

CATHOLICISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS: THE CASE OF LATIN AMERICA

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When I first met Don Fernando Volio shortly after I joined the Consejo Ejecutivo of the Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos in 1982, I was frankly somewhat intimidated. The quality of his intellect and his passion for what he believed in allowed no quarter in discussions. However, after a few years I learned that under that imposing exterior was an individual who was deeply concerned with the wellbeing not only of the people he worked with, but also those who lacked champions. And he was an indomitable champion of those he felt had been treated wrongly. I also found him to be a paladin of women and their rights. His loss is deeply felt, but his legacy is still with us.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion and human rights in Latin America have become strongly identified with each other particularly since the 1960s. Many major human rights actors, including the Vicariate of Solidarity in Santiago, Chile, the office of legal assistance of the Archbishopric of San Salvador, and the Justice and Peace Commission in São Paulo, Brazil, were initiated by churches during periods of severe repression and survived largely because of national and international ecclesial support. It is frequently assumed that the link between churches, particularly the Catholic,¹ and human rights was

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1 This essay will focus primarily on the Catholic Church since approximately 85 percent of Latin Americans identify themselves with that institution and space does not allow for substantial discussion of other religions.

initiated by the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965 and the Conference of Latin American bishops in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968. While both these gatherings encouraged the contemporary Catholic Church's focus on human rights there was a historical basis for it as far back as the early sixteenth century when the friar Bartolomé de Las Casas denounced the exploitation of the Indians by Spanish colonists and succeeded in convincing the Spanish monarchs to enact laws protecting the rights of indigenous communities. Even in the face of the close identification of ecclesiastical and secular elites in colonial Latin America and into the twentieth century there was always an outspoken sector of the Catholic Church that called for an end to exploitation of the poor and greater respect for human rights.

This tendency was reinforced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the international Catholic Church urged, in such encyclicals as *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), greater socioeconomic justice and political participation especially for workers. This stimulated the growth in Latin America in the 1920s and 1930s of such change oriented groups as Catholic Action, Young Christian Workers, Young Christian Students as well as Christian Democratic parties. These organizations tended to further legitimate calls for greater commitment to human rights and increased efforts to reduce poverty and political marginalization. Such currents contributed to the focus at Vatican II on peace, justice and human rights and its reaffirmation by the Latin American bishops at Medellín. These developments occurred within the context of increasing popular pressures for political and economic reforms in post World War II Latin America and the emergence of national security regimes and the hardening of more traditional dictatorships to combat such pressures.²

In the 1960s and 1970s Latin America witnessed the emergence in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay of authoritarian regimes whose ideological bases tended to justify wide-ranging violations of civil and political rights in order to curb reformist and revolutionary movements. These governments tended to regard the nation as a living organism with

2 For an analysis of the origins, evolution and ideology of such regimes see Margaret E. Crahan, "The State and the Individual in Latin America: An Historical Overview", "The Evolution of the Military in Brazil, Chile, Peru, Venezuela and Mexico: Implications for Human Rights", and "National Security Ideology and Human Rights", Margaret E. Crahan, ed., *Human Rights and Basic Needs in the Americas* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1982), pp. 23-127.

rights that took precedence over the rights of the individual. Identification of the state with the nation led governments to arrogate to themselves unlimited authority that conflicted with the concept that sovereignty resided in the people. As a result, individual rights, and particularly those related to participatory government, were undercut by the objectives of the governing elite. Identification of the state with the nation also led governments to regard opposition to or criticism of its policies as akin to treason. This had a chilling effect on enjoyment of civil and political rights.

Since these governments regarded themselves as locked in a constant state of internal warfare, constitutional restrictions on governmental power were generally suspended via the imposition and renewal of states of siege or emergency. Belief that the state was engaged in total war in which no quarter could be given led to the sanctioning of disappearances, torture and assassination. Those who took up arms against the state were regarded as having no rights whatsoever. The rationale was that such individuals could not claim any rights as citizens because they had acted against the common good. To provide them legal protections would be to act in opposition to the rights of the nation. Such reasoning was used to justify extralegal actions by governments and the denial of rights to political prisoners or prisoners of conscience. These governments tended to justify their actions by claiming they were acting on behalf of the common good, defined as the sum of individual good, rather than as traditionally conceived as the promotion of the well-being of the entire community via the pursuit of justice and respect for individual rights.

The authoritarian regimes that began to emerge in Latin America in the 1960s also held a diminished concept of socioeconomic rights, believing that they should be restricted not only because of scarce national resources and limited economic development, but also to implement particular economic strategies, which frequently emphasized capital accumulation at the expense of meeting such basic needs as adequate nutrition, housing, health care and education. Challenges to specific government policies or models of development were not considered a legitimate exercise of the right of political protest. Such an attitude contributed to the suppression of labor organizations and restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression as well as the right to organize and participate in government decision-making. This required the suppression or control of such organizations as labor unions and political parties. Under these conditions human rights organizations appeared

serving not only to document and protest violations, but also frequently constituting the only institutional bases for dissent. While often linked to the Catholic Church, these groups tended to be politically and religiously ecumenical and included non-believers.

II. CONTEMPORARY CATHOLICISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATIN AMERICA

Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* issued on April 11, 1963, had a galvanizing effect on Vatican II, as well as on Latin America. It clearly and succinctly stated the official position of the church that:

Any human society, if it is to be well ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation this principle, namely that every human being is a person; that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will. Indeed, precisely because he is a person he has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature. And as these rights are universal and inviolable so they cannot in any way be surrendered.³

In line with this, the prelates gathered at the Council took pains to affirm the necessity of respect for the full spectrum of political, economic, social, cultural and religious rights, if peace and justice were to be achieved. They further asserted that the legitimacy of all political and economic systems was determined by the degree to which they promoted the enjoyment of such rights. Vatican II consciously avoided proposing any specific political or economic models as most supportive of human rights suggesting, as one commentator phrased it, that:

Human rights norms do not lead to the prescription of any single economic, political, or ideological system as the natural law ethic which dominated past thought...often claimed to do. Rather, basic human rights set limits and establish obligations for all systems and ideologies, leaving the precise form in which these systems will be organized undefined.⁴

3 *Pacem in Terris*, no. 9 in Joseph Gremillion, ed., *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching since Pope John* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 203.

4 David Hollenback, S.J., "Global Human Rights: An Interpretation of the Contemporary Catholic Understanding", in Alfred Hennelly, S.J. and John Langan, S.J., eds., *Human*

Given the increasing ideological competition within post-World War II Latin America, as well as rising criticism of the impact of international capitalism in the area, Catholic acceptance of political and economic pluralism contributed to greater ferment. Such acceptance helped diminish the historical image of the Catholic Church as a monolithic supporter of the status quo and stimulated political debate and activism, including among priests, nuns, brothers and laypersons.

