

# How Ratzinger's Modern Inquisition Affected Brazil

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To carry out his vision, John Paul II felt he had to purge his church of dissent and opposition. He placed the arch-conservative Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger - now reborn as pope Benedict 16 - at the head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to enforce discipline and conformity. And so the modern-day Inquisition was on.

Karol Wojtyla is dead. He had ruled over the Roman Catholic Church for 26 years as John Paul II. All through that long reign, he aggressively worked to make his church a powerful conservative force throughout the world.

He was a fierce opponent of social liberation, modern secular thinking, and equality for women. He opened his pontificate with an intense political intervention into the Soviet bloc, and particularly his home country of Poland.

In fact it was his aptitude for that mission that brought him to power. His public sponsorship of a rising Catholic nationalist opposition within Soviet-dominated eastern Europe was a crucial political weapon in the U.S. war arsenal during those days of the 1980s.

From the very beginning, John Paul toured the world, restlessly, in a way no other pope had done, preaching in 129 countries on 104 international trips.

It was a campaign to reclaim the initiative for a rigidly conservative vision of humanity, morality, and society - and he tried to do this by projecting himself, his church, and his traditionalist ideology on the world stage as a hope-filled alternative to the suffering and alienation of modern life.

He stomped on the social activism of some priests in Latin America especially in Brazil. And he purged opposition from the ranks of the church hierarchy.

He rejected any erosion of key Catholic doctrines regarding women and sexuality - opposing any forms of birth control, including especially abortion, and rejecting any change in the second class status of women within his own church.

And for all this he is being hailed, rather shamelessly, at his death - as a unique, saintly, and towering human being. It is an ominous sign of our times that this apostle of submission, intolerance, and inequality gets honored in such extravagant ways.

## A Conservative Warrior

From the very beginning of his pontificate, John Paul II stood for an aggressive reinsertion of the Catholic Church into world events. John Paul was picked to be on the frontlines - and the decision to choose a Polish Cardinal was a chess move by the U.S. bloc in their rivalry with the Soviet imperialists and their allies.

It is said that John Paul fought the Nazis who occupied his home country during World War 2 - but all the evidence suggests that this is untrue.

Karol Wojtyla was a devout Catholic who sat out the Nazi occupation (as so many conservative Poles did), and studied quietly for the priesthood. After World War 2, he rose in the hierarchy as a bishop well-trained in political intrigue and maneuver.

Poland's Soviet-imposed government officially claimed the country was "socialist." But Polish society never went through any deep-rooted revolutionary transformations in culture, politics or economics.

The unpopular authorities were associated with a vague, modern, urban secularism - while crudely enforcing their control over a society defined by private capitalism in agriculture and state capitalism in industry.

Karol Wojtyla was a leader of a Catholic apparatus that jealously protected its power and prerogatives within this revisionist Poland and served as a center for highly conservative pro-Western forces that were biding their time.

By 1980, discontent in Poland had given rise to the Solidarity trade union movement that led millions of workers to defy the government with strikes and rallies.

Once Wojtyla became Pope John Paul II, his Vatican acted behind the scenes to finance and guide the most reactionary Catholic forces within this political upheaval - seeking to keep the masses of people under control as they undermined the Soviet bloc.

All of this is now portrayed as if John Paul heroically championed "freedom." But in fact, his maneuvers and influence helped prevent anything truly revolutionary or new from emerging from those times.

And in the years since the "fall of the wall," this resulting Catholic power within Poland has produced a relentless assault on the rights of women and on modern secular society generally.

#### Siding with Oligarchs and Death Squads

You can see the highly reactionary nature of the Pope's politics by looking at the operations he launched in Latin America. There chunks of his church had identified themselves with the "social concerns" of the poor and even aligned themselves with various movements against brutal pro-U.S. dictatorships.

Pope John Paul II was relentless in his war on these currents - including the reform-minded trends known as "Liberation Theology."

In 1980, on his first trip to Nicaragua, he publicly wagged his finger in the face of Ernesto Cardenal, a Catholic priest who held a post in the anti-U.S. Sandinista government.

This was a time of intense brutality and murder in Latin America. U.S.-backed governments and death squads were committing mass murder in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. And their victims included thousands of Catholic priests, nuns and lay people. And John Paul turned a deaf ear to all this.

