

# *Frei Betto says the Brazilian Left is to blame*

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Brazilian priest Frei Betto declared that the Left is to blame for the situation of inequality in Brazil. The internationally known theologian and social analyst made the commentary during a dialogue on February 10 at the Casa de ALBA Cultural, in the framework of the XXIX International Book Fair of Havana. Betto declared that Brazil is the most unequal country in the world, and he declared that “we of the Brazilian Left are to blame for it.” The Brazilian Left, he said, made three errors during its years in power. First, we did not incarcerate the criminals of the dictatorship, giving them the possibility to reclaim influence in the emerging new form of fascism, represented by Bolsonaro. Secondly, we did not try to educate the people, whereas the Right has, using media and films. Thirdly, we did not make structural reforms, such as agrarian reform or establishing public control of the media. As a result of these three errors, we were gradually losing our base. At the present time, both Lula and Bolsonaro have the same approval rating of 30%, and the Brazilian people are demobilized, a situation different from Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia.

Betto also discussed theological reflection on the armed struggle, in response to a question on the guerrilla struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. He declared that liberation theology, formulated in the 1960s by the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez, defends the right of the oppressed to take up arms. It is a question of interpreting what the Bible means from the situation of oppression, looking at the same sacred texts from an epistemological vantage point distinct from that of the oppressor, and thus arriving at a

different interpretation. On the basis of this theological understanding, many Christians have been participating in the struggles for emancipation, including the armed struggle.

Many people think that Marxism is a religion, Betto declared, but this generates confusion. Christianity is a religion, defined as a set of beliefs and practices in relation to a deity. Christian theology is an understanding of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and liberation theology, in particular, proclaims a God that acts in history in defense of the poor, interpreting biblical texts from the vantage point of oppression. Marxism, on the other hand, is a science, analyzing human history from the vantage point of the working class, and discerning the role of class interests in human conduct. Liberation theologians use the science of Marxism in the formulation of their theological understanding.

Both Frei Betto and Gustavo Gutierrez belong to the Dominican religious order, also known as the Order of Preachers, of the Roman Catholic Church.

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