

**The NCBB note
on the Brazilian TFP:
Unfounded statements,
Biased and
impassioned assessments**

The American TFP has occasionally been asked about a 1985 "note" of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (NCBB) on our Brazilian sister organization, the Brazilian TFP. We have adequately answered these inquiries, albeit briefly due to the enormous amount of other requests that the activities of the many TFPs, especially our own, generate throughout the country.

Some friends, however, have expressed the desire for a more detailed clarification of this subject. We have therefore asked the Brazilian TFP to provide this, and it has kindly prepared the following comprehensive document, which we transcribe for the satisfaction of our friends.

The NCBB note on the Brazilian TFP: Unfounded statements, Biased and impassioned assessments

1. TFP encounters misunderstanding, animosity, and even hatred

TFP's efforts in defense of Christian civilization find definite support in a considerable sector of Brazilian opinion, as well as general sympathy in the public.

This success unfortunately – and unavoidably in this valley of tears – is viewed with incomprehension, animosity, and at times even furious hatred in sectors of opinion that are leftist (in the civil field) and progressivist (in the religious field).

This incomprehension, animosity, and hatred frequently turn into public attacks aimed at destroying the organization. These are quickly supported by the leftist mass media.

TFP has always emerged victorious from these attempts, which it has termed *media uproars* because of their deafening character.

Although these attacks usually come from leftists, animosity sometimes comes from people on the other side of the spectrum: conservatives, and even traditionalists, who do not understand the organization's distinct way of acting.

Not surprisingly, some deserters lend themselves to these unfortunate defamation campaigns. Our Lord Jesus Christ warned His followers of such a possibility when He allowed one of His own to betray and deliver Him into the hands of His enemies!

TFP was not spared this possibility, and in March of 1985 had to confront groundless criticisms from former members, most of whom later adhered to Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre's rupture with the Holy See.

The fact is remembered here, since it explains the context of the NCBB's totally unjust note on the Brazilian TFP.

2. The note of the NCBB

This media uproar had just died down when the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (NCBB), gathered in mid-April for its 23rd General Assembly, issued a note on TFP. It read:

"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" (our emphasis).

This note of the NCBB, published in the main newspapers of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and in several newspapers in other parts of Brazil,¹ did not impress Catholic public opinion. It lacked the attributes to do so, as we will show a little later.

3. The note of TFP

To defend its good name, TFP felt obliged to release a commentary on the NCBB note the very next day. The commentary, serene, objective, and efficacious, read:

"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).²

As our note affirmed, TFP reserved the right of *"producing a more detailed analysis of the NCBB's pronouncement."* This is what we now propose to do, since, after having been practically forgotten for years, in the last few months the issue of the NCBB note has been raised some half dozen times in different places.

4. How the NCBB's note was approved

¹ The NCBB's 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.

² The note of TFP 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.

According to the NCBB's *Comunicado Mensal* (no. 388, 4/30/85, p. 287), the commission appointed to draft the note on TFP was made up of Dom Gilberto Pereira Lopes, Archbishop of Campinas, Dom Antonio Misiara, Bishop of Bragança Paulista, and Dom Carlos Alberto Navarro, Bishop of Campos (State of Rio).

The episcopal commission submitted its draft to the Plenary Assembly in the meeting of Thursday, April 18, with 211 bishops present.

Several bishops made suggestions (cf. *Comunicado Mensal*, p. 334):

One bishop, for example, suggested that the text state that "*TFP is heretical and schismatic*." His suggestion was rejected by the drafting commission.

Another bishop requested that TFP be censured for having campaigned against the CEBs (Base Christian Communities or Grassroots Ecclesial Communities, whose leftist orientation is well known). The request was turned down.

However, the suggestion that "*a civil society with a religious goal*" be changed to "*a civil society that manifests itself as a Catholic religious entity*" was accepted.

Finally, four bishops suggested removing the phrase "*according to news items recently circulated*." The commission agreed only to delete "*recently*."

This last observation shows that several bishops sensed that the criticisms against TFP lacked foundation; they were based solely on newspaper coverage. The drafting commission, however, thought it better to admit that than to say nothing.

The NCBB's note reveals, then, that the Bishops allowed themselves to be influenced by the accusations circulated by the recent media uproar, completely ignoring TFP's response.

