says the CDF, centers on "prevent[ing] ministers of the Word of God from straying away from sound doctrine or from transmitting it in a corrupt or incomplete way" ("Christ" 668). Theologians "will be able to recognize in the Magisterium the gift of Christ to His Church and will welcome its word and its directives with filial respect" ("Instruction on Certain" 30). The CDF speaks in like manner of the laity: "The people who are entrusted to the care of bishops and for whom 'they are responsible before God,' enjoy the unrenounceable and sacred right of 'receiving the Word of God...of which the Church has not ceased to acquire an evermore profound understanding" ("Christ" 668). The Congregation maintains that, in terms of prophetic function, there must exist "immediate subordination of the members to those in the hierarchy" ("Doctrinal" 687). While the CDF says "Christ fulfills his prophetic office not only by means of the hierarchy but also by means of the

laity," they conclude that prophecy must maintain a correct relationship to the hierarchy and its function ("Doctrinal" 687). The CDF elaborates:

Not only must [prophetic denunciation] accept the hierarchy and the institutions, but it must also cooperate positively in the consolidation of the Church's internal communion; furthermore the supreme criterion for judging not only its ordinary exercise but also its genuineness pertains to the hierarchy. ("Doctrinal" 687)

The judgment of prophetic denunciation belongs to the hierarchy's mission in the church. This mission also entails defending and protecting the doctrine of the church and guiding the laity in doctrinal matters. The CDF's understanding of mission arises from its view of revelation and doctrine.

### **Summary**

The conclusion of this section completes the investigation of the Congregation's understanding of the hierarchy. The underlying principles in this analysis include the CDF's understanding of revelation and doctrine and their Christology and ecclesiology. The CDF's methodology directly supports these principles and, through the principles, guides an understanding of the hierarchy. The Congregation sees the hierarchy as a basic part of the church's makeup which stems from Christ's will for the church. Apostolic succession guarantees the continuity of the hierarchy throughout the ages and also forms an essential part of church structure. As a result, any talk of change in church structure must not alter or reduce the basic nature of the hierarchy and apostolic succession. The hierarchy, whose mission centers on preserving and interpreting the deposit of faith, governs change and prophetic denunciation. These aspects provide a basic matrix for the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Conclusion**

The elaboration of the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy and underlying

principles allows for the initiation of an analysis of its positions and Boff's positions. The two side's conclusions concerning the nature and mission of the hierarchy differ on fundamental levels. These levels reveal divergent methodologies, Christologies, ecclesiologies, and understandings of revelation and doctrine and the differences influence two ways of looking at change in church structure as well. The investigation carried out in this chapter can now be combined with the analysis of chapter one to compare and analyze the two positions. The discussion of chapter three focuses on each side's understanding of the hierarchy, but also incorporates analysis of the presuppositions which inform these understandings. Through this comparison conclusions are reached concerning the compatibility of the two views and the possibility of reconciling the two side's views.

1. The word 'culture' may cause some confusion concerning the intent of this section. When speaking of the CDF's understanding of culture I want to pose answers to one main question: what is the CDF's position on the use of other disciplines, i.e. sociology, anthropology, philosophy, to inform theological discussion? I define the word narrowly to facilitate discussion of each side's divergent understandings of the hierarchy and methodology.

2. The question arises as to whether the areas of liberation, sin, and poverty are really "methodological" issues, and, after considerable thought, I have decided to keep them under this heading. My decision is based on the following line of reasoning. The nature of this chapter is such that I'm not defining the CDF's methodology so much as I am defining what the CDF considers to be poor methodology. Hence, while these themes may not represent the CDF's method, they do represent areas in Boff's methodology. What the CDF has to say about the areas gives further insight into their understanding of poor methodology. Also, the CDF's understanding of these areas, if properly spelled out, allows for a comparison between the Congregation and Boff on these important issues. In sum, while liberation, sin and poverty are not explicitly CDF methodological issues, they arise in a methodological context in chapter three when I compare the two sides.

3. For differing perspectives on Communion Ecclesiology consult the following: Luis M. Bermejo, Church, Conciliarity and Communion (Anand, Gujarat, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1990); Jerome Hamer, The Church is a Communion (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964); Bonaventure Kloppenburg, The Ecclesiology of Vatican II (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1985); Robert Kress, The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); and J.-M.R. Tillard, Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

## CHAPTER III CONVERGENCE OR DIVERGENCE?: A COMPARISON OF BOFF AND THE CONGREGATION

### Introduction

The two preceding chapters established how both the Congregation and Boff understand the hierarchy and showed how each side's understanding rests on presuppositions about theological method, Christology, ecclesiology, revelation and doctrine. A grasp of these presuppositions aids more than the investigation of each side's understanding of the hierarchy. The presuppositions form a framework for viewing the wider issues involved in the dispute between Boff and the CDF. A discussion of these issues must begin by referring back to the questions posed in the introductory chapter: What primary theological positions underlie the Congregation's criticism of Boff? How would Boff's understanding of the hierarchy respond to the criticism's posed by the CDF? Finally, Given answers to the above questions, can the two positions be reconciled at some level, or, as possibly evidenced by Boff's recent resignation from the Franciscans, do the understandings differ on a fundamentally irreconcilable level? In answering these questions, this discussion examines two criticisms by the CDF of Boff's book Church: Charism & Power.<sup>1</sup> The Congregation criticizes Boff's understanding of the hierarchy which reduces any ontological relationship between the magisterium and the church. The Congregation also charges Boff with relativism. The first criticism concerns the relationship of the hierarchy and the church and includes problems with Boff's analysis of



sacred power and problems with Boff's understanding of the prophetic role. The second critique of relativism includes a perceived ecclesiological relativism and a perceived relativism in Boff's understanding of revelation and doctrine. The Congregation calls these four criticisms "options" and finds them "unsustainable" (Doctrinal 685).

This chapter concentrates on understanding these criticisms in light of the Congregation's underlying presuppositions. The discussion incorporates elements from chapter two that directly or perhaps indirectly influence the Congregation's criticism, and includes Boff's response to these criticisms. The analysis of Boff's response builds on the findings of chapter one. The explicit ties to chapters one and two enable a comparison of each side. Following this comparison, a summary shows how the Congregation perceives Boff's understanding of the hierarchy and vice versa. An appreciation of how each side perceives the other's understanding of the hierarchy makes possible a final analysis concerning the reconciliation of the two sides.

### **Criticism 1: Relationship Between Church and Hierarchy**

The CDF's problems with Boff's understanding of the relationship between the church and the hierarchy arise through a critique of Boff's analysis of sacred power and Boff's understanding of the prophetic role. A comparison of the CDF and Boff on these two issues results in the discovery of a fundamental problem between the CDF and Boff: how the two sides relate the church and the world.

#### **Analysis of Sacred Power**

The CDF dislikes Boff's analysis of "the hegemonic exercise of the sacred power," saying that "Boff takes it for granted that the organizational axis of a society

coincides with the specific mode of production proper to it, and he applies this principle to the church" (Doctrinal 686). The Congregation continues:

One ought not impoverish the reality of the sacraments and the word of God by reducing them to the 'production and consumption' pattern, thus reducing the communion of faith to a mere sociological phenomenon. The sacraments are not 'symbolic material,' their administration is not production, their reception is not consumption. (Doctrinal 686)

Proper understanding of the Congregation's criticism of Boff's analysis of sacred power must incorporate the theological presuppositions, defined in chapter two, which shape this criticism.

