



Resenhas

Autores Diversos

Brasa sob cinzas: Estórias do anti-cotidiano [Live-Coal on Ashes: Uncommon Stories of Common Life]. By Leonardo Boff. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1996. 125 pp.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the trajectory of Leonardo Boff — the most prolific and arguably the most creative of liberation theologians — is archetypal of much of Latin American liberationism. In certain respects Boff has abandoned the liberationist agenda of the 70's and 80's; in other respects he continues a spokesman. Leaving the Franciscan priesthood and marrying in 1993,

he continues to write as well as to teach at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ).

Boff's most recent work, *Brasa sob cinzas*, is quite different from any of his previous works. Free from formal arguments, the author relates through a mixture of real occurrences, fables and ponderings his understanding of the meaning of life. Here is the artist, the poet, sometimes a C. S. Lewis, other times a Sid-dhartha-like Hesse, an extraordinary master of eloquence in the Portuguese language. His introduction explains that God enters magically into everything.

I warn the religious that the God who speaks through these texts is closer to the experience of mystics than to the talk of experts of whatever religious creed. Mystics pray. Experts think. Mystics talk with God. Experts talk about God. Mystics relate stories, religious experts teach doctrines. Mystics sail to the high seas. Experts stay secure in the port. Mystics challenge the dangerous waves. Experts want to avoid them. [8,9, my translation]

With the mystery, nonetheless, comes a great deal of theology. In uneven chapters from one to twenty pages, often plied with his own emotions and doubts, Boff's ideas are presented on death (*i.e.*, of his friend, the virgin Veronica); the poor and marginalized ("Our Father of the poor and dogs," 38f); forgiveness (how God continually empties hell, 40ff); the Trinity ("symbol" of social unity and diversity in God, 45) and other themes seen in previous works. Most striking, however, are his comments concerning women, ecological mysticism and globalization.

Of these cameos of life, the first six short stories have to do with women — always favorable, always closer to God than male counterparts. Throughout the book God is often referred to as the Mother God (*magna mater, a grande Pacha Mama, etc.*), with emphasis on the forgiving, affective side of divinity reflected in Mary, Julian of Norwich and especially the feminine poor. Chapter 2, "Se fosse um santo teria pecado" [If I were a saint I would have sinned], relates an apparently real-life situation in which a baby from the *favela* had died. After the interment, the mother of the infant invited Boff to her abject dwelling. Alone, the mother whispered to him: "I have only known ugly, sick, skinny men... You are well-fed, handsome, strong and attractive. Allow me this joy. Make love with me." (21) She lifted her skirts. Boff hesitated and finally stammered that he was a *religioso*. He could not. Later meditating at home, he was filled with "immense shame," concluding that freely making love to the woman would have affirmed her humanity, given dignity to her person. So the title of the chapter.

Secondly, Boff describes at length his "love-affair" with trees, how he "seduces" them (his terminology) and hugs them for hours (81-87). He has increasingly used the term "non-dualism" to describe not only a solidarity with all

creation but also a loss of personal consciousness in the nirvana of cosmic unity: "Suddenly I no longer felt myself. I was pure and vital cosmic energy. The tree was me. I was the tree." (83) Interestingly, Boff's little-known first published work, *O evangelho do Cristo cósmico* [The Gospel of the Cosmic Christ] (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1971), was a defense of Teilhard's theology. His bridge to "Christian pantheism" is the resurrection of Jesus and the Christogenesis of mankind. Boff defines resurrection as "filling the whole universe and occupying every place" (108), just as the resurrected Christ is not a glorified body but penetrates and is a part of all things.

Thirdly, Boff emphasizes universalism. He stands decidedly against any theology of divine atonement for sin (65). Rather God became incarnate out of his fascination with human nature and his desire to glorify creation (115). Based on tenuous evidences of pioneer discoveries from the 16th and 17th centuries, Boff posits that Christ had already visited the Incas and other indigenous peoples of Latin America well before Cabral. His theme corresponds with CELAM IV (Santo Domingo, 1991) on the pre-evangelism of Latin America through indigenous and popular religions. His last chapter "Grace, Destiny and the Train" is a parable of how all persons — the pious, the rebellious and the Hitlers — are on God's train carrying them to himself. Gone is any rhetoric whatsoever of a Latin American theology. At the same time, the appreciation of Brazilian life and its vibrant humanity is very evident, in romanticized proportions.

Several themes are developed more academically in the recent Atica series Religion and Citizenship: *América Latina: da Conquista à nova evangelização* [Latin America: From the Conquest to the New Evangelization] (São Paulo: Ática, 1992); *Nova Era: A civilização planetária* [New Age: A Planetary Civilization] (São Paulo: Ática, 1994); and *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade: A emergência de um novo paradigma* [Ecology, World Consciousness, Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Paradigm] (São Paulo: Ática, 1996). None of these works, however, approaches the engaging prose of *Brasa sob cinzas*, published by the largest secular publisher in Brazil.

Amidst the persuasive dialogue, Boff does not hesitate take some hard shots. Jesus' description of Peter as both Satan and Rock, Boff affirms, is a hermeneutical key for understanding all the Popes. Describing several abominations in papal history, he insists that the worship of papal personality — as in Rome today — has become far too exaggerated. Indeed because of Rome's alliances with the world's powerful rather than the poor, "The Vatican lives that which Jesus never would have wanted: grandeur, riches and ostentation. It is a scandal." (92)

Leonardo Boff has always presented himself as an integrator and innovator of religion. Without Roman Catholic restraints, he alludes as much to other religions (Buddhist, indigenous Indian) as to the traditions of Saint Francis and other lesser known divines, or again to Scripture itself. On the one hand Boff's subjective theologizing is refreshingly human, fecund with creativity and

beauty — in many ways what divine truth ought to be like. On the other, he is increasingly a post-modern man with few if any anchors to hold his theology in a Christian harbor. For the while, capitalism has largely won the day in Latin America; the trickle down effect on various economies has done far more for the poor than the ambitious but unsuccessful socialist agendas. Like many a disillusioned liberation theologian, Boff is adrift somewhere between prioritizing the poor and a inter-religious gnosticism.

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