The note's lack of basis is thus manifest, as is the inobservance of the fundamental legal norm: *audiatur et altera pars* (let the other side also be heard).

On the following day, April 19, 206 voters being present, the drafting commission submitted the final version of the note to the Plenary Assembly. It "*was approved by an expressive majority*" (*Comunicado Mensal*, 4/30/85, p. 341).

Interestingly, for the other issues voted on during this session, the number of Yes votes is usually given, or it is stated that they were approved by the great majority or unanimously. (In one case the number of No votes is also given.)

In the case of the note on TFP, however, it is stated only that it was approved by "*an expressive majority*." How vague. How many votes beyond a simple majority make up an "*expressive*" majority?

At any rate, contrary to what some people seem to insinuate when they portray – erroneously – the totality of our episcopate as disagreeing with TFP, **the vote was not unanimous.**

We stress that of the approximately 360 bishops only 206 were present for the vote.

We will return to this subject (see topics 8, 10 and 11).

5. The canonical scope of the NCBB's note

The NCBB's note on TFP is not an *ecclesiastical censure* in the canonical sense of the expression. Nevertheless, some enemies of TFP, unfamiliar with the Church's juridical procedures, see the note as a "*condemnation*" of TFP. With their simplistic discourse, they convey the idea that the note has the weight of a condemnation in terms of Canon Law.

However, not even the NCBB presented it as such. And it would certainly never do so, because anyone versed in Canon Law knows that it would have to be preceded by a laborious process including the gathering of documentation, the hearing of witnesses, the summoning of the accused in order to examine his defense, etc. – procedures that did not even occur to the NCBB when it released its note on TFP.

Furthermore, in a canonical process conducted according to the norms and praxis of the Church, if the accused is declared guilty, he is exhorted, before any condemnation, to correct his conduct or retract his erroneous doctrine. If this exhortation is ignored, it is followed by a warning of canonical sanctions. Only after that would there be a formal condemnation.

Once again, it should be noted that nothing of the sort happened in the case of the NCBB's note on TFP.

Therefore, the note is a pronouncement whose weight corresponds to the objectivity of the allegations it contains. In other words, it has no weight, as will be shown in greater detail now.

6. TFP and Canon Law

The Brazilian Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) defines itself as an association of lay faithful who, guided by the traditional doctrine of the Supreme Magisterium of the Church, act in the temporal sphere. The organization acts under its own and sole responsibility and is structured according to civil law.

Its aim is the preservation of Christian civilization in what pertains directly to the temporal order or in what is indirectly related to it. In this sense, TFP targets not only socialism and communism – irreconcilable enemies of the principles of the natural order and Catholic morals – but all the other factors of the deterioration of present-day society. Hence its motto: Tradition, Family, Property – three pillars of Christian civilization.

Juridically, TFP is an association of a mixed nature. From the standpoint of civil law, it is a not-for-profit civil society governed according to civil statutes; from the standpoint of Canon Law, it is **a *private association of faithful, without ecclesiastical juridic personality and without belonging to the canonical juridic order by any kind of recognition or erection.***

In fact, it was formed by a free agreement among some of the faithful (canon 299 §1) exercising their right to freely found and govern associations for charitable or pious purposes or to promote the Christian vocation in the world (canon 215), to imbue and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel (canon 225 §2), or to animate the temporal order with the Christian spirit (canon 298 §1); in sum, to work so that the divine

message of salvation becomes known and accepted by all persons throughout the world (canon 225 §1).

TFP did not request canonical recognition from any ecclesiastical authority (canon 299 §3) nor did it try to obtain ecclesiastical juridic personality (canons 310 and 322).

Since TFP's field of action is so ample, and since the provisions of the Code of Canon Law regarding associations of the faithful are so nuanced, the organization decided to consult a prominent Roman canonist to assure that no aspect of its activities entailed a change in its status before the laws of the Church.

