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**The Church in Pinochet's Chile:
Agent for Change?**

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Abbreviations

AD – Alianza Democrática

Comité pro Paz – Comité de Cooperación para la Paz en Chile

CELAM – Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano

CPEC – Comité Permanente del Episcopado de Chile

CTC – Confederación de Trabajadores del Cobre

MAPU – Movimiento para la Acción Popular Unida

MIR – Movimiento Izquierdo Revolucionario

PDC – Partido Demócrata Cristiano

Vicaría – Vicaría de la Solidaridad

Introduction

The military coup d'état of September 1973 which overthrew the democratically elected Marxist government of Salvador Allende, and the regime which ruled Chile for the following sixteen years in the name of restoring Christian values and order, presented many moral and political dilemmas for the Chilean Catholic Church. Military rule altered Chile's political, economic and social landscape so profoundly that traditional democratic actors were demobilised; the Church's response and actions therefore took on a unique political significance.

Consequently, the restoration of democracy in Chile in 1990 was the product of a long process of mobilisation, reconciliation and negotiation. Manuel Antonio Garretón's numerous studies of the evolution of the transition process, and his assessment of the accumulative factors which gradually opened the way back to a democratic system, highlight the overarching importance of two main actors in leading the transition: mobilised civil society and political parties.¹ Schneider and Oshorn have described the challenge of mobilised shanty town communities and popular organisations to the regime's legitimacy and the destabilising effects that its demands for the return of full democracy had on the regime. Valenzuela and Valenzuela, Oppenheim, Siavelis, Garretón and Loveman all give detailed context and analysis of the oppositional efforts of political parties from the whole ideological spectrum, and their responses to the imposed conditions which irrevocably altered the constitutional system.

¹ M.A. Garretón in Drake and Jaksic, (eds.) 1991

The prominence of these two actors in leading the transition is evident from an examination of the main political developments during the period of military rule. Following the coup, the regime dismantled the country's political, institutional and economic systems in favour of new authoritarian and neoliberal structures. There was little significant oppositional activity, other than what Garretón calls 'resistance'² for the first ten years of military rule; such was the severity of repressive measures used against opponents and the considerable strength of sectors supportive of the regime's efforts. In 1980, the regime institutionalised its rule through a new Constitution and prescribed the powers civilian actors and the armed forces were to have in Chile's political future. Alarmed by this and the financial crisis which rocked the economy from 1981-1982, the first oppositional movement emerged from civil society in the form of national protests demanding the demise of the regime and the return to democracy. This brought a degree of political opening, encouraging the reorganisation of political parties and initiating processes of dialogue, both with the regime and between previously uncooperative parties. On reaching consensus for a democratic alternative, the opposition parties formed the *Concertación* coalition, defeating Pinochet in the 1988 plebiscite and, after also winning the 1989 presidential elections with its candidate Patricio Aylwin, became the new democratic government inaugurated in 1990.

The imposition of authoritarian rule and the gradual efforts for transition that followed presented a challenge for the Catholic Church. There is a significant literature on the opportunities for cooperation or confrontation for the Catholic Church presented by

² M.A. Garretón in Cavarrozzi and Garretón, (eds.) 1987, p.403

mass-based, revolutionary and authoritarian regimes across Latin America by Levine, Mainwaring, Berryman and Wilde³. Studies of the Catholic Church in Chile during this period have focussed principally on its relations with the regime, and their evolving confrontations. Smith, Fleet, Sigmund and Bouvier's various works detail the increasingly oppositional responses to the regime of Catholics at different levels, particularly focussing on bishops; Lowden shows the formation of the Church as moral opposition to the regime through its denunciation of human rights, and Cancino's book describes the institutional conflict between the Church and the regime. All thoroughly examine the challenges for the Church operating under a regime with which its own views were increasingly at odds.

This study, however, will assess the extent to which the Church's work during this period interacted with the efforts of the social and political actors mentioned above to initiate a transition to democracy, and how far it contributed to making a political change possible, rather than its frictions with the regime itself. The chapters will examine three areas of the Church's work which had significant political impact. The first chapter will look at the public voice that the Church was afforded by the regime and how far this was used to promote democratic ideals and the defence of human rights, and the effect of this on the demise of the regime. The second chapter focuses on the Church's interaction with the efforts of the first leading political actor in the transition: civil society; through its support of popular organising and protests; while the third examines how far the Church supported the political opposition in forming a viable democratic alternative to the

³ Levine 1979 and 1986, Mainwaring 1986, Berryman 1984 and 1987, Wilde 1989

military regime. In this way, it is intended that the wide range and capacity of the Church's work for change is evident, both at the grassroots and with elites.

The Church's role in a political process

The Catholic Church in Chile is not a political institution, nor have the motives for its work ever pretended to be politically orientated. Where, then, is its significance as an institution in a clearly political process? This can be explained firstly in the context of the progressive developments within the Catholic Church in both Chile and Latin America in the years preceding the military coup, and secondly, because the extreme restrictions imposed by the regime on all organisational activity effectively created a political vacuum, causing some of the Church's work with social, humanitarian and religious motivations to have an inevitable, though often unintentional, political impact.

Progressive developments in the Catholic Church

A strong progressive element in the Chilean Church developed 'relatively early' in the twentieth century compared with other Latin American Churches.⁴ Catholic Action programmes were formed for social action in 1931,⁵ and there was a growing consciousness of the need for reform of political and economic structures to ensure social justice for the poor. This sense of the Church's social responsibility towards the marginalised was not unique to Chile and formed part of discussions at the Second

⁴ Adriance, 1992, p.S53

⁵ Smith and Fleet, 1997, p.41

Vatican Council of 1962-1965. What became known as the 'preferential option for the poor'⁶ became institutionalised in the Latin American Church at the Conference of Latin American bishops held in Medellin, Colombia in 1968. The need to 'give effective preference to the poorest, most needy and segregated sectors'⁷ emerging from this conference changed the face of Latin American Catholicism, finding expression in the growing Liberation Theology movement, inspired by Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, and a growing network of base Christian communities which existed to promote values of social justice alongside religious teaching and evangelism. Although strongly conservative elements remained influential, especially at higher levels of the Church hierarchy, there was a notable shift in official discourse that work with the socially and economically marginalised must accompany the evangelistic mission of the Church in Latin America as an intrinsic part of the gospel.

The timing of these developments within the Latin American Church influenced the Chilean Church's response to its national politics. It strongly supported the reformist Christian Democrat government of Eduardo Frei from 1964-1970, not only as an alternative to Marxism but also to improve conditions for Chile's lower classes.⁸ Its commitment to defending human dignity and the rights of the poor, formalised at Medellin, crucially influenced a more defensive position towards the dramatic changes imposed by the military in 1973. By placing greater emphasis on its social responsibility, it acted and spoke on behalf of the socially excluded, which were the very sectors

⁶ CELAM, 1979

⁷ CELAM, 1968

⁸ Adriance, 1992, p.S54

Pinochet sought to suppress. This inevitably brought political connotations to the Church's social initiatives.

The Church in a political vacuum

Pinochet and the military junta took over all executive and legislative powers from the democratic government of Salvador Allende in September 1973 after the country had reached the point of institutional crisis, economic collapse and social unrest, for reasons discussed in Chapter 3. The Chilean political party system was held to blame for the national crisis, and the junta therefore aimed to radically deconstruct that system to destroy 'the virus of partyism,' partly involving the elimination of the 'totalitarian threat'⁹ of Marxism by removing all Leftist political party members from society. In addition, all political institutions were dismantled, Congress was disbanded, all Leftist parties were made illegal and the others put into recess before also becoming illegal in 1977. Media censorship and strict curfews were also enforced,¹⁰ the trade union movement and public sector organisations were repressed and military administrators assumed control of universities.¹¹ In particular, an effort was made to cut the traditionally strong links between political parties and civil society by banning all social and political organisational activity, thereby dismantling citizen access to political power and closing all channels of participation.¹² The restrictions were particularly enforced in areas in

⁹ Pinochet, 1983 in Loveman, 1986 p.3

¹⁰ Sigmund, 1986 p.32

¹¹ Loveman, 1986 p. 9

¹² Valenzuela and Valenzuela (eds.), 1986, p.213

which Leftist party organising had traditionally been strong, namely more working class and less developed urban areas, called *poblaciones*.

