

Jesus With a Kalashnikov

Examining Marxist Elements in Liberation Theology and Soviet Influence on its Origins

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Abstract

Liberation theology emerged as a prominent feature of religion and politics in the 1960s. Since the beginning, detractors have noted the overtly Marxist tendencies within this ideology. This thesis introduces the core concepts and presuppositions of liberation theology itself, and then focuses on specific and varied allegations concerning any influence the Soviet Union may have had on its formation and propagation. Particular weight is lent to the testimony of Lieutenant General Ion Mihai Pacepa, formerly the head of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's national intelligence service and the highest-ranking defector ever received from the Soviet Bloc. Pacepa has shared his insider knowledge at a variety of times and through a variety of mediums, and this thesis aims to collect and systematize all his allegations concerning liberation theology and the Soviet Union.

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Introduction

Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Dominican priest originally from Peru, was the first to articulate the concepts of liberation theology, a controversial notion that swept across Latin America in the late twentieth century. His 1971 *A Theology of Liberation* lent a name and face to a movement that began in the 1960s and continues to impact the world to this day. The radical reinterpretation of the Bible required to support liberation theology, and the theology's focus on good deeds and solidarity with suffering people the world over as the new locus of faith, have made understanding liberation theology a crucial step in understanding the tumultuous times we occupy.

History and Tenets of Liberation Theology

Liberation theology began its emergence as a theological and philosophical theory in the early 1960s in Central and South America, although nailing down a precise definition of the ideology is difficult. Juan Luis Segundo, a contemporary of Gutiérrez and fellow liberation theologian, notes that liberation theology is “broad in scope and varied within itself. Therefore it is not easy to say what the exact content of the theology of liberation is for all the Christians involved in it.”¹ Echoing this same sentiment, John Pottenger writes that “Liberation theology is not a homogenous body of doctrines but

1. Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 3.

rather a broad philosophical movement comprised of diverse arguments on theological and social issues.”²

Almost all who write on liberation theology explain and discuss the theory differently, and the customization and adaptability the ideology displays (the “have-it-your-way” factor that allows the key tenets of liberation theology to be presented in a variety of fashions) have enabled it to take deep roots in a variety of movements, from feminist narratives to black liberation. In the beginning, however, Gutiérrez primarily articulated his understanding of theology through his seminal work, *A Theology of Liberation*, which was published in 1971 and translated into English two years later.

According to Gutiérrez, liberation theology

is a theological reflection born of the experience of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human . . . to give reason for our hope from within a commitment that seeks to become more radical, total, and efficacious. It is to reconsider the great themes of the Christian life within this radically changed perspective and with regard to the new questions posed by this commitment. This is the goal of the so-called *theology of liberation*.³

Strains of leftist, particularly Marxist, thought are immediately apparent both in the above excerpt and throughout *A Theology of Liberation*. However, despite the radical ideas the theology clearly contains, Gutiérrez was hesitant when it came to fully articulating them and their logical conclusions. Instead, he spends a great deal of time discussing problems, and then vaguely refers to a solution in broad, sweeping platitudes

2. John R. Pottenger, “Liberation Theology: Its Methodological Foundation for Violence,” in *The Morality of Terrorism: Religious and Secular Justifications*, ed. David C. Rapoport (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press, 1982), 100.

3. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), xiii.

with few specifics. Further, he tends to be verbose in his writing, making it difficult to render clear, succinct excerpts from his work. Additionally, Gutiérrez often seems to present ideas and retract them simultaneously. As Richard Neuhaus argues

There seem almost to be two Gutiérrezes. The one quotes Fanon and Che Guevara almost as Scripture, proclaiming we are on the edge of “revolutionary anthropophany” in which historically inexorable forces are creating “the new man in the new society”. . . The second Gutiérrez comes out of the closet in the notes, carefully positioning his arguments in relation to the larger theological and political discourse both of the past and of the international community. He cautions the reader against understanding what he has just said as what he has just said.⁴

While Gutiérrez is widely regarded as one of the first and most prominent liberation theologians, his coyness toward ideas and their implications, coupled with a longwinded writing style, has rendered it necessary to refer to other, more recent works to clarify Gutiérrez and liberation theology itself. This must be done carefully and minimally, in order to avoid importing ideas which may not be present or may only be present in a nominal form. However, in order to do justice to Gutiérrez’s theological and philosophical brainchild, it remains necessary to refer also to the thoughts of its later adherents. Nothing referenced therein is not already present in Gutiérrez’s works and that of other early liberation theologians, if only in its penumbras and platitudes.

For example, Miguel de la Torre, a more modern liberation theologian, writes that liberation theology can be reduced to John 10:10: “I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” This abundant life

reveals that God is a God of life, not a God of death. Structures or individuals that bring death are anti-Christ. Hence, the gospel message of liberation that is found in Christ stresses liberation from all forms of *human* oppression. . . . Salvation is

4. Richard John Neuhaus, “Liberation Theology and the Cultural Captivity of the Gospel,” in *On Liberation Theology*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 233.

achieved through the process of consciousness raising, learning how structures of oppression prevent believers from experiencing the abundant life promised by Christ.⁵

Such literally revolutionary interpretations of scripture typify liberation theology and have been a feature of the movement since its earliest days.

In addition to such scriptural pronouncements, understanding liberation theology also requires one to understand its theory of history. In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez describes his theology's historical ideas in the following manner:

To conceive of history as a process of human liberation is to consider freedom as a historical conquest; it is to understand that the step from an abstract to a real freedom is not taken without a struggle against all the forces that oppress humankind . . . The goal is not only better living conditions, a radical change of structures, a social revolution; it is much more: the continuous creation, never ending of a new way to be human, a *permanent cultural revolution*.⁶

Extra-Biblical & Marxist Elements of Liberation Theology

The Marxist elements of liberation theology are clearly on display here and elsewhere throughout Gutiérrez's work and the whole of liberation theology.⁷ Consider the issue of private property. Karl Marx is infamous for his disdain for such, noting in *The Communist Manifesto* "the theory of the Communists can be summed up in a single sentence: Abolition of private property. We Communists have been reproached with the desire of abolishing the right of personally acquiring property as the fruit of a man's own

5. Miguel A. de la Torre, *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 57.

6. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 21.

