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# Prayers of Peace and Protest: The Relationship between the Catholic Church and Chile's Socialist and Military Governments (1970-1990)

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Prayers of Peace and Protest:  
The Relationship between the Catholic Church and Chile's Socialist and Military Governments  
(1970-1990)

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Honors Requirements  
for the Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Studies Department  
Dickinson College

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this work I examine the relationship between the Chilean Catholic Church and the socialist government of Salvador Allende (1970-1973) as well as the military government of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). In the years preceding Allende's election, an ideological current emerged in Chilean religion and politics that emphasized a focus on social justice. This swell of leftist ideas created a tension within both the Church and the country that continued into Allende's presidency. These conflicts were further exacerbated by the military coup in 1973, and the attitudes of laypeople and clergy toward the dictatorship were varied. Scholarship written before the country's return to democracy as well as in the decades following identifies the Catholic Church as one of the most vocal groups in opposition to the military Junta led primarily by Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez. I problematize this portrayal by investigating documents produced by the Church hierarchy at this time in order to better understand the Church's stances and political objectives. I conclude that the Church's relationship with Pinochet's government paralleled their relationship with Allende's government, and that the Church's words and actions reveal a strategic balancing act between political involvement and neutrality. These carefully reasoned stances allow the Church to advance its roles as mediator and peacekeeper.

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## INTRODUCTION

We watch the superpolitization of the country with worry, because it threatens not just the Church, but all of national life. When all of a country becomes political, those politics become unhealthy, because they occupy parts of life that they shouldn't.<sup>1</sup>

*Comité Permanente del Episcopado*  
*August 1, 1973*

In the span of a few short years in the latter half of the 1900s, the ideological warfare being waged in Chile had produced massive political movements, the election of a socialist president, a deadly military coup, and a subsequent dictatorship that persecuted its own people. The 1960s saw the strengthening of a leftist political current which gave rise to passionate supporters and equally passionate dissenters. Amidst fears of a military coup, the fissures splitting the country only deepened after the 1970 election that put socialist Salvador Allende in the presidency. While no coup happened prior to or just after the election as feared, the armed forces intervened three years later, killing Allende and taking power of Chile's government. The country's democratic system had been upended, and supporters of the recently deceased president began to disappear. The military government targeted anyone who threatened its authoritative position, and General Augusto Pinochet, who took power after helping to lead the coup, remained in the presidency until 1990. Chileans desperately needed something constant to look to in their rapidly changing world. For many, this came in the form of the Catholic Church.

I attempt to better understand the role of the Catholic Church in Chile's tumultuous political sphere during this time. The Church, facing its own internal divisions, struggled to unify its own members as well as the country. To do so, it not only had to interact with the Chilean

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<sup>1</sup> Comité Permanente del Episcopado. "Fe cristiana y actuación política." *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*. 1 August 1973. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The original quote reads as follows: "Miramos con suma inquietud la superpolitización del país, no sólo porque amenaza a la Iglesia, sino también a la entera vida nacional. Cuando todo en un país se vuelve política, la política misma se vuelve insana, porque ocupa zonas de vida que no le corresponden."

people, but also the Chilean government. As an institution with a power and visibility that rivaled the government at the time, the Chilean Catholic Church was in the position to be extremely influential in the country's sociopolitical sphere. I examine the tensions within the Church and attempt to understand them in relation to the broader ideological conversations happening in the country on the whole. This allows me not only to have a more holistic picture of the Church and its views, but also to contemplate its motives and approaches to engaging with the Chilean government, both under Allende and under Pinochet. I assert that the values and reasoning with which the Catholic Church navigated their relationship with Allende's government carried over into its approach to Pinochet's military dictatorship. I also argue that its broader goal to maintain stability in Chile put the Catholic Church in a unique sociopolitical position that forced it to balance between political involvement and neutrality.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### *The Chilean Catholic Church*

Catholicism's presence in Latin America was established with the arrival of Spanish and Portuguese colonizers in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since then, Roman Catholics have maintained religious dominance in the region and have played an important role in Latin American politics.<sup>2</sup> This prominence was not attained just by chance or the good grace of God; throughout its long history, the Church actively worked to maintain its power. By developing close ties to other institutional powers like a country's government, the Church was able to reinforce its own dominance while simultaneously legitimizing the other. Although the Catholic

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Scheper Hughes and Maria dos Campos Machado. "Spirits, Bodies, and Structures: Religion, Politics, and Social Inequality in Latin America." *Latin American Perspectives* 43.3 (May 2016): 4.

Church in Chile officially broke with the State in 1925,<sup>3</sup> it maintains important governmental influence both as an institution and through its prominence in citizens' daily lives. In times of trial many turn to their religion for answers and use its ideological framework to both inform and justify their own actions. It is this relationship that makes the Catholic Church a significant area of study when holistically examining major historical events. The role of the Catholic Church proves particularly important in the political affairs of Chile from the late 1960s through the 1980s as the country transitioned into a socialist government and shortly thereafter to a military dictatorship. While legally untethered from the Chilean government and morally distanced from political involvement, the Catholic Church nonetheless had a curiously heavy hand in the political affairs of the country during this time period. The relationship between the Chilean Catholic Church and State must be understood in the context of the Church's stance toward sociopolitical issues in the years leading up to the military coup.

### *Chile's 1970 Presidential Election*

The two presidential elections in Chile prior to 1970 were extremely contentious and marked the increasing political division in the country. These fissures were only exacerbated by the wildly unstable economy, high rates of inflation, and disputes over agrarian reform.<sup>4</sup> By the end of Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei Montalva's presidency, political polarization in Chile had heightened dramatically as the Right was frustrated with the current government and the Left emboldened by the fervor of the Cuban Revolution.<sup>5</sup> In the election of 1970, socialist candidate Salvador Allende was on the ballot for the fourth time, after failed campaigns in 1952, 1958, and 1964. In this election he represented the Popular Unity Party, which was a coalition of six leftist

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<sup>3</sup> Brian H. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 70.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion on these themes, see Alan Angell, "Chile since 1958." In *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, edited by Leslie Bethell. 311-382 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 315-20.

<sup>5</sup> Angell, "Chile since 1958," 337.



parties who had joined together to strengthen their political alliances.<sup>6</sup> Running against him were former president Jorge Alessandri Rodríguez of the National Party and Radomiro Tomic of the Christian Democratic Party. Allende was clearly the most liberal candidate, yet even the Christian Democratic Party, which was generally more moderate, had endorsed the more leftist ideas of Tomic as a successor to the current president.<sup>7</sup> Members of the working class rallied around Allende, who received 36.2% of the vote in the election. His lead over Alessandri was miniscule, as he garnered 34.9% of the vote. Because Allende took the election with a plurality and not a majority as is required, the Chilean Congress had to vote to confirm Allende's win over Alessandri in order to allow him to take the position of President of the Republic.<sup>8</sup> With this confirmation, Allende became the first socialist leader in Latin America to democratically assume power. Allende's win, however, "was more the product of party relationships and hostilities than a great shift in opinion."<sup>9</sup> He ultimately assumed the role without the approval of 64% of the country, and even the portion of the population that had voted for him was not a unified political block; this lack of cohesive support would plague the Popular Unity Party throughout its short time in power.<sup>10</sup> Chile's political divisions reflected broader tensions about socialism and communism occurring as the Cold War unfolded between world powers like the United States and Russia. Amidst Chile's growing concerns about the rise of socialism and its potential ties to communism as well as the worsening economic state of the country, the armed forces staged a military coup that dramatically altered Chile's political trajectory.

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<sup>6</sup> Angell, "Chile since 1958," 311-2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest S. Sweeney, "Allende's Election and the Catholic Church in Chile: The Overlapping of Pastoral Concerns and Political Realities," *Thought* 56.223 (1981): 382.

<sup>9</sup> Angell, "Chile since 1958," 338.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

### *The golpe de estado of September 11, 1973*

On September 11, 1973, the Fuerzas Armadas (Chile's armed forces) executed a military coup that instated a military dictatorship lasting for the next 17 years. Allende was killed in the attack on the Palacio de la Moneda in Santiago de Chile, which is where the seat of the president was held. This event marked an abrupt end to the Popular Unity's control of the government and to the democratic process in Chile. General Augusto Pinochet, one of the key generals in planning and leading the attack, became the head of the new Junta. This initiative, backed by the U.S. CIA, is often described as a preventative measure to protect the country from its seemingly inevitable path to communism. Throughout the rule of the Junta, the government systematically silenced those who opposed its positions and objectives by implementing "torture, detentions, military raids, threats and exile," to create what Ruderer described as "a climate of fear which cast a shadow over Chilean society."<sup>11</sup> There is extensive debate on the number of Chileans who were killed as a result of political repression under the Junta, but the estimate ranges from 3,000 to 30,000 victims.<sup>12</sup> This number does not include the thousands of others who were detained or experienced torture and exile.<sup>13</sup> The Catholic Church emerged as a leader in the investigations of these human rights abuses and took a prominent role in Chile's return to democracy 17 years later in 1990.<sup>14</sup>

The period between 1970 and 1990 encompasses a particularly complex era in Chile's political history that is further complicated by the involvement of the Chilean Catholic Church in the country's political affairs. The Church was vocally opposed to communism and voiced

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<sup>11</sup> Stephan Ruderer, "Between Religion and Politics: The Military Clergy during the Late Twentieth-Century Dictatorships in Argentina and Chile," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 10.1017 (2015): 474.

<sup>12</sup> Angell, "Chile since 1958," 360.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Wilde, "Irruptions of Memory: Expressive Politics in Chile's Transition to Democracy," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 31.2 (1999): 495.

<sup>14</sup> Hugo Cancino Troncoso, *Chile, Iglesia y dictadura 1973-1989: un estudio sobre el rol político de la Iglesia Católica y el conflicto con el régimen militar* (Odense, Denmark: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1997), 230; Angell, "Chile since 1958," 370.

concerns about the recent shift to the left in Chile's government during Allende's presidency. At the same time, it had also previously warned against the repercussions of a possible military coup and lauded the country's strong democracy and Chileans' right to express individual political opinions. These stances alone created a basis for a wide variety of reactions to the coup from both the Church and Church members. The prominence of the Church in Chilean society positioned it to act as mediator between laypeople and the changing political arena.

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In this thesis I focus primarily on the institutional Catholic Church (which I refer to as simply “the Church”) and distinguish between the Church hierarchy and laypeople. The Catholic Church is headed by the Pope, who in turn appoints cardinals, who hold the second most prestigious position in the Church. The Chilean cardinals during the era of my research were Raúl Silva Henríquez, who served under Allende and until 1983 during the Pinochet regime, and Juan Francisco Fresno Larraín, who took over after Silva's retirement. Cardinal Silva is generally more well-known as an advocate for human rights than is Cardinal Fresno, and he takes a prominent role in my research due to his active leadership and communications with Chile's governments. However, both cardinals made use of their visibility within the Church and broader Chilean community to promote the ideals of the Church. Beneath the cardinals are archbishops and bishops, who often spread the word of God to the laypeople, or Church attendees, just as other priests. Priests and bishops are those preaching directly to Church followers. My use of the “Church hierarchy” focuses on the Chilean cardinal and assorted Chilean bishops and archbishops, particularly those who make up the Comité Permanente del Episcopado de Chile (Comité Permanente) — a committee of bishops headed by the Cardinal— and the Conferencia Episcopal de Chile (CECH) — a grouping of all Chilean bishops—

respectively. Members of the hierarchy shared the same objective of bringing people to spiritual liberation through Jesus Christ, but their views on the use of political action to achieve this goal were vastly different. I identify tensions between these committees and lower members of the Church hierarchy, such as other bishops and priests, and describe the ways in which the Church addresses these differences of opinion within the Church and within Chile on the whole.

The Catholic Church does not hold a monopoly on religion in Latin America nor in Chile, but it does have a strong historical presence that makes it influential both in the everyday lives of Chileans as well as in the political sphere. This is particularly evident in the late 1900s when the Church positioned itself in the middle of the country's political affairs. Throughout this work I analyze the depth and breadth of the Church's political influence through an examination of its relationship with the governing bodies of Chile. I also explore what factors may have caused the Church to engage politically in the way that it did.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Scholarship written before Chile's return to democracy in 1990 as well as in the following decades identifies the Catholic Church as one of the most vocal groups in opposition to the military junta under Augusto Pinochet. The literature tends to focus on the institutional Catholic Church but also identifies resistance from grassroots organizations such as ecclesiastical base communities. Scholars focusing on theology and social movements such as Brian H. Smith and Christian Smith note that after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) in Medellín, Colombia (1968),<sup>15</sup> the Church's mission shifted to be more sympathetic toward the main tenets of liberation theology, which

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<sup>15</sup> The abbreviation CELAM stands for the Spanish *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*.

included a focus on equality and social activism.<sup>16</sup> This general consensus about the Church's role elides the divisions within the Church that pitted the Church hierarchy and members alike against each other. During the 1960s and early 1970s the Church hierarchy was adamant about distancing itself from politics, and most of the direct support or opposition to any governmental body was that of individual clergy and parishioners acting individually or mobilizing together. Scholars describe these divisions with varying degrees of emphasis, and they appear both before and during Allende's rule and continue into the military regime under Pinochet as well. While the Church's attitude toward Allende is portrayed as either tolerant or supportive, stronger support is evident from religiously affiliated groups such as Christians for Socialism (CPS).<sup>17</sup>

There is more disagreement among scholars regarding the Church's attitude toward Pinochet and the military junta. They commonly assert that the institutional Church was vocally opposed to the dictatorship and in effect functioned as figurehead for the opposition. Others, especially Chilean scholars, are more discerning and suggest that the acts of individual players such as Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, Cardinal Fresno, and groups like ecclesiastical base communities (CEBS) should not necessarily be conflated with the Church hierarchy, which tried to act as a neutral mediating body between the people and the government. In order to best understand this conversation, I examine the literature as it discusses the Church's relationship to politics in the years preceding and during the leadership of President Allende and later General Pinochet.