The Congregation speaks of a reduction of the faith to mere sociological phenomenon. This passage betrays the CDF's concern to utilize properly other disciplines in theological investigation. The Congregation warns that "the human sciences, however valuable their contribution in their own domain, cannot suffice...for they cannot grasp the realities of faith: the properly supernatural content of these realities is beyond their competence" (Vatican 523). The CDF finds Boff's analysis of sacred power an improper application of the social sciences' analysis of 'profane' power. A methodological issue undergirds this CDF criticism of Boff. The Congregation levels serious charges at Boff's method of analysis:

Interpreting the reality of the sacraments, of the hierarchy, of the word and the whole life of the church in terms of production and consumption, of monopoly, expropriation, conflict with the hegemonic bloc, rupture and the occasion for an asymmetrical method of production is equivalent to subverting religious reality, and that, far from contributing to [the] solution of various problems, leads rather to the destruction of the authentic meaning of sacraments and the word of faith. ("Doctrinal" 687)

How would Boff see these charges and what underlies his analysis of sacred power? A look at his underlying presuppositions can begin to address this question.

Boff's position on the use of other disciplines in theological inquiry differs

appreciably from the Congregation's position. He concludes that "the realities of salvation and perdition overflow the limits of religious consciousness. They exist even where they are not explicitly recognized." (Faith 157). Boff includes the analysis provided by other disciplines in theological reflection because he considers them to contribute substantively to theology. Far from being unable to grasp the realities of faith, "the personal and social utopias projected by psychology, sociology, political science, economics, cultural anthropology, the sciences of communication, and the various philosophies *are of interest to faith*" in Boff's theological method. (italics mine) (Faith 157). Furthermore, Boff says that "it may happen that the Church has reproduced the structures of the ruling classes within itself" (Church 113). Because the Church may mirror these structures, Boff argues for the validity of a critique of church structure that utilizes the tools of social analysis. He qualifies his thought, saying that the Church's reproduction of the ruling classes' structures "is not a mechanical reproduction because there is always the relative autonomy of the religious-ecclesiastical realm" (Church 133). Boff's notion of relative autonomy will arise again in the later analysis of each side's understanding of church-world relationships. Boff denies that his analysis subverts religious reality. In speaking of the Church's use of sociological analysis and other disciplines, Boff argues that "were it to dispense with an antecedent analysis of reality, the Church would risk deciphering as grace and liberation what is nothing of the kind, as, for example, mere assistance and paternalism" (When 77). Given these understandings of theological method and its relationship to other disciplines, Boff asks the following question: "Will the church, *sociologically*, in the organization of its power and the exercise of its pastoral charge, change - or will it remain the fortress of conservatism

and a stagnant backwater of structures of a world definitively passe?" (italics mine) (Ecclesiogenesis 89). Boff's statement reveals a key difference between him and the CDF in theological methodology. Boff emphasizes both the necessity and *ability* to analyze the church from a sociological viewpoint. The relative autonomy of the Church tempers sociological structural analysis. Still, given this caveat, Boff's analysis of sacred power calls for serious use of the social sciences. The CDF denounces incorporation of this analysis. Careful analysis must point out that Boff's critiques the *use* of sacred power, not the existence of sacred power. He admits that "power structures in the Church do not necessarily violate its charismatic nature" (Church 161). He dislikes the current "monopolistic structure of civil and sacred power" (Church 117). The heart of Boff's criticism lies in the following passage:

Obviously the episcopate, the priesthood, and other functions are here for good. This is basic. It is perfectly evident that these structures respond to the ever-present needs that communities have- needs for union, universality, and bonding with the great witnesses of the apostolic past. But more important is the style with which one lives these functions within these communities: whether the functionaries are *over* the communities, monopolizing all services and powers, or *within* them, integrating duties instead of accumulating them, respecting the various charisms and leading them to the oneness of one and the same body. (Ecclesiogenesis 60)

Boff finds the current structure obstructs this oneness. The Congregation says oneness only comes through and in communion with this current structure, an understanding explored more explicitly in the following section. The CDF realizes too that "the danger of abuses [in the use of sacred power] always exists" (Doctrinal 686). These abuses point to the ever present problem of "how access by all the faithful to full participation in the church's life and its sources, the Lord's life, can be guaranteed" (Doctrinal 686). The key difference lies in how each side analyzes these abuses, how each side interprets their meaning, and what conclusions each side draws from this analysis concerning church

structure, the hierarchy, and change in the institution. Boff and the CDF diverge considerably on these methodological issues.

The discussion of the CDF's criticism of Boff's analysis of sacred power includes, indirectly, several other issues discussed in chapters one and two. These involve the relationship between theology and history, the influence of culture on theological analysis, and the weight given to experience in theological discourse. Differences between Boff and the Congregation concerning the relationship between the church and the world affect the underlying issues. These differences also underlie the ensuing discussion of the Congregation's criticism of Boff's understanding of the prophetic role. Each side's understanding of church-world relationships follows this second critique and comparison.

### **Understanding of the Prophetic Role**

The Congregation criticizes Boff's understanding of the prophetic role in the church, saying that in Boff's line of reasoning,

the hierarchy would have the mere function of 'coordinating,' of 'making way for unity and harmony among the various services,' and keeping things flowing and impeding all division and impositions, therefore eliminating from the prophetic function 'immediate subordination of the members to those in the hierarchy.'  
(Doctrinal 687)

The passage suggests a basic disagreement between Boff and the CDF on the function and nature of the hierarchy. Again, each side's presuppositions shed light on the disagreement.

The Congregation ontologically ties the hierarchy to the institutional structure of the church. The CDF bases an intrinsic tie between the hierarchy and the church on Christ's will for the institutional structure. As explained in chapter two, the Congregation finds a direct link between the present structure of the church and the will of its founder,

Jesus Christ. On the basis of this argument, any critique of the hierarchy must not alter or reduce the basic nature of the hierarchy. The Congregation elaborates:

The function of the magisterium is not, then, something extrinsic to Christian truth nor is it set above the faith. It arises directly from the economy of the faith itself, inasmuch as the magisterium is in its service to the word of God an institution positively willed by Christ as a constitutive element of his church. ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 121)

The Congregation speaks of the proper nature of the magisterium, saying that "the priestly ministry is not just a pastoral service; it ensures the continuity of the functions entrusted by Christ to the apostles and the continuity of the powers related to those functions" ("Vatican" 522). The CDF continues, saying that there is a need "to rediscover the preeminent place of the priest in the community of the baptized" ("Vatican" 523). The CDF describes the character of magisterial acts:

One must therefore take into account the proper character of every exercise of the magisterium, considering the extent to which its authority is engaged. It is also to be borne in mind that all acts of the magisterium derive from the same source, that is, from Christ, who desires that his people walk in the entire truth. ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 122)

The Congregation's understanding of the hierarchy's relationship to the church supports its distinction between the ministerial and common priesthood. Another dimension to the Congregation's criticism of Boff's understanding of the prophetic role can now be added. In addition to its wish to maintain a strong distinction between the church and the world, the CDF wants to maintain a difference between the hierarchy and the laity which arises, according to the congregation, from "a permanent designation by Christ" (In Defense 112). The Congregation expands on the relationship of the hierarchy and laity, saying that,

by divine institution it is the exclusive task of these pastors alone, the successors of Peter and the other Apostles, to teach the faithful authentically, that is with the

authority of Christ shared in different ways; so that the faithful...must accept their teaching given in Christ's name. ("In Defense" 100).

