

## Medellín Is “Fantastic”: Drafts of the 1969 Rockefeller Report on the Catholic Church

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*Since the 1970s, both foreign and U.S. opponents of U.S.-Central America policy have cited the 1969 Rockefeller Report on the Americas: The Official Report of a United States Presidential Mission for the Western Hemisphere as the beginning of U.S. government efforts to eradicate liberation theology. During the 1980s, progressive Catholic press accounts in the United States and abroad emphasized the similarities between the Report and President Ronald Reagan’s approach to Central America. But, critics’ charges are misplaced. The Report supported the Church’s leftward turn, and Nelson Rockefeller was the reason. Early report drafts and Rockefeller’s comments reveal that he enthusiastically welcomed the Medellín documents. It was family planning that preoccupied Rockefeller, not communist subversion.*

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**I**n a January 1989 pastoral letter, Archbishop Próspero Penados del Barrio of Guatemala railed against Protestants’ growing influence in this Central American nation. From 1969 to 1989, Guatemala’s Protestants increased from 2 percent to approximately 33 percent of the population, the most dramatic increase in Latin America. The archbishop blamed the United States for this growth.<sup>1</sup> As he alleged, “The diffusion of Protestantism in Guatemala is more part of an economic and political strategy” of U.S. busi-

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1. Susan Benech, “Religions Slugging It Out to Win over Guatemalans: Growing Protestant Conversions Threaten Country’s Catholic Majority,” *St. Petersburg Times*, December 18, 1989, 1A.

ness and political interests, “than of an authentic religious interest.” To Penados, the U.S. desire to promote Protestant conversion was nothing new. In 1969, Penados noted, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller recommended that President Richard Nixon support Protestant churches’ attempts to counter the Catholic Church’s social justice efforts in Latin America.<sup>2</sup> Nixon asked Rockefeller to consult with Latin Americans to assess U.S.-Latin America policy and to inform its future development. As part of this project, Rockefeller evaluated the Alliance for Progress, the U.S. aid program to Latin America initiated by President John F. Kennedy in 1961. Based on visits to twenty countries, Rockefeller’s findings were publicly released in 1969 as the *Rockefeller Report on the Americas: The Official Report of a United States Presidential Mission for the Western Hemisphere (Report)*.<sup>3</sup>

Penados was not alone in making these accusations. In the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. and Latin American Catholics who opposed U.S. policy toward Central America cited the *Report* as the beginning of U.S. government efforts to eradicate progressive trends in the Catholic Church. In a 1978 interview, Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo of Cuernavaca argued that U.S. analysts seemed “very preoccupied with the paths the church is taking.” As his first example, he cited the Rockefeller *Report*’s discussion of the 1968 Medellín conference,<sup>4</sup> at which the Latin American bishops concluded that both internal and external structures of society oppressed the majority of Latin Americans through “institutionalized violence.”<sup>5</sup> In 1980, journalist Penny Lernoux argued that Rockefeller “warned the U.S. business community of the anti-imperialist nature of the Medellín documents.” She also contended that the *Report*’s observation that the Catholic Church was “vulnerable to subversive penetration” provided the basis for 1970s U.S. policy toward the Church in Latin America.<sup>6</sup>

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2. Colum Lynch, “Catholics, Evangelicals Tangle amid Latin Turmoil,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 10, 1989, Z1. Before the *Report*, at the First Inter-American Episcopal Conference in 1959, Brazil’s Bishop Agnelo Rossi contended that Protestantism was “an instrument in disguise of the political imperialism of the U.S.,” and he urged action to combat its growth. James F. Garneau, “The First Inter-American Episcopal Conference, November 2–4, 1959: Canada and the United States Called to the Rescue of Latin America,” *The Catholic Historical Review*, 87 (2001), 662–87.

3. Nelson A. Rockefeller, *Rockefeller Report on the Americas: The Official Report of a United States Presidential Mission for the Western Hemisphere* (Chicago, 1969), pp. 5, 8.

4. Dow Kirkpatrick, “False Language About Medellín,” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 8, 1978, 15.

5. Latin American Episcopal Conference, “Statement on Peace,” Medellín Conference Documents, September 6, 1968.

6. Penny Lernoux, *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* (Garden City, NY, 1980), pp. 38, 58–59.

In the subsequent decade, progressive Catholic press accounts in the United States and abroad extended Lernoux's argument by emphasizing the similarities between the *Report* and President Ronald Reagan's approach to Central America.<sup>7</sup> Critics linked the Rockefeller *Report* to the Santa Fe document in which presidential candidate Reagan's advisers asserted that "Marxist-Leninist forces have utilized the church as a political weapon against private property and productive capitalism by infiltrating the religious community with ideas that are less Christian than Communist."<sup>8</sup> These allegations regarding the Rockefeller *Report* have continued into the twenty-first century.<sup>9</sup>

The charges exist within academia as well.<sup>10</sup> Some scholars have argued that the Rockefeller *Report* advocated the use of conservative religious groups to stamp out progressive Catholicism. As one academic has alleged, the *Report* noted that "the Catholic church has ceased to be an ally in whom the U.S. can have confidence" and therefore recommended that the U.S. government counter the growth of liberation theology through "an extensive campaign with the aim of propagating Protestant churches and conservative sects in Latin America."<sup>11</sup> Neither passage exists in the *Report*, as at least one scholar has noted.<sup>12</sup>

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7. See Gary MacEoin, "Nicaragua: A Church Divided," *America*, November 10, 1984, 294–99; Patricia Hynds, "The Ideological Struggle Within the Catholic Church in Nicaragua," *Revista Envío* (Managua), September 6, 1982, <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3097>, accessed February 3, 2011.

8. Lewis A. Tambs, *A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties* (Washington, DC, 1980), p. 20.

9. Juan Hernández Pico, "The Religious Question and the Myth of the Army," *Revista Envío*, December 2002, <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/1627>, accessed February 3, 2011; Héctor Sevillano, "Mi Major Amigo, Gustavo Gutiérrez," *El Ciervo* (Barcelona), July–August 2003, p. 36.

10. See Miguel Concha Malo, "Los Caminos de la Iglesia en América Latina," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 43 (1981), 2069–83, here 2075; Marie Augusta Neal, "Women Religious: Twenty-Three Years after Vatican Council II," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 10, nos. 1–2, (1991–92), 113–18, here 116; Jean-Pierre Bastian, "The Metamorphosis of Latin American Protestant Groups: A Sociohistorical Perspective," *Latin American Research Review*, 28, no. 2 (1993), 33–61, here 52.

11. Jeffrey Marishane, "Prayer, Profit and Power: US Religious Right and Foreign Policy," in "Fundamentalism in Africa: Religion and Politics," spec. issue, *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 52, (1991), 73–86, here 75. See also Rafael Aguirre, "El Salvador, Encrucijada Histórica y Lugar Teológico," *El Ciervo*, March 1988, 27–28, here 28.

12. David M. Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley, 1990), p. 34.

Although the *Report* did state that the Church was “vulnerable to subversive penetration,” it did not comment on potential implications for U.S. policy. Observers of the *Report* have combined this statement, Rockefeller’s footnote on the Medellín conference, and subsequent U.S. government opposition to liberation theology together with Rockefeller’s push for military aid to all Latin American governments, to conclude that the Rockefeller *Report* was the source. The opposite was true.

