

## Revolutionary Latin America Lecture

### PART 1

#### **Slide 1:**

Over the past few weeks, you have been looking at the major social changes in Latin America around mid-century.

This week we begin looking at and the period of the Late Cold war from the late 1950s to around 1992 with a focus on the left-wing revolutionary guerrilla movements of the 1960s and 1970s

We are looking at the influence of **two major ideas** on the emergence of revolutionary guerrilla movements and New Social Movements in Latin America.

**Marxism**, and the response to socialism within the Catholic Church, which, in Latin America took the form of a new kind of Theology, called **Liberation Theology**, which aimed to empower poor and disenfranchised people from a grassroots level to become agents of change and overcome structural inequalities.

There are regions of Latin America that were under the de facto control of guerrilla movement from the 1960s to the 1990s with protracted conflict and protracted unresolved peace processes that continue to shape politics and societies in Latin America today.

For example, in Colombia the ELN (National Liberation Army) later the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) controlled swathes of Colombia and were involved in civil conflict with state security forces and paramilitaries. Poor communities in the region, some sympathising with the guerrilla and some not, were disproportionately affected and sometimes displaced by the conflict.

The legacies of these **two ideas** remain relevant in Latin America today.

#### **Slide 2**

Let's think about the Cold War context of the emergence of these movements.

After WWII, the US was increasingly concerned about what it saw as communist insurgencies, not only in Eastern and Southern Europe but also in Latin America.

What does US concern about national insurgencies involve?

It involves much more political interference in countries with left-leaning governments. The most obvious example of this is in Guatemala in 1954 when the US staged a coup against the regime of Jacobo Arbenz that had implemented land reform and redistributive policies.

Many of those who would become Cuban revolutionaries, including Ernesto (Che) Guevara were in Guatemala at this time, attracted and inspired by the economic nationalist policies of Arbenz. They saw the US coup and what it could

do. This led to a deep distrust of the US and set them on the path towards the Cuban Revolution.

[Economic policy of developmentalism]

Another outcome of the US concern with the stemming the spread of communism in Latin America is that the US government pushed the economic policy of developmentalism.

On the one hand, this policy encouraged agrarian and industrial development but on the other hand, it kept Latin American countries producing raw materials for US factories so it kept Latin American countries linked to the United States. This was a major concern for the radicals of the 1960s and 1970

### Slide 3:

#### [Two Reactions]

There were two reactions to these developments:

#### [Marxism and left-wing revolutionary movements: Cuban Revolution]

The first reaction is the development of Marxist inspired and left-wing guerilla revolutionary movements. These are inspired by a - Third World, Latin American form of Marxism. By far the most prominent example is the Cuban Revolution. The most successful anti-imperialist revolution and the most enduring. The Cuban Revolution is still in power today.

#### [Liberal theological movements in Catholic Church: Liberation Theology]-

Another reaction is the response of the Catholic Church to the rise in socialism and some Latin American theologians increasing concerns about exponentially high levels of inequality in Latin America.

Both the New Theology developed by some groups in the Catholic Church in Latin America and the Marxist and left-wing revolutions were concerned with questions of inequality, poverty, low literacy levels and the unfair distribution of land or **structural inequalities**. They were also interested in a) international solidarity with other left leaning movements in the region (pan-Latin Americansim)-(and opposition to right wing dictatorships in the Brazil, Chile and Argentina and also in Guatemala) They were also interested in solidarity with the Third World (eg. anti-colonial movements in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East). opposition to dictatorships in Chile and Guatemala, for example. b) The left leaning guerrilla and Catholics were interested in criticizing ideas of development.

### Slide 4

#### [Cuba

- **1952: Military Coup of Fulgencio Batista against Carlos Prio**
- **Support of US economic interests – by 1959, US companies own 40% of sugar lands, 90% of minerals, 80% of utilities.**
- **Widespread poverty throughout Cuba.]**

Let's look at the first reaction, the Cuban Revolution.

Since Cuba was liberated in 1898, in the Spanish American War and subsequently became a pseudo US protectorate and it played two roles for the US.

Firstly, a playground during prohibition era where Americans could go to drink, party attend brothels and get involved in activities that were prohibited at home.

Secondly, it produced most of the sugar for the US along with some other minerals and raw materials. There were significant US economic interests in Cuba.