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<sup>16</sup> Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*, 1982; James V. Schall, *Liberation Theology in Latin America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982); Alberto M. Piedra, "Some Observations on Liberation Theology," *World Affairs* 148, no. 3 (1985-86): 151-157; Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movements*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Cancino, *Chile, Iglesia y dictadura 1973-1989*, 1997; Mario I. Aguilar, "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime, 1973-1980: Public Responses to a National Security State," *Catholic Historical Review* 89.4 (2003): 712-731.

<sup>17</sup> The abbreviation CPS stands for the Spanish *Cristianos por el Socialismo*.

## **The Catholic Church and Socialist President Allende**

When President Salvador Allende took office in Chile in 1970, 84% of the Chilean population was Roman Catholic.<sup>18</sup> The Catholic Church's strong presence in Latin American countries like Chile and long history of reinforcing the dominant political status quo gave it the influence and perhaps responsibility to be involved as a necessary mediating force amidst the political turmoil surrounding the election. Two main events, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the CELAM conference (1968), redefined the Church's mission in the 1960s, altering the Church's stance toward politics in the following years. These events were crucial in allowing the Church to be tolerant of the socialist government of Salvador Allende. No matter the Church's opinion, the institution's facilitation in a peaceful transition of power was crucial. A trend in the scholarly literature was that the Church attempted to remain neutral to politics and generally maintained peace with the Popular Unity government, but it also vocalized resistance to Allende's socialist agenda. Despite the characterization of a supportive Church by scholars like Ernest S. Sweeney, others such as Brian H. Smith assert that the Church hierarchy never openly supported Allende, but were resigned to reconciling with his government in order to assure a smooth political transition. I argue that the Church's relationship with Allende and the Unidad Popular in this time period established a framework that shaped the Church's later relationship with Pinochet and the Junta.

### *The Second Vatican Council and CELAM*

It is crucial to situate the conversation about the Church's relationship to the government within the ideological context that framed the Church's decision-making in the years prior to and during the dictatorship. One of the most prominent points of ideological contention that the Church faced during this time period had to do with a burgeoning movement labeled liberation

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<sup>18</sup> Sweeney, "Allende's Election and the Catholic Church in Chile," 371.

theology. The Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez is regarded as the founder of liberation theology,<sup>19</sup> which adheres to the belief that “the quest for justice is the central focus of the Christian doctrine.”<sup>20</sup> Terry Hoy explains that this method of theological interpretation pushes an examination of not just individual sin, but of the sin evident in exploitative and oppressive institutional structures.<sup>21</sup> Theologians often criticized foreign capitalism (especially from dominant countries like the United States) as a source of this exploitation and as a source for much of Latin America’s poverty.<sup>22</sup> This compliments Enrique Riobó Pezoa’s assertion that liberation theology “encompasses political, social, and even economic elements within a religious context and interpretation.”<sup>23</sup> The Catholic Church saw this theology more as religious manipulation rather than interpretation, however, and it distanced itself from the movement. In addition to the Church’s concerns about the movement’s ideological consistencies with and sometimes support of Marxism,<sup>24</sup> it saw liberation theology as wrongly attempting to shift the Church’s purpose from advocating for man’s spiritual liberation to his political liberation.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference in the 1960s convened to discuss the Church’s mission and objectives, and liberationist themes not only appeared in these discussions but were also incorporated into the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The Second Vatican Council, which convened between 1962 and 1965 to discuss the Catholic Church and its relationship to the rest of the world, was one of the first times that the Church institutionally accepted a more progressive approach to Church doctrine, paralleling the

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<sup>19</sup> Piedra, “Some Observations on Liberation Theology,” 151.

<sup>20</sup> Terry Hoy, “Gustavo Gutierrez: Latin American Liberation Theology,” *International Journal of Social Economics* 13.9 (1986): 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Schall, *Liberation Theology in Latin America*, 38; Piedra, “Some Observations on Liberation Theology,” 152.

<sup>23</sup> Enrique Riobó Pezoa, “La evolución del discurso de la Teología de la Liberación durante la dictadura chilena. El caso de los periódicos clandestinos No Podemos Callar y Policarpo,” *Revista Cultura y Religion* 4.2 (2010): 43.

<sup>24</sup> Schall, *Liberation Theology in Latin America*; Hoy, “Gustavo Gutiérrez,” 12.

<sup>25</sup> Piedra, “Some Observations on Liberation Theology,” 155.

general political trends at the time.<sup>26</sup> Former Jesuit Brian H. Smith provides an extensive chronological analysis of the Catholic Church's relationship with the Chilean government, spanning from the 1920s to 1980. Of the Council, Smith says that it “committed the Church to an active role in the promotion of justice, human rights, and freedom.”<sup>27</sup> For Smith, this was indicative of a slight but general shift in the Church’s mission from one that sought to legitimize itself as a powerful structure toward one that fought for equality.<sup>28</sup> This is not to say that the Church unanimously and eagerly supported the socialist shift in agenda; Smith makes it clear that the general shifts in the Church’s approach to political involvement created a lot of internal conflict between those in the Church who thought it should be more politically active and those who thought it was already doing too much.<sup>29</sup> However Christian Smith, who uses Brian H. Smith’s work to inform his own, claims that “for Latin American Catholics who were already experimenting with progressive pastoral strategies and social activities, Vatican II came as an unequivocal endorsement.” To Christian Smith, the Council directly incorporated liberationist ideas into the main objectives and mission of the Catholic Church.<sup>30</sup>

The CELAM Conference was held several years after the end of the Second Vatican Council and presented itself as a continuation of the liberationist ideals validated by the Council. Held in Medellín, Colombia, it was put together by Latin American Catholic progressives who reaffirmed the need for the Church to support poor and marginalized communities through both grassroots work and by supporting greater structural change.<sup>31</sup> Riobó Pezoa says that CELAM “condemn[ed] poverty, institutional violence, and called for a fight against both.”<sup>32</sup> These ideals

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<sup>26</sup> Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movements*, 99.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>32</sup> Riobó Pezoa, “La evolución del discurso de la Teología de la Liberación durante la dictadura chilena,” 40.



held many commonalities with the political left and the literature largely agrees upon the liberalizing effects of these two events, painting them both as promoting liberal approaches to Catholicism.<sup>33</sup> The presence of this connection is echoed by numerous other scholars who assert that the central ideas of liberation theology influenced the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference in Medellín, orienting the Church in a direction set on social justice. Even though the institutional Church attempted to distance itself from liberation theology and later socialism,<sup>34</sup> it adopted liberationist themes through these conferences that parallel the later objectives of Allende's socialist agenda in the early 1970s. A focus on alleviating injustices was brought to the forefront of the Church's mission through the Second Vatican Council as well as the CELAM Conference in Medellín, and these ideas prospered among leftist Christian circles emboldened by Allende's win.

These developments did not radicalize the Church but they at least amounted to a greater tolerance within the Church to leftist ideas. David Fernández claims that on the whole in the 1960s "it became acceptable for Christians to be left-wing – not as something tacked on to their Christianity, but as a socio-political choice illuminated by faith."<sup>35</sup> The institutional Church attempted to remain neutral and refused to directly endorse liberation theology or a leftist political agenda, despite some of its ideological refocusing due to the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference. Sweeney claims that this neutrality was a "convenient fiction, for although [the Church] did not publicly support any one candidate, their message clearly

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<sup>33</sup> The connection between the liberalizing Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference of Medellín and anti-dictatorship sentiments within the Church and/or Catholics is described in Aguilar "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime," 2003:714; Cancino Troncoso, *Chile, Iglesia y dictadura 1973-1989*, 1997:3; David Fernández, "Oral History of the Chilean Movement 'Christians for Socialism', 1971-1973," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34.2 (1999): 283; Hoy, "Gustavo Gutierrez," 1986:3-4; Piedra, "Some Observations on Liberation Theology," 151-2; Riobó Pezoa, "La evolución del discurso de la Teología de la Liberación durante la dictadura chilena," 2010:40; Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 1991:150.

<sup>34</sup> Piedra, "Some Observations on Liberation Theology," 153-4.

<sup>35</sup> Fernández, "Oral History of the Chilean Movement 'Christians for Socialism,' 284.

contained elements intimately bound up with sociopolitical values which found little echo in conservative quarters.”<sup>36</sup> Although the Church’s later concerns about socialism make the insinuation that it supported any left-wing candidate unlikely, Sweeney’s statement serves to underline the blending of religious and political beliefs among many Church members that made the election of 1970 particularly divisive. I suggest that the liberal shift in Latin America as well as within the institutional Church in the years leading up to Allende and Pinochet’s governments solidified values in the Church that condemned and worked against inequality, essentially preparing it to be vocal against the human rights abuses of the later dictatorship.

### *Socialist Christians under Allende*

The Church’s general shift to the left in the 1960s primed it to be more open to the socially oriented policies of Salvador Allende. Ernest S. Sweeney’s article published in 1981 focuses on the Chilean Catholic Church’s attitude toward the election of Salvador Allende and while he identifies both agreements and tensions, and he ultimately argues that the Church generally supported the leftist policies of Allende’s government. Sweeney examines statements, documents, and pastoral letters produced by bishops at the time as well as additional newspaper publications. He uses these sources to show the tensions surrounding various opinions about how involved the Church should be in politics. Despite this, he claims that Allende “proved to be scrupulously respectful toward the Catholic hierarchy throughout his presidency, and with but few exceptions Church-state relations remained harmonious and cordial right to the end.”<sup>37</sup> In contrast, Brian H. Smith’s aforementioned study, published the following year, portrays the relationship between the Church and Allende’s Popular Unity government as more cordial than amicable due to the Church’s concerns about socialism. I situate my argument

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<sup>36</sup> Sweeney, “Allende’s Election and the Catholic Church in Chile,” 373.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

between these two approaches by distinguishing the Church's support for socially conscious policies (as motivated by the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference) from its criticism of socialism as a system of economic governance.

For a more holistic picture of the religious ideological shift at this time, one must look beyond the institutional Catholic Church. Among the Christian community in Chile, Allende found both dissenters and supporters, and he significantly impacted the organization power of the Christian left. Christians for Socialism (CPS) was a grassroots organization that gained momentum up to and under Allende. Shortly after the election of Allende, CPS was formalized as a political and religious movement that rationalized support for socialist and Marxist ideologies through biblical justification.<sup>38</sup> Brian H. Smith explains that the movement claimed that "socialism is the only economic system compatible with Christianity, and they claim churches must become predominantly rooted in the culture of the working classes to achieve their mission authentically".<sup>39</sup> David Fernández, whose work presented oral testimonies of people involved in CPS, cites Fidel Castro's visit to Chile in 1971, when the Communist leader of Cuba also met both with Allende and with Cardinal Silva,<sup>40</sup> as a key moment that helped to spur the momentum of the movement.<sup>41</sup> He additionally attributed the movement to the First Latin American Congress of CPS, held in Santiago in 1972, when Christians from other countries gathered to talk about the religious basis for their commitment to Latin America's liberation from oppressive forces like U.S. capitalism.<sup>42</sup>

The institutional Church actively distanced itself and its Chilean bishops from the planning of the Congress in much the same way that it distanced itself from liberation

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<sup>38</sup> Fernández, "Oral History of the Chilean Movement 'Christians for Socialism,' 1971-73," 285.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*, 168.

<sup>40</sup> Aguilar, "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime, 1973-1980," 718.

<sup>41</sup> Fernández, "Oral History of the Chilean Movement 'Christians for Socialism'. 1971-73," 288.

<sup>42</sup> Fernández, "Oral History of the Chilean Movement 'Christians for Socialism'. 1971-73," 288.

theologians in the decade prior.<sup>43</sup> While references to human liberation in the context of the Church almost exclusively refer to a spiritual liberation, these bishops, priests and laypeople justified the need for political action by advocating for earthly liberation as well. The Church as an institution did not endorse CPS because of its direct political affiliation, so instead this movement embodied a subset of Christian voices including bishops and laypeople. This separation is further evidenced by Brian H. Smith's explanation of a breakdown in the relationship between CPS and the Church in the year leading up to the military coup.<sup>44</sup> The Church became increasingly critical of CPS's use of religion to justify its political positions, a tension that became almost irrelevant once Allende was taken out of power.<sup>45</sup> The military coup could have been a reaction to socialism and the concern about the proliferation of communist values in Chile, as signaled by Allende's friendship with Fidel Castro of Cuba and his government's push for socialism. Fernández directly asserts that even if the fear of communism did influence the actions of the armed forces, CPS was not the cause of the military coup.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Catholic Church and Pinochet's Military Regime**

The *golpe de estado* of September 11, 1973 in Santiago de Chile killed President Allende and instituted a military junta as the controlling body of the Chilean government. A common thread through the literature is that the Catholic Church headed the opposition to the military regime, and was one of the few social institutions in the position to do so.<sup>47</sup> These works present

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*, 242-3, 253; Sweeney, "Allende's Election and the Catholic Church in Chile," 377.

