LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND *THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF REBELLION*

by

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Should Christians encourage and support Marxist revolution? An increasing number of liberation theologians say yes. In justifying this conclusion, these churchmen cite both social conditions and scripture. The theme of freedom is deeply rooted in the New and Old Testaments. In his inaugural address at his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus characterized his mission with a quotation from the prophet Isaiah:

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
> because he has anointed me
> to preach good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim freedom for
> the prisoners and recovery of sight
> for the blind,
> to release the oppressed, to proclaim
> the year of the Lord's favor.[1]

In this text and throughout the Gospels we see the great concern of Jesus for the poor and the oppressed and his expectation that his followers would come to their assistance ("whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers, you did for me"[2]). Furthermore, a central motif for both Christians and Jews is the Exodus, in which God, through Moses, delivered the Hebrews from enslavement in Egypt. As these scriptures illustrate, the concept of liberation is fundamental in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and it has become the central theme of liberation theology.

As a distinct movement, liberation theology is of fairly recent origin. It emerged during the dynamic 1960s, influenced by several factors: the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian executed by the Gestapo for his resistance activities and his collaboration in the plot to assassinate Hitler;[3] the Christian-Marxist dialogue, especially in France; the civil rights movement in the United States; and the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which reaffirmed the mission of the church as service and urged every Christian to work for social justice according to Gospel principles. In Latin America, where liberation theology developed most fully, the effects of these factors were heightened by conditions of pervasive and increasing poverty, a tradition of authoritarian governments controlled by the military or ruling oligarchies, and a new model for revolution emanating from Cuba and led by Che Guevara.

This article traces the evolution of liberation theology in this revolutionary setting, beginning with a summary of the movement's rise and some of its basic tenets.

After considering the reaction of the church hierarchy in Latin America and Rome, attention is given to Phillip Berryman's *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions*,[4] which details church involvement in the violence of this turbulent region. The article concludes with an assessment of the implications of liberation theology for US policy.

In seeking ways to apply the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, Latin American bishops met at Medellin, Colombia, in September 1968. At the conclusion of this conference, the bishops issued a letter which became the charter for liberation theology. Strongly attacking "economic neocolonialism" and structures (i.e. not simply individuals or groups) of injustice that created and maintained poverty, the bishops declared the church on the side of the poor and endorsed nonviolent means of liberation from sin, ignorance, hunger, and oppression. In light of the supportive relationship between church and state traditionally existing in Latin America, the Medellin statement was revolutionary.

After Medellin, *communidades de base*, or "basic Christian communities," began to emerge. Because of a shortage of ordained clergy, these "people's churches" were led largely by laymen, especially in rural areas. When tutored by liberationists, these communities also became centers for *concientizacion*, a process of consciousness raising where scripture was discussed in light of the Medellin mandate to liberate the poor from unjust economic and political structures. Marxist concepts of class struggle, alienation, oppression, and revolution often were used to analyze social structures and to plan programs of liberation.

Amidst this diverse popular movement, a theology professor at the Catholic University in Lima named Gustavo Gutierrez published a seminal text entitled *A Theology of Liberation* in 1971.[5] In the introduction, Gutierrez describes his book as a reflection based on the Gospel and experiences of men and women "committed to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America."[6] Although he uses theological categories (e.g. God, Christ, Church, Salvation, Sacrament), he argues that Marxism may provide the best "formal framework" for social analysis.[7] Efforts for political reform and economic development have failed to address the root causes of injustice; thus, what is needed, according to Gutierrez, is "a social revolution" to achieve a radical break with the status quo, a profound transformation from the class and private property systems to a socialist system. The oppressed class must replace capitalist oppressors. Because the political arena is "conflictual," liberation requires confrontation. The two kingdom or separate planes theory, where the state is supreme in secular matters and the church rules in religious, is rejected. Christ is Lord of all; the church is in the world; the church is the world. The Christian's vocation includes working for a just society; "to participate in the process of liberation is already, in a certain sense, a salvific work."[8] Through liberation a "new man" and a "new society" will be created in Latin America. Whatever else the Kingdom of God may be, it is a radical historical process which begins with the establishment of a just society on earth. In this society, human nature is transformed from individual selfishness to one of community service. Citizens give according to their ability and receive according to their needs. The means of production are owned collectively, and they serve the common good. In case all this

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sounds familiar, Gutierrez is quick to point out that the liberation movement in Latin America is unique and not to be confused with socialist failures in other parts of the world. He does imply that the Cuban revolution may be a model for creating this new society in Latin America.

