

## **The American TFP's 2007 comments regarding a note on the Brazilian TFP approved by the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil on April 19, 1985**

The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property has received several inquiries concerning a 1985 note of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (NCBB) on its **autonomous** sister organization, the Brazilian Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property. Many of these individuals received an Internet version of the note, which we will refer to below as the “1985 NCBB note.”

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On April 19, 1985, “an expressive majority” of the bishops present for the 23<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly of the NCBB approved a note on the Brazilian TFP. This is the TFP’s English translation of the full text of the note:

The lack of communion of TFP (the Brazilian Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property) with the Church in Brazil, its hierarchy, and the Holy Father is well known.

Its esoteric character, the religious fanaticism, the cult given to the personality of its leader and his mother, the abusive use of the name of Mary Most Holy, according to news items circulated, cannot in any way merit the approval of the Church.

We regret the inconveniences occasioned by a civil society that manifests itself as a Catholic religious entity, without connection to the legitimate shepherds.

That being so, the Bishops of Brazil exhort Catholics not to join TFP or collaborate with it.

Over the next few days, this 1985 NCBB note was published in major newspapers of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and other Brazilian cities.<sup>1</sup> However, despite this significant media coverage, the note did not impress Brazilian Catholic public

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<sup>1</sup> The 1985 NCBB note was published by: *Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, and *Folha da Tarde* in São Paulo; *Jornal do Brasil* and *O Globo* in Rio de Janeiro; *Correio Popular* in Campinas (São Paulo State), all on 4/20/85; *Diário do Povo*, in Campinas, 4/21/85; *Centro Informativo Católico* (CIC), 4/23/85; *O São Paulo*, 4/26-5/2/85; *A Notícia*, Campos (State of Rio) and *Voz de Nazaré*, both on 4/28/85.

opinion because of the well known leftist political leanings of the Conference and many Brazilian bishops.

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In 2007, in response to additional efforts by detractors to use the 1985 NCBB note to malign it, the American TFP published ten considerations. They are as follows:

First: Yes, this NCBB press note was approved by “an expressive majority”<sup>2</sup> of bishops at the NCBB’s annual meeting, on April 19, 1985, and was published in several Brazilian newspapers.

Nevertheless, the 1985 NCBB note **must be seen in its twofold context**:

- a) The immediate context: The note was issued in the midst of a *leftist* media uproar against the Brazilian TFP, and based itself on the false accusations circulated by the media. This is clear from the 1985 NCBB note itself when it states, “**according to news items circulated.**”
- b) The background context: For decades, Brazil has been divided over the question of socialist and confiscatory land reform. Many Catholics oppose it for religious and economic reasons. They believe it will lead to greater poverty and the destruction of the right to private property, and the transformation of Brazil, the world’s largest Catholic country, into a gigantic Cuba. The Brazilian TFP has been in this debate from the beginning. In the 1960s—when Bishop Helder Camara and other prelates were using the NCBB’s prestige to favor land reform—Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, together with the economist Luiz Mendonça de Freitas and the ordinaries of two Brazilian dioceses, Archbishop Geraldo de Proença Sigaud of Diamantina and Bishop Antônio de Castro Mayer of Campos, authored the book *Land Reform: A Question of Conscience*. The book emphasized the duty of Catholics to oppose leftist land reform, even when proposed or supported by ecclesiastics. Such a reform, the book argued, violates the Seventh and Tenth commandments and the traditional teachings of the Popes. The Brazilian TFP promoted this book, and others that followed it, with highly visible months-long street campaigns, and media advertisements. One of the subsequent books, *I Am a Catholic: May I Oppose Land Reform?* by Prof. Corrêa de Oliveira and

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<sup>2</sup> *Comunicado Mensal*, no. 388, April 30, 1985, p. 341.

the American-educated economist Carlos Patricio del Campo, showed that “The Church and the Land Problem,” a document on land reform approved by 172 bishops at the February 1980 General Assembly of the NCBB, contradicts the traditional teachings of the Supreme Magisterium of the Church. The decades-old polemic between the Brazilian TFP and the NCBB over land reform is the background context of the 1985 note.

