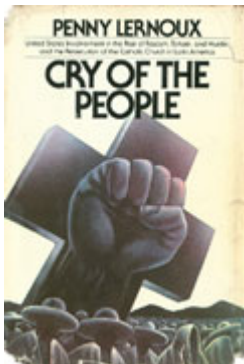


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32 years later, book on Latin America still challenges us

by Zoe Ryan



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

By Penny Lernoux

Published by Doubleday, 1980

In 1968 the Latin America bishops met in Medellín, Colombia, and out of that meeting came the Medellín documents: "the Magna Carta of today's persecuted, socially committed Church ... it shattered the centuries-old alliance of Church, military, and the rich elites."

So wrote Penny Lernoux in her landmark first book, *Cry of the People*, which brought great attention to the Latin American political reality, a reality of which many Americans were unaware or would not believe.

She documented in fine detail the rule of authoritarian regimes in oppressing the poor and indigenous, U.S. involvement in promoting those regimes, and the Catholic church's role in all of it. That role ranged from church hierarchies that cooperated and supported regimes to the people of the church who died

because of their work with the oppressed.

Not all clergy had a change of heart. But the clergy, religious and laypeople who did choose to work with the poor were vilified, threatened, tortured or murdered by government militaries. Lernoux wrote on behalf of those same poor, and the people risking their lives for the poor and indigenous.



She received the 1980 Sidney Hillman Foundation book award, a testament to her

dedication to the rights of the people as well as a tribute to the depth of her investigations into U.S. intelligence activities, U.S. commercial bank involvement, and the practices of private companies promoting U.S. economic interests in Latin America.

As one can imagine, Lernoux put her life on the line as a reporter in Latin America. Death threats to her and her family did not stop her dedication as a Catholic to justice, to the poor and to the truth.

Cry of the People inspires readers to think about their own actions or inactions. As one bishop in the book said, "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 as we know it holds in bondage, not only those who are exploited to maintain the 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 benefits."

Thirty-two years later, Lernoux's book still challenges American Catholic readers to evaluate how their American lifestyles feed into exploitation, to examine what model of Jesus they follow.

[Zoe Ryan is a staff writer at *NCR*. Her email address is zryan@ncronline.org.]

The works of Penny Lernoux

- Re-encountering Lernoux, *Hearts on Fire: The Story of the Maryknoll Sisters (Centennial Edition)* reviewed by Chris Herlinger
- A web of greed and power grabs, *In Banks We Trust: Bankers and Their Close Associates: the CIA, the Mafia, Drug Traders, Dictators, Politicians and the Vatican* reviewed by Brian Roewe
- 32 years later, book on Latin America still challenges us, *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* reviewed by Zoe Ryan
- A document of Vatican II's undoing, *People of God: The Struggle For World Catholicism* reviewed by Joshua J. McElwee

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