From Private Diplomacy to Public Denunciation: The Catholic Church in Pinochet’s Chile

by

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# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** ................................................................................................................................ 3

**Introduction** ........................................................................................................................................... 4

**Chapter One: A Historical Overview of the Chilean Church** ................................................................. 14

  *The Colonial Period and Church State Disestablishment* ................................................................. 14
  *Progressive Change in the Chilean Church* ...................................................................................... 17
  *Vatican II and Medellin* ...................................................................................................................... 21
  *The Church and Marxism* .................................................................................................................. 24
  *A Political and Social Crisis* ............................................................................................................. 28

**Chapter Two: Private Diplomacy in the Face of Oppression** ................................................................. 34

  *The Military Captures Power* ........................................................................................................... 34
  *The Church Responds* ...................................................................................................................... 36
  *“They’re Killing all the Elephants in Chile”* .................................................................................... 42
  *Church’s Awareness of Abuses* ......................................................................................................... 44
  *Repression of the Church* ................................................................................................................ 45
  *The Church Offers the Junta Public Support* .................................................................................... 50
  *Social Services* .................................................................................................................................. 54
  *Beyond Pro Paz* ................................................................................................................................ 57
  *The Lack of Information Theory* ...................................................................................................... 59
  *Private Diplomacy* ............................................................................................................................. 60

**Chapter Three: A Struggle to Express a Unified Voice in Defense of Human Rights** ......................... 63

  *A New Stage of Repression* ............................................................................................................... 63
  *Declaration of Principles* .................................................................................................................. 66
  *The Church Issues Cautious Public Criticism* .................................................................................. 68
  *Internal Deliberations* ...................................................................................................................... 71
  *“Reconciliation Does not Fall from the Sky in a Parachute”* ............................................................. 74
  *Support among Bishops for the Regime* ............................................................................................ 78
  *Attacks on Pro Paz and the Church* .................................................................................................. 82
  *The Cardinal Fluctuates between Open Criticism and Neutrality* .................................................. 83
  *A Concern about Poverty* .................................................................................................................. 86
  *Private Diplomacy Becomes More Forceful* ..................................................................................... 87

**Chapter Four: Church-State Tensions Escalate** .................................................................................... 94

  *Zamora Incident* .................................................................................................................................. 94
  *The Junta Turns Against the Cardinal* ............................................................................................. 95
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Introduction

On the morning of September 11, 1973 Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez was in the middle of his morning prayers when Bishop José Manuel Santos called, telling him to turn on his radio. The nun who was preparing the Cardinal’s breakfast did so, revealing news of a military coup in process. The phone began to ring incessantly with priests throughout Chile reporting violent confrontations between the military and militant leftist groups, as well as mass arrests of leftists and union members. The mood in the house was tense. One of Silva’s assistants living there, Father Raúl Hasbún, left for several hours and then returned to his room without saying a word.¹

The day that commenced like a nightmare would last 16 years. Initially, the Church struggled with how best to respond to the horrors of life under military rule. Hasbún, a prominent broadcaster on the Catholic University TV station, viewed Marxism as the most dire threat to Chile and became one of the regime’s most vocal supporters. Others in the Church struggled with how to assist the victims of the regime’s persecution, many of whom were avowed leftists.

Three days following the coup, two young leftist militants arrived at a residence of priests in downtown Santiago looking for help. The priests, however, would not do anything for them and told them to leave. That night, when the priests gathered to celebrate the Eucharist, an American seminarian said that he was unable to do so. He explained that he felt he had broken communion with God, because two people had come asking for help and no one would provide it to them. The other

priests were moved by these words. One later reflected, “We have sinned in the truest sense of the word. We said no to God in the person of two young people whose lives were in danger.”

The Chilean Church eventually became a significant source of moral opposition to the junta, condemning abuses and excommunicating all those that practiced torture. While the dictatorship continued until 1989, this thesis will focus on the years 1973-1975. This initial period is crucial for understanding how and why the Church adopted public opposition to oppression.

This role as a guardian of human rights had little to do with liberation theology, a type of Christian thought which seeks to reinterpret the Gospel from the perspective of the poor. In a survey of Chilean bishops conducted in 1975, Brian Smith found that only 16.7 percent felt that liberation theology “offers a valid image of the Catholic faith of the Latin American people.” Nevertheless, the Chilean Church had a history of advocating for social justice before the coup, calling for economic reforms and offering Church land to landless farmers in an effort to promote agricultural reform. At the same time, the Church forcefully opposed Marxism, often characterizing it in declarations as repressive and anti-Christian. Nevertheless, when Salvador Allende’s Marxist Popular Unity (UP) party was elected to the presidency, the Church did not express any opposition, partly because Allende had vowed to work within the democratic process.

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2 Quoted in Ibid., 126. [“Hemos pecado en el sentido más autentico del término. Hemos dicho que no a Dios en la persona de dos muchachos cuyas de vidas en peligro”]

3 Followers of liberation theology were often politically active, critical of capitalism as exploitive of the poor, and advocated the struggle for liberation from systems of oppression. Brian H. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 26-27.

4 Ibid., 32.
However, Allende’s reforms were increasingly a source of civil strife and polarization. In response to the growing crisis, the military ousted the government on September 11, 1973. With the overthrow of a democratically elected communist government and the oppressive rule of a military dictatorship, the Chilean Church had three principal options. It could support the military junta in order to defend against communism, turn inwards and focus on spiritual salvation or actively work to defend human rights. This thesis will examine the factors that led the Church to choose the third option.

Within this work, the term, “Church,” is used in reference to the Roman Catholic Church in Chile. While there were also a number of Protestant churches in Chile, in this period their numbers were relatively small and they had little influence on Chilean society. Fully, 90 percent of Chileans considered themselves to be Catholic and the term Iglesia in Chilean Spanish is usually used in reference to the Catholic Church only.5

The term “Church” can also refer to different levels of the institution, including all Catholics, all religious and laypeople who exercise an important role within the Church, or the 31 bishops that make up the national Episcopal Conference. This analysis on will focus on the bishops.6 While the other levels of the Church often play important roles in shaping Church policy, repression under military rule heightened the importance of the bishops. The junta allowed no right to dissent and

6 The Catholic Church is a hierarchical institution, governed by the pope as the successor to Peter and by the bishops below him. At the local level, bishops govern particular territories and the bishops within a country exercise leadership over that national Catholic Church. “Lumen Gentium” in Walter M. Abbott, ed., The Documents of Vatican II (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 8, 9, 23.
closely monitored and controlled social organizations. Any activity interpreted as political often resulted in the participants being detained, or worse, permanently “disappeared.” This, along with the proliferation of informants and the frequent disappearances of people not involved in political activity, created an atmosphere of constant fear. In this environment, it was nearly impossible for laypeople to exercise leadership in advocating for human rights. Even a significant number of priests were detained or killed during this time. Moreover, with the junta’s censorship of the media and banning of public gatherings, even those willing to risk their lives to express dissent had few means of getting their message to the public.

The junta, for its part, had an interest in maintaining amicable relations with the Chilean Catholic Church. It had come to power vowing to restore Chile’s Christian tradition. Thus, open opposition by the Church would discredit one of its main claims to legitimacy. In contrast to Chile’s priests, the 31 bishops (the number varies with vacancies) had a much higher level of visibility. While a statement by a priest denouncing abuses would probably reach only his immediate parish, the bishops possessed much more powerful tools for publicizing their messages. A bishop could, for example, order that a statement be read from the pulpit in every Church in his diocese. And when the gathering of Chile’s bishops, the Chilean Episcopal

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7 The Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation defines the disappeared as those who were arrested, killed and then hidden. Torture was usually used during the detentions and they usually ended in the victim’s death and the disposal of the remains to prevent them from being found. There were two stages in which the military made people disappear. The first, primarily conducted during the months following the coup, involved the summary execution of a victim followed by efforts to dispose of the body and cover up the crime committed. The second method, carried out between 1974-1977, was a systematic and coordinated effort to exterminate specific categories of people, usually for political reasons. Chile Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, trans. Phillip Berryman, vol. 1 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 36.
Conference, released a statement, it was always widely published in the press, no matter what its content.