Gutierrez was soon joined by other liberation theologians.[9] Some of these, like Dom Helder Camara, Leonardo Boff, Jose Miguez Bonino, and Enrique Dussel, advocate nonviolent approaches to liberation, while Gutierrez, Juan Luis Segundo, Hugo Assmann, and others argue for the legitimacy of violent means. The liberation theology movement grew rapidly in the 1970s through the work of these theologians, in combination with the proliferation of basic Christian communities,[10] political repression, worsening economic conditions, and the rise of other opposition organizations. In addition to providing a religious rationale for revolution, some priests participated directly in revolutionary groups. In Nicaragua, for example, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, Edgar Parrales, Fernando Cardenal, and his brother Ernesto Cardenal joined the *Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional* (FSLN) and serve today as officials in the Sandinista government.

Nevertheless, liberation theology remains a minority movement in Latin America. In 1979, Archbishop of Medellin Alfonso Lopez Trujillo (elevated to cardinal in 1982), an opponent of Gutierrez and liberation theology, intensified his counterattack at the Latin American bishops' conference in Puebla, Mexico. He contends that the church should protect its pastoral independence by remaining politically neutral in the current struggles for power. Another important critic is Cardinal Obando y Bravo of Nicaragua.[11] His brief support of the Sandinista government in 1979 turned to sharp criticism in 1980. He strongly opposed the participation of priests in the government and official restrictions on the church. At the Puebla conference and increasingly since then, Pope John Paul II has criticized the Gutierrez, Boff, and Cardenal theologies of liberation. The Vatican endorses the concept of liberation, but opposes this movement's alliance with Marxism and the establishment of "people's churches" in conflict or competition with the hierarchical church. The Vatican's Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith issued an "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation," dated 6 August 1984 and signed by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, which warned of "deviations" that are brought about by "certain forms of liberation theology which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought." The Instruction also criticized liberation theology for examining church structures from the perspective of a class struggle, which posits truth in the "church of the base" and represents "a challenge to the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the church, which is willed by the Lord himself."[12]

The church in Latin America remains sharply, if unevenly, divided between proponents and critics of liberation theology.[13] The vast majority of church leaders are committed to liberating change; the principal questions center on pace, means, and alliances to bring about change.

The ecclesiastical and military tumult of Central America has regenerated interest in liberation theology in the United States, resulting in political debate, vigorous theological discussion, and a new body of literature. *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions*, by Phillip Berryman, is published by the Maryknoll Fathers and is one of many Orbis Books advocating liberation theology. (Indicative of the level of their influence, members of the Maryknoll Order also advise House Speaker Tip O'Neill on Latin American policy.) I will give considerable attention to this book for several reasons. Berryman provides numerous examples of revolutionary activities by basic Christian communities and other exponents of liberation theology. The book itself is a contemporary representation of this theology, written by one strongly committed to its liberation tenets and equally critical of US

policy. Moreover, Berryman participated in the Central American movement and is a key figure in the American discussion. He is frequently invited as a consultant or conference speaker by groups which are interested in evaluating US policy in Central America. Although some of his views may not be acceptable to all, they certainly merit our consideration in assessing the impact of liberation theology in Latin America and on US policy.

The author's "basic sympathy and commitment" is with the poor in Central America and those groups "struggling for change." He begins his account by describing the evolution of one of these groups, a basic Christian community founded by Father Ernesto Cardenal at Solentiname, an isolated island in Lake Nicaragua. Berryman bases much of his narrative on Sunday dialogues recorded in Cardenal's four-volume work, *The Gospel in Solentiname*.[14] These Gospel discussions, according to Berryman, are similar in style and content to dialogues in other basic communities he observed. In these Bible studies participants draw parallels between Gospel events and characters and the "political realities" of Nicaragua. For example, the Herods are like the Somozas; the Luke 4:16f text (partially cited in the introduction of this article) is Jesus' "first political manifesto." Pilate is like the "gringo ambassador" to Nicaragua; Roman soldiers are like Somoza's National Guard; Satan tempts Jesus to take a "developmentalistic" approach to reform. Jesus is "the greatest revolutionary" (like Che); Christian love demands the building of a new kind of society—socialism (like Cuba). In discussing the means by which the new society will be achieved, violence, if necessary, is justified. Pastor Cardenal recalls the following quotation with approval: "Christ forbade the sword but not the machine gun."[15] A peasant paraphrases Christ: "We must love the enemy but he doesn't say we can't fight them." Berryman cites the following discussion of communism as representative:

> LAUREANO: "A perfect communism is what the Gospel wants."
>
> PANCHO, who is very conservative, said angrily: "Does that mean that Jesus was a communist?"
>
> JULIO said: "The communists have preached what the Gospel preached, that people should be equal and that they all should live as brothers and sisters. Laureano is speaking of the communism of Jesus Christ."
>
> And PANCHO, still angry: "The fact is that not even Laureano himself can explain to me what communism is . . . ."
>
> [CARDENAL] said to Pancho: "Your idea of communism comes from the official newspaper [*Novedades*, Somoza's newspaper] or radio stations, that communism's a bunch of murderers and bandits. But the communists try to achieve a perfect society where each one contributes his labor and receives according to his needs. Laureano finds that in the Gospels they were already teaching that. You can refuse to accept communist ideology but you do have to accept what you have here in the Gospels. And you might be satisfied with this communism of the Gospels."
>
> PANCHO: "Excuse me, but do you mean that if we are guided by the word of God, we are communists?"
>
> [CARDENAL]: "In that sense, yes, because we seek the same perfect society. And also because we are against exploitation, against capitalism."
>
> REBECA: "If we come together as God wishes, yes. Communism is an equal society. The word 'communist' means community. And so if we all come together as God wishes, we are all communists, all equal."
>
> WILLIAM: "That's what the first Christians practiced, who had everything in common."[16]

In concluding his description of Solentiname, Berryman reports that in October 1977 a number of young people (apparently accompanied by Cardenal) participated in an attack on the nearby town of San Carlos, and

then retreated into Costa Rica where they joined other Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) forces.[17] The author also records later that many of those who were deeply involved in the Christian community of Solentiname became important figures in the FSLN and that almost all of them "seemed to arrive at a point where they no longer saw themselves as Christians."[18]

Berryman's book documents crimes of both the left and the right, but in accord with his basic sympathies, he gives much more attention to violence committed by governmental forces and right-wing terrorist organizations. In El Salvador, for example, he describes the ascendance of Major Roberto D'Aubuisson and the White Warriors Union (UGB), a right-wing paramilitary organization he reputedly founded. In 1977, to rid the country of "Jesuit guerrillaism," the UGB warned all Jesuits to leave or be "systematically eliminated."[19] Berryman believes that D'Aubuisson, with General Medrano (assassinated in 1985), is responsible for the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was executed while conducting mass on 24 March 1980.[20] The author also discusses the deaths of Father Rutilio Grande of Aguilare, Father Alfonso Navarro, Father Ernesto ("Neto") Barrera, the four US churchwomen, and others. Occasionally, Berryman records violent actions by resistance groups in "retaliation" for right-wing repression. He even identifies some clergy who accompanied guerrilla forces as pastoral agents and perhaps combatants, including Sister Maribel Arriola, Father Ernesto Barrera, and Father Rogelio Poncelle. Nevertheless, he is usually ready to excuse or rationalize actions of the left. He paints a Robin Hood image of leftist guerrillas and a Gestapo portrait of the right-wing forces. Concerning Guatemala he writes: "In a word, the army practiced systematic torture and terrorism (that is, killing or threatening to kill noncombatants as a political technique) and was largely indiscriminate in its violence, while guerrilla violence was targeted."[21] The author's obvious bias may be somewhat justified. An informal US intelligence report covering El Salvador indicated that in the late 1970s and early 1980s human rights violations by the right exceeded those of the left by a margin of ten to one. A subsequent report, however, suggests that violence from right-wing groups has been reduced dramatically in the last three years, and death squad activity has virtually ceased.[22]

In his final section, Berryman centers his discussion of the ethical legitimacy of the "revolutionary *proyecto*" (plan, program) on three issues: the need for economic transformation, the political order (democracy), and the use of violent means. His fundamental premise on the economy is that those who labor should receive a fair share of the wealth they produce. That is, the economy should serve the needs of the majority. In the capitalist systems of Central America this will not happen, Berryman concludes, because "the oligarchies, in league with the military, manage the political process and have been willing to support a high degree of repression to maintain their privilege."[23] In these conditions, revolution is justified in self-defense and because "justice demands expropriation" to achieve a socialist redistribution of wealth and means of production.