Vatican II was also concerned, as were the drafters of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), with establishing a «consensus on the normative basis for international justice and peace»⁵ that would transcend differences in ideologies, cultures and societies. This did not mean the abandonment of the belief that the Catholic Church held the one true faith, but rather an acceptance of political, economic and religious pluralism in the modern world. It also opened the way to working with those individuals of goodwill committed to the common good. All this caused the Catholic Church, as an institution, and churchpeople as individuals, to increasingly participate in the struggle for change and in debates over the best strategies and models to accomplish it. In Latin America, this meant evaluating the merits of a broad spectrum of political and economic options including liberalism, capitalism, socialism and communism. This was attempted while continuing to be politically and ideologically neutral within increasingly conflictual societies. The difficulties of this task became patently clear in the late 1960s and 1970s leading the Latin American bishops to conclude at the 1979 general conference in Puebla, Mexico, that special care had to be taken to avoid any appearance of taking partisan stands either politically or ideologically both as an institution and as individuals.

The Catholic Church in Latin America has attempted to deal with this by struggling to establish and apply principles that transcend societal and systemic differences. To do this, emphasis has been placed on the guaranteeing of human dignity and the common good, rather than on supporting particular political, economic and social structures. This contributes to considerable tension both within and without the church, as individuals interpret Catholic positions as either for or against particular systems. The situation is further

Rights in the Americas: The Struggle for Consensus (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1982), p. 13.

5 Ibid.

complicated by the identification of individual churchpeople, pastoral forms and theological currents with authoritarianism, liberalism, capitalism or socialism. The Catholic Church in Latin America has attempted to cope with this by evaluating the impact of past and present political and economic forms on human dignity and the common good, praising those systems and structures that appeared to promote greater rights enjoyment and criticizing those that produced systemic violations.

The result has been a constant refining of the Catholic Church's stances on the legitimacy of political, economic and social systems, together with regular reassertions of the principles deemed necessary to guide just societies. Church positions have also been influenced by the specific conditions within countries and the degree of consensus among, as well as intellectual strength and political openness of, church leaders. All this creates, at times, an appearance of conflict within the church and a struggle, not always successful, to avoid identification with particular structures. The latter is difficult, especially given the historical identification of the Catholic Church with the status quo in Latin America, even if the reality was more complex.

Since the 1960s, the Catholic Church has attempted to suggest that alternative political, economic and social systems and structures be devised via critiques of defective ones and the enunciation of overarching principles. This has led the church to be sharply criticized by defenders of specific models both within and without the church. When it involves ecclesial criticisms of particular governments, it has, at times, resulted in repression of churchpeople by authoritarian states and irritation by democratic ones. The latter tend to see such criticism as destabilizing and ultimately lacking in an appreciation of the difficulties of governing societies characterized by sharp political, economic and social cleavages. In attempting to deal with this, Catholic leaders tend to urge greater commitment on the part of public officials to justice and participation. More specifically they counsel that respect for civil/political rights is directly related to fulfillment of social, economic, religious and cultural rights. Violations in one area, they argue, promote violations in the other. Broad-based popular participation in political and economic decision-making is seen as the most effective way to guarantee that no one set of rights will be given priority to the detriment of another. Hence, the rights of participation and to integral development⁶ are

6 Integral development refers to the realization of the individuals full human dignity.

seen as the best defenses against gross violations. This presumes societies open to change, as well as high degrees of toleration of political and ideological pluralism. The Catholic Church sees its task as encouraging participation, integral development and greater pluralism in the face of highly conflictual societies fraught with national and international impediments to change. The difficulty of this is suggested by a closer examination of the specific positions of the Catholic Church in Latin America on political and economic issues and their consequences.

III. CATHOLICISM, HUMAN RIGHTS AND LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS

The Catholic Church in Latin America has in recent years justified its taking positions on political issues, as flowing from its mission to struggle for the realization of the Kingdom of God commencing here on earth. Such a kingdom is the achievement of societies characterized by peace and justice arising out of generalized respect for human rights. In order to accomplish this, the church clearly admits the necessity of individuals creating political, economic and social structures in order to guarantee the common good.⁷

The definition of the common good in contemporary Latin American Catholicism reflects not only the traditional social doctrine of the church, but also contemporary realities. As the Argentine episcopacy expressed it in 1976, the common good is:

not the simple and sometimes chaotic sum of individual interests (often obtained and defended in practice by questionable means), as liberal individualism proclaims. Neither is the welfare of the State itself to be considered superior to the legitimate rights of individuals, families and others, as is the claim of dictatorships of both left and right. The common good should rightly be the aim of all-collectively, and individually considered; it is 'the conjunction of conditions of social life which make possible to associations and each of their members the fullest measure of success and the easiest means to their achieving perfection.' (Gaudium et Spes, No. 26)⁸

7 Brazilian Episcopal Conference (hereafter BEC) "Christian Requirements of a Political Order, February 17, 1977", *LADOC 'Keyhole' Series*, 16 (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, [1977]), p.57.

8 Argentine Episcopal Conference (hereafter AEC), "The Common Good and the Present Situation, May 5, 1976", *LADOC 'Keyhole' Series*, 15, (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, [1977]), p.17.

Echoing this, the Brazilian episcopacy the same year held that the «common good is that combination of specific conditions which permit all people to reach standards of living compatible with human dignity. Thus the essential characteristic of the common good is that it be the common good for everyone, without discrimination of any kind whether it be cultural, social, religious, racial, economic, political or partisan.”⁹

The function of the state is to realize the common good by striving to provide the conditions necessary for the integral development of all, that is, each individual's realization of his or her physical, moral, intellectual and social potential, to the degree permitted in justice. This requires that the state have some coercive authority and that individuals respect the rule of law and discharge their duties as citizens.

Thus, the common good becomes the principal underlying factor in the maintenance of society, the ultimate criterion of political life, the strict norm of authority, the *raison d'être* for law, and the touchstone for all legislation. The common good must never be achieved at the expense of the rights of the individual, not even the unjust infringement of such rights, but, on the contrary, must act as the very safeguard of such rights, because, just as a part of the whole being protects and preserves itself, so also does preservation contribute to the perfection of the whole to which it belongs. As in the human body, the welfare of the social organization depends on the good health of each and every one of its organs.¹⁰

In short, it is the responsibility of the state to promote the common good and human rights to the degree necessary for individuals to achieve human dignity. In doing this, the state must defend human rights, but is not their source, nor does it confer them as privileges. Rather rights are considered claims by the individual not only on the state, but also on every other member of society. The church's role is to use moral suasion and the granting or withholding of legitimacy to states and societies to the degree that they promote the common good and enjoyment of human rights. In this view, the Catholic Church sees itself not as engaging in politics, nor attempting to exercise political power, but rather as promoting the Kingdom of God on earth.