He denounced the activism on the side of the oppressed and blessed the powerful. Grassroots "base communities" among the poor were attacked and often dissolved, and the priests who worked within them were often removed.

When Argentina's "Mothers of the Disappeared" asked to meet with John Paul to discuss the military torture and murder of government opponents, he refused.

In February 1985, John Paul made a special trip to Peru - where the fascist government was being challenged by the Maoist people's war led by the Communist Party of Peru. John Paul made a specific trip to Ayacucho, the heartland of the revolution, where the Peruvian military had been carrying out a bloodbath.

From a church pulpit in Ayacucho he preached against the revolution: "The men who put their faith in armed struggle have allowed themselves to be tricked by false ideologies. I ask you, then, in the name of God: Change your course!" It was a demand that the people's fighters capitulate.

As his plane approached Peru's capital, Lima, the lights of the city went out. In the darkness, this Pope got his reply from the revolution: across the side of a nearby hillside, a series of bonfires blazed in the shape of the hammer and sickle, symbol of revolutionary workers and peasants.

Throughout his career, John Paul systematically moved the most rightwing clerics imaginable into the highest church positions. Just one example: Angelo Sodano had the "papal nuncio" (Vatican ambassador) to the murderous Pinochet regime in Chile.

Sodano openly defended Pinochet's fascist rule by saying, "Masterpieces can also have small errors. I would advise you not to dwell on the errors of the painting, but concentrate on the marvelous general impression." Today, this Angelo Sodano is a Cardinal.

The elevation of bitter reactionaries, supporters of fascist murder, and opponents of popular movements was carried out in country after country. In 1998 an arrest warrant was issued for Augusto Pinochet while he was in London, and the Pope openly opposed the prosecution of this notorious fascist.

### Conformity and Persecution

"Above all, believers distinguished by critical thinking and energetic reform are persecuted in inquisitorial fashion..The consequence: a Church of surveillance, in which denunciation, fear and lack of liberty are widespread. The bishops regard themselves as Roman governors instead of the servants of churchgoers, the theologians write in a conformist manner - or not at all."

### Hans Küng, Catholic theologian silenced by John Paul II

John Paul was extremely active throughout his papacy, entrenching and refining conservative Church doctrine. He issued 14 encyclicals (official papal instructions) on a wide range of issues.

What emerged was a traditionalist Catholic doctrine that rejected and denounced socialism (as an essentially atheist doctrine) while upholding entrepreneurial capitalism.

He urged that a conservative Catholic morality and spirituality be unleashed to fill the voids of modern life - and specifically replace the empty preoccupation with material things that is common in capitalist culture.

He urged reconciliation of opposing forces - between workers and owners, Israelis and Palestinians, and even between Iraq and the United States - in ways that opposed war but specifically ruled out challenges to the capitalist status quo.

He opposed both of the wars the U.S. launched against Iraq, taking a position close to the stand of European governments like France and Germany.

It was a vision of a world where the arch-conservative morality of Catholic Christianity would play a prominent role as a spiritual "glue" for a capitalist world dominated by the U.S. superpower.

The man who would become pope Benedict XVI, arch-conservative Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was put at the head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by John Paul II. Ratzinger mission was to enforce discipline and conformity and this way install a modern-day Inquisition in the Catholic Church..

Dissenting Catholic theologians were prevented from publishing or teaching at Catholic seminaries and universities. Franciscan Friar Leonardo Boff of Brazil, for example, was silenced by Rome for a year and ultimately forced out of the priesthood.

Cardinals and bishops were investigated for loyalty - and those out of step with John Paul's Vatican were threatened, forced into line, and often replaced by extreme conservatives.

And as part of all that, John Paul promoted the sinister secret clerical-fascist order of Opus Dei. He rushed forward the beatification of Josemaria Escrivá, the Spanish fascist cleric who founded Opus Dei and was once notorious for his open praise of Hitler.

(Beatification is the first stage of becoming a saint.) Several Opus Dei members were appointed as bishops and cardinals and have exercised great power over the selection of cardinal Ratzinger as pope.

The Pope could suppress the voices of dissent and take power away from those who openly opposed him - but he could not and did not uproot different powerful currents within his church that continued to question and defy his edicts.