Among the bishops, Cardinal Silva, archbishop of Santiago, had the greatest influence. While he was not the ecclesiastical superior to the other bishops, as archbishop of Chile’s largest city, he was considered the leader of the national Church. Therefore, unlike the other bishops, he met regularly with the Pope and his statements were regularly published throughout the country. For these reasons, he had the unique ability to represent the Church and exert influence on the junta.

In some instances, it is true, priests were able to affect individual cases of abuse by, for example, convincing a local military official to release a prisoner; however, only the bishops were in a position to influence the policies of the government itself, such as those that made arbitrary and indefinitely long detentions possible in the first place. Priests were also more vulnerable to repression than the bishops were. Under the government’s media censorship, the detention or death of a priest was not noticed in most of the country. During the first two years of military rule, Chile’s bishops rarely publicly criticized this repression of the lower levels of the Church. In contrast, the bishops themselves were the highest authority in the Catholic Church, and an attack on them was an attack on the very institution of the Church. Moreover, bishops had the power to excommunicate those in their diocese.

There is a general consensus among historians that with the economic and political chaos that had developed under the UP government, most bishops had little

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sympathy for it. They saw the coup as a temporary deviation from democracy that would restore order to Chile and they had little knowledge of the abuses being perpetrated by the junta. However, as the repression persisted, this conception of the military regime as a necessary evil quickly vanished.

The central argument of this thesis is that from the coup until 1980, the Chilean Catholic Church, led by Cardinal Silva, was thoroughly committed to protecting human rights. For the first two years the bishops practiced private diplomacy in an attempt to convince the junta to respect human rights. They believed that the regime would be more receptive to Church’s influence if it was not viewed as openly hostile, so they refrained from publicly criticizing the junta. The bishops also feared that their criticism might cause more harm than good leading the junta to restrict their work providing social services or by encouraging violent resistance to the junta by leftist groups. Thus, pragmatically, they sought to do what would most help Chileans. Once the bishops realized that the junta was unreceptive to their private diplomacy and their fears were misplaced, they changed strategies and began to more openly criticize the junta.

Many authors, including Brian Smith, a professor of political science, and William Cavanaugh, a professor of religion, have viewed the Church as primarily driven to protect its own institutional interests. Thus, they charge, the Church only became openly critical in 1976 as a defense against the increasingly strong and threatening attacks on it. In support of this view, in late 1976, when the Episcopal

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Conference first threatened members of the military regime with excommunication, they only targeted those carrying out attacks on bishops.

Cavanaugh also posits a theological explanation for the Church’s shift. According to him, most bishops did not want the Church to be viewed as engaging in politics. Instead the Church had ceded the temporal issues to the state and retreated into the spiritual sphere. Gradually though, as Church officials themselves came under attack, they came to realize that they could not leave temporal matters, such as torture and poverty, to the state. In other words, the Church was a provider of social services that was only willing to denounce the government once it felt that it as an institution was under attack. It defended itself, rather than the victims of oppression.

However, this view results from an exclusive focus on declarations by the Episcopal Conference and fails to take into account the vast array of speeches and statements, both published and unpublished, issued by individual bishops and Cardinal Silva. The Episcopal Conference did not represent the whole of the Chilean Catholic Church, as bishops governed their particular diocese and often spoke independently of the Conference. Moreover, the speeches and statements of bishops demonstrate that a concern for human rights guided the decisions of many Church leaders throughout the initial period of dictatorship. The documents reveal that many bishops were adopting a more denunciatory posture well before the Episcopal Conference began to do so. Most prominently, in a conversation with international

*Catholic Church and democracy in Chile and Peru* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 72.

10 Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: theology, politics, and the body of Christ*, 120.

11 These attacks took the form of criticism by the government controlled media, the detention of priests, the expulsion of foreign-born priests and the raiding of Church organizations.
In September of 1975 Bishop Carlos Camus, secretary general of the Episcopal Conference, blamed the Junta for creating a climate of hate and characterized the Church as defending the persecuted against the regime.

Authors have been accurate in holding that the Episcopal Conference’s shift to more direct criticism coincided with increasingly systematic attacks on the Church; however, the Episcopal Conference did not reflect the positions of most of the Chile’s bishops. The Conference was generally divided into two factions. A group of bishops viewed the threat of communism as too dire to risk weakening the government with public criticism. The other group felt that the Church should do everything in its power to promote human rights. However, while many bishops supported a vigorous defense of human rights, the canonical independence of individual bishops (who are only subject to the pope), made reaching a consensus in the Episcopal Conference difficult. Fearing that the military regime would exploit disunity among the bishops, those favoring a more confrontational stance against the government often compromised and accepted more ambiguous positions that could be accepted by all. Only after attacks by the regime began to threaten the Church itself did the more conservative bishops begin to allow more direct criticism to be issued by the Episcopal conference. However, this reflected only a shift in the opinion of less than half of the bishops, while many others, including Cardinal Silva, had already publicly adopted an openly critical position.

In determining the factors underlying the shifting attitude of the Chilean Catholic Church towards the military regime, this thesis will analyze many of the speeches and statements by individual bishops, as well as declarations by the
Episcopal Conference. It will also examine interviews with Church officials, the autobiography of Cardinal Silva and survey data conducted by Brian Smith, in order to elucidate a diversity of positions. Moreover, an analysis of internal Church strategy documents will reveal the rationale behind many of the bishops’ decisions. This will help demonstrate that a concern for human rights, rather than a fear of Marxism or a desire to defend the Church as an institution, motivated the actions of most bishops.

Newspaper and magazine articles will help determine the level of criticism in the media against the Church at different times. Primary and secondary research will be used in order to establish the level and types of repression being executed by the regime against society and the Church. Primary sources include the Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, a report commissioned by the government after the return to democracy in order to detail human rights violations during the military junta. This will enable an assessment of correlation, if any, there was between the actions of the regime and the shifting position of individual bishops.

Chapter one will examine the strong theological support in the Catholic Church for bishops to openly advocate for human rights. Moreover, it will survey the previous work by Chilean bishops on behalf of social justice issues before the coup. Chapter two will explain the Church’s initial efforts in support of the junta and the bishops’ belief that private diplomacy was the most effective strategy for promoting human rights. Chapter three will analyze the increasingly forceful nature of the bishops’ private diplomacy in response the increasingly systematic and brutal repression by the junta. It will show that despite the growing evidence that private
diplomacy was ineffective, the bishops feared that a public denunciation would cause greater harm. Chapter four will analyze the rising frustration among the bishops with private diplomacy and the increasing public criticism of the junta by individual bishops. Chapter five will examine the growing repression of the Church and the Episcopal Conference’s decision to start criticizing the junta.
Chapter One: A Historical Overview of the Chilean Church

The Colonial Period and Church State Disestablishment

During the colonial period, which lasted until Chilean independence in 1818, the Catholic Church was closely tied to the colonial government and helped legitimize the state, the social hierarchy and the subjugation of the indigenous peoples. As the struggle for independence raged, the authority of the Catholic Church was never in question, with both royalists and patriots swearing allegiance.

After independence, Church and state relations remained closely tied. The Constitution of 1833 established the Catholic Church as the Church of Chile, and gave it exclusive jurisdiction over education and family affairs. Moreover, the state continued, as it did during colonial times, to provide the Church with most of its funding. In return for this support, the state held the right of *patronato nacional* to nominate Chile’s bishops. With the interests of the Church and ruling elite so closely intertwined, until the 1920’s the Catholic hierarchy generally supported the agrarian oligarchy and the Conservative party.

However, a minority of clergy supported a more progressive orientation for the Church and started to provide social services and establish Catholic workers

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4 Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: the Catholic Church and the State in Latin America*, 123.
associations. This Social Doctrine was expressed by Pope León XII in the Encyclical “Rerum Novarum” (1891), which called on Catholics to protect the workers in a social system where “a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself.”