9 BEC, p.59.

10 AEC, p. 17.

According to the Catholic Church, the principal obstacle to the achievement of the common good in Latin America is the extent of poverty and exploitation which means being:

kept outside on the margin; it is to receive an unjust salary. It is to be deprived of education, medical attention, and credit; it is to be hungry and live in sordid huts; it is to be deprived of land by inadequate, unjust agrarian structures.¹¹

Such conditions make it difficult not only to meet one's basic needs, but also to participate in political and economic decision-making and contribute creatively to one's national culture. Historically, in Latin America it has caused the individual to be regarded not as the subject of rights but as an object to be manipulated via political and economic favors and hence unable to fully participate in the determination of one's individual and national destiny.¹²

This reasoning led the Latin American bishops to enunciate at the 1968 Medellín conference a preferential option for the poor. That is, the church would attempt to identify and accompany those afflicted with poverty and exploitation in their struggle for justice and human dignity. To do this it was deemed imperative that the Catholic Church more actively condemn human rights violations and injustice, as well as the structures that cause or permit them. This preferential option for the poor was reaffirmed at the Latin American bishops' conference at Puebla, Mexico, in 1979, as well as by Pope John Paul II on various occasions.¹³

The enunciation of a preferential option for the poor in Latin America gave rise to charges that it was, or could be interpreted as, sanctioning concepts of class warfare and was in opposition to the universality of the church's mission. Catholic leaders, including Pope John Paul II,¹⁴ have insisted that the option is inclusive not exclusive. They argue that it is a call to the church to accompany the poor and evangelize the rich to encourage their support for a more just society. Furthermore, the Catholic Church has repeatedly reaffirmed that the preferential option for the poor excludes the

11 BEC, p.60.

12 *Ibid.*, pp.60-61.

13 Cardenal Eduardo Pironio, "Qué se espera de América Latina en el Sínodo sobre los laicos", *Páginas*, separata No. 77 (Mayo, 1986), pp. 6-7.

14 *Ibid.*

use of violence to achieve socioeconomic justice, except in the most extreme cases of state terror.¹⁵

Since the late 1960s the Catholic Church has denounced gross violations of rights by both the right and the left, as well as by states and their opponents. In some countries, such as Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Paraguay, the armed forces and the military have been repeatedly identified by national and international human rights monitors as the chief instigators of violations. In other countries, such as Colombia and Peru, violations flow from the violence engendered by such phenomena as drug trafficking and guerrilla movements, as well as state repression. The positions of the Catholic Church in these countries attempt to take such factors into account calling on all sides to respect human dignity. An increasing preoccupation of the church in the 1980s was the spread of human rights violations resulting from warfare, particularly in Central America. As a consequence it assumed a major role in the search for peace in the region. An examination of the church's action in the face of such phenomena as state terror, guerrilla movements, and regional warfare will help reveal the diverse nature of the implementation of the Catholic position on human rights.

Of particular concern to the Catholic Church have been those governments or movements that have attempted to justify violations of human rights on the grounds that they are defending Western Christian civilization or the true gospel message. The military government of General Augusto Pinochet installed in Chile on September 11, 1973, is often cited as an example of the former, while the guerrilla movement Sendero Luminoso initiated in Peru in 1980 is regarded as an example of the latter.

Church authorities have repeatedly admitted the right of government officials to use coercive force in the pursuit of the common good and order

15 On June 2, 1979, the Nicaraguan episcopacy issued a pastoral letter stating that the armed insurrection against the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in Nicaragua was moral and licit due to longstanding gross violations of human rights. It should be noted that this support of the insurrection did not mean automatic approval of whatever government the insurrection brought to power. Hence, the Nicaraguan bishops throughout the Sandinista government (1979-1990) claimed the right to criticize its human rights practices and legitimacy. Conferencia Episcopal de Nicaragua (hereafter CEN), "Mensaje al Pueblo Nicaragüense", June 2, 1979.

within society. They further admit the right of a nation to protect itself from foreign attack or subversion of a legitimate government. What they strongly object to are attempts to eliminate subversive terrorism through illegal state repression whose «principle victim is always the people.»¹⁶ The defense of national security, it is argued, must be accomplished within the parameters of a country's constitution and laws as well as human rights criteria. Hence, while the Catholic Church accepts the necessity, under extraordinary circumstances, of the suspension or limitation of some rights it insists that these not involve violence. Furthermore, it has repeatedly condemned structural violence, that is, gross violations of rights resulting from the nature of societal forms. In the face of such violence, the Catholic bishops at Medellin affirmed the right of individuals and communities to resist in defense of their lives and dignity.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the official position of the church is one of opposition to violence. As the Paraguayan Federation of Religious phrased it in 1987:

We don't believe in the efficacy of violence, but rather in the transforming power of love. We reaffirm our faith in the efficacy of «active non-violence as a courageous and Christian expression of the divine and human love in the construction of a fraternal world.»¹⁸

While this is official Catholic policy there are a few churchpeople who find strict adherence to non-violence exceptionally difficult within highly repressive societies. Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador stated in 1978 that «when dictatorship seriously violates human rights and attacks the common good of the nation, when it becomes unbearable and closes all channels of dialogue, of understanding, or rationality, when this happens, the church speaks of the legitimate right of insurrectional violence.»¹⁹ Romero also called shortly before his assassination in March 1980 for Salvadoran soldiers and police to disobey orders that would cause them to commit grave violations of human rights.

16 Paraguayan Episcopal Conference (hereafter PEC), "Amidst Persecutions and Consolations, June 12, 1976", *LADOC 'Keyhole' Series*, 15, p.10.

17 Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), pp.157-162.

18 FERELPAR, Paraguay: A Statement by the Federation of Religious", *LADOC*, 18, 5 (May/June, 1988), p.16.

19 Archbishop Oscar Romero as quoted in Alan Riding, "The Cross and the Sword in Latin America", in Marvin E. Genleman, et al., eds., *El Salvador: Central America in the New Cold War* (New York: Grove Press, inc., 1981), p.196.

Clearly the issue of the moral response to structural violence has dominated many discussions of church policy since the 1960s. The emergence of the theology of liberation and its utilization by some to justify guerrilla movements has led some commentators to conclude that liberation theology promotes violent revolution. The appearance of a handful of "guerrilla priests," such as Camilo Torres in Colombia in the mid-1960s, has been used to confirm this. It should be noted, however, that there have been only about a dozen such clerics in the last twenty-five years in Latin America. The vast majority of priests and religious continue to strongly support reform rather than revolution, even though they may at times question whether justice can be achieved without imposing radical structural transformations.

