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Conciliatory Letter Issued By Archbishop

By HAROLD J. LIDIN

San Juan Archbishop James P. Davis yesterday vindicated Msgr. Rafael Grovas, chancellor of the archdiocese and author of the controversial circular letter describing possible canonical penalties including excommunication for some bishop-defying Populares.

At the same time, Archbishop Davis left the door open to conciliation with Governor Muñoz's ruling Popular Democratic Party (PDP).

The San Juan prelate said the canonical references made in the Grovas letter were in "perfect conformity" with church discipline. But the ecclesiastical penalties described in the circular "will not be applied," the archbishop stressed.

The prelate's statement yeasterday came the day after San Juan Mayor Felisa Rincon de Gautier reportedly

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received Holy Communion at the Church of our Lady of Fatima in Hato Rey.

Last Friday, in the heat of the polemic over whether "public sinners" could receive Sacraments, she quietly received absolution from her confessor, Jesuit Father Jose Ballesteros.

The Grovas circular letter was prompted in part by
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the public statements of Mayor Rincon that she would "never repent" having voted Popular. Catholics were forbidden to vote Popular in the last election by the island hierarchy.

Soon after publication of the circular letter Archbishop Davis who was in Chicago attending a conference, announced the letter had not been authorized by him.

But yesterday the prelate said he has "accepted and approved" a report submitted to him by Msgr. Grovas explaining the content and circumstances of the chancellor's circular letter.

The action by the archbishop clearing Msgr. Grovas seems to have pacified certain Catholic clergymen and laymen who felt that Davis's Chicago statement was unfair to the chancellor.

But the conflict between the church and the Popular Democratic Party may well be still alive.

Archbishop Davis's statement yesterday stressed that the church is disposed to conciliation with respect to "any declaration or official explanation of the PDP that "definitely makes clear" that the Popular Party has no intention of creating problems of conscience for its Catholic members.

Despite the soft tone of the

episcopal message, some observers interpreted the reference to a PDP pronouncement that would make "definitely clear" the party stand as meaning that the Wednesday action by the PDP Central Committee was not fully satisfying to the Church.

Last Wednesday, the PDP Central Committee, at the urging of Governor Muñoz, unanimously passed a motion stating that the party platform "does not embody...any concept whatsoever which is in contradiction with the Christian doctrine upon which the civilization of our island is based."

The phrase "any concept whatsoever" in the Central Committee motion referred to a plank in the PDP platform that said a democratic government cannot forbid acts which a "consensus" of public opinion does not consider immoral.

This position was attacked by the Catholic hierarchy as "moral relativism," and the bishops warned that such a premise could lead to disregard of the Ten Commandments as a basis for morality.

In his statement yesterday, Archbishop Davis said that "it might be preferable to totally eliminate said clause" from the PDP platform.

Such an attitude by the Popular Party would "pacify consciences," the archbishop added.