<sup>45</sup> Comité Permanente, "Fe cristiana y actuación política," 1 August 1973.

<sup>46</sup> Fernández, "Oral History of the Chilean Movement 'Christians for Socialism'. 1971-73," 294.

<sup>47</sup> Meacham, Carl E. "Changing of the Guard: New Relations between Church and State in Chile." *Journal of the Church and State* 29.3 (1987): 411-433; Aguilar, "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime," 2003; Bowers, Stephen R. "Pinochet's Plebiscite and the Catholics: The Dual Role of the Chilean Church" *World Affairs* 151.2 (1988): 51-7; Angell, "Chile since 1958," 370.

the approach that the Catholic Church took toward Pinochet and the military dictatorship with varying degrees of nuance. David Fernández, a Chilean scholar, cautions against generalizing the Catholic Church and its followers during this time period, asserting that there were Christian supporters of the regime and that the Church, while significant in its role, was not the only source of resistance.<sup>48</sup> As the work of scholars like Steven R. Bowers and Carl E. Meacham show, the Church both criticized the government of its human rights abuses and attempted to maintain its precarious position as the social organization with the fewest governmental restrictions in Chile. These authors, published in the late 1980s, wrote about the Church's activism and relationship with the military regime even before the country's return to democracy. While the literature often emphasizes that the Church took a hardline stance against the dictatorship, these earlier scholars explain that this relationship had to be a balancing act. The Church was awarded a sort of privilege by not being entirely silenced by the dictatorship as many other social groups were—it could not approach that opportunity recklessly if it were to use it to the advantage of the opposition, while simultaneously not getting the institution shut down.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, it was important for the government to respect the prominence of the Church in Chilean society in order for the Junta to keep its image as Chile's savior and to stave off a total insurrection.<sup>50</sup> This balance is crucial to my assertion that while many bishops were vocally opposed to the human rights abuses that occurred under the dictatorship, the Church continued to promote a separation from direct involvement in political affairs. Scholars have studied the dissent of the dictatorship by looking in particular to the actions of key members of the Church's

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<sup>48</sup> David Fernández, *La "Iglesia" que resistió a Pinochet: Historia, desde la fuente oral, del Chile que no puede olvidarse* (Madrid: IEPALA, 1996), 23.

<sup>49</sup> Bowers, "Pinochet's Plebiscite and the Catholics," 57; Meacham, "Changing of the Guard," 411.

<sup>50</sup> For more information on the Junta's positioning as the salvation of Chile, see Angell, "Chile since 1958," 361 and Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, 108-9.

hierarchy such as Cardinal Silva and his successor Cardinal Fresno, as well as to grassroots groups such as CEBs.

*The Roles of Cardinal Silva and Cardinal Fresno*

Raúl Silva Henríquez, dubbed a Cardinal in 1962, acted as the figurehead of the Catholic Church in Chile during Allende's short time in power as well as through the violent governmental transition in 1973. Cardinal Silva is well known for his vocal opposition to governmental human rights violations. Mario I. Aguilar cites Silva's history with the Salesians Order as the basis for his continued support of the poor and marginalized in Chilean society, echoing the liberationist ideas supported by the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM conference of 1968.<sup>51</sup> Cardinal Silva took his new title at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council and potentially had his views further shaped by the liberationist currents introduced to the institutional Church at this time. Aguilar focuses on Cardinal Silva's role as a member of leadership not only for the Catholic Church but also of the opposition to Pinochet's dictatorship. He highlights the pressure that Silva put on the regime and Pinochet during the decade he served as Cardinal, especially through his formation of COPACHI (Comité Pro Paz) and the following Vicaría de la Solidaridad, organizations that investigated the cases of people affected by political violence.

Cardinal Silva retired from his position in 1983, and the Pope appointed Archbishop Juan Francisco Fresno Larraín as his replacement. The work Carl E. Meacham published in 1987 picks up where Aguilar leaves off and examines Cardinal Fresno's work with Pinochet and the Junta.<sup>52</sup> Like Aguilar, Meacham strives to show that the Cardinal was dedicated to the cause against the Junta's human rights abuses, even if Fresno was not as overtly opposed to the regime

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<sup>51</sup> Aguilar, "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime, 1973-1980," 714.

<sup>52</sup> Meacham, "Changing of the Guard," 412.

as was Silva.<sup>53</sup> Published the year after Meacham, Stephen R. Bowers interprets Fresno's conciliatory position as a weak stance against the Junta's human rights abuses. While Meacham claims that Fresno was just as critical of the regime as Silva was, Bowers contradicts that notion, even asserting that Fresno shifted away from harsher criticisms of the regime when a renewed wave of governmental violence occurred in 1986.<sup>54</sup> The extent to which these key players spoke out against the regime is contested, but the important role that Cardinal Silva and Cardinal Fresno played in the opposition is acknowledged by scholars. The power of their position as central figures in the Chilean Catholic Church was crucial leverage in the conversation against the abuses of the dictatorship, and allowed them to send a message of solidarity with those in less privileged positions also fighting for the freedom of political prisoners and for the fate of the tortured and the disappeared.

#### *Opposition from the Ground Up: CEBs*

The influence of the roles of major Church leaders in the formation of Church-State relations during the military regime is obvious by its extensive presence in the literature. However, scholars have paid less attention to grassroots movements whose importance cannot be entirely omitted from this narrative. Authors like Fabián Bustamante Olguín attest to the importance of groups like ecclesiastical base communities (CEBs) that were set apart from the Church's hierarchy and openly denounced the dictatorship.<sup>55</sup> Cavendish describes these CEBs as "small (ranging in size from ten to seventy members), grassroots groups within the Catholic Church that meet in homes, community centers, and local church facilities. CEB members gather regularly to reflect on Scripture and to discuss its bearing on their lives, and on the social and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>54</sup> Bowers, "Pinochet's Plebiscite and the Catholics," 54-5.

<sup>55</sup> The abbreviation CEB stands for the expression in Spanish: *comunidades eclesiales de base*.

political conditions in their country and communities.”<sup>56</sup> He even refers to them as a “pastoral build-up of a new Latin American theological reflection: liberation theology,” which he says were entered into the Catholic Church through the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference.<sup>57</sup> Bustamente uses a case study of the Manuel Rodríguez community from 1973-1983 and its experiences with the regime's violence to demonstrate the importance of their cohesion as a community in order to speak out against the regime. Just the same, Bustamente and David Fernández both make it clear that CEBs were not all affiliated with leftist ideas.<sup>58</sup> Investigating those that were, however, allows for a deeper understanding of the modes of political resistance coming from the religious left.

The vocal nature of these CEBs is not often disputed in the literature, but scholars disagree on the extent to which the CEBs affected governmental proceedings. In James C. Cavendish's work on Christian base communities' influence on the change from authoritarian to democratic regimes in Brazil and Chile, he utilized data from past interviews of members of CEBs and quantitative data about CEB retention of members, as well as his own ethnographic work with a community in Santiago, Chile. He ultimately concludes that the impact of CEBs on the dominant political culture cannot be determined.<sup>59</sup> I suggest that this potentially weak political impact could be a result of a resistance that was tempered by an increased vulnerability to government repression among CEB members. An organization like the institutional Catholic Church had the security of its visibility that (to some extent<sup>60</sup>) could safeguard members; as less

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<sup>56</sup> James C. Cavendish, “Christian Base Communities and the Building of Democracy: Brazil and Chile,” *Sociology of Religion* 55 (1994): 180.

<sup>57</sup> Fabián Bustamente Olguín, “Una experiencia carismática de base durante la dictadura militar: Comunidad ‘Dios con Nosotros’, 1973-1983,” *Revista Cultura y Religión* 3, no. 2 (2009): 260.

<sup>58</sup> Bustamente Olguín, “Una experiencia carismática de base durante la dictadura militar,” 260; Fernández, *La “Iglesia” que resistió a Pinochet*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> Cavendish, “Christian Base Communities and the Building of Democracy,” 191.

<sup>60</sup> One's affiliation with the Catholic Church in no way eliminated the risk of being targets of government repression. There were cases where bishops and priests disappeared, were barred from re-entry to Chile from abroad, or faced



powerful religious and political organizations, members of CEBs had no such protection.

Cavendish also cast doubt on previous research on the social influence of CEBs, suggesting that an increase in CEB participation can be explained by the opportunity they afforded for political gathering, not due to an increased need or desire for religion.<sup>61</sup> In either case, the fact that they did offer a legitimate space to convene in a time when social cohesion was discouraged is significant. The agency of laypeople should be acknowledged even given my research's focus on the institutional Church and warrants further research.

### *Current Representations of the Memory of the Dictatorship*

Because the Church performed a crucial role during the regime, it would follow that it has also been an important topic in the broader conversations about unpacking and retelling Chile's collective memory. As established previously, the Church has been lauded for its part in the opposition's fight against the Junta and for its defense of human rights during a time when the government was blatantly violating them. It would be dangerous, however, not to acknowledge the divisions within the Church regarding the regime. María Angélica Cruz Contreras and Camilo Ramírez (2015) do not examine the relationship between the Church and the State during the dictatorship, but rather how that relationship has been remembered and retold since Chile has returned to democracy. They are conscious to distinguish between what they refer to as the "Liberating Current" of the Church, identified as a site of subaltern memories

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other forms of political violence. I do suggest that the power and visibility of the Catholic Church offered some form of protection for members of the hierarchy when compared to laypeople, but this is not to dismiss the very real risk that clergy took when voicing their dissent of the government. For an exploration of cases of political repression against members of the Church hierarchy, see Aguilar, "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime," 725-6; Mario I. Aguilar, "The Vicaría de la Solidaridad and the Pinochet Regime (1976-1980): Religion and Politics in 20th Century Chile," *Iberoamericana: Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 31.1 (2001): 104, 106-7; Bowers, "Pinochet's Plebiscite and the Catholics," 56; Mario I. Aguilar, "Los derechos humanos en las memorias del Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez: primer período del régimen militar de Augusto Pinochet, Chile 1973-1980," *Grupo de Estudios Multidisciplinarios sobre Religión e Incidencia Pública* (2004): 6.

<sup>61</sup> Cavendish, "Christian Base Communities and the Building of Democracy," 193.

of the regime, from the mainstream general Church hierarchy that they identify as being less vocal against the dictatorship.<sup>62</sup> They explain that the Church is often portrayed as “the voice for those without a voice” (“*la voz de los sin voz*”), but that this effort was varied and uneven within Church leadership.<sup>63</sup> In this way, Cruz and Ramírez separate the discourse of the official Church hierarchy from the Liberating Current in the years after Chile returned to democracy. Earlier works regarding the Church’s relationship to the dictatorship, especially those written just before or after the fall of the regime, sought to understand the Church’s role in fighting against the dictatorship or returning to democracy.<sup>64</sup> The work of Cruz and Ramírez instead notes a greater shift in literature about the dictatorship that attempts to understand how it is being remembered.

My contributions to this discussion reinforce the literature’s focus on the Church as a facilitator of liberal ideologies. While my research centers on the groups that opposed the military dictatorship from the left, it should not be forgotten that many supported the Junta with religious justification. This connection is illustrated in Stephan Ruderer’s recent work which explores the political stances of Chile’s Military Vicariate, which was comprised of the clergy who served the Junta and the armed forces. Perhaps the strongest focus for these clergy was the threat of communism. When teaching the history of the coup to the armed forces, the clergy highlighted this fear of Marxism and “intertwined a theological interpretation which gave religious content to the events, providing the military with Christian legitimisation.”<sup>65</sup> Ruderer explained, however, that this was a position not commonly found in the hierarchy, as the Military

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<sup>62</sup> María Angélica Cruz Contreras and Camilo Ramírez, “Memorias subalternas de la dictadura militar en Chile: El caso de la corriente Libertadora de la Iglesia Católica,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 72.170 (2015): 18.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Sweeney, “Allende’s Election and the Catholic Church in Chile,” 1981; Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*, 1982; Meacham, “Changing of the Guard,” 1987; Bowers, “Pinochet’s Plebiscite and the Catholics,” 1988.

<sup>65</sup> Ruderer, “Between Religion and Politics,” 483.

Vicariate was both ideologically and structurally isolated from the Chilean Church and bishops.<sup>66</sup> Catholics on the left and right of the political spectrum used biblical teachings to justify their political views, and the institutional Church attempted to distance itself from both extremes to maintain neutrality. The voices of the religious right are not as visible in Chile's reconstruction of memory of the dictatorship, but recognizing their existence can only serve to offer a more holistic picture of the ideological fissures within the Church. Even an analysis of the official position of the Catholic Church, such as mine, inevitably glosses over the multitude of perspectives and memories produced during this era by people outside of the small sphere that the hierarchy encompasses. My analysis of the Church's relationship to Allende and Pinochet strives to understand the position of the institutional Church as it was constructed in the context of the time, and not just as it has been reconstructed in scholarly literature to date.