The Church was one of the only remaining institutions in Chilean society that was allowed to continue functioning autonomously, due to its historic moral prestige in society and the military's need of it for legitimacy, given the regime's desire to represent traditional Christian values as a preferable alternative to atheist Marxism.¹³ It must be remembered that despite many of the Church's actions seeming to show a pro-democratic stance, the Church maintained official political neutrality throughout the duration of the military regime and never broke relations with Pinochet or declared his government illegitimate. However, by necessity, and due to the political vacuum left by the lack of representation and political activity, the Church's work and engagement with society expanded rapidly to counter the regime's repressive measures, reaching into arenas traditionally occupied by political parties or social organisations. Though the justification for these new areas of work was always defined in moral and humanitarian terms, to protect the dignity of human life and to promote peace, its impact often extended into the realm of the political.

Clarifying concepts and scope of this study

This topic is subject to the complexity of using broad categories of definitions; both in the sometimes uncertain or subjective boundaries of what constitutes particular concepts, for example, 'the moral' or 'the political,' which share areas of commonality. This study

¹³ Loveman, 1986 p.8, Valenzuela and Valenzuela (eds.), 1986 p.191

seeks to work with this ambiguity to illustrate that the Church's work had such significance for the transition precisely because of this commonality. The clearly political was avoided; while moral service extending into the political was more acceptable.

Similarly, the discussion centres on a global and hierarchical Catholic Church, which even within Chile is highly heterogeneous in social class, political opinion, theology and doctrine, meaning that a reference to 'the Church' can rarely encompass all elements accurately. For this reason, more specific terms will be used where possible, though 'the Church' will be used for general references to the institution. Because of this diversity, this study will attempt to show the broad range of its work for influencing political change: from the upper levels of Church hierarchy referred to in Chapters 1 and 3, to the more radical and progressive Church of the grassroots in Chapter 2. The same diversity and heterogeneity, however, led to some contradictions and complexities within the Church's work, where extreme differences in political opinion pulled the Church in different directions.

In addition, I will be working with a definition of democracy beyond the electoral mechanisms and elite negotiations emphasised by O'Donnell and Schmitter,¹⁴ to full social and economic democracy based on the public contestation, active citizen participation and popular sovereignty in all areas of public life similar to that described in Robert Dahl's theory of *Polyarchy*.¹⁵ Therefore a discussion of the Church's 'contribution to democracy,' does not refer only to the restoration of free elections, but

¹⁴ O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986

¹⁵ Dahl, 1979 p.7

also to the freedom to organise, associate, dissent and participate in economic and social policy without risk to personal security. The authoritarian establishment of governance created by the Chilean armed forces will be referred to not as the ‘military government’ or ‘the dictatorship’, which, while both used within academic literature, have strong associations for Chileans of Right and Left persuasions respectively; instead here the more neutral term ‘military regime’ will be used.

The international influence on Chilean politics during this period was not insignificant in the context of the Cold War, with the perceived threat of Allende’s government much amplified through its ties with the Soviet Union, and the pressures of the United States influencing Pinochet through sanctions out of concern for human rights violations, and through an increased presence to verify the conditions of the 1988 plebiscite and 1989 election. However, this study will focus on national events, excluding as well the influence of exile politics, both due to its limited scope, and due to the fact that the international environment, though influential, did not significantly alter the course of events,¹⁶ unlike in many parts of Central America where national politics was directly dependent on international factors. Similarly, this study does not pretend that the Catholic Church is the only Christian Church with a significant following in Chile; to the contrary, protestant denominations are stronger there than in many other parts of Latin America. However, they do not form a part of this study because, apart from some notable exceptions working in human rights or solidarity organisations, most protestant Christians supported or accepted the regime rather than working for political change.¹⁷

¹⁶ Skidmore and Smith, 2001 p.132, A. Valenzuela in Linz, Diamond and Lipset (eds.) 1999 p.220

¹⁷ Interviews with Aldunate 06/07/09, Lagos 21/07/09 and Wehrli 21/07/09

Methodology

Primary research for this study was carried out in Santiago, Chile over the period of one month between June and July 2009 and consisted of interviews and the consultation of archival documentation, Episcopal Declarations, and press articles.

The eleven interviewees were Church representatives, political party representatives and those involved in the human rights work and organisations of the Church during the military regime, and all except one were directly involved in the processes described. They covered numerous political perspectives, and included men and women, Catholics, atheists and protestants, and representatives from the base and elite levels of society. With this range of opinions I was able to ascertain the way in which the political significance was perceived by those within the Church, by those at the forefront of leading the political process itself, and by professionals involved with the Church's work at different levels, many of whom were not practicing Catholics. Efforts were made to secure interviews from more conservative sectors, though due to a lack of response I instead consulted works written by the individuals in question to ensure representation from the Left, Centre and Right of the political spectrum; however this would be a future area in which the present research could be expanded.

I consulted Episcopal declarations, the Jesuit opposition magazine *Mensaje* and archival documents from the *Fundación de Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la*

Solidaridad for official and unofficial Church views and publications. To gain a sense of secular views on the significance of the Church's work in the political process I consulted *El Mercurio*, the proregime daily newspaper and *Analisis*, a intellectual opposition regime magazine, (as no opposition newspapers were permitted until 1987).

Chapter 1

The Church's Public Voice

The military junta which seized power in Chile in September 1973 imposed conditions attempting the depoliticisation of Chilean society, which as well as the deconstruction of the political system and institutions, included restrictions on freedoms of expression and opinion, press censorship, and the prohibition of political activity or organisation. These restrictions were heightened during various states of emergency and formed part of the junta's National Security Doctrine in which, like other Latin American military regimes which O'Donnell has named 'Bureaucratic Authoritarian', they claimed to be defending the population from external and internal subversion which was considered a threat to a peaceful national life and the maintenance of order.¹⁸

In this context, the Catholic Church became the only remaining institution with relative freedom to express opinions contrary to official regime rhetoric, due to its high level of prestige in society and the regime's perception of the Church as a necessary provider of moral legitimacy. The Church used this public voice to raise concerns regarding national social, economic and political conditions, and to present a reality at odds with the prosperity and success claimed by the regime, despite a huge diversity of political opinion between Catholics of different social classes.

¹⁸ O'Donnell, 1988 p.31-32

This chapter will examine how far this public voice had an impact for political change in the three main areas in which it was expressed: in the Episcopal declarations regarding regime practices and societal problems; the denunciations of human rights abuses; and the promotion of opposition or critical publications.

Episcopal Declarations

The declarations issued by the Permanent Committee of the Chilean Episcopate during 1973-1988 represented the Church's official voice in society, and were widely heard throughout Catholic and secular society. They reveal a compromised middle ground between the varied opinions held by the upper hierarchy, rather than the whole Church.

Smith, Viera-Gallo and Bouvier, among others, have carried out extensive analyses of Episcopal statements during the military regime, focussing particularly on the deteriorating relations with the regime and the Episcopate's move from ambiguity to opposition¹⁹. In contrast, this examination will focus on the way in which this voice from Chile's bishops promoted democratic values and conditions, making pronouncements where these were considered inadequate. Though the declarations were intended as a moral and spiritual, rather than political, voice of the nation, they commented on political circumstances where the moral rights of citizens were affected.

¹⁹ Smith 1982, Smith in Valenzuela and Valenzuela (eds), 1986, Smith 1997, Viera-Gallo in Gazmuri 1988, Beauvier 1983

The hierarchy was consistently anxious to maintain official neutrality, not favouring any political tendency over another, or giving or denying government legitimacy. This was in order to maintain basic relations with Pinochet's government and freedom for its religious and evangelistic activities, as well as from the basic conviction that, as a moral and spiritual institution, the Church should not involve itself in national politics; and in 1975 they clarified: 'The bishops have no commitment to any political party, social class or economic interest; we are neither for nor against this government or any other.'²⁰ Criticism of social conditions was therefore initially balanced and qualified with respect for the armed forces, gratitude for their efforts and pleas to the people for cooperation and non-violence.