Berryman defines democracy as "rule by the people," or "people power." He contends that all forms of democracy are incomplete. Western democracy, such as that in the United States, does not adequately represent the wishes of the people. In presidential elections, for example, the best actor, not the most qualified, wins. Also, important decisions in areas such as defense policy and economic planning are made largely outside of the democratic process. Marxist "democracy" in the Soviet Union, on the other hand, is spoiled by forced labor camps, official suppression of dissidents and minorities, and actions such as the invasion of Afghanistan. The "bourgeois democracy" of Latin America only serves as a mask for "oligarchical/military rule," replete with structural violence and fraudulent elections. Not surprisingly, Berryman finds little to criticize in Marxist revolutions in Central America. He is favorably disposed to the

modes of "people power" in Cuba and Nicaragua as new (and improved) forms of democracy. He offers no criticism of suppression of dissent in these countries. To the contrary, in a later section he suggests that criticism of a fragile Marxist revolution (i.e. in Nicaragua) may undermine the revolution and, thus, the overall good resulting from it.[24] He concludes that Latin American countries should be allowed to develop "their own forms" of democracy. Of course, the form he commends is "economic democracy," in which the principle of economic equality takes precedence over Western bourgeois concepts of individual political rights.

Concerning the use of violence, Berryman contends: Central Americans did not "choose" violence; rather, "after suffering violence for a long time, and seeking to exert pressure for their rights through nonviolent means, they still suffered violence repeatedly."[25] It was at this point that they turned to armed groups and engaged in combat. "Structural violence" followed by "repressive violence" produced "revolutionary violence." Berryman concludes that nonviolent means are insufficient to overthrow ruling groups and to achieve necessary social change in this region. Therefore, he argues for the ethical position of "just insurrection."

After endorsing the legitimacy of the revolutionary cause and the necessity of violent means, Berryman then turns to an assessment of rebel tactics. He does not object to armed occupation of villages because this is a propaganda action and it is violent only if someone resists. He acknowledges no ethical concern over this gunboat diplomacy from the left or in holding villages hostage at gunpoint. He agrees with rebel arguments that attacks on property are "war taxes" to finance opposition operations, are "recuperation" of what rightly belongs to the people, or are normal military tactics in war to tie down forces or destroy the economy of the enemy. Concerning "combat and killings," Berryman is more restrictive. Torture, rape, and direct killing of civilians ("those not responsible for the death of others") are never justified. Legitimate targets include government military and police forces and paramilitary groups responsible for repression or killing. He considers kidnapping the most ambiguous case, but concludes: "I find no grounds for justifying the kidnapping of people who themselves are not guilty of personally shedding the blood of others."[26] It should be noted in Berryman's evaluation that he presupposes a state of war between governments and guerrillas (which he prefers to call the armed opposition), and that the latter are legitimate combatants, not "criminals" or "terrorists."

Berryman concludes the book with a more formal statement of his theology of liberation. His discussion contains many of the themes developed by Gutierrez; however, he relies more heavily on the work of Karl Rahner[27] and Jon Sobrino.[28] Without fully rejecting traditional theology, Berryman adopts liberation definitions for Christian categories. He characterizes the conflict in Central America as a holy war between "rival divinities": the "living" God of the poor and the idolatrous "death" god of the rich and powerful. "Sin" is unjust social structures and oppression (e.g., "Somocismo is sin"). "Conversion" is adopting a "preferential option for the poor" and changing the social structures of sin. Because sin is social, there also must be "social grace." In times of oppression, revolutionary movements are agents or "bearers" of grace. Faith is, with the grace of God, "fidelity to the process of history as it unfolds."