7. Humberto Belli, *Breaking Faith: The Sandinista Revolution and Its Impact on Freedom and Christian Faith in Nicaragua* (Westchester, IL: Published by Crossway Books for the Puebla Institute, 1985) 153-165, 169-182.

labour.” Gutiérrez echoes a similar sentiment in “Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith,” saying that in the ideal society,

Private ownership of the means of production will be eliminated because it enables a few to expropriate the fruits of labor performed by the many, generates class divisions in a society, and permits one class to be exploited by another. In such a reordered society the social takeover of the means of production will be accompanied by a social takeover of the reins of political power that will ensure people’s liberty.⁸

Further similarities can be seen in the openly revolutionary nature of both liberation theology and Marxism. Marx boasted, “Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. . . . They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.”⁹ Liberation theologian Alfredo Fierro agreed wholeheartedly when he stated:

Persuaded by the evidence gathered by social theory, current theology knows there can be no transformation of human beings without the transformation of society. In the last analysis, societal transformation comes down to a transformation of production relationships. Real conversion to a new humanity must necessarily go by way of revolution.¹⁰

Presuppositions of a permanent class-based oppressor-versus-oppressed dynamic, coupled with the notion that current society – the supposed source of all ills – can only be reformed by its total abolition are the bedrock of liberation theology. After the

8. Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith” in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, ed. Rosino Gibellini, trans. John Drury (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1979) 1-2.

9. “Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties,” *The Communist Manifesto*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>.

10. Alfredo Fierro, *The Militant Gospel: A Critical Introduction to Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 235-236.

destruction of the old society, a better, more utopian one will spontaneously emerge, righting the wrongs wreaked by the previous order, but apparently imparting no wrongs of its own. Gutiérrez seems to recognize that this will be the message many take from this theology, and he takes pains to avoid spiritualized Marxism appearing as liberation theology's main building block. Specifically, he pleads that "My purpose is not to . . . fashion a theology from which political action is 'deduced,'" and

[i]t is not possible . . . to deduce from the gospel a single political course that all Christians must follow; as soon as we enter the political sphere, we are in the area of free choices in which factors of another order (social analysis; the concrete histories of nations) have a role to play. The faith does indeed set down certain ethical requirements in making these choices, but the requirements do not entail a specific political program.¹¹

It is thus apparent that Gutiérrez is at least paying lip service to the notion that his liberation theology does not recommend a specific course of political action to bring about its goals. Regardless, leftist ideas and a particular trend toward Marxism are still prevalent throughout Gutiérrez's writings, so much so that Dr. Edward Norman, Dean of Peterhouse at Cambridge, called Gutiérrez "the most distinguished of the Marxist theologians in South America."¹² Marxist ideas seem to be central to the tenets of liberation theology, enough so that at times liberation theology appears to be Marxism in spiritual clothing more than anything else. The covering does not even need to be Christian; Gutiérrez discusses other religions' liberation theologies on just as high a level as his own nominally Christian one.¹³ De la Torre does the same, noting that "there are

11. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xiii; *Ibid.*, 175.

12. Edward Norman, "The Imperialism of Political Religion," in *On Liberation Theology*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 128.

13. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xix.

liberative theologies from the perspectives of different faith and spiritual traditions.”¹⁴

Hitting right at the heart of this issue, that of liberation theology’s extra-biblical starting point, John Pottenger points out that

[L]iberation theology begins with a commitment to human liberation from social injustice and then develops a theological foundation which considers various forms of political action for effecting social changes to be morally correct . . . [L]iberation theology reverses the usual theoretical development by placing the commitment to liberating humans from social injustice prior to the development of the theological position.¹⁵

The overriding theme in Gutiérrez’s conception of liberation theology is its pro-Marxist and anti-capitalist sentiments, demonstrated partly by its similarity of tone with Marxism and continuous usage of Marxist terminology. Gutiérrez constantly refers to the bourgeois, capitalists, and multinational corporations, and always in a negative tone. Further, he references greed as the driving force for the world’s economy, cites Che Guevara,¹⁶ and discusses how the current economic system is purposefully “designed” to funnel all its resources to the top, away from the oppressed masses beneath. Gutiérrez writes:

The underdevelopment of the poor countries, as an overall social fact, appears in its true light: as the historical by-product of the development of other countries. The dynamics of the capitalist economy lead to the establishment of a center and a periphery, simultaneously generating progress and growing wealth for the few and social imbalances, political tensions, and poverty for the many.¹⁷

14. de la Torre, 46.

15. Pottenger, 101.

16. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 138.

17. Neuhaus, 229.

Such assertions fly directly in the face of a great deal of scholarship in this field. Many researchers cite primarily cultural, historical, and geographic considerations – not external power and oppression – as the primary factors in the distribution of global wealth.¹⁸ Regardless of this, humanity has regularly shown itself to prefer the easy falsehood to the difficult truth, and Gutiérrez is no exception. His philosophy offers release from this supposed system. While he remains vague on how relief will be accomplished and what its end result will be, he is confident that:

The historical plan, the utopia of liberation as the creation of a new social consciousness and as a social appropriation not only of the means of production, but also of the political process, and, definitively, of freedom, is the proper arena for the cultural revolution. That is to say, it is the arena of the permanent creation of a new man in a different society characterized by solidarity.¹⁹

This further elucidates Gutiérrez's Marxist leanings. Dr. Ronald Nash, the late philosophy professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, summed up Gutiérrez's liberation theology in this fashion:

The foundation of liberation theology is a set of three claims: (1) Christians ought to become politically active on behalf of people who are poor and oppressed; (2) *The major cause of poverty, injustice, and oppression in the contemporary world is capitalism*; (3) *Christians should attack capitalism and work to see it replaced by socialism*. Although assorted liberation theologians may assert a great deal more than this, it seems fair to say that all liberation theologians agree with these three basic claims.²⁰ (emphasis added)

18. David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999); Lawrence E. Harrison, *Jews, Confucians, and Protestants: Cultural Capital and the End of Multiculturalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012); Peter T. Bauer, "Western Guilt and Third World Poverty," in *From Subsistence to Exchange and Other Essays*, by Peter T. Bauer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000) 53-73.

19. Neuhaus, 229.

20. Ronald H. Nash, "The Christian Choice Between Capitalism and Socialism," in *On Liberation Theology*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 49.

Nash goes on to further discuss and critique liberation theology, with the assistance of several other distinguished authors. The book in question, *On Liberation Theology*, is highly recommended for an in-depth examination of the nature of liberation theology and the problems associated with it.