It therefore wrote a *consultation* in which it described in great detail its many activities, which we summarize here:

a) the distribution of several periodicals (the consultation specified their respective content): *Catolicismo*; *Informando*, *Comentando*, *Agindo*; *Informativo Rural*; *Informativo Operário*; *TV Plebiscito*; *Ecos de Fátima*.

b) mass mailings on several subjects, especially those titled *O Amanhã de Nossos Filhos* (dealing with the harmful consequences of television in the psychic, social, moral, and religious fields) and *Vinde Nossa Senhora de Fátima, não tardeis!* (the spreading of the message of Our Lady at Fatima and of the devotion to this Marian invocation).

c) the work of direct contact with the public carried out for decades by groups of members and volunteers who travel continually throughout Brazil to spread the books and other publications of the organization. (These were presented in the consultation.)

d) the collateral activities of these traveling groups, such as slide presentations on historical-religious subjects at different types of associations and in family homes; visits to the sick in hospitals, to take them words of spiritual comfort and distribute religious medals and cards; etc.

e) the setting up of stands at agricultural shows and fairs, to promote free enterprise and private property.

f) various petition drives, like that done in 1990 for the liberation of Lithuania from communism, which collected, along with the other TFPs, over 5.2 million signatures, a world record registered in the *Guinness Book of Records*.

g) the work of people who are not part of the organization, but who help it on a regular basis by promoting our principles and ideals in their circles and by participating in educational efforts like handing out flyers of *O Amanhã de Nossos Filhos* and *Vinde Nossa Senhora de Fátima, não tardeis!*

All these activities having been described *in detail*, the following consultation was made.

CONSULTATION

In view of the amplitude and variety of this action of the Brazilian TFP, considered above all in the light of the doctrine insistently inculcated by the Second Vatican Council and incorporated into the new Code of Canon Law, namely that the Catholic laity have as a paramount obligation to imbue the temporal sphere with the spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ and to make the Church present and active in the temporal institutions (cf. Lumen Gentium 31, 36, 152, 160, 161; Apostolicam actuositatem 6, 7, 29, 470-472, 502; Ad gentes 15, 573; Gaudium et Spes 43, 746; canons 225 and 298 §1), we ask:

— May a *consociatio privata* of faithful that does not figure in the juridic order of the Church (cf. canons 215, 299 §1 and §2, and 310) develop all and each of the abovementioned activities, or is any of them of a nature that would oblige it to request the ecclesiastical authority for canonical recognition (cf. canon 299 §3) and obtain ecclesiastical juridic personality (cf. canon 322)?

* * *

The *consultation* was dated August 15, 1995, the feast of the Assumption, and signed by Prof. Paulo Corrêa de Brito Filho, Secretary of the TFP National Council.

The document is of special affective significance to the members, volunteers, and supporters of TFP, for it was the last document that our unforgettable founder, the distinguished **Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira**, was able to orient and review. A few days later, the sickness he would die from on October 3, 1995, manifested itself.

* * *

This consultation was submitted to the illustrious canonist Fr. Eutimio Sastre Santos, of the Claretian Juridic Institute, based in Rome, who answered it January 11, 1996, in the following terms:

"Regarding the two final questions on page 7, I answer:

"— I see no impediment in Canon Law to the carrying out of the activities enumerated in the consultation and that you have been carrying out.

"— To the second question, I answer that you are not obliged to request the ecclesiastical authority for canonical recognition to carry out the activities mentioned."

* * *

So, when the note of the NCBB affirms that it regrets *"the inconveniences occasioned by a civil society that manifests itself as a Catholic religious entity, without connection to the legitimate shepherds,"* in final analysis it is regretting a form of private association of the faithful that, according to the principles established in Canon Law, is perfectly legitimate.

In other words, the Church allows the faithful to freely organize themselves to exercise activities of apostolate (cf. canon 215) – to imbue the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ (canon 225 §2) – without requiring that they obtain canonical recognition from the ecclesiastical authority.

The illustrious prelates who wrote and approved the NCBB's note on TFP simply did not take this fact into account.

TFP feels entirely at ease, then, as it carries out its statutory activities, for which it does not need a special approval of the ecclesiastical authority. This is confirmed by the Roman canonist in his competent answer to our consultation.

What TFP cannot do – and never did do – is display the title "Catholic" in its name without the consent of the ecclesiastical authority (cf. canon 216). This, however, does not mean it cannot term itself an organization of *Catholic inspiration*, a formula we use constantly. Furthermore, its members declare that they are Catholic persons, which is not

only a right, but even a duty, according to the warning of the Divine Master: *"Everyone that shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But he that shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven"* (Matt. 10:32-33).

However, TFP willingly submits to the right of vigilance that belongs to the legitimate shepherds, in matters of Faith, morals and ecclesiastical discipline.