Contrary to the claims of many, the *Report* adopted a sympathetic, even supportive, position regarding the Catholic Church’s turn to the left. Based on information learned by the mission team, the final report could have stressed radical trends in the Church and warned of their implications for U.S. policy, but it did not. Rockefeller was the reason. He was concerned about the Catholic Church, but not because he feared liberation theology or because he worried that the U.S. government would lose the Church as a cold war ally, as critics charge. Early drafts of the report and Rockefeller’s comments about the draft report reveal that he enthusiastically welcomed the Medellín documents. Population growth preoccupied Rockefeller, not communist subversion. He focused on the Church’s opposition to artificial methods of birth control because exploding population threatened to derail the Alliance for Progress. Although Kennedy avoided what he regarded as a “politically and medically impractical and morally dubious” issue, Latin America’s population growth at 2.9 percent annually was the world’s fastest.<sup>13</sup> Rockefeller’s final report reflected his desire not to lose the Church’s quiet support for family planning that many Latin Americans said existed. It was the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), not the Rockefeller *Report*, which warned of leftist trends among Catholics and their potential ramifications for U.S. policy.

This article reveals Rockefeller’s decision to omit discussion about subversion in the Church by explaining (1) why President Nixon asked Rockefeller to study the issue, (2) the *Report*’s conclusions about the Church, and (3) why the *Report* said so little about subversion, given Nixon’s request. It is argued here that a reexamination of the Rockefeller *Report* provides a more nuanced view of U.S.-Latin America relations in two ways. First, Rockefeller’s support for leftist trends in the Church questions the notion that the U.S. government always viewed liberation theology as a challenge to U.S. influence in Latin America. Rockefeller’s sup-

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13. Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999), pp. 162–63.

port for liberation theology bucked the trend among Latin American military governments and U.S. support for them. Second, the misunderstanding of the *Report's* treatment of the Church underscores the importance of intra-Catholic conflict in U.S.-Latin America relations. Progressive Catholics argued that the *Report* revealed the U.S. government's desire to squelch liberation theology, but they failed to acknowledge that their fellow Catholics opposed liberation theology without any nudging from the U.S. government.<sup>14</sup> In this way, this article heeds Eric Zolov's call for historians to continue moving beyond the rigid categories of right and left in 1960s Latin America in which the left was seen as representing the popular will, whereas the right was "influenced if not directly shaped by Washington and the (ever-present) bogey-man, the CIA."<sup>15</sup> For progressive Catholics, the *Report* provided an easy way to blame the U.S. government, rather than to examine the divisions among Catholics caused by liberation theology.

Rockefeller examined subversive trends in the Catholic Church because President Nixon asked him to do so. A meeting with Colombian President Carlos Lleras Restrepo prompted Nixon's demand. In his first meeting with a Latin American head of state in June 1969, Nixon invited Lleras to raise topics. Lleras discussed trade, arms, and radical movements in Latin America, among other issues. As he explained, Latin America faced "two radical trends": communism and "revolutionary priests and even bishops." Both groups linked ideas about social change to anti-U.S. views, namely charges of U.S. imperialism. Lleras warned that radical priests posed a potential danger because their "simple, unsophisticated" ideas about economics could easily be conveyed to the masses.<sup>16</sup>

In elaborating on his remarks the next day, Lleras explained that subversive clergy, some of whom were Americans, held anti-U.S. views. Both clergy and Marxists spoke of "imperialism" and "capitalist exploitation." Colombia's foreign minister added that some clergy had adopted violent, revolutionary means, and Lleras noted that some who did so were foreign missionaries—namely Maryknoll priests, the oldest U.S. missionary order.

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14. For a discussion of intra-Catholic debates over liberation theology, see Penny Lernoux, *People of God: The Struggle for World Catholicism* (New York, 1989).

15. Eric Zolov, "Introduction: Latin America in the Global Sixties," *The Americas*, 70 (2014), 349–62, here 358–59.

16. Memorandum of Meeting, June 12, 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*. Vol. E-10: *American Republics, 1969–1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d7>, accessed December 5, 2011.

The Colombian president concluded that communist infiltration might not exist, but a “convergence of discontent, slowness in reform and desire to improve things which led the churchmen to simplistic thinking and to sympathy with the simplistic scapegoats the extremists suggested.”<sup>17</sup>

Lleras’s decision to mention one order, which was U.S.-based, revealed his attempt to show how U.S. clergy fostered instability and perhaps the notoriety of the Melville incident among Latin Americans. In 1967 Maryknoll expelled two priests, brothers Thomas and Arthur Melville, and Sister Marjorie Bradford from Guatemala for involving themselves and others “in plans for starting an armed revolution” in the country.<sup>18</sup> The episode drew international attention to Maryknoll, as U.S., Mexican, and Guatemalan newspapers covered the incident.<sup>19</sup> The Guatemalan secret police conducted surveillance of Maryknollers, and the government linked the order to revolutionary violence.<sup>20</sup>

Colombian representatives pointed to U.S. Maryknollers, but they did not mention how one of their own, Camilo Torres, joined the guerrillas. Torres, from an upper-class family, aimed to create a mass organization to overthrow the government. His efforts led to conflict with his country’s church hierarchy, the most conservative in Latin America. Torres left the priesthood rather than face excommunication. Several months later, facing assassination threats, he joined the National Liberation Army. Torres concluded it was better to die in armed struggle than at the hands of an

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17. Memorandum of Meeting, June 13, 1969, *FRUS*, Vol. E-10: *American Republics, 1969-1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d154>, accessed December 5, 2011.

18. Maryknoll, NY, Maryknoll Mission Archives (hereafter Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Archives), Report, John Breen, Regional Superior, to Reverend John J. McCormack, Superior General, 1969, Folder 1, Box 7. There is no typed date, but “9 enero 1969” is handwritten, indicating a mistake or that Breen wrote the report years after the episode.

19. See “3 in Maryknoll Order Suspended for Aiding Guatemala Guerrillas,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 1968, A17; George Dugan, “Maryknoll Suspends 2 Priests As Guatemala Guerrilla Aides,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1968, 15; “Two Priests Are Silenced by Superior,” *Baltimore Sun*, January 19, 1968, A3; “Suspend US Priests Linked to Guerrillas,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 19, 1968, 2; Editorial, “Why the Alliance Falsters,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1968, 28; Arnold R. Isaacs, “Guatemala Calls a State of Siege,” *Baltimore Sun*, March 19, 1968, A1. For a discussion of Mexican and Guatemalan press coverage, see Penny Lernoux, Arthur Jones, and Robert Ellsberg, *Hearts on Fire: The Story of the Maryknoll Sisters* (Maryknoll, NY, 1993), p. 158; Edward Tracy Brett, *The U.S. Catholic Press on Central America: From Cold War Anticommunism to Social Justice* (Notre Dame, 2003), pp. 50-57; Report, Breen to McCormack, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Archives.