Further evidence of liberation theology's leftist leanings can be seen in Gutiérrez's references to the nature of history. His continued references to "the historical process of human liberation" showcase his extra-biblical conception of history as continually marching on, bringing with it inexorable change.²¹ This bears a striking similarity to Marx's Hegelian dialecticism with regard to history, resulting in delineated phases of time through which history irresistibly passes. Gutiérrez seems to presuppose the truth of this theory and incorporate it into liberation theology.²² Further, Gutiérrez writes of history as if there were only two primary actors in it: those who are oppressed and those who oppress others. He refers to the former as "absent from our history."²³ They are dominated and subjugated by the ruling classes, who exploit them for resources and promote the "institutionalized violence" that oppresses the poor and weak.²⁴ As noted before, Gutiérrez is vague on the exact nature of the liberation theologian's response to these crises, but Miguel de la Torre later clarified:

The ultimate aim is to go beyond reform, for reform attempts to make sinful societal structures more bearable while maintaining capital in the hands of the few. Liberationists envision a new creation free of injustices, where human

21. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 29.

22. *Ibid.*, 19, 126.

23. *Ibid.*, xxi.

24. *Ibid.*

dignity and the freedom to seek one's own destiny reign supreme. Liberationists call for social revolution, a radical change of the structures that cause oppression, a move closer to Jesus' explanation of why he came: to provide an abundant life.²⁵

Another concept present in Gutiérrez's thinking is a concept known as the preferential option for the poor.²⁶ This concept can be understood in two distinct fashions: one relating to God, the other relating to man. As far as God is concerned, the preferential option for the poor references God's special concern for the poor and oppressed. God loves all people, but he loves the poor especially. Gutiérrez would argue that the lion's share of God's reaching out to man is dedicated to the poor. At times the crucifixion itself is referred to as less of an act of Atonement and more an expression of solidarity with the oppressed of the earth.

Where men are concerned, particularly Christians seeking to live well in the world, the preferential option for the poor manifests itself similarly. Throughout Gutiérrez's writing, the Christian's actions toward the poor are spoken of and treated as if they are the most important aspects of a Christian lifestyle, and the major (if not the only) mark of a true believer. This will be discussed in further detail at a later point. As Gutiérrez writes, "To know God is to do justice, is to be in solidarity with the poor person."²⁷

Another interesting aspect of liberation theology is its distaste for absolutes, even religious ones. Throughout Gutiérrez's works, truth is treated as purely subjective,

25. de la Torre, 57.

26. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxv-xxvi.

27. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 51.

subject to cultural paradigms and the restraints of time and place. Outside of this pervasive treatment, there are specific examples where Gutiérrez is even reluctant to recognize truth at all. This can be first seen when he is discussing the concept of salvation. Maintaining his sometimes faint, sometimes overt anti-Western attitude, he writes:

Normally, only contact with the channels of grace instituted by God can eliminate sin, the obstacle which stands in the way of reaching that life beyond. This approach is very understandable if we remember that the question of “the salvation of the pagans” was raised at the time of the discovery of people belonging to other religions and living in areas far from those where the Church had been traditionally rooted.²⁸

Gutiérrez’s discomfort with absolutes is evidenced by his apparent sarcasm toward the conception of non-Christians being considered unsaved and thus damned. De la Torre elaborated the following, referencing Gutiérrez’s *Theology of Liberation*:

Gutiérrez seeks a new way to do theology in order to make Christianity relevant and liberative at the underside of history. Theology ceases to be doctrinal truths created by the intelligentsia for the common people to believe; instead, it becomes a reflection of actions taken to end human suffering – a critical reflection based on praxis in light of God’s word, especially the exodus narrative and the incarnation of Christ.²⁹

As noted here and elsewhere, and supported in Gutiérrez’s own works, orthopraxis is valued infinitely more than orthodoxy. Knowing and believing the “right” things is relatively unimportant to Gutiérrez and other liberation theologians; what matters is that one *does* the right things for the right people at the right time in history. In this manner, liberation theology becomes heavily works-based. De la Torre, continuing his practice of elucidating Gutiérrez’s ideas, is very frank on this point. Noting that

28. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 84.

29. de la Torre, 66.

orthodoxy (correct beliefs) normally gives rise to orthopraxis (correct actions), he makes the curious and potentially illogical claim that liberation theologians invert this formula:

Theology is the second step, as orthodoxy instead flows from orthopraxis. Beyond the historical experiences and the social locations where individuals act as social agents, truth cannot be ascertained. Only through justice-based praxis, engaged in transforming society, can individuals come closer to understanding God's will. From understanding the social location in which the oppressed find themselves, through the praxis of consciousness raising to understand the causes of oppression, comes a theological response. In the doing of liberative acts, theory (theology) is formed as a reflection of praxis. Liberation theology is thus a praxis-centered theology which recognizes that before we can do theology, we must do liberation.³⁰

Such reasoning is a hallmark of liberal Christian existentialism, but par for the course for liberation theologians. In situations like Nicaragua's Sandinista revolution, this argument was adapted so that only those participating in the conflict could understand both the justifications for it and liberation theology itself. In other words, it was necessary to become part of the *revolution* before one could receive *revelation*. In this manner a new man could be created – a baptism of Marxism with Christianity.³¹

Strengths and Weaknesses of Liberation Theology

It is worthwhile to briefly examine the strengths and weaknesses of liberation theology as an ideology. The primary strength is clearly the concern for orthopraxis. In a passage frequently cited by liberation theologians, James himself argues that "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."³² There is clearly a very prominent place for good deeds in the thinking Christian's life. Orthodoxy on its own will produce little fruit

30. Ibid., 47-48.

31. Donald C. Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986) 262-264.

32. James 2:14-26

that benefits others, and such service clearly must become an aspect of the Christian's life.

Gutiérrez and his fellow liberation theologians have recognized this.

Unfortunately, they do so to the complete detriment of orthodoxy. One receives the impression while reading Gutiérrez that he would be perfectly happy to put his stamp of approval on whosoever endorses his idea of liberation, regardless of religious stripe.