In addition, whenever there is occasion, it seeks their support for many activities and collaborates with them when asked, as will be described (see topic 11).

7. The supposed "lack of communion of TFP with the Church in Brazil, its hierarchy, and the Holy Father"

In its absolute sense, the expression *"lack of communion of TFP with the Church in Brazil, its hierarchy, and the Holy Father"* would amount to affirming that an association in those conditions is heretical and schismatic. For only such associations totally lose communion with the Church.

Now, we saw in topic 4 that the commission that drafted the note of the NCBB itself rejected the proposal of a bishop in this line, regarding TFP. Actually, such an affirmation could not be made without the presentation of concrete facts duly verified in a regular canonical process. Such was absolutely not done in the case of the NCBB note on TFP (see topic 5).

So we are left with the hypothesis that the supposed *"lack of communion"* is to be understood in a relative sense: TFP, in the exercise of its activities, acts freely, without seeking the approval of the ecclesiastical authority.

As explained at length in the preceding topic, according to the laws of the Church, such approval is not necessary.

Therefore, although the NCBB's note declares that this *"lack of communion"* is *"well known,"* TFP has the right to declare that that is not so.

In view of the above, the NCBB note has no weight.

8. The legitimate right to differ from the Shepherds in secular matters

It is true that TFP has at times differed with some Brazilian bishops, and with the NCBB itself, in matters related to the secular sphere, such as land reform. However, it has always done so in the most respectful way, duly presenting its documents and arguments in books and papers that remain unrefuted.

These attitudes in no way violate the Code of Canon Law, since, in secular matters, laymen have a legitimate autonomy. Canon 227 states: *"Lay Christian faithful have the right to have recognized that freedom in the affairs of the earthly city which belongs to all citizens."*

TFP has likewise dealt with religious matters to the extent that they bear on secular issues, as in the case of the Grassroots Ecclesial Communities, influenced by the "theology of liberation" of Marxist inspiration. But even here there was no violation of Canon Law. To respectfully manifest to the ecclesiastical authority one's thought

regarding the good of the Church is a right of the faithful and may even be a duty, according to canon 212 §3: *"In accord with the knowledge, competence, and preeminence which they [the faithful] possess, they have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and they have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard for the integrity of faith and morals and reverence toward their pastors and with consideration for the common good and the dignity of persons."*

This is what TFP has done. Such attitudes, therefore, in no way harmed or weakened the organization's communion with the Sacred Hierarchy.

9. The "inconformity" of Brazilian bishops with a measure of the Holy See

It should be noted in passing that a few days after the closing of the NCBB's General Assembly, Friar Leonardo Boff (who some years later would abandon the religious life and the priesthood) received a gentle punishment from the Holy See. Ten Brazilian archbishops and bishops declared their *"inconformity"* with the Holy See's measure. They stated: *"As bishops of the Catholic Church in Brazil, we feel it our duty to manifest publicly our inconformity with the punishment inflicted by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on our theologian Leonardo Boff. Both the measure in itself and the way it was applied seem to us little evangelical, hurtful to the human rights and the freedom of investigation of the theologian, contrary to the witness of freedom and Christian charity, disruptive of the walk of our Churches and offensive to the co-responsibility of our Episcopal Conference."*³

In the days that followed, another seven bishops declared their solidarity with the statement.⁴

Dom Mauro Morelli, Bishop of Duque de Caxias (State of Rio), went so far as to affirm that the silence imposed on the then Friar Boff was an expression of *"human stupidity."*⁵

The NCBB did nothing to rebuke such a notorious and, in that case, real lack of communion with His Holiness John Paul II. Obviously, the NCBB has two weights and two measures.

³ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 5/11/85.