20. Lernoux, Jones, and Ellsberg, *Hearts on Fire*, p. 158.

unknown assassin. He died in his first fight with the guerrillas in 1966.<sup>21</sup> Lleras may have emphasized Maryknollers to grab Nixon's attention and to solicit U.S. assistance. Nixon was likely more open to Lleras's charges of radicalism within the clergy given the involvement of U.S. priests and nuns in anti-Vietnam War protests.<sup>22</sup>

Lleras's charges led Nixon to order reports on the Catholic Church in Latin America from the CIA, State Department, and Rockefeller. At the administration's first National Security meeting on Latin America, Nixon raised his concern that the Catholic Church was no longer a force for stability in the region. He then asked the CIA to study the issue.<sup>23</sup> The president wanted a country-by-country analysis of the Church's role, its leaders, and current trends, as well as an assessment of both foreign clergy and non-Catholic missionaries.<sup>24</sup> Nixon called on the State Department to analyze what led some Catholics "to be radical." Finally, the president requested that Rockefeller investigate the Church's role in Latin America as part of his evaluation of the Alliance for Progress.<sup>25</sup> At that point, the Rockefeller mission had already begun its work.

Likely heeding Nixon's request, Rockefeller publicly announced the addition of James Noel to the mission four days after Nixon's meeting with Lleras. Director of Catholic Relief Services for Central America and the Caribbean, Noel lived in Mexico. He joined the mission after the team had

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21. Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, p. 29; Rick Edwards, "Religion in the Revolution? A Look at Golconda," North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) *Report on the Americas*, February 1970, p. 1.

22. Less than six months after the Melville incident, Tom Melville and Marjorie Bradford, who married after leaving Maryknoll, were part of the "Catonsville Nine." They burned 378 draft files using homemade napalm outside a Maryland draft board. Although often characterized as an anti-Vietnam war protest led by priests Philip and Daniel Berrigan, the group's members sought a broader message. The Melvilles said they were protesting "U.S. military interference in Guatemala." Murray Polner and Jim O'Grady, *Disarmed & Dangerous: The Radical Life and Times of Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Brothers in Religious Faith and Civil Disobedience* (New York, 1997), p. 198; Myra MacPherson, "The Thomas Melvilles: Church Dissenters," *Washington Post*, September 26, 1968, E1.

23. Editorial Note, Document 6, *FRUS*, Vol. E-10: *American Republics, 1969-1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d6>, accessed December 5, 2011.

24. National Security Study Memorandum 68, July 12, 1969, *FRUS*, Vol. E-10: *American Republics, 1969-1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d13>, accessed December 5, 2011.

25. Memorandum of Meeting, State Visit of President Lleras, June 12, 1969, *FRUS*, Vol. E-10: *American Republics, 1969-1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d150>, accessed December 5, 2011.

taken two of its four trips to Latin America. Mission files’ description of Noel suggest that he did not focus exclusively on the Catholic Church. Although Noel met with religious and philanthropic leaders in Brazil, Argentina, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic, files characterize his role in broader terms: “Catholic Church Affairs advisor,” “Social welfare advisor,” and “cultural advisor.”<sup>26</sup>

In submitting their reports in fall 1969, the CIA, State Department, and Rockefeller mission reached different conclusions about the Catholic Church’s role and its potential impact for the United States. The CIA was most concerned about the Church. In “conclusions,” the declassified four-page excerpt of its report, the CIA warned that if Catholics turned to revolutionary means, they might direct their activities against the United States. The agency argued that progressives’ influence was “irreversible,” although conservative forces still held power both in influence and numbers. The CIA cautioned that, if frustrated with their inability to bring about societal change, progressives and “radical churchmen” might turn to “increasingly disruptive” means. The agency argued that these changes held implications for the United States because progressives blamed “foreign domination” for impeding economic development in Latin America. According to the CIA, progressives would likely view the United States as the “principal scapegoat” in this regard.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas the CIA warned of “radical churchmen” turning to “increasingly disruptive means,” the State Department report, submitted under contract by the RAND Corporation, did not believe this was the future. Instead, examples such as Colombian Camilo Torres and Maryknollers the Melvilles were outliers who demonstrated “the unrest within the Church and the limits of its political radicalization.”<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the CIA’s largely classified report, in eighty-one published pages, the RAND report

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26. Sleepy Hollow, NY, Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center (NAR Papers), Governor Rockefeller’s Mission for the President: Dominican Republic, Mr. Noel’s Schedule; Rockefeller Mission, Letters of Appreciation—Sao Paulo, Names and Addresses of Persons who Met with Catholic Church Affairs Advisor—Mr. James Noel, Jr.; Social Welfare, Advisor: James Noel, Jr.; Schedule for Cultural Advisor Mr. James Noel, Folder 964, Box 120, Series O, RG 4, Nelson A. Rockefeller, Gubernatorial.

27. Intelligence Memorandum 2609/69, October 9, 1969, *FRUS*, Vol. E-10: *American Republics, 1969–1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d1>, accessed December 5, 2011.

28. Luigi Einuadi, Richard Maulin, Alfred Stepan, and Michael Fleet, *Latin American Institutional Development: The Changing Catholic Church* (Santa Monica, 1969), p. 73.



downplayed radical trends and placed Catholic divisions in an historical and worldwide context.

The authors of the RAND report portrayed the Catholic Church as experiencing a “crisis of relevance.” The Church struggled to balance its encouragement of social change with its desire to maintain its “ideological and institutional coherence.” As the authors explained, this debate occurred among Catholics worldwide. In Latin America, it began with the independence movements a century earlier, yet the Church was “probably” experiencing “greater ferment” than at any time in its history. Catholics divided over whether the Church was primarily an institution or a movement responsible for advocating for a “just and good society.”<sup>29</sup>

Rather than singling out the United States, the RAND report argued that anti-U.S. sentiment grew out of Catholic teaching and Latin America’s colonial past. The RAND authors explained that Catholics were more receptive to anti-U.S. views because historically, the Church criticized economic capitalism and liberal democracy. Additionally, Catholics in Latin America were wary of “foreign” influence on the Church. Many associated foreign clergy with colonial and neo-colonial practices. In fact, some Latin Americans considered U.S. church members in Latin America to be “unwitting agents of U.S imperialism” and part of the U.S. Church’s attempt to impose its brand of Catholicism.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps even more sympathetic than the RAND report, the publicly released Rockefeller *Report* characterized revolutionary change as a positive movement led by the institutional Church. The *Report* noted that the Catholic Church and the military—two pillars of the status quo—were “moving rapidly to the forefront as forces for social, economic, and political change.” Associated with the colonial government since the conquest and later with the powerful of society, the Catholic Church was now “more responsive to the popular will.” The *Report* concluded that the Church was “a force dedicated to change—revolutionary change if necessary” and cited the Latin American bishops’ statement at Medellín. In describing the Church’s changed outlook, the *Report* stressed the Church’s good intentions, but warned that naiveté made it “vulnerable to subversive penetration.”<sup>31</sup>

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29. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3, 31, 48.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 69.

31. Rockefeller, *Rockefeller Report on the Americas*, p. 31.

Although critics have used these passages to argue that the Rockefeller *Report* marked the beginning of the U.S. government’s campaign against leftist trends in the Church, the final report said surprisingly little about the Church, downplayed the radical trends about which Lleras warned Nixon, and failed to explicitly mention any repercussions for the United States. Rockefeller’s pre-travel meetings with outside advisers, his enthusiasm for the Medellín documents, and his concern with population growth explain why.