Tensions in this neutral political position emerged with worsening human rights violations, political and social exclusion, and deepening economic suffering, occurring alongside regime consolidation. In October 1978 the bishops defended the fact that 'political matters...are a legitimate preoccupation of the Church,'²¹ while renouncing direct political intervention. The Church's right to political comment was also justified with international Church authority, often in the writings of previous Popes, including the often cited example: 'The Church may give its moral judgement, including upon subjects referring to the political order, when the fundamental rights of the person demand it'.²² This right to comment on the political was used to promote the need for improved democratic conditions, which was mentioned with greater boldness as social suffering

²⁰ CPEC, 05/09/75, in Mensaje 243, Oct 1975

²¹ CPEC, 04/10/78 in CPEC, 1982 p.349

²² CPEC, 03/77 in Mensaje 257, Apr 1977 p.166 and 168 and CPEC, 23/08/80 in Mensaje 292 Sept 1980 p.519

worsened .These democratic conditions centre around one main concern: the need for popular participation for the healthy functioning of government, social peace and for the legitimacy of political processes.

Popular political participation was promoted in the declarations as the basic right of every citizen and ‘fundamental for democracy.’²³ Concerns were often raised that the lack of adequate channels of popular expression left ‘the majority of Chileans without a real possibility of participation.’²⁴ It was deemed necessary by the bishops for the social autonomy of popular organisations in communications with the authorities, for successful local government,²⁵ for the majority to take part in making decisions affecting them, and for pluralism and diversity of opinion to be respected.²⁶

The Episcopate also showed effective participation to be central in the introduction of new political and economic models by the military regime; in 1977, stating that ‘It is clear that a country can...opt for a new political model, but that new structuring cannot emerge other than as the product of a free and mature national consensus, legitimately expressed,’²⁷ Similarly, the economic suffering of the country’s poorest citizens is one of the areas in which the Church spoke with most regularity and boldness, condemning the exclusive nature of the new neoliberal model’s implementation without popular consensus. The bishops state that for those living in ‘unbearable conditions’, namely peasants, workers and *pobladores*,

²³ CPEC, 04/10/78 in CPEC, 1982 p.383

²⁴ CPEC, 17/12/82 in Mensaje 316 Jan-Feb 1983 p.73

²⁵ CPEC, 04/10/78 in CPEC, 1982 p.383-384

²⁶ CPEC, 05/09/75, in Mensaje 243, Oct 1975 p.472

²⁷ CPEC, 03/77 in Mensaje 257, Apr 1977 p.167

‘in the name of participation, the Church asks that the diverse economic opinions be submitted to an open debate, asks that the access to decisions and the possibility of exercising pressure would not be reserved only for a scientific school, or for more privileged economic groups.’²⁸

Finally in the 1980s, with increasing social tensions due to the economic crisis of 1981-1982, repression of political protests and continued exclusion, the Episcopate’s demands for effective participation became more urgent, and necessary in the prevention of social and violence. The Church claimed peace would only be reached with ‘all Chilean people free and responsible to actively participate,’²⁹ and that exclusion and closed structures must be remedied by the re-establishing of ‘effective channels of participation at every level: in the universities, in politics, in work, in base organisations.’³⁰

The Episcopate also used popular participation as a measure of the legitimacy of political processes. They emphasised the necessity of popular approval of the formulation of the 1980 Constitution,³¹ and prior to the September 1980 constitutional plebiscite, the Episcopate presented a number of conditions for the plebiscite to be considered ‘an authentic expression of the national feeling,’ including freedom of votes, sufficient access to information, and not grouping multiple criteria to be answered with a single ‘Yes’ or

²⁸ Ibid, p.169

²⁹ CPEC, 10/09/86 in CPEC, 1988 p.167

³⁰ CPEC 13/07/86 in CPEC 1988 p.156

³¹ CPEC, 03/77 in Mensaje 257, Apr 1977, p169

‘No’ response.³² Before the 1988 plebiscite for the extension of Pinochet’s presidency, the Church encouraged electoral inscription by all so that the result would most accurately represent popular will.³³ While no pronouncement was made about the 1980 Constitution itself, modifications to the text were requested by the Episcopate with regard to the mode of transition it prescribed.³⁴

The numerous limitations on the Church’s political pronouncements such as the diversity of bishops’ opinions, the desire not to alienate any sectors of Catholics, and pressure from the Vatican to remain entirely removed from politics, especially after 1978 when John Paul II became Pope, shaped Episcopal statements. They promoted democratic values and principles over specific judgements on how to vote or details of political structures. Despite these limitations, the Episcopate clearly felt it had a responsibility to speak out regarding the reestablishment of democratic norms with increasing urgency; in 1982 asserting that, in contrast to the regime’s constant use of fear of the past to defend its prolonged hold on power, ‘The abuses of the past do not justify such a long interruption in the normal life of a nation. This is not healthy and has brought us the consequences that we now lament. Opening the channels of political participation is an urgent task.’³⁵

A voice for the defence of human rights

³² CPEC, 23/08/80, Mensaje 292 Sept 1980 p.519

³³ CPEC, 13/08/87 in CEPC, 1988 p.246

³⁴ CPEC, 10/08/88 in Mensaje 372, Sept 1988 p.408

³⁵ CPEC, 17/12/82 in Mensaje 316 Jan-Feb 1983 p.74

The human rights work of Catholic Church organisations under Pinochet formed the basis of the Church's 'moral opposition'³⁶ to the regime. As arguably the most effective area of the Church's work at the time, it forms part of the way in which the Church used its public voice to demand change.

The immediate response of the base Church to human rights emergencies precedes the official denunciations of abuses. Wide scale repression of Left political party members began immediately after the coup, and included those active at a grassroots level and those who had formed part of the overthrown Left coalition *Unidad Popular*, or UP government. It affected even members of the Centrist *Partido Demócrata Cristiano*, or PDC after the initial wave against the Left. This process formed part of the regime's strategy to eradicate all Marxist influence from Chilean society with violence and intimidation. The politicians, militants, and sympathisers that were unable to escape were arrested, 'disappeared', tortured, murdered, taken to concentration camps or forced into exile.

In this imposed climate of fear, the Church were uniquely positioned to respond to the humanitarian crisis caused by regime repression, and in October 1973, the *Comité de Cooperación para la Paz en Chile*, or *Comite Pro Paz* was created by the Catholic and Protestant Churches and the Jewish Community, to respond to the growing needs of Chileans who had been imprisoned, to assist the families of those who had been killed or disappeared, and to provide legal support to those being tried in war tribunals³⁷. From

³⁶ Lowden, 1996, p.1

³⁷ Interview with R.Garretton 22/07/09

1973 to the end of 1975 the *Comité Pro Paz* was the main organisation for defence of victims of repression who were powerless to denounce the violence they suffered.

The *Comité Pro Paz* was forced to close at the end of 1975 after increasing tensions with the regime, accusations of Marxist infiltration due to its support of the politically persecuted and a personal request from Pinochet. At the beginning of 1976, however, Cardinal Raul Silva Henríquez, who was instrumental in the Church's effective defence of human rights; authorised and opened the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*. The *Vicaría*, as it is known, continued and expanded the work of the *Comité Pro Paz*, but was more closely associated with and protected by the Catholic Church, symbolically situated beside the main Cathedral in central Santiago. The *Vicaría* was run by Catholic and non-Catholic professionals and funded by international religious organisations and NGOs. They assisted and protected associations established by families of the politically executed and the disappeared,³⁸ set up citizen human rights groups in many areas of the city, provided medical care to torture victims and legal assistance to those who had lost jobs for political reasons, exiles and those standing trial.