With 40 pages of notes and bibliography, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion* is rich in source materials. From his interviews and research, the author is able to acquaint us with many of the principal actors and events in the Central American struggles, but Berryman's survey of repressive political and economic conditions in the region and the role of the church in addressing these conditions is not academically rigorous. It contains simplistic argument and some inaccurate data. More useful is the mosaic Berryman presents of

liberation theology at work. Indeed, his own values, attitudes, presuppositions, logic, and biases illustrate features characteristic of this movement.[29] Yet, the subjectivism of Berryman also causes the most serious weakness in this book. His biases override his objectivity in selecting and interpreting factual data. For example, he interprets the hostile treatment accorded the Pope during his Nicaraguan visit in March 1983 as a result of the Pope's poor judgment and a spontaneous outcry of the people; he admits no orchestration by the Sandinista regime. He characterizes Sandinista censorship of the church in Nicaragua as "unwise" politics. Yet, when similar actions are taken by other regimes, it is "repression." In seeking to convince Americans that Marxist governments can change and reform from within, he illustrates his point by claiming that in Poland "the majority of the Communist party supported Solidarity."[30] He does not explain why this same party outlawed Solidarity, nor mention that the vast majority of Poles overwhelmingly reject the legitimacy of the Communist Party.[31] In his treatment of terrorism, violence, repression, and human rights, Berryman roundly criticizes actions of the traditional structures of power, but he routinely rationalizes these same actions by Marxist movements.

Much of the above appraisal of Berryman's work could be repeated for liberation theology in general. This movement advocates many legitimate ethical precepts. Injustice is wrong, whether perpetrated by individuals or social structures. Jesus was most sympathetic to the poor and oppressed. God is concerned about the sacredness of individual and collective life. It is the church's responsibility to work for a more just social order in this world. Christians should resist oppression and violence. Government is responsible, to the best of its ability, for providing mechanisms or structures for meeting the basic needs of its citizens. Individuals or groups should not so monopolize the instruments of power that people are deprived of basic human rights and a voice in the government. Indeed, as Americans should recognize, even revolution is justified under certain conditions.

What about the common criticisms of liberation theology? Are they accurate? Is this movement a "horizontal religion," one that neglects the transcendent element of God, who stands in and above history? Not completely, at least not in the works of major theologians like Gutierrez and Boff. However, extensive emphasis on the "process of history" and political activism tends to point in this direction. Bonino argues, for example, that there is no truth outside or beyond the historical events in which men take part.[32] Certainly, this was the case in the Solentiname community, where revolutionaries discussed "atheistic" Christianity and then ceased to see themselves as Christians by any description.

Does liberation theology endorse a utilitarian ethic in which the ends justify the means? Yes, at least to some extent. Segundo describes Christian ethics as "a morality of ends."[33] For liberationists, the highest ethical principle is the greatest good for the poor. This good justifies revolution and even terrorism. However, as seen in the work of Berryman, this end does not justify all forms of violence. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe liberation theology as a form of situation ethics. The theological method urged by Gutierrez and others begins with the human condition—the political, economic, and social context as viewed through Marxist analysis. From this starting point, scripture is then reinterpreted and principles of action derived. In this admittedly subjective approach, truth and right behavior are to be determined in the historical context.[34]

This brings us to our next question: Are liberation theologians "Marxists in clerical clothing?" Yes, definitely! Ernesto Cardenal explicitly describes himself as a Marxist, a follower of Christ, and a revolutionary.[35] Even those theologians who reject violent means generally endorse and use Marxist concepts of class struggle, alienation, revolution, and economic socialism. They naively envision a basic change in human

nature, that is, the development of a "new man" and a "new society" from a socialist utopia. These theologians deprecate Western political forms as "bourgeois democracy" and capitalism as "economic imperialism." Yet, they also reject some elements of Marxism-Leninism. They do not hold a strictly materialistic philosophy. Contrary to patterns in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Vietnam, and elsewhere, they believe that Marxist social structures can be established without the accouterments of totalitarianism, repression, and atheism. Liberation theologians discount accusations that they are contributing to a coordinated international communist conspiracy. Nevertheless, many cite Cuba as a model for revolution and social organization, and a few, like Cardenal, have received training in Cuba. In classifying liberationists as Marxists, I do not mean to imply that they cease to be Christians. I am suggesting, as Pope John Paul II did, that these theologians are overly optimistic in believing that they can utilize Marxist analysis and cooperate with Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries and still avoid communist dictatorships. Furthermore, for those who favor Cuban and Soviet models, communist dictatorships are not undesirable consequences.