In order to play this role Cuba needed to have pliable political authority. So the US government was continually interfering in Cuban politics. This came to a head in 1952 when the US government backed a coup against a relatively left leaning government to establish the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. In Batista's Cuba the unequal economic system that favoured US interests and repressive government led to widespread poverty.

### Slide 5

#### **[26<sup>th</sup> July 1953: Revolutionary group attacks Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba, led by Fidel Castro, Marks beginning of Cuban Revolution]**

The first revolutionary act was Fidel Castro's attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba in the East of the island.

Many place the beginning of the revolution in 1956 when Castro and a small group of revolutionaries arrived in Cuba from Mexico on the boat Granma and begin a guerrilla campaign there. However, the first shots were fired in 1953 this is Castro's first attempt at revolution. It was a failure. Castro and the other revolutionaries were arrested and some were killed. Castro and his revolutionaries were poorly armed and poorly trained. It was not a mistake that Castro, at least, would make again.

The attack on the Moncada barracks and, more significantly, the speech that Castro gave at his trial for the attack provide us with significant insights into the aims of the revolutionaries.

### Slide 6. Map of Barracks Attack

The Moncada Barracks are in Santiago de Cuba in the East of the Island, not very far from the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay (still a naval base today).

### Slide 7: [ *History Will Absolve me* La historia me absolverá

- **Castro gives *History Will Absolve Me* Speech at defense in court**
- **Sentenced to 15 years in prison**
- **Attack on US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista**
- **Criticises economic disparity in Cuba. Cites 700,000 Cubans without work, 30% illiteracy**
- **Demands economic reforms including:**
  - **Land reforms**
  - **right of industrial workers to 30% share in profits**

– **right of sugar workers to 50% of profits]**

Castro used his arrest and his trial to popularize his ideas with a speech, which was also a kind of manifesto, *History Will Absolve Me*. Batista was a dictator but he did not have complete control particularly over the media (radio and newspapers.) Therefore, the ideas of Fidel Castro spread and were broadcast to the general population of Cuba and he became a well-known, radical figure. Castro has since become known for giving long and eloquent political speeches and he gave the first of these at his trial. It adapted some Marxist ideas to the Latin American context. However, there was also evidence of the influence of the Latin American revolutionary tradition (eg. The concern with anti-US imperialism and redistributive land reform and economic nationalism like in the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and in Arbenz' Guatemala. A criticism of the narrow elite or the oligarchy- like Juan Perón's populist regime in Argentina.)

In the trial speech, Castro attacked Batista as being in thrall to US imperialism and being a US stooge/ puppet. He decried economic disparity and inequality in access to education. He also set out a revolutionary plan that he called the five-point plan and among these demands were redistributive land reform and the right of industrial workers and agrarian workers in sugar, to a significant share in the profits that he argued were going straight into the pockets of the US-friendly oligarchy.

These kind of reforms at the time were not hugely radical in the Latin American context. The vast majority of them were taken from the Mexican Revolution and similar reforms had been ushered in in Guatemala and Bolivia, in the revolution there. [You'll also find similar concerns in the writings of the Peruvian intellectual, Marriategui. In Chile there is land reform but no revolution.] These are not demands emerging from Marxist literature. In Mexico by the 1950s land reform had been rolled out, agrarian workers had access to communally held land and some workers had the right to shares in the profits of firms.

This was Castro's economic and political programme of how Cuba should be and as the title of the speech suggests, how he thought Cuba would eventually be.

Some of the debate in the research about the Cuban Revolution asks whether, in the early years, the revolution was more of an anti-imperialist, nationalist revolution than a communist or Marxist revolution, like the Mexican Revolution or movements in Guatemala and even Bolivia. Researchers ask whether it wasn't the embargo imposed by the US and choices of the revolutionary government around economic policies that pushed Castro's revolutionary government towards closer alliances with the USSR.

## **Slide 8**

### **[The Cuban Revolution**

- **1955: Castro released**
- **Travels to Mexico to plan new offensives**
- **1956: Returns to Cuba with 80 guerrilla fighters]**

Although Castro was originally given a sentence of 15 years in prison, he was released after serving just a year and a half of his sentence. The US put pressure on Batista to release some of his political prisoners. Fidel Castro was from a relatively well off, elite family of landowners and he has quite significant support from members of the Cuban elite who, at this stage, didn't see him as a Marxist.