## **METHODS**

I addressed my proposed questions by using a historical sociological approach. The intent of this method is to illuminate a historical event or issue by positioning it in a greater historical context and considering its broader social impacts. Christian Smith describes historical sociology as “the reconstruction of past events, through the use of interviews, texts, historical documents, and statistics, guided and illuminated by analytical, theoretical models of explanation.”<sup>67</sup> My reconstruction of the relationship between the Chilean Catholic Church and the Chilean government spans from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, with a concentration on the years between 1970 and 1980. An examination of this relationship as it changed through the election of

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 482.

<sup>67</sup> Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). For more information on this methodological approach, see also *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* by prominent sociologist Theda Skocpol (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Salvador Allende in 1970, the military coup of 1973, and the subsequent control of Augusto Pinochet until 1990 allows me to reconstruct these events in a way that follows the historical and social development of the Church in conjunction with Chile's political trajectory. With a focus on the institutional Catholic Church's perspective, I consider its motives in two frames. The first recognizes the Church's relationship with the government as it is guided by religious doctrine and objectives, especially those that were reaffirmed during the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference in Medellín. This perspective influences the second frame, which considers how the Church's political goals affected its relationship with the government.

I examine the position of the institutional Church through the analysis of primary documents such as official statements produced by the Church hierarchy. Important contributors were the Bishop's Permanent Committee and the Episcopal Conference of Chile, which I refer to as the Comité Permanente and CECH, respectively. These committees were both comprised of assorted members of the Church hierarchy and offer a view into the official positions of the Church. In addition to these statements, I include other interviews, speeches, and statements produced by Cardinal Silva. As the figurehead of the Chilean Catholic Church under both Allende and Pinochet, Cardinal Silva's role in the political sphere was an essential component to the Church's relationship with the Chilean government. The majority of these sources are available in the Chilean Catholic Church's online database of documents.<sup>68</sup> Additional sources came from statements printed in Christian newspapers like *Mensaje* and online collections of Cardinal Silva's works.<sup>69</sup> I selected pieces within my intended time frame with titles that referenced Allende, socialism, Pinochet, the government, or the general state of Chile. My analysis of over 30 primary source documents was structured through a system of coding that

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<sup>68</sup> <http://documentos.iglesia.cl/documentos.php>

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.cardenalsilva.cl/>

captured more nuance as I worked through the texts. I read the pieces chronologically (with several exceptions) in order to construct a clearer image of the Church's mission and stances as they evolved over time. I identified words and phrases that signaled recurring ideas and incorporated them into my coded terms so that I could monitor their placement and prevalence in these documents. Some consistent themes I flagged include direct references to the Church's relationship to the government, such as its support or resistance, the Church's political stances, allusions to the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference, and stances on human rights. I give special attention to the ideologies the Church used to justify its positions regarding the government.

It is important to note that my research specifically focuses on the stances of the institutional Catholic Church and will only briefly explore the ways in which other Christian voices contributed to the Church's relationship with the government, specifically when considering the denunciation of the Junta's human rights abuses under Pinochet. The documents and resources available in relation to the Catholic Church's positions during this time period are far more abundant and easily accessible for researchers in the U.S. than information on other Christian voices. The access to these documents has shaped the course of my research as well as the broader scholarly narrative that positions the Catholic Church at the center of Christian opposition to the Junta. My research will provide a more informed understanding of the institutional Church's motivations and approaches to its relationship with Allende and Pinochet's governments, respectively. That being said, the plurality of Christian opinion and political activity, as evident in other Christian-affiliated groups, merits further investigation.

## **CHURCH VALUES AND ALLENDE**

In this section I deconstruct the Church's general attitude toward political involvement and more specifically toward the government of socialist President Salvador Allende. In the documents produced by the Catholic Church in the years leading up to the election in 1970, two common messages emerged as the central foci of the Church's political perspectives. First, the Church does not ascribe to nor promote any political party, system or doctrine over others. This is in part because diversity of political opinion amongst Christians is to be anticipated and respected. However, this assertion of political neutrality was not meant to suggest that the Church and Christians should be apolitical. The second message encourages Chilean Christians to be politically active as part of their duty to maintain democracy in their country. The Church as an institution is political insofar as it must fight for human liberty and man's spiritual liberation. Ultimately I show how the Church's approach to politics and the government leading up to and during the presidency of Allende solidified the Church's role as a self-proclaimed neutral mediating body between the Chilean government and the Chilean people. This was indicative of the Church's later approach to dealing with the military junta after the coup in 1973.

### *Political Neutrality and Political Participation*

The Church's role in politics was disputed by those inside and outside of the religious community, and in the politically tumultuous times of the late 60s and early 70s in Chile the Church hierarchy adamantly reaffirmed its neutrality in the political sphere. This was not a novel approach for the Church; it can be seen in its relationship with Chile's previous governments as well. Ruderer explains that "although the Church was close to the Christian Democrat administration of Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964-70), it never openly supported any political party

and jealously defended its political independence.”<sup>70</sup> In order to maintain that independence, the Church remained politically neutral.

Presented with the risk of further dividing Chile, the Catholic Church maintained its position of political neutrality. Several months before the election in 1970, Canal 13, a popular Chilean news station, broadcast Cardinal Silva’s message to Chilean Christians in which he explicitly stated that “THE CHURCH AS SUCH NEITHER HAS NOR IS BOUND TO ANY SYSTEM OR POLITICAL PARTY.”<sup>71</sup> This was far from the first time that the Church declared its political independence, yet the claim was more significant given the proximity of a contentious election.<sup>72</sup> The Church hierarchy saw that taking a political stance would threaten Christian unity, which was already under tremendous strain due to the opposing political perspectives of Church clergy and members. It also may have intensified the already deep political divisions in the greater Chilean society. Several weeks prior, the Comité Permanente affirmed this neutrality as well, asserting that to attack or condemn a certain political party or perspective stifles the liberty of Christians both to determine their own political opinions and to come together for the common good of mankind.<sup>73</sup> The Church understood that to take a political side would have only exacerbated the already volatile political situation in the country.

The governing bodies of the Church were particularly concerned about the political neutrality of their priests and bishops because of their direct relationships with laypeople. Cardinal Silva and the Church hierarchy were quick to say that priests “can and should cast their

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<sup>70</sup> Ruderer, “Between Religion and Politics,” 472.

<sup>71</sup> Raúl Silva Henríquez, “Iglesia, Sacerdocio y Política,” televised interview transcript, *Canal 13, Cardenalsilva.cl*. 20 July 1970. “NO TIENE NI ESTÁ LIGADA A NINGÚN SISTEMA NI PARTIDO POLÍTICO.” Emphasis in original text.

<sup>72</sup> Comité Permanente del Episcopado, “Chile: Declaración Episcopal sobre la situación actual del país,” *Mensaje*, January-February 1970. 12 December 1969: 77-79.

<sup>73</sup> Comité Permanente, “Chile: Declaración Episcopal sobre la situación actual del país,” 12 December 1969.

vote and have political preferences” just like other Chilean citizens.<sup>74</sup> However, the Church made a definitive distinction between the priests’ duties as citizens and their duties as messengers of God. The hierarchy declared that priests should not take on roles as political activists and should not justify those opinions through Christ— to say that one’s political opinions are more religiously moral than another’s denies the diversity of perspective and opinion within the Church that is an important aspect of the Church as well as Chilean democracy.<sup>75</sup> Cardinal Silva explicitly states that “priests should not participate in active partisan politics; they cannot manage political groups nor intervene publicly in order to make propaganda for them.”<sup>76</sup> The Church suggested that political opinions expressed by its leaders would be associated with the position of the institutional Church, which would compromise its politically neutral stance. Additionally, the Church feared that this political expression could inhibit patrons’ liberty to make their own political opinions and decisions and could thus cause even more divisions within the Church.

While Cardinal Silva tempered the political action and militancy of priests, bishops, and other Church leaders, he said that it was important for all Christians to thoughtfully discern who they felt best embodied Christian ideals and to voice that opinion. Political neutrality does not signify political indifference, as the Church regularly encouraged political participation by its members. Silva says that no one political choice can be seen as the correct or only evangelical

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<sup>74</sup> Raúl Silva Henríquez, “¿Hace política la Iglesia?” Interview transcript, *Las Últimas Noticias*, *Cardenalsilva.cl*. 20 January 1968. “Los sacerdotes en Chile... pueden y deben dar su voto y tener preferencias políticas.”; A similar statement was made in the text *los Obispos de Chile*, “El Evangelio exige comprometerse en profundas y urgentes renovaciones sociales,” 22 April 1971.

<sup>75</sup> Silva Henríquez, “¿Hace política la iglesia?,” 20 January 1968; Silva Henríquez, “Iglesia, sacerdocio y política: Intervención por Canal 13 de TV,” 20 July 1970.

<sup>76</sup> Silva Henríquez, “¿Hace política la iglesia?,” 20 January 1968. “Los sacerdotes no deben participar en la política activa de partidos; no pueden dirigir colectividades políticas ni intervenir públicamente para hacer propaganda por ellas.”



choice.<sup>77</sup> The potentially dangerous political unrest compelled Silva to give a pre-election message in which he asserted that the Church should be concerned with human liberation, and that this is far more important than any particular political affiliation.<sup>78</sup> Without telling people to relinquish their political preferences, he reaffirmed that the Church as an institution should not preoccupy itself with politics. This stance, however, seems at odds with the Cardinal's Christmas statement several months prior. At Christmas of 1969, Silva and two other bishops published a pastoral letter that, while calling first and foremost for unity and respect for differences within the Church, also called Christians to speak out against political oppression. They said that a Christian "will denounce institutionalized violence of oppressive structures... he will denounce all installation, assurance, and use of power by a group for personal gain."<sup>79</sup> While this may have nodded to the rumors of a political coup that were sweeping across the country, it highlighted the distinction that the Church made between political neutrality and political participation.<sup>80</sup> Getting too involved in politics is seen as distracting the institutional Church from its mission to evangelize and liberate people, but is important for the Church's constituents. The Church espoused somewhat contradictory messages in its attempt to achieve a balance between political neutrality and activism; this tension foreshadows a similar balancing act that the Church faced in its direct relationship with subsequent Chilean governments.

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<sup>77</sup> Silva Henríquez, "Iglesia, sacerdocio y política: Intervención por Canal 13 de TV," 20 July 1970.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Silva Henríquez, Raúl. "Inquietudes y esperanzas: Reflexión de la Iglesia de Santiago sobre problemas candentes de la hora." *Mensaje*, January-February 1970. December 1969: 87. "El cristiano... denunciará así la violencia institucionalizada de las estructuras opresoras" and "denunciará toda instalación, aseguramiento y uso del poder por parte de un grupo en provecho propio y con desmedro o postergación de otros."

<sup>80</sup> In the same issue of *Mensaje*, the Comité Permanente published a statement in which they directly condemned any attempts by a group to undemocratically seize power in Chile. The Comité penned their letter approximately two weeks before Silva's message. He may have written the previous line to support the sentiment of the Comité in a more indirect way. I describe the Comité's message in this work on pages 30-1. For the Comité's message, see Comité Permanente, "Chile: Declaración Episcopal sobre la situación actual del país," 22 December 1969.

## *A Call for Democracy*

The Church supported a diversity of opinions within its constituency not just to appeal to a wider range of Chileans, but also to support the country's democratic system. In an election season that felt like it could be destabilizing democracy, the Church was adamant in upholding the democratic process, as well as the importance of peoples' participation in said process. Silva said "it would be a lack of Christianity and an absence of democracy to not accept that another person thinks differently than oneself."<sup>81</sup> Embracing diversity of opinion was part of the narrative supporting unity within a Church that was being weakened and divided by political discontent in the years leading up to the election of 1970. Even while advocating for the Church's political neutrality, Cardinal Silva is careful not to suggest that Christians should not have or express their political opinions, as they are essential to a strong democratic tradition.

Tangential to these themes are the references to threats to human liberty, such as a coup that would destabilize the country's democratic and capitalist system. The Church focused on unification and democracy not just for the betterment of the Church itself but also to advance its role in facilitating peaceful transitions of power. In the years leading up to the election "political parties in Chile became more ideologically dogmatic and intransigent and ... party relationships deteriorated."<sup>82</sup> The end of President Frei's term saw a sharp increase of polarized political activity and the emergence of a discontented sector of the military.<sup>83</sup> With these warning signs, the weakened state of Chile's democracy seemed to be an insufficient safeguard in the face of a possible coup. In a 1969 declaration about the state of Chile, the Comité Permanente explicitly stated that "it would be inadmissible if a group within our armed forces, or sectors unaffiliated

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<sup>81</sup> Silva Henríquez, "¿Hace política la iglesia?," 20 January 1968. "Sería una falta de cristianismo y una ausencia de democracia el no aceptar que otra persona piense distinto de uno."

<sup>82</sup> Angell, "Chile since 1958," 323.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 337-8.

with them, hoped to divert them from their true mission, imposing on the country without having to declare themselves a new political regime.”<sup>84</sup> Later in the document they reiterated that “the military institutions are called to fit into the nation’s shared effort, without defining the common good nor converting themselves into a decisive political organism.”<sup>85</sup> The fact that the Church included statements like these speaks to the volatile state of Chile in the time leading up to the election of 1970. The Church hierarchy represented an organization which consistently lauded itself for being a promoter of peace between its constituents and the country on the whole, and in condemning a possible political coup they signaled that this threat was tangible. In the same declaration the Comité Permanente asked “if our democracy is weak and even at times only formal, is that not precisely because justice, wellbeing and education are still [considered] lesser assets?”<sup>86</sup> The Church acknowledged that the democratic system in Chile was by no means perfect, and even seems to highlight some ways in which it was weakened by a lack of focus on social justice issues in the country. Nevertheless, its stance against military intervention shows a faith in the people of Chile and in the hope for peace. In 1970 the country exercised its democracy in the Chilean presidential elections, yet the results served neither to unify the country nor to assuage citizens’ fear and discontent.