⁴ The bishops who declared their *"inconformity"* were: 1. Dom Sinócio Bohn, Bishop of Novo Hamburgo; 2. Dom Fernando Gomes dos Santos, Archbishop of Goiânia; 3. Dom Augusto Alves da Rocha, Bishop of Picos; 4. Dom Pompeu Bezerra Bessa, Bishop of Limoeiro do Norte; 5. Dom Antonio Possamai, Bishop of Ji-Paraná; 6. Dom José Gomes, Bishop of Chapecó; 7. Dom Pedro Casaldáliga, Bishop of São Felix do Araguaia; 8. Dom Tomás Balduino, Bishop of Goiás Velho; 9. Dom Celso Pereira de Almeida, Bishop of Porto Nacional; 10. Dom Antonio Batista Fragozo, Bishop of Cratêus; 11. Dom Aparecido José Dias, Bishop of Registro; 12. Dom Mauro Morelli, Bishop of Duque de Caxias; 13. Dom Quirino Adolfo Schmitz, Bishop of Teófilo Otoni; 14. Dom Adriano Hypólito, Bishop of Nova Iguaçu; 15. Dom Fernando Figueiredo, Coadjutor Bishop of Teófilo Otoni; 16. Dom Orlando Dotti, Coadjutor Bishop of Vacaria; 17. Dom Jorge Marskel, Bishop of Itacoatiara (cf. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 5/10/85; *Folha de S. Paulo*, 5/11, 13, 14, 16 and 5/20/85; *Jornal do Brasil*, 5/13/85).

⁵ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 5/13/85.

10. Divisions in the Brazilian episcopate

Any impartial observer of the Brazilian situation knows that the Brazilian episcopate is profoundly divided. This division is not limited to secondary aspects; it affects fundamental points of doctrine and Church discipline.

For example, important sectors of the national episcopate resisted the first Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on liberation theology, issued in August 1984.

The division within the Brazilian episcopate is publicly acknowledged by some of the bishops themselves; for instance, Dom Luciano Cabral Duarte, Archbishop of Aracaju. In an article entitled *"Bishop Casaldáliga and the Divided Church,"* he writes: *"Several ecclesiastics, including top aides of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (NCBB), generally do not like it when someone affirms that the Church in Brazil is divided. I am one of the Brazilian bishops who testify to that division, despite statements to the contrary by others. I do so with what I consider evidence in my hands."*⁶

In an earlier article in *Veja* magazine, the same Archbishop, commenting on the rebellion of the bishops opposed to the punishment of Friar Boff, exclaimed: *"I suffer with this laceration of the shepherds of the Church in Brazil, but I prefer that the abscess of episcopal disunity, which has been throbbing for so long, be finally lanced. I remind these brethren of mine that, in punishing Boff, Rome merely fulfilled its duty, and it did so with discretion and moderation. If it had not acted, it would have been guilty of omission in the fulfillment of its obligations.... My brethren and successors of the Apostles, remember your oath of fidelity to Peter and make public retraction just as you have publicly manifested your rebellion. Attitudes like yours in the Boff case may unleash disastrous consequences in the Church of Brazil."*⁷

Declarations criticizing the action of the NCBB were made by: Dom Cristiano Jakob Krapf, Bishop of Jequié;⁸ Dom Manoel Pestana, Bishop of Anápolis;⁹ Dom José Fernandes Veloso, Bishop of Petrópolis;¹⁰ Dom Boaventura Kloppenburg, Auxiliary Bishop of Salvador;¹¹ and Dom Karl Romer, Auxiliary Bishop of Rio de Janeiro.¹²

This division surfaced even in the august presence of the Pope. When asked about his divergence with Dom Ivo Lorscheiter, Bishop of Santa Maria and then President of the NCBB, Cardinal Eugenio Salles of Rio de Janeiro declared: *"Between Dom Ivo and myself there is a difference of opinion. Everyone knows that.... During our audience with the Pope, after Dom Ivo had spoken about the activities of the NCBB, I raised my hand and made some clearly divergent observations."*¹³

⁶ *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 10/12/88.

⁷ *Veja*, 5/22/85.

⁸ "Bishop Criticizes Political Position of the NCBB" (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 8/3/84).

⁹ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 5/13/85; and "The NCBB's Dirty Linen" (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 3/27/88).

¹⁰ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 5/13/85; *Liaisons Latino-Américaines – Bulletin d'Information sur la vie des Églises d'Amérique Latine*, Paris, April 1988.

¹¹ *Folha de S. Paulo*, 5/13/85.

¹² "Auxiliary Bishop of Rio Criticizes Text of the NCBB" (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 4/12/85). Other examples showing that the division in the episcopate is public can be found in: "Bishops Discuss in Itaiçá the Tensions within the Church" (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 4/15/86); "Cardinal Salles Forbids NCBB Text for the Brotherhood Campaign" (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 10/31/87); "A New Athanasius" (Dom Marcos Barbosa, *Jornal do Brasil*, 3/11/88); "The Smoke of Satan" (*Jornal do Brasil*, 4/8/88).