On his release in 1955 Castro went to Mexico, whose revolutionary regime and revolution we have seen had been an inspiration for many of Castro's ideas. The Mexican government helped and protected Fidel Castro, Che Guevarra and about 40 other released prisoners who arrived in Mexico. Castro made contact with the secret service in Mexico, which gave him some military training and a place to train his guerrilla forces. In 1956 after a year in Mexico, Fidel Castro and around 80 guerrilla fighters, mainly Cubans but some from elsewhere including Che Guevarra from Argentina, a Uruguayan and some Guatemalans arrived in Cuba from Mexico on the boat the Granma. This was a Pan-Latin American group but the majority were Cuban.

They were hoping to inspire a major revolution of industrial workers in the city on their arrival in Cuba. They were hoping that industrial workers would take up arms as they had in the Russian Revolution. In fact, this attempt, like the Moncada Barracks attack was a bit of a disaster. Batista had heard of their arrival, they were bombed, and about 30 members of the guerrilla were dead within about two weeks of arriving. At the same time, the urban proletariat in the factories were not interested in rising up in arms. There were a small number of strikes in support but not a mass movement.

## Slide 9

### **[Uses guerrilla 'foco' strategy to defeat US-armed Batista forces**

#### **21 August 1958: After several failures, begin final offensive, taking cities on the way to Havana]**

So, through necessity Castro and his rebels developed a new guerrilla strategy known as the 'foco' strategy. The French philosopher and thinker Régis Debray wrote a book about how to fight a guerrilla war based on Castro and Che Guevara's guerrilla strategy.<sup>1</sup> It's called the *foco* strategy and was adopted by guerrilla groups throughout Latin America. It involved quick, focussed attacks on army bases but most importantly it involved getting the support of the peasantry. They thought that you needed the support of the peasantry in the area that you were fighting in so that they could hide, feed and protect you from government forces. Che Guevarra's role was crucial in winning over the Cuban Peasantry during the guerrilla campaign as he was a doctor and he went from village to village curing children of curable diseases in order to develop a solid support network among the poor peasants of the region where they were fighting.

Fidel Castro and Raul Castro were very savvy about the power of the media. They realised that fighting a small-scale war in the corner of Western Cuba wasn't going to get them much press so they established a rebel radio called Radio Revolution and they invited major international journalists to be in the frontline with them. The best

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<sup>1</sup> Régis Debray. *Revolution in the Revolution?: Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in the Revolution*. London: Penguin, 1968.

known is Matthews who worked for the New York Times and lived with the rebels for about a month. Castro pulled the wool over Matthews' eyes by making his troops, which at the time only numbered around 150, march up and down in front of him, claiming that each group that passed were different people. It worked and Matthews in his reports wrote that there were tens of thousands of people in the jungle of Western Cuba when there were really only about 150.

When Matthews published his reports in the New York Times people thought there was a sizeable army in Western Cuba which, in turn inspired workers and students in the cities to rise up in support.

Eventually, the guerrilla had a number of direct confrontations with the army and by August 1958 a number of students and workers in the cities have also begun to rise up and support the guerrilla movement and Batista is on the way out.

### **Slide 10**

#### **2 January 1959: Revolutionaries take Havana**

The rebels finally entered Havana on 2 January 1959 as the leaders of a new Cuban state.

Here you can see Castro and Guevarra but also Camilo Cienfuegos, who was one of the other major leaders and thinkers of the Cuban Revolution. It was rumoured that he was eventually killed by Castro who saw him as a major political rival. He and Guevarra, who was killed in Bolivia while exporting the revolution, would be celebrated in Revolutionary propaganda as martyrs of the revolution.

### **Slide 11**

#### **Castro's Cuba**

What did Castro's government do when it came to power?

For the first two years Castro was not a card-carrying Marxist. His government did not ally with either the USSR or China. Some of his first communications with the US were favourable.

He had a New York Times journalist as his major spokesperson there. He wrote to US dignitaries and journalists claiming that, all that the new Cuban government were doing was another version of "your American Revolution." It wasn't until the US put sanctions and a trade embargo on Cuba that Castro and the Cuban Revolution embraced socialism. Cuba did not become communist until 1962 when the sanctions forced Cuba to ally with Russia. Castro gave a characteristically long and eloquent speech about it, *Cuba is a Socialist Country*.