Finally, what are the implications of liberation theology for US policy? As outlined by President Reagan in his address to Congress in April 1983, US policy in Central America has four main goals: (1) support for democracy, reform, and human freedom; (2) support for economic development; (3) support for the security of threatened nations; and (4) support for dialogue and negotiated peace in each country.[36] Liberation theologians have clearly rejected the first three of these goals. There exists a thorough correlation between liberationist views and those of Central American revolutionary movements. Or, to adopt the wording of a guerrilla fighter from Esteli, Nicaragua: "The Frente Sandinista and the Christians are one and the same."[37] Liberation theology, therefore, adds a formidable religious dimension to the political opposition confronting US policy in Central America. Moreover, this religious opposition is not limited to Central America.

Liberation theologians are also influential in North America. Universities and seminaries conduct courses in liberation theology, and scholars search for a US theology of liberation.[38] Robert McAfee Brown affirms approvingly: "We will have to realize that there are liberation theologies developing in our midst, and that the significant North American contributions are going to come from blacks, Hispanics, women, Asians, gays and lesbians."[39] Through direct contacts, Latin American liberationists have influenced many leaders of mainline churches in America. For example, Bishop William Boyd Grove, United Methodist leader in West Virginia, notes the controversy in the Roman Catholic Church and adds: "The controversy also has divided the United Methodist Church into factions that decry or defend various theologies that move under the banner of 'liberation.' " After traveling to Latin America, Grove himself is convinced that liberation theology "is an articulation of the Christian faith that is deeply rooted biblically and that relates the biblical message to the economic and political context within which people live out their lives."[40]

The influence of liberation theology can also be seen in the small but growing Sanctuary Movement. This movement advocates civil disobedience to US law and protest of Central American policy by harboring illegal aliens from El Salvador and Guatemala. The movement was officially born on 24 March 1982, the second anniversary of the murder of Archbishop Romero, in the Southside United Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona. Now over 200 congregations in 12 denominations in 30 states are affiliated with the Sanctuary Movement.[41] One apologist explains: the same conditions prompting liberation theology are responsible for the flight of Central American refugees to the United States. These refugees "incarnate this new theology of liberation for the North American church." They provide an opportunity for US Christians to protest

government policy and demonstrate their own "preferential option for the poor"; that is, to "serve the rule of love" rather than the "rule of money and violence."[42] Two antagonists add:

> It is becoming increasingly apparent that the movement is primarily dedicated to opposing U.S. Central American policy. What is not so well understood is that many sanctuary leaders view the movement as the centerpiece of a strategy for radical change in the United States under the motif of liberation theology.[43]

Many in the Sanctuary Movement are among those directly lobbying Congress against US policy. Over 65,000 have signed a "Pledge of Resistance," which now amounts to a network coordinated by Jim Wallis of individuals and groups who are committed to civil disobedience and lobbying to change US policy. Among Protestants, the Interreligious Task Force on El Salvador and Central America provides a network for 28 national and regional agencies and over 350 task forces at local churches. The Religious Task Force on Central America serves a similar function among interested Catholics. Another organization, the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, works with about 100 organizations in lobbying Congress.[44] To date the lobbying effort has concentrated primarily on blocking congressional approval of US economic and military assistance to the regimes of Central America.[45]

Many significant questions concerning Central America remain unanswered. Furthermore, in the present polarized circumstances, some of these appear unresolvable. Liberationists and policymakers approach the conflicts through different alliances, data, and objectives. Liberationists look foremost from the perspective of the poor at oppressive social conditions. Despite the risk that Marxist guerrillas may establish communist dictatorships, liberationists look to these groups as agents of revolution and social change. Policymakers, on the other hand, focus primarily on the threat posed by the Marxist insurgents, fearing that victorious movements will establish totalitarian regimes linked strategically with Cuba and the Soviet Union. Although concerned about social conditions, policymakers are more concerned about these strategic alliances and the threats they pose to US interests. These differences are leading to a deeper sense of alienation for some in both church and state.