Pamela Lowden's book *Moral Opposition to Authoritarian Rule* details the nature of the *Vicaría's* human rights work, how it became an oppositional institution and the development of its growing antagonism with the regime. She claims that this work 'was the only public form of opposition that existed at the time' except for a limited union

³⁸ Ensalaco, 2001 p.63

presence.³⁹ The *Comité Pro Paz* and the *Vicaría* also opened the way for secular human rights organisations emerging in the late 1970s.⁴⁰

The Episcopal Declarations also clearly denounced the use of violence by the regime and called for it to respect the dignity of every person,⁴¹ to investigate the whereabouts of the disappeared,⁴² for the renunciation of all violence, torture and terrorism,⁴³ and accused the regime's of its failure to observe even its own constitutional laws regarding human rights.⁴⁴

The *Vicaría*, and to a lesser extent the Episcopate's consistent public condemnations of regime violence through its work and publications transformed the Church into a voice for the persecuted as well as the poor. The Church and particularly the *Vicaría* became greatly respected within international human rights circles and the recipients of much foreign aid.⁴⁵ For conservative Catholic and non-Catholic sectors, however, the association with human rights was strongly criticised as being outside the Church's proper field of responsibility. For this reason the human rights work, Cardinal Silva, the *Comité Pro Paz* and the *Vicaría* all came under severe attack at different times by the regime itself, conservative Catholic groups such as Opus Dei,⁴⁶ The Chilean Society for Tradition, Family and Property, and mainstream pro-regime press. Common accusations were of Marxist infiltration and Leftist persuasion of sectors of the institution and of

³⁹ Lowden, 1996 p.91

⁴⁰ Ibid p.84-86

⁴¹ CPEC, 13/04/74 in Mensaje 228, May 1974 pp.195

⁴² CPEC, 03/77 in Mensaje 257, Apr 1977

⁴³ CPEC, 09/11/78 in Mensaje 275, Dec 1978 p.823

⁴⁴ CPEC, 17/12/82 in Mensaje 316, Jan-Feb 1983, p.73

⁴⁵ Smith in Valenzuela and Valenzuela, 1986 p.291

⁴⁶ Smith in Valenzuela and Valenzuela (eds.) 1986 p.286

individuals, and that their work supported and aided ‘terrorists.’⁴⁷ Therefore, the denunciations were boldly and publicly made, though did not represent unanimous Catholic opinion.

A voice for alternative information

The third way in which the Catholic Church became a public voice for democratic values in Chile in this period was by supporting alternative sources of information, thereby challenging the regime’s official version of events, censorship laws and restricted freedoms of expression and opinion.

The Church was not subject to the same censorship restrictions as media communications or publication groups,⁴⁸ and sponsored and oversaw two main critical publications: *Mensaje*, the Jesuit intellectual magazine publishing research on national political, social and economic issues, and *Solidaridad*, the *Vicaría*’s bimonthly bulletin which documented information on human rights work and the reality of consequences of regime policies and was circulated widely through Church, human rights and international circles.⁴⁹

Cardinal Silva also created the *Academia del Humanismo Cristiano* in November 1975 which provided a space for many Left wing dissident intellectuals, who had been removed from positions in universities, to continue writing and researching about

⁴⁷ Bouvier, 1983 p.53 and 62

⁴⁸ Valenzuela and Valenzuela (eds.) 1986 p.215

⁴⁹ Lowden, 1996 p.56

national events. Many researchers were from two Leftist splinter parties from the PDC: the MAPU and the Christian Left,⁵⁰ and their research was proscribed by the regime but funded by international sources.⁵¹ The *Academia's* publication *Análisis* was a secular opposition magazine and was strongly critical of regime policies and practices. In this way, Leftist intellectuals were not only protected and supported materially by the Church, but their work became an outlet for dissident opinion in a society with little alternative information to what the regime provided. This information 'fed public opinion, informing and denouncing'⁵² and was permitted by the regime, though was subject to censorship during states of emergency.

The political impact of the Church's public voice

The Church's denunciations of regime practices have been deemed limited in impact by some, based on their failure to produce any response from the regime⁵³ regarding the truth for human rights victims, changes to the economic model to protect the poor, and restoration of participative political mechanisms. Additionally, the Church was limited in affecting direct political change by its refusal to use its voice to condemn the regime's right to have taken power or to call for an alternative democratic government, as it did not perceive these judgments to be within its right as an institution.

⁵⁰ Valenzuela and Valenzuela (eds.) 1986 p.215

⁵¹ Cancino, 1997 p.63

⁵² Interview with Hourton 09/07/09

⁵³ Smith in Valenzuela and Valenzuela (eds.) 1986, p.293-294

However, the promotion of democratic values and the denunciation of inhumane regime practices led to greater public consciousness, provided a limited means of popular representation in a context of political repression and discredited the regime nationally and internationally. The consciousness produced by the provision of alternative information and criticism informed the public of the reality of social conditions, fuelled growing levels of discontent, helped mobilisation against the regime where opportunities arose, and contributed to an informed 'No' vote in the 1988 plebiscite against the extension of Pinochet's term as President. Consciousness among the international community brought pressure on the regime to improve its human rights record and ensured a presence monitoring the 1988 plebiscite to ensure the will of the people was fully acknowledged.

The Church countered the total absence of political representation by traditional parties, institutions and social organisations by adopting a representative function to expose the demands of Chile's poor and persecuted. Where the poor were denied expression of economic demands, the Church publicly criticised the new economic model and detailed its effects on the poor. Where victims of repression and their families were denied the means to make their experiences known, the Church's publications exposed the extent of violence used against them.

The Church discredited the regime with its public voice, but left the active oppositional strategy and task of formulating an alternative to other actors: civil society and political party representatives.

Chapter 2

The Church's support of Civil Society

Shanty town communities, or *poblaciones*, suffered disproportionately under the changes implemented by the military regime. Father Ronaldo Muñoz, a Chilean liberation theologian, describes their situation in 1976:

‘Today in Chile the popular sectors are facing a very difficult situation. There are the families of the detained and disappeared, there is the enormous amount of unemployed...and simply the vast majority of workers, whose salaries now do not even suffice for adequate nutrition.’⁵⁴

These sectors had benefitted most from the previous *Unidad Popular*, or UP government's social policies, and were hardest hit by the junta's social cuts, economic restructuring and political persecution. Many lower income communities also had traditional Leftist affiliations and so were also among the most oppositional sectors to the regime. Therefore the Church's work with these sectors assumed a new political significance.

This chapter will examine the direct or indirect political impact of the Church's support for popular sectors during the military regime. Popular organisations will be examined

⁵⁴ Muñoz, 1976 p.9

first, looking at their purposes, activities and effects, and the Church's involvement with them. Secondly, the wave of national protests which occurred between 1983-1986, the Church's position towards the protests and its contribution to popular mobilisation will be examined. Finally, the role and political implications of the Church providing refuge and support for the politically persecuted will be considered.

While indicating some of the political impact of the Church's support of the organising and protest tendencies of poorer communities of Santiago, it is notable that for most within the Church this impact was never an intention or even a consideration. Support existed in response to urgent needs and not for long term political aims.⁵⁵ Admittedly, many of those working for the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* with popular organisations, were aware and in favour of the political implications of their work and had Leftist political tendencies themselves,⁵⁶ but these were personal motivations and not part of the Church's own incentives. However, with the benefit of hindsight it is now possible to trace ways in which this work did make an important contribution to longer term political change, albeit unintentionally.