What the supposed believer believes is irrelevant in his worldview; all that matters is that one *does* the right thing. Finally, there is the crushing weakness of the overt reliance on leftist ideals, particularly Marxism, found throughout Gutiérrez's writings. Contained here is the idea of it being the Christian's sole responsibility to participate in a poorly thought-out revolution with the unachievable goal of "liberating" the poor from oppression. This is supported by an extra-biblical reinterpretation of the nature of Christ himself as a revolutionary, and all other major tenets of Christianity subjugated to revolutionary thinking.³³ At the 1979 Puebla conference, Pope John Paul II had these strong words in response to this idea: "The conception of Christ as a political figure, a revolutionary, as the subversive of Nazareth, does not tally with the Church's catechism."³⁴ In the end it would seem that Gutiérrez's liberation theology as a whole does not mesh with either the Church's catechism or the broader teachings of Scripture, and long and careful thought must be given to the matter by the thinking Christian before any embrace of liberation theology can be made.

33. Belli, 241-242.

34. Nikolas Kozloff, "The Pope's Holy War Against Liberation Theology," *North American Latin American Congress*, April 29, 2008, (<https://nacla.org/news/popese-holy-war-against-liberation-theology>) accessed March 2, 2016.

Implications of Liberation Theology

Given the staggering implications liberation theology has for societies and governments the world over, one would reasonably expect to find detailed exposition concerning the details of the liberation theologian's "ideal" government and social situation. A lack of such would seem to leave great potential for the hijacking of the entire movement. Unfortunately, Gutiérrez rarely lends enough clarity to his writing to allow an exposition of these implications on any reasonable level. Ultimately liberation theology appears more concerned with what Christians (and indeed all who subscribe to his religion of liberation, regardless of spiritual affiliation) should do in response to the status quo. It is silent on the actual goals of this movement. Gutiérrez stops just short of commanding violence, but simultaneously condones it,³⁵ and commends the removal of the current system and replacement of it with something more just as a moral imperative. Quoting Gutiérrez and Segundo, Pottenger points out:

Gutiérrez warns that love remains "an abstraction unless it becomes concrete history, process, conflict." Universal love becomes concretized by opting for the oppressed – the commitment to human liberation – and by seeking also to liberate the oppressors from their own mistaken path, "by combating the oppressive class. In the context of class struggle today, to love one's enemies presupposes recognizing and accepting that one has class enemies and that it is necessary to combat them." Thus, in harmony with Segundo, to love one's enemies is to "combat against them."³⁶

Gutiérrez does not, however, provide specifics as to what this new system of society and government should look like, what it should do, or who should run it. All one has to work with are his vague platitudes on involving the poor and oppressed more in the

35. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 64.

36. Pottenger, 112.

process of governance. All one can conclude is that his “religious” ideas (if one can honestly label the ideas in question as such) should be promoted on a mandatory, society-wide basis.

Critics of liberation theology do not share this bashfulness. William Doyno stated flatly that the “liberation theological ideal” was “nothing less than a Marxist state with a politicized God thrown in.”³⁷ Liberation theologians themselves echoed this sentiment.³⁸

Origins of Liberation Theology and Allegations of Soviet Influence

With an examination of liberation theology in its most basic elements, however cursory, having been made, focus can now be turned to the convoluted and controversial account of its origins. Liberation theology took shape at the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) of 1968 in Medellín, Colombia. CELAM had been founded by Pope Pius XII, and first met in 1955.³⁹ The purpose of their 1968 meeting was to “set a proper agenda for addressing the high levels of illiteracy among the peasant population of Latin America, and help them to conquer poverty and obtain educational and other rights.”⁴⁰

The term “liberation theology” itself began emerging in December 1967, when eighteen liberal bishops circulated a document favoring a Marxist analysis of the

37. William Doyno, Jr., “The Jesuits,” review of *The Pope and the Jesuits: John Paul II and the New Order in the Society of Jesus*, by James Hitchcock, *Modern Age* 29, no. 2 (1985): 181-83, https://isistatic.org/journal-archive/ma/29_02/doyno.pdf (accessed February 7, 2016).

38. Belli, 142-143.

39. Harriet Murphy, *The Schneiders-Chittister Offensive: Definitive Dossier on the Changing Profile of Religious Life*, 14.

40. *Ibid.*, 144.

problems faced by the Third World, South America in particular. This was dubbed the “Manifesto of 18 Bishops from the Third World.” The Movement of Priests for the Third World was the organized aspect of these bishops’ activism, and it grew to around 500 members – including almost 1 in 10 of Argentina’s clergy.⁴¹ This document decried “international money imperialism” and accused the Catholic Church of “always [being] linked to the political, social, and economic system” and the political Right of “[launching] a subversive war [and] massacring entire peoples.”⁴² The Manifesto concluded with Luke 21:28: “Get up and raise your head, because your liberation is nigh.”

However, the broader concept of liberation theology gained popularity and took flight from the Medellín conference. Gustavo Gutiérrez was in attendance, and it was there that he first presented his “Towards a Theology of Liberation,” to a large audience, although he had first published these ideas several months previously and had been advocating for a more experience- and praxis-based faith for the Catholic Church since at least 1964.⁴³ He also worked as a theological adviser to the bishops at the conference, and had a strong influence in several of the resulting documents.⁴⁴ Medellín, however, was

41. Ibid., 23, 148; Mario Aguilar, *Pope Francis: His Life and Thought*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014) 70.

42. Raúl Zibechi, “Buenos Aires: The Poorest Resist ‘Social Cleansing,’” *Americas Program – Center for International Policy*, November 4, 2008, <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/1549> (accessed March 31, 2016).

43. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xviii; John Button, *The Radicalism Handbook: A Complete Guide to the Radical Movement in the Twentieth Century* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1995), 173-174.

44. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, viii-ix.

only the beginning of the story. In 1979, the Conference of Latin American bishops met again, this time in Puebla, Mexico, to deal with the rapidly-developing theology of liberation and decide upon and clarify its meaning and implications. Rome was no friend of this new doctrine and barred many liberation theologians, including Gutiérrez, from participating in this conference. Undeterred by their *persona non grata* status, they rented a house in the city and submitted their proposals through other bishops sympathetic to their cause, and had great influence on the final published decisions of the conference.⁴⁵

Pope John Paul II spoke at the opening of the Puebla Conference, but the meaning of his remarks is hotly contested, with both liberation theologians and their critics claiming an ally in the Holy Father.⁴⁶ While all involved agree that the Pope communicated a profound empathy for the world's poor and a strong imperative for the Church to be actively involved in their lives and struggles, they diverge in their views of his recommended solutions:

[John Paul II] addressed the conflict that had come into the open because of a politicization of Medellín's statements by those in liberation theology. He too is unequivocal. He criticizes "incorrect interpretations of Medellín," the "silence, disregard, mutilation of the whole of the mystery of Jesus Christ," the "rereadings of the Crucifixion," and warns against a new ecclesiology which is subversive of our duty to promote Evangelisation; he mentions the vogue for atheistic humanism; and elaborates the misuse of the word liberation. . . . Understood in the right frame, none of the commitment to combating poverty was or could be subversive of Catholic social teaching. It became subversive of Catholic teaching because of priests who were susceptible to Marxist analysis, rhetoric and philosophy.⁴⁷

45. Ibid., ix-x.

46. James Schall, *Liberation Theology in Latin America* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1982), 331-354.

47. Murphy, 146.

Harriet Murphy's 2012 Schneiders-Chittister Offensive (quoted above) contains further excellent accounts and analyses of both the 1968 and 1979 conferences, as well as each respective Pope's remarks there. Pope Paul VI spoke at the Medellín conference, but died before Puebla. Additionally, from 1979, liberation theology began to attract the attention of the North American religious establishment, in addition to their Southern brethren.⁴⁸

Ion Mihai Pacepa

At this point, the story becomes particularly interesting. Those seeking further knowledge on the topic must turn to an equally interesting source: Lieutenant General Ion Mihai Pacepa. A former three-star general in the Romanian intelligence service (the DIE) from the 1950s to the 1970s, Pacepa's career included six years as its director and as personal advisor to the unbalanced Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu. Due to Romania's status as a member of the Warsaw Pact, Pacepa's DIE worked closely with the KGB, Soviet Russia's own intelligence service, which used the services of its subordinate republics as contractors to increase their own reach. In 1978, disgusted with Ceaușescu and Communism, Pacepa brought his career to an abrupt end and defected to the United States, which earned him two death sentences and a \$2 million bounty on his head from his former employer. Panicked by Pacepa's desertion, President Ceaușescu

48. Belli, 215.

cleaned house in his government and all-but-eliminated the DIE.⁴⁹ Since that time, at least two Romanian hit teams have attempted to make good on Pacepa's death sentence.⁵⁰

As the highest-ranking defector from the Soviet Bloc, Pacepa began his work with the US intelligence community where he rapidly became "an important and unique contribution to the United States," according to the CIA.⁵¹ In 2013, he and Professor Ronald Rychlak of the University of Mississippi School of Law published *Disinformation*, a book dedicated to showcasing Soviet psychological warfare efforts focused on undermining the United States by weakening it from within and persuading its citizens and the West as a whole to accept pro-Soviet falsehoods. Former CIA Director R. James Woolsey wrote the introduction for *Disinformation*, dubbing it a "remarkable book" and stating that it would "change the way you look at intelligence, foreign affairs, the press, and much else besides."⁵²

Pacepa pulls no punches in *Disinformation*. Early in the book he states that "The Kremlin . . . invented liberation theology, a Marxist doctrine that turned many European and Latin American Catholics against the Vatican and the United States."⁵³ He adds: "We

49. Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Red Horizons: Chronicles of a Communist Spy Chief* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1987), 425.

50. Michael Ledeen, "Red Horizons: Chronicles of a Communist Spy Chief," review of *Red Horizons: Chronicles of a Communist Spy Chief*, by Ion Mihai Pacepa, *The American Spectator*, April 1988, 47, <http://www.unz.org/Pub/AmSpectator-1988apr-00047> (accessed March 2, 2016).

51. *The Washington Times*, "Red Past in Romania's Present," January 2004, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2004/jan/13/20040113-085236-5919r/> (accessed March 2, 2016).

52. Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Disinformation* (New York, NY: WND Books, 2013), i.

53. *Ibid.*, 5.

at the top of the European intelligence community nicknamed [it] Christianized Marxism . . . not the product of Christians who pursued Communism, but of Communists who pursued Christians.”⁵⁴

In Chapter 15 of *Disinformation*, Pacepa elaborates on these allegations, although liberation theology is only one of the many topics dealt with in that particular volume. A great deal more information and clarification regarding alleged Soviet influence in the formation and propagation of liberation theology has come to light in Pacepa’s subsequent publications.

According to Pacepa, liberation theology originated from Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s passionate desire to be the Soviet dictator who finally exported communism to the Americas. Noting the state of Latin America in the 1950s and ‘60s – populated by predominantly poor, uneducated, and most importantly, religious peasants – Khrushchev believed a “judicious manipulation of religion” would be sufficient to bring them into the Communist fold.⁵⁵ Nor was he alone in this presumption, according to former Nicaraguan Sandinista Humberto Belli:

As early as the midsixties, [Che] Guevara had spoken of the tactical need to draw Christians into the revolutionary struggle, given the religiosity of Latin Americans and the difficulty of persuading the poor to embrace the revolutionary creed. Guevara’s concern was picked up by [Fidel] Castro. Pablo Richard, a Chilean who became a spokesman of Christians who advocated socialism in Latin America, gave this report of a visit with Castro around 1972:

“Fidel invited us to Cuba. We spent three weeks getting to know the Cuban process and, at the end, we spent ten hours discussing, along with Commander Fidel, the issue of an alliance between Marxists and Christians. We were also helped by the famous words of Che Guevara: ‘When the revolutionary Christians

54. Ion Mihai Pacepa, “The Secret Roots of Liberation Theology,” *National Review Online*, April 23, 2015, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/417383/secret-roots-liberation-theology> (accessed March 2, 2016).

55. Belli, 139; Pacepa, *Disinformation*, 106.

dare to give an integral testimony, that day the Latin American revolution will be irreversible.’ Fidel was deeply convinced that there would be no revolution in Latin America without the Christians.”

Castro was probably right. Armed revolutionary efforts proved unsuccessful in Venezuela (1963), Peru (1966), and Uruguay (1971), and were stagnant in Colombia and Guatemala. A key factor was the lack of popular support.⁵⁶

Fernando Cardenal, a Nicaraguan Jesuit and Minister of Education for the Sandinista government, pointed out that the Sandinista Revolution in particular was “was the first revolution in the history of humanity that was not carried out without Christians, despite the Christians, or against the Christians, rather it was carried out with broad and profound participation of Christians.”⁵⁷ Uriel Molina, a prominent liberation theologian acknowledges that while he was always seen as a strictly religious leader, Christian communities in Latin America were infiltrated by Marxists.⁵⁸ Khrushchev, then, appraised the situation well. Religion was deeply embedded in Latin American life, and manipulation thereof could produce powerful results.

