

BOOK REVIEWS

Walter J. Broderick, *Camilo – El Cura Guerillero*,
Bogota DC, Icono Editorial Ltda., 2013, 400 pp.

Covering the life and death of Camilo Torres, one of the most famous Colombian guerilla rebels of all times, Walter J. Broderick, recreates what it felt like to be in the middle of Colombia's social revolution from the Interwar Period to the first decades after World War II. The book, written in Spanish, is a historical masterpiece that reads like a novel and proves to be accessible to the average reader not versed in Colombian history or politics. At the same time, however, the book will be appreciated by any historian, political scientist, sociologist and may even provide interesting insights for economists.

Spreading over roughly half a century, the Colombian civil war is one of the longest civil wars in history and certainly the longest ongoing war. Given the recent breakthrough in Colombia regarding the peace process with the guerilla forces spread throughout the country and the latest announcement that the Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos was the winner of the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize, reading *Camilo – El Cura Guerillero* can provide current historians with a thorough understanding of some of the reasons behind the start of the Colombian civil war. Despite focusing on just one historical character, the book allows the reader to understand the social, political and economic context of Colombia during those times. While it may be enticing to dismiss all the rebels as uneducated and unsophisticated thugs, Camilo Torres certainly breaks the mold and makes people reevaluate the rebel struggle. Thus, the author forces historians to take into account the political demands of the rebels and to see the war through their eyes as well, not just from the perspective of the government. The life of Torres is in consequence much more than a personal story.

Camilo Torres begins life in Bogota as the middle child of one of the most prominent families in Colombia, sheltered from the misery in which the majority of the people in his country lived in at the time. His passion for knowledge places him on a course of discovery that leads him to enter priesthood in the Catholic Church. Setting himself apart from the majority of

Catholic priests, Torres allies himself with Marxists and other left leaning parties and politicians. This move puts him at odds with the Catholic cardinal of Colombia and he eventually becomes a pariah in the Church. No longer able to manage his commitment for social justice with his duties as a priest, Camilo resigns from the Catholic church and fully dedicates himself to the rebel cause. The proof of his total dedication for social justice must be his decision to not only support the left through political means, but to go to the jungle and join the rebel fighters on the ground. This final decision brings about his end, as he dies in his first ever military combat against the Colombian army and thus becomes a martyr for the cause and a symbol of liberation theology. In the years following his death, Camilo became well-known throughout Latin America. His story impresses even today most of all through the fact that he genuinely cared for the people and sacrificed his life to a cause he deemed just. On top of that, the fact that he had been born into wealth and privilege, but threw it all away when he discovered the lack of justice in the world, made him respected like few other leaders. Despite his extremely short military experience fighting the government, Camilo gave legitimacy to many of the ideals that the rebels were fighting for. Equally important, in the aftermath of Camilo's death, liberation theological spread like wildfire throughout most of Central and South America, as many groups adopted the ideology as part of their struggle against injustice.

Camilo – El Cura Guerillero allows the reader to see reality through the main character's eyes and understand it through his perspective. Walter J. Broderick does an excellent job at showing how Camilo's understanding of the political and religious universe, especially the way he saw man's relationship to God and the necessity of social justice, affected his political decisions. Though readers might still disagree with Camilo's political views by the end of the book, they learn to appreciate and respect the character for his fairness, consistency, and humility.

Stoica Cristinel Popa*

* Stoica Cristinel Popa graduated with Honors in Political Science from Stanford University. Afterwards, he did a Master's in Public Policy at Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government. Later, he did a Master's in Government at the University of Texas at Austin. He is currently a PhD Candidate in History at "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați in Romania; e-mail: stoica_cristinel_popa@post.harvard.edu