Before Rockefeller embarked on his trips to Latin America, outside mission advisers told him that the United States should see the Catholic Church as a source of welcome change and that Catholic forces on the right posed a greater problem for the United States. During a discussion on political questions, former senator, U.S. ambassador, and vice-presidential candidate Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. argued that communism in Latin America did not present a threat. Lodge contended that the United States should choose between supporting stability or change in the region. He advocated that the United States back “vehicles of change,” such as “the radical Church,” modernizing military men, entrepreneurs, and university students.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, while discussing security threats emanating from Latin America, three RAND researchers contended that “over time” political forces on the radical right might threaten U.S. interests more than those on the left. As the RAND researchers explained, these radicals sought to change the political order through “authoritarian and often violent methods.” Some were “intensively motivated religious activists,” Catholics who drew on anticommunism and “nationalist sentiment” to attract support.<sup>33</sup> (These RAND researchers later were among the authors of the State Department report requested by Nixon.) This pre-mission advice made an impression on Rockefeller. As he later told Senator Charles H. Percy (R-IL) during a congressional hearing on the *Report*, he was “surprised” to hear from pre-trip advisers “that there was no internal security threat from communism in the Western Hemisphere.”<sup>34</sup>

The final *Report* not only followed pre-mission advisers’ advice by downplaying the threat of subversion within the Church to the U.S. gov-

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32. Discussion Meeting Report: Latin America–NAR, April 9, 1969, Digest of Discussion, p. 5, Folder 1155, Box 146, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

33. CFR, Discussion Group on Latin America, Security Questions, April 16, 1969, p. 9, Folder 1155, Box 146, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

34. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, *Rockefeller Report on Latin America*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1969, p. 50.

ernment but also did not mention the potential political implications for the United States of intra-Catholic divisions, despite mission materials on the issue. In preparation for their trips, mission members received briefing papers. The Argentine report noted that “militant Catholics” on the right ran the government and enacted many policies that reflected their religious views. At the same time, Third World Priests, a group that advocated a position between capitalism and communism, promoted worker and student demands, and participated in protests. Although some members had been jailed, the backgrounder stressed that no reports of group members supporting violence or of being connected to guerrilla activities existed.<sup>35</sup> The “Brazil Briefing Paper” outlined societal divisions since the 1964 coup with the government on one side and students, “militant priests,” and some “high-ranking Catholic Church officials” on the other.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, U.S. newspaper articles contained in Rockefeller mission files described Catholic divisions and church-state conflicts. In the midst of the team’s travels, the *New York Times* discussed how disagreements among Catholics led to violence. Brazilian conservatives sought to remove communism from the country and the Church. In response to clergy’s social activism, these conservatives killed a priest and they “regularly” sprayed churches with slogans condemning communist infiltration of the Church. The group Tradition, Family, and Property, present in several Latin American countries, implored the pope to purge the Church of communists. At the same time, clergy in Argentina taught people how to demonstrate and some even advocated violence, while Colombian Camilo Torres had joined the guerrillas. As the reporter reminded readers, this conflict among Catholics and between the Church and military governments was a problem in Brazil, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, and Paraguay.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Lleras’s assessment, the reporter did not explain how these Latin American developments might impact U.S. policy.

Although the U.S. press may have overlooked the potential ramifications for the United States, mission team members heard firsthand how

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35. U.S. Presidential Mission to the Republic of Argentina, Background Notes, pp. 39–40, Folder 1064, Box 131, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

36. William N Simonson, Brazil Briefing Paper, May 1969, pp. 119–36, Folder 1474, Box 180, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

37. Malcolm W. Browne, “Church in Latin America Develops a Leftward Trend,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1969, 1. See also Alfred L. Malabre Jr., “South America’s Changing Church,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 1967, 16, Folder 1721, Box 196, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

church-state conflict in Latin America was often entangled with, and in some cases bred, anti-U.S. sentiment. One mission member met with two “dissident clergy” in Ecuador whose frustration with economic inequality included a critique of the United States. The men emphasized the need for change, especially economic redistribution, but concluded nonviolent change was not possible because of opposition from the powerful. These men saw U.S. influence in nearly every aspect of Ecuadoran life. The United States allied with “the propertied classes, the industrialists” and the importers and exporters of Ecuador, “directed” the 1964 coup, and trained the military. The report did not indicate whether the two men were Ecuadorans or foreigners.<sup>38</sup>

Mission Catholic Church adviser Noel took a broader approach by explaining the connection between church-state conflict in Latin America and anti-U.S. views. Based on his conversations with church leaders in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Chile, Noel traced how the Church moved from a conservative view of political, social, and economic life that prioritized eternal salvation to an emphasis on social justice and human development on earth. This new advocacy often brought the Church into conflict with military regimes as governments’ focus on economic development often led to restrictions on “civil liberties and civic expression.” Governments’ descriptions of Church programs as “subversive” or “communist” aroused anti-U.S. feeling because many Catholics believed that U.S. pressure caused their governments’ preoccupation with communism. These Catholics saw an inherent contradiction between these communist accusations and important social programs they believed fostered U.S. democratic values, such as liberty and free expression.<sup>39</sup>

Clergy’s critiques of U.S. influence, combined with the violence that greeted the mission, might have led the governor to conclude that subversion existed in the Church. Students and workers vehemently protested Rockefeller’s presence. Security forces killed a student in Honduras.<sup>40</sup> Students in Nicaragua burned a U.S. flag and chanted, “Rocky, go home!”<sup>41</sup> In

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38. Jerome Levinson Report, Rough Draft, Ecuador: Conversation with Dissident Clergy, May 30, 1969, Folder 928, Box 118, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

39. James D. Noel Jr., “Catholic Church Affairs,” June 27, 1969, Folder 1367, Box 167, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

40. Jerome Levinson and Juan De Onis, *The Alliance that Lost Its Way: A Critical Report on the Alliance for Progress* (Chicago, 1970), p. 311.

41. Gerard Colby and Charlotte Dennett, *Thy Will Be Done: The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil* (New York, 1995), p. 635.

flyers, Uruguay's Tupamaros National Liberation Movement proclaimed that Rockefeller was a "[m]ember of a family of exploiters, a greedy capitalist."<sup>42</sup> The group bombed the General Motors building, causing \$1 million in damage. During a demonstration before Rockefeller's arrival, Argentine police killed a trade union leader. The day of the funeral, 10,000 troops armed with machine guns and accompanied by dogs escorted Rockefeller through Buenos Aires.<sup>43</sup> Fearing similar violence, Bolivia's president met with Rockefeller at the airport, and leaders of Venezuela and Chile cancelled the visit.<sup>44</sup> Yet Rockefeller's notes give no indication that he tied these disruptions to the Church.

Even with these experiences, information about anti-U.S. sentiment among religious, discussion of intra-Catholic tensions in briefing papers and press reports, and a presidential request, Rockefeller did not include subversion in the final report, likely based on an outside adviser's suggestion. Viron Vaky recommended omitting a proposed discussion on the "Church & Subversion" because he was "not sure it should be said." As he argued, "the Church has been all through this in Europe with the worker-priest movement,"<sup>45</sup> in which priests, wearing civilian clothing, toiled as laborers among the working class. While the worker-priests sought to "raise the social-justice consciousness of Catholics," critics charged the men with failing to address their parishioners' spiritual needs and with being communists.<sup>46</sup> Vaky's recommendation was surprising because he knew that Nixon ordered the mission to examine the Church. As a National Security Council staffer, Vaky was present when Nixon and Lleras discussed the clergy's role in radical movements in Latin America and when Nixon requested that the Rockefeller mission study the issue.<sup>47</sup>

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42. "¡Quién Te Ha Visto y Quién Te Ve!," *El País* (Montevideo), October 8, 2013, accessed November 2, 2014, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1494F253D4F21368?p=AWNB>.

