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Introduction to the Articles by Clodovis Boff, Frei Betto and Hugo Assmann

JAMES PENNEY

Clodovis Boff OSM is the younger brother of the more famous Leonardo. He is the author of several 'academic' books, notably his doctoral thesis translated into English as *Theology and Praxis* (Orbis, 1987). He teaches in the Franciscan theological institute in Petrópolis, and in CESEP, a centre for training pastoral agents, priests and laypeople in São Paulo. He spends at least three months a year working with base communities. His account of a pastoral journey to communities in Acre, in the far north of Brazil, has been translated into English as *Feet-on-the-ground Theology* (Orbis, 1987). He has also written several books on liberation theology with his brother.

The essay published in this issue of *RSS* is the final chapter of Boff's 1989 book *Cartas teológicas sobre o socialismo*. The first three chapters of the book are the texts of letters written by Boff on visits to Cuba, the USSR and China in the late 1980s. This final chapter is a more general commentary on socialism. The piece is written in colloquial Portuguese and its style reflects the fact that it is addressed to ordinary members of an urban base community. Duque de Caxias forms part of the Baixada Fluminense, a series of suburbs on the outskirts of Rio, and is regarded as one of the most dangerous places in Brazil, with a high level of poverty, violence and murder.

The first part of the letter, which has been omitted here, gives a brief description of the so-called 'socialist' countries around the world in 1989; it is of course out of date now. The rest of the letter is an analysis of the principles of socialism, democracy and freedom. The analysis is set in the context of contemporary Brazil, as occasional references to Brazilian politics demonstrate; but it has much to contribute to debate on these issues in a wider context.

Frei Betto is a Dominican friar. A journalist by training, he is a frequent contributor to the major Brazilian daily newspapers as well as being a prolific author. He has long worked in popular education and with base communities. He is the principal assessor of the 'workers' pastoral', with a particular commitment to the team in São Paulo, the industrial heartland of Brazil. He is also adviser to Luís Ignácio da Silva, the former leader of the Metalworkers' Union in São Paulo and presidential candidate of the Workers' Party.

The article by Betto published in this issue of *RSS* originally appeared in 1990 in the *Revista eclesialística Brasileira*, the leading Brazilian theological journal published by the Franciscans. It is one of a number of articles written by Betto on the subject of theology and socialism in the aftermath of the events of 1989. This particular piece focuses on liberation theology and its future development. The refer-

ence to the events of 1989 is pertinent in view of the fact that many people believe that liberation theology is, if not dependent on socialism, at least influenced by it. This view of liberation theology tends to equate this theology's critique of capitalism with an explicit political option for socialism. In this article Betto endeavours to point out the falsity of this understanding of liberation theology, while emphasising the validity of his fellow theologians' criticism of the market and of the international economic structure.

Hugo Assmann, a sociologist and theologian, is professor of postgraduate studies in Human and Social Sciences at the Methodist University of Piracicaba in the state of São Paulo. He is the author of numerous works in the field of theology and economics, as well as on liberation theology itself.

The essay by Assmann in this issue of *RSS* is the final piece in a collection of essays entitled *Challenges and Fallacies: Essays on the Contemporary Situation* (Paulinas, 1991). The style and tone of the essay are colloquial. Unlike many of Assmann's other publications, it is not intended to be an academic work in the strict sense of the word. Assmann reflects on the present state of liberation theology and indicates some of the directions in which it might develop in the future.

The text of the essay was first presented to a conference on society and religion in Goiânia, Brazil, in July 1991. The participants in the conference would have had a substantial knowledge of and, in many cases, a considerable commitment to, liberation theology. The original context of the paper goes some way towards explaining Assmann's rather speculative comments. The wide-ranging style of the essay reflects an attempt to show how liberation theology has made contributions across a number of disciplines, relating these to the contemporary political and economic situation. Assmann's piece draws together, albeit in a rather unsystematic way, the main ideas in the other two essays.