The relationship between the hierarchy and the church, in the Congregation's understanding, is not simply functional. The hierarchy exists as a divinely willed pillar of church structure. Boff's understanding of the prophetic role jeopardizes the hierarchy's ontological basis in church structure in the CDF's view. Boff understands the hierarchy to have "the mere function" of coordination among other duties. The CDF is concerned that Boff minimalizes the hierarchy's involvement in the prophetic role, reducing its involvement to a service or function. In the Congregation's understanding of the prophetic role, prophecy must "accept the hierarchy and the institutions, [and] it must also cooperate positively in the consolidation of the church's internal communion" ("Doctrinal" 687). The CDF's understanding of this communion represents another element influencing their criticism of Boff's understanding of the prophetic role.

The Congregation emphasizes that "unity, or communion between the particular churches in the universal church, is rooted not only in the same faith and in the common baptism, but above all in the eucharist and in the episcopate" ("Some" 110). Another underlying area of concern in the CDF's criticism of Boff's understanding of the prophetic role centers on church unity. The Congregation says "the unity of the church is also rooted in the unity of the episcopate" ("Some" 100). The Congregation's understanding of unity relates to its explanation of Jesus' will for the episcopate: "This unity of the episcopate is perpetuated through the centuries by means of the apostolic succession and is also the foundation of the identity of the church of every age with the church built by Christ upon Peter and upon the other apostles" ("Some" 110). The Congregation elaborates on the necessity of the hierarchy for unity: "in the church on earth, there is an

intimate relationship between this invisible communion and the visible communion in the teaching of the apostles, in the sacraments and *in the hierarchical order*" (italics mine) ("Some" 108). The fostering of this unity, "is a fundamental task of the Roman pontiff for the whole church...[and] is also a task of everyone in the church" ("Some" 111). The Congregation's link between unity and the episcopate follows from a conviction that, at an essential level, the hierarchy and church conjoin.

The CDF's criticism of Boff's understanding of the prophetic role rests on several basic concerns about the relationship between the hierarchy and the church. Any understanding of prophecy in the church must not jeopardize the ontological nature of the hierarchy in church structure. Likewise, prophecy must, in the CDF's understanding, remain at the service of church unity, and the hierarchy is an important aspect of this unity. Finally, the CDF says that "the supreme criterion for judging not only its ordinary exercise but also its genuineness pertains to the hierarchy" (Doctrinal 687). Boff's understanding of the prophetic role diverges from the CDF's understanding at these points. His view of the hierarchy develops a radically different understanding of the hierarchy's relationship to the church and the notion of church unity.

Boff's position that the hierarchy does not form an ontological part of church structure forms a basic element of his understanding of the prophetic role. Boff's understanding of Christ's will for the institutional church guides his position hierarchy-church relationships. While Boff shares the CDF's conviction that Jesus willed an institutional structure for the church, he diverges from the CDF's conclusions that the present, hierarchically ordered, structure follows directly from the will of Jesus. Boff says Jesus willed the institutional structure "which the apostolic community, enlightened by the



Holy Spirit and confronted with the urgencies of its concrete situation, decided and in all responsibility assumed" (Ecclesiogenesis 60). Christ did not define the precise institutional form of the church. In Boff's view, this decision, left to the apostles, "will continue to exist only if Christians...renew [it] and incarnate the Church in ever new situations" (Church 147). Boff speaks of "a fundamental obstacle to communitarian life: the current structure of participation in the church" (Ecclesiogenesis 30). Boff's conclusions clash openly with the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy. He emphasizes the importance of baptism over that of the laying on of hands, saying that it was only in the second millennium that the sacrament of orders "began to be ontologized- understood as the means whereby the priest participates in the priesthood of Christ and constitutes, ontologically, a specific class of Christian, alongside the simple baptized, or common priests" (Ecclesiogenesis 67). In Boff's estimation, "it is as a service to the church that the ministerial priesthood exists, not as something independent of it" (Ecclesiogenesis 93). Departing from the CDF's conclusions, Boff places emphasis on the function of the hierarchy within the community. He stresses the importance of the baptism of all people, saying that "whole and entire, [this community] is priestly, and directly priestly- the mediation of the ordained minister aside- just by the fact of its faith and its baptism (Ecclesiogenesis 71). Boff finds that in the present structure, "the hierarchy considers itself to be the only fundamental charism, forgetting that the Church, the family of God, is built upon the foundation of the apostles as well as the prophets (Eph 2:20) and doctors (Eph 4:11; 1Cor 12: 28)" (Church 157). He concludes that "the hierarchy is only one charismatic state in the Church" (Church 157). Boff's notion of charism combines with

his understanding of the origins of church structure to define his understanding of prophecy. He affirms that,

The specific function of the hierarchy (those who are in leadership roles) is not accumulation but integration, making way for unity and harmony among the various services so that any single one does not trip up, drown out, or downplay another. From this comes the immediate subordination of the members to those in the hierarchy. (Church 164)

Boff's language of subordination and the CDF's conclusions concerning subordination of the prophetic role to the hierarchy differ because of the radical dissimilarity between each side's definition of the hierarchy. Boff ideas concerning unity and the hierarchy also diverge from the Congregation's understanding of unity.

Boff's understanding of unity diverges from the CDF on a key point: unity is not ontologically tied to the episcopate. The episcopate has the charism and function of unity, but unity does not arise from the hierarchy itself. He understands unity to be "built around three main axes: faith, worship; and organization for inner cohesion, mutual love and mission. These three aspects *are embodied in the community itself*" (italics mine) (Trinity 67). If unity arises anywhere, says Boff, it arises in the whole community. Tying it ontologically to the hierarchy, leads to an abuse of power and authority. Leery of this abuse, Boff downplays any direct link between the hierarchy and Jesus' will for the church and between the hierarchy and unity.

Boff's conclusions about unity and his understanding of Christ's will for an institutional church structure inform a view of the prophetic role that limits the hierarchy's involvement in that role. The Congregation criticizes these conclusions and analysis of this criticism must look at the CDF's own conclusions about unity and Christ's will. Further light can be shed on both CDF criticisms by focusing on a fundamental issue

underlying both critiques: how each side perceives the relationship between the church and the world.

### **Church and World**

Each side's understanding of the relationship between the church and the world directly affects the criticism of Boff's analysis of sacred power. How does theology interact with other disciplines? What influence should the analysis from other disciplines have on "theological" conclusions? Are there definable parameters between the church and the world? Answers to these questions shape the differing views on theological method, and, subsequently, the differing analyses of sacred power.

An understanding of the relationship between the church and the world also influences the CDF's critique of Boff's understanding of the prophetic role, albeit in a more indirect way. The debate centers on how each side views the relationship between the hierarchy and the laity. Boff grounds his understanding of prophecy partially in an assertion that the hierarchy must remain directly rooted in the wider church community.

He concludes that,

in the church, before any differentiation comes fundamental equality....Accordingly, the difference between hierarchy and laity is not primary but secondary. It can obtain only within a basic equality and at the service of and for the purpose of equality-not over the people and independently of the people. (Ecclesiogenesis 92)

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation, defines several levels of meaning for the lay person, commenting that "the lay person...does not find his definition in relationship to the priest, but in a series of further relationships" ("Who" 344). Another meaning, according to Ratzinger, can be found in the diverse forms of spirituality in the lay community: "St. Francis de Sales pointed out that there is no absolutely uniform spirituality of Christians or of the laity, but rather many diverse forms" ("Who" 344).

