**A Communist Pope? An interview with author George Neumayr**

George Neumayr is contributing editor to and former executive editor of the American Spectator. He has written extensively on politics and religion for many outlets, including the Washington Times, National Review Online, and Catholic World Report.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The opinions expressed in the following conversation are those of the book's author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of LifeSiteNews.

September 1, 2017 (LifeSiteNews) — Journalist Maike Hickson conducted an interview with author George Neumayr on his new book, The Political Pope. Neumayr offers insights into communist influences on Pope Francis.

Maike Hickson: Throughout your book, you make references to Pope Francis' relationship with communism or with certain communists in particular. Could you describe for us in general his attitude toward communism?

George Neumayr: He tends to speak of communism in benign terms. He told the Italian press that he wasn't "offended" if people call him a communist since he has “met many Marxists in my life who are good people." Another time he said, "I must say that communists have stolen our flag," because "the flag of the poor is Christian." Past popes, who recognized the power of communism to enslave the poor, would have found such comments very puzzling.

MH: You write in your book that Pope Francis is sympathetic and supportive of the "radical political agenda of the global left" and you call him an "ecclesiastical equivalent of Barack Obama." What are specific topics that Pope Francis is promoting that remind you of a worldview which is sympathetic with communist ideas?

GN: Hardline leftists used to say that they dreamed of a world without popes. But now they gush about Pope Francis. The radical academic Cornel West summed up the reason why: "I love who he is, in terms of what he says, and the impact of his words on progressive forces around the world."

In other words, Pope Francis has turned the Vatican into a bully pulpit for the left's favorite causes, including: open borders, gun control, climate-change activism, the abolition of the death penalty and lifetime imprisonment, and the socialism of central planners.

This is why the 1960s radical Tom Hayden said his election "was more miraculous, if you will, than the rise of Barack Obama."

MH: Which prominent communists has Pope Francis publicly praised during his pontificate? Could you give us names and their backgrounds?

GN: As I describe in the book, he rolled out the red carpet for Raul Castro, which flabbergasted Cubans who have suffered under the heel of his communist thuggery. Castro was so thrilled by the pope's support and his tributes to government-run economies that he declared, "If you continue talking like this ... I will return to the Catholic Church. I am not joking. I may convert again to Catholicism, even though I am a communist."

MH: Who of his closest advisers has a socialist worldview?

GN: They all lean in that direction, but one of the loudest socialists around him is the Honduran Cardinal whom he elevated to secretary of his council of cardinals – Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga.

It came out through the WikiLeaks disclosures that Maradiaga has been working with George Soros operatives to promote socialism in the Church.

Pope Francis used the strident socialist Leonardo Boff, a disgraced liberation theologian from Brazil who left the priesthood, as an adviser when drafting his environmentalist encyclical Laudato Si. Boff says Francis asked to see his plans for the promotion of world government through the UN.

MH: As you write in your book, Pope Francis, when visiting Cuba, celebrated a Holy Mass "in the shadow of Che Guevara." Could you explain this scene and its symbolism?

GN: Saying a Mass in the shadow of a mass murderer like Guevera was a propaganda gift to the brothers Castro. Cuban dissidents were appalled by the scene, with even some liberals expressing unease.

MH: Could you also describe to us Pope Francis' reaction when he received, as a gift, from the Bolivian President Morales a crucifix in the form of a hammer and sickle? What kind of message did he send by his reaction?

GN: That grotesque cross had been designed by the late Jesuit, Fr. Luís Espinal, whose memory Pope Francis had honored upon his arrival in Bolivia. Other popes would have rejected such a perversity; Pope Francis accepted it warmly, saying that he "understood" it. He thereby left the impression that he regards one of the most anti-Christian systems ever devised as harmless.

MH: As you write, Pope Francis has had several mentors in his life who were pro-communist. Could you first tell us about Esther Ballestrino and what he later, as archbishop in Buenos Aires, did for her burial?

GN: She was, by his own description, a "fervent communist." He has described her as one of his chief mentors. "I owe a huge amount to that great woman," he has said, saying that she "taught me so much about politics." She introduced him to communist periodicals and literature. When she got into trouble with the authorities, he hid her Marxist tracts in a Jesuit library, according to the author James Carroll (who wrote up the story approvingly).

The reporter John Allen says that when her family asked for her to be buried in a Catholic cemetery, Bergoglio "readily consented" even though he knew she wasn't a believing Catholic.

MH: Could you tell us more about Pope Francis' relationship with Leónidas Barletta?

GN: He was a communist filmmaker in Latin America, whose writings a young Jorge Bergoglio devoured. He says that he would rush to get the publication of the communist party in Argentina, Nuestra Palabra y Propósitos, because he was "enchanted" by Barletta's writings. Bergoglio says they "helped me in my political formation."

MH: You report that, while in Argentina as a younger priest, then-Father Bergoglio was close to the Jesuit General Superior, Fr. Pedro Arrupe who himself opened up the Jesuit Order to socialist ideas. Could you explain this thesis a little more?