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, the Chilean government began extending religious rights to non-Catholics. In 1844 non-Catholics were allowed to conduct marriages and in 1865 all denominations were allowed to worship and establish schools. Moreover, in the 1870’s and 1880’s laws were passed subjecting clergy to public trials and establishing civil marriage. This extension of rights came to a head in the early 1920’s when the Catholic Church and Chilean government negotiated an amicable separation of Church and state, which received minimal resistance from the public and Church hierarchy, becoming official in 1925 with the enactment of a new constitution. The agreement provided the Church with transitional funding, control over its own education system, the retention of Church landholdings and an end to patronato.

According to Brian Smith, this amicable form of separation paved the way for the Church to play a more socially progressive role in society. Through its attainment of financial autonomy and independence from state interference in internal decision making, the Church acquired the ability to criticize repressive governments. The elimination of most ecclesiastical privileges also placated leftist groups and prevented

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6 Ibid., 12.
9 Ibid., 73-74.
10 Gill, Rendering unto Caesar: the Catholic Church and the State in Latin America, 125.
the growth of anti-clericalism, which in other Latin American countries made religion a significant source of tension and oftentimes led to the alignment of the Catholic Church and conservative parties.\textsuperscript{11}

However, this official disestablishment did not mean the end of Church involvement in state affairs. Just two days after the separation of Church and state became legal, the Archbishop of Santiago, Crescente Errázuriz, declared, “the State is separated from the Church; but the Church is not separated from the State, and will always be ready to serve it.”\textsuperscript{12} Nevertheless, in a pastoral letter three years earlier, Errázuriz maintained that clergy, “in their capacity as bishops and priests, should completely maintain their distance from the struggles of parties, removed from any purely political competition.”\textsuperscript{13} The Archbishop went on to qualify that “This does not mean, however, that the priest should be silent on the duties that the citizen has in conscience, but when speaking on these matters, he must do so with great caution, and only with regard to the religious aspect of such duties.”\textsuperscript{14} Archbishop Errázuriz, therefore, constructed a sphere of “politics” from which he sought to banish the Church. This sphere was not defined by any pastoral issue, but by the means it used to influence those issues; that is party politics. He sought to exert the Church’s influence over social issues, while at the same time asserting the Church’s autonomy.

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\textsuperscript{11} Smith, \textit{The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism}, 68-69.
\textsuperscript{12} Archbishop Crescente Errázuriz, quoted in Gill, \textit{Rendering unto Caesar: the Catholic Church and the State in Latin America}, 126.
\textsuperscript{13} Archbishop Crescente Errázuriz, quoted in Fidel Araneda Bravo, \textit{Historia de la Iglesia en Chile} (Santiago: Ediciones Paulinas, 1986), 704. [“en su calidad de obispos y curas, deben mantenerse absolutamente extraños a las luchas de los partidos, alejados de toda competición puramente política.”]
\textsuperscript{14}Archbishop Crescente Errázuriz, quoted in Ibid. [“No significa eso, empero que el sacerdote guarde silencio acerca de los deberes que en conciencia tiene el ciudadano, pero al hablar, de la materia, ha de hacerlo con Cuma prudencia, y solo en lo que mira al aspecto religioso de tales deberes”]
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Progressive Change in the Chilean Church

In the mid-1930’s Chilean Catholic Action (Acción Católica Chilena or ACC), an apostolic group, was founded as an association of small groups of laity that discussed social Church principles and how to influence society. ACC often worked to organize workers and promote labor unionization, acting as the Church’s official counterweight to the growing popularity of communism. In response to criticism by wealthy landowners, several ACC leaders stated, “…the absence-felt for a long time-of a Catholic social organization is precisely the cause of the loss of thousands of Catholic workers, gone to the Marxist ranks.”15 The creation of other apostolic groups soon followed including, Young Catholic Workers (Juventud Obrera Chilena) and Catholic Action Labor Union (Acción Sindical Católica).16

At the same time the makeup of the Church hierarchy began to shift as progressive clerics, educated in European universities, started to attain leadership positions within the Church. In 1938 the Falange National party was formed to promote these social teachings in the political system and in 1957 Falange merged with other Catholic movements to form the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). In 1958 its first presidential candidate, Senator Eduardo Frei, ran on a platform of agrarian reform, profit sharing with workers and shifting production to basic consumer goods from luxury goods.17 Despite these changes, the Catholic hierarchy remained fairly Conservative and resistant to Falange until the late 1950’s.18 In one such instance the Church criticized Falange in 1947 for supporting the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, criticizing the Catholic regime of

15 Gill, Rendering unto Caesar: the Catholic Church and the State in Latin America, 128.
16 Ibid., 129.
17 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 88-89.
18 Ibid., 93-94.
Franco in Spain, proposing Catholic participation in labor unions controlled by Marxists, and for accusing rightwing parties of using anticommunism as an excuse for not supporting economic reforms.19

Despite these changes, the Catholic hierarchy remained fairly conservative until 1958. In four pastoral letters concerning social problems published by Chilean bishops during the 1930’s and 1940’s, the bishops did not connect social issues, such as poverty, with the economic system. Rather, they called for changing the individual human heart. In their declarations, the bishops were often preoccupied with Marxism, offering explicit condemnations of it.20

During the late 1950’s and early 1960’s the Chilean Church began to change and focus more on alleviating social issues such as poverty. Much of this can be attributed to changes at the Vatican. In November 1958, John XXIII was elected to the papacy and initiated major transformations in the Catholic Church and the Church in Chile. The Pope most directly influenced the Church in Chile by appointing young progressive bishops.21 Between 1955 and 1964, he replaced 14 of the 28 bishops in Chile owing either to retirement or death. Seven of the new bishops had worked in Catholic Action programs and many received their education from the same high schools and universities that were producing leaders in the PDC. In 1961 Pope John XXIII appointed Raúl Silva Henríquez Archbishop of Santiago and the same year he was elected leader of the Episcopal Conference. Silva had previously served as the director of Cáritas-Chile, a Church-sponsored social welfare program.22

19 Ibid., 96-97.
20 Ibid., 93-94.
21 Ibid., 120-21.
22 Ibid., 112.
The Pope also called on Catholics in North America and Western Europe to send a significant amount of personnel and financial resources to Churches in the developing world. As numerous foreign priests responded to this call, Chile’s supply of priests increased 27.8 percent between 1950 and 1965. Also, between 1960 and 1964 the Chilean Church received $34 million in money and other resources, allowing it to establish programs for helping the poor.23

Moreover, the Pope provided theological support for the progressive positions taken by Chile’s bishops. For instance, in the 1961 encyclical letter, *Mater et Magistra*, the Pope discussed the need for structural changes in stagnant economies.24 In March 1962 the Chilean Episcopal Conference released the document, “The Church and the Problem of Peasants in Chile,” which expanded on the Pope’s encyclical letter and called for specific economic reforms in Chile. The document discussed the distribution of large estates to peasant farmers, credit institutions, cooperative farming, technical education for farm workers, tax reform, a system of social security, price supports and universal basic education. This Episcopal document was striking for the specificity in its analysis of economic problems and its detailed solutions. This distinguished the document from most previous declarations that focused more on general principles and values. As such, the bishops anticipated that they would be attacked for involving themselves in political matters outside the scope of the Church. They therefore defended the Church’s competence to make recommendations about the economy, stating, “…it is an error to affirm that the

23 Ibid., 122.
economic order and the moral order are separated… the objectives of this economic order remain outside the human activity… the purpose is imposed by God on the economic world.”  

Given the extent to which the Church would be accused of engaging in politics when defending human rights during the period of military rule, this early defense of the Church’s role in the material world is significant. It rejects the relegation of the Church to a spiritual sphere, separate and apart from the temporal sphere of human activity. Rather, it asserts that God demands specific ends of the material world. If it does not sufficiently satisfy these objectives, it is the role of the Church to advocate change.