Finally, two definitions of the lay person especially impact the ensuing discussion on church-world relationships. Ratzinger explains that

The second level of meaning is of a sociological-functional nature. Whoever assumes a full-time permanent function within the church is not in this sense a lay person: His specific problems in reference to the church cannot in any case be presented as problems of the laity....

The fourth level of meaning is historical and eschatological: The church must not become the world, nor the world the church; but all Christians must prepare the church and the world for the coming of the kingdom of God. ("Who" 344)

Ratzinger's remarks point to a definable difference between Boff and the CDF in each side's understanding of the laity and the hierarchy; a difference affected by each side's understanding of church-world relationships. An understanding of church-world relationships colors Boff's elaboration of the prophetic role in the church and the CDF's criticism of this elaboration.

The debate on how to relate the church and the world resides on a continuum. One end emphasizes a complete break between the church and the world; the church should not become stained with "worldly" things. This pole encourages explicit separation. The other end identifies the church with the world. To attempt any great distinction leads to Platonic dualism and a denigration of created things. Neither Boff nor the CDF stand at the poles of this continuum. The two sides, however, do *lean* toward one end or the other. These differing positions on the continuum have definite effects on the debate.

The Congregation tends toward a well defined distinction between the church and the world, and the distinction appears in warnings against improper use of other disciplines in theological reflection. The CDF complains of a "principal error" in liberation theology which says achievement "in the fields of sciences, technology and

economics...should serve as the basis for achieving freedom" ("Instruction on Christian" 13). The CDF defines a freedom based "in the truth and love which are stronger than suffering: the truth and love revealed to men by Jesus Christ" ("Instruction on Christian" 15). The church, which receives this revelation, "is a society different from other societies, original in her nature and structure;" a contention the CDF grounds in its understanding of church-world relationships ("Vatican" 523). An emphasis on dissimilitude arises in other areas of the Congregation's thought, including the relationship between ministers and the people, political activity, and the exercise of power in the church.

According to the CDF, critiques of church structures which build on a conception of the church as the "Church of the People" lead to a "denunciation of members of the hierarchy and the magisterium as objective representatives of the ruling class which has to be opposed" ("Instruction on Certain" 25). The Congregation says that "this position means that ministers take their origin from the people who therefore designate ministers of their own choice in accord with the needs of their historic revolutionary mission" ("Instruction on Certain" 25). The CDF finds this argument jeopardizes the necessary distinctions between the hierarchy and the faithful. These groups, commonly distinguished as possessing the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the faithful, "differ from each other not only in degree but also in essence" ("In Defense" 111). The Congregation's understanding of the ministerial priesthood and priesthood of the faithful leads it to conclusions about political activity: "It is not for the pastors of the Church to intervene directly in the political construction and organization of social life. This task

forms part of the vocation of the laity acting on their own initiative with their fellow-citizens" ("Instruction on Christian" 48). These distinctions dovetail with the CDF's understanding of hierarchical authority and power. The Congregation describes "specific apostolic powers deriving from the sacrament of holy orders" ("The Minister" 232). Apostolic authority "existed from [the church's] earliest days" and arises from the fact that the church "was deliberately structured hierarchically by its divine Founder" ("The Minister" 232). The existence of apostolic authority necessitates, in the CDF's view, a "proper hierarchy" of human rights ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 125). These conclusions have a direct impact on the discussion of the tensions between Boff and the CDF. The Congregation's distinction between the church and the world appears in its understanding of the nature of the church, the relationship of the hierarchy and the laity, the involvement of Christians in political activity, and power and authority in the church. Boff's positions on these same areas differ radically from the CDF's.

Boff leans toward less distinction between the church and the world in his understanding of these two entities, but he does not identify the church and the world. Rather, he speaks of a church which "is in the world today. Its autonomy is relative. It must accept being part of a society and then decide in which direction to move" (Faith 174). This notion of relative autonomy, pointed out above, guides Boff's thought concerning the church and the world. According to Boff, "all reality...has a sacramental dimension and function: to speak of God, to evoke God, to point to God" (The Maternal 90). Boff's understanding of the very nature of reality, leads him to conclude that "all historical articulations contain an objective theological reality" (When, 71). He elaborates on this point with a discussion of Vatican II: "The council no longer speaks of the human

being's natural and supernatural calling, but of its *integral vocation*, its calling to integrate heaven and earth, the exigencies of history with the imperatives of transcendence" (When 70). Boff draws on this understanding to conclude that "symbolic practice is never politically neutral" (Faith 176).<sup>2</sup> Boff explains the duty of Christians to be active in politics:

The church institution does not span the whole of Christian reality. Sensitized by the Church and by the liberating dimensions of their faith, Christians can extend their activity over a far vaster area than that of the Church as an institution. They can and should be active in political parties, unions, and other organizations, inspired by their liberating faith. (Faith 178).

Boff restricts political involvement by calling for a proper understanding of the relationship between faith and politics. He says that "faith and the Church as its organized locus make possible practices that transcend politics, such as prayer and celebration..." (Faith 179). He concludes that "faith is the larger space....we may formulate the relationship between faith and politics as follows: Faith (the greater) always contains a political dimension (the lesser)" (Faith 179).

Boff finds a dichotomy between the church and the world, and a separation of the church from proper political engagement damaging to Catholic institutions: "The Church appears then as a mere institution, concentrating on defending a deposit of revealed truths and on proclaiming some moral principles divorced from the concrete reality of life" (God's 27). Similarly, "representations of divine transcendence as distance from the world must have disastrous consequences for the life of faith" (God's 27). He says these institutions "must undergo a thorough reform, seriously asking themselves what kind of Gospel witness they give to the world" (God's 231). Understanding the church as

relatively autonomous in its relationship to the world leads Boff to conclusions concerning power and authority which differ from the CDF's conclusions.

Boff finds that "adequate understanding of the ministerial priesthood... does not posit its specificity in the power to consecrate, but in being the principle of unity in the community" (Ecclesiogenesis 95). Consequently, Boff finds a problem with the way authority is exercised in the church. He nuances this point: "There is no argument as to the legitimacy of the authority of the Church; it exists and is willed by God. The historical form it has taken, the ideologically justified imbalance of power among the members of the Church, is called into question" (Church 43).

Boff says that "in the early years, the Christian people as a whole shared in the power of the Church, in decisions, in the choosing of minister; later they were simply consulted; finally, in terms of power, they were totally marginalized, dispossessed of their power" (Church 113). Boff, through his understanding of the nature of the relationship between the church and the world and his understanding of power, concludes that:

A Church in which lay people cannot participate in sacred authority, in which decisions are concentrated within the clerical body, cannot really call itself the People of God; it lacks the communion and participation expressed by communities and groups that live their faith with relative autonomy. ("A Theological" 93)

An emphasis on the need for more lay participation in the church influences Boff's critique of sacred power and his analysis of the prophetic role in the church. His position on the laity, political involvement and the use of other disciplines in theological inquiry all find some grounding in his understanding of church-world relationships.

The two critiques examined in this section can now be seen in a wider scope of underlying presuppositions concerning methodology, Christology and ecclesiology. The Congregation's problems with Boff, and Boff's responses to these problems, arise from



radically different perspectives and divergent analyses of church-world relationships. Similar analysis can now be applied to the CDF's critique of relativism in Boff's theology. The following examination illuminates how both side's positions arise from a radically different substructure of presuppositions.