So what did the revolutionary government do in these first two years? Many of the initial reforms might be seen as socialist or left leaning but they were nothing like Russian or Chinese communism.

Progressive social reforms:

Racial equality for black Cubans- Cuba was a mixed society with descendants of the original indigenous populations, the Spanish and a significant population of Afro-Cubans descendants of the enslaved Africans that we have seen were brought to Cuba into well into the nineteenth-century. Castro introduced far-reaching civil rights

legislation to overcome inequalities and structural racism that left Afro-Cubans disenfranchised at the bottom of the social hierarchy. (Recent research suggests there has been a mixed record on Civil Rights).

#### Women's rights movements

The Cuban revolution was very strong on Women's rights. Women had participated in the fighting and had roles in the new government. Women's universities replaced the brothels of Havana that were closed by the revolutionary government.

#### Healthcare, hygiene and sanitation improved

Increased education and literacy rates- teachers went into the countryside on literacy campaigns

In 1960 economic reforms are put in place. Economic reforms: Nationalised land (Ministry of Misappropriated Assets) These reforms meant that the state owned farms and payed the workers. **This was the policy that turned the US against Cuba and imposed socialist economy** that threatened US private interests.

Repression of dissidents, Church, political opponents, journalists etc. There was significant repression until the mid-1960s. Che Guevarra was involved in repression of dissidents, shooting them in the back of the head. Figures suggest that between one and two-hundred dissident were killed that way. That said, compared to most revolutions Cuba was relatively peaceful. The main policy towards dissidents was that they were invited to leave and many went to Miami in the US.

#### **Slide 12:**

The revolution remains in power. Cuba is a one-party state under the communist Party of Cuba. No longer Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro succeeded his brother in April 2011 as Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba.

Changes of the late 70s and 90s and more recently are important.

Here we are interested in the impact of the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s.

#### **Slide 13:**

#### **Latin American Reactions**

So what was the impact of this effective and what turned out to be a long-enduring revolution on Latin America?

The Cuban Revolution is a massive inspiration to Latin Americans, way more so than the Mexican Revolution had been. The combination of US intervention and economic dominance, combined with this new hope that Cuba had rebelled against this and won, was a great inspiration. It inspired many Latin Americans to take up arms just as Fidel Castro had. It was a success story that needed no support from the USSR or the Chinese or the big powers. All you needed was a few hundred armed rebels, a poor peasantry, something that every Latin American country had, and the US as an enemy, which was guaranteed to left-wingers. There was a new self-determination- Our America and Theirs (see José Martí).

**Slide 14:**

By the mid-1960s, there was barely a country in Latin America that did not have a small guerrilla.

The best known were the Venezuelan and Colombian Guerrilla.

**Slide 15:**

The Colombian Guerrilla, eventually known as the FARC, had de facto control of vast swathes of Colombia for much of the late twentieth-century and there was a long civil conflict there between the guerrilla and the government forces and paramilitaries. Here you see Camilo Torres the priest, socialist and member of the ELN reaching out to peasant communities.

**Slide 15:**

Even in Mexico, which was a relatively peaceful regime at the time, there was a series of guerrilla movements and an attempted guerrilla attack on Ciudad Madera. Here you see the casualties of the failed attack.

**Slide 16:**

Political leaders, like the Mexican President Luis Echeverría, or the Chilean President Salvador Allende, who came to power in 1970 were keen to support or, in Echeverría's case, be seen to support Castro's regime to prove their revolutionary credentials. [ Echeverría (1970-1976), wanted to appease increasingly radicalised students, peasants and rural and urban guerrilla by appearing to go back to the original aims of the Mexican Revolution,]

**Slide 17:**

There were also broader effects. Latin American authors or the young generation were all inspired by the Cuban revolution to write about authentically Latin American popular culture and write historical novels that openly opposed US imperialism. The most famous of these authors was by the Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez. His novel 100 Years of Solitude makes direct reference historical events related to US intervention in Colombia and a Massacre of United Fruit. It's worth reading if you are interested in the relationship between History and literature. This Boom generation took Latin American literature global and translated editions of boom generation and the genre magical realism became very popular in the late twentieth century.