This issue was a prime focus of discussion at the Latin American bishops' conference at Puebla in 1979 particularly in terms of the limits of political action for clerics in promoting change. To those who had argued that Christ himself was a revolutionary, Pope John Paul II replied in his opening address that:

This idea of Christ as a political figure, a revolutionary, as the subversive man from Nazareth, does not tally with the church's catechesis. By confusing the insidious pretexts of Jesus' accusers with the very different-attitude of Jesus himself, some people adduce as the cause of his death the outcome of a political conflict, and nothing is said of the Lord's will to deliver himself and of his consciousness of his redemptive mission. The Gospels clearly show that for Jesus anything that would alter his mission as the servant of Yahweh was a temptation (Luke 4:5). He does not accept the position of those who mixed the things of God with merely political attitudes (cf. Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; John 18:36). He unequivocally rejects recourse to violence. He opens his message of conversion to everybody without excluding the very publicans. The perspective of his mission is much deeper. It consists in complete salvation through a transforming, peacemaking, pardoning and reconciling love.²⁰

Increasingly since the late 1970s emphasis has been on evangelization to promote societal reconciliation, particularly in those countries that have

20 John Paul II. "NC Documentary: Pope's Opening Talk to Latin American Bishops, January 28, 1979, Puebla, Mexico", NC Press Release, p.10.

been afflicted by warfare such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Peru and Colombia. The working out of this thrust within conflictual societies has caused church leaders to attempt to balance denunciations of violence, whatever the source, with calls for reconciliation. This has resulted in criticism of the Catholic Church from all sides with authoritarian governments accusing the church or churchpeople of being subversive and guerrilla leaders castigating the church for abandoning the poor and the exploited.

The situation is even more complicated when societies are engulfed in political and ideological struggle as in Chile during the government of Salvador Allende in the early 1970s. In these countries the historical church preference for order and fear of chaos tended to assert itself. Hence, the episcopacy largely accepted Allende's overthrow on September 11, 1973, by the military under the leadership of General Augusto Pinochet. The prelates had become alienated from the Popular Unity Government in large measure as a result of Allende's Marxism, the alleged superficiality of government efforts to assist the poor, sectarianism in education, increasing loss of faith among youths, political rhetoric and growing social disorder. The Chilean hierarchy was also preoccupied with what they regarded as the attempt by Chilean Christians for Socialism to establish a parallel magisterium or authority within the church.²¹ In recent years the bishops also admitted to having been influenced by their formation and the opposition press.²²

The gravity and extent of human rights violations in the immediate aftermath of the coup caused the Chilean episcopacy within a month to establish, together with the Lutheran and Methodist churches as well as sectors of the Jewish community, the Committee of Cooperation for Peace. Until it was disbanded in December 1975 under pressure from the Pinochet government, the Committee provided over 100,000 individuals with legal, medical and economic assistance. Local offices were established in 15 of 25

21 A similar complaint has been made by the Nicaraguan bishops about progressive Christian sectors in that country. Comunidades Eclesiaticales (sic) de Base, Managua, Nicaragua, "Managuan BECs Defend Their Church Identity", *LADOC*, XII, 5, (May/June, 1982), pp.5-6.

22 Monseñor Carlos Camus L. (Obispo de Concepción), "La experiencia de la iglesia chilena en la defensa de los derechos humanos", in Hugo L. Frühling, ed., *Represión política y defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (Santiago: Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, 1986), p.54. See also Brian H. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

Chilean provinces to provide such services. Together with its successor, the Vicariate of Solidarity, established in 1976, it served not only to provide human rights assistance for tens of thousands of people, but also to raise consciousness within and without the Catholic Church concerning the relationship between respect for human rights and the preservation and promotion of democracy.²³

Direct church involvement in human rights work strengthened Catholicism in Chile. It also helped identify it as the institutional base for opposition to the regime. This resulted in the church and churchpeople being targeted by the regime for repression resulting in assassination, torture, exile and harassment from October 1973 up to 1990.²⁴ This helped decrease divisions within the church over political issues and to activate a broad cross section of churchpeople. In December 1987, over 150 Catholic priests, nuns and lay missionaries publicly called for the resignation of General Pinochet on the grounds that Chile «is experiencing a collective death, whose symptoms are generalized poverty, human rights abuse and the regime's plans to continue indefinitely by imposing a plebiscite [in 1988] based on the immoral constitution of 1980.»²⁵ In a related statement the Chilean Episcopal Conference asserted in June 1988 that fair and ethical conditions did not exist for the plebiscite.²⁶ Early that year the church undertook a massive campaign to encourage the Chilean public to register to vote in the plebiscite. Implicit in the effort was the church's desire to see a return to civilian government which occurred in 1990.

Behind such positions were, however, some ambiguities. While there was a consensus concerning the need for an end to the military dictatorship and a return to civilian government, there was not full agreement concerning post-Pinochet political and economic structures. Some sectors of the church

23 Jaime Esponda F. "Objetivos y criterios estratégicos aplicados por la Vicaría de la Solidaridad de Santiago en su tarea de defensa de los Derechos Humanos", in Frühling, pp.108-138, and Margaret E. Crahan, "Evaluation of the Chilean Commission of Human Rights and the Vicariate of Solidarity", Report prepared for the Ford Foundation, Lima, Peru, July 1988.

24 Americas Watch, *The Vicaría de la Solidaridad in Chile* (New York: Americas Watch, 1987) and Amnesty International, *Chile: Persecution of Human Rights Monitors and Members of the Clergy: Recent Cases* (New York: Amnesty International, 1987).

25 The plebiscite occurred on October 5, 1988 and the Pinochet government was defeated. "Church: Chile", *Latinamerica Press*, 21 (January 21, 1988), p. 2.

26 "Church: Chile", *Latinamerica Press*, 20, 26 (July 14, 1988), p. 2.

supported socialism, while others continue to adhere to a reformed capitalism. Most church leaders tended to sidestep such disagreements in a pragmatic effort to maintain unity during and after the dictatorship. Overall, however, there was a substantial increase in the prestige of the Catholic Church which was identified, together with the Vicariate, in a public opinion survey in 1987 as being the most trustworthy and esteemed institution in Chile. Government and military officials ranked last.²⁷

The relative unity and high degree of activism of the Chilean church was not matched by its Argentine counterpart in the aftermath of a March 1976 military coup in that country. Reports of disappearances, torture and assassinations did not prompt the Argentine church to establish a human rights office nor identify themselves closely with secular rights groups. Only four of more than eighty bishops took public stands denouncing violations by the military government which held power from 1976 to 1983.²⁸ Other prelates attempted to obtain information about the disappeared on a confidential basis, while still others are alleged to have soothed the consciences of torturers.²⁹

The reasons adduced for the behavior of the Catholic Church in Argentina include a history of close relations with the armed forces, particularly via a system of military chaplaincies, the institutional weakness of the church in a highly secularized society, a deep-rooted fear of chaos and Marxism in the face of an urban guerrilla movement (the Monteneros) together with an increasingly radicalized youth, the economic dependence of church officials on the government which paid a part of their salaries and the formation of the Argentine clergy which was influenced, to a degree, by right wing movements emanating from Europe. Hence, while the Argentine episcopacy supported human rights in pastoral letters on a number of

27 CERC, *Informe preliminar sobre primera encuesta nacional* (Santiago de Chile: CERC, 1988).

28 The four were Enrique Angelelli of La Rioja, allegedly murdered by the military on August 4, 1976; Jaime de Nevares of Neuquén; Miguel Hesayne of Viedma and Jorge Novak of Quilmes. The latter two both personally joined secular human rights organizations. Emilio Mignone, *Witness to the Truth: The Complicity of Church and Dictatorship in Argentina, 1976-1983*. Translated from the Spanish by Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), p. 19.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 20, 25.

occasions,³⁰ it did not mobilize its resources and exercise strong moral leadership in their defense.