Second: The “expressive majority” of bishops who approved the 1985 NCBB note based on false accusations in the leftist media never pronounced themselves on the TFP response to these false charges which had been circulating for several years. The TFP response consisted primarily of three books, all published before the NCBB note:

- a) *Imbroglia, Detraction, Delirium—Remarks on a Report About the TFPs— Verdict on a Report—the Thesis: Absurd; the Argumentation: Groundless; the Witnesses: Anonymous.* This 260-page book was first published in 1980 by the French TFP.
- b) *Timely Reflections and Examples of Saints for Our Times.* This 416-page book was first published by the Brazilian TFP in June 1984.
- c) *The TFP’s Reply to a Vain Onslaught.* This 498-page book was first published by the Brazilian TFP in June 1984.

The last two books were submitted to Fr. Victorino Rodriguez y Rodriguez, O.P. This world-renowned theologian reviewed both books thoroughly and gave a written opinion in which he vouches for the full Catholicity of the TFP position expounded in the same.

Third: The day after the 1985 NCBB note was published in the Brazilian media, the Brazilian TFP gave the following respectful statement to the press:

TFP found it hard to believe that the note of the NCBB published by *O Estado de S. Paulo* on April 20 really expresses the thought of the illustrious episcopal body, such is the accumulation of unfounded statements and biased and impassioned assessments in the text.

TFP does not renounce the possibility of yet producing a more detailed analysis of the NCBB’s pronouncement. In any case, it will remain faithful to its unbreakable tradition: It will render to the ecclesiastical authority all the respect and obedience prescribed in Canon Law for civic organizations of Catholic inspiration.

Already now, TFP affirms that it willingly accepts, and has always accepted, the vigilance of the Sacred Hierarchy in matters of Faith and morals.

If the NCBB considers that TFP expressed a heterodox concept or did a single action in the line of yesterday's communiqué, we would like to know exactly what it was. Should the existence of any error or the illicitness of any action be proven, TFP will certainly accept correction.

However, justice forbids TFP from accepting as valid vague and generic accusations like those in the NCBB text. Specific facts and proofs must be presented.

TFP awaits, then, the enumeration of the facts and proofs with a totally tranquil conscience and is ready to publicly defend its honor to the fullest legitimate and necessary extent, even if this must be done, in sorrow, in relation to sacred pastors –Paulo Corrêa de Brito Filho, TFP Press Secretary. (Our emphasis.)<sup>3</sup>

As can be seen, the Brazilian TFP (a) denies that the accusations are true; (b) reiterates its total submission to the vigilance of the hierarchy in matters of faith and morals; (c) reiterates its willingness to accept correction should any error or the illicitness of any action by the organization be proven; (d) requests *specificity, clarity, and proofs* in the charges against the organization, as opposed to vague and generic accusations.

In 1997, since the 1985 NCBB was being widely circulated by TFP detractors in the United States, the American TFP requested its Brazilian sister organization to issue a more detailed response, which it did. The American TFP's English translation of the Brazilian TFP's May 13, 1997 more detailed response is available on the Internet at this link, <http://www.tfp.org/ref/1985NCBB.htm>

Fourth: Considering the Brazilian TFP's denial of the charges, public submission to episcopal vigilance, willingness to accept correction, and request for specific facts and proofs, it is significant that since 1985, neither the NCBB nor any Brazilian bishop acting on his own ever contacted the Brazilian TFP to institute a canonical inquiry into the veracity of the grave charges made in the 1985 note.

Fifth: The 1985 NCBB note had no impact on Brazilian Catholic support for TFP. The Brazilian TFP did not lose one donor, member, friend or supporter. For many Brazilian Catholics, the note merely reflected the decades-long polemic

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<sup>3</sup> The TFP note was published in full in *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Jornal da Tarde*, São Paulo, 4/23/85; *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 4/24/85; *A Cidade*, Campos (State of Rio), 4/29/85. *Jornal do Brasil* published a summary of it April 22, 1985.

between the TFP and pro-liberation theology bishops<sup>4</sup> over socialist and confiscatory land reform.