By the late 1960s-early 1970s there was a reaction against Fidel Castro when repression became apparent. However, still to this day, even among the centrists of Latin America, there is an enormous amount of respect for what Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolutionary government managed to do. Not only overturning a military regime but also holding out against repeated attacks from the US and attempts to end the revolutionary regime.

**Slide 18:****[US Reactions**

**Cold War and fear of spread of Communism – Cuba is 90 miles from Florida coast**



## **Economic and political sanctions**

### **Florida becomes hub of Cuban refugees**

### **U.S. training of Cuban paramilitaries**

### **Bay of Pigs]**

#### Assassination Plots

Cuba took up arms, overthrew its dictator and began to introduce major land reform. This was frightening for a US government that is being vigilant about the spread of communism in Latin America, a region that US foreign policy had actively intervened with for years. Cuba was even more of a concern if you believed, as the US government did, in the domino theory, whereby if one country turns communist neighbouring countries will follow suit.

So what action did the US take to allay these concerns?:

Firstly, in 1961 the US imposed economic and political sanctions on Cuba and forced other countries in the Americas to follow suit so that diplomatic ties and trade between Cuba and those countries would be cut. That is why Cuba had to start trading and making alliances with the communist bloc, particularly the USSR. By the 1960s, Cuba was exchanging sugar for oil with the USSR.

#### **Slide 19:**

Then there was the more interventionist policy, by which the US government began to arm and train the Cuban exiles in Florida. Florida had become the hub of Cuban exiles who had been invited to leave. These paramilitaries boarded boats in order to invade Cuba and were accompanied by US army planes. However they were met by a large citizen army and defeated in the Bay of Pigs. So, not only had Castro and his government overthrown a dictator but they had now seen off a US attack. You can understand why the Cuban revolutionary regime was an inspiration to many Latin Americans.

#### **Slide 20:**

The Bay of Pigs was followed by a string of CIA assassination plots, sometimes in collaboration with exiled members of the Cuban mafia whose hotels, clubs and brothels had been closed by the regime. These ill-fated assassination attempts all failed.

[We'll be thinking about the influence of the Cuban Revolution in the coming weeks as we analyse Cold War politics in Latin America. We'll think about whether the conflicts of the Cold War in the region were the result of Proxy Wars between the Eastern and Western bloc, whether they were civil wars or whether they were more about US imperialism. We'll consider the Cuban Revolution and Cuban foreign policy of exporting the revolution and whether this in particular meant that it was inappropriate to think about the conflict as Proxy Wars.]

Part II:

### Slide 23: The second influential idea is Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology has a revolutionary praxis but it falls short of Marxism.

However, because the aims of Liberation Theology, empowering the poor was similar to those of the left-wing, Marxist inspired guerrilla this meant a) collaborations between guerrilla/ left-wing social movements and members of the liberation theology who were priests but also lay Catholics. b) Opposition from the traditional conservative Church and political actors and governments on the right.

#### What is Liberation Theology?

Theological reaction to poverty and marginalisation in Latin America.

Growing concern about poverty, inequality and development.

Also, international solidarity. The global context is decolonization, **liberation** movements, feminism, black power etc. **Liberation** Theology was not unique to Latin America; the movement had followers in the Soviet Union. Many Catholics in a number of African countries, in particular South Africa, for example, were involved in movements associated with Liberation Theology. Bishops from across the Global South, or the Third World as the guerilla and Liberation Theologians would have said, travelled to the episcopal and ecumenical conferences in Latin America in the 1970s. [There were also theologians of liberation in other Christian traditions like the Methodist theologian James H. Cone from the US who wrote *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969). Also eg. Dalit Theology in India, also Philippines, Palestine etc.]

Latin American Liberation Theology was particularly influential. However, not all priests and Bishops or lay Catholics in Latin America were part of the movement, there was also a conservative tradition. As with politics, the Catholic Church was split between left and right.