During this time, the Church began to put its social doctrine into practice by founding its own labor unions, educational programs for peasants, land reform projects on Church owned land, and low-income housing. These projects often helped people who previously had little connection with the Church. Moreover, while the Church was not officially connected with the Christian Democratic Party, informal connections began to proliferate. Many of the leaders of the social projects undertaken by the Church were also leaders in the PDC and as a result, many of the programs were included in the PDC’s platform. More generally, the Church’s many lay groups focused on social action became training grounds for leaders of the PDC.

In 1955 the Church founded the University of Catholic Action (AUC) where youth

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26 Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*, 114.
discussed strategies for economic and social reform. Many of those involved in AUC also became leaders in the PDC. In 1964 this informal partnership helped Eduardo Frei, the PDC’s candidate for president, to win the election with 55.7 percent of the vote.

**Vatican II and Medellín**

The Second Vatican Council, (1962-1965), the first international meeting of Catholic bishops in nearly 100 years, affirmed the Church’s role in society. In “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” the bishops declared that it is the responsibility of the Church to “pass moral judgment, even on matters of the political order whenever basic personal rights or the salvation of souls makes such judgment necessary.” This established a theological foundation, not just for the Church’s involvement in social issues, but also for its involvement in issues specifically connected to politics. The Church could thus denounce human rights violations and those that perpetrated them, even if they held political power.

While previous documents from the Vatican established the Church’s responsibility to provide guidance on social issues, the 1968 conference of 150 Latin American bishops at Medellín, Colombia elaborated on the content of that guidance. There the bishops approved documents urging a commitment to the poor and greater responsibilities for lay people. In the final document of the Conference, the bishops asserted the Church’s responsibility, “to defend the rights of the poor and the

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27 Ibid., 114-15.
29 Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*, 147-48.
oppressed.”30 They also affirmed their authority to exercise influence within the
temporal sphere, which includes “denounc[ing] everything which, opposing justice,
destroys peace.”31

However, the bishops did not see this public advocacy for reform as an end to
itself. Rather, they were acutely aware of social reality and the consequences of their
actions. Thus, in the late 1960’s, as society became more polarized and the prospects
of a coup became more real, the bishops decided that promoting reform would be
counterproductive and probably further social conflict. So instead, they issued public
support for democratic processes. Thus, in response to an attempted military coup in
October 1969, the Episcopal Conference released a document denouncing the
legitimacy of both a military coup and terrorism, declaring that either would lead to a
“reign of terror” and repression.32

The Vatican also sought to justify the Church’s involvement in the temporal
sphere. As Pope Paul VI declared in Populorum Progressio (1967),

Founded to build the kingdom of heaven on earth rather than to acquire
temporal power, the Church openly avows that the two powers—Church and
State—are distinct from one another; that each is supreme in its own sphere of
competency. But since the Church does dwell among men, she has the duty
“of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of
the Gospel.”…So she offers man her distinctive contribution: a global
perspective on man and human realities.33

64.
31 “Peace,” in Ibid.
32 Comité Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, "Declaración Episcopal sobre la situación
33 Pope Paul VI, Populorum Progressio (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, March 26, 1967 [cited February 7
2009]); available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-
vi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html.
This passage asserts that the line between the competencies of Church and state does not correspond to the line between the spiritual and the temporal. While the state usually restricts itself to temporal issues, the Church has a responsibility to provide guidance on both temporal and spiritual issues. Yet it disavows temporal power for itself. As Vatican II states, the Church “stands ready to renounce certain legitimately acquired rights” in order to make the “sincerity of her witness” more credible to all peoples. Its primary means of influencing temporal matters is through persuasion, with its methods including good works, positive guidance, denunciation and excommunication. In contrast, the state is largely defined by its means, or in the words of Max Weber, its “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force.”

Throughout the late 1960’s, the population was becoming increasingly polarized politically in response to the economic and social reforms being undertaken by PDC President Eduardo Frei. While Frei had campaigned on a platform of reform and received a large majority of the vote, much of his support was from conservatives afraid that splitting the vote would result in a victory for Marxist candidate, Salvador Allende. However, by the end of the 1960’s, conservatives were alarmed by the pace of change and abandoned the PDC. Political discourse also became increasingly undemocratic as the rivalry between factions deepened. The right, with no clear path to power and few alternative solutions to offer, began to promote authoritarianism.

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and belittle democracy. On the left, Marxist parties, inspired by the Cuban Revolution, advocated for a guerilla struggle and popular insurrection.\textsuperscript{37}

In response to this increasing polarization, the Church began dropping the specifics from its advocacy for economic and social reforms, but started more vocally supporting democratic processes. This was especially true after a group of military officers from the Tacna regiment attempted a coup in October 1969 in order to press for increased salaries and send a message to the government to not let the reforms go too far.\textsuperscript{38} The late 1960’s also saw a weakening of the Church’s social projects as the government took over many of its social services. Moreover, the rise to power of the PDC led many of those who previously were involved in groups such as Catholic Action to join the government, thus draining these groups of leaders and causing many to collapse.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{The Church and Marxism}

As elections approached in 1970 and it became clear that a Marxist party might win, the Church stopped issuing criticisms of Marxism. This was striking in contrast to the Church’s vocal criticisms during the early 1960’s before the 1965 election. Thus, when Salvador Allende, the Presidential candidate of the Marxist Popular Unity (UP) party, won the election with a plurality of 36 percent of the vote, the Church did not openly oppose the government. Rather, it offered legitimacy in the face of an attempt by an extreme right wing group to instigate a coup by kidnapping

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 155.
\item Ibid., 156.
\item Ibid., 137-38.
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the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, General René Schneider. The plan failed when Schneider resisted and was killed.40

The Church’s offers of legitimacy to Allende took the form of calls for the Chilean people to support democracy. In September of 1970 the Episcopal Conference released a declaration saying that “the Chilean people want to continue in the system and style of liberty that they have been defending for the past 160 years.”41 According to Smith, this supportive attitude towards the Marxist government was a reflection of the Church’s concerns that opposition to a democratically elected government would undermine its credibility and alienate Catholics that supported the UP. The Church also wanted to avoid a major Church-state conflict that could result in restrictions on religious freedom and create political instability.42

The increased openness also had much to do with the sympathy of many bishops for the social initiatives of the government. As Cardinal Silva, head of the national Church, stated two month after the election, “The basic reforms contained in the Popular Unity program are supported by the Church…I believe that socialism contains important Christian values, and in many respects is very superior to capitalism-the value it places on work, and the primacy of the person over against

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40 Ibid., 157.
42 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 173.
capital…I believe that these ideals which it espouses are very close to the Church’s preferred goals in the organization of society.”

The Episcopal Conference reiterated this point with more cautious language, stating that there might be some forms of socialism compatible with Christianity. For socialism to be compatible, it would have to “guarantee that the state will not be transformed into an uncontrollable and dictatorial force, and that can assure the promotion of the values of personal and social liberation which the Gospel of the Risen Christ proclaims.”

