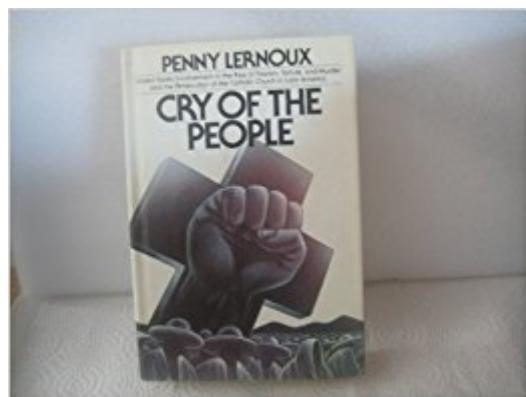


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# **Cry Of The People: United States Involvement In The Rise Of Fascism, Torture, And Murder And The Persecution Of The Catholic Church In Latin America**



## Synopsis

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## Customer Reviews

Cry of the People: United States Involvement in the Rise of Fascism, Torture, and Murder and the Persecution of the Catholic Church in Latin America [Apr 01, 1980] Lernoux, Penny

The book tells the dark story of how the Catholic church with its liberation theology fought a battle in Latin America defending the poor and oppressed peasants and Indians against landowners, rancheros, paramilitary police, US backed dictatorships and the CIA. In Honduras the wealthy ranchers did not want to let the bishops fulfill their jobs since it increased agitation amongst the peasants. Hector Gallego was one priest who didn't let himself be silenced. He was killed when he was thrown in the pacific ocean from a helicopter by what believes to be agents from the Panamanian police. Canadian Protestant missionary Gilbert A. Reimer and Father Ivan Betancur where also victims of landowners violence against priests, landowners who called the new testament "a communist book". The CIA was "particularly valuable in providing full information on certain priests-personal data, studies, friends, addresses, writings, contact abroad, etc." Between 1975 and 1978 twelve foreign missionaries had been arrested and father Raymond Herman who worked with helping the Indians in Cochabamba in Bolivia was found strangled with two bullet wounds in the head. The Banzer plan, named after the Bolivian dictator Hugo Banzer, was a plan

developed to undermine the churches work in Bolivia. This plan was later adopted by 10 different Latin American countries. Support for anti-Marxist priests was also proposed. Bishop Pronao of Ecuador, who supported the impoverished Indians in that country against the wealthy landowners, said, "I am honored to be called a subversive. I hope that we are permanently subversive in the way that I have described. If we are living within a state or a system that is evidently not in accord with the designs of God, we must oppose it. In a sense Christ, too, was a subversive." The stories of priests who have been killed, disappeared or been tortured are not isolated incidents. A few major American companies made major economic gains by encouraging a political system that bred this kind of militarism, torture and repression against its citizens. The Catholic Church has been severely denounced in Latin America by the US defense department for criticizing it. But what the Catholic Church was criticizing was really a rebirth of a kind of fascism in Latin America, a "Creole fascism". This was "a model for promoting economic development without changing the existing social conditions". This colonial fascisms marriage to capitalism intensified class differences and made the rich richer and the poor poorer. The United States was directly involved in the creation of military, police and paramilitary agencies responsible for torture and other atrocities in seventeen Latin American countries. Did it ever occur to the Americans that the reason for subversive movements, Marxist guerillas, or other disruptive elements did not have so much to do with a "communist threat" as it had to do with internal influences; like decades of dictatorship and repression. There was no way the US could admit that there may have been legitimate reasons for the subversive activities. Anything that went against the government was automatically labeled as "communist activities". Between 1968-1969, 1000 marines helped the Guatemalan counterinsurgencies hunt down subversive peasants. Around 8000 peasants in total were killed. These groups were the forerunners of the infamous "white hand", a right wing vigilante group responsible for thousands of deaths. In 1970, 3200, trained Guatemalan policemen killed or had disappear 7000 people. The military intervention in all these Latin American countries made it almost impossible for the regular citizen to have any real involvement in politics. These dictatorships operated under the myth that they created "law and order" when in fact there were narcotic traffickers, black mailers, thieves and assassins for hire operating freely under these Para-military regimes. Many churches opposed these regimes and therefore made it clear that the real message of the gospels was to stand up for human rights. These priests who speak out have been denounced by their governments just like the humanitarian priest who spoke out 400 years ago by the colonialists. Many of these priests and bishops also rightly pointed the finger at the United States government for being involved in training army and police who destroyed Christian communities and murdered priests and nuns. A Brazilian