¹³ *O Globo*, 3/18/86.

The disagreement within the NCBB voiced in the highest levels of the Church is commented on in the media, as a piece by the illustrious Benedictine monk Dom Marcos Barbosa, member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, illustrates:

"During these days when the whole country was bent over the sickbed and the bier of [President] Tancredo Neves, the deflating of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, the famous NCBB, seems to have gone unnoticed....

"This organism, which, unlike the bishops and the Pope, was not created by Jesus (and is therefore an organism of ecclesiastical law and not divine law), came to play an exorbitant role in Brazil, constantly speaking everywhere in name of all and about any subject.

"How was it able to do this? Simply by gathering the bishops in annual assemblies, presenting issues that the bishops had no time to study, and proposing last-minute conclusions, which were voted on in a climate of rush and pressure. From such conclusions came practical consequences imposing uniform programs for the whole country that dealt solely with political and social problems, depriving the people of the true preaching of the Gospel....

"For quite a while already, the Holy See had been censuring the theology of liberation preached among us.... But the NCBB has tried to minimize the instructions of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine even when – and this should not have been necessary – the Pope declared that they represent his thought and initiative. Among us, the 'protection' of Boff continued. The Secretary of the NCBB went so far as to declare that there had been not a condemnation, but only an orientation for the reading of the theologian's books. As if they contained anything but the errors that teem in them!...

"The latest assembly of the NCBB intended to send Rome a document, ignoring as much as possible those that had come from there, and deceiving once again the good faith of Catholics. Thanks be to God...the plan was frustrated. Thanks be to God again, we have...a pleiad of bishops...trying to neutralize and correct the positions of the NCBB....

"The NCBB is no longer untouchable."¹⁴

¹⁴ *Jornal do Brasil*, 5/3/85. In *The Ratzinger Report*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, stated the following regarding the institution of bishops conferences: "The decisive new emphasis on the role of the bishops is in reality restrained or actually risks being smothered by the insertion of bishops into episcopal conferences that are ever more organized, often with burdensome bureaucratic structures. We must not forget that the episcopal conferences have no theological basis, they do not belong to the structure of the Church, as willed by Christ, that cannot be eliminated; they have only a practical, concrete function."

"It is, moreover, he [the Cardinal] says, what is confirmed in the new Code of Canon Law, which prescribes the extent of the authority of the conferences, which cannot validly act 'in the name of all the bishops unless each and every bishop has given his consent,' unless it concerns 'cases in which the common law prescribes it or a special mandate of the Apostolic See...determines it' (CIC, Can. 455, 4 and 1). The collective, therefore, does not substitute for the persons of the bishops, who – recalls the Code, confirming the Council – are 'the authentic teachers and instructors of the faith for the faithful entrusted to their care' (cf. CIC Can. 753). Ratzinger confirms: 'No episcopal conference, as such, has a teaching mission; its documents have no weight of their own save that of the consent given to them by the individual bishops.'...

"'It happens,' he says, 'that with some bishops there is a certain lack of a sense of individual responsibility, and the delegation of his inalienable powers as shepherd and teacher to the structures of the local conference leads to letting what should remain very personal lapse into anonymity. The group of bishops united in the conferences depends in their decisions upon other groups, upon commissions that have been established to prepare draft proposals' (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The*

In view of a divided and contested NCBB, it makes no sense to present the Brazilian bishops as a cohesive bloc censuring the supposed "*lack of communion of TFP with the Church in Brazil.*"

11. The collaboration between TFP and members of the national episcopate and clergy

Although working in its own sphere – an autonomy guaranteed in the sacred canons (see topic 7) – whenever there is occasion TFP requests the support of members of the national episcopate and priesthood.

Since October of 1995, TFP has received the support of 49 archbishops and bishops for several initiatives. For example, for its stand against a bill for the legalization of homosexual unions now before Congress, the TFP campaign *O Amanhã de Nossos Filhos* consulted the theologian Dom João Evangelista Martins Terra, S.J., Auxiliary Bishop of Brasília. His clarifying response was subscribed to by another eighteen archbishops and bishops.¹⁵ At the same time, the *Catholic Outcry Against Abortion and "Homosexual Marriage"* organized by *O Amanhã de Nossos Filhos* was supported by 604 priests of 23 Brazilian states.