Popular Organisations

The Catholic Church had been active in the *poblaciones* prior to 1973 with ecclesial base communities, or CEBs forming part of the local parishes. These communities were a small group of local people who would meet together regularly to pray, read the Bible

⁵⁵ Interviews with Muñoz 08/07/09, Aylwin 15/07/09 Sepúlveda 22/07/09, Garreton 22/07/09

⁵⁶ Interview with Bahamondes 20/07/09, Lowden, 1996 p.88

and talk about their situations and expanded Church networks at the base, forming part of its 'preferential option for the poor.'⁵⁷

After 1973, the CEBs continued to grow and promote awareness of changing social circumstances. Alicia Cáceres, a resident of the *población* La Victoria, described how at their Thursday night Church meetings people came to talk about their activities in the community and advise one another and to sing and pray.⁵⁸ In addition, the Church also adopted the function of umbrella institution for many different types of social and economic self-help organisations formed in the *poblaciones*. Many of these communities had long histories of political organising, but needed Church protection for initiatives after 1973 in the context of repression and regime suspicion of organising of any sort in these highly politicised communities. The Church facilitated and resourced, but did not create these popular organisations: Schneider and Oxhorn's comprehensive studies of the organisational and protest activities of these communities under Pinochet both show that the initiatives clearly emerged from the grassroots.⁵⁹

A 'Zones Department' was created in the *Vicaria de la Solidaridad* to coordinate the support of significant numbers of popular organisations, which increased sharply after the 1981-1982 economic crisis: by there were 40,000 participants in popular organisations in Santiago through the work of the *Vicaría* by 1985.⁶⁰ Church and *Vicaría* support took the form of provision of funding from international donations, material resources, supply

⁵⁷ CELAM, 1979

⁵⁸ Interview with Cáceres 10/07/09

⁵⁹ Schneider in Escobar and Alvarez (eds.) 1991, Schneider 1995 and Oxhorn, 1995

⁶⁰ Martínez Nogueira, 1985 p.5-8

personnel, and professional training for popular organisations which were channelled towards meeting the most urgent needs of the communities, namely nutrition, healthcare and unemployment.

The first organisational response after the coup was the *comedores infantiles*, which eventually reached the capacity to be able to provide thousands of children with a hot meal daily. These evolved into *comedores familiares* to encompass the nutritional needs of adults, and *ollas comunes* from 1981; soup kitchens in which families and neighbours combined resources and produced meals together.⁶¹ These were also linked with the *Comprando Juntos*, or ‘buying together’ initiatives, involving food bought between families to maximise available resources.

Unemployment affected the *poblaciones* from the first days of the regime where many were dismissed from their jobs for political reasons. From early 1975 the implementation of the regime’s neoliberal ‘Plan of Economic Recovery’ brought a new source of dismissals to add to the already high levels of those without work, and unemployment reached 17.6%.⁶² By 1985, estimates for some *poblaciones* were exceptionally high: between 50 and 70% without occupation.⁶³

In response, another type of organisation formed in the *poblaciones* with Church protection and support: unemployment cooperatives, in which people would meet, buy a

⁶¹ Martinez Nogueira, 1985 p.7

⁶² Rojas, 1991 p.30

⁶³ Martinez Nogueira, 1985 p.3

newspaper together and look for work collectively.⁶⁴ From these, professional workshops developed for productive activities, such as making items to sell, or providing a repair service to the community, to generate income and gain skills to find alternative employment.

As a consequence of the high levels of unemployment, many *pobladores* were left without medical coverage or access to health care, and voluntary health groups were established to provide basic medical care for those without alternative means. The health groups also provided medical assistance during the mass protest movement and provided basic or primary health care workshops.⁶⁵

Relations between those working in popular organisations were not always harmonious, however. Tensions with political activists with clear political agendas were evident, particularly from the side of those with a strongly religious or humanitarian approach to the social work.⁶⁶ Some more independent organisations found the Church too paternalistic and controlling in its approach, and were frustrated by their limited autonomy in a context where the Church had great influence.⁶⁷ These tensions were the product of thousands of people with multiple agendas attempting to work together on the same projects. The organisations evidently were open to manipulation, in large degree to the vulnerability of the participants, and though the *Vicaría* emphasised the empowerment of autonomous popular efforts, rather than traditional local Church

⁶⁴ Rojas, 1991 p.31

⁶⁵ Interview with Caceres 10/07/09

⁶⁶ Rojas, 1991 p.136-7

⁶⁷ Oxhorn, 1995 p.98-9 and 84

tendencies towards paternalism or charity in its documentation and analyses, this seems to have not always been in operation throughout the diverse operations.

The Vicaría's aims stated that Zones Department workers must:

'empower and encourage base personnel (community leaders). Provide necessary technical capabilities to popular groups so that they themselves can be agents of their own history,' and 'must motivate, encourage and facilitate existing and other organisms of the *población* to effectively overcome the problems they are facing.'⁶⁸

They state the meeting of basic needs as a fundamental right,⁶⁹ and the need to capacitate participants, not encourage their dependence. From the late 1970s it taught leadership and personal interaction skills, as well as the importance of organising and collective action 'to encourage people to organise themselves in autonomous popular organisations.'⁷⁰

Where independent organisational ability developed, it facilitated the meeting of other 'wider objectives'⁷¹ as a consequence, as seen in the progression of the *comedores* from providing for children, to whole families, and with the initial employment cooperatives progressing to professional workshops. Lowden describes the housing committees formed autonomously in the 1980s as an example of how many participants in Church-

⁶⁸ Centro de Documentación Vicaría de la Solidaridad, 1979 p.5

⁶⁹ Muñoz, 1976 p.10

⁷⁰ Oxhorn, 1995 p.92

⁷¹ Martínez Nogueira, 1985 p.25

sponsored organisations used acquired organisational experience to make their own demands without needing the Church as an overarching institution.⁷²

Effects of the support of popular organisation

In his evaluation of this work, Martinez Nogueira lists some of the main impacts of the activities of the Zones Department of the *Vicaría* with popular organisations. In a practical sense, urgent nutritional, income and other basic needs were met, which was usually the immediate concern of the community. He also shows how through the effort and commitment required by participants, they achieved a sense of belonging, which in turn helped to facilitate and expand the organisational life of the community. These numerous active groups illustrated ‘the preservation of popular organisation at the level of the *población*.’⁷³ Those involved often gained a new confidence and awareness of their own capabilities.⁷⁴

The Church’s support of popular organisations also united people of different political persuasions, often with historic rivalries or distrust, who by working together for a common social goal, were more able to overcome their differences. This occurred particularly between members of the PDC and Left parties.⁷⁵ Cáceres described how members of the Communist Party, Socialist Party, Christian Left, MAPU and MIR

⁷² Lowden, 1996 p.90

⁷³ Martinez Nogueira, 1985 p.27

⁷⁴ Interview with Cáceres 10/07/09

⁷⁵ Smith in Valenzuela and Valenzuela (eds.), 1986 p.293

parties were all present in the Thursday meetings in La Victoria,⁷⁶ and the same was often true within the popular organisations themselves. The *Vicaría* also adopted an inclusive attitude towards the political tendencies of its staff, many of whom were atheists or had strong political affiliations; one of the most famous examples being communist Jose Manuel Parada, who was murdered by the regime in March 1985. Eduardo Bahamondes, who worked in the Zones Department during the 1980s, said that ‘one did not even ask’ about the political views of those involved, due to a culture of ‘political incorrectness’ in doing so.⁷⁷ The Church also did not demand any religious commitment by those participating in popular organisations or from the *Vicaría* staff.⁷⁸

By working with popular organisations to confront and expose the failures of the military regime, by responding practically to the urgent material needs of communities, and by facilitating communal cooperation within the communities, the Church helped to maintain the historical organisational capacities of *poblaciones* that the regime had attempted to suppress through intimidation. This created the conditions for those with a political conscience to work for the return of democracy.

The Church as a political refuge

The military regime attempted a total eradication of the Left as a political option through reversing the UP’s policies, publicly discrediting the ills of socialism and through eliminating prominent and militant members of all UP parties. In its drive to achieve the

⁷⁶ Interview with Caceres 10/07/09

⁷⁷ Interviews with Bahamondes 20/07/09 and Muñoz 08/07/09

⁷⁸ Interview with Sepulveda 22/07/09

latter, all non-religious meetings were strictly monitored, and those of a political nature were interrupted; suspected 'subversives' would be arrested, then often disappeared, tortured or killed. For this reason political activity was either completely disrupted, or was forced to become clandestine.