### *The Church’s Position on Allende*

In the months leading up to the 1970 presidential election, the Chilean cardinal and bishops directly addressed the political unrest in the country. The Church continued to tout the

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<sup>84</sup> Comité Permanente, “Chile: Declaración episcopal sobre la situación actual del país,” 12 December 1969, 78.

“Por esto sería inadmisibile que un grupo dentro de nuestras fuerzas armadas, o sectores ajenos a ellas, pretendieran desviarlas de su verdadera misión, imponiendo al país sin que éste pueda pronunciarse, un nuevo régimen político.”

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. “Las instituciones militares están llamadas a integrarse en el esfuerzo común de la nación, sin definir ellas el bien común, ni convertirse en organismo político de decisión.”

<sup>86</sup> Comité Permanente, “Chile: Declaración episcopal sobre la situación actual del país,” 12 December, 1969, 78. “Si nuestra democracia es débil aún y a veces sólo formal, ¿no es precisamente porque la justicia, el bienestar y la educación son todavía patrimonio de grupos minoritarios?”

importance of remaining neutral in regards to politics<sup>87</sup>, and both the government and the Church made conciliatory measures in order to help the country transition smoothly to socialism without supporting Allende directly.<sup>88</sup> Even so, the social justice issues in Allende's campaign were compatible with the Church's doctrine, allowing the Church to justify its cooperation with the new president.<sup>89</sup> It is important to note that there were also people in the Church who opposed Allende, and that the Church vocally did not support the presidential candidate while he was running. Part of the reason the Church wanted to remain neutral was to avoid alienating any of their constituents.

To say that the Catholic Church was simply in support of or opposed to Allende would be a gross oversimplification of its position. The hierarchy was, however, extremely vocal in its concerns about the implementation of Allende's socialist system in Chile. The 1960s saw a marked increase in Cold War tensions that put communism at the forefront of international discussion. Chile was not directly involved in this power struggle, but the Church's fears of communism voiced in the early 1970s echo those being disseminated globally at that time. Less than a year after Allende's election, the Chilean bishops created an extensive document in which they carefully deconstructed the problems with Chilean socialism in practice. It was a public document but the Church specifically intended to distribute it among clergy and laypeople, perhaps to influence their political opinions or to curb the swell of Catholics joining the Christians for Socialism movement. The bishops explain that "the liberating effects of the gospel lived comprehensively should echo effectively... in the social, cultural, political, and economic

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<sup>87</sup> Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*, 174; Sweeney, "Allende's Election and the Catholic Church in Chile," 375.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*, 189.

<sup>89</sup> Sweeney, "Allende's Election and the Catholic Church in Chile," 385.

environment.”<sup>90</sup> This shows that the hierarchy understood the unavoidable overlap between religion and other aspects of life. The bishops continued to articulate, however, that the Church “does not opt politically for any party or determined system,” and expresses that Christians can “come to different political opinions” and still be one community because of their union through the belief in the risen Jesus Christ. Political neutrality and the support of diverse political opinions were still central to the hierarchy’s message into Allende’s presidency. In a Church that continues to be divided through political strife even after the election, these themes continue to be not simply important, but necessary.

The Church’s stance on socialism goes far beyond what is required to seem neutral, however. Just before the bishops enumerate their long list of concerns regarding socialism, they concede that the practice is not entirely wrong. They say that of the many possible ways to enact socialism, “it is possible to conceive that some are compatible with the Christian spirit.”<sup>91</sup> The bishops’ fears, as they explain, lie within the way that socialism centralizes the power of the state, which they said could “open the door to all kinds of oppression, manipulation, and discrimination of people and groups for political motives, falsifying the democracy, equality, and participation that in principle it proclaims.”<sup>92</sup> In hindsight this description may sound more indicative of the later military dictatorship, yet it embodied the concrete fear that many Chileans had regarding the country’s developing socialist government. This fear was rooted not just in the movement toward socialism, but more deeply in its connections to communism. The bishops argue that “in Chile they are not constructing any ordinary socialism, but a socialism with a

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<sup>90</sup> Obispos de Chile, “Evangelio, Política y Socialismos,” *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*, 27 May 1971. “Los efectos libertadores del Evangelio integralmente vivido deben llegar a repercutir eficazmente como ya se ha dicho, en el ambiente social, cultural, político y económico.”

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* “Pero entre [los tipos de socialismos] es dable concebir algunos compatibles con el espíritu cristiano.”

<sup>92</sup> Los Obispos de Chile, “Evangelio, Política y Socialismos,” 27 May 1971. “El sistema socialista tiende a acumular un inmenso poder económico en manos del Estado, poder que, si no se contrapesa y limita de alguna manera, puede abrir la puerta a todo tipo de opresión, manipulación y discriminación de las personas y de los grupos.”

**markedly Marxist inspiration.**<sup>93</sup> To them, Marxism erases the opportunity for diverse opinions because it reduces any issue to its ties to economics, which would be a dangerous oversimplification as can be seen in other countries that have experienced Marxist-inspired governments. The Church identifies that the central goal of these systems are to reduce or end systemic oppression, but they counter by saying that any system “can generate social, political and cultural structures that oppress man. And he is not going to be fully liberated for the simple act of socialist structures **taking the place** of capitalist ones.”<sup>94</sup> To this end the hierarchy calls people to look for liberation not in manmade structures, but in God. “Only saints are capable of truly sanctifying — that is to say, imbuing with the liberating presence of God — the social structures.”<sup>95</sup> This perspective simultaneously re-centers the Church’s narrative about politics back on its religious purpose and reaffirms the Church’s political neutrality; there should be no reason for the Church to push a particular political agenda if solutions to evil lie with the Lord, not with man.

The Church’s self-proclaimed neutral political stance did not prevent it from advocating against socialism, and it faced backlash from Christian groups affronted by the Church’s silence on pressing political issues. For example, the movement Christians for Socialism (CPS), which was formally organized in 1971, quickly became a point of contention with the institutional Church. The Church’s earlier disavowal of the way Chilean socialism seemed to be evolving was followed two years later by an equally lengthy criticism specifically of CPS. In 1973 the Comité Permanente said that CPS claimed that the hierarchy’s neutral stance put itself “at the service of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. “En Chile no se está construyendo un socialismo cualquiera, sino un socialismo de **inspiración marcadamente marxista.**” Emphasis in original text.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. “Con uno y otro sistema de propiedad pueden generarse estructuras sociales, políticas y culturales que oprimen al hombre. Y éste no va a ser plenamente liberado por el simple hecho de **pasar** de las estructuras capitalistas a las socialistas.” Emphasis in original text.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. “Sólo los santos son capaces de santificar verdaderamente —es decir, de impregnar de la presencia liberadora de Dios— las estructuras sociales.”

bourgeois ideology and its class interests, and would be allied with and defensive of the oppressive structures of capitalism.”<sup>96</sup> In a scathing retaliation the Comité Permanente claimed that the group’s active and exclusionary political involvement “disfigures the Church and the Gospel, obscures the universality — its Catholicism — diminishes its credibility, deforms the truth and obstructs its true mission.”<sup>97</sup> CPS may have asserted that the Church’s neutrality put it on the side of the oppressors, but the bishops declared CPS’s political affiliations as hostile to the evangelical mission of the Church. The Church affirmed that although it was politically neutral, it was not neutral in the fight for justice. Alternatively, the Comité Permanente accused CPS of getting inspiration from Marxist-Leninist ideas, a claim that they had asserted previously about the socialism unfolding in Chile.<sup>98</sup> This extensive document was created in August of 1973 and was set to be published publicly after a reconvening of the Comité Permanente scheduled for September 12<sup>th</sup> of that same year. On the day prior socialist president Allende was killed in the military coup and Chile’s system of governance made a dramatic slide to the right. Although the Comité decided to publish its review of CPS and socialism without alteration, the political sphere had already been upended.

To be clear, the years leading up to the military coup of 1973 were exceptional in Chile’s political sphere. This turmoil and the rise of socialism created much new aspects for the Church hierarchy to consider when navigating its relationship with the state, and it clearly had reservations about the way socialism was unfolding in Chile’s government. The hierarchy’s

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<sup>96</sup> Comité Permanente, “Fe Cristiana y actuación política,” 1 August 1973. “Diversos voceros de este grupo han afirmado que la Jerarquía, al sostener el carácter no político de su misión, la primacía de lo espiritual y la universalidad de los valores cristianos... estaría poniéndose al servicio de la ideología burguesa y de sus intereses de clase, y sería por tanto aliada y defensora de las estructuras opresivas del capitalismo.”

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. “Afirmamos que los modos de pensar y actuar arriba mencionados desfiguran a la Iglesia y al Evangelio, oscurecen su universalidad –su catolicidad–, disminuyen su credibilidad, deforman su verdad y obstaculizan su verdadera acción.”

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

focus on political neutrality, upholding democracy, and defending human liberties during this time is crucial to understanding the Church's later relationship with General Pinochet.

## **THE CHURCH'S POSITION IN PINOCHET'S POST-COUP CHILE**

Despite the Church's tenuous relationship with Allende at the end of his leadership and life, it was not willing to ignore the circumstances of his death. Two days after the coup the Comité Permanente published a statement in which it asked for "respect for the fallen in the fight and, first and foremost, for he who was the President of the Republic until Tuesday September 11."<sup>99</sup> Through an analysis of documents produced by the Church hierarchy during General Pinochet's rule, I will demonstrate how the Church's tactics to deal with the political unrest under President Allende were implemented in a similar manner under the later rule of the Junta. Despite the drastically different ideologies supported by the Chilean government during these time periods, the Church attempted to remain politically neutral while simultaneously speaking out about the actions of the government that it saw as a threat to the people of Chile.

### *Church cooperation with the Junta*

The Church is remembered now as being one of the most vocal and direct sources of opposition to the dictatorship, yet its criticisms of the government were often indirect and layered with conciliatory overtures. Most members of the hierarchy may have approved the military intervention at the time of the coup,<sup>100</sup> yet I assert that the Church strove for a sort of interested ambivalence regarding its position on the issue. Whatever the members of the hierarchy felt in private, they expressed a cautious optimism for the future in the official

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<sup>99</sup> Comité Permanente del Episcopado. "Declaración del Comité Permanente del Episcopado sobre la situación del país." *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*, 13 September 1973. "Pedimos respeto por los caídos en la lucha y, en primer lugar, por el que fue hasta el martes 11 de septiembre, Presidente de la República."

<sup>100</sup> Ruderer, "Between Religion and Politics," 474.



documents they produced. Days after the coup, the Comité Permanente assured the unstable country that “the good sense and patriotism of Chileans, united by the tradition of democracy and humanism of our Armed Forces, will allow Chile to return very soon to institutional normalcy, as members of the Junta de Gobierno themselves have promised, and to restart their journey of progress in peace.”<sup>101</sup> The Comité Permanente visited the Junta before the end of the month in order to, as one bishop put it, “express their sentiments of respect and appreciation for the Armed Forces and the Chilean Guard and to thank the new authorities throughout the country for their deference to the bishops.”<sup>102</sup> Especially in the early years after the coup, the Church continuously announced its desire to collaborate with the government for the moral well-being of the country.<sup>103</sup> In October of 1973, just under one month after the coup, Cardinal Silva announced at a press conference that “the Church is called neither to impose governments or remove governments, nor to recognize or not recognize governments.” This statement demonstrates the Church’s attempts to remain politically neutral. He goes on to say that “what we really want is to serve the people of Chile, and so we recognize the government that *the people* want.”<sup>104</sup> This statement may have been a subtle jab at the undemocratic nature of the coup, but in it Cardinal Silva highlights the separation of the Church from the political processes of Chile. In this way he

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<sup>101</sup> Comité Permanente del Episcopado, “Declaración del Comité Permanente del Episcopado sobre la situación del país,” 13 September 1973. “La cordura y el patriotismo de los chilenos, unidos a la tradición de democracia y de humanismo de nuestras Fuerzas Armadas, permitirán que Chile pueda volver muy luego a la normalidad institucional, como lo han prometido los mismos integrantes de la Junta de Gobierno y reiniciar su camino de progreso en la Paz.”

<sup>102</sup> Monsignor Carlos Oviedo Cavada, “Comunicado sobre la visita del Comité Permanente a la H. Junta Militar de Gobierno,” *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*, 28 September 1973. The Comité Permanente visited the Honorable Junta “para expresarle sus sentimientos de respeto y aprecio por las Fuerzas Armadas y Carabineros de Chile y agradecerles las deferencias que han tenido con los Obispos las nuevas autoridades a lo largo de todo el país.”

