

PRESS & TELEVISION

history. And reporters who rely on government officials to re-create dialogue, tell anecdotes, and leak selected documents leave themselves open to manipulation. Packaging the results in a book, which suggests much more permanence and authority than a newspaper, compounds the problem. Draper suggests that journalists, book publishers, and complaisant book reviewers, among others, examine their consciences.

Reagan 1, Media 0

"The Media and the Presidency" by Paul Johnson, in *Encounter* (Nov. 1984), 59 St. Martin's Lane, London WC2N 4JS, England.

In his 1984 memoir *Caveat*, former Secretary of State Alexander Haig complained that during the early days of the Reagan administration the nation's TV networks, newsmagazines, and top newspapers "let themselves be converted into . . . bulletin boards" for the White House.

Johnson, a British journalist, finds a certain grim justice in that.

For 20 years, American presidents and the press have been feuding over the limits of presidential power. Until the mid-1960s, Johnson observes, reporters in the nation's capital "were usually content to allow themselves to be used by the White House." So "discreet" were the Washington newspapermen of the earlier era that their readers were unaware in 1919 that a stroke had rendered President Woodrow Wilson incapable of carrying out his duties.

The press was not always pampered by Franklin D. Roosevelt—photographers who took pictures revealing the extent of his disability due to polio were likely to have their cameras smashed by Secret Service men—but he was a masterful press agent. It was during the New Deal that Washington journalists warmed to the virtues of executive power rather than congressional authority. That feeling survived FDR by more than 20 years. But by 1967, as Lyndon B. Johnson's "credibility gap" widened over Vietnam policy, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch's* James Deakin could write, "The relationship between the President and the Washington press corps has settled into a pattern of chronic disbelief."

After LBJ's downfall, Johnson says, TV and newspaper journalists took off after Richard M. Nixon. They seemed to believe "that the moral necessity to destroy Nixon was so overwhelming that all constitutional standards, all rules of decency indeed, had to be suspended." Johnson blames the *New York Times* for beginning "dirty tricks warfare" with its celebrated publication of the secret Pentagon Papers in 1971. The war between press and president soon culminated in the Watergate scandal, a story, Johnson avers, that was vastly exaggerated and that became a news media "obsession."

Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, fared well on the front pages and the evening news only by comparison; Jimmy Carter was bludgeoned "the moment he set foot in the White House."

If the Reagan White House has now tamed many reporters, Johnson concludes, it is because the President's men understand that by selec-

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tively satisfying the journalists' hunger for leaks and spicy tidbits, they can make the press corps "hooked and dependent." Far from decrying this development, Johnson welcomes it as evidence that balance has been restored to American politics.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

*Catholicism,
Latin-Style*

"The Case against Liberation Theology"
by Michael Novak, in *The New York Times
Magazine* (Oct. 21, 1984), 229 West 43rd
St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Fourteen years ago, a little-known Peruvian priest named Gustavo Gutiérrez published his book, *A Theology of Liberation*. Today, the doctrine it inaugurated is controversial enough to provoke Pope John Paul II's anger and to garner front-page stories in U.S. newspapers.

Novak, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, traces the roots of liberation theology back to the 1960s, when hundreds of young American- and European-trained priests and nuns went out to serve in local parishes throughout Latin America. Hoping to ease their parishioners' dreadful poverty, they were frustrated by Latin American Catholicism's stress on personal piety over social action. Indeed, the church's hierarchy "seemed to be part of the very establishment responsible for Latin America's social ills."

Father Gutiérrez's liberation theology wed the social conscience of many of the Catholic Church's younger recruits to the Western social-science theory of "dependency," which holds that Third World poverty is the result of exploitation by "neocolonialist" American and European capitalists. Among the clergymen who later helped elaborate liberation theology were Brazil's Leonardo Boff and Nicaragua's Ernesto Cardenal, now minister of culture in that nation's Sandinista government.

Liberation theology "gains its excitement from flirting with Marxist thought," Novak writes, though Marxism is only a thread within it. What troubles Pope John Paul II most is the contradiction between the revolutionary priests' call for "class warfare" and the Christian edict to love one's enemies. The Pope, himself a sometime critic of capitalism, believes that the Catholic Church must transcend politics.

Novak goes further. He dismisses the liberation theologians' belief that "neocolonialism" and capitalism are to blame for Latin America's poverty. In fact, he says, Latin America is "precapitalist." The "missing link" in liberation theology is a "concrete vision of political economy. It refuses to say how safeguards for human rights, economic development, and personal liberties will be instituted after the revolution." Novak agrees that a "social transformation" is long overdue in Latin America. But he insists that a truly liberating theology would call for healthy doses of democracy and free enterprise.