In this context, the Church became a physical refuge not only to the poor and unemployed, as had been its tradition prior to 1973, but also to the politically persecuted. Though the official Church refused to condemn the military regime through its claim to work with and accept all without discrimination, this was also consistent with regard to the persecuted Left, who it sheltered and protected regardless of political affiliation.

The politically persecuted used church buildings as refuges, and worked within Church organisations which gave protection. In the initial and most severe wave of repression from 1973-1976, the Vatican embassy and the *Nunciatura* were also used as places of asylum.⁷⁹ Human rights lawyer Roberto Garretón described the discovery of a meeting of the extreme Left by Pinochet's secret police on the outskirts of Santiago. While some of those in attendance were killed, the rest fled, and all to different Catholic denominations, and 'it did not occur to anyone to go to somewhere different that was not the Church...The Church protected; there was nowhere else.'⁸⁰ The Church was recognised by believers and non-believers alike as a refuge without discrimination, and was able to offer protection because of its prestige in Chilean society. In this way, the Church prevented the imprisonment and death of many Leftist party militants, which together

⁷⁹ Interview with Núñez 13/07/09

⁸⁰ Interview with R.Garretón 22/07/09

with its moral importance, had a political impact in allowing the survival of strong oppositional forces and therefore maintaining the possibility of reorganisation.

In addition, the Church offered a physical space for political meetings, which were not safe to be held in any other location. Socialist Party Senator Ricardo Núñez described that:

‘Many parishes, many cultural centres linked with the Catholic Church gave space to believers and non-believers so that they could organise, including for activities against the dictatorship.’⁸¹

Therefore in addition to the crucial survival of opposition militants, the Church facilitated their organisation and illegal political activity. Though it was not part of these meetings, nor parties, it maintained the politicisation of Chilean civil society where the regime was attempting the opposite.

National Protests

Chile’s severe economic crisis from 1981-1982, which also affected much of the rest of Latin America, had profound political consequences. After significant economic growth after neoliberal restructuring in 1975, a financial crisis at the end of 1981 caused many bankruptcies across the country, GDP declined to minus 14%, and both inflation and

⁸¹ Interview with Núñez 13/07/09

unemployment rose: to 27% and 28.5% respectively.⁸² These conditions discredited the regime's new economic model, the success of which had been publicly referred to regularly by Pinochet in the 1970s to justify and legitimate his prolonged hold on power. Lower income sectors, many of whom had already been unable to support themselves adequately in the 1970s 'growth' period due to the lack of redistribution, were adversely affected by the crisis.

As a result, a national protest movement emerged which was initially led by a large copper miners' union, the CTC, but eventually incorporated many other grassroots, professional, union and women's organisations, culminating in an autonomous network of opposition organisations called the *Asamblea de la Civilidad* in April 1986. The protests were the first oppositional activities calling for the end of the regime since the coup in 1973. The first occurred on the 11th May 1983 in Santiago, and they followed almost monthly for the next three years, quickly spreading across the country.

Protest activities included strikes, marches, boycotts of public transport, protests in universities, banging pots and pans on the streets as symbols of economic shortages and blocking roads with burning tyres. The common goal was to demand the end of the regime and the beginning of a new democracy, declared with the slogan 'Democracy Now, Pinochet Out'⁸³. The majority of protests were peaceful, though where the armed forces and police responded with repression, their conflicts with protesters were often violent, causing injuries and some deaths.

⁸² Oppenheim, 2007 pp.119-120

⁸³ Aylwin, 1998 p.128

The Church's response to the protests was mixed. The hierarchy criticised all violence but affirmed that it was legitimate to protest.⁸⁴ Some conservative Church elements, along with much of the right-wing and upper income sectors in Chile saw the protests as a threat of instability and of a possible return to the pre-1973 unrest, and were concerned that if the protests were not contained, any political change would be violent and unstable.⁸⁵ The popular Church however, including base communities and many priests located in *poblaciones*, took an active part in the protests.

Similarly to the way in which Church premises offered protection and refuge to political party militants, they also provided the locations in which many of the protests were planned,⁸⁶ particularly by young people. Health centres were also established in local parishes to attend to those who were injured from the protests and enable their recovery.

Oxhorn emphasises the importance of differentiating between popular organisations and the popular protest movement, stating that the organisations themselves 'were an important form of symbolic protest'⁸⁷. But it seems inevitable that where people's awareness of their shared circumstances were heightened, where they worked together and developed mutual trust, and where they were given resources and space with which to organise; their ability to organise in an oppositional movement would have been strengthened in addition to their capacity to defend their economic needs. The Church did

⁸⁴ Interview with Aldunate 06/07/09

⁸⁵ Allamand, 1989 p.65

⁸⁶ Interviews with Núñez 13/07/09 and Muñoz 08/07/09

⁸⁷ Oxhorn, 1995 p.100

not cause or lead the process of mobilisation, but through its promotion and support of popular organisation, it strengthened opposition forces and maintained their organisational space, contributing to their ability to mobilise effectively when the crisis came.

Through the protests, civil society became an autonomous actor where traditionally it had often acted through political parties. They were a bold exposition of the failures of the regime, and brought hope that some change was possible.⁸⁸ Though analysts have indicated that the social movement was limited in scope because of its lack of political leadership and coherent strategy,⁸⁹ it destabilised the regime enough to force it into a limited period of *apertura*, or opening, in which opposition-regime dialogue took place for the first time in 10 years. They opened a political space and reduced fear enough that the fragmented political parties were finally able to assume leadership of the transition process and begin to search for consensus and a viable alternative to Pinochet.

⁸⁸ Interview with Muñoz 08/07/09

⁸⁹ M.A. Garretón in Eckstein, 1989 p.275 and Schneider 1995 p.189

Chapter 3

The Church's Support of the Political Opposition

The political opposition was fragmented and mutually uncooperative for many years under Pinochet, and its journey of reconciliation and reorganisation was an arduous one. This contrasted with the model party system Chile had exemplified for most of its history as a republic, in which cooperation and mutual respect was the norm. The breakdown of this cooperation and its slow recuperation can only be understood in the context of the depth of the crisis which erupted in 1973.

An early respect for democratic institutions and a strong legislature emerged in Chile from the nineteenth century, with the first extension of suffrage occurring in 1874 and the incorporation of the working classes in the 1910s.⁹⁰ A 'tripartite' system emerged from the 1930s, in which there was consistent and broad support for the main parties across the Left, Right and Centre of the ideological spectrum. Because of the wide range and strength of parties that existed, achieving a majority in presidential and congressional elections was impossible without party coalitions, meaning that parties were accustomed to finding consensus despite ideological differences.

⁹⁰ Valenzuela in Diamond Linz and Lipset (eds.) 1999 p.192

This consensus and cooperation broke down during the *Unidad Popular*, or UP government of Salvador Allende from 1970-1973, which was a coalition of six parties of Leftist ideological orientation. The structural reforms of the previous *Demócrata Cristiano*, or PDC, government from 1964-1970 had already caused fragmentation within parties and defensiveness from the Right, therefore causing an open hostility towards Marxist Allende from the Right from the moment of his election in 1970. The UP's proposals, including constitutional amendments, nationalisations of all firms of a certain size, and extensive agricultural expropriation,⁹¹ provoked immediate opposition from the Right, and by 1972 had also alienated the PDC, who together blocked the initiatives from being passed in Congress. This polarisation caused political stalemate, exacerbated by economic collapse and extreme social discontent. In response, the Right and Centre parties sought the military overthrow of Allende's government in September 1973.

As we have seen, the military junta blamed the crisis on the failure of the Chilean party system and the ills of political parties.⁹² Aside from the parties of the Right, which voluntarily disbanded in favour of military rule, the UP coalition parties were declared illegal and all others in recess, until 1977, when all parties became illegal, including the Centrist PDC. This meant that not only was hostility between parties of different ideologies at its peak in the 1970s, but their suppression through forced exile, arrest and disappearance limited individual parties from developing strategy, coherence and cross-party communication. Therefore, it took many years for trust, consensus and cooperation

⁹¹ Faundez, 1998 p.248

⁹² Loveman, 1986 p.3

between parties to be regained. This chapter will outline this process, and how it was aided by the Catholic Church's initiatives for reconciliation and dialogue.