<sup>103</sup> Oviedo Cavada, “Comunicado sobre la visita del Comité Permanente a la H. Junta Militar de Gobierno,” 28 September 1973; Raúl Silva Henríquez, “Restañar Heridas,” press conference transcription, *Cardenalsilva.cl*. 9 October 1973; Raúl Silva Henríquez, “La Reconciliación en Chile,” *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*, 24 April 1994.

<sup>104</sup> Emphasis added. Silva Henríquez, “Restañar heridas,” press conference, October 9, 1973. “La Iglesia no está llamada ni a poner gobiernos ni a sacar gobiernos ni a reconocer o no reconocer gobiernos. Nosotros aceptamos los gobiernos que este Pueblo quiera darse y los servimos.”

legitimizes the new government and assures both Chileans and the on-looking world that they are confident that the government will do what is in the best interest of the country. When the Pope lamented the situation in Chile, Silva suggested that the Pope had received bad information from various exiles and European media that was biased against Chile.<sup>105</sup> “The image the Holy Father has formed,” Silva said, “is not the one that we want Chile to have in this moment.”<sup>106</sup> In Silva’s willingness to contradict the Pope, his attempt to soothe the potentially tenuous relationship between the Church and the new Chilean government is evident.

This initial cooperation with the government may have come from the “personal conviction of many of the bishops that the coup was necessary and their hope that the Church might regain its unity,” or perhaps from “the prospect of preserving a privileged negotiating position with the new government.”<sup>107</sup> This may be true, but one must also consider the Church’s previous concerns about socialism and Marxism in Chile. The fear of communism had taken hold in Chilean Church to the extent that in these early years “the general tenor of ecclesiastical pronouncements was to praise the generals for having saved the country from Marxism.”<sup>108</sup> This can be evidenced in the document the CECH produced after reconvening several months after the coup over the issue of Chile’s experience with socialism. The hierarchy linked Allende’s Popular Unity government with Marxism, saying that “to speak of the Popular Unity and not of a Marxist government pretends to expand its base of support to all of the sectors of the democratic left, but with the confidence to maintain Marxist hegemony in key places.”<sup>109</sup> The bishops

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. “La imagen que el Santo Padre se ha formado no es la que nosotros quisiéramos que tuviera de Chile en este momento.”

<sup>107</sup> Ruderer, “Between Religion and Politics,” 475.

<sup>108</sup> Angell, “Chile since 1958,” 371.

<sup>109</sup> Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, “La Iglesia y la experiencia chilena hacia el socialismo,” *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*, 1 January 1974. “Al hablar de Unidad Popular y no de gobierno marxista se pretende ampliar las bases de apoyo hacia todos los sectores de izquierda democráticos con la confianza de mantener, sin embargo, la hegemonía marxista en los lugares claves.”

painted a troubling picture of Marxism in practice, which they argued differed dramatically from the utopia that its supporters asserted it would produce. Without speaking explicitly of the coup, the bishops stated simply that “the Armed Forces are democracy’s last reserve.”<sup>110</sup> Implicit in this is the idea that Marxism had threatened democracy so the Armed Forces reasonably intervened. This document rationalized the coup, albeit indirectly, as a way to prevent the destruction that a Marxist-socialist system was sure to create. This rationale is not unlike the narratives being produced by the government and its supporters at this time, who framed the Junta as having acted in the best interest of national security, ultimately saving the country from itself.<sup>111</sup> To have this rhetoric echoed by the Church complicates the notion of its commitment to neutrality as well as to democracy.

Later, when the Church’s investigations into the government’s human rights abuses began to strain the relationship between the two, the Church continued to express a desire for peaceful cooperation. The Church was willing to critique some of the actions of the government but refused to be seen as opposed to the Junta on the whole. In 1975, the U.S. magazine *Time* ran an article in which it described Cardinal Silva as the “head of Chile’s increasingly oppositionist Roman Catholic Church.”<sup>112</sup> Even though this was the only mention of the Church in the entire article, Silva wrote a letter to the editor in which he said explicitly that “the Chilean Catholic Church is not and does not oppose the Government of Chile.”<sup>113</sup> Silva’s reaction may seem unwarranted but it expresses both the Church’s concern with Chile’s global image and the desire to maintain at the very least the appearance of a good relationship between the Church and the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid. “Las Fuerzas Armadas son la última reserva de una democracia.”

<sup>111</sup> For a broader discussion of narratives of the Junta, see Angell, “Chile since 1958,” 361 and Alexander Wilde, “A Season of Memory: Human Rights in Chile’s Long Transition,” In *The Politics of Memory in Chile*, edited by Cath Collins, Katherine Hite, and Alfredo Joignant, 35-6 (Boulder, CO: First Forum Press, 2013).

<sup>112</sup> “Chile: Terror Under the Junta,” *Time* 105.25. 16 June 1975. Accessed 12 May 2017.

<sup>113</sup> Raúl Silva Henríquez, “Comunicado de Prensa,” *Vicaría de la Solidaridad: Departamento de Opinión Pública del Arzobispado de Santiago*, 27 June 1975. “La Iglesia Católica no es ni hace oposición al Gobierno de Chile.”

Junta.<sup>114</sup> A similar desire is evident in a 1977 letter written by the Comité Permanente to the Junta in which it gave the Church's blessing for the government to call a plebiscite to obtain the opinions of the public. The Consulta Nacional (National Consultation) gave the opportunity for all Chileans to vote on whether or not they supported the oppressive regime, and the results suggested that they overwhelmingly did.<sup>115</sup> In a way the Comité Permanente's letter was another test of loyalty, and in response the hierarchy opened the message with the explanation that it had "the vehement desire to collaborate effectively for the common good of our country" and for the "desired unity of all Chileans."<sup>116</sup> The Church's reaction could reflect its genuine desires both to work effectively and peacefully with the government and to avoid conflict and subsequent targeting by the Junta. Whatever the case, these themes of unity and cooperation evident in the Church's approach to the military Junta reflect similar methods of dealing with this political unrest as those it used with Allende's government.

The Church was perhaps not as influential in its vocal criticisms of the regime as it was through its critical investigations of political abuses of power. The direct verbal pushback of the Church against the regime throughout the dictatorship was not as obvious nor as impactful as the direct action that it took to help alleviate the pressures of the regime. The politics of the institutional Church were perhaps "modest and restrained," which in turn gave it the ability to continue servicing victims of the regime.<sup>117</sup> The majority of these services were provided through the Church's organization the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, which was responsible for investigating the cases of political prisoners, exiles, and the disappeared.

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<sup>114</sup> Silva Henríquez, "Restañar heridas," press conference, October 9, 1973; Silva Henríquez, "Comunicado de Prensa," Departamento de Opinión Pública, Arzobispado de Santiago. June 27, 1975.

<sup>115</sup> Angell, "Chile since 1958," 369.

<sup>116</sup> Comité Permanente del Episcopado, "Carta del Comité Permanente a la Junta de Gobierno, sobre la Consulta Nacional," *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*, 30 December 1977. "...el vehemente deseo de colaborar eficazmente al bien común de nuestra Patria, y en particular a la deseada unidad de todos los chilenos..."

<sup>117</sup> Bowers, "Pinochet's Plebiscite and the Catholics," 56-7.

*Vicaría de la Solidaridad and Human Rights Investigations*

Immediately after the coup, the Church began to receive requests for help from people looking for family members who had been taken prisoner by the government. These early motions to work through the cases of prisoners and refugees resulted in the creation of the Comité Pro Paz (COPACHI) on October 9, 1973.<sup>118</sup> Because of Cardinal Silva's role in the creation of COPACHI and its push for human rights, Chileans and the Junta saw him as the figurehead of these investigations. On this same day a press conference was held in which Cardinal Silva addressed the public about the Junta's visit to the Comité Episcopal de Chile, which was a cordial response to the visit the members of the CECH gave in the weeks prior. At the conference, Cardinal Silva asserted that the Junta had graciously given the Church the authority to continue with its work helping refugees and prisoners. He said explicitly that "the Junta has promised us that it will facilitate our work of the Good Samaritan who wants to heal wounds and reduce pain" in the wake of the coup.<sup>119</sup> The Cardinal was not naïve to the source of this pain and he clearly addresses the questions about the detained that the press had been asking indirectly. He declared that the Church was "making arrangements for all of the detained. For the foreigners we have houses of refuge and an organization that asks after them. We are making arrangements to get them released if there is no culpability."<sup>120</sup> This organization was most likely an early reference to COPACHI. The organization quickly became a point of contention between the two powerful bodies, even if the Junta's original blessing had been genuine.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Aguilar, "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime, 1973-1980," 723.

<sup>119</sup> Silva Henríquez, "Restañar heridas," 9 October 1973. "Estamos de acuerdo y la Junta nos ha prometido que facilitará nuestra tarea del buen samaritano que quiere restañar las heridas y disminuir los dolores."

<sup>120</sup> Silva Henríquez, "Restañar heridas," 9 October 1973. "Para los extranjeros tenemos casas de refugios y una organización que pregunta por ellos. Hacemos gestiones para conseguir que se les libere si no hay ninguna culpabilidad."

<sup>121</sup> Aguilar, "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime, 1973-1980," 723.

The Church frames its work with victims of government repression not as a political issue, but as a type of “Good Samaritan” act that followed through with religious responsibilities. A year after the first Symposium for Human Rights was held in 1978 in Santiago, Cardinal Silva spoke at its anniversary celebration. His speech made no mention of the government and he stated that man’s rights are not political because they “are born in the spiritual soul of man. They are spiritual rights and, therefore, it is our turn, as the Church of Christ, to act as guardians to these rights and ensure if possible that all men respect them.”<sup>122</sup> By framing human rights as an issue directly linked to the mission of the Church, it attempted to reaffirm its political neutrality while simultaneously dabbling in political affairs.

Nevertheless, the political nature of the human rights investigations created tension between the Church and the Junta. By the end of 1975, General Pinochet wrote to Cardinal Silva to formally request that he shut down COPACHI. The president claimed that the organization gave the impression that differences existed between the Church and the government, and that it threatened the necessary harmony between the Catholic Church and the reigning governmental body.<sup>123</sup> For good measure, he added that the Junta had “considered that the aforementioned organization is a means that is taken advantage of by Marxist-Leninists in order to create problems that disrupt civic tranquility.”<sup>124</sup> I interpret this as Pinochet drawing on the fear of Marxism that even the Church had expressed previously to use as leverage against an organization that was digging deep into the human rights abuses of the government. While the Cardinal quickly dispelled the possibility of a Marxist-Leninist infiltration in his response three

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<sup>122</sup> Raúl Silva Henríquez, “El Camino de la Justicia: Discurso en el Primer aniversario del Simposio de los Derechos Humanos,” speech transcript, *Cardenalsilva.cl*, 25 November 1979. “Estos derechos nacen del alma espiritual del hombre. Son derechos espirituales y, por lo tanto, nos toca, a la Iglesia de Cristo, tutelar esos derechos, y hacer, si fuere posible, que todos los hombres los respeten.”

<sup>123</sup> Raúl Silva Henríquez and Augusto Pinochet, “Intercambio de Cartas: Con el General Augusto Pinochet a propósito de la Disolución del Comité Pro Paz,” *Cardenalsilva.cl*. 11 and 14 November 1975.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* “Por ello hemos considerado que el mencionado organismo es un medio del cual se valen los marxistas-leninistas para crear problemas que alteran la tranquilidad ciudadana.”

days later, he deferred to the government's wishes. In a letter to General Pinochet, he broadly stated that the Church would continue to work toward peace in the country; however, at the end of the letter he expressed hope that "in the near future, civil jurisdiction will be restored in its full capacity to the matters that until now have been the objective of the Comité [Pro Paz]."<sup>125</sup> On November 27, 1975 COPACHI was disbanded, but as Cardinal Silva alluded to in his letter to Pinochet, he announced plans for a new organization to continue its work in the early weeks of December.<sup>126</sup> This took the form of the creation of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

The purpose of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad "was to educate Catholics in the values and the practice of solidarity for the future, while helping those suffering due to political circumstances."<sup>127</sup> Cardinal Silva said in an interview in 1981 that the Vicaría "is the expression of our love toward the persecuted and the poor of our desire that the rights of all men be respected."<sup>128</sup> The Vicaría was one of the few organizations, if not the only one, that gave politicians and intellectuals the ability to keep serving citizens while additionally providing "a physical location for those preparing possible grounds for the restoration of democracy in Chile."<sup>129</sup> The Vicaría served not only as an entity that allowed the institutional Church to give aid to constituents, but it also provided the space for laypeople to use their skills to help each other.<sup>130</sup> In a way, the Vicaría acted as an institutional structure to legitimize grassroots resistance.<sup>131</sup> The closing of COPACHI in 1975 marked a breaking point in the increasingly

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid. "El sacrificio que esta decisión importa nos permite esperar que, en tiempo no lejano, le será restituida a la jurisdicción civil su plena competencia en las materias hasta ahora objeto de la acción del Comité."

<sup>126</sup> Aguilar, "The Vicaría de la Solidaridad and the Pinochet Regime (1976-1980)," 104.

<sup>127</sup> Aguilar, "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime, 1973-1980," 726.

<sup>128</sup> Raúl Silva Henríquez, "Entrevista Polémica," interview transcript with the ANSA Agency, *Cardenalsilva.cl*. 12 April 1981. "La Vicaría de la Solidaridad es la expresión de nuestro amor hacia los perseguidos, hacia los pobres, de nuestro deseo de que se respeten los derechos de todos los hombres."