43. Colby and Dennett, *Thy Will Be Done*, p. 641.

44. Levinson and De Onis, *The Alliance that Lost Its Way*, p. 311.

45. Memo from Nancy Maginnes to Hugh Morrow, re: Changes for the Final Report, undated, Folder 966, Box 122, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

46. Joseph J. Willke, "The Worker-Priest Experiment in France," *America*, April 7, 1984, 253–357; Polner and O'Grady, *Disarmed & Dangerous*, p. 91.

47. Memorandum of Meeting, Washington, June 12, 1969, 11 a.m., *FRUS*, Vol. E-10, *American Republics, 1969–1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d150>, accessed December 5, 2011; Memorandum of Meeting, Washington, June 13, 1969, 11:30 a.m., *FRUS*, Vol. E-10: *American Republics, 1969–1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d154>, accessed December 5, 2011. Vaky attended a

Unfortunately, archival records do not contain a copy of “Church & Subversion,” although hints of what the section may have addressed exist. Mission files include a 1969 document, “Subversion of the Church in Latin America.” The author argued that the Church was facing a worldwide problem and that in Latin America, the clergy was the “backbone of subversive action of communist imperialism.” It is unclear if any mission team member, including Rockefeller, read the document because it contains no markings.<sup>48</sup> But, in a draft of the report, a mission team member echoed these sentiments by arguing that a “radicalization” of the Church had occurred in Latin America. As he alleged, church leaders consciously decided the Church would become an “instrument of the revolution” to maintain “its viability.”<sup>49</sup>

Although he did not mention it, Vaky’s experience with Catholics and revolution in Guatemala may have influenced him. As the U.S. Guatemalan embassy’s second-in-command in the late 1960s, Vaky used the Melville incident to criticize Guatemala’s counter-terror tactics and U.S. support for them. He argued that the priests’ decision to adopt radical means—he only mentioned priests—illustrated the profound anger provoked by Guatemala’s policies. As he contended, Guatemala’s “brutal” counter-terror tactics blurred the line between communist and noncommunist in many people’s minds and instead “convert[ed] it into an issue of morality and justice.” Vaky argued that Guatemala’s approach was a liability for the United States in Latin America and at home; therefore, the United States should reconsider its policies and stop deluding itself regarding its role. As he insisted,

We *have* condoned counter-terror; we may even in effect have encouraged or blessed it. We have been so obsessed with the fear of insurgency that we have rationalized away our qualms and uneasiness. . . . Murder,

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pre-mission meeting on political questions and several post-mission discussions about how to change U.S. policy. Discussion Meeting Report: Latin America—NAR, April 9, 1969, Digest of Discussion, Folder 1155, Box 146, Series O, RG 4; Conference on Presidential Mission re Latin American Affairs in Rockefeller Boat House, Seal Harbor, Maine, August 12, 1969, Folder 996, Box 122, Series O, RG 4; Conference on Presidential Mission re Latin American Affairs in Rockefeller Boat House, Seal Harbor, Maine, August 14, 1969, Folder 996, Box 122, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

48. “Subversion of the Church in Latin America,” undated, Folder 100 “Church in Latin America,” Box 12, Subseries 2, Latin American Mission, 1968–1972, Series 7, James Cannon Files, 1968–1971, RG 15, NAR Papers.

49. “Nature of the Challenge,” n.d., pp. 3–4, Folder 998, Box 122, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

torture and mutilation are all right if our side is doing it and the victims are Communists.<sup>50</sup>

Scholars often cite Vaky's memo as evidence that someone within the State Department questioned U.S. anticommunist policy toward Latin America.<sup>51</sup> Although true, Vaky's memo also reveals the Melville incident's high profile within government circles and suggests that the episode may have prompted Vaky to raise concerns about U.S. policy. In advising Rockefeller, Vaky likely recalled the uproar surrounding the Melville incident less than two years earlier.

Besides the suggestions of outside advisers, Rockefeller's notations and comments indicate that he welcomed changes in the Catholic Church. He expressed surprise—with two exclamation marks—upon reading Noel's conclusion that a move to the left among church leaders was not only "certain," but also "rapid." Noel's interviews revealed that those "on the right are becoming moderates, those in the middle are leaning to the left, and those on the left are even becoming radicals."<sup>52</sup> After Noel alerted Rockefeller to the Medellín conference, Rockefeller carefully read the concluding documents, as his markings indicate.<sup>53</sup> The Latin American bishops condemned "institutionalized violence" as oppressing the majority of people, and they targeted both domestic and foreign social institutions as perpetuating inequality, poverty, and injustice. To address the situation, the bishops declared a "preferential option for the poor," which meant not simply working with the poor, but recognizing unequal social systems and seeking to transform them through religious values.<sup>54</sup> The bishops proposed that people be liberated from oppression through

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50. Memorandum, Viron P. Vaky to Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs [Covey T. Oliver], March 29, 1968, *FRUS*, Vol. XXXI: *South and Central America; Mexico*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d102>, accessed December 8, 2011. Emphasis in original.

51. See Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York, 2012), p. xxxi; Daniel Wilkinson, *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala* (Durham, 2004), p. 324; Gilbert M. Joseph, "What We Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies," in *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (Durham, 2008), p. 25.

52. James D. Noel Jr., "Catholic Church Affairs," p. 2, Folder 1198, Box 148, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

53. Concluding Document, and Justice and Concluding Document, Second General Conference of the Latin American Roman Catholic Episcopate, Medellín, Colombia, August–September 1968, Peace, Folder 1181, Box 147, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

54. Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, p. 38.

*conscientization*, a process of self-reflection in which people developed an awareness that their situation was not the result of fate, but of humanly-created societal structures of injustice.<sup>55</sup> While discussing a draft of the report, Rockefeller described the Medellín documents as “fantastic!” He explained that communist forces, intellectuals, and “newspaper people” were already calling for change, and with the addition of the Church and the military, such a movement would have a “tremendous impact on the minds of young people.” He likened the situation to what was happening in the United States.<sup>56</sup>

The Medellín documents prompted Rockefeller to reconsider his view that the Church was responsible for stifling Latin America’s economic progress. In early drafts, Rockefeller attributed the existence of democracy and successful economic structures in the United States to the country’s religious heritage. As he explained,

We must constantly keep in mind the contrast between the conquest of Latin America by the highly individualistic Conquistadoes [sic] and the Catholic Church with the Pilgrim Fathers arriving in the United States seeking religious freedom and banding together in activities for the common good.<sup>57</sup>

Rockefeller’s assessment reflected modernization theory’s view that Latin America’s economic troubles resulted from the region’s Catholic and Mediterranean histories. But later drafts excluded this contrast and revealed Medellín as the reason. The seventh draft of the report characterized Medellín as inspiring a democratic movement—“a quiet revolution”—within the Church. As the author noted,

The outgrowth of this Conference was a series of documents, on such subjects as peace and justice, which detailed the new role of the Church as a force dedicated to change—revolutionary change if necessary. However, deep divisions are evident among the clergy and within the hierarchies in all parts of the hemisphere. An institution whose own tradition is authoritarian seems not to understand the forces of grass-roots democracy.<sup>58</sup>

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55. Gerald M. Costello, *Mission to Latin America: The Successes and Failures of a Twentieth-Century Crusade* (Maryknoll, NY, 1979), pp. 149, 153.