### **Criticism 2: Relativism**

According to the Congregation, Boff exhibits both a "relativising concept of the church" and a similar "relativising logic...in [his] conception of doctrine and dogma" ("Doctrinal" 685-686). Both critiques demonstrate the CDF's concern with balancing dialectical concepts explained in chapter two. The Congregation wants any discussion of ecclesiology to avoid compromising the essential nature of the Roman Catholic Church. Boff compromises the church's essence, in the CDF's view, by "turning upside down the meaning of the council text on the church's subsistence" ("Doctrinal" 686). Similarly, the CDF warns that one must not speak of doctrine or revelation which compromises the following position: "the sense of the dogmatic formulas always remains true and coherent, determined and unalterable, although it may be further clarified and understood" ("Doctrinal" 686). The charges of relativism in this area arise from a perception that Boff's understanding of revelation and doctrine *do* compromise this position. A key point to understanding the critique of relativism lies in how each side defines the essence of both the church and doctrine and revelation.

### **Ecclesiological Relativism**

The CDF accuses Boff of ecclesiological relativism on the basis of his explanation of the relationship between Catholicism and Protestantism. The Congregation comments that, in Boff's understanding, "both confessions would be incomplete mediations,

pertaining to a dialectical process of affirmation and negation" ("Doctrinal" 685). Boff supports this notion by appealing to the constitution *Lumen Gentium* (No. 8) of the Second Vatican Council and its statement, "*Haec ecclesia (sc. unica Christi ecclesia)...subsistit in ecclesia Catholica*" ("this church (that is, the sole church of Christ)...subsists in the Catholic Church"). The CDF finds that Boff's analysis of this passage "derives a thesis which is exactly contrary to the authentic meaning of the council text, for he affirms: 'In fact it (sc. the sole church of Christ) may also be present in other Christian churches'" ("Doctrinal" 685). The Congregation explains the council text:

The council had chosen the word *subsistit* - subsists - exactly in order to make clear that one sole "subsistence" of the true church exists, whereas outside her visible structure only *elementa ecclesiae* - elements of the church - exist; these - being elements of the same church - tend toward the Catholic Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 8) ("Doctrinal" 685).

The Congregation follows this passage with its accusation that Boff turns upside down the meaning of the council text. While the CDF's critique opens several angles of analysis, the following discussion focuses on the ecumenical issue of Boff's comparison of Catholicism and Protestantism.

In Boff's analysis of Catholicism and his comparison of it with Protestantism he distinguishes between the Gospel and the Church. The Gospel represents the heart or essence of Christianity:

Gospel, properly understood, is not synonymous with Church. But neither can it be understood apart from the Church....The Gospel is the impetus and structuring force of Catholicism, the life that creates the structures, the statements and the skeleton that manifest life, living that life but not identified with it. (Church 74)

Based on this line of reasoning, Boff defines Catholicism as a mediation of Christianity:

"What is Christianity? We do not know. We only know what is shown in the historical process. In other words, only through incarnations, through Catholicism, is the identity of

Christianity both revealed and hidden from us" (Church 79). Boff defines a necessary distinction between Christianity (core identity, understood as partially mysterious) and Catholicism (mediation of Christianity, cannot completely identify with the core). Utilizing this distinction, he compares Roman Christianity and Protestantism, pointing out that "we are dealing with emphases and styles of living the totality of Christianity" (Church 80). Boff makes a comparison of the *practice* of the two religions, not their core identity. This comparison can be understood better by remembering that a basic tenet of Boff's methodology centers on the notion of praxis. Boff's analysis investigates what the two religions manifest in their praxis, which, as Boff defines it, mediates the Christian identity. Boff says that "Catholic identity lies in its sacramentality, in the positive mediation through which the Gospel and Christ reach the world" (Church 84). In Boff's understanding, "pure Christianity does not exist, never has existed, never can exist. The Divine is always made present through human mediations which are always dialectical" (Church 92). Through the preceding line of thought, Boff arrives at the conclusion criticized by the CDF as involving ecclesiological relativism:

The Roman, Catholic, and apostolic Church is the Church of Christ on the one hand, and on the other, it is not. It is the Church of Christ inasmuch as through it the Church of Christ is present in the world. But at the same time it cannot claim an exclusive identity with the Church of Christ because the Church may also be present in other Christian churches.

The Second Vatican Council, overcoming a theological ambiguity present in previous ecclesiologies that tended to identify the Roman Catholic Church with the Church of Christ in simple and pure fashion, makes the [distinction involving *subsistit in*]. The Council avoids saying, as was said in previous documents, that it *is* the Church of Christ. (Church 75)

Boff's distinction between Christianity and its mediation in Catholicism and Protestantism clarifies this passage. The Catholic Church *is* the Church of Christ in so far as Catholicism finds its origin and identity in Christ. The Catholic Church *is not* the Church

of Christ in so far as the Church's practice does not manifest this identity. On this second level, Boff compares Catholicism and Protestantism and finds that "one can speak of Catholic and 'catholicistic' (the decayed form of Catholicism) tendencies....Much of what traditional Protestant and cultural criticism has levied against Roman Catholicism is merely a criticism of its catholicistic aspects" (Church 84).

Boff continues by evaluating religious syncretism which he defines as intrinsic to the formation and growth of all religions. He describes syncretism as an inevitable aspect of religion that "is positively the historical and concrete way in which God comes to people and saves them" (Church 99). Boff explains his position: "A syncretism that held only truth has never existed and, if it had, would have been an eschatological event. At the present time, the wheat is mixed with the chaff. The truth of Christian syncretism is relative and cannot pretend to be otherwise" (Church 101). Boff refrains from saying the truth is relative. The mediation of the truth, through the Church's practice, is relative. And, according to Boff, what separates the mediation of Christianity by Roman Catholicism from the mediation of Christianity by Protestantism "is not so much differing doctrines as different ways of living Christianity" (Church 75). Whether or not this constitutes relativism again depends on the underlying principles which influence each side of the debate.

Boff's understanding of the church and its relationship to history, to culture and to the world again influences his understanding of the above positions. In addition, his methodological emphasis on praxis marks his comparison of Catholicism and Protestantism. A simple disassociation among the church, history, and culture cannot exist given Boff's understanding of church-world relationships. Neither can this

differentiation exist in the CDF's understanding of church-world relationships. As noted, however, both sides take up differing positions with respect to these relationships. In addition, the two sides differ appreciably in their understanding of the influence of other disciplines in theology. These differences foster radically different views of Boff's understanding of the relationship between Protestantism and Catholicism. The basic problem lies with a misunderstanding of the level on which Boff speaks. His critique and comparison takes up the practice of Catholicism and Protestantism, not the essence. The CDF's critiques Boff's analysis because the Congregation finds Boff jeopardizes the essence of Catholicism. The CDF's letter on Communion ecclesiology helps to explain this criticism. The Congregation says that, through ecumenical commitment, all may:

recognize the continuity of the primacy of Peter in his successors, the bishops of Rome and see the Petrine ministry fulfilled in the manner intended by the Lord as a worldwide apostolic service which is present in all the churches from within and which, while preserving its substance as a divine institution, can find expression in various ways according to the different circumstances of time and place as history has shown. ("Some" 111)

The church must retain its substance as a "divine institution," but it can be variably expressed. The CDF perceives that the *substance* of the church is relativised in Boff's theology. A critical point centers on how the two sides perceive the substance of Catholicism, Christianity and other religions. Boff understands Christianity's essence as a mystery. On a practical level, Catholicism appears as an incomplete mediator of Christianity. The CDF defines less distinction between Catholicism and Christianity. The church's foundation and identity appear as one because "the unity of the episcopate is perpetrated through the centuries by means of the apostolic succession and is also the foundation of the identity of the church of every age with the church built by Christ upon Peter and upon the other apostles" ("Some" 110). These differing understandings lead to

the CDF's critique of ecclesiological relativism. Similar differences surround the Congregation's critique of doctrinal relativism.