The 1980 Constitution

A new Constitution was ratified by a plebiscite on the 11th September 1980, in which the regime fully institutionalised itself, its possible perpetuation in power was planned until 1997, and the restrictions on political party and citizen participation in the transition were more limited than as announced in 1977. Its implementation was a turning point for the opposition, which realised the armed forces' lack of intention to relinquish power. The Left was weak due to severe repression, and the institutionalisation of the regime produced a cleavage between already fragmented parties. In addition to a major split in the Socialist Party in 1979 into two main groups following their respective leaders Clodomiro Almeyda and Carlos Altamirano, the whole Left became divided into two main positions: one, advocating an insurrectionary strategy to overthrow the regime by force as it was clear the armed forces had no intention of handing full power back to Chilean citizens, and the other, advocating a peaceful transition based on negotiation with the regime, out of a belief that it could not be defeated militarily and that violence was not a valid democratic solution. The former position was adopted by the Communist Party and the Almeyda Socialists, and the latter by the Altamirano Socialists, later known as the Núñez Socialists.

The latter position was also shared by the PDC. The PDC was active in an opposition campaign to vote 'No' in the 1980 Constitutional Plebiscite, which was permitted by the regime for appearances of competition. It had rapidly become the leading oppositional voice against the regime in Chilean society, as due to its Centrist position it had the advantage of having some ability to negotiate with some members of both Left and Right. The ratification by plebiscite of the 1980 Constitution was upheld by members of the political Right as 'a clear demonstration of the support that the Government had at that time', and which 'consolidated the legitimacy of the Government,'⁹³ though some did recognise its restrictions on the transition to democracy, the fact that 'it prolonged...the ruling military authoritarianism,' and 'postponed' and 'made more difficult...the evolution of democracy'⁹⁴

A group of the political Right began to emerge who had been in agreement with the reasons for military intervention in 1973, but who did not believe that the democratic system should be subject to such a long and transformative interruption. Though not active in cross-party dialogue until after the national protests began, the 1980 Constitution made many more aware of the lack of even longer-term democratic intentions of the regime.

Apertura and Dialogue

⁹³ Allamand, 1985 p.61

⁹⁴ Ibid p.62

The National Protests provided a greater opportunity for oppositional activity among political elites. The display of extreme discontent within Chilean society brought representatives of the Centre and Left parties closer together with the formation of the *Alianza Democrática*, or AD, in 1983, and had a destabilising effect on the regime after the economic crisis, pushing it towards a limited dialogue with the opposition which began in August 1983.

The AD was formed after the first protests from representatives from mainly Centre and Left political parties, though with one member of the Republican Right, a group of original allies of the regime who had begun to distance itself in 1983.⁹⁵ The Communist Party and Almeyda Socialists were excluded from the AD due to their support of an insurrectionary strategy being rejected as anti-democratic by more moderate centrist sectors.

The AD existed to reach a democratic alternative to military rule and demand the return of democratic norms. Though still ‘rent by discord’⁹⁶ ideologically, the AD was the most high profile political opposition group at that time, with its formation and demands published extensively in *El Mercurio*, the leading pro-regime newspaper. Among the most significant of these was its document demanding ‘the orderly and peaceful recovery of democracy’ over a period of 18 months in response to ‘the serious moral, institutional,

⁹⁵ Constable and Valenzuela 1991 p.288

⁹⁶ Ibid p.285

economic and social crisis' due to regime violations of human rights and levels of unemployment and low production levels.⁹⁷

The AD functioned as a representative body of moderate opposition political groups during the process of *apertura*, or political opening, which was initiated by the regime after the most violent protests to date in August 1983. This involved a process of dialogue between the regime and the political opposition to attempt to pacify the protests. Sergio Onofre Jarpa was appointed as the new Interior Minister, who appeared disposed to dialogue through initiating meetings both with union leaders at the end of August,⁹⁸ and with the AD through Archbishop Fresno, who acted as mediator and host.

Archbishop Francisco Fresno had replaced Cardinal Silva as the head of the Catholic Church in Chile in June 1983. He was not as respected as Silva by many progressive sectors of the Church due to his more conservative stance and Silva's record for the defence of human rights through the *Vicaría*; however Fresno was able to act as an effective intermediary as he was seen as less of a threat ideologically by conservative sectors of the Church, the civilian Right and the regime.

The dialogue between Jarpa and members of the AD began on 25th August 1983 and those in attendance were invited by the Archbishop. It was hosted and facilitated by Fresno at his own residence with two auxiliary bishops, and five members of the AD presented Jarpa with their basic requirements for an effective transition and establishment

⁹⁷ El Mercurio, 23/8/83, p.A1

⁹⁸ El Mercurio, 25/8/83, p.C3

of democracy.⁹⁹ Two more meetings occurred during September at Fresno's house and at the Papal Nuncio's residence. However, despite Jarpa's initial openness to the possibility of an *apertura* process, it became clear that Pinochet was not willing to make the necessary concessions to meet the demands for the transition process presented by the democratic representatives, particularly with regard to changes to the 1980 Constitution.¹⁰⁰ With the AD representatives equally unwilling to make concessions, the regime-opposition dialogue broke down.

The National Accord

Despite the failure of negotiations with the regime's Interior Minister, oppositional efforts to construct viable political alternatives did not end with Jarpa's resignation in November 1984.¹⁰¹ During 1985, talks took place between moderate Left, Centre and Right political leaders for the first time, to try to reach a wider and more inclusive consensus regarding the democratic transition. Much of the democratic Right did not consider itself in opposition to the regime, but recognised the need to dialogue with other ideological groups to achieve a stable democratic future for Chile, and formed part of the Accord.¹⁰²

The National Accord was more closely associated with the Catholic Church than the Jarpa-AD dialogue because it was directly initiated by Fresno as a call to greater

⁹⁹ El Mercurio, 26/8/83 p.A1

¹⁰⁰ Smith and Fleet, 1997 p.121

¹⁰¹ El Mercurio, 06/12/84 p.A12

¹⁰² Allamand, 1999 p.94

reconciliation between political factions. Fresno invited individuals, and small groups of representatives from a variety of political parties to discuss the national political situation at his residence from March 1985. In July, by which time Fresno had become Cardinal, a group of political leaders from Right, Centre and Left parties met together for the first time in a Jesuit retreat house¹⁰³ and produced a document detailing their areas of consensus and commonality. The location of these meetings was not incidental: for the Accord, the Church's premises offered a degree of neutrality and a sympathetic host, as well as a necessary 'immunity,' which according to Aylwin, protected them from being arrested as they may have been if meeting in political party quarters.¹⁰⁴

Reaching consensus was slower for the National Accord than for the AD due to greater ideological diversity with the significant presence of the Right and more far Left groups such as the Christian Left. The main areas of disagreement were the extent of changes to be made to the 1980 Constitution, the inclusion of Marxist parties and the role that social mobilisation should play as part of the opposition.¹⁰⁵

On August 1985, however, the 'National Accord for the Transition to Full Democracy' was signed by 20 leaders representing 11 political parties - or 'currents of opinion' as they were referred to during the continued ban on political parties. The final meetings were not held on Church premises, as the regime had complained to the Vatican about political meetings being held in Church buildings.¹⁰⁶ The main demands of the Accord

¹⁰³ Aguilar, 2006 p.156

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Aylwin 15/07/09

¹⁰⁵ Smith and Fleet, 1997 p.122

¹⁰⁶ Aguilar, 2006 p.157

were for: an end to the states of emergency, the legalisation of political parties, the end of arbitrary exile, free, direct presidential elections instead of a yes-no plebiscite, an elected Congress and more flexibility over changes to the 1980 Constitution.¹⁰⁷ The document was given to Fresno, who released it to the press and sent it to Pinochet.