To support his assertions, Pacepa provides countless supporting details. On October 26, 1959, Nikita Khrushchev came to Romania on what came to be known as his “six-day vacation,” despite the fact that he had never before taken such a long vacation abroad. In fact, the wily dictator had an ulterior motive. He brought with him Soviet General Aleksandr Sakharovsky – chief foreign intelligence adviser to Romania and Pacepa’s then-*de facto* boss – and a plan, which was approved by Aleksandr Shelepin

56. Belli, 20-21.

57. Matthew Krain, “Interview with Fernando Cardenal,” Liberation Theology in Nicaragua, December 10, 2005, <http://liberationtheology.voices.wooster.edu/documents/document-7/> (accessed March 31, 2016).

58. Belli, 24.

(chairman of the KGB) and Aleksey Kirichenko (coordinator of the Communist Party's international programs). At this time, Pacepa was chief of Romania's intelligence station in West Germany and acting chief of the Romanian Mission there. As he was considered an expert on German affairs, he attended most of these discussions.⁵⁹

“Religion is the opiate of the people,” Khrushchev said, “So let's give them opium . . . we'll use Cuba as a springboard to launch a KGB-devised religion into Latin America.”⁶⁰ As Romania was the only Latin country in the Warsaw Pact, Khrushchev wanted its “Latin leaders” and the DIE to assist in this new war of so-called liberation. Pacepa alleges that the very name of liberation theology itself was a KGB invention, noting the KGB's fondness for “liberation” movements – National *Liberation* army of Colombia (FARC), National *Liberation* army of Bolivia, Palestine *Liberation* Organization, etc.⁶¹

Pacepa points out that religious manipulation was an old technique in the Soviet toolbox, and one they used routinely. Doing so via coopted clergy was a favored method:

Creating a secret intelligence army of religious servants and using it to promote the Kremlin's interests abroad was an important task the KGB community had during the 27 years I belonged to it . . . Since priests were not allowed to become KGB officers, they assumed the position of cooptee or deepcover officer. A cooptee received perks from the KGB (promotions, trips abroad, foreign cigarettes, foreign beverages, etc.). A deepcover officer enjoyed the same perks, plus a secret supplementary salary according to his real or imaginary KGB rank.

59. Ion Mihai Pacepa, “The Kremlin's Religious Crusade,” *FrontPage Magazine*, June 30, 2009, <http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=35388> (accessed March 2, 2016).

60. Ibid.

61. Catholic News Agency, “Former Soviet Spy: We Created Liberation Theology,” May 1, 2015, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/former-soviet-spy-we-created-liberation-theology-83634/> (accessed March 2, 2016).

To preserve their secrecy, all priests who became cooptees or deepcover officers were known inside the KGB only by their code names.⁶²

This capability was one that Khrushchev wanted the DIE to utilize now by sending “a small army” of cooptee and deepcover priests to Latin America to explore how liberation theology could be made “palatable” to that part of the world.⁶³ Subsequent stages of the plan called for a KGB takeover of the Geneva, Switzerland World Council of Churches (WCC), and covert use of it for converting liberation theology into an effective revolutionary tool. Pacepa notes that at that time “the WCC was the largest international ecumenical organization after the Vatican, representing some 550 million Christians of various denominations throughout 120 countries.”⁶⁴

First, though, the KGB built an “intermediate” international organization of a religious stripe, dubbed the Christian Peace Conference (CPC). As Pacepa explains, “The KGB intended to infiltrate Marxism into their countries with the help of the Christian Peace Conference, which was designed to quietly incite the peasants to fight ‘institutionalized poverty.’”⁶⁵ The CPC was to be headquartered in Prague and aid in bringing liberation theology into “the real world.” It was also to be subordinated to the KGB-created World Peace Council (WPC), which had been founded in 1949 and by now was also based in Prague.⁶⁶ Additionally, Pacepa notes “To preserve the secrecy of the

62. Pacepa, “The Kremlin’s Religious Crusade.”

63. Ibid.

64. “Former Soviet Spy: We Created Liberation Theology.”

65. Ibid.; Pacepa, “The Kremlin’s Religious Crusade.”

66. “Former Soviet Spy: We Created Liberation Theology.”

whole operation, we were also ordered to transform all our own religious organizations involved in foreign affairs into secret intelligence entities.”⁶⁷

Pacepa’s personal experience with the WPC had informed him of both the true nature and capabilities of that organization. Early in his intelligence career, he had worked for the WPC, and later on managed its operations in Romania. He describes it as “purely KGB as it gets,” and that

Even the money for the WPC budget came from Moscow, delivered by the KGB in the form of laundered cash dollars to hide their Soviet origin. In 1989, when the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse, the WPC publicly admitted that 90% of its money came from the KGB.⁶⁸

Both the CPC and the WPC produced publications for public consumption, designed to persuade their audience of their benign character. The WPC published *Nouvelles Perspectives* and *Courier de la Paix* in French, all managed by undercover Soviet and Romanian intelligence officers – as most of the WPC’s employees were.⁶⁹ The CPC published *CPC Information* in English, which presented them as “a global ecumenical organization concerned with the problems of peace.” As previously noted, however, their true task was to “incite hatred against capitalism and consumerism throughout Latin America, and to spread Liberation Theology into that part of the world.”⁷⁰

67. Pacepa, “The Kremlin’s Religious Crusade.”

68. Ibid.; “Former Soviet Spy: We Created Liberation Theology”; Herbert Romerstein, “Soviet Active Measures and Propaganda,” Mackenzie Institute Paper no. 17 (Toronto, 1989), 14-15, 25-26, WPC Peace Courier, 1989, no. 4, as cited in Andrew and Gordievsky, KGB, 629.

69. “Former Soviet Spy: We Created Liberation Theology.”