### Science and Anti-Semitism

At the same time, in a number of areas, this Pope modified Church doctrine to better serve his purposes on the world stage. For example he publicly softened the traditional hostility of the church toward Judaism.

His church has been notorious for openly teaching that Jews were the killers of Christ. During World War 2, Pope Pius XII collaborated with Italy's fascist Mussolini regime and with the Nazis themselves - and was silent as Jews were rounded up and killed.

But after World War 2, the Zionist state of Israel emerged in the Middle East as an important strategic foothold for Western imperialism. And the Catholic Church has adjusted its doctrine - in part to be able to recognize and work with Israel.

John Paul established diplomatic relations with Israel and visited there. He was the first pope to attend a Jewish synagogue and express "sorrow" over the Holocaust.

However, here, too, his approach was marked with a stubborn and reactionary traditionalism. Theologically, he denounced the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah.

His regrets over the Holocaust did not include criticizing the policies of Pius XII at that time, and in fact he even worked to elevate Pius XII (and the rabidly anti-Semitic Pius IX) to sainthood.

On his watch there were repeated Church provocations against Jewish people at the remains of the Auschwitz death camp. The Polish Church first built a convent there and then in 1999 raised a giant cross over the site.

When leading Jewish rabbis complained, they were met with open anti-Semitic abuse by the Polish Cardinal Glemp and indifference from Pope John Paul II.

John Paul carried out similar limited adjustments in the realm of science. In 1992 he conceded that his church had been wrong to threaten the 17th-century scientist Galileo with death and torture if he did not renounce his discovery that the earth revolves around the sun. And in 1996, John Paul conceded that evolution is "more than just a hypothesis."

However these concessions to modern sensibilities coexisted with John Paul's massive promotion of religious mysticism. After all, the very idea of a pope, the infallible voice of god on earth, is an affront to science and reality.

John Paul aggressively promoted all the fantasy culture that surrounds traditional Catholic mythology: he publicly promoted the hoaxes of Fatima and Lourdes (and even claimed that his own near-assassination was foretold by a special visitation of the Virgin Mary at Fatima).

He promoted 473 people for sainthood (more than in several previous centuries put together) - and each beatification unleashed a fantasy search for supernatural powers and documented "miracles."

Meanwhile, he placed his church squarely in the path of important scientific research, for example condemning the scientific use of embryonic stem cells.

This pope admitted it was wrong to threaten scientists with torture and death (350 years too late!), but he simultaneously promoted medieval belief in blind obedience, submission, divine miracles, and unfathomable "mysteries" - all in direct opposition to scientific and rational thought.

### The Deeply Patriarchal Pontificate

For decades Pope John Paul II and his Roman Catholic Church have been in the forefront of an intense global campaign to deny women equality and reverse any gains they may have made.

Without compassion or compromise, John Paul argued that women must not be allowed to exercise control over their own reproduction. He opposed birth control and abortion - and has demanded over and over that his church apparatus be more aggressive in fighting for laws that enforce that opposition.

With his personal guidance and insistence, the Catholic Church has served as a backbone for the anti-abortion movement in the U.S. and the anti-divorce campaigns in Italy and Ireland.

It has been aggressive in fighting to keep birth control out of the hands of young people - and where possible, out of the reach of everyone. And he justified all this with an endless stream of flowery and misleading rhetoric about "life" and "human dignity."

It is hard to overestimate the raw human suffering caused by this campaign against women. Women denied abortion or other forms of birth control lose control over their very lives and futures. Women without the right to divorce are often trapped in the beatings and rape of abusive marriages.

When John Paul toured Africa as the horrific AIDS epidemic was building, he ordered his priests to oppose the use of condoms, even for disease prevention. In 1988 he said at a congress of theologians:

"Even for people infected with AIDS or for those who want to use condoms to prevent AIDS, the Church's moral doctrine allows no exceptions."

Priests and nuns on every continent were ordered to spread the lie that the AIDS virus could pass through a condom - raising protests from the World Health Organization. This stand against condom use condemned huge numbers of his own believers to horrible deaths from this epidemic.