In another televised speech that year, the Cardinal also delineated the sphere of the “political” from which the Church was to be absent. Specifically, Silva insisted that “The Church as such does not have nor is linked to any political system or any party.” Rather, this sphere was to be inhabited by individual Christians who, motivated by the teachings of the Church, could make any of a number of valid political choices. This then allowed the Church to serve as a source of unity above the political divisions of society. However, Cardinal Silva made clear that the Church’s refusal to engage in party politics did not mean that it should refrain from

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43 Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, quoted in Ibid., 174.
44 “Evangelio, política y socialismo,” in Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Documentos del Episcopado: Chile, 1970-1973, 71. [“Hay en efecto, muchos tipos de socialismos. Pero entre ellos es dable concebir algunos compatibles con el espíritu cristiano, es decir, en los cuales pudiera asegurarse debidamente que el Estado no se transforme en un poder dictatorial incontrolable y que, por lo mismo, pueda garantizarse adecuadamente el respeto y la promoción de los valores de liberación personal y social que proclama el Evangelio de Cristo resucitado.”]
45 Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, “Iglesia, sacerdote y política,” in Ibid., 24. [“…la Iglesia como tal no tiene ni está ligada a ningún sistema ni partido político.”]
46 “The Christian bishops, priests and laity…carried by their Christian conscience, be inclined to choose a particular political option will have to admit that other believers, led by the same sincerity, can choose a different solution” [“…los Obispos, Sacerdotes y Laicos cristianos…llevados por su conciencia cristiana, se inclinan a elegir una determinada opción política, tendrán que admitir que otros creyentes, llevados por la misma sinceridad escojan una solución divergente”] Ibid.
47 [The Church] is the sign and safeguard that men can meet and, beyond their political ideologies and options, unite.” [“[La Iglesia] es el signo y salvaguarda de que los hombres puedan encontrarse y, más allá de sus ideologías y opciones políticas, unirse.”] Ibid.
being engaged in social issues. Instead, he stated that “Our same loyalty to the people demands that…we proclaim the Gospel: with all its commands, with all the frankness of an Apostle, with hunger and thirst for justice. That we proclaim it without fear and always with love…”

Allende had promised dramatic change, running on a platform that pledged to “search for a replacement to the present economic structure…in order to initiate the construction of socialism.” He instituted large wage increases and price controls that redistributed income from the rich to the poor. The government nationalized most of the copper mines, the entire financial sector, 40 percent of industrial production, as well as redistributed 60 percent of irrigated land.

The Church supported some of these reforms. When Allende nationalized the copper mines without providing compensation to the affected companies, Cardinal Silva stated on national television “I think the process of nationalization is constitutionally impeccable.” Moreover, when Western European politicians tried to establish an embargo on Chilean copper, in retaliation for the nationalization, Silva successfully convinced the French bishops to publicly denounce these efforts. The government reciprocated by completely respecting freedom of religion, maintaining

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48 Ibid., 25. [“Nuestra misma lealtad con el pueblo exige que…anunciemos el Evangélico: con todos sus imperativos, con toda la franqueza de un apóstol, con hambre y sed de justicia. Que lo anunciamos sin temor y siempre con amor, cuyo signo es el respeto.”]
49 Salvador Allende, quoted in Bethell, Chile Since Independence, 157.
50 Ibid., 161.
52 Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, quoted in Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 186.
53 Ibid.
subsidies of Catholic schools and even increasing subsidies for Catholic
universities.54

A Political and Social Crisis
The government’s reforms soon started causing economic problems. The
increase in purchasing power among the poor soon ran into the limits of supply. By
1972 Chile entered a devastating economic crisis, with unprecedented inflation,
shortages of basic goods and a burgeoning black market.55 Moreover, the waves of
nationalizations put an immediate end to capital investment in the private sector,
leading to a decline in production.56

In response to the dramatic changes gripping the country, Chile became highly
politicized and polarized. Opposition political parties sought to prevent the
government from instituting further economic reforms by obstructing the UP’s work
and making Chile ungovernable. The non-UP majority congress conducted a
campaign of obstructionism, refusing to authorize most of the UP’s reforms,
including tax reforms, and causing the fiscal deficit to skyrocket. The conflict in the
Congress culminated in August 1973 when the opposition accused the government of
violating the constitution and planning to impose a totalitarian Marxist government.
The Congress then passed a resolution calling on the armed forces to “reestablish the
rule of the Constitution and the law…in order to guarantee institutional stability, civil

54 Ibid., 189.
55 Chile Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, Report of the Chilean National Commission
on Truth and Reconciliation, 51, 164.
56 Ibid., 51, 165.
peace, security, and development.”57 Moreover, the opposition used professional and social associations to organize strikes and sabotage production, both of which severely harmed the economy; the most destructive of which was a month-long trucking strike in October 1972. With Chile’s long narrow geography, the transportation sector was critically important, and the strike paralyzed the economy.58

The government’s authority over civil society also began to disintegrate as armed groups of citizens began to proliferate and act with impunity. Leftist groups illegally seized private property without punishment and when the courts ordered restitution, the administrative authorities refused to comply. In response, owners would violently recover their property, producing an escalation of armed conflict. At the same time, politically oriented armed militias developed, committed to either supporting or opposing the government. Many of these paramilitary groups exaggerated their strength, claiming to have many members and to be well equipped.

In response to this growing crisis, the Church adopted a more mediating role in society, calling for mutual respect among opposing political factions and sought to forge compromises in the increasingly polarized political environment.59 While the Jesuit magazine, Mensaje, endorsed cooperation between the PDC and the UP, no progress was made. The UP refused to suspend its nationalization efforts and the PDC moved further into the opposition.60 In September 1972 Cardinal Silva warned of “fratricidal war” and said that “we must destroy hatred, before hatred destroys the

59 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 191-92.
60 Ibid., 195.
soul of Chile.” To this end, Silva condemned violence as means to promote change and called on Chile to “respect legality” within “our democratic institutions and in our public authorities.”

In the spring of 1973 tensions began to develop between the government and the Church. During this time the government proposed a National Unified School System (ENU) that would impose a national ideology promoting socialism throughout the country. Under this proposal all private schools would have to adopt the ideology and structures of the ENU. The Church interpreted this as a violation of its traditional role in providing private Catholic education. In response, the Episcopal Conference released a declaration on March 27 opposing the proposal, stating that it undermined pluralism and was formed without public consultation. Moreover, the bishops criticized the proposal for disregarding “the religious values which are part of the spiritual patrimony of Chile” and attracting the opposition of “a considerable part of the country.” While the Church hierarchy had generally been supportive of the UP government, a minority of leaders was strongly opposed to Marxism and used the conflict over education as an opportunity to voice their long held criticisms. Father Raúl Hasbún, director of the Catholic University T.V. station, stated that he believed a “confrontation between totalitarian Marxism and the

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61 Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, "Congoja y esperanza," Mensaje 21 (October 1972). [“Por eso amamos y respetamos el derecho, con sus normas legales…]; [“Confianza en nuestras instituciones democráticas, en nuestros poderes públicos, llamados a ser servidores y garantes de la unidad nacional.”]

62 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 197-98.

63 “Declaración del Comité Permanente del Episcopado de Chile sobre la Escuela Nacional Unificada,” in Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Documentos del Episcopado: Chile, 1970-1973, 152-53. [“Por muy pluralista que se informe, no vemos destacados en parte alguna los valores humanos y cristianos que forman parte del patrimonio espiritual de Chile…”]
Catholic Church is inevitable.” In response to this mounting criticism from the
Church, the government postponed the ENU plan in late March.

Over the summer and fall violence escalated between rival militant groups and
with the police. In this environment the Church became frustrated with the
government and continued to criticize it, despite the government’s concession on
ENU. In a June Episcopal Conference declaration, the bishops warned of a Marxist
dictatorship, stating, “We are concerned about the tendency toward absolute statism
without sufficient participation…The Church has always denounced
totalitarianism…” At the same time, the bishops also sought to promote restraint and
amity, affirming “Ideologies divide people, but history, blood, common language,
human love, and the common project which all Chileans share should help us form
one family.” However, the statement had little impact in quelling the political crisis.