56. Discussion RE: Report on Presidential Mission in Office of the Governor, NY, NY, August 8, 1969, 11:00 am, Folder 997, Box 122, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

57. Draft 1, NAR, n.d., Folder 135, Box 144, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

58. Draft 6, August 15, Folder 998, Box 122; Draft 7, Folder 977, Box 120, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.



The final report excluded this argument, but in discussions with mission advisers, Rockefeller also contended that Medellín challenged the Church's traditional structures. In a meeting one month before Rockefeller submitted the *Report* to Nixon, George D. Woods, mission adviser on finance and former World Bank president, was skeptical that Medellín signaled a change. As he asked,

They talk about human rights and human dignity, and all of this. Is the Catholic Church providing the best background? The whole Latin-American scene—well, the Caribbean is full of those Monsignors and bishops, just as fast as they can be, walking around with all these kids who are undernourished—pre-natal and post-natal—undereducated, and even if they grow up they haven't got . . . the grey matter to do anything for themselves. And this is what the Church has accumulated—all this tax-free real estate. But they do nothing about it.

Rockefeller disagreed: Medellín “is not for that. They are for overthrowing all of this.”<sup>59</sup>

Based on Rockefeller's notations and remarks, one might argue that he embraced Medellín insofar as it meant overturning internal Catholic Church structures and breaking-up Catholic power, such as landholding. As Woods argued, the Church held vast wealth, while poverty was prevalent. For this reason, the U.S. government and U.S. businesses could have viewed the Church as impeding their influence in Latin America. If Rockefeller was thinking this way, he might have supported radical changes within the Church that decreased its economic power and thereby potentially benefited U.S. business.

Based on his notes, however, it is unlikely that Rockefeller held such a narrow interpretation of Medellín or misunderstood what the bishops said. He underlined passages in which the bishops proposed a reorganization of economic and political power outside the Church. Rockefeller marked the bishops' denunciation of both “liberal capitalism” and Marxism: “We must denounce the fact that Latin America sees itself encircled between these two options and remains dependent on the centers of power which control its economy.” Also in blue pen, Rockefeller underlined the bishops' call to restructure society for the benefit of all, especially the lower classes. As they asserted:

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59. Discussion RE: Report on Presidential Mission in Office of the Governor, NY, NY, August 8, 1969, 11:00 am, Folder 997, Box 122, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

The Latin American Church estimates the situation in such a way as to encourage the formation of national communities, that reflect a global organization, where all of the peoples but more especially the lower classes, have by means of territorial and functional structures an active and receptive participation, creative and decisive, in the construction of a new society.<sup>60</sup>

In praising Medellín, Rockefeller disagreed with military governments such as Brazil's, which regarded social activism within the Church both as communism and as a threat to the state. In 1964, military generals overthrew Brazilian President João Goulart. The men portrayed the bloodless coup as an act that saved both the Catholic Church and country from communism. Fear of subversion continued after the coup, as some in the military referred to progressive priests as “bacteria” that threatened to infect Brazil with communism. As one general explained to his troops, “Even though they are Catholic, these individuals have betrayed the Revolution. Today they are working for the opposition, not the one in Congress and the press, but the one that wanted to Communize Brazil in 1964.”<sup>61</sup> The general was not alone. Just months after Medellín, on December 13, 1968, Brazil's President General Costa e Silva issued the repressive Institutional Act No. 5, which led to crackdowns, including those against the Church.

Rockefeller's support for Medellín also challenged U.S. alliances with Latin America military governments and anticommunist Catholics, like those in Brazil. Among the Brazilian generals' most visible supporters were middle-class Catholic women,<sup>62</sup> who charged Goulart with turning the country over to communism and with being an atheist whose policies would threaten Catholics' ability to practice their faith. The women wrote letters and marched in protest. After the coup, both the U.S. press and government promoted the women as anticommunist models, which underscored the U.S. government and Catholic Church's shared cold war aims. *Reader's Digest* argued that “with determination and intelligent planning, an aroused citizenry can rid itself of even a deeply entrenched communist threat.” The *Digest* encouraged readers to spread the word about the women in “How You Can Use This Article to Best Effect.” The State

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60. Concluding Document, Second General Conference of the Latin American Roman Catholic Episcopate, Medellín, Colombia, August-September 1968, Church, Folder 1181, Box 147, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers. Emphasis in original.

61. Ken Serbin, *Secret Dialogues: Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Authoritarian Brazil* (Pittsburgh, 2000), p. 39.

62. James N. Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States* (Durham, 2010), p. 36.

Department arranged for fourteen women to speak across the United States in fall 1964.<sup>63</sup>

Although the U.S. government promoted the anticommunist Brazilian women who would have opposed Medellín, Rockefeller approved of the Church's leftward trend. He did not characterize the bishops' language at Medellín as "an attack on bourgeois society, private property, and military institutions," as one Salvadoran priest later did. Nor did Rockefeller agree that the bishops' talk of "community ownership" and "social reform" was the same as Marxist party language.<sup>64</sup> Overall, Rockefeller seemed unconcerned about communist infiltration in the Church, and he raised no worries about Medellín threatening U.S. influence in Latin America.

Besides viewing the Church in a new light given Medellín, Rockefeller also did not discuss subversion in the final report because he was more focused on population growth. His decision reflected both his family's funding priorities and U.S. concerns at the time. In 1952, Nelson's older brother, John D. Rockefeller III, founded the Population Council, "the world's preeminent institute for policy oriented research in demography and contraception, but also the nexus for all the other major players in the field."<sup>65</sup> The year before the *Report's* publication, Paul Ehrlich's bestselling *The Population Bomb* warned that overpopulation would lead to mass starvation,<sup>66</sup> and Pope Paul VI announced the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which prohibited all forms of artificial birth control. These two strands—fear of overpopulation and the Church's opposition to birth control—came together in assessments that the Alliance for Progress failed because population growth outpaced any positive results from the program.

Rockefeller submitted his report to Nixon thirteen months after *Humanae Vitae* sent shockwaves through the Catholic community world-

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63. Margaret Power, "Transnational Connections among Right-Wing Women: Brazil, Chile, and the United States," in *Women of the Right: Comparisons and Interplay Across Borders*, ed. Kathleen M. Blee and Sandra McGhee Deutsch (University Park, PA, 2012), pp. 21–35, here pp. 23, 27–28.

64. Chicago, DePaul University, Special Collections & Archives, Ricardo Fuentes Castellanos, "De Medellín a Riobamba y San Salvador," *El Mundo* (San Salvador), March 25, 1977, 7, Box 39, Brockman-Romero Papers.

65. Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), p. 159. When questioning Rockefeller, Percy mentioned John D. Rockefeller's population control work. Percy's daughter, Sharon, was married to John D. Rockefeller's son, Jay. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Rockefeller Report on Latin America*, p. 52.