GN: He was a protege of Arrupe, who identified Bergoglio as a rising liberal star in the order. That is why he made him a provincial at the age of 36. Arrupe presided over the order during its most intense period of liberalization and used Bergoglio as a liberal enforcer at the infamous worldwide gathering of Jesuits in 1975 that sealed the order's socialist and modernist direction.

MH: Pope Francis has been meeting with, and supportive of, the World Meeting of Popular Movements. Could you tell us more about this movement and its political orientation? More specifically, could you tell us about Pope Francis' participation at such a meeting in Bolivia, together with its socialist President?

GN: It is a collection of radicals and socialists. In 2016, they gathered in Bolivia to celebrate among other things that the papacy had fallen into their hands. Pope Francis shared the platform with Bolivia's Marxist president, who was wearing a jacket emblazoned with a picture of Che Guevara

Francis used his speech to urge the attendees to keep agitating against the "new colonialism," which he equated with budget-cutting, free-market-oriented governments. The speech was catnip for the communists in the audience.

Bolivia's president said after that he "finally" could follow a pope.

MH: In the context of Pope Francis' possible sympathies with communism, could you tell us more about the canonizations of Archbishop Óscar Romero and Dom Hélder Câmara?

GN: Romero's canonization movement had stalled under the two previous popes. But under Francis it bolted forward, with the meaning of martyrdom stretched to include politically-motivated assassinations. That is a papal nod to Romero's status as a fashionable left-wing victim of government brutality. By way of contrast, it is hard to imagine the Vatican fiddling also with the rules for a right-wing bishop whose politics led to his death.

The Camâra canonization movement – he was called the red cardinal for his support for communist guerillas — would have been rejected out of hand by previous popes. But Pope Francis is letting it move forward.

MH: What is the symbolism behind Pope Francis' personal visit with the widow of Paolo Freire, the author of the book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"?

GN: That meeting was set up by Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, who had whispered in the pope's ear upon his election, "Don't forget the poor," by which Hummes really meant, don't forget to push socialism. Freire's widow said after the meeting that her husband, whose book is regarded as a communist classic in Latin America, had influenced this pope. The pope likes to say that the "meeting is the message," and his meeting with Freire's widow lived up to that adage, reinforcing the confidence that a generation of radicals raised on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed has in Francis.

MH: You also discuss in your book Pope Francis' leniency toward Liberation Theology. Could you describe to us his assessment of this theory and how he deals with its main representatives, such as Gustave Gutiérrez?

GN: Liberation theology, which is an attempt to incorporate socialism into Catholic theology, was marginalized under Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Francis has brought it back into the mainstream. Leonardo Boff, one of the most outré liberation theologians, has gloated about how he and many of his renegade confreres have been rehabilitated by Francis.

After Pope Francis honored Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the founding fathers of liberation theology, L'Osservatore Romano reported that Francis was bringing liberation theology "out of the shadows to which it has been relegated for some years."

MH: How would you describe Pope Francis' relationship with Barack Obama and with the U.S. Left in general? Could you tell us more about George Soros and the pope? Are there connections between these two men, and are they sharing some of the same agendas?

GN: Pope Francis is turning the Church into an appendage of the political left. Look at all the pro-abortion pols who describe themselves as Pope Francis Democrats. Look at all the Soros-funded partnerships between the left and this Vatican. Soros practically wrote the script for the pope's visit to the US, as the WikiLeaks exposure attests.

MH: Do you think that Pope Francis is preparing and willing to work with global elites for the establishment of a World Government?

GN: He is certainly flirting with proposals that would move the world in that direction. He has turned advocates for world government, such as Cardinal Peter Turkson, into key advisers. Laudato Si has a section, ghostwritten by Turkson, that says climate-change regulations should be imposed on countries by a global authority.

MH: How would you assess in this context the pope's open criticism of Donald Trump before his election as President of the U.S.?

GN: He in effect called Trump a bad Christian – a strange charge given his unwillingness to call pro-abortion Catholic pols bad Christians.

But his comment, as even Jeb Bush acknowledged, ended up helping Trump win. The media call Francis the people's pontiff, but he is actually the elite's pontiff. They love his politics but the man on the street is shrugging at it.

MH: You speak in your book about the pope's visit to the U.S. in 2015. How would you describe the message and the purpose of that visit, and also what he omitted?

GN: In short, he omitted Catholicism. His speeches contained no distinctively Catholic content whatsoever. Had someone swapped out his speeches for those of almost any Democratic senator, no one would have known the difference.

MH: Did Pope Francis, according to your knowledge, ever issue a public critique of communism and of practices of communist countries?

GN: He spares it of any of the sustained critiques he has applied to the free market. Instead of acknowledging socialism's role in impoverishing countries, he prefers to tweet out such Marxist cliches as "inequality is the root of all evil."