By July militant groups were stockpiling arms and there was a growing sense
of an impending civil war. The bishops responded by issuing a declaration
recognizing the prospect for “civil war” and calling on the government and opposition
to enter into negotiations in order to forge a consensus. To rebuild trust, the
bishops called on the government to cease promoting socialism and asked each side
to “put aside the effort to make its interpretation of social reality the only valid

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64 Father Raúl Hasbún, *La Tribuna*, quoted in Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*, 199.
65 Ibid.
67 Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez et al., “Sólo con amor se es capaz de construir un país,” in Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, *Documentos del Episcopado: Chile, 1970-1973*, 166. (“Nos preocupa la tendencia al estatismo absoluto, sin la adecuado participación…La Iglesia siempre ha denunciado el totalitarismo.”); “[Las ideologías dividen; la historia, la sangre, la lengua común, el amor humano y la tarea semejante que los chilenos tenemos hoy deben ayudarnos a formar una familia.”] Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*, 201.
68 Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*, 204.
This statement had the effect of jumpstarting negotiations between the UP and the PDC. However, before any sort of compromise could be reached, the military intervened and on September 11, 1973 overthrew the UP government.70

Just one day before the coup, Allende had decided to break the political impasse by calling a referendum on his government. It was during a meeting that night discussing the plan that Allende received his first warnings that something was amiss. At midnight, Alfredo Joignant, the chief of police, called Allende’s Interior Minister, reporting that the army was on red alert. Another call informed the minister that troops stationed two hours outside of Santiago were on their way to the city; however, when Allende called General Pinochet, the commander-in-chief of the army, and the other generals, he was told that they were either in the shower, or traveling to the south of Chile.71

At 7:30 am, Allende arrived at the presidential palace, La Moneda, with tanks located at its front gates. On his arrival the presidential guard saluted him as usual. At the same time, when Allende’s Defense minister Orlando Letelier arrived at his office, he found he was no longer in charge of the armed forces and was quickly arrested. Allende was then informed that a plane was ready to take him abroad as the military was taking over his government. Allende refused the offer. Throughout the morning, he tried to speak to the nation by radio, but each station he spoke through was immediately bombed by the air force.72

69 “La paz de Chile tiene un precio,” in Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Documentos del Episcopado: Chile, 1970-1973, 172. [“Para ello, es preciso que renuncie cada uno a la prepotencia de querer convertir la propia verdad social como solución única.”]
70 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 204-06.
72 Ibid., 24-26.
At 9:15 am, Allende gave his last speech to the nation, saying “They have force and will to be able to dominate us, but social processes can be arrested by neither crime nor force. History is ours, and people make history.”73 Afterwards, bombardment of the presidential palace began and it was soon consumed in flames. At 2:00 pm the army entered the palace and found Allende dead. While there is some evidence that Allende committed suicide, the cause of death has been under dispute with others arguing that he was shot by the army. Throughout the day, the military completed the work of taking over the country, capturing strategic locations and neutralizing leftist guerilla groups.74

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73 Salvador Allende, quoted in Bethell, Chile Since Independence, 177.
Chapter Two: Private Diplomacy in the Face of Oppression

The Military Captures Power

On September 11, 1973 the Chilean armed forces overthrew the democratically elected Marxist government, with the general support of most Chileans and the Chilean Catholic Church. This support was a direct result of the conflict and chaos that had overtaken Chilean society during the last years of the Marxist government. Over the next two years the Church came to respond through public acceptance of the junta, while at the same time providing an array of social services to those affected by the coup. To the extent that the church sought to effect change, it did so through quiet diplomacy. Even though the Church was often the target of attacks by the junta, it seemed to interpret them as a consequence of the coup and something that would disappear once institutional normalcy was restored.

With its capture of power, the military regime immediately made it clear that it would not be bound by the legal system that had previously been an integral element of Chilean society. On the day of the coup the governing junta declared a series of “states of exception,” which allowed the junta to impose its authoritarian rule. With Decree-Law Three, the junta declared a “State of Siege,” which according to the Constitution, allowed the government to suspend all constitutional rights and guarantees. Moreover, Decree-Law Four proclaimed a “State of Emergency,” which allowed the junta to divide Chile up into Military Zones and empowered a Military
chief over each one. Finally, Decree-Law Five declared a “State of War,” which authorized the creation of War Tribunals to try the defeated.¹

To consolidate and retain power, the military regime immediately began to suppress sources of opposition and outlets for dissent. The military engaged in nocturnal arrests, holding between 7,000 and 45,000 in military detention centers, and killing between 5,000 and 30,000 in the few weeks following the coup.² Many of those killed are counted among the “disappeared” who vanished forever during torture sessions. Moreover, the regime outlawed public gatherings and took control of the entire public media. Many of these measures and tactics would last until the late 1980’s, when the regime’s hold on power began to unravel.³

While the regime dismantled most independent social organizations that could harbor political dissent, the Chilean Catholic Church, was largely insulated. With 90 percent of Chileans identifying as Catholic, the Chilean Catholic Church enjoyed a high degree of power and autonomy in relation to the military regime and was therefore the only civil society organization that the regime was unwilling to suppress or control.⁴ Moreover, in overthrowing Salvador Allende’s democratically elected government, the military claimed the mantle of the restorers of Western Christian

Civilization, thus relying on the Church for, at the least, an implicit grant of legitimacy.\footnote{For example, in the government’s “Declaration of Principles” released in March 1974, the junta justified the coup by insisting “The alternative of a Marxist inspired society must be rejected by Chile, given its totalitarian character and destruction of the human person, which contradicts our Christian and Hispanic tradition” [“La alternativa de una sociedad de inspiración marxista debe ser rechazada por Chile, dado su carácter totalitario y anulador de la persona humana, todo lo cual contradice nuestra tradición cristiana e hispánica.”] Junta Militar de Gobierno, Declaración de principios del gobierno de Chile (Centro de Estudios Miguel Enríquez, 1974 [cited October 30 2008]); available from http://www.archivochile.com/Dictadura_militar/doc_jm_gob_pino8/DMdocjm0005.pdf.}

\textbf{The Church Responds}

On September 13, the Permanent Committee of the Chilean Catholic Episcopal Conference, the national gathering of Chilean bishops that regularly issues public declarations, responded to the military coup.\footnote{All Chilean bishops comprise Chile’s Episcopal Conference. While different localized territories within Chile are governed by a diocesan bishop, the Episcopal Conference assumes leadership over the national Church. It often meets annually and elects bishops to four year terms as president, vice president and Secretary General of the Conference. When the Episcopal Conference is in recess, it is represented by a five member Permanent Committee, each of whom is elected by the Conference to two year terms (Yañez 20, 28-29; Aguilar 201).} It asked the population to cooperate with the government in its “difficult work of restoring the institutional order and the economic life of the country, so gravely altered.”\footnote{Comité Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopado de Chile, \textit{Declaración del Comité Permanente del Episcopado sobre la situación del país} (September 13, 1973 [cited November 15, 2008 2008]); available from http://www.jesus.cl/iglesia/paso_iglesia/documentos/conf/documentos_sini.ficha.php?mod=documentos_sini&id=147&sw_volver=yes&descripcion=. [“…la difícil tarea de restaurar el orden institucional y la vida económica del país, tan gravemente alterados”]} This language seemed to echo the language used by the military to justify the coup. Two days earlier, the junta had insisted that the previous government was characterized by “absolute irresponsibility and incapacity” while there persisted in Chile “anarchy, the suffocation of liberties, moral and economic madness.”\footnote{Junta Militar de Gobierno, \textit{Bando N°5} (Centro de Estudios Miguel Enríquez, September 11, 1973 [cited January 16 2009]); available from http://www.archivochile.com/Dictadura_militar/doc_jm_gob_pino8/DMdocjm0023.pdf. [“Que existe en el país anarquía, asfixia de libertades, desquiciamiento moral y económico y, en el Gobierno, una absoluta irresponsabilidad o incapacidad que han desmejorado la situación de Chile impidiendo llevarla al puesto que por vocación le corresponde, dentro de las primeras nacionales del continente;”]} Thus, this situation was
justified the military’s intervention to remove “the illegitimate, immoral and unrepresentative government...[and] restore the economic and social normalcy of the country, peace, tranquility and security.”

By repeating this conception of the military junta as the restorers of political, economic and social, the bishops implicitly granted legitimacy to the military’s use of a coup and violent force to deal with the country’s problems. Moreover, by calling on Chileans to support the work of the military junta, the Episcopal Conference legitimized the continuation of governance by the nondemocratic military junta. Had the Church merely called for an end to violence or asked for a swift return to democracy, the junta would not have developed the same level moral legitimacy it acquired in the immediate aftermath of the coup.