66. Paul Ehrlich, *Population Bomb* (New York, 1968).

wide. Against the recommendations of a group that Paul VI commissioned to examine the issue, *Humanae Vitae* prohibited all forms of artificial birth control. The encyclical was surprising because the group’s proposal that the Church change its policy had already been published in North America and Europe.<sup>67</sup> As scholars have recognized, the nearly two-year delay between the group’s end and the encyclical’s announcement “fed the rebelliousness that marked its reception.”<sup>68</sup> Feminists were not the only ones who refused to follow the encyclical; “the laity almost universally ignored the doctrine.”<sup>69</sup> The Church seemed out of step with the changing times. As the Church pondered the issue, the U.S. government began including funding for family planning programs abroad, and the United Nations declared that the decision about the number and spacing of children was a human right.<sup>70</sup>

In discussing population growth in the *Report*, Rockefeller may have also considered his ties to the Church in his home state. Politicians nicknamed New York’s Cardinal Francis J. Spellman the “American Pope” because they saw him as the voice of U.S. Catholics.<sup>71</sup> The cardinal opposed family planning. At least partially in response to his urging, the Rockefeller Foundation decided not to pursue population control efforts in Japan in the 1950s.<sup>72</sup> Rockefeller had an unusual relationship with the Catholic prelate. According to the governor’s former aide, Spellman “embraced” Rockefeller in 1962 as the governor faced public rebuke, especially from fellow Protestants, over his divorce.<sup>73</sup>

Population growth was a popular, bipartisan issue in the late 1960s. In 1968, both the Republican and Democratic Party platforms cited population control as a priority. The G.O.P. described the “world-wide population explosion . . . as a menace to all mankind.”<sup>74</sup> On July 18, 1969, Nixon

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67. Charles B. Keely, “Limits to Papal Power: Vatican Inaction after *Humanae Vitae*.” In “The New Politics of Population: Conflict and Consensus in Family Planning,” supplement, *Population and Development Review*, 20 (1994), 220–40, here 221.

68. Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America’s Most Powerful Church* (New York, 1997), p. 363.

69. Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2008), p. 51; Morris, *American Catholic*, p. 346.

70. Keely, “Limits to Papal Power,” pp. 225–26.

71. John Cooney, *The American Pope: The Life and Times of Francis Cardinal Spellman* (New York, 1984), p. xvi.

72. Connelly, *Fatal Misconceptions*, pp. 140–41.

73. Cooney, *The American Pope*, p. 312.

74. Democratic Party Platforms, “Democratic Party Platform of 1968,” August 26, 1968, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29604>,

dedicated a special message to Congress to the “Problems of Population Growth.” Nixon noted that the recently released report “World Population: A Challenge to the United Nations and Its System of Agencies” urged “expanded action and greater coordination.” John D. Rockefeller chaired the UN panel. The president called for the creation of a U.S. commission to study population growth, and he urged additional governmental action before the committee’s findings were released.<sup>75</sup> The president later appointed John D. Rockefeller to lead the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future.

Given the concern with population growth, it was unsurprising that during hearings on the *Report* members of Congress asked about the Church’s position on family planning, not Catholics’ support for revolutionary activities. Four months after Nixon’s special message to Congress, Senator Percy quoted the *Report’s* assertion that “[t]he church is a force dedicated to change, revolutionary change if necessary, ready to undertake a revolution if necessary to end injustice.” He assumed the passage concerned family planning. Percy interpreted “revolutionary” as a major change in approach, not as a resort to arms. He referred to a “touchy subject” on which there was an “internal struggle within the Church,” and then began discussing high birth rates in Latin America. He wondered what the United States could do “to save the future” of Latin America. Percy implied that Catholicism was an impediment because he noted family planning progress in India, which presented no problem of “religious inhibitions.” Rockefeller then assured Percy that people in and outside of government were working on the issue. But, Rockefeller said the *Report* omitted discussion of the Church and family planning because “this is a sensitive subject with many groups there, and I pointed out the problem.”<sup>76</sup>

Senator Frank Church (D-ID) also focused on family planning and expressed surprise over the governor’s silence. Although the *Report* indicated that population gains had “kept” economic growth “to something less than 2 percent,” Rockefeller made no recommendations on the issue. In response, Rockefeller emphasized Latin America’s Catholic nature. As he explained,

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accessed May 12, 2014; Republican Party Platforms, “Republican Party Platform of 1968,” August 5, 1968, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25841>, accessed May 12, 2014.

75. Richard Nixon, “Special Message to the Congress on Problems of Population Growth,” July 18, 1969, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2132>, accessed May 12, 2014.

76. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Rockefeller Report on Latin America*, p. 51.

it seems to me that is something that is so obvious that it is hardly necessary for me to recommend to 23 or 24 sister sovereign nations that we impose family planning on a Catholic country . . . But I felt that this is a very personal question, that it would be taken as an insult for me to express, as an individual, to the President of the United States what our friends in the Western Hemisphere should do about family planning.<sup>77</sup>

Privately, Rockefeller feared that discussing family planning would lead the Church to “single out” the *Report*. After an aide noted that the Alliance for Progress failed because population grew faster than any positive changes, Rockefeller acknowledged that “everybody knows that. This subject is what everybody is talking about,” but he worried that church leaders would condemn the report for “intervening in their province” and that the Communist Party would call it “imperialism.”<sup>78</sup>

The placement of population growth in the *Report* reflected Rockefeller’s desire not to provoke the Church. Although Rockefeller repeatedly stressed how the population increase was the most “compelling” concern in the “other Hemispheric nations,” he discussed the matter at the end of the *Report*. As the *Report* concluded, “Of all the broad concerns of the other Hemisphere nations, none is more compelling—in terms of public health, economic growth and social progress—than the increase in population.”<sup>79</sup> But Rockefeller made no recommendations focused specifically on population.

As Rockefeller hinted to Percy, he feared jeopardizing existing efforts. The *Report* stressed that “In country after country,” physicians, public health officials, educators, scientists, leaders of women’s groups, economic ministers, and planning directors “voluntarily” raised “the problem of population growth, and the need for family planning to slow that growth.” These same individuals, however, also noted that “they could not take a public position in favor of family planning because the issue of birth control in some hemispheric countries is too emotional and controversial. In private, however, they were candid and realistic.”<sup>80</sup> What Rockefeller heard was consistent with what the United Nations had concluded. Its demographic center in Chile (CELADE) found that by 1965, the majority of women in Chile, Peru, and the Caribbean “had already tried some method

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77. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

78. Conference on Presidential Mission re Latin American Affairs in Rockefeller Boat House, Seal Harbor, Maine, August 12, 1969, Folder 996, Box 122, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

79. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Rockefeller Report on Latin America*, p. 191.

80. Senate, *Rockefeller Report on Latin America*, p. 191.

of contraception.” Data from 1968 found that 38 to 65 percent of women living in Bogota, Caracas, Mexico City, and Rio had as well.<sup>81</sup> To mission team members, women’s organizations described their efforts to disseminate information about birth control. As one woman explained, “both the government and the Church turn their backs” on these programs.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, mission adviser Noel reported that the Church had decided to remain largely silent so long as it did not feel people were being coerced.<sup>83</sup> As senators’ questions of Rockefeller revealed, population growth, not subversion, was lawmakers’ concern with the Church in 1969.