### **Doctrinal Relativism**

Much of this discussion builds upon the sections on revelation and doctrine outlined in chapters one and two. The discussion also ties into the each side's understanding of the church and the world. The CDF says "the same relativizing logic [understood by the CDF to exist in Boff's discussion of Catholicism] is found again in the conception of doctrine and dogma expressed by L. Boff" ("Doctrinal" 686). The Congregation says that, in Boff's understanding, "dogma in its formulation holds good only 'for a specific time and specific circumstances'" ("Doctrinal" 686). The CDF concludes that relativism results "from such affirmations" ("Doctrinal" 686). A clearer understanding of the criticism of doctrinal relativism arises from a review of the Congregation's own understanding of revelation and doctrine.

The Congregation distinguishes between meaning and expression in doctrinal formulations, saying that "the meaning of dogmatic formulas remains ever true and constant in the Church, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed" ("Doctrinal" 686). In the Congregation's understanding, the meaning of dogmatic formulas "is declared by the Church [and] is determinate and unalterable" ("Doctrinal" 686). Hence, in the CDF's understanding, the truth of revelation joins directly and explicitly to the doctrinal formulations. The Congregation points out that "one thing is the deposit of faith, which consists of the truths contained in sacred doctrine, another thing is the manner of presentation, always however with *the same meaning and signification*" (italics mine) ("In Defense" 111).

The CDF goes on to emphasize that "the ultimate normative principle for [theological discernment which employs the elements and conceptual tools of philosophy or other disciplines] is revealed doctrine" ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 120). As explained earlier, the CDF sees a danger in placing too much emphasis on other disciplines because, in the Congregation's estimation, the Truth *cannot* be fully uncovered through these disciplines. The Congregation defines our existence as "*spiritual* struggle to live according to the Gospel and it is waged with the weapons of God" (italics mine) ("Instruction on Christian" 30). A distinction between what is *spiritual* and what is *earthly* arises from the Congregation's understanding of the source of truth and how humanity appropriates that truth. In another area, the Congregation says that "the Church desires the good of man in all his dimensions, first of all as a member of the city of God, and then as a member of the earthly city" ("Instruction on Christian" 37). These dichotomies play a large role in the Congregation's conclusions concerning revelation and doctrine. Boff's approach provides very different conclusions.

Boff would not easily conclude that the deposit of faith and manner of presentation always contain the same meaning and signification. He defines this view of doctrine and revelation as "a doctrinal understanding of revelation," and elaborates on this type of understanding:

God reveals the necessary truths...to facilitate the road to salvation...The magisterium presents an absolute doctrine free from any doubt. Any inquiry that is born of life and that calls into question a given doctrine is mistaken. Doctrine substitutes for life, experience, and everything from below. (Church 42)

Boff's understanding of revelation and doctrine reflects his conclusions on church-world relations. He leans toward an understanding which finds Truth *in* the world. The ultimate Meaning can be found through the world:

In asking ourselves...for the meaning of the technico-scientific world, we were not simply looking for something we had not yet encountered. At these heights of thought the reflection we make show that we are already within the Meaning. We ask because we have already been caught up and involved in the Meaning. (God's 42)

This understanding leads Boff to conclude that:

From this experience of God in contact with our world, we can see the world from a different perspective: in itself the world is profoundly opaque, but it becomes the revealer of God and the articulator of all Meaning, beginning to present itself to us as the transparency of God himself, veiled and revealed in it, given and held back. (God's 42)

Boff's understanding of revelation influences his use of dialectical theology. The use of dialectics, instead of leading to relativism, leads to a better understanding of Christianity.

He elaborates: "There is a kind of denial a Christian can make which better restores the original divine meaning of Christianity" (God's 48). Boff directs much of this "denial" at the present structure of church organization. His understanding of revelation and church-world relationships leads him to see the denial as constructive. Boff speaks of a paradox:

Carrying the cross of Christ today means needing to live in an unjust and discriminating social situation, aware both of its injustices and of the short-range impossibility of overcoming them. It is a question of living with an awareness of paradox, challenging and criticizing the situation from within, while at the same time trying to make it better or to renew it. (God's 173)

Boff's criticisms of church structures can only be seen in light of his ideas concerning revelation and doctrine, as well as his understanding of the church and the world. In a similar vein, the CDF's criticism's of Boff arise from their understanding of these issues.

The Congregation warns that,

In order to go on with its function of being the salt of the earth which never loses its savor, the *depositum fidei* (the deposit of faith) must be loyally preserved in its purity, without falling along the line of a dialectical process of history and in the direction of the primacy of praxis. ("Doctrinal" 686)

The CDF's warning arises from its understanding of church-world relationships and the relationship between theological discourse and other disciplines. Boff's conception of



revelation and doctrine endangers the "purity" of the truth precisely because his methodology incorporates a close relationship among theology, history, culture and other disciplines. The Congregation works out of an entirely different set of presuppositions concerning the interaction between the deposit of faith and the world. Therefore, what appears to Boff as a necessary engagement between doctrine and experience, is, from the CDF's position, a grave danger to the purity of the doctrine. These differing perspectives influence the CDF's charge of doctrinal relativism. An even larger influence, however, comes with the two side's divergent view's concerning *where* Christians encounter truth or revelation. Boff understands the world to be the revealer of Truth. In Boff's understanding, Revelation resides in the very fabric of existence, of the world. Boff says that:

All we need to do is analyze human beings in their existential situation to conclude that God is not something extrinsic to us, revealed only in the privileged moments of our life, but perpetually present in the tapestry of our lives, constantly revealing himself in our comings and goings. (God's 55)

The Congregation does not share Boff's conclusions that revelation can primarily be found through experience or that Truth exists *in* the world because these ideas lead to relativism. According to the Congregation "the ultimate content of revelation is God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who invites us to communion with him" ("Doctrinal" 686). The CDF speaks of the magisterium's role in relation to this content, saying that the hierarchy "must protect God's people from the danger of deviations and confusion, guaranteeing them the objective possibility of professing the authentic faith free from error, at all times and in diverse situations" ("Instruction on the Ecclesial" 121). An understanding of revelation that seeks truth in the world jeopardizes a guarantee of faith free from error.

The Congregation's understanding of doctrinal and ecclesiological relativism in Boff's writings arises from different views about ecumenism, the essence of Catholicism and Christianity, and the interaction between meaning and expression in doctrinal formulations of revelation. These views color Boff's response to the Congregation's criticism. The CDF's two criticisms also arise from differing presuppositions concerning methodology, Christology and ecclesiology. The comparison of these underlying divergences enables a more explicit understanding of the framework which informs both side's positions. The following section utilizes this framework to summarize briefly how Boff's understanding of the hierarchy appears to the Congregation and vice versa.