No other Latin American national church has been as criticized for its-perceived lack of a prophetic stance on human rights. While there is little doubt of the Argentine church's support for democracy and human rights, its actions during the 1976-1983 military government do not appear to have resulted in a commensurate upsurge of prestige and influence such as experienced by the Catholic Church in Chile. Rather it reflects the fact that while the Catholic Church may be universal in faith and doctrine, its actual behavior is heavily influenced by national realities. An examination of the Catholic Church's efforts in seeking peace in Central America further confirms this.

During the 1980s El Salvador and Nicaragua were embroiled in war, revolution and counterrevolution. Today El Salvador and Nicaragua are devastated economically resulting in approximately one-quarter to two-thirds of their populations being unemployed. In Guatemala it is estimated by international human rights observers that some 100,000 civilians have been killed since 1980 as a result of government efforts to eliminate a guerrilla force of some 3000.³¹ Costa Rica, Honduras and Panama while not the actual scene of warfare experienced serious political, economic and social destabilization. Throughout this period the Catholic Church in each of these countries attempted to defend human rights and promote peace. Their efforts met with only limited success. Nevertheless, their role has been repeatedly recognized by secular authorities, including the Central American presidents who in August 1987 formally requested the participation of the episcopacy in national reconciliation commissions. The bishops of El Salvador and Nicaragua assumed major roles in these efforts, while their counterparts in Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras lesser ones.

September 1984 peace talks between the government of El Salvador and its political and armed opposition, the FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front) and the FMLN (Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation),

30 AEC, 5/15/76 and Argentine Episcopal Conference, "A Christian Reflection for the People of Argentina, May 7, 1977", *LADOC 'Keyhole' Series*, 16, pp. 23-29.

31 Amnesty International, *Guatemala: The Human Rights Record* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1987).

were arranged, in part, by the Archbishop of San Salvador Arturo Rivera y Damas and some Jesuits. While this meeting was not successful since there was little inclination to compromise on either side, in August 1985 the Salvadoran Episcopal conference issued a pastoral letter calling for a renewal of talks as the only means of avoiding the destruction of the country.³² In mid 1986 President José Napoleon Duarte asked Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas to arrange and mediate new peace talks. While the opposition in principle accepted such talks the initiative did not bear fruit, nor did the October 1987 talks convened under the Arias peace plan. This prompted the hierarchy in mid-1988 to attempt a slightly different strategy of inviting representatives of over one hundred social, economic and popular organizations to participate in a national forum to promote a peace settlement. In this fashion the prelates hoped to pressure both the government and the FDR/FMLN to concede to the overwhelming desire of the public for peace.³³

The bishops' initiative was sharply criticized by Salvadoran political and economic elites who argued that the forum was an attempt to impose Marxism on the country and undercut the government and political parties. The episcopacy replied that the initiative was a simple pastoral effort to find a peaceful solution to war and did not constitute political activity.³⁴ It should be noted that by 1988 the government of José Napoleon Duarte was widely regarded as ineffectual and political parties primarily represented conservative elements. Labor unions, agrarian cooperatives and other grassroots groups supported the forum which provided them with an opportunity to express their opinions on ending the civil war. The debate over the forum illustrates the limitations on the church's efforts to translate popular support for peace talks into serious negotiations in the face of the resistance of political and economic elites.

The Catholic Church had more success in humanizing the conflict

32 Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador (hereafter CEES), "Reconciliación y Paz» (8 de agosto de 1985), San Salvador, El Salvador, p.14.

33 In 1985 Archbishop Rivera y Damas estimated that approximately 80 percent of all Salvadorans favored peace talks. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), "Archbishop Rivera y Damas Holds News Conference", (9/24/85), *Latin America: Daily Report*, VI, 186 (9/25/85), pp. P3-5.

34 "A propósito de la carta de ASCAFE a Mons. Revelo", *Proceso*, 9, 344 (7/13/88), pp.4-7.

through negotiating truces, the exchange of prisoners of war and release of political kidnap victims. It also publicly denounced civilian deaths caused by the armed forces and guerrillas noting that the majority resulted from the actions of the former. Together with such Protestant churches as the Lutheran and Baptist, it was in the forefront of caring for refugees. Throughout, these churches justified their activities as the natural outgrowth of their commitment to human rights.

Tragically it was the assassination in 1989 of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter by the Salvadoran military in the midst of the FMLN's last offensive that helped precipitate serious peace negotiations. The deaths helped erode support for continued U.S. military assistance in Congress. Several of the Jesuits had been active in organizing the National Forum, as well as served as go-betweens between the government and the guerrillas. Ignacio Ellacuría, for example, rector of the Jesuit's Universidad Centroamericana played a major role in maintaining communications between the conservative president, Alfredo Cristiani (1989-1994) and the FMLN. A supporter of armed struggle in the early 1980s, by the middle of the decade Ellacuría had become a champion of a negotiated solution, a position which contributed to his death since it was regarded as treasonous by the extreme right.

In Nicaragua the Catholic Church as an institution and churchpeople played a major role in the consolidation of the movement which overthrew the Somoza dictatorship (1934-1979). From the establishment of the Government of National Reconstruction in July 1979, the Catholic Church was a major actor in the political and ideological struggle that ensued as the Sandinista leadership attempted to implement a socialist revolution. Counterrevolutionary elements, known as the Contras, took up arms in 1980 and by mid-1981 were receiving support from the U.S. government. Throughout the 1980s the Catholic bishops called for a national dialogue to end the conflict. The situation was complicated by the fact that some priests and wellknown laypersons serve in the upper echelons of the government.³⁵ In addition, attitudes within the church towards the Sandinistas and the Contras covered the full spectrum from strong support to strong opposition

35 Four priests have held cabinet level posts: Miguel D'Escoto—Foreign Minister, Ernesto Cardenal—Minister of Culture, his brother Fernando—Minister of Education and Edgard Parrales—Minister of Social Welfare. In 1986 all four were canonically censured for holding political office in the face of a 1980 Vatican prohibition.

with many churchpeople being uncomfortable with both options.³⁶ All sides attempted to use the church to legitimate their positions and church-state tension, as well as conflict within the church were substantial.

The Catholic Church at all levels struggled to promote peace while debating how best to achieve it. A prime stumbling block was the question of terms. Some churchpeople supported the government position that the Contras lay down their arms and U.S. aid cease before a final agreement was signed. Others argued that this would be tantamount to surrender for the Contras and therefore was unacceptable.