Instead, congressmen most questioned Rockefeller’s support for military aid to all Latin American governments. The *Report* praised “a new type of military man,” who was “prepared to adapt his authoritarian tradition to the goals of social and economic progress.” Though there was potential for repression, the greater danger was Marxist influence. To counteract it, the *Report* advised “exposure to the fundamental achievements of the U.S.’ way of life . . . through the military training programs which the U.S conducts.”<sup>84</sup> Senator Church was “disturbed” by the recommendations, whereas Senator Claiborne Pell (D–RI) described the aid as “already overbeefed.” Rockefeller protested. If the United States did not sell military equipment, Latin Americans would buy it elsewhere. U.S. military aid, he argued, could foster greater security, leading to democracy’s reestablishment.<sup>85</sup>

But Rockefeller knew what military governments were doing. While in Brazil, his principal speechwriter, Joseph E. Persico, heard from Brazilian friends, “roughly the equivalent of middle-of-the-road Republicans,” of their friends who had been disappeared, tortured, or jailed. Following their advice, Persico urged Rockefeller to speak about democracy. A “furious” Rockefeller responded, “Don’t you understand? That’s exactly what these people resent, our sticking our noses in their business, Americans trying to tell them how to run their internal affairs.”<sup>86</sup> To Rockefeller, the eradication of subversion was important, not how it was accomplished.

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81. Keely, “Limits to Papal Power,” p. 225.

82. Senate, *Rockefeller Report on Latin America*, p. 192.

83. James D. Noel Jr., “Catholic Church Affairs,” June 27, 1969, Folder 1367, Box 167, Series O, RG 4, NAR Papers.

84. Rockefeller, *Rockefeller Report on the Americas*, pp. 32–33.

85. Senate, *Rockefeller Report on Latin America*, pp. 10, 35, 37, 45.

86. Joseph E. Persico, *The Imperial Rockefeller: A Biography of Nelson A. Rockefeller* (New York, 1982), pp. 104–05.

Although Rockefeller and Congress separated discussion of the Church from military aid, the two were intertwined, as governments increasingly targeted Catholics in the name of fighting Marxism. Priest and theologian José Comblin, who worked with Archbishop Dom Helder Câmara of Olinda and Recife in Brazil, critiqued what he called the “national security doctrine,” under which military governments prioritized the state’s security above all else. Although the model originated with the U.S. National Security Act of 1947, which created the CIA and the National Security Council, Latin Americans “copied” this approach.<sup>87</sup> As Comblin explained in 1976, “Any movement that advocates leadership training or grass-roots organizing is regarded as subversive by the military rulers.” As the military sees it, “some Christians, including priests and bishops, are either infiltrating Marxists or useful dupes. Consequently, it is left to the armed forces to save the church from the danger it cannot see.”<sup>88</sup> In many countries, the only remaining voice after union leaders, politicians, and students were silenced was the Church.<sup>89</sup> From 1968 until 1982, nearly 1000 priests, bishops, and nuns were murdered, imprisoned, or exiled.<sup>90</sup>

Whereas Latin American clergy believed the U.S. government was targeting Catholics, Nixon determined that Catholics were aligning with communists. By spring 1971, Nixon had concluded that a strong current of Marxism existed in the Latin American Church. In a meeting with several advisers, the Quaker-raised Nixon described himself as “the strongest pro-Catholic who is not a Catholic” and noted that one-third of Catholics in Latin America were Marxists, one-third center, and one third “Catholics.” He referred to “the deterioration of the attitude of the Catholic Church” but praised the U.S. Church’s decision “finally . . . [to] condemn[] . . . an awful lot of Catholics in Latin America and everywhere else.”<sup>91</sup> Just as Nixon heard the Colombian president’s warnings of radical clergy as U.S. religious protested the Vietnam War, Nixon made these

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87. Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, p. 32; José Comblin, *The Church and the National Security State* (1979; repr. Maryknoll, NY, 1984), pp. xi, 64–65, 72.

88. Shepard Bliss and Frank Maurovich, “Latin Clergy Fear Continent—Wide Strategy vs. Church,” *Latinamerica Press* (Lima), October 7, 1976, 7–8.

89. Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, p. 10.

90. Anna L. Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador’s Civil War* (Albany, 1997), p. 63.

91. Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, pp. 118–19; Conversation Among President Nixon, Assistant for National Security Kissinger, President’s Assistant Haldeman, Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs Haig, and Director of Central Intelligence Helms, Washington, March 5, 1971, *FRUS*, Vol. E–10, *American Republics, 1969–1972*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d36>, accessed December 5, 2011.



comments as so-called radical clergy were again in the news. In January 1971, six people, including Jesuit Philip Berrigan, were indicted on charges of plotting to kidnap Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and to blow up federal buildings. Shortly after, *Time* magazine featured the Berrigan brothers—"rebel priests"—on its cover.<sup>92</sup>

Just as Nixon echoed conservative Catholics regarding Marxism in the Church, he sided with them regarding population growth as well. Although in 1969 Nixon advocated population growth efforts, by spring 1972, he had publicly distanced himself from the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future. The president ordered his officials to ensure no legislative measures would come of the commission's recommendations, which included greater access to abortion and contraception, because he opposed legalized abortion and sought to win Catholic votes in the 1972 election.<sup>93</sup> Nixon's retreat from population control reflected broader U.S. political shifts, as abortion became the more salient issue. In this regard, Rockefeller proved prescient in worrying about Catholic opposition.

Although the U.S. government grew more concerned with liberation theology's spread during the 1970s and 1980s, critics have pointed incorrectly, although understandably, to the Rockefeller *Report* as the source. Rockefeller's push for military aid made it easier for military governments, trained and funded by the United States, to target their own people, including the Church. By 2001, the U.S. School of the Americas had trained more than 60,000 Latin Americans, including "some of the hemisphere's most notorious dictators, death squad operatives, and assassins," such as the two accused of murdering Blessed Óscar Romero, archbishop of San Salvador.<sup>94</sup> The devastating impact of U.S. military aid on left-leaning Catholics seemed like a targeted campaign. Such an approach was more believable, given the Rockefeller family's economic ties to Latin America and that Nelson Rockefeller's protégé, Henry Kissinger, served as national security adviser, secretary of state, and leader of the bipartisan commission on U.S.-Central America policy under Reagan. The theory of

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92. Patricia McNeal, *Harder Than War: Catholic Peacemaking in 20th-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1992), p. 202; *Time*, January 25, 1971.

93. Derek S. Hoff, "Kick That Population Commission in the Ass: The Nixon Administration, the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, and the Defusing of the Population Bomb," *Journal of Policy History*, 22 (2010), 23–63, here 25, 27–28, 42.

94. Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham, 2004), p. 137.

the *Report* persisted because there was no alternative. The *Report* was public, whereas documents from Nixon’s meeting with Lleras and his request for the CIA, State Department, and Rockefeller reports were not released as part of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* until 2009. The misunderstanding matters because the characterization of the *Report* as the source of U.S. government opposition to liberation theology overlooks how, at times, the U.S. government inserted itself into, rather than created, tensions among Catholics. With its aid to the Salvadoran government and the Nicaraguan contras in the 1980s, the U.S. government simultaneously bolstered liberation theology’s opponents and encouraged progressive Catholics to believe that a government campaign to eradicate leftward Catholic trends began with the Rockefeller *Report*.