Despite the bold achievement of the participants in presenting unified demands, the Accord was rejected by Pinochet, who raised public objections to it in September. When Fresno directly asked him to reconsider in December in a personal visit, he received the conclusive reply: 'Let's turn over the page.' The regime never publicly mentioned the Accord again.¹⁰⁸

A criticism of the Church's role in the National Accord is Fresno's position regarding the exclusion of the Communist Party, or PC. On the 9th September, Manuel Chacón, the leader of the PC, wrote to Fresno, asking for 'an open meeting for those of us who are willing to enact the immediate measures contained in the document,' and petitioned for the inclusion of 'all civil forces.' There are also reports of Communist leaders' four fruitless visits in one day to the Cardinal's house, in which they were refused an audience with him.¹⁰⁹ Through this apparent adversity to including the PC in discussions, the Cardinal appeared hostile to their views. With this agenda and influence he possessed, he shaped the political nature of the document and the type of transition that would

¹⁰⁷ Constable and Valenzuela, 1991 p.271

¹⁰⁸ Allamand 1999, p.102

¹⁰⁹ *Analisis*, 17th-24th September 1985, p.6

eventually take place, despite claiming that one of his principal concerns was ‘the conciliation of all sectors.’¹¹⁰

Critics have questioned the extent to which the National Accord was fully democratic while excluding a sector of the extreme Left,¹¹¹ though most of those involved, apart from the Christian Left, maintained that those sectors were anti-democratic in advocating violence. Only a few months later, the Communist Party was irrevocably discredited as a player in the transition after the discovery of hidden arms and the attempted assassination of Pinochet by the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front. Ultimately, the exclusion of the extreme Left was maintained in order to guarantee the involvement of the democratic Right, whose presence was perceived to be key in attempting to negotiate with the regime.

Some have called the National Accord a failure in attempting to initiate a democratic transition process because of the regime’s refusal to cooperate with its demands.¹¹² In spite of this rejection, the Accord advanced the prospects for democratic change longer term: it contested Pinochet’s terms of transition and formed a platform for a clear consensual democratic alternative upon which the parties continued to build, until the eventual defeat of Pinochet in both the 1988 plebiscite and 1989 presidential elections, which helped ensure that the first years of transition were stable and successful.

¹¹⁰ El Mercurio, 25/8/83, p.A12

¹¹¹ Interview with Aldunate 06/07/09

¹¹² M.A. Garreton in Rammsy (ed.) 1990, p25

Cardinal Fresno initiated and enabled this agreement between extremely diverse and rival groups to take place. He was an unthreatening and acceptable figure to leaders of all political ideologies, and as a matter of priority offered the premises and time at his disposal to listen to the points of view of all those invited before bringing them together to share areas of agreement. His commitment to reconciliation extended to promoting political change with the National Accord, because, despite consensus being reached with the signed Accord document, he directly challenged Pinochet for a response. Despite revealing his own preference of the exclusion of the extreme Left, the decision over this matter was ultimately made by the political representatives and meant that the Right remained part of discussions; arguably making the peaceful nature of the transition more secure.

In supporting the political opposition for change, the Church's actions were determined by Cardinal Fresno and those supporting him. This was not a whole Church initiative but one which Fresno himself upheld and prioritised, as part of his assumed duty to bring about national reconciliation and social peace. However, his actions were widely publicised and as the head of the Church in Chile, he modeled the Church's stance towards democratic values. Fresno was not responsible for, nor party to the political agreements or party reconstruction but by initiating meetings and presenting opportunities for dialogue between those with deep and painful historical rifts, he helped to build bridges and make political change more viable.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church's contributions to democratic change between 1973 and 1988 have been presented in this study in three areas of greatest impact: its public voice, its support of civil society opposition, and its support of the political opposition. Its main contributions in these areas can be summarised as follows: establishing the protection of human rights and full popular political participation as non-negotiable values of any government and exposing the regime's failure to fulfil these criteria; helping to reduce citizen fear, both for social mobilisation from 1983 and for the 'No' vote in the 1988 plebiscite, despite harsh repression; protecting civil society organisation; and emphasising consensus and commonality between democratic elements and opponents of the regime to overcome deep divisions and resentment remaining from the years preceding and following the 1973 coup.

Though Cancino has argued strongly that the Church became a 'leading political actor'¹¹³ during this period, but I would question this assumed protagonism of the Church in the process of transition because it had no long-term strategy, did not seek to take power or create its own political alternative, and consciously avoided becoming involved in the details of political terms of agreement or shaping the demands agreed upon by civil society actors.

However, while not becoming a political actor, the Church's role did clearly extend beyond the moral arena into the political. In the 1970s, it began to occupy the political

¹¹³ Cancino, 1997 p.3

vacuum left by the absence of political parties and activity through its representative function for Chilean citizens in denouncing political and economic repression, and through providing opportunities and resources for those with clearly oppositional political agendas to organise. In the 1980s, this function was extended to include the facilitation of agreements between members of the democratic political elite in search for a viable alternative to Pinochet.

The difference between the Church occupying political space to promote democratic values and it becoming an explicit political actor lies in the fact that it supported other actors, while not participating directly in the political processes. It allowed civil society to organise, but did not organise itself around a political agenda. It aided democratic leaders to reach agreement and enabled negotiation without projecting its own voice into those agreements. It helped to make transition possible by providing what the social and political actors lacked: physical space, resources or mediation.

In this sense, the Church became an agent for change in Chile by helping to create and nurture an oppositional space for others to occupy, rather than becoming the change that was needed itself. The political parties and civil society embodied this change by constituting a valid and coherent democratic alternative to ensure both Pinochet's defeat in 1988, and that a stable government would follow from 1990. But the Church publicly promoted change, heightened civil society's capacity to mobilise and helped enable coherence and cooperation within a political opposition rent by past bitterness. The

Church was the only institution capable of fulfilling this function at the time;¹¹⁴ that was considered officially neutral enough by the regime not to be a threat, that had such considerable prestige among all social classes, and that had the resources and international contacts to pursue an agenda radically different to that of its leaders.

For some critics, the role for change assumed by the Church in the areas outlined in this study was inappropriate and improper, given its religious, not political mission; and many, particularly regime sympathisers, felt the Church became too outspoken during this period and criticised it for being influenced by the political Left. For others, it was not outspoken enough, and too conservative in its choices, for example, in not publicly supporting a vote against Pinochet in 1988 and in supporting the exclusion of the Communist Party in democratic dialogue. But despite the Church's continual 'balancing act' of not appearing too involved in politics while equally not remaining passive over the democratic needs of the country, it was still able to promote and support the democratic values it believed necessary for the well-being of the country. These efforts meant, longer-term, that the nature of the transition after 1990 was characterised by many years of routine exposure and denunciation of the deficiencies of the regime, of the primacy of the inclusion of popular demands through participation, and was less conflictual and more stable through greater respect of political parties for one another.

The role for change assumed by the Church in Chile under Pinochet was specific to that time and the particular national circumstances. After the 1988 plebiscite was won against Pinochet, it notably retreated from the political sphere and returned to a more traditional

¹¹⁴ Interviews with Núñez 13/07/09 and Sepúlveda 22/07/09

role focussing on its religious and evangelistic mission. It also seems that the Church perceived itself, and was perceived by others, very differently after the return of democracy. All the non-Church representatives interviewed for this study were overwhelmingly positive in their attitudes towards the work assumed by the Church during the military regime, but many were not so favourable in their portrayal of it after 1990, describing it as condemnatory and imposing on moral issues and uncritical about the enduring legacies of the military in political life.¹¹⁵ It retreated from the political arena as soon as democratic actors could resume free activity, confirming that the role assumed by the Church under Pinochet as an agent for change was unique to this period, brought about by the necessity of the circumstances.

Word Count: 11,995

¹¹⁵ Interviews with Núñez 13/07/09 and R.Garretton 22/07/09

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