A few points are clear. Liberation theology has rightly signaled the imperative of social justice, but it has made an unholy alliance and in some instances even endorsed terrorism to achieve its earthly program. Latin American governments must make substantial reforms or increasingly be confronted by violent movements for change. Recognizing that instability in Latin America is caused by both social conditions and revolutionary insurgency, the Reagan Administration has no option but to provide both economic and military assistance. No amount of military assistance alone will achieve lasting justice and order; it must be more than matched by political reform, economic development, and improvements in human rights. The fundamental problems in Latin America are social, not military. As long as they remain, these conditions will provide fertile ground for the roots of rebellion—and liberation theology.

NOTES

1. Luke 4: 18-19 (*New International Version*).
2. Matthew 25: 40.
3. Compare Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954); *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1967); and *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1965).
4. Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984).
5. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, ed. and trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973).
6. Ibid., p. ix.
7. Ibid., p. 9.
8. Ibid., p. 72.
9. These include Dom Helder Camara, Catholic Archbishop of Brazil (*Revolution Through Peace* and *Spiral of Violence*); Juan Luis Segundo, a Jesuit from Uruguay (*A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity*); Jon Sobrino, a Spanish Jesuit now living in El Salvador (*The True Church and the Poor* and *Christology at the Crossroads*); Jose Miguez Bonino, a Methodist theologian in Argentina (*Christians and*

Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution); Hugo Assmann of Brazil (*A Theology for a Nomad Church*); Enrique Dussel, an Argentine now teaching in Mexico (*Ethics and the Theology of Liberation* and *Philosophy of Liberation*); and perhaps most prominent, Leonardo Boff, a Franciscan friar from Brazil (*Salvation and Liberation*, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, and *Church: Chrism and Power*). In the original Portuguese publication, Boff's last book carried the subtitle, "Essays in Militant Ecclesiology" and resulted in his censure by the Vatican in May 1985.

10. An estimate in 1983 placed the total number of basic Christian communities in Latin America between 100,000 and 150,000, with possibly 50,000 in Brazil alone. See Ronald T. Libby, "Listen to the Bishops," *Foreign Policy* (Fall 1983), pp. 79-80.

11. Obando y Bravo rose from humble birth to become the first native Nicaraguan Archbishop. Pope John Paul II elevated him to cardinal in 1985, probably because of his opposition to liberation theology and the Sandinista regime. See Andrew Reding, "Getting to Know Managua's New Cardinal," *Christianity and Crisis*, 22 July 1985, pp. 307-10.

12. Robert McAfee Brown, "Liberation Theology & the Vatican: A Drama in Five Acts," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (April-June 1985), p. 6.

13. Berryman suggests, for example, in Nicaragua between 15 and 25 percent of the Catholic clergy support the revolution, while the rest are "with the bishops." Similarly, he describes the basic Christian communities as a "minority phenomenon." Berryman, p. 266.

14. Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976-82).

15. Berryman, p. 19.

16. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

17. Ibid., pp. 23-24.

18. Ibid., p. 362.

19. Ibid., p. 127.

20. Following Archbishop Romero's death, according to Berryman, the influence of the church in El Salvador declined. Bishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, Romero's successor, was more reserved and cautious and he took a stance "above" the conflict, "equidistant from both sides." Rivera was sympathetic to Christian Democrats and "more clearly opposed to—and perhaps afraid of—Marxism." Berryman, p. 153.

21. Ibid., pp. 209-10.

22. Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, personal interview, 8 November 1985. Duryea knows of no deaths attributable to death squads in the last 18 months. Until recently Duryea was the US military attaché to El Salvador. He is presently a member of the faculty, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa. Elliot Abrams indicates that the number of civilian deaths in El Salvador has fallen from a high of 9000 in 1980 to 771 in 1984. See "Sanctuary and the Sanctuary Movement," *This World* (Spring/Summer 1985), p. 10.

23. Berryman, p. 286.

24. Ibid., p. 356.

25. Ibid., p. 309.

26. Ibid., pp. 319-20.

27. See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978) and *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 14 (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

28. Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978).