<sup>129</sup> Aguilar, "The Vicaría de la Solidaridad and the Pinochet Regime (1976-1980)," 101.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>131</sup> Angell, "Chile since 1958," 371.

tenuous relationship between the government and the Church.<sup>132</sup> Its documentation of the government's human rights abuses gave the Church the ammunition to place increasing pressure on the Junta and made the organization extremely contentious.<sup>133</sup>

### *The Late 1970s: A Shift in Approach*

In the late 1970s the Church became more aggressively outspoken against the regime's tactics, using the work of the Vicaría to justify its positions. Some scholars portray the relationship between the Church hierarchy and the Junta as perpetually tense,<sup>134</sup> but this tension became most evident in the Church's less civil accusations against government actions in the late 70s. It began even earlier of course, as "even in mid-1974, initially cautious criticism was gaining momentum, and after 1976 the Church openly opposed the military government."<sup>135</sup> In the first few years of the dictatorship, the Church hierarchy legitimized the Junta while simultaneously beginning to help the victims of political abuse through COPACHI and later the Vicaría de la Solidaridad.<sup>136</sup> It was not until the late 1970s that the CECH became more critical of the regime, and in only openly denounced political repression after the increased violence between 1983 and 1986.<sup>137</sup> In my research, I found the Church's most critical statements were produced in 1978.

In 1978 the Comité Permanente released several statements between June and November regarding the disappeared and detained. The Church's increased discontent with the regime came on the heels of an Amnesty Law enacted that April that dropped the investigations into accused

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>133</sup> Cancino Troncoso, *Chile: Iglesia y dictadura 1973-1989*, 226.

<sup>134</sup> Aguilar, "The Vicaría de la Solidaridad and the Pinochet Regime (1976-1980)."

<sup>135</sup> Ruderer, "Between Religion and Politics," 475.

<sup>136</sup> Cruz Contreras and Ramírez, "Memorias Subalternas sobre la Dictadura Militar en Chile," 20-1.

<sup>137</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the protests and violence that occurred, see pages 371-4 in Angell, "Chile since 1958"; Cruz Contreras and Ramírez, "Memorias Subalternas sobre la Dictadura Militar en Chile," 21-2.



perpetrators of human rights abuses.<sup>138</sup> In the following months some families of the disappeared participated in a hunger strike, refusing to eat until the government gave them information about their loved ones. The bishops requested that the families stop their hunger strike, yet continued to put pressure on the government to give them answers. In July the Comité Permanente wrote that “the Bishops, upon whose request the families suspended their hunger strike, feel committed to continue preoccupying themselves with the families’ problems, as they are convinced that the correct solution will end the anguish of people who have suffered so much from uncertainty, bring peace to the country.”<sup>139</sup> The Church proposed that distributing answers to the families of the disappeared would not only alleviate their suffering, but would also serve to promote peace within the country; this focus on peace circumvented the need for the Church to verbally attack the regime by positioning its inaction as depriving Chileans of tranquility. With this document the Church sent a clear message to the Junta and the people that the Church would not allow the cases of the disappeared to disappear with them.

Several months later the Comité Permanente reconvened about the issue and condemned the Junta’s inaction in a statement released in November of the same year. Until this point, the Church used language that expressed its confidence that the government would act in the best interest of its citizens. This document proves to be less forgiving, as it expresses that the responses of government officials regarding the disappeared “have not been satisfactory.”<sup>140</sup> The bishops said that “unfortunately, we have come to the conclusion that the government will not carry out an in-depth investigation of what has occurred, which would allow us to establish the

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<sup>138</sup> Aguilar, “The Vicaría de la Solidaridad and the Pinochet Regime,” 110.

<sup>139</sup> Comité Permanente del Episcopado, “Informa sobre gestiones para investigar situación de los Detenidos Desaparecidos,” *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*, 13 June 1978. “Pero los Obispos, a cuyo pedido los familiares suspendieron su huelga de hambre, se sienten comprometidos a seguir preocupándose de su problema, convencidos como están de que su acertada solución terminará con la angustia de personas que mucho han sufrido con la incertidumbre, traerá paz al país.”

<sup>140</sup> Comité Permanente del Episcopado, “Declaración acerca de los Detenidos Desaparecidos,” *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*, 9 November 1978. “Las respuestas obtenidas hasta ahora no han sido satisfactorias.”

reality of each case and the corresponding responsibilities.”<sup>141</sup> In addition to their criticisms of the Junta’s lack of cooperation in investigations, the Comité calls for an end to the violence. While they direct their plea to both Chile’s authorities and all Chilean people, their request directly evokes images of the governments’ human rights abuses. They call for them to “definitively renounce all violence committed against people, torture, terrorism, and contempt for human life.”<sup>142</sup> These statements came not from the Vicaría, but from the institutional Church. This is significant because the Church, which exerted tremendous effort to cooperate with the government, still held the regime accountable for its disregard for human life and the good of the Chilean people. Yet even as the Church does this, it does not position itself as anti-Junta. The bishops end on a conciliatory note that echoes the appeals made in earlier documents when they say that “we trust that the government will take the steps necessary to prevent abuses and to reprimand them if they continue occurring.”<sup>143</sup> I believe that this could be interpreted as genuine “trust” or as pressure on the government to act accordingly. Either way, this gives the impression that the Church still supported the regime to some extent, even after its harsh denunciations of the regime’s actions.

On November 30th, 1978, just weeks after the Comité Permanente’s criticisms of the regime, the Vicaría helped uncover a grave in the town of Lonquén containing the bodies of fifteen political prisoners.<sup>144</sup> Aguilar explains that through this event “the Chilean public had access to public information about human rights abuses, and the Vicaría was able to assert that

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid. “Desgraciadamente, hemos llegado a la conclusión de que el gobierno no realizará una investigación a fondo de lo ocurrido, que permitiera establecer la realidad de cada caso y las responsabilidades correspondientes.”

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. “Suplicamos, no tan sólo a nuestras autoridades sino a todos los chilenos, que renuncien definitivamente a toda violencia sobre las personas, a la tortura, al terrorismo, al desprecio de la vida humana.”

<sup>143</sup> Comité Permanente, “Declaración acerca de los Detenidos Desaparecidos,” 9 November 1978. “Confiamos que el gobierno tomará las medidas necesarias para prevenir los abusos y reprimirlos, si siguieran ocurriendo.”

<sup>144</sup> Aguilar, “The Vicaría de la Solidaridad and the Pinochet Regime (1976-1980),” 108.

the disappearance of people was not an invention but a reality.”<sup>145</sup> Since the start of Pinochet’s rule, the government had actively denied accusations of missing and abused persons at the hands of its officials. This concrete evidence began to erode its disavowals of truth.<sup>146</sup> In the two years prior to the discovery at Lonquén, the Vicaría had been pushing the Supreme Court to acknowledge and provide information on the cases of over 400 *desaparecidos*. The government entity resisted acknowledging the reality of these missing persons, and when it did give a list of persons in exile, detained, or being processed, none of the cases matched those that the Vicaría was inquiring about.<sup>147</sup> The Supreme Court’s lack of cooperation reflected an unwillingness to acknowledge the crimes of the government which became increasingly difficult to ignore with the discovery of bodies of political prisoners.

Despite the aggressive tactics of the Vicaría and the tangible evidence the mass grave provided, the institutional Church remained remarkably aloof in its criticisms of the regime. Cardinal Silva was asked about the Church’s voice and activity in the wake of the Lonquén discovery in an interview with *HOY Magazine* the following year, and he responded not with outright criticism of the regime but by highlighting the importance of the Church acting as a voice for the people. He noted that “the only thing that we can say is that we will always serve the causes of truth, justice, and peace.”<sup>148</sup> Despite the dramatic events of the year prior, the Church continued to repeat the idea that it existed to promote peace and justice to the country and did not act as a force in opposition to the government. I interpret Silva’s response, as well as the mild conclusion to the Comité Permanente’s severe condemnations of the Junta’s violence, as

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>146</sup> Stern, *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile*, 108-9; Wilde, “A Season of Memory,” 35.

<sup>147</sup> For a chronological explanation of the Vicaría’s legal battle with the Supreme Court, see “Se reconoce veracidad de información de Vicaría,” *Solidaridad* 34 (1978): 5.

<sup>148</sup> Raúl Silva Henríquez, “Las Difíciles Relaciones,” interview transcript, *Revista HOY, Cardenalsilva.cl*. 3-9 October 1979. “Lo único que podemos decir es que estamos siempre al servicio de la verdad, de la justicia y da la paz.”

markers of the Church's unwillingness to relinquish its dedication to political neutrality. I argue that even though the Church continuously exposed the unjust and inhumane actions of the Junta, it refused to position itself against the Junta as Chile's governing body. The Vicaría was affiliated with the Catholic Church, but its existence as a separate entity allowed the Church to distinguish its human rights investigations from its official position. This is particularly significant in the late 1970s when tensions over the government's attacks on its own people were becoming increasingly intense. This distinction between Church actions and message, while it may seem negligible, was necessary for the Church to adhere to its own political neutrality while it worked simultaneously to uphold both human rights and the political stability of Chile.

#### *Cardinal Fresno's Refocus on Conciliation*

The increased pressures against the regime both domestically and internationally in the late 1970s forced Chile's government to reestablish its legitimacy in order to maintain control of the country. Two years after the National Consultation in 1978, which was meant to gauge Chileans' support of the regime, Pinochet called another plebiscite, this time to propose a new constitution. The 1980 constitution "created a system of presidential rule with few limitations" and consolidated the power of the Junta. It authorized Pinochet's presidency to continue for the next eight years with the opportunity for later reelection, established a nomination process for many Senate seats instead of election, and further institutionalized the military.<sup>149</sup> Protests broke out across the country several years into this new phase of the Junta's rule due to Chile's failing economy and strengthening unions. "Demonstrations organized on a monthly basis from May 1983 rocked the regime," and it was amidst this increased opposition that Juan Fransisco Fresno

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<sup>149</sup> Angell, "Chile since 1958," 369. The constitution was approved by a majority vote from the public, but Angell doubts the legitimacy of this win. He says that "the absence of registers, complete government control over the electoral process, massive official propaganda, tiny opposition protests and, undoubtedly, fraud, intimidation and fear of expressing opposition in what might not be so secret a ballot cast considerable doubt on these figures."

Larraín assumed his position as the Chilean cardinal.<sup>150</sup> Cardinal Silva stepped down from his position in 1983 and the Pope selected Fresno to fill his seat. Even though “Fresno was one of the few bishops publicly to support the 1973 military coup,”<sup>151</sup> his later objectives as the head of the Chilean Catholic Church were to actively work toward a reconciliation with the regime while supporting social justice values.<sup>152</sup>

Fresno’s conciliatory measures are embodied most obviously in the National Accord that he spearheaded in 1985. The Accord, backed by other political party leaders, publicly called for a return to democracy and is often cited as one of Fresno’s finer moments in his work against the regime.<sup>153</sup> Critics of Fresno assert that this Accord was not a crucial act of defiance toward the government because it was “based on a formula that would favor the nation’s center-right political groups at the expense of the left, something that pleases the government far more than the activists among the poor and the working class who see the left as their champion.”<sup>154</sup> This criticism serves only to reinforce the notion that the Catholic Church was dedicated to its balanced position, perhaps even more so under Cardinal Fresno than Cardinal Silva. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency wrote an evaluation of the situation in Chile in 1985 and had this to say of the Church:

The Catholic Church has become a major factor in support of the moderate opposition in its efforts to open up the political system and speed up the transition process [to democracy]. Church leader Cardinal Fresno, an opponent of Pinochet’s policies, brokered the National Accord. He is likely to continue to play a key role in maintaining political pressure on the government, including attempting to use as leverage the Pope’s projected visit to Chile. Fresno probably will be circumspect in his dealings with the government,

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<sup>150</sup> For more discussion on the protests that began in 1983 and the circumstances that spurred them, see Angell, “Chile since 1958,” 371-4.

<sup>151</sup> Meacham, “Changing of the Guard,” 412.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 427; Wilde, “Irruptions of Memory,” 479; Cruz Contreras and Ramírez, “Memorias Subalternas sobre la Dictadura Militar en Chile,” 22.

<sup>154</sup> Bowers, “Pinochet’s Plebiscite and the Catholics,” 54.

however, because he badly wants the National Accord to succeed and does not want to appear too partisan.<sup>155</sup>

The CIA's assessment of the Church in the mid-80s seems to be more in line with and further supports the Church's dedication to both holding the regime accountable and keeping the peace with the government.

Fresno met with Pinochet in December of 1985 over the issue of the Accord, but the General refused to discuss the document.<sup>156</sup> Although the 1985 Accord did not gain backing from the government, a plebiscite was called in 1988, as per the conditions of the Junta's 1980 constitution, over the potential re-election of General Pinochet. An overwhelming 97% of the country voted, and the majority voted against Pinochet's continued rule. The vote resulted in an election held in December of 1989 in which Pinochet did not run. In its first democratic presidential election in almost 20 years, Chile chose Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin to lead it through the country's next difficult political phase.<sup>157</sup> The Church continued to be an influential force in Chile's government after 1990 as it helped to facilitate the country's complicated return to democracy and its remembrance of the regime's human rights abuses.<sup>158</sup>

#### *Church's Self-Reflection and Memory Making*

As individuals and as a nation, the people of Chile have been tasked with understanding, telling, and retelling its difficult history. The first president after the dictatorship, Patricio Aylwin, instituted various ceremonies and memorials to recognize the violence under the

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<sup>155</sup> U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Chile: Prospects for Democratic Transition," December 1985. Accessed April 2017.