Liberation Theologians were not the only Christian religious groups to be involved in politics Members of other Churches. Lutherans and Evangelicals did too. Not all Latin Americans were Christians of course, especially since late nineteenth and early twentieth century migrations from Central Europe, the Lebanon, Japan and China, for example, there were also members of Jewish, Muslim and a number of other faith communities. However, in the 1960s and 1970s the majority of Latin Americans were Catholics (albeit, with a broad range of 'syncretic' traditions). And the majority of Latin Americans were poor Liberation Theology in particular had a significant impact in the 1960s and 1970s and it's legacies can be seen today in terms of social movement organizing, international solidarity and the democratization of the Church. That is what I will demonstrate here.

- Hangs on question: How can one preach a gospel of love and hope in a context of poverty and suffering?

Liberation Theologians were concerned with *taking action* to address issues inequality, poverty, low literacy levels and the unfair distribution of land or **structural inequalities**.

The ideas were best formulated by the Peruvian Dominican Priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez in the influential text, *Teología de la Liberación* (1971) - You'll be reading his work in the seminars and you will see how he continued to adapt his ideas to changing contexts.

- Brings together social analysis with Christian belief.

The pastoral methods and ministry look back to the early church or the 'primitive church', the gospels and the teachings of Christ. In Latin America Liberation Theologians also looked at the experience of Bartolomé de las Casas. They thought that his critique of the *encomienda* and the cruelty of the early colonial enterprise, made him a defender of indigenous groups and this placed him in the tradition of liberation and walking with the poor. The movement has received some criticism for this for it's lack of critique for the role of the Church in Colonialism.

Liberation Theologians, Bishops and Priests and lay Catholics read contemporary sociology that a) criticized development economics and developmentalism and b) looked back at the long history of colonialism in the region in order analyse contemporary issues of structural injustice.

### Slide 23 Context

Originally a concern of the Catholic Church in Rome

Liberation theology was part of a 'broad effort to rethink the meaning of religious experience and the role the Catholic church should play in society and politics.' (Levine)

- Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) – 1962-1965

What was discussed at the Second Vatican Council?

- Concern with secularism among labour movement
- Recognition of importance of the poor to the Catholic Church

Between 1961 and 1965 a series of encyclicals (papal letters sent to all the Bishops in the Catholic Church) promoting democracy, human rights and religious liberty as ideals to be supported by the Church. Vatican II also raised concerns about underdevelopment and social inequality and presented the Catholic church as the 'Church of the Poor.' [After Vatican II, Catholic social teaching became rights-based, combining both civil and political and social rights.]

- Particularly relevant to Latin Americans – where levels of poverty and inequality were high and where the majority of the population were practicing Catholics

One of the responses or strategies in the Catholic Church in Latin America to establish gatherings councils and conferences so that Bishops from across the region and beyond could meet to discuss the ideas. An example is the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM). The of the meetings was was in Medellín in Colombia in 1968. The new pastoral practice that emerged from the CELAM conference in Medellín outlined a 'preferential option for the poor' involving 'consciousness-raising evangelization'. It encouraged priests and Catholics to engage in social analysis in order understand the contemporary situation and overcome issues of social injustice and inequality.

The importance of **walking with the poor. Not speaking for them.**

**Slide 24: Gustavo Gutierrez**

- **Born Peru, 1928. Of Quechua and Spanish descent. Direct experience of poverty**
- **Dominican priest**
- **Vocation to work with the poor of Lima**
- **Major work: *A Theology of Liberation.***

The most influential text of the movement at the time, *A Theology of Liberation*, which laid out these ideas, was written by Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian Dominican priest of Quechua and Spanish descent with direct experience of poverty. He had vocation to work with the poor in the Peruvian capital Lima.

This was not the only text, but the most influential. Another theologian writing at the time, was Leonardo Boff from Brazil, which had an active movement and an important tradition of Liberation Theology.

Since in many countries like Peru and Mexico, for example, the poorest communities were indigenous communities, or in Brazil, Peru and Colombia Afro-Latin Americans, the work of the Liberation Theology movement often meant reaching out to these groups.

**Slide 25 Liberation theology**

Social Catholicism and the Catholic Church' concern with the poor was not new. Liberation Theologians' approach to social justice was a much more radical, revolutionary approach than that of earlier social Catholics. It was also less paternalistic as it aimed to empower the poor to be 'agents in their own evangelization'.