29. Berryman offers a perspective and model for effecting liberation theology. He speaks favorably of the poor and oppressed, basic Christian communities (the popular church), socialism, Marxism, revolution, armed opposition (guerrilla) movements, and Cuba. He criticizes the rich and powerful, the hierarchical church (including the Vatican), capitalism, Western democratic values, the status quo, existing regimes (except in Nicaragua), and US policy.

30. Berryman, p. 307.

31. See Leopold Unger, "Poland: The People Versus the Party," *The Wilson Quarterly*, 7 (Spring 1983), 50-68.

32. "Liberation Theology," *The Economist*, 13 October 1984, p. 32.

33. John R. Pottenger, "Liberation Theology: Its Methodological Foundation for Violence," in *The Morality of Terrorism: Religious and Secular Justifications*, ed. David C. Rapoport and Yonah Alexander (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), p. 115.

34. Situation ethics subordinates all ethical rules to the context, without regard for general ethical principles. It is this procedure that distinguishes situation ethics from other deontological or teleological theories. To some extent, however, all ethical decision-making should consider the immediate context. Ethical courses of action may vary in different situations. It is when basic principles vary that ethicists are inconsistent. In recent years some Christians in the Western world have articulated inconsistent ethical principles. Alarmed over the prospects of superpower conflict and nuclear war, they have endorsed the position of pacifism. Concern for social justice in Latin America, however, has led many of the same to approve of violent revolution. Berryman personifies this inconsistency. Although he represented the American Friends Service Committee, traditionally a pacifist Quaker organization, he supported violent revolution. He advocates liberation of those in Latin America oppressed by poverty, capitalism, and bourgeois democracy, and of those in the United States under the apocalyptic tyranny of nuclear holocaust. He suggests that the central issue for liberation theology in the United States should be the manufacture and possession of nuclear weapons by the United States (p. 397). No doubt both of these tenets are viewed favorably by the forces supporting the expansion of Marxism-Leninism.

35. See Michael Novak, "The Case Against Liberation Theology," *The New York Times Magazine*, 21 October 1984, p. 51.

36. See Langhorne A. Motley, "The New Opportunity for Peace in Nicaragua," *Department of State Bulletin*, 85 (June 1985), 81.

37. Sandy Darlington, "The Bible, The Frente and the Revolution," *Christianity and Crisis*, 22 July 1985, p. 302.

38. Russell Barta, "Liberation: U.S.A. Style," *America*, 13 April 1985, pp. 297-300.

39. Brown, p. 10.

40. William B. Grove, "Liberation Theology: A Challenge to US," *The United Methodist Reporter*, 4 January 1985.

41. Robert F. Drinan, "The Sanctuary Movement on Trial," *America*, 17-24 August 1985, p. 81. As of December, the Catholic Church (primarily Maryknoll and other orders) provided the largest number of sanctuaries, 32. The Friends were second with 28, and the Unitarians third with 21. Other denominations are: Presbyterian, 16; United Church of Christ, 12; Lutheran, 9; Brethren and Methodist, 7; Mennonite, 6; and Baptist and Episcopal, 5. The Southside United Presbyterian Church is one of four churches in Arizona, representing the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the American Lutheran Church, that filed suit against the government for undercover activities associated with the investigation of the Sanctuary Movement in Arizona. Eleven leaders of this movement are

now on trial in Tucson (see "Churches Sue U.S., Alleging Illegal Acts in Inquiry on Aliens," *The New York Times*, 14 January 1986, p. A1).

42. Ignatius Barr, "Strangers and Sojourners Together," *New Catholic World*, 228 (May/June 1985), 131.

43. Kerry Ptacek and Laura Ingraham, "Sanctuary and the Sanctuary Movement," *This World* (Spring/Summer 1985), p. 12.

44. Leon Howell, "Organizing the Opposition to U.S. Policy," *Christianity and Crisis*, 22 July 1985, pp. 296-99.

45. Not all participating in the Sanctuary or lobbying efforts support violent revolution. From his work with Sojourners, Wallis appears to be a pacifist. However, it is fair to say that these persons and groups are "liberationists" who seek to alleviate suffering in Central America by helping people escape and by opposing US policy, which they believe aids oppressive governments. According to the CBS Evening News (10 December 1985), local religious leaders were influential in the Los Angeles city council decision to ignore federal immigration officials and to grant sanctuary to political refugees from Central America.