

Concerns about the new Pope

Leonardo Boff

Theologian

The elevation of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to Pope of the Catholic Church has brought satisfaction to some, and concern to others. Two factors cause these concerns: his style of governing the Church, and his basic attitude vis-a-vis today's pluralistic world.

As Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for more than twenty years, and in his homily to the Cardinals before entering the Conclave, Benedict XVI made it clear that he will continue the line of his predecessor.

If his style of governing the Church were to centralize it, as previously, there is a risk that the Church will be identified with the Pope. If, in the face of a plural world, the basic attitude is purely and simply to affirm orthodoxy, openly opposing cultural pluralist tendencies, the Church runs the risk of identifying Rome with the world, thus becoming a redoubt of conservatism and of Christian intellectual mediocrity.

If centralization prevails, it will restrict the creativity of the local churches that need freedom to articulate to the masses of the suffering faithful, faith with justice and social mission with liberation, without which evangelization is alienation. The exodus of the faithful to other denominations will worsen. This situation is characteristic of all the Third World where more than half of all the

Catholic of the world are found.

If the attitude of confrontation with modernity and post-modernity prevails, I foresee disastrous consequences for the future of the Church. Traditionalist as he is, Benedict XVI must know that this strategy profoundly wears down the Church. In the past, he deprived the liberation movements of the oppressed the cooperation of Christians who could have offered Christian values to the emerging social relations, leaving them instead alienated and immature. The Church herself arrived always late for everything, even to the signing of the Declaration of Human Rights. A Church that returns to models of the past becomes immobile, like a fossil. Accommodating, she does not fulfill her mission of educating Christians for the new times. Instead, she clericalizes, leaving them immature in matters of faith, if not childish, popish flatterers, of whom there are so many these days.

These questions, once they have been thought through and articulated, will remain so long as they are not settled. Vatican Council II settled them, but John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger interpreted it in a manner which nullifies the Council.

Open confrontation instead of dialogue, besides being a strategic error, is a theological one. Vatican Council II taught that to dialogue with philosophies and ideological currents, in the first place, the elements of light and positive that are in them must be identified, because, whether they come through Marx, Freud or Lyotard, if they are true, in the final analysis they come from God. Ending ecumenism is to affirm, as the document *Dominus Iesus*, by Cardinal

Ratzinger, says, that only the Catholic Church is the Church of Christ and that the others are not Churches, but only have ecclesial elements. It is also to say to other religions that they have valid elements, but that their followers run a grave risk of perdition because they are outside the Catholic Church, the only true religion. This is not to dialogue but to insult. Cordiality is used to facilitate conversion. That is deceitful and undignified.

I believe in miracles. Let's hope Benedict XVI becomes again the theologian I used to respect, who elicited hope, not fear.

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