In Liberation Theology, the poor were important, but not as objects of charity, living a good moral life now and hoping for a better life in the next world. Earlier social Catholics would have seen it as their role to moralise and discipline the faithful. Living a virtuous life helped you cope with poverty and accept your lot. In Liberation Theology 'The idea the poor inheriting the earth took on more immediate and activist tones, with concrete efforts to enhance the role of poor people as legitimate participants in religion, society and politics.'

To summarise, Liberation Theology consisted of

an interpretation of Christian faith out of the suffering and hope of the poor,

a critique of society and of the ideologies sustaining it, and

a critique of the activity of the church and of Christians from the angle of the poor.

As Gustavo Gutiérrez argued, 'It is then to the oppressed that the church should address itself, not to the oppressors.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 2001.

## **This was a new theology based on community action.**

### **What did this mean in practice?**

Along with the meetings of Bishops and Church leaders, It involved the development of a grassroots strategy (or pastoral method) to put the new ideas into practice, specifically, through Ecclesial Base Communities (*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* or CEBs)

### **Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs).**

A process of consciousness-raising in regular meetings of lay Catholics. Participants were invited to '*ver, pensar, actuar*' (observe, reflect, act). They would reflect on their social reality and develop strategies to overcome inequalities and injustice.

In a typical CEB meeting, members would first identify a current social concern, then discuss and reflect on regional, national and international perspectives and responsibilities in relation to the issue. This would be followed by a reading of relevant Bible extracts and a reflection on possible actions to be taken to overcome the issue. Actions included assigning roles to particular individuals or arranging a survey of a broader sample of members of the community. Similar meetings were held throughout the region. In Peru, Gutierrez organised *Jornadas de Reflexión* (Theological Reflection Workshops)

Literacy teaching, but also strategic and organisational literacy was high on the agenda. They were influenced by the ideas about literacy teaching that the, now famous, Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, father of critical pedagogy, laid out in *Education for the Oppressed* and the practice of literacy education through cultural circles. The influential concept of **knowing as a political act**.

### **What was the impact of these forms of social organising?**

CEBs and their strategies had a direct impact on the emergence of a number of organisations that defended rights and organised in favour of social justice.

In taking this radical approach, liberation theologians changed the relationship between the church and the state. Rather than supporting the state, liberation theologians and lay Catholics actively engaged with communities at a grassroots level and became involved in the development of a range of civil society organisations making claims for rights against the state.

### **What about the impact and legacy of liberation theology?**

These organisational strategies are credited with having a direct impact on the development of New Social Movements that, among other things, helped fight for social justice and oppose right wing dictatorships. You'll be hearing more about New Social Movements in the coming weeks.

From the 1970s some Liberation Theologians and lay Catholics...

**Slide 26:**

...became directly involved in revolutionary action (eg. Camilo Torres)  
 A Colombian priest and member of the ELN. Revolutionary Marxism and Catholicism. By far not all priests and Liberation Theologians were Marxists.

**Slide 27: Oscar Romero El Salvador**

...became involved in opposing authoritarian military regimes and dictatorships and died for it or were martyred in the process of defending the rights of the poor.

- **Appointed Archbishop 1977**
- **Assassinated 1980- by a right wing paramilitary group.**

On the mural memorialising his life and work here you see him quoted.  
 'The structures of social injustice are the cause of the slow death of our poor.' Oscar Romero.

**Slide 28:** Eg. Ernesto Cardinal on the Revolutionary Junta in Nicaragua

- **Poet, priest and Member of the Nicaraguan Revolutionary Government (1979-1990)**

Here (in the beret) with Sergio Méndez Arceo the 'Red Bishop', or former Bishop, of Cuernavaca in Mexico who established a solidarity movement to support Central Americans at the height of the Civil Conflict there. Picture from the early 1990s after the end of the revolution.

**Slide 29: Indigenous Pastoral**

I mentioned the importance of indigenous communities, in Mexico the movement.

Liberation Theologians also defended the indigenous rights to Land eg. Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of Chiapas and others in Mexico. Samuel Ruiz established the first large scale Indigenous Congress in 1974 with representatives from communities across the region, some religious groups and some Marxist groups.