And wherever his own church threatened to depart from such reactionary teachings on women and sexuality - for example in the U.S. - he reined it in, elevated conservatives to power, and sharply demanded obedience.

His declarations said that women would never be considered for the priesthood and that male priests would never be allowed to share their intimate lives with women.

His last encyclical, in 2003, sternly insisted that divorced Catholics who remarry should never have acceptance and would be prevented from receiving communion.

It was a declaration of permanent second-class status for women in his church - justified by a view of sexual roles that assumes women's inferiority and "sinfulness." Such stands have an impact far beyond the walls of his church and outside the immediate issues of priesthood and celibacy.

Repeatedly, the Pope insisted that same-gender sexuality was "intrinsically evil." In 2003 the Vatican launched an aggressive campaign against the legalization of same-sex marriage and an acceptance of adoption by gay couples - just in time to give papal blessing to the bigotry of Bush's reelection campaign.

The liberation of women from ancient and horrific oppression is sharply posed by this whole epoch of history. Tremendous changes in life and thinking have made real equality and emancipation possible for the first time.

And this pope spent his life opposing that, rallying sinister and hateful forces to his cause, casting a veil of confusion and justification over that whole operation. And then, in death, he was showered with praise from those who continue his anti-woman crusade.

### Suffer the Little Children

Because this pope draped his reactionary politics with claims of lofty and divine morality, it is important to point out the gross hypocrisy of his stand on the global sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests.

One story tells it all: In Boston, after endless denials, it became obvious that Cardinal Bernard Law had protected child-molesting priests from punishment - and moved them from parish to parish as they brutalized more children.

Massachusetts authorities estimated that more than 1,000 children had been sexually abused by 250 priests and church workers in the Boston Archdiocese since 1940.

A 2004 Church report said that more than 4,000 Roman Catholic priests had faced sexual abuse allegations in the previous 50 years in the U.S., in cases involving more than 10,000 children.

The response of this pope was shocking: After all this had come out, he opposed a "zero tolerance" policy proposed by the American church hierarchy and insisted on continuing the traditional Church shielding of priestly child molesters.

In a major symbolic move, he elevated the disgraced Cardinal Law to the prestigious Vatican post as archpriest of St. Mary Major Basilica.

This heartless monster, Bernard Law, was then chosen to preside over one of the funeral masses for his protector John Paul. And he was among the other powerful Cardinals who picked pope Benedict XVI.

This Pope made his stand clear: No tolerance for abortion, birth control, the loving relationships of gay people, or the right of women to divorce - but a belligerent defense of Church temporal power and the privilege of priests, even at the cost of thousands of children.

### Imperialist Homage

It was a ominous sign of how far U.S. politics has moved: the heads of the U.S. government - including past and current presidents, leaders of Congress, the luminaries of both the Republican and Democratic parties - all filed reverently through Vatican City to honor Pope John Paul II after his death.

In the U.S. media, there has been a orgy of praise for this reactionary priest-king. And it has been yet another occasion to cement the growing theocratic alliance in the U.S. between extreme conservative Catholic forces and the fundamentalists of the born-again Right.

Prominent Protestant figures (who are traditionally anti-Catholic) gushed in praise of this pope and suggested that new laws banning abortion should be passed in his honor.

President Bush made a point of saying that when he met this pope, he experienced a personal awe and nervousness that he never felt with anyone else.

At the death of this pope, flags were flown at half-mast at government buildings in the U.S. by presidential proclamation - in complete violation of the separation of church and state.

It was just one more sign of the deliberate assertion that secular power should be subordinate to the symbols and morality of conservative religion.

Such official honors are now treated as so completely natural and normal by the media that many people may not have any idea just how extreme and reactionary this pope was and how inconceivable such governmental homage would have been in the U.S. just a few decades ago.

Here is the mummified body of a reactionary hatchetman - an absolute ruler of a non-hereditary monarchy, the lingering symbol of the medieval "divine right of kings," a rightwing priest-king who claimed infallibility when he spat out his prejudices and demands.

And millions are being told, by media coverage and commentary, to view him as an inspiration.

It is part of a deliberate and growing effort to take reactionary politics, ancient mysticism, and a morality literally hoisted up from the Middle Ages, and offer them all as solutions to the tremendous agonies and insecurities of modern capitalist life.

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