This expression of support for the Junta did not necessarily reflect a lack of resolve among a majority of bishops to promote human rights. While the first days of the coup produced clear violence, it was not apparent that the violence would persist, nor that there were human rights abuses occurring. With the existence of paramilitary leftist groups, it was believable that the military’s violence was necessary for self-defense and for forging a long desired security.

Moreover, the Church’s acceptance of the coup must be understood in the context of the economic and political chaos during the last years of the Popular Unity government. Cardinal Silva later wrote in his memoirs, “The bishops had agreed that

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9 Ibid. [“Que estos mismos antecedentes son...suficiente para justificar nuestra intervención para depender al gobierno ilegitimo, inmoral y no representativo...pues para lograr esto no hay otros medios de razonamiento exitosos, siendo nuestro propósito restablecer la normalidad económica y social del país, la paz, tranquilidad y seguridad perdidas.”]

10 Chile Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, 55.
the coup had been foreseeable and almost inevitable; we were conscious that the last period of the UP had brought us closer than ever to a climate of civil war…we sincerely believed that the armed forces would put an end to the climate of violence, and that immediately they would return to their professional functions.”11 This sentiment was reiterated by Carlos Camus, a progressive bishop, who later said that on the day of the coup, no Chilean bishop sympathized with the UP Government.12

The belief that the junta would be temporary was supported by the junta’s own statements. In a decree law released on the day of the coup, they declared that they assumed “power only for the time demanded by the circumstances.”13 Thus, most bishops saw the coup as a necessary and temporary deviation from democracy that would quell the turmoil, and restore order to Chile.

The declaration did seem to try and set standards for the junta by promoting general values. First, the bishops expressed their distress over the bloodshed, stating, “It immensely pains us and oppresses us that blood has stained our streets, our populations and our factories – the blood of civilians and soldiers…”14 However, the bishops not only did not assign any blame for the violence, but also seemed to clear the junta of any potential responsibility, writing that the violent ending to Chile’s

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11 Raúl Silva Henríquez, Memorias, vol. 2 (Santiago, Chile: Copygraph, 1991), 288. [“Los obispos habíamos concordado en que el golpe había sido previsible y casi inevitable; estábamos conscientes…de que la ultima etapa del gobierno de la UP nos había acercado como nunca antes a un clima de guerra civil…creíamos sinceramente que las Fuerzas Armadas pondrían fin al clima de violencia, y que luego,…returnarían a sus funciones profesionales.”]
13 Junta Militar de Gobierno, Bando N°5. [“el poder por el sólo lapso en que las circunstancias lo exijan”]
14 Comité Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopado de Chile, Declaración del Comité Permanente del Episcopado sobre la situación del país. [“Nos duele inmensamente y nos oprime la sangre que ha enrojecido nuestras calles, nuestras poblaciones y nuestras fábricas -sangre de civiles y sangre de soldados…”]
political crisis was “an outcome that the members of the Governing Junta have been
the first to lament.”

Second, the bishops asked for the restrained treatment of the defeated, saying
that they had been inspired by a sincere idealism. “We ask for respect for those that
have fallen in the fight and, in the first place, for him who until Tuesday the eleventh
of September was President of the Republic… That we put an end to hate and that the
hour of reconciliation returns.”

Third, the declaration expressed a desire for the
military regime to respect the rights of the working class and urged that their previous
progress “be maintained and expanded until full equality arrives and everyone is able
to participate in national life.”

Finally, the bishops expressed the conviction that
Chile’s tradition of democracy and humanism within the armed forces would allow
for a rapid return to institutional normality and peace. Given Chile’s log history of
stable democracy, this reflected the bishops’ conviction that there would be a swift
return to democracy.

However, despite the fairly supportive nature of the declaration, one day after
releasing the declaration to the press, the junta strenuously objected to its content. A
message from the regime sent to Cardinal Silva made clear that the junta felt that

15 Ibid. (“Consta al país que los Obispos hicimos cuanto estuvo de nuestra parte por que se mantuviera
Chile dentro de la Constitución y de la Ley y se evitara cualquier desenlace violento como el que ha
tenido nuestra crisis institucional. Desenlace que los miembros de la Junta de Gobierno han sido los
primeros en lamentar.”)
16 Ibid. (“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… Que se acabe el odio, que vuelva la hora de la
reconciliación.”)
17 Ibid. (“Confiamos que los adelantos logrados en Gobiernos anteriores por la clase obrera y
campesina, no volverán atrás y, por el contrario, se mantendrán y se acrecentarán hasta llegar a la plena
igualdad y participación de todos en la vida nacional”)
18 Ibid. (“Confiamos en el patriotismo y el desinterés que han expresado los que han asumido la difícil
 tarea de restaurar el orden institucional y la vida económica del país, tan gravemente alterados,
pedimos a los chilenos que, dadas las actuales circunstancias, cooperen a llevar a cabo esta tarea, y
sobre todo, con humildad y con fervor, pedimos a Dios que los ayude.”)
“they had been stabbed in the back” because the declaration did not include any mention of the junta’s work in saving Chile from Marxism.19

Five days after the issuance of the declaration, the Church reaffirmed its deference towards the junta at the annual Te Deum service. Traditionally, this was a service where the Catholic Church, other Christian denominations and the Jewish chief-rabbi came together with the top governing officials in order to give thanks to God for Chilean independence and demonstrate partnership between the state and the country’s different religions.20 There was often significant pageantry and media coverage of the service, with the President riding in on a horse drawn carriage and the service broadcast to the whole country on state television.21 Taking place just one week after the coup, the Te Deum carried great importance for building the junta’s public image and popular legitimacy. With this probably in mind, but officially citing security concerns, the junta requested that the Te Deum service be moved from the Cathedral to the Military Academy. Cardinal Silva’s deference towards the junta was not unconditional as he rejected the request, writing in his memoirs that he thought the proposal was “a total problem,” as it would have appeared that the Church was on the side of the military. After discussing the issue, the Cardinal and the junta agreed to hold the Te Deum at the church of National Gratitude, constructed to honor Chile’s defeat of Peru in the War of the Pacific, 1879-1883. 22

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19 Ascanio Cavallo, Salvo Manuel Salazar, and Pacheco Oscar Sepúlveda, La historia oculta del régimen militar: memoria de una época 1973-1988 (Santiago: Random House Mondadori, 1989), 126. [“Fue como una puñalada por la espalda…En la declaración nada se dice de la salvación patriótica del país”]
20 Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: theology, politics, and the body of Christ, 82.
22 Silva Henriquez, Memorias, 289. [“La proposición…me parecía totalmente inconveniente…La Iglesia debía orar por todos, y no tomar partido por un bando.”]
The Te Deum homily, delivered by the Cardinal, was submitted in advance to the Junta for approval. Its theme was of reconstruction of the fatherland (la patria), and it struck many of the same themes as the Episcopal Conference’s declaration. The Cardinal spoke of the values that he hoped would characterize Chilean society under the new regime, discussing the need to obtain unity and “to put an end to hate so that it does not poison and destroy the soul of our fatherland.” He also called for a more just and humane world with greater solidarity and respect for the law, the greatest safeguard of liberty. Moreover, the Cardinal prayed for the fallen and said that “among us are neither conquerors nor conquered.”

Cardinal Silva also expressed support for the junta in language more direct than that of the Episcopal conference. In a probable reference to Marxism, the Cardinal talked of preventing foreign values, customs and powers from corrupting the country’s “Chilenicity.” He concluded with an offer of “all our disinterested assistance to those who in such difficult times have taken onto their shoulders the extremely weighty responsibility of guiding our destiny.” The Cardinal’s more explicit level of support for the junta is notable, as he was generally considered to be progressive, while the Episcopal Conference could only issue declarations after it had attained consensus among all of the bishops, and was therefore generally more conservative. Silva’s stance may be explained by junta’s perception of the Episcopal Conference’s declaration as a “hostile act,” an interpretation the Cardinal wished to

23 Raúl Silva Henríquez, *Los Te Deum del Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez en el régimen militar* (Santiago: Ediciones Copygraph, 1988), 16. [“…debemos acabar con el odio para que él no envenene y destruya el alma de nuestra patria.”]