In Mexico Liberation theologians, lay Catholic groups and pastoral agents discussed foregrounded the importance of culture and many learnt indigenous languages in order to understand indigenous culture and spirituality and to officiate in indigenous languages. They translated the Bible into indigenous languages and set up CEBs and community groups to discuss the relevance of scripture to issues of displacement, access to land and resources and preservation of indigenous culture and practices. This method depended on the importance **of 'inculturation' and 'accompaniment' meaning walking with the poor and disenfranchised rather than leading and speaking for them.**

Also supported the political causes of indigenous people, including state recognition of difference and their right to autonomy in cultural, political, social and legal practices. They became directly involved in establishing agrarian cooperatives, working with autonomous communities, education, including bilingual schools.

Here is one of the legacies of the indigenous pastoral where so you are beginning to see how these ideas are still relevant today.

This is a bilingual school in Juchitán in Oaxaca, Mexico A translation into Ikoote language. Mural in memory of a Liberation Theologian from the US who had worked with the community.

### **Slide 29:**

A lot has been written about Liberation Theology Peru, Brazil, Uruguay and Central America. Particularly about the opposition to authoritarianism of authoritarian regimes in Brazil, Argentina and Chile and civil conflicts in Central America. Less about Mexico, where in the 1960s and 70s nonetheless the urban and rural guerrilla were influenced by Liberation Theology and involved in Base Communities and the work of Catholics associated with base communities.

Eg. Ignacio Arturo Salas and the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre, Mexico. Marxist-Leninist Guerrilla named after the failed Ciudad Madera Barracks Attack

OR

### **Slide 30**

Eg. Mario Menéndez

Eg. Journalist and the first Mexican to interview Fidel Castro

As the number of followers of Liberation Theology grew, conservative elements of the national churches across Latin America and the Vatican felt increasingly threatened by the movement's connections to radical movements and leftist tendencies. There was concern that social unrest and consciousness raising would weaken the power and influence of the Church. The only clear connection between Marxism and liberation theology is a focus on empowering the poor and class struggle. However, words like revolution, socialism, consciousness-raising linked liberation theology with the controversial doctrine of Marxism. Supporters of traditional theology felt that the movement's promotion of a "people's church" could undermine Catholic institutions and weaken the authority of Catholic teachings

By the late 1980s the Catholic Church in Rome was were avoiding appointing Bishops associated with Liberation Theology. Liberation Theologians were accused of being communists by governments and other, more conservative elements of the Church. 1990s Liberation Theologians no longer held prominent positions but the lay Catholic organisation and the influence on the forms of social organising remain. The ideas and influences associated with liberation theologians have changed over time. Started more to do with class then maybe indigenous rights, some turned away from social issues to the immediate emergency of finding disappeared and getting justice for disappeared in the authoritarian regimes or displaced communities in civil conflicts. Today, due to the engagement with indigenous communities and land, environmental justice and the Rights of Mother Earth is high on the agenda (see Leonardo Boff).

**Slide 31 Legacy:**

The Current Pope, Pope Francis, Jorge Mario Bergoglio is from Argentina. The first from the Western Hemisphere and Latin America. [Leader of the Jesuits in Argentina during the Dirty War in the 1970s. The first from the Western Hemisphere and Latin America. It's still unclear whether he was an opponent of the Argentine military regime or more in line with the more conservative elements of the Church] You can see the influence of Latin American social processes in his work in the form of:

**Slide 31 Legacy:**

Awareness of role of Global South in Catholic Church.  
 Appointment of Global South Cardinals, including first Caribbean Cardinal.  
 Emphasizes aspects of Liberation Theology and 'preferential option for the poor' - rejection of Papal trappings, emphasis on Church's duty to poor.

**Slide 32:** A ritual demonstration of solidarity and walking with the poor.

In the seminar, you'll be comparing the ideas of Castro and Gutierrez to think about the influence of Latin American style Marxism and Liberation Theology.

**Sources and further reading:**

Régis Debray. *Revolution in the Revolution?: Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in the Revolution*. London: Penguin, 1968.

Leonardo Boff, "The Ethic of Care", in Peter Blaze Corcoran, et al. (eds.) *Voice for Earth : American Writers Respond to the Earth Charter*, University of Georgia Press, 2008.

Paulo Freire. *Pedgogy of the Oppressed*. Bloomsbury, 2018 (50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition).

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*. SCM, 2001.

*Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution of the Catholic Church in the Modern World*, 1965 at

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) [accessed 30 December 2019]

Andrew Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire and the Cold War Politics of Literacy*. UNC Press, 2010.