### **Summary**

The Congregation finds a fundamental problem in Boff's understanding of church origins and his portrayal of an institutional structure that arises as much from a particular culture and time than from any divine mandate. In the Congregation's estimation, these conclusions arise from faulty understandings of doctrine and revelation as well and place in jeopardy the proper understanding of the hierarchy which sees the magisterium as an ontological part of church structure. Given its presuppositions, the Congregation would have serious difficulty conceiving of the role of the hierarchy as coming from *within* the communities. Based on the CDF's understanding of revelation, Jesus' will for the church, and the concept of unity, Boff's criticisms and ideas for institutional reform violate several fundamental concepts the Congregation perceives as basic to the church's identity. Chapter two points out the Congregation's concern to balance the earthly with the spiritual, the promotion of humanity with the evangelization of humanity, and structural

conversion with inner conversion. Boff's understanding of the relationship between the church and the world, in the CDF's estimation, seriously imbalances these three concepts in favor of the earthly, the promotion of humanity and structural conversion. The CDF also sees in Boff's methodology an improper relationship between theology and other disciplines. This impropriety then leads to faulty analysis of church structure. Through this analysis, Boff draws, in the Congregation's estimation, dangerous conclusions about the role of the hierarchy, its place in the church and the role of the laity. The Congregation, building upon its own notions about the place of the laity in the church, sees in Boff's understanding of the hierarchy's place in the church improper lay involvement and a faulty tendency toward democratization in church structure. Viewed from the CDF, Boff's understanding of the hierarchy and his underlying presuppositions could indeed appear to "endanger the sound doctrine of the faith" ("Doctrinal" 687).

Viewed from Boff's perspective, the Congregation's understanding of the hierarchy uses faulty analysis of church origins and groundless conclusions about Christ's will for church structure. Boff would give little support to an understanding of the hierarchy that ties the present structure ontologically to the institution of the church. Boff would also find imbalances in the Congregation's understanding of the earthly and the spiritual, the promotion of humanity and the evangelization of humanity, and structural conversion and inner conversion. These imbalances arise from an improper understanding of church-world relationships that results in too large a dichotomy between the two arenas. Boff's praxis approach would influence his view of the CDF's elaboration of Catholic "essences." Given his presuppositions, Boff would find fault with the Congregation's understanding that the supreme criterion for judging the ordinary exercise and

genuineness of prophecy belongs to the hierarchy. While agreeing that some criterion is necessary, Boff's understanding would place the judging capacity ultimately within the community itself. Similarly, Boff would see in the CDF's understanding of the hierarchy too great a distance between the magisterium and the laity, as well as too great a dichotomy between magisterial functions and lay functions. Viewed through Boff's eyes, the Congregation's view of the hierarchy arises "from the historical paternalism by which, surely without intending it, [the church] has maintained the poor in a condition of dependency" ("Liberation" 57).

Two foundationally different perspectives lead to two radically different views of each other. The question now becomes whether the two views represent a fundamental divergence, to the point of being irreconcilable. Or, perhaps the differences in presuppositions, while not easily reconcilable, still do not represent a fundamental rift. The investigation continues with a look at the question of divergence and convergence in the two side's understanding of the hierarchy.

### **Discussion of Divergence/Convergence**

Is Boff really "subverting religious reality?" ("Doctrinal" 686). The answer depends on how both sides define the reality. Does Boff's ecclesiological relativism lead to "a profound misunderstanding of the Catholic faith on the church of God in the world?" ("Doctrinal" 686). Again, one's perception of the nature of the world and the church determines how one answers this question. Dennis Doyle, who discusses the Boff-CDF controversy with a look at the CDF's understanding of Communion Ecclesiology, provides a helpful insight:

Under the lens of a more balanced version [of communion ecclesiology than that of the CDF], Boff's ecclesiology might still look particular, partial and in need of

challenge and balance. But it might appear less as a heretical denial of essential truths about the structure of the church and more as a somewhat one-sided affirmation of other crucial elements of that structure. ("Communion" 143)

Perhaps the problem lies more with the CDF's particular lens than with Boff's conclusions. Certainly, the Congregation provides useful warnings against imbalances that could arise from Boff's method. Doyle says that "what the C.D.F. finds is that Boff's praxis approach to truth has *implications* that, when pushed to their logical consequences, constitute a denial of their principles" ("Communion" 143). But do these implications necessarily "endanger the sound doctrine of the faith"? ("Doctrinal" 687). The relativism in Boff's theology does exist, but it exists to the extent that one holds the *presuppositions* about church-world relations and revelation and doctrine that the CDF holds. In a different light, this relativism appears less dangerous to the constitutive elements of the Catholic church.

The problems between Boff and the CDF reflect a larger arena of tension in the Roman Catholic church as well as Christianity in general. This larger picture reveals a dramatic upheaval in what constitutes the defining principles of Christianity and, more particularly, the Catholic church. Certainly, these tensions have existed since the dawn of Christianity. The present period of the Catholic church, however, coming on the heels of Vatican II, appears to be particularly important for these questions and their answers. Many speak of a sort of paradigm shift occurring both in the church and in the world. Harvey Cox notes that "what is at issue between the two parties is not *whether* there should be norms and discipline but *what* they should be" (The Silencing 147). Cox comments that, "as Ratzinger might put it, eventually one must distinguish flowers from poison ivy, healthy diversity from proliferating malignancy, the genuine from the spurious. The Latin

Americans recognize this too. But the question is how?" (The Silencing 167). The question of *how* lies at the root of the CDF's criticism of Boff. Ratzinger again asks the question of how in relation to the CDF's investigation of liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez: "It is not a question of condemning the person of Gutierrez, but the issue: How are political beliefs, Christian theology and the act of faith mutually related?" ("The Testing" 89). The conclusions Boff generates imperil the Congregation's understanding of church and world, revelation and doctrine. The issues, however, run deeper than the conclusions, and a determination of the soundness of the arguments demands some ability to discern whether the underlying presuppositions are true and sound.

What, then, can one conclude about the possibility for rapprochement between Boff and the CDF? One could say, based on the two sides' fundamentally diverse presuppositions, that reconciliation of the positions appears improbable. Donal Flanagan, sheds light on the discussion by providing an indication of Cardinal Ratzinger's intentions:

Ratzinger's preoccupation in Rome has been to maintain and stabilise Vatican II Catholicism, to emphasise continuity in a climate of change, to stress the need for institution as well as charism, to emphasise the centre as against the periphery, to underscore the tradition of Catholicism, to be conscious of the vulnerability of Vatican II Catholicism, to be aware of the 'loose cannons' it inflicted on the Church, to prevent the dissolving of belief in a highly secular-minded culture. ("Two Visions" 518)

Given the discussion of the CDF's understanding of the mission of the hierarchy,

Flanagan's portrait appears to be accurate. He continues:

These are the preoccupations of a man steeped in the history of Europe and of Christendom. They are also the product of the European Catholic experience before, during and after Vatican II. How far they help Joseph Ratzinger to understand and sympathise with the goals and preoccupations of Leonardo Boff is a good question. ("Two Visions" 518)

Here lies fertile ground for furthering an understanding of the tensions between Boff and the CDF. Both sides' presuppositions and conclusions arise in a context which radically differs from the other. An understanding of the context will not solve all of the fundamental differences in the sides. Much misunderstanding, however, arises from an inadequate appreciation of these contexts. The following section explores the notion of differing contexts, among other ideas, and offers several of my own conclusions about the tensions between Boff and the CDF.

### **Differing Contexts**

Latin America differs greatly from Rome. Their cultures and histories, while containing many similar aspects, offer different views of the world. The diversity between Latin America and Rome presents a major challenge for the Catholic church. The tensions between Boff and the CDF reflect some of the wider confusion as the church attempts to maintain unity in the midst of cultural diversity. Flanagan notes how "things look different outside Rome. In Latin America, in the basic Christian communities, the Gospel is not read with the same perceptions as the lecture halls of Rome or Germany. Even Vatican II looks different viewed from the Vatican and from the Third World" ("Two Visions" 517). Boff alludes to the problems this difference presents, saying that "'poly-incarnation' can cause problems for the type of unity Rome sets forth, a unity that originates from Roman culture, European culture, centralization and security for the Pope" ("Leonardo" 26). Similar ideas can be found in Cox's book. He finds that a second story "concealed within l'affaire Boff is the rapid transformation of Christianity from a faith based principally in Europe and North America to a church whose members live mainly in Latin America, Asia, and Africa" (The Silencing 12).