A breakthrough occurred with the Esquipulas Accords brokered by Costa Rican president Oscar Arias (1986-90). As a result, in the fall of 1987, the Sandinista government asked its frequent critic, the Cardinal of Managua, Miguel Obando y Bravo, to chair the National Reconciliation Commission and mediate peace talks. The move served to reduce the image of Obando as a strong opponent of the government and he reported that the Sandinistas were more committed to serious peace talks than the contras.³⁷

In mid-1988 after the breakdown of peace talks the Nicaraguan episcopacy urged the government, the Contras and the civilian opposition "to find peaceful, civic and political means for renewing peace talks where practical steps and time frames would be undertaken for an irreversible democratization of the country."³⁸ The bishops warned that if such a move was not undertaken Nicaraguans would suffer even more severe violations of human rights leading to desperation for man accepts pain and temporal misery when it is accompanied by hope for the future, but not when there seems to be no way out of the situation.³⁹

While some commentators ascribed the defeat of the Sandinistas in the February 1990 elections in large measure to the opposition of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, survey research has not confirmed this. Nor is there data to support assertions that there existed a formal alliance between the

36 Andrew J. Stein, "The Prophetic Mission, the Catholic Church and Politics: Nicaragua in the Context of Central America", Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1995.

37 Interviews with Foreign Ministry Officials in Panama and Mexico, January 1988.

38 "Church: Nicaragua", *Latinamerica Press*, 20, 26 (7/14/88), p. 2.

39 Stephen Kinzer, "All Sides in Nicaragua Get Plea from Bishops", *New York Times*, (7/1/88), p. 6.

government of Violeta de Chamorro (1990-1996). Catholics, in general, continue to represent a wide spectrum of political and ideological positions reflecting their presence in all sectors of Nicaraguan society.⁴⁰

U.S. military and economic support for the Contras also led the U.S. Catholic bishops to speak out. In 1987 they characterized U.S. support for the Contras as "morally flawed" and endorsed the Arias peace plan. Their reasoning was that military solutions to the conflict in Nicaragua resulted in serious human rights violations undercutting the common good. The bishops also concluded that economic issues were at the root of the conflict in Central America including the burden of heavy foreign debt,⁴¹ rather than Marxist subversion as the Reagan administration argued.

In addition the U.S. episcopacy backed efforts on the part of the Archbishop of Panama to mediate between that country's dictator General Manuel A. Noriega and his civilian opposition.⁴² The Catholic Church in Panama was also highly critical of U.S. economic sanctions aimed at pressuring Noriega to resign as «exceeding legitimate political pressure and constituting a threat to the life of our people.» In addition, they rejected the 1989 U.S. military intervention as immoral.⁴³

While all of the positions taken by church leaders in Latin America reflect a general consensus concerning the role of human rights in assuring peace and political stability, there is no unanimity about specific solutions. Hence while Catholic leaders in El Salvador and Nicaragua agree with the public about the absolute necessity for peace they disagreed on what concessions the contending forces should make in peace talks. This reflected the differing ideological persuasions of churchpeople, as well as local realities. The actions of individual churchpeople whether they be bishops, priests, brothers, nuns or laypersons further complicate matters for all tend to use religion to legitimate the political options they support. In highly conflictual societies this can lead to increased tensions both within churches and in society. This helps explain the greater efforts displayed by many

40 Stein, *passim*.

41 Marjorie Hyer, "Catholic Bishops Call Support for Contras 'Morally Flawed,'" *Washington Post* (11/20/87), p. A30.

42 "U.S. Bishops Back Church Effort in Panama", *Los Angeles Times* (4/6/88), p.1-5.

43 "Church: Panama", *Latinamerica Press* (5/5/88), p.2.

church leaders in recent years to insist that the church does not support specific political systems.

It is very difficult to maintain such a position, however, while at the same time criticizing those same systems and models. Strong postures in support of human rights have, as a consequence, politicized the church and inserted it into political and ideological struggle. This results in constant tension within the church and attacks by those not satisfied with its positions who tend to question the universality of the churches' mission. The church's response has been to hold that criticism of political elites across the political spectrum is part of its mission to evangelize and interpret the gospel message. The interpretation of that message at Vatican II, Medellín, Puebla and Santo Domingo (1992), however, presented serious challenges to political structures in Latin America. As long as the church maintains a strong human rights posture, its claims to political neutrality will continue to be questioned by those presiding over governments guilty of repression. At the root of the church's criticism of political structures is its belief that they are used frequently to defend unjust economic systems.

IV. CATHOLICISM, HUMAN RIGHTS AND ECONOMICS

Both Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II have insisted that development is the new name for peace.⁴⁴ That is, if societal concord is to be augmented and international conflict reduced, economic policies must have as a guiding principle the reduction of the gap between the rich and poor within nations and between rich and poor nations. Development models, it is argued, must be guided by ethical principles and morality, not just technical criteria. The prime criterion should be the promotion of the integral development of the individual, not simply economic growth. In Latin American countries where substantial minorities and sometimes a majority of the people exist in absolute poverty,⁴⁵ this demand has shattering implications and has perhaps generated more controversy than any of the church's other positions. Nevertheless, it has been pursued with considerable vigor.

44 John Paul II, p. 16.

45 Elizabeth W. Dore and John F. Weeks, "Economic Performance and Basic Needs: The Examples of Brazil Chile, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela", in Crahan, *Human Rights and Basic Needs*, pp.150-187.

Catholic reasoning is that while the church does not claim technical economic expertise, it does have an obligation to criticize economic systems and structures that are morally deficient, because they condemn a substantial proportion of populations to inhuman conditions.⁴⁶ While admitting the necessity of economic development consisting of rising growth rates, capital accumulation and increased exports, the Catholic Church since Medellín has insisted on the necessity of integral development "which responds to the requirements of the common good [and] is not measured just by the quantitative growth of measurable values...."⁴⁷

Church leaders freely admit that this implies substantial economic change. As with political problems, they do not propose specific solutions. Rather they argue that moral economic structures flow from the incorporation of the citizenry into the process of determining the long-term goals of development policies. Without broadbased political participation, economic decisionmaking is regarded as seriously flawed. Furthermore, «[o]nly a people called to participate in the process of their own development will accept with dignity the necessary sacrifices. Otherwise the call to sacrifice creates tension and social revolt and increased violence, repression and corruption.»⁴⁸ Such participation is more likely to insure that economic models are conducive to the common good.⁴⁹

Latin American Catholic leaders have been particularly critical of what they regard as an overdependence on technocratic elites who determine nationaleconomic policies without sufficient attention to the moral imperative of meeting basic needs. In Chile where the Pinochet government depended on a group of economists identified with strict monetarist policies, the Chilean episcopacy strongly challenged the belief that «economic decisions are based on scientific reasons, as if to say that in human sciences we do not find a variety of opinions and theories allowing for an equal multiplicity of options.»⁵⁰ The programs implemented, it was argued, must not only be successful in technical terms, but also promote the common good. If they did not then they were considered sinful. Evidence that economic structures are

46 Chilean Episcopal Conference (hereafter CEC). "Our Life as a Nation", March 25, 1977", *LADOC 'Keyhole' Series*, 15, p. 52.