So we can say once again that there is no basis for affirming that TFP lacks "*communion with the Church in Brazil [and] its hierarchy*" (see topics 7 and 8).

Furthermore, *Nobility and Analogous Traditional Elites in the Allocutions of Pius XII*, the last book by our dearly missed founder, **Prof. Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira**, received letters of praise from four Cardinals: Cardinal Silvio Oddi, Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy from 1979 to 1985; Cardinal Mario Luigi Ciappi, O.P., Theologian Emeritus of the Papal Household (deceased in 1996); Cardinal Alfons M. Stickler, S.D.B., former Librarian and Archivist of the Holy Roman Church; and Cardinal Bernardino Echeverría, O.F.M., Archbishop Emeritus of Guayaquil (Ecuador).

Prof. Corrêa de Oliveira's biography, *Il crocciatto del secolo XX: Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira*, by Prof. Roberto de Mattei, has a very laudatory foreword by Cardinal Stickler.

Just this March, Cardinal Opilio Rossi, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, wrote a letter eulogizing *Catolicismo*, TFP's magazine.

To allege that such eminent figures allowed themselves to be deluded about the real nature and goals of TFP is absurd, and disrespectful to the eminent clerics involved.

Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church [Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1985], pp. 59-61).

¹⁵ They were: Dom Albano Bortoletto Cavallin, Archbishop of Londrina; Dom Vitorio Pavanello, S.D.B., Archbishop of Campo Grande; Dom José Newton de Almeida Baptista, Archbishop Emeritus of Brasília; Dom Geraldo de Proença Sigaud, S.V.D., Archbishop Emeritus of Diamantina; Dom José de Aquino Pereira, Bishop of São José do Rio Preto; Dom Waldemar Chaves de Araújo, Bishop of São João Del-Rei; Dom Efraim Basílio Krevey, O.S.B.M., Ukrainian Eparch of São João Batista de Curitiba; Dom Francisco Barroso Filho, Bishop of Oliveira; Dom Jerônimo Mazzarotto, retired Auxiliary Bishop of Curitiba; Dom João M. Messi, Bishop of Irecê; Dom José da Silva Chaves, Bishop of Uruaçu; Dom Miguel Maria Giambelli, Bishop Emeritus of Bragança do Pará; Dom Luis Ferrando, Bishop of Bragança do Pará; Dom Walter Ivan de Azevedo, S.D.B., Bishop of São Gabriel da Cachoeira; Dom Geraldo Majela de Castro, O.Praem., Bishop of Montes Claros; Dom Rubens Augusto de Souza Espínola, Bishop of Paranavaí; Dom Jackson Damasceno Rodrigues, C.S.S.R., Auxiliary Bishop of Manaus; and Dom José Mauro Ramalho de Alarcón Santiago, Bishop of Iguatu.

12. A study by the NCBB's Episcopal Commission on Doctrine

The baseless accusations of a minuscule group of people who left TFP led to a torrent of newspaper articles in September and October of 1984 and in March of 1985. These were the elements used as a basis for the second paragraph of the note of the NCBB, as is admitted in the note itself (see topic 4).

An analysis of the note of the NCBB would be incomplete if it did not touch on the merit of this paragraph.

Here we can do no more than give a very general outline of this controversy, which was the subject of two books published by TFP, with a total of some 1,300 pages: *TFP's Refutation of a Vain Onslaught* (São Paulo: TFP Editions, vol. 1, June 1984; vol. 2, July 1984), by TFP members Antonio Augusto Borelli Machado, Átila Sinke Guimarães, Gustavo Antonio Solimeo, and João S. Clá Dias; and *Servitudo ex Caritate* (São Paulo: Artpress, March 1985), by TFP member Átila Sinke Guimarães.

In synthesis, the accusers alleged that an illicit cult was given in TFP to **Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira** and to his mother, **Dona Lucilia Ribeiro dos Santos Corrêa de Oliveira**, and that the devotion to Our Lady practiced in TFP was but a facade for this illicit cult.

The abovementioned books analyzed in detail the erroneous interpretations given the facts alleged, and showed, based in Catholic doctrine, that, taking the word *cult* in its theological sense – “*a sign of submission in recognition of someone's superiority and excellence (nota submissionis ad agnitam excellentiam alterius)*”¹⁶ – the signs of veneration shown our founder and his excellent mother in no way violated the doctrine and laws of the Church.