Differences in perspective do not necessarily mean one approaches Truth in a better manner. Understanding these perspectives, however, allows one to better grasp the theological conclusions reached within them. Cox explains that "this is why liberation theologians are so insistent that their critics do more than read what they have written...but that they become aware of the actual situation in which they live and work, what they often call the 'social reality'" (The Silencing 183). An appeal to better understanding of contexts is one part of a resolution to the conflict between Boff and the CDF. Considerable rifts remain between the two sides. A fundamental look at the situation yields little support for convergence of the two sides. Boff's resignation from the Franciscans testifies to a continued divergence. At some point, there needs to be an understanding reached on what underlying presuppositions draw the community closer to the Truth and what ones move the community away from the Truth. The post conciliar period offers much promise but little action in this area. Methodology, Christology, ecclesiology, revelation, and doctrine are all moving through a period of normative upheaval. For this reason, a divergence between Boff and the CDF will remain for some time.

### **Conclusion**

I conclude this chapter with several thoughts based on the research and my own experience. First, both sides must continue to dialogue. The methods of inquiry used by the CDF show little sensitivity to the Latin American context in itself. Boff's recent resignation is particularly troubling, and I wonder if, in some way, his resignation signals an irreparable separation between the two sides. Second, the question of timing comes into play. Several of Boff's ideas may simply not be ripe for the present moment. I feel



the increased education of the laity foreshadows a fundamental change in church structure. As people become more educated through schooling, experience, self awareness and intuition, their capacity for the reception of church teaching becomes mated with an increased ability to contribute to this teaching. In addition to a more educated laity, there remains the question of the role of women in the church. Increased participation by women also foreshadows a coming change in church structure. The CDF's underlying presuppositions appear, in my estimation, ill-suited to prepare the church for the massive influence of women and an educated laity. In an effort to maintain a balance of certain concepts, especially in church-world relationships, the Congregation disregards legitimate concerns coming from the burgeoning influence of women and the laity in church structure. I do, however, agree with Boff when he says that:

Despite these limits, surely we ought not to view these human beings as performing their task in the spirit of the Grand Inquisitor, but rather in that of brothers in faith with ourselves, persons seeking to discharge their arduous task and mission of zealously preserving the basic tenets of our faith and the mainstays of our hope. This task is done sometimes correctly and properly, sometimes incorrectly and improperly, but always with the intention of being faithful to that Word that ultimately will judge us all. (Liberation Theology 91)

My final point emanates from Boff's call to understand the hierarchy as brothers. An important balance must be maintained in the dialogue and discussion of the issues which underlie the tensions between Boff and the CDF. A certain element of respect for the other side must be coupled with an ability to clearly enunciate and not compromise one's position. Boff may say things in such a manner that the CDF misses his message and focuses on the *way* he says things. On the other hand, Boff's message needs to sting, to challenge, to be presented in a way that contains some acidic value. In an untitled article

on the controversy for *America* magazine, the author points out that "theological writing through the centuries has been marked with a certain vigor and vinegar. In this tradition, [Boff] is in a theological mainstream that stretches back to Paul and Augustine" ("To Walk" 265).

The problems between Boff and the CDF intersect on an underlying level of the two sides presuppositions. Both sides draw conclusions from these presuppositions which offer divergent views of the place, mission and function of the hierarchy in the church. These conclusions appear, for the present time, to be irreconcilable and the impasse necessitates further dialogue and discussion, especially to determine norms for the underlying positions. The way in which the two sides discuss their disagreements will play a major role in how much fruit it bears for the whole church. Both sides must also remain aware that their positions represent an ultimately limited viewpoint, and that these viewpoints, while perhaps not perfectly complementary, also are not absolutely contradictory. The controversy between Boff and the CDF remains open-ended and requires a vigilance on both sides to the workings of the Spirit in their dialogue.

The controversy between Boff and the CDF goes beyond each side's understanding of the hierarchy and, ultimately moves beyond the underlying presuppositions that guide these understandings. The tensions between the two come from the fundamental issue of how one determines the relationship between the church and the world. The controversy also arises from differing concepts of truth and our ability to "know" truth. Further study of Boff and the Congregation must incorporate these foundational issues. In doing so, such a study will find that the tensions between Boff and the CDF on these foundational issues exist throughout the church. The study of Boff and the Congregation uncovers one

small part of a debate that will determine the future of Catholic Church's structure and mission.

1. The letter, published in English in *Origins*, was reprinted under the title: "Doctrinal Congregation Criticizes Brazilian Theologian's Book."
2. An excellent article on political involvement and the Latin American church comes from Carolyn Cook Dipboye, "The Roman Catholic Church and the Political Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America, 1968-1980," Journal of Church and State 24 (Autumn 1982) 497-524.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Christ, the Trinity & Theology Today," Origins 1 (March 23, 1972): 665-668.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Doctrinal Congregation Criticizes Brazilian Theologian's Book," Origins 14 (April 4, 1985): 683-687.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "In Defense of Catholic Doctrine," Origins 3 (July 19, 1973): 97-112.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation.'" Washington, D.C.: Publishing and Promotion Services, United States Catholic Conference, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation." Washington, D.C.: Publishing and Promotion Services, United States Catholic Conference, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian," Origins 20 (July 5, 1990): 117-126.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Minister of the Eucharist," Origins 13 (Sept. 15, 1993): 229-233.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion," Origins 22 (June 15, 1992): 108-112.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Vatican Declaration: Women in the Ministerial Priesthood," Origins 6 (Feb. 3, 1977): 517-524.

### Leonardo Boff

- \_\_\_\_\_. Church: Charism & Power. Translated by John W. Diercksmeier. New York: Crossroad, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church. Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence. Translated by Robert R. Barr. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989.

- \_\_\_\_\_. God's Witness in the Heart of the World. Translated by Robert Fath. Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Jesus Christ Liberator. Translated by Patrick Hughes. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Liberating Grace. Translated by John Drury. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Maternal Face of God. Translated by Robert R. Barr and John W. Diercksmeier. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. New Evangelization: Good News to the Poor. Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The New Evangelization: New Life Burst In," Concilium (December 1990): 130-140.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Theological Examination of the Terms 'People of God' and 'Popular Church.'" Concilium (December 1984): 89-97.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Trinity and Society. Translated by Paul Burns. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. When Theology Listens to the Poor. Translated by Robert Barr. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.

#### Leonardo and Clodovis Boff

- \_\_\_\_\_. Liberation Theology: From Confrontation to Dialogue. Translated by Robert R. Barr. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Salvation and Liberation. Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984.

#### Additional Sources

- "Boff Explains His Resignation in a Letter," LatinAmerica Press, July 9, 1992.
- Cox, Harvey. The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity. Oak Park: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988.
- Doyle, Dennis. "Communion Ecclesiology and the Silencing of Boff," America 166 (Sept. 12, 1992): 139-143.
- Flanagan, Donal. "Two Visions of Church: The Boff-Ratzinger Encounter," Doctrine and Life 40 (December 1990): 517-520.