47 BEC, p.66.

48 Ibid., p.62.

49 Ibid., p.66.

50 CEC, March 25, 1977, p.53.

sinful is the existence of widespread poverty which results in doing violence to the people and furthermore encourages violent responses.⁵¹

Such positions have led Catholic leaders to take the stance that there is no absolute right to private property, but rather that each individual has a right to those resources necessary for life with dignity. As the Caribbean bishops phrased it «any society in which a few control most of the wealth and the masses are left in want is a sinful society. We believe that those who own superfluous possessions are obliged in justice to share them with those who are in want.» As a consequence, Christians have an obligation to work to «change society so that wealth is more fairly divided among all and to support authentic participation initiatives by governments to this end.»⁵²

This position has led some church leaders to state that they are not opposed to socialism in total, but rather that they reject those expressions of it which involve “the denial of God and the spiritual, the insistence on the need for class warfare, and the suppression of all types of private property.”⁵³ The bishops of the Caribbean, for example, regard the stated socialist commitment to greater enjoyment of basic needs as highly laudable. What they object to is any position that “denies God or the supernatural destiny of man, promotes violence or absorbs individual freedom into the collectivity.”⁵⁴ If a socialist system promotes such values as liberty, responsibility and receptivity in such fashion as to encourage the integral development of the individual then it is morally acceptable.⁵⁵ Hence, this stance accepts socialism while rejecting Marxism-Communism because the latter is regarded as denying spiritual values and exploiting class differences and emphasizing the material over the spiritual.

Catholic leaders have also been outspoken in criticizing liberal capitalism for overemphasis on the profit motive, acceptance of poverty, and exacerbation of class differences. The Catholic Church in Latin America has repeatedly argued that the manner in which capitalism has evolved in the

51 “Peru: Poverty the Most Fundamental Violence”, Statement by 300 Peruvian priests, 9/8/87. *LADOC*, XVIII, 3 (January/February, 1988), pp. 25-26.

52 Antilles Episcopal Conference (hereafter ANEC), “Justice and Peace in a New Caribbean, November 21, 1975”, *LADOC ‘Keyhole’ Series*, 16, p.12.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*, p.13.

55 *Ibid.*, p.14.

region has resulted in the subordination of human rights and dignity to the pursuit of material gain. In the face of this, the church has urged greater popular participation in decision making in order to make both socialist and capitalist systems more just.⁵⁶

The emergence of neoliberal economic models in Latin America since the 1970s and their failure to substantially reduce poverty has also generated criticism from within the Catholic Church from prelates to Base Christian Communities (CEBs). A coalition of the latter in Colombia using biblical terminology (Apocalypse 12.3) characterized neoliberalism as a seven headed monster because:

1. It strips us of our national wealth and pays badly for our products.
2. It exploits our cheap labor. It produces unemployment due to increasing technology and removes people who do not contribute to production from circulation.
3. It imposes its commercial laws and closes its market to our products.
4. It invests vast amounts of money in arms and security organizations in order to maintain its power.
5. It intervened by force in governments and in international organizations according to its own interests.
6. Through communication media and education [it] converts us into consumers and worshippers, attempting to present itself as a religion.
7. It throws us its toxic waste, its garbage, poisoning the environment, and contaminating and destroying nature.

The effects of the presence of the neoliberal dragon can be seen in all Third World nations and even among those of the so-called First World.⁵⁷

The CEBs argued for a "spirituality of resistance" and popular mobilization to promote alternative economic models more protective of natural resources and the dignity of the worker.⁵⁸ In Chile where the neoliberal policies of the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) resulted in generally strong economic growth, with increased poverty,

56 Salvadoran Episcopal Conference (hereafter SEC), "A Call to End Violence and Promote Justice, May 17, 1977", *LADOC 'Keyhole' Series*, 16, p.49.

57 "Neoliberalism: The Seven-Headed Monster Roars", *LADOC*, XXIV, 4 (March/April 1994), pp. 1-2.

58 *Ibid.*, 3.

his civilian successors, Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994) and Eduardo Frei (1994-1998) have attempted to modify some of the negative consequences of neoliberalism without abandoning it. The Catholic hierarchy has responded by asserting that the new political leadership has the moral obligation to reduce the suffering of the poor. While the prelates recognize the constraints of the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, the bishops have called upon political and economic elites to have as a major objective the socioeconomic rights of a greater number of the poor.⁵⁹ Untrammelled neoliberalism, they argue, leads to:

Excessive competition [which] can produce an individualism that is harmful to people and life. As we reject the concept of class struggle, we also reject the struggle of everyone for himself as the way of getting ahead. The economic model, if it is not internally regulated by strong ethical principles and a true sense of solidarity, leaves the poor with very little protection and faced with unfair and unequal competition.»⁶⁰

The complexities of Latin American economic issues are also reflected in a paper presented by the Nicaraguan Jesuit Xabier Gorostiaga at the UN Social Development Summit in Copenhagen in March 1995. An economist who has advised both the Socialist Sandinista and neoliberal Chamorro governments, Gorostiaga linked gains in the enjoyment of socioeconomic rights by Latin America's poor to the increased strength of civil society, as well as international cooperation, particularly in support of environmental protection and sustainable development. Gorostiaga holds that "today, there exists transformative proposals, hopes and visions that are in open contrast to the fear and uncertainty of those who recognize that their stabilization and adjustment formulas are not working."⁶¹

Such positions demonstrate the degree to which the Catholic Church in Latin America has accepted, at least in principle, both political and economic pluralism. Hence, the Catholic Church in Cuba has since the late 1960s repeatedly affirmed its belief that socialism in Cuba has made some positive

59 Enrique Moreno Laval, S.S.C.C., "Poverty in Chile: Theme of the Day", *LADOC*, XXIV, 6 (July/August 1994), pp.11-13.

60 CEC, "Challenges to Reality and Tasks for the Church", *LADOC*, XXVII, 1 (Sept./Oct. 1996), pp.12-13.

61 Xabier Gorostiaga, S.J., "Citizens of the Planet of the 21st Century", *LADOC*, XXVI, 3 (January/February 1996), p.6.

contributions to the common good, particularly in the realm of expanded education and health care. As early as 1969 the Cuban episcopacy urged Catholics to participate in government-linked community efforts to promote the common good.⁶² Both the prelates and the government have expressed their belief that one can be both a Christian and a revolutionary.⁶³ As the Archbishop of Havana stated:

It has always been said that it's possible to be a Catholic and a revolutionary. Our Catholic University students start from the base that they are Catholics and revolutionaries. Here, in Cuba, the word Marxism isn't used much. The term that binds Cubans together is revolution (and socialism). So when we talk about a dialogue, we don't talk about a dialogue between Marxists and Christians, because they could have philosophical and theoretical implications of a European nature. It's a question of a government we have and that in practice has made a great and new social change that is a quarter of a century old in the history of Cuba. So the dialogue has to be between the reality called the socialist revolution and the Church, which is part of this people and which thinks—within the process we have named Cuban Church reflection—starting from the grassroots level.⁶⁴

In fact, at a national meeting in early 1986, the Catholic Church dedicated itself to participating even more fully in the building of a socialist society, while recognizing that in Cuba there are serious problems relating to political and religious liberties. The solution is seen not in the overthrow of the government even in the face of the post Cold War economic difficulties, but in evangelizing Cuban society, as well as the church itself,

62 Cuban Episcopal Conference (hereafter CUEC), "Pastoral Letter, April 10, 1969", *LADOC 'Keyhole' Series*, 7 (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, nd).

