vast majority of English Catholics, and while they allied with many leftist movements, they were always on the fringe. Without *Slant*, would English Catholicism or English politics have been markedly different? I think not. The synthesis of Marx and Catholicism failed for a variety of reasons, though mainly due to Marx’s atheism. To McCabe, the gap was unbridgeable unless “Marxists abandon their atheism or Christians their belief in the Father” (298). By the 1970s, Martin Shaw, Bernard Sharrat, and Neil Middleton left the Catholic faith, and those who remained Catholic were never fully accepted by their Marxist peers, proving the synthesis unobtainable even on a personal level.

Thoroughly researched, Corrin’s work breaks new ground in his examination of the Catholic New Left. He not only expounds on the theories contained in *Slant*, but he also provides an outline of reformist thought from Distributism to Liberation Theology to Radical Orthodoxy. For American Catholic readers, the work of the *Slant* group complicates the convenient relationship between orthodox Catholics and the Republican Party, and emphasizes Catholic objections to capitalism in a radical fashion. Their writings additionally point to the problem of an apolitical church, and as history has shown, a passive church is open to being implicated in the evils of fascism and poverty. In contemporary Catholicism, Corrin’s book provides a framework for the thought of Pope Francis, and more generally, with Catholics from the developing world who have a more sympathetic view of Marx than do American Catholics.

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**Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutierrez, *In the Company of the Poor*. Orbis Books, 2013.**

Some Catholics may be tempted to automatically dismiss any work presenting a theology of liberation as little more than Marxist thought repackaged as Catholic theology and condemned in its entirety by Pope John Paul II thirty years ago. In reality, liberation theology—an interpretation of revelation that emphasizes the need to change structures that oppress the poor—is neither a monolithic body of thought nor was it ever condemned outright. Indeed, it has experienced a resurgence of late, thanks in part to the continued work of Gustavo Gutierrez, OP, and the Pope Benedict XVI-appointed head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF),
Cardinal Gerhard Müller. Before elaborating on this revived present, it is useful to outline liberation theology’s controversial past.

Pope John Paul II was particularly concerned with the role that Marxism played in various liberation theologies. At the 1979 Latin American Bishop’s Conference in Puebla, he insisted that any authentic theology of liberation rests on the truth about Jesus Christ, the Church, and mankind. Under John Paul II, the CDF, headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, issued instructions in 1984 and 1986, the former cautioning against the Marxist influence in certain liberation theologies and the latter affirming the preferential option for the poor. In Ratzinger’s “preliminary notes” to the 1984 instruction he warned against those theologies that interpret all reality in political terms, replace redemption of sin with liberation from oppression, identify love with the option for class struggle, and eschew metaphysical truths in favor of praxis or action.

The Church has since accepted versions of liberation theology she finds compatible with her approach to the poor. In the 1990s, Gutierrez, a Peruvian who is considered the father of liberation theology for his 1971 book, *A Theology of Liberation*, underwent a review process during which he was asked to clarify certain aspects of his theology. At a 2014 book launch for Müller’s *Poor for the Poor* (with a preface by Pope Francis), Gutierrez reflected on this investigation and credited then-Cardinal Ratzinger for his theological understanding and assistance, suggesting that Cold War geopolitics had influenced the initial suspicion of his work.

Indeed, Pope Benedict has shown particular discernment when it comes to theologies of liberation. In the same year that he warned against the downplaying of Christ’s divinity in the work of Jon Sobrino, S.J., he also spoke at the Aparecida Bishop’s Conference (2007) and acknowledged that the preferential option for the poor is centered on faith in Christ. Then in 2012, he appointed Müller, a student and collaborator of Gutierrez, to head the CDF. When Gutierrez and Müller published their co-authored *Dallaparte dei poveri (With the Poor)* in 2013, the Vatican newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano* published a two-page spread with articles from each author. It is safe to assume that Gutierrez’s current iteration of liberation theology is supported by the hierarchy, thus one of his recently published volumes deserves our attention.

