

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios and Lorenzo Carrasco

The smoke of Satan

Fans of Brazil's liberation theology cardinal are attacking the papacy with claims that John Paul II has cancer.

The expression "their perversity is greater than their intelligence," coined by a wise bishop, is a perfect description of Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider, the archbishop of Fortaleza, in the wake of the "slip" he made on July 11 in an interview with the major radio station in the northwest state of Ceara. He stated, "Pope John Paul II has what they are calling bone cancer. It is probably bone cancer, which I imagine is making him suffer a lot."

By this shocking statement, Lorscheider became possibly the highest official of the Catholic Church internationally to publicly put his weight behind the insidious campaign to force the pope to resign due, ostensibly, to failing health, as part of a broader offensive to destroy John Paul II's papacy just at the moment that he has put the entire Catholic Church on "red alert" to derail the anti-population conference scheduled in Cairo for Sept. 5-13.

Almost as soon as he had said it, Lorscheider, a populist who is normally quite attuned to public opinion, realized he was isolated, and tried to lie his way out of the firestorm his remark had ignited. Barely a few hours after his interview, he denied the very story he had asserted on the radio earlier that day.

But the damage was done. Making clear the outrage within the top levels of the Vatican hierarchy, Vatican spokesman Joaquín Navarro-Valls responded immediately, flatly denying the veracity of the report. Within Bra-

zil, the scandal created was such that popular evening television newscaster Boris Casoy of network TVS, after playing the recording of Lorscheider making his assertion on radio, declared: "Cardinal, to lie is a sin."

The only figures to rally to Lorscheider's defense were his buddies in the Brazilian "theology of liberation" movement, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns and former priest Leonardo Boff—no surprise, since their joint project for years has been to dismantle the centralized church, eliminate the Vatican, and create "autochthonous churches" based on New Age paganism, and a theist "democracy." Despite Lorscheider's own "retraction," Cardinal Arns came out immediately saying that "if the information came from Don Aloisio, then it must be respected."

Arns's attempt to give Lorscheider's rumor credibility came less than a month after their sidekick Boff gave the game away with a broadside attack on the pope. In an interview in *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Boff wrote that the College of Cardinals "must act now, before everything falls hopelessly apart, and remove the pope, with his consent, and choose a true representative of the people, rather than an envoy of the top levels of the Curia." Practically the only thing Boff didn't specify in his diatribe was the date for new papal elections.

Clearly, Lorscheider's deliberate slip was part and parcel of this effort to force the pope's removal.

The background of these three

leaders of the liberation theology movement clarifies their motives for seeking to eliminate John Paul II, and the role of the Vatican in general. Years ago, while still a priest, Boff brought down the justified anger of the Vatican for his heretical teachings. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith imposed the "punishment of silence" on Boff, meaning that he could no longer openly preach his views. Arns and Lorscheider sought to neutralize this ban, right up until Boff decided to resign from the priesthood altogether, to better permit him to organize the movement.

Indicative of Boff's heresy, his adoption of the pagan ideology of the "New Age," best represented in his book *The New Age: Planetary Consciousness*, is his effort to become the high priest and theologian of that movement, displacing the witches and "magicians" otherwise aspiring to lead it. His thesis is so outrageous that the self-proclaimed Brazilian "magician," Pablo Coelho, concerned about Boff's appeal to Coelho's pagan followers, stated, "I am more Catholic than Boff."

As for Lorscheider, not only was his statement egregious, but it came immediately upon his return from the historic Extraordinary Consistorium of 114 cardinals to deal with the theme of the new evangelization, at which John Paul II took the opportunity to personally mobilize the church hierarchy against the Cairo depopulation conference on the basis that it represents a threat to the principles of life and family.

The insidious role of Lorscheider and Arns brings to mind Pope Paul VI's remark about the growth of liberal currents in the church following Vatican II: "Some smoke appears to be entering the church through a crack. It is the enemy, and that enemy has a name: the Devil."