63 Margaret E. Crahan, "Salvation Through Christ or Marx: Religion in Revolutionary Cuba", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, XXI, 1 (February 1979), pp. 56-184; "Cuba: Religion and Revolutionary institutionalization", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 17 (November, 1985), pp. 319-340; "Cuba and Nicaragua: Religion and Revolution", in Thomas M. Gannon, S.J., ed., *World Catholicism in Transition* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 265-282.

64 Monsignor Jaime Ortega, "The Church in Political Life: Archbishop of Havana—Interview on Church-State Relations in Cuba", *LADOC*, II, 6, (December, 1987), p.33.

to make it more dedicated to the common good.⁶⁵ Not all Cuban Catholics, nor all Latin American Catholics, are as accepting of socialism. However, it should be noted that a good many of the most active bishops, priests, brothers, nuns and laypersons have lost their faith in the capacity of liberal or neoliberal capitalism to substantially reduce the widespread poverty that reflects the denial of basic socioeconomic rights which in turn leads to the violation of political and civil rights.

V. SOME REFLECTIONS

While the severity of political repression and economic exploitation in some countries of Latin America has caused the Catholic Church to focus most of its attention on violations of physical integrity and poverty, it has also spoken out on other rights' issues such as racism, sexism, indigenous rights, the media, AIDS and corruption.⁶⁶ Because of its strong stands on rights questions, religious rights have been at times violated. The latter is attested to by the fact that hundreds of churchpeople, including bishops, priests, brothers, nuns, and lay activists have been tortured and assassinated as a result of their church-related human rights work.⁶⁷

While the defense of human rights has always been a concern for the Catholic Church in Latin America, it is true that since the 1960s it has become a hallmark of its activities. This was the result, in large measure, of increasing concern within the church, particularly in the aftermath of the rise of fascism and World War II in Europe and state terror in Latin America, over asserting moral leadership. There was a sense among church leaders in the post World War II period that their moral leadership was eroding and that they needed to speak more directly to issues of peace, justice and human rights. Hence, the attention paid to these issues at Vatican II and Medellín, as well as throughout the church. A strong commitment to human rights in

65 Monseñor Adolfo Rodríguez, "Discurso Inaugural del ENEC pronunciado por Mons. Adolfo Rodríguez, Presidente de la Conferencia Episcopal de Cuba, en nombre de los Obispos Cubanos" and Encuentro Nacional Eclesial Cubano (ENEC), *Documento Final* (Miami: Instituto de Estudios Cubanos, 1987), pp.7-19; 31.

66 Regrettably, an essay of this length does not permit a fuller exploration of these topics.

67 See for example, Human Rights Watch, *The Persecution of Human Rights Monitors: December 1986 to December 1987 - A Worldwide Survey* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1987), *passim*.

the face of repressive governments, terrorist movements, and increasing societal violence, has tended to increase consensus on the basic rationale for such work among churchpeople. Given the complexities of Latin American societies and the diversity of individuals within the church, divisions remain concerning the most moral political and economic strategies and structures to achieve greater enjoyment of human rights. This reflects the reality of political and ideological debate and struggle in these countries. The fact that via its human rights work the Catholic Church is more directly inserted into contemporary Latin American society has made it a major actor in the struggle. While it has sought to maintain its position of enunciating principles, rather than recommending models, its increasing utilization of the denunciation of violations of human rights have caused it to be accused of partisanship. In reality, some churchpeople, at all levels, have been highly partisan. Nevertheless, throughout Latin America the Catholic Church's human rights work has caused it, as an institution, to become more trusted than in the pre-1960s period. In addition, it has resulted in the church's becoming much more identified with the poor majority, although it has struggled to avoid the appearance of abandoning the rest of society. This has resulted in some ambiguities and apparent contradictions, as well as variations within and between countries in terms of the level of involvement in human rights work. Hence, while the Catholic Church in Latin America has grown in influence and esteem, it has probably never been as beset by internal debate and tension.

While the bishops, clergy and religious have taken the lead in enunciating principles and establishing renowned human rights institutions, much of the pressure to do so came from the laity. While principles were laid out at Vatican II and Medellín, they were generally acted upon in the context of human rights crises that affected the ordinary citizen in Brazil in the late 1960s; Chile and Uruguay in the 1970s and Central America, Colombia and Peru in the 1980s. In some cases, most notably Argentina, crisis did not prompt as much action as in other countries.

The human rights work of the churches caused it to become the target of attack, particularly by repressive governments. This helped reduce the distance between the conservative and progressive sectors within the church. It also stimulated it to seek support internationally not only from the Catholic Church, but also from non-Catholic religious groups, governments and secular human rights organizations. In doing so, the Latin American

human rights situation became better known abroad, particularly in Europe and North America. This prompted the churches in these areas to become more informed and active in pressuring the governments in their countries concerning their policies towards Latin America. Overall, this resulted in considerable rethinking of European and North American positions on Latin America. A notable example of this is the U.S. Catholic bishops' criticism of the impact of international capitalism on areas such as Latin America in their 1986 pastoral letter, "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy."

Such criticisms by church leaders have prompted accusations that the Catholic Church has been infiltrated by Marxists. There is no convincing evidence of this, although some theologians and progressive churchpeople may use Marxist concepts and terminology. Rather the church has succeeded in distancing itself from identification with capitalism, as well as with political and economic elites. It has argued that the political and economic models of superpowers were not necessarily the most conducive to the common good in Latin America. As with all human institutions the pursuit of this objective is not without great difficulties as individual churchpeople are encouraged to transcend their personal and ideological biases.

In addition, not all Latin American Catholics are enthusiastic about the church's strong human rights posture thereby making, as the Puebla and Santo Domingo conferences noted, evangelization of the church a priority. Even without fully accomplishing this the Catholic Church has become the major human rights actor in contemporary Latin America. This initiative resulted from many of the same motives as those which prompted the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that is, that the defense of the full spectrum of human rights was a necessary prerequisite for long-term peace in the world. Or as the Latin American churches would phrase it—the recreation of the Kingdom of God on earth.