*In the Company of the Poor*, edited by Michael Griffin and Jennie Weiss Block is presented as a conversation between Gutierrez and Dr. Paul Farmer, a medical anthropologist and physician, Harvard professor and founding director of Partners in Health, an international non-profit that provides health care services to the poor. After the editors’ introduction, the chapters alternate between Farmer’s application of the preferential op-
tion for the poor to healthcare and Gutierrez’s expounding on the theology behind this preferential option. The “conversation” culminates in a joint interview, conducted by Daniel Groody, which is an amicable meeting between theory and practice.

Farmer’s contributions evince a great admiration for Gutierrez and the profound influence that the theology of liberation has had on his life. He writes that poverty is death because it is statistically correlated with high risk of disease and poor outcomes; medical intervention is a way of offering hope. His many stories of caring for the sick in Haiti are truly compelling, and, in providing testimony on the integration of his faith and work, Farmer’s chapters make this book well-suited for those in the healthcare professions, particularly those who work with the poor.

Gutierrez’s contributions outline his version of liberation theology, with certain key concepts appearing as a refrain throughout the book. He begins with the central question that the theology of liberation seeks to answer: “How do we say to the poor: God loves you?” Gutierrez reflects that Christ came proclaiming the love of God and the coming of his Kingdom. For the poor, who suffer deprivation and exclusion in their daily lives, this can be a difficult message to appreciate. Thus, Gutierrez writes, we need to accompany them, not merely as pre-evangelization, but as a way of announcing the Gospel message and showing the poor that God loves them. Accompaniment of the poor is a reference point for our primary task as disciples, la sequela Christi (following Jesus). He is careful to note that this must be a genuine solidarity—not one where we anoint ourselves “the voice of the voiceless,” but one where we ensure that the poor can find their own voice, expressing their dignity as agents of their own history. This sensitivity to the context of local situations is exemplified in a phrase Gutierrez borrows from St. Bernard of Clairvaux: that “we drink from our own wells,” or root our spirituality in our experience.

Gutierrez’s work avoids the pitfalls that have plagued certain versions of liberation theology. Rather than framing the preferential option for the poor in terms of class warfare, Gutierrez explains that the “preference” does not connote a competition between rich and poor for God’s love. This love is universal, but in His care for the poor, God is “like a mother who tends most tenderly to the weakest and threatened of her children” (29). Additionally, liberation theologies have sometimes been criticized as too utopian or this-worldly. In diminishing Christ’s role, they risk turning the Church into nothing more than, as Pope Francis said in his first homily, a “pious NGO.” Gutierrez weaves the faith of the Church throughout his work: he says that, beyond liberation from various forms of oppression, liberation is from sin; he acknowledges our eternal goal, saying that
in walking towards the Kingdom of God, it is not enough to say “Lord, Lord,” and he roots his theology in Christ’s redemptive role, repeatedly citing Pope Benedict XVI’s Aparecida address: “The preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).”

Liberation theology, as presented in In the Company of the Poor, would benefit from a firmer anchoring in the tradition of Catholic social thought. Of the many papal encyclicals on social doctrine, Gutierrez cites just Paul VI’s Evangelii Nuntiandi. Ideas like ‘accompaniment’ or ‘drinking from our own wells’ might have been linked fruitfully to the concepts of solidarity and subsidiarity as they appear throughout the tradition. In urging a move beyond the class conflict of his day, Pope Leo XIII in Rerum Novarum (1891) wrote that “the Church . . . aims at joining the two social classes to each other in closest neighborliness and friendship.” Accompanying the poor is about cultivating a love of neighbor and recognizing the dignity of every human person, regardless of their status.

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There has been talk about the crisis of religious liberty for many years. To cite just one example, the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty (Committee) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement in 2012 entitled “Our First, Most Cherished Liberty: A Statement on Religious Liberty.” In the face of growing threats to religious liberty and around the world, the Committee made an impassioned plea for the protection of religious liberty. No one thinks that this situation has improved since 2012. In fact, the threats to religious liberty have escalated since the Committee’s statement was released. This is particularly true outside the United States. As the Committee noted, the age of martyrdom is not over. It is important to recognize that the situation in the United States is less grave. The threats to religious liberty here, however, are ever more apparent.

There are profound ironies about this current situation. The United States has long been associated with the idea of religious liberty. Judge