bishop said, " Where it not for the guns, for the torture, and the terror, Brazils military regime could not survive. And were it not for this regime, foreign corporations could not continue to make enormous profits at the expense of the people. The government has all the legal instruments necessary to control the companies, and so has the United States, but the military ignores them."Most Latin Americans know that US foreign policy is run by corporate interests. Many of the men who approved of CIA activities against democratically elected governments; assassination courses for the police were all "pillars of the US business community". Many of the Latin American coups have meant big payoffs for US corporations. In 1980 the richest man in Latin America earned 550,000 dollars a week while the poorest earned 90 dollars a year, the gap still widening. Bribes are very common even for the biggest American corporations. "Consumer democracy" was to replace political democracy. The Catholic Church objected to this because they thought that this model of development was a mask for privilege. There was only as small procent of the Latin American population that could afford things like refrigerators, cars or TVs. The theologian Jose Comblin says, " the economy is not supposed to produce for the people, but for foreign markets, for the military, and for a few privileged technocrats. This marginalization means that the masses do not work for themselves, or have any hope of advancing themselves through their work." Father Virgilio Rosa Netto from Brazil says: "The amazing thing is that so many of these technocrats have turned their backs on own earlier educations as Christians to adopt the religion of the global corporations."In the nuns, bishops and priests are in "open, often violent conflict with the multinationals, local ranchers, the military and the police." This land that at one time relieved the pressure of overpopulation now has caused land-starved peasants to move by the millions into the inner city favelas. This is an "avalanche of human misery" that makes up the backbone of Brazils industrial wealth. In the bible there is a part in the first book of kings, chapter 21 that illustrates this story. The is about 83% of the size of the United States of America and is incredibly rich in natural resources. The indigenous people living here have no real rights and the basic attitude is that "the Indian cannot stand in the way of progress". Brazils Indian population has declined from 2 million at the beginning of the last century to 200.000 in 1963 and went down to 100,000 in 1978. Both American and European multinational corporations have cleared and taken over land that originally belonged to the Indians. They have also cleared large areas of the by using the same chemicals they used to clear out jungles in Vietnam.During the 1960s many American Catholic missionaries where approached by the CIA to gather information about progressive priests in Latin America. Many of them where quite naïve and felt flattered by the attention. The CIA was playing god in Latin America, deciding who should be the next president, which people should be assassinated, even how the

people should live. The CIA was using the religious groups in Latin America for their own secret ends. They supported right wing catholic groups and trained police that killed and tortured priests, nuns and bishops some of who where US citizens. The missionaries now started saying that you "cannot defend democracy by destroying it." The TFP group-Tradition, family and property, was a right winged catholic group that existed in several Latin American countries. They were wealthy and belonged to the upper class of the society. They wanted an old school church that saw the rich as having a divine right for owning all that they owned. They supported the CIA economically in staging many of the government coups in Latin America. The CIA in turn encouraged and supported the TFP. Therefore the CIA was accused by many Latin American bishops of "inciting one sector of the church to attack another." Father Joao Bosco Penido Burnier was a Jesuit missionary who was shot in the head and killed when he tried to stop two police men from torturing and raping two peasant women who were related to a man who had opposed himself to the police brutality in the . Bishop Hipolito was another Brazilian bishop who was kidnapped and beaten because he opposed the dictatorship. Father Tito de Alencar was a 29-year-old Dominican priest who was severely tortured for 40 days in a Brazilian prison. He later committed suicide after being let out of prison. The "institutionalization "of terror was rationalized by the US government and multinational corporations as something that was necessary for development. In Argentina during its dirty war between 1974 and 1976 the repression was even worse. Officially 9000 people went missing but some say the numbers are as big as 30000. The group "mothers of the disappeared" has since been formed consisting of mothers who still want to find out what happened to their sons and daughters under this torturous and brutal regime. The US government funded Argentina's regime and gave them extra money for police training. This police force was corrupt and according to Lernoux involved in drug trafficking. There was also a wave of anti Semitism in Argentina fueled by the hundreds of Nazis that the country had let in after World War 2. Argentina became the world center for the publication of anti-Semitic literature. The progressive Catholic Church was also persecuted. By the end of 1977 seventeen priests and nuns had been killed, thirty were in prison and Argentina's most vocal bishop Enrique Carletti had been killed in a fake auto accident. The situation in Mexico was tense as well with many priests being tortured for working for rights for the poor. There were several assassination attempts on a few of the countries bishops and one priest, father Rodolfo Aguilar, was killed. He was shot while working in an impoverished area trying to improve conditions for the poor there. A few weeks after another priest was killed called Father Rodolfo Escamilla. He had worked for 8 years in the slums trying to help the poor there organize themselves and organize cooperatives. Poor Latin American Christians therefore view the bible as "a very revolutionary book".