<sup>156</sup> Meacham, "Changing of the Guard," 429.

<sup>157</sup> For a more detailed description of the 1988 plebiscite and resulting election, see Angell, "Chile since 1958," 376-80.

<sup>158</sup> For further discussion on the Church's role in Chile's return to democracy after 1990, see Cruz Contreras and Ramírez, "Memorias Subalternas sobre la Dictadura Militar en Chile," 23-26; Wilde, "Irruptions of Memory," 495; Cancino Troncoso, *Chile*, 229; Fernández, *La Iglesia que resistió a Pinochet*.

Junta,<sup>159</sup> while General Pinochet remained in the government as the army's commander-in-chief.<sup>160</sup> Chile's complex processes of remembrance have permeated all aspects of society, playing out through personal accounts, scholarly research, legal proceedings, and government-sanctioned ceremonies.<sup>161</sup> The memory of government opposition has focused on the Church as a body that not only played a crucial role during the regime but also one continues to exercise great influence in Chile and the rest of Latin America.

Countless scholars reference the Church as one of the most influential forces of opposition to the Junta while it was in power.<sup>162</sup> It is easier in hindsight for scholars to say that the Catholic Church's actions were against the regime, and while this may be true, it negates the Church's efforts to portray itself as a neutral body accountable only to God and to its people. During the rule of the Junta the Church adamantly denied any suggestion that it was anti-Junta. This discrepancy between the image that the Church presented during the regime and the way it is often remembered today reflects the importance of memory construction in Chile's process of coming to terms with this past and in looking to its future. This memory may also be tempered by the multitude of ways that Catholics reflect on the history of Chile and the Church. Catholicism was an essential part of many Chileans' identities during this time, and "contrasting memories could also mean contrasting types of Catholicism."<sup>163</sup> The Catholic Church was adamant about the acceptance of a variety of political approaches and opinions during the

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<sup>159</sup> Wilde, "A Season of Memory," 37.

<sup>160</sup> Angell, "Chile since 1958," 381.

<sup>161</sup> For example of this scholarly discussion, see Wilde, "Irruptions of Memory"; Wilde, "A Season of Memory"; Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*.

<sup>162</sup> This association can be found in Cruz Contreras and Ramírez, "Memorias Subalternas sobre la Dictadura Militar en Chile," 21; Meacham, "Changing of the Guard," 411; Bowers, "Pinochet's Plebiscite and the Catholics," 51; Aguilar, "Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime," 712; Aguilar, "The Vicaría de la Solidaridad and the Pinochet Regime," 101.

<sup>163</sup> Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*, 66-7.

instability of the 1970s and 80s, so it would follow that there would also be a multitude of experiences Christians have in processing the grief and trauma of the dictatorship.

The institutional Church had a very specific way of approaching its role during the dictatorship. Cardinal Silva was frequently asked if the Church had turned into the most important oppositional force to the military government. In an interview that Cardinal Silva had with *HOY Magazine* (1979), Silva asserted that “the Church is does not make political opposition,”<sup>164</sup> echoing his response to *Time* magazine after it also suggested that the Church was working against the government.<sup>165</sup> In his interview with *HOY* he goes on to justify the Church’s actions in the context of evangelism, which required that the Church denounce situations that inhibit the salvation of Jesus Christ. Silva also says in this interview about the Church is above taking political sides, which offers an important follow-through of beliefs from the pre-Allende era.<sup>166</sup> The cardinal made similar remarks the following month at the celebration for the first anniversary of a Symposium on Human Rights.<sup>167</sup> These examples illustrate a common thread in Church documents about the Church’s political involvement only extending as far as the need to uphold the Gospel and the Church’s mission in that regard. At this time the Church was active politically and played a large role in the opposition to the dictatorship, yet it never backed down from its position that its work is not about the politics. Even if the Church was doing evangelical work through human rights investigations, the very political repercussions of its actions cannot be ignored.

However, even the memories from the hierarchy offer a different perspective in hindsight than what may have been the reality at the time. Mario I. Aguilar presents an analysis of Cardinal

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<sup>164</sup> Silva Henríquez, “Las Dificiles Relaciones,” Entrevista en Revista “HOY,” 3-9 October 1979. “La Iglesia no hace oposición política.”

<sup>165</sup> Silva Henríquez, “Comunicado de Prensa,” 27 June 1975.

<sup>166</sup> Silva Henríquez, “Las Dificiles Relaciones,” 3-9 October 1979.

<sup>167</sup> Silva Henríquez, “El Camino de la Justicia,” 25 November 1979.



Silva's memoirs to both highlight the importance of personal testimonies in the construction of historical memory and also to examine the ways that memory changes history.<sup>168</sup> He claims that the Church was not simply influential during Chile's military dictatorship, but "converted into a force parallel to that of the military."<sup>169</sup> He poses a salient argument that the Cardinal's memoirs "showed the importance of subjectivity in the historical plotline and the possibility that the history is not written from the official institutional [perspective], but from the perspective of those marginalized and persecuted in a society."<sup>170</sup> History as I have described it from the perspective of the institutional Church cannot stand alone as a complete picture of Chile's history under President Allende nor General Pinochet. This research must be weighed and understood in respect to future analysis of alternative perspectives and experiences under the Junta in order to create a comprehensive memory of historical events.<sup>171</sup>

#### *Other Voices: CEBs and the Christian Left*

Grassroots groups, while decidedly less influential than the institutional Church, are an important part of the narrative of the opposition to the regime when highlighting citizens' agency and resistance in the face of an abuse of power. Bowers asserts that "the Catholic church is not a monolithic body either at the popular or at the elite level." CEBs were a physical manifestation of the different approaches Christians took to the regime. Leftist tendencies were often suppressed within the institutional Church which complemented the government pushback to liberal tendencies in church media.<sup>172</sup> Looking for a more open form of political and religious expression under the Junta, some Christians turned to participation in CEBs.

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<sup>168</sup> Aguilar, "Los derechos humanos en las memorias del Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez," 1.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>171</sup> For more exploration on the theme of memory in Chile, see Wilde, "A Season of Memory"; Wilde, "Irruptions of Memory"; and Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*.

<sup>172</sup> Bowers, "Pinochet's Plebiscite and the Catholics," 53.

It must be made clear that CEBs were not always affiliated with progressive or leftist thought, despite the fact that scholars commonly label them as such. This simplifies the complex realities that these diverse communities lived.<sup>173</sup> CEBs had existed before the military coup in 1973, but for Bustamante these organizations were especially active after the coup because they “represented a crucial opportunity for communities that were developing practices for political consciousness... The CEBs were strongly seen as necessary and tense, for they demanded clear action in order to end Pinochet’s dictatorship.” CEBs applied the Church’s doctrine and ideals to social action in a way that the Church hierarchy refused to do.<sup>174</sup> It is perhaps because of this, however, that members of CEBs were more vulnerable to being targeted by the government as sources of resistance. In 1976 the Comité Permanente wrote a declaration decrying the exile of two Chilean lawyers in which they also questioned that “if this could happen to two prestigious professionals well-known for their intellectual ability and who had performed jobs of the highest responsibility, what could happen to modest and unsuspecting citizens?”<sup>175</sup> This is not to insinuate that members of CEBs were unintelligent, rather that they likely lacked the nuanced understanding of the law as it functioned under Pinochet’s government that these exiled lawyers would have had. Those CEBs who did resist the dictatorship would not have had any institutionalized protections against its retaliation.

The increase in CEB membership during the years when the regime was most oppressive may not have been due to an increased need for faith during these times, but rather a need for a space in which one’s oppositional political ideas could be expressed, which these CEBs

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<sup>173</sup> Bustamante, “Una experiencia carismática de base durante la dictadura militar,” 260.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>175</sup> Comité Permanente del Episcopado, “Declaración sobre la expulsión de los Sres. Jaime Castillo y Eugenio Velasco,” *Iglesia.cl: Conferencia Episcopal de Chile*, 16 August 1976. “Si esto sucede con dos profesionales de prestigio, de reconocida capacidad intelectual y que han ejercido cargos de alta responsabilidad, ¿qué podrá suceder con modestos e ignorados ciudadanos?”

offered.<sup>176</sup> Even if this were the case, this reasoning contributes to the sentiment that CEBs provided a critical opportunity for community members to find temporary relief from the oppressive regime as well as a place to voice that opposition. It is crucial to understand that high-ranking members of the Church were not the only Christian voices of opposition. I offer this brief analysis not simply to acknowledge the diversity of political opinion within the Church's membership, but also to frame the work on the institutional Church. The Church and these leftist groups acted in similar manners through their condemnation of the abuses of the regime, yet took vastly different ideological approaches to their interactions with the government. Christian grassroots groups were often politically radical in ways that the Catholic Church refused to engage. These groups show that the Church could have easily enhanced its political activity through religious justification, as it did to some extent in its framing of the Vicaría's human rights investigations. The fact that they did not do so could nod to a broader objective to keep the peace in a country that was already volatile without its interference.

## CONCLUSION

An examination of the Chilean Catholic Church's involvement in the country's affairs from the late 1960s through the 1980s shows an adamant expression of political neutrality on the part of the Church. The Church's function was much disputed by those critical of its political involvement as well as by people within the Church who saw it accountable for various degrees of political action. Its self-proclaimed objectives were to defend the liberation of man, evangelize the masses, and to promote peace and unity. As the hierarchy claimed, the purpose of the Church was not to attach itself to any partisan politics or economic system, as doing so would jeopardize the unity of its members and threaten to alienate those who supported differing politics or

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<sup>176</sup> Cavendish, "Christian Base Communities and the Building of Democracy," 193.

economics as they were afforded the right to do in a fair and democratic system. Political neutrality, then, was central to the Church's ability to promote unity among the country and its governing bodies.

This idea of unity not only applied to the relationship between the Church hierarchy and its patrons, but more broadly to the relationship between the Church and the government and to the country as a whole. Any direct denunciation of the government, whether Allende's or Pinochet's, would have resulted in increased political tension and unrest among both elites and the masses. The Church was perhaps most forthright in its opposition to socialism as a mode of governance, yet it remained civil with Allende's government and supportive of its goals in the name of unifying Chile. Similarly, the Church refused to position itself in opposition to the following military dictatorship, despite its criticisms of the regime's actions. To do so would not only have gone beyond what the Church saw as legitimate political interference, but it would also have jeopardized the already precarious political situation in the country.

In the face of this constant reaffirmation of the Church's political neutrality, scholars cite the Church's active work in investigating the human rights abuses committed by the Junta as the action that proved its opposition to the dictatorship. The Church hierarchy, however, framed its defense of human rights and support of victims of political terrorism as strictly non-political; instead, it was work required of the Church as an act of evangelism. The active work of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad may have been exposing the government's flagrant disregard of human rights but the hierarchy refused to say that the Church was opposed to the regime. The justification of this non-political framing of human rights can be seen in the link to the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference in Medellín, Colombia. The values that these conferences incorporated into mainstream Church doctrine linked with the kind of social change

advocated for by liberation theologians, but the mainstream Church strictly dissociated itself from any form of political leanings or affiliations. However, I maintain that the reestablished values of social action and both spiritual and political human liberation that resulted from these conferences laid the foundation for an action-based evangelical response on the part of the Church to the political injustices committed under the dictatorship.

Understanding the prominent position of the Catholic Church in Chile is critical to framing its visibility in current representations of how the opposition to the regime is remembered. It cannot be denied that the Church's voice was one of the loudest in calling out the wrongdoings of the regime. Even so, scholarly narratives often eclipse other groups and organizations that were vocal against the dictatorship, in many ways more directly than the Church itself. Those who sought to make direct connections between a Christian narrative and leftist political agendas were seen as radicals and were separated from the institutional Church. These individuals and groups were more likely to be victims of government repression and surveillance. This is not to say that members of the Church were exempt from the strong hand of the government, rather that the institution itself offered more protection than could have been afforded to more independent bodies.

The Church likely advocated for its political neutrality because it understood its pivotal role in maintaining peace and political stability in the country. It was separate from politics, but still had a lot of power in the social and moral standing of a country whose population identified overwhelmingly as Catholic in 1970; many in the country looked to the Church for security and answers, and this was especially true when there was such fear and unease during the 1970s and 1980s. A direct denunciation of either Allende or Pinochet's governments specifically could have pushed the already volatile situation in the country to another coup or all-out war. This non-

political framing of the Church's stance further served to guard it from further political persecution under Pinochet's rule. The Church held a precarious position during the regime, seeing as it had more freedom than many other social institutions, but it risked jeopardizing that freedom with too aggressive a stance against the Junta. If the Church had denounced the dictatorship directly it likely would have given the Junta more than sufficient justification to suffocate the voice of the Church altogether. This would have not only put clergy and laypeople at an increased risk, but also would have stifled any opportunity for the Church and the Vicaría from continuing their investigations and human rights work. In much the same way that the Church criticizes its parishioners' sins and not the individuals themselves, the Church identified the wrongdoings of the government without explicitly denouncing the government itself.

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