The second of these books, *Servitudo ex Caritate*, discussed more specifically the consecration of many TFP members as slaves of love to Our Lady, according to the method of Saint Louis de Montfort, in the hands of **Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira**. It proved, once again, its perfect legitimacy and authenticity.

The books included supporting opinions by Spanish Dominican theologians of world renown: Fr. Victorino Rodríguez y Rodríguez (deceased in 1997), Prior of the Convent of Santo Domingo el Real in Madrid, the author of over 200 studies on theology and philosophy, professor at the School of Theology of San Esteban and the Pontifical University of Salamanca, professor of Madrid's Superior Council of Scientific Investigations and a member of the Pontifical Roman Theological Academy; Fr. Arturo Alonso Lobo (likewise deceased), professor of Canon Law of the Pontifical University of Salamanca, and one of the contributors to the famous *Commentaries on the Code of Canon Law* of BAC (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos); and Fr. Antonio Royo Marín, professor of the Pontifical Faculty of the School of Theology of San Esteban in Salamanca, and the author of highly-regarded books published around the world. Father Rodríguez evaluated the three volumes in their entirety, and Fathers Royo Marín and Alonso Lobo answered consultations on specific points.

The subject seemed to be closed when, toward the end of 1986, TFP learned that the Bulletin of the Diocese of Santos (São Paulo State), of October 31, 1986, had published an opinion on TFP by Fr. Gervásio Fernandes de Queiroga, juridic consultant of the

¹⁶ A. Chollet, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1923), vol. 3, v. "Culte en général," col. 2404.

NCBB, and a study by the Episcopal Commission on Doctrine (ECD). The documents were accompanied by a letter of NCBB Secretary-General Bishop Luciano Mendes de Almeida, who, without actually endorsing them, was bringing them to the attention of the Brazilian episcopate. In its September-October 1987 issue, *SEDOC* magazine, of Editora Vozes of Petrópolis, also published both documents.

The work of the Episcopal Commission on Doctrine analyzed the first volume of *TFP's Refutation of a Vain Onslaught and Servitudo ex Caritate*. It criticized the veneration shown **Prof. Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira** in the ranks of TFP (it terms it "extraordinary") and accused the organization of trying to avoid ecclesiastical vigilance by not requesting canonical recognition. Now, as we saw in topic 6, such recognition is not demanded by Canon Law nor does its absence dispense TFP, or any other association of Christian faithful, from submitting to this legitimate and necessary vigilance.

TFP prepared a comprehensive reply to both documents: *An Analysis of Two NCBB Documents on "TFP and Its Family of Souls,"* by the brothers Gustavo Antonio Solimeo and Luiz Sérgio Solimeo. The reply unavoidably took on the dimensions of a book, which was not published given the general indifference toward the subject. It was filed by its distinguished authors, ready to go the press if circumstances demanded. Anyone who is interested may obtain a copy of the text from us.

The work carefully analyzes the ECD study, showing the baselessness of the Commission's conclusions. It points out the flaws of the study, whose authors, to better support their theses, systematically omitted in their quotes from the TFP books the passages that contradicted their own conclusions.

As for the opinion by the juridic consultor of the NCBB, which dealt with the "*canonical autonomy of associations of the faithful, like TFP,*" the study of the Solimeo brothers shows that the illustrious author simply overlooked the fact that the new Code of Canon Law states that associations of the faithful are free to adopt either a civil juridic structure or a canonical structure (see topic 6).

Therefore, in face of the 1985 note of the NCBB, as well as the 1986 study of the ECD, **TFP remains sure of the Catholicity of its doctrinal position, of the perfect legitimacy of its activities, both external and internal, and reaffirms its complete submission to the control and to the vigilance of the Sacred Shepherds in matters of Faith, morals, and ecclesiastical discipline.**

On closing, it turns to the Most Holy Virgin, especially under the invocation of Our Lady of Fatima, whose 80th anniversary, by happy disposition of Providence, is celebrated today, asking that She deign to confirm us in our vocation (a vocation so emphasized in the Documents of the Supreme Magisterium): to imbue civil society with the principles of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ as Catholic lay people.

Ut adveniat Regnum Christi, adveniat Regnum Mariae.

São Paulo, May 13, 1997

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