**Sixth: The American TFP is not the subject of the 1985 NCBB note.**

The Brazilian TFP and the American TFP are separate, autonomous organizations. Each TFP is solely responsible for its actions.

Seventh: Despite the 1985 NCBB note, numerous Brazilian bishops continued to give *written* support to campaigns of the Brazilian TFP. So much for a note that exhorts “*Catholics not to join TFP or collaborate with it.*”

In 2007 alone, twenty-two Brazilian bishops provided letters of support to be used as evidence in the French TFP’s legal confrontation with the secularist French government. These bishops speak of their experience with the Brazilian TFP and affirm its Catholicity.

A reasonable explanation for this support is that the Brazilian hierarchy has been divided for some time. In 1985, the larger faction favored leftist political parties and liberation theology and opposed the Brazilian TFP. In the 22 years that have elapsed since the 1985 NCBB note, the size and the composition of the contending groups have changed.

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<sup>4</sup> The Brazilian TFP’s anti-communist stance has much to do with the opposition from liberal Brazilian bishops. For forty plus years, the Brazilian TFP respectfully, but publicly opposed the socialist and confiscatory land reform policy adopted by most Brazilian bishops.

It may be difficult for Americans to fathom how a majority of bishops could adopt positions favorable to liberation theology and socioeconomic policies advocated by Marxists. However, Latin Americans have experienced this tragic reality for years. Examples are legion. Take the letter sent by Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns of São Paulo (at the time, archbishop of the diocese with the largest number of faithful in the world) to the communist tyrant Fidel Castro on the 30th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. The Cardinal’s letter was delivered by Friar Betto, a leading proponent of liberation theology. The letter was published January 6, 1989, in *Granma* (the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party) and in the January 21, 1989 issue of *O São Paulo* (the São Paulo archdiocesan newspaper). Cardinal Arns writes:

Dear Fidel,

Peace and well-being!

I take advantage of Friar Betto’s trip to embrace you and greet the Cuban people on the 30th anniversary of the Revolution...

Cuba today can take pride in being, in our continent so impoverished by foreign debt, an example of social justice. The Christian faith clearly sees in the conquests of the Revolution the signs of the Reign of God...

I keep you in my daily prayers, asking the Father to grant you always the grace of ably guiding the destiny of your country. Receive my fraternal embrace on the feast of the 30th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution.

Eighth: As the Brazilian TFP's 14-page response of May 13, 1997 demonstrates, the 1985 NCBB note is not a canonical document. The Brazilian TFP's response explains the note's context and exact scope and authority. It also explains the status of the Brazilian TFP in Canon Law and the tragic influence of Marxist liberation theology among Brazilian bishops. Again, the response is available online in English at [www.tfp.org/ref/1985NCBB.htm](http://www.tfp.org/ref/1985NCBB.htm).

Ninth: Neither the Brazilian TFP's response of April 21, 1985, nor its response of May 13, 1997, makes the claim that the NCBB statement was "just an 'unsigned note.'" On the contrary, the Brazilian TFP's 1997 response gives abundant details on how the NCBB note was drafted, amended, voted on, and then published in the Brazilian media.

Tenth: No special significance need be attached to the fact that the existence of the 1985 NCBB note can be authenticated. What matters is if the accusations against the Brazilian TFP contained within the 1985 NCBB note are true. The Brazilian TFP denied their veracity and requested proofs already two days after the 1985 NCBB note was approved. In any case, the note does not apply to the American TFP. Each TFP is autonomous.

In short, the 1985 NCBB note has no canonical implications for the Brazilian TFP. It is not a condemnation, an interdict or an excommunication. It is not even an ecclesiastical censure. It does not bind or oblige the faithful in any way. It is a note approved by bishops in the context of the Brazilian TFP's longtime opposition to socialist land reform, and the adoption by these bishops of positions favorable to liberation theology and socioeconomic policies advocated by Marxists. Moreover, it is based on false accusations made during a *leftist* media uproar against the Brazilian TFP and fails to consider the published TFP refutations of these false accusations.

The TFP invites readers desiring further information to visit [www.TFP.org](http://www.TFP.org) or to contact the organization directly. TFP staff will be glad to assist them.

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