A book that from the beginning to the end tells the story of Jahves liberation of his people. The exodus story is the central event, where the people are freed from oppression. The oppression is from a political tyrant who has imposed on them an unjust economic order with unjust social structures. So it's a story about economic and political liberation too. The Old Testament prophets convey the same message. Attacking the corruption within the state of Israel and condemning those within the ruling classes who oppress the poor. Jesus as well stands in the same tradition as these prophets, the core of his message being "freedom to captives" and "liberation to the oppressed." Therefore if god took sides back then god is still doing it now, identifying with the oppressed. Earlier the church mostly has taken the side of the rich oppressor but this was starting to change in Latin America. If the church doesn't speak out against oppressors then they run the risk silently supporting them. Many Latin American peasants first saw the catholic imagery in their own way. God was the wealthy landowner who one had to bow down to and obey. While Jesus was the poor peasant or Indian who had been tortured and killed. They had difficulty viewing the symbolism of the resurrection. This came as a shock to many of the priests who started working more actively with the poor and left their comfortable positions of power. Gradually this view is starting to change with the spread of liberation theology. Here the teachings go against those of the colonial church. Instead of trying to force teachings on the people instead one tries to listen and learn from them. This opened up a more authentic dialogue between the church and the people. Smaller Christian communities started developing throughout Latin America where the principals of liberation theology where applied at a grassroots level. When the new pope came to Latin America in the late 1970s he denounced the situation in the continent speaking closely to Indians and other marginalized groups saying that the church was on their side. After this a new document was drafted by all Latin American bishops that strongly took the side of the poor and the oppressed. On the other hand there was a more conservative vein within the church that opposed these progressive liberation theologians. Later Ratzinger turned on the liberation theologians and started a new inquisition against them. Read more about this in Penny Lernouxs book "People of god". The American bishop in El Paso said: "The use of capital and the development of a corporate economy have without doubt produced great benefits for mankind. But it has become increasingly evident that large corporations reaching across national boundaries drain natural resources and labor from poor countries primarily for the benefit of a small proportion of affluent people in the world. Such an ordering of the world economy is immoral and must be rejected and fought by the church. It is not sufficient to weep for the priest who is martyred by the regime in Brazil, without acting to prevent the complicity of the United States of America in that act of murder. The system that we know it holds in

bondage, not only those who are exploited to maintain a flow of wealth largely in one direction, but it also holds in the bondage of unslaked thirst for goods and power and sense of superiority those who reap the benefit."

A scathing indictment of U.S. foreign policy in Latin-America. Follow this book with "Turning the Tide", by Noam Chomsky, and you will realize that the United States bank-rolled, engineered, and directly carried out more acts of international terrorism than any other dozen countries in the world. A courageous book, not for the head-in-the-sand crowd or those bamboozled by the myth of the inherent benevolence of American society.

Just want to add my voice to the other two reviewers. Book appeared in 1980 but from what I read today and from the week I spent in Guatemala City ten years ago, it is still timely. Lernoux is one of my heroes.

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