70. Pacepa, “The Kremlin’s Religious Crusade.”

Even with all of this first- and second-hand knowledge, Pacea acknowledges that he himself was not directly involved in the creation of liberation theology. As he learned from Sakharovsky, however:

In 1968 the KGB-created Christian Peace Conference, supported by the world-wide World Peace Council, was able to maneuver a group of leftist South American bishops into holding a Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellín, Colombia. The Conference's official task was to ameliorate poverty. Its undeclared goal was to recognize a new religious movement encouraging the poor to rebel against the "institutionalized violence of poverty," and to recommend the new movement to the World Council of Churches for official approval. The Medellín Conference achieved both goals. It also bought the KGB-born name "Liberation Theology."⁷¹

At the request of the KGB, Pacea's DIE provided specific logistical assistance to the organizers of the Medellín conference.⁷²

The 1968 Medellín conference put its stamp of approval on liberation theology – or at least, enough proponents of liberation theology interpreted Medellín's documents as such – and passed it on to the World Council of Churches for further approval. On this point, Murphy provides further analysis:

We are already at liberty to conclude that the WCC's function in this story was to help put a "liberation theology" spin on Medellín's documents. That means stressing two things. One, that "the poor" were an oppressed collective, oppressed by politics, economics and religion. Two, that "the poor," in order to arrive at "agency" on a world-stage, should act against that "injustice." This kind of rhetoric leaves it open as to whether politicization through violence is "necessary." These kind of nations are, in themselves, disinformation or propaganda for Soviet purposes [*sic*].⁷³

71. "Former Soviet Spy: We Created Liberation Theology."

72. Pacea, *Disinformation*, 106.

73. Murphy, 148.

The WCC posed no problem, as Pacepa states it had already come under control of the Kremlin via many well-placed Russian Orthodox priests who also functioned as agents of Soviet intelligence.⁷⁴ Indeed, the WCC's portion of the program went directly according to plan, as Eugene Carson Blake, former president of the National Council of Churches in the United States and then-general secretary of the WCC, "endorsed liberation theology and made it part of the WCC agenda."⁷⁵ Pacepa is by no means the only voice making these allegations, as the US Department of State released reports in 1987 citing serious Soviet influence and conspiracies within the WCC during the 1960s and 70s, in several cases strongly supporting Pacepa's (at that time unreleased) allegations.⁷⁶ Bulgarian researcher Momchil Metodiev provides a great deal of support for Pacepa's allegations in his 2010 *Between Faith and Compromise*.⁷⁷ While Metodiev does not share Pacepa's first-hand experience in Soviet manipulation of religion, his painstaking research through primary sources uncovered a large amount of corroborating information. Specifically, Metodiev alleges that the Bulgarian intelligence agencies were used by the KGB to infiltrate the WCC and CPC and direct its agenda, exactly in the same manner as Pacepa describes.

74. Pacepa, "The Kremlin's Religious Crusade."

75. Pacepa, *Disinformation*, 107.

76. "Recent Revelations About Soviet Active Measures," *Soviet Active Measures in the "Post-Cold War" Era 1988-1991: A Report Prepared at the Request of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations by the United States Information Agency – June 1992*, http://intellit.muskingum.edu/russia_folder/pcw_era/sect_16e.htm (accessed March 2, 2016).

77. Mark D. Tooley, "World Council of Churches: The KGB Edition," *FrontPage Magazine*, March 30, 2010, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/56261/world-council-churches-kgb-connection-mark-d-tooley> (accessed March 2, 2016).

As can be easily inferred from Metodiev and Pacepa's testimony, the Kremlin's takeover of the WCC is a fascinating story in and of itself and one whose ramifications carry over to the present day. This infiltration began in 1961 when the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) joined the WCC. "Alien seeds were planted in fertile soil," writes Robert Chapman, a former CIA officer with a long career in Latin America. He continues:

This once-in-a-lifetime invitation was one the Soviet intelligence service, the KGB, could not turn down: the ROC was a KGB organ. The ROC itself was known, so it was beyond comprehension for many that a Christian church allowed a ruthless intelligence and security organization into its ranks, but many in Soviet prisons and labor camps attested to its infiltration.⁷⁸

Chapman alleges that Boris Georgiyevich Rotov, the second-highest ranked prelate of the ROC, where he was known as Metropolitan Nikodim, took liberation theology with him to the WCC. He later became one of the organization's six presidents before his abrupt death in 1978.⁷⁹ Metodiev arrives at this same conclusion.⁸⁰

One of the most instrumental agents in the WCC's acceptance and propagation of liberation theology was Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev, codenamed "Mikhailov," who worked with the KGB for forty-plus years. He is now known better by the title of Patriarch Kirill, and is as of the time of this writing the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church. As Pacepa writes,

78. Robert D. Chapman, "The Church in Revolution," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 23, no. 1 (2009), 167-168, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08850600903348895?journalCode=ujic20> (accessed March 2, 2016).

79. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, "Russian Archbishop Dies During Papal Audience," September 6, 1978, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=N0wNAAAIAIAJ&sjid=Pm0DAAAIAIAJ&pg=7076%2C622971> (accessed March 2, 2016).

80. Tooley.

In 1971, the KGB sent Kirill – who had just been elevated to the rank of archimandrite – to Geneva as emissary of the Russian Orthodox Church to the World Council of Churches . . . [His] main task was to involve the WCC in spreading the new liberation theology throughout Latin America. In 1975, the KGB was able to infiltrate Kirill into the Central Committee of the WCC — a position he held until he was “elected” patriarch of Russia, in 2009. Not long after he joined the Central Committee, Kirill reported to the KGB: “Now the agenda of the WCC is also our agenda.”⁸¹

Further support for Pacepa’s allegations concerning the WCC and now-Patriarch Kirill can be found in the so-called “Mitrokhin Archive,” the extensive collection of KGB documents archivist Vasili Mitrokhin brought with him when he defected to the United Kingdom in 1992. The FBI described these documents as “the most complete and extensive intelligence ever received from any source,” high praise indeed from an organization whose entire purpose is analyzing intelligence.⁸²

Allegations of corruption have followed Kirill even into the present day. As a reward for Kirill’s loyal service to the KGB, the Russian Orthodox Church’s Department for External Church Relations, which Kirill managed at the time, was given permission to import cigarettes into the Soviet Union, duty-free. He soon became the largest supplier of foreign cigarettes in Russia, and in 2006, his personal wealth was estimated at \$4 billion.⁸³

During his last fifteen years in Romania, Pacepa managed that country’s industrial and technical espionage, and as such did not have much contact with such operations as

81. Pacepa, “The Secret Roots of Liberation Theology.”

82. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 1.

83. Pacepa, “The Secret Roots of Liberation Theology.”

liberation theology. However, when asked in 2015 about possible direct connections with liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, he responded,

I have good reason to suspect that there was an organic connection between the KGB and some of those leading promoters of Liberation Theology, but I have no evidence to prove it. For the last 15 years of my life in Romania (1963 - 1978), I managed that country's scientific and technological espionage, as well as the disinformation operations aimed at improving Ceaușescu's stature in the West.

I recently glanced through Gutiérrez's book *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation* (1971), and I had the feeling that it was written at the Lubyanka. No wonder he is now credited with being the founder of Liberation Theology. From feelings to facts, however, is a long way.⁸⁴

Further Support for Pacepa's Allegations

A long way indeed. However, such a distance becomes significantly shorter in the face of mounting evidence. Suspicion regarding liberation theology and theologians' remarkable proclivity for Marxism is hardly unique to Pacepa, or even new. Robert Chapman's allegations date to 1981, and William Doyno pointed out in 1989 several specific cases of liberationist priests practically gushing over their enthusiasm for Marxism in action. Enough evidence has emerged from different sources over a wide enough period of time that these allegations of Soviet support of liberation theology must be taken seriously.

Even if one flatly refuses to acknowledge the possibility of a liberation theology wholly sired by the Russian bear, it must be recognized that covert support for indigenous movements has been a prominent feature of every world power's foreign policy, particularly so for the Soviet Union, given the Marxist tendency to surround a core of

84. "Former Soviet Spy: We Created Liberation Theology."

committed believers with less passionate supporters or those with whom they shared some common ground.⁸⁵ As Alejandro Bermúdez stated in 2015,

Only the naïve can disregard the mountain of evidence connecting liberation theology with Soviet action in the region. . . . It's abundantly clear that even the best case scenario for Pacepa's detractors is a situation like that in Nicaragua – where KGB and Stasi “advisors” funded and supplied material support for their friends, the liberation theologians, who were all too willing to take it. If the Soviet bloc wasn't the mother of liberation theology, it was certainly a sinister stepmother.⁸⁶

Murphy points out that in 1968 the political and economic situation of Central and South America was “more than ripe” for subtle manipulation, and given the high level of religiosity in the region, influence over the church held the best option for success.⁸⁷ Chapman's argument that “dissuading those who believe politically what they were taught under religious authority is difficult, if not impossible” only strengthens this conclusion.⁸⁸ Even if liberation theology did not find its genesis in the Soviet Union, it at least found ideological common ground and a hotbed of fervent support there, support without which it may not have succeeded.⁸⁹ This fact is even grudgingly conceded by those who ridicule the notion that the Soviets had anything to do with liberation

85. Belli, 30.

86. Alejandro Bermúdez, “A Meeting in Managua: Liberation Theology 30 Years Later,” *Catholic News Agency*, May 15, 2015, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/column/a-meeting-in-managua-liberation-theology-30-years-later-3207/> (accessed March 2, 2016).

87. Murphy, 147.

88. Chapman.

89. Bermúdez.

theology.⁹⁰ In any case, the clear Marxist starting point of liberation theology would render a rebuttal moot. Murphy has these particularly blistering words, in response to some of Gustavo Gutiérrez's more eyebrow-raising quotes concerning revolution and the new society:

Although neither [I] nor anyone else has yet been able to prove that the well-known liberation theologians received a pay cheque from the Kremlin, we do not have to in the light of these sorts of comments. Anticipating an uprising of the mass of down-trodden peasants, when Fr. Gutiérrez has no means at his disposal to alleviate their poverty because he is not a politician nor an economist nor a business man, the Messianic aspect to liberation theology is one of its most worrying characteristics . . . What liberation theologians tend to do is fuse the bible with Marxist dialectics on the assumption that humanity as such must progress, and that dialectical materialism is "true."⁹¹

Murphy's continued sharp criticism of liberation theology and strong support for an honest examination of allegations of Soviet influence on it is well worth the read.⁹²

Conclusion

Regardless of what one chooses to believe concerning liberation theology or its origins, two points stand in distinct relief. First, liberation theology boasts at its core an extra-biblical starting point. The conception that history irrevocably marches on, the notion of a humanity ruthlessly separated into classes, and the utopian relief to these problems through a societal revolution cannot be found in the Scriptures. On the contrary, they must be presupposed or found elsewhere and imported into one's biblical views. As

90. Damian Thompson, "Former Communist Spy: KGB Created Catholic Liberation Theology," *The Spectator*, May 2, 2015, <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2015/05/former-communist-spy-kgb-created-catholic-liberation-theology/> (accessed March 2, 2016).

91. Murphy, 151.

92. *Ibid.*, 267.

such, when liberation theologians publicize their agenda on a supposedly scriptural basis, it is imperative to recognize that these ideas are not supported by Scripture, but by extraneous philosophies.

A second point is that the theology of liberation is marred by an appalling track record, both positively and negatively. To paraphrase the Apostle Paul, it has done what it should not have done and left undone what should have been done. Positively, it has brought adverse results. The false hope of Marxism never fails to disappoint, and all laypeople who bought into liberation theology's support for Marxist movements, like the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, were sorely disappointed in the kind of government their false faith brought them.⁹³ Negatively, liberation theology has failed to provide what it promised: deliverance and relief. This is a consistent theme in all literature critical of liberation theology, which points out how liberation theologians are long on talk and promises but short on tangible results: an ironic feature for a movement that prides itself for its focus on good deeds and solidarity.

In the end, liberation theologians can claim little or nothing as their distinctive accomplishment. Much of what they hold forth as success is simply the result of the church's standard emphasis on serving the poor and needy, a task at which the Catholic Church in particular excels. Liberation theology's extra-biblical commitment to Marxist ideology and rhetoric brings no additional benefit to the table; indeed, it is categorically incapable of doing so.

The devastating impact of Marxism cannot be ameliorated by religious window dressing; it may only be temporarily whitewashed in an appeal to the mimetic desires of

93. *Ibid.*, 150.

the masses. As long as any persons continue to see themselves primarily or solely as members of an oppressed and excluded class, held back and down by despotic power structures, there will always be a demand for a revolution in which the oppressors receive their just comeuppance and the former slaves become the masters. This drive is all the stronger when it bears the stamp of religious authority. Liberation theology lives on.

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