24 Ibid., 16-17. [“…que no haya entre nosotros ni vencedores ni vencidos…”]

25 Ibid. [“…quisiéramos ofrecer a los que en horas difíciles han echado sobre sus hombros la pesadísima responsabilidad de guiar nuestros destinos, toda nuestra desinteresada colaboración”]
dispel. In any event, he used the Te Deum homily to reaffirm the Church-state partnership.

Cardinal Silva’s sermon revealed the Church’s initial strategy of building trust with the junta through demonstrations of public support, while at the same time using private diplomacy to convince the junta to stop committing human rights abuses. The first instance of this occurred on September 18, the same day as the Te Deum. In the days following the coup, when bodies started appearing in the Mapocho River, the Cardinal sent his first letter to General Pinochet, commander-in-chief of the army and head of the junta. The letter expressed the Cardinal’s concerns that some of the deaths may be linked to the military, citing evidence that some of the dead had been previously held in a nearby detention center. However, Pinochet stood by the media reports at the time, which insisted that the deaths were the result of either vendettas between militants or leftists abandoning their injured.

“They’re Killing all the Elephants in Chile”

In the first few months after the coup, when Cardinal Silva began initiating this strategy of quiet diplomacy, there was much to concern him. On the day of the coup, the junta moved to take control of the entire governmental apparatus. After removing the president and taking over the administrative branch, the junta issued Decree Law 27, authorizing the disbanding of Congress. The junta then proceeded to take control of civil society. First, it banned political activity. Thus, Decree Law 77 on October 13 prohibited the existence of all groups “which in the aims and behavior

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26 Silva Henriquez, Memorias, 288.
27 Ibid., 293.
28 Chile Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, 76.
of their adherents are substantially in agreement with the principles and objectives of [Marxist] doctrine.” Then four days later the very next Decree Law suspended all political parties. The junta also restricted the activity of labor unions, placed all professional and neighborhood associations under governmental control and installed military rectors in all universities. Moreover, the media was censored and prohibited from releasing anything without the express approval of the junta. This was well known, so much so that Bishop Carlos Camus, Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference, sarcastically joked about it with several foreign correspondents, saying, “In Chile we know that the press does not publish anything if it is not authorized by responsible people (laughter).”

In addition to these official restrictions, junta used fear to chill activity within civil society. The existence of informants was widely rumored; leading people to live in constant fear that one of their friends might turn them in to be subjected to torture and possibly disappeared. Even if an independent social organization was not infiltrated, there was also always the fear that a member might be captured and forced to give up the names of others, subjecting every participant to the horrors of military detention. A popular joke in Chile at the time expressed this pervasive paranoia. “A terrified bunny runs off to the border. The guard who stops him on the other side asks, ‘what are you running away from?’ He answers, ‘They’re killing all the elephants in Chile.’ The border guard soothes him, saying ‘That’s OK, you’re a bunny.’ The

29 Ibid., 77.
30 Ibid., 79-80.
31 Ibid., 58.
32 Bishop Carlos Camus, quoted in “Conversación de Obispo Camus con corresponsales extranjeros,” El Mercurio, October 8, 1975. [“En Chile sabemos nosotros que en la prensa no se publica nada si no está autorizado por personas responsables (risas). En eso estamos de acuerdo, ¿no? (Risas).”]
33 Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: theology, politics, and the body of Christ, 45.
bunny answers, ‘And how am I supposed to prove that?’” 34 Even for those that were not engaged in activities that could be found objectionable, the lack of accountability and the not infrequent occurrence of innocent people being taken away by the security services, created an enduring sense of anxiety throughout the country.

Finally, the junta purged suspected leftists from the public sector, as well as from the faculty and student bodies of universities.35 It also raided factories and carried out mass arrests of working class and student leaders. Moreover, the junta was expansive in identifying possible dissenters. Of those killed or disappeared throughout the reign, 46 percent were not known to be politically active.36 Therefore, by the end of the first several months, it was becoming readily apparent that the junta had gone beyond restoring institutional normality to consolidating its own power and dismantling the capacity for opposition. It was clear that democracy would not be returning soon.

**Church’s Awareness of Abuses**

While many of the regime’s abuses took a while to become publicly known, other abuses, such as the mass detention centers, were immediately apparent. After the coup, the military rounded up anyone who was suspected of harboring Marxist sympathies and placed them in detainment sites for interrogation. There was visible evidence of mass detentions, the most prominent in the National Stadium in Santiago, which functioned as the largest detention center. On September 24 1973, Cardinal

Silva visited the National Stadium after hundreds of the relatives of detainees requested help from the Church and several priests were unable either to enter the stadium or obtain information from the military. The Cardinal later recalled that, on hearing stories of violent interrogations and seeing the squalid and unbearable living conditions, he felt physically ill and was unable to hold back his tears. He spoke to the prisoners over the loud speakers, saying “I am the representative of a Church that is the servant of everyone, especially of those that are suffering. I want to serve you and like the Lord, I do not ask who you are or what are your beliefs or political positions. I put myself at the disposal of the detainees.”37 With this statement the Cardinal expressed the Church’s policy of aiding the persecuted irrespective of religious or political identity. This policy would eventually become a source of tension as the recipients of Church aid came to include fugitives pursued by the junta.

**Repression of the Church**

Repression also spread to the Church, despite its elevated status, as the junta believed it to be infiltrated by Marxism and in need of cleansing. In the weeks following the coup, parishes and the residences of priests and nuns were violently searched, and two of the four offices of the Archbishop were entered by troops. Moreover, the regime jailed forty-five priests and expelled another fifty from the country.38 Several priests were killed during these initial weeks. On September 16 a naval patrol arrested Father Michael Woodward, a university professor, in Valparaíso.

37 Memorias II, 294. [“Soy el representante de una Iglesia que es servidora de todos, y esencialmente de los que están sufriendo. Quiero servirlos y, como el Señor, no pregunto quiénes son ni cuáles son sus creencias o posiciones políticas. Me pongo a disposición de los detenidos.”]

and tortured him to death on the ship Lebu.\textsuperscript{39} Three days later the military arrested the Spanish priest Joan Alsina, the head of personnel at the San Juan de Dios Hospital, and executed him the same day. His body turned up in the Mapocho River on September 27.\textsuperscript{40} Later, on October 1, the Spanish priest Antonio Llidó disappeared and was taken to a torture facility. He was last seen at the end of month in the Cuatro Alamos detention center.\textsuperscript{41}

The police arrested Gerardo Poblete, a priest and professor of philosophy at a college in the northern town of Iquique, on October 21. That evening the police called Father Poblete’s superior to administer last rites. By 8:00 pm when the superior arrived, Father Poblete was already dead. The military stated, “Father Poblete…slipped upon exiting the van, falling heavily on the pavement without initially apparent consequences” however later “[the police] went to get him to be interrogated and found him unconscious.”\textsuperscript{42} Nevertheless, witnesses later asserted that the death was the result of the sustained beatings he endured at the police station. In justifying the arrest, local newspapers alleged that the police found Marxist materials and weapons in Father Poblete’s bedroom. Cardinal Silva conjectured that the arrest might have resulted from a running joke where Father Poblete would called


himself a “revolutionary” to his students and the Salesian Bishop of Punta Arenas, Tomás González, confirmed that the arrest was probably due to false accusations by people that did not realize the potential consequences of their actions. 43 One of those who killed Father Poblete later recounted repeating the words of Jesus on the cross as he tortured the priest, saying “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.” In response Father Poblete then prayed for those that were torturing him.44

The junta also attempted to control some of the Church’s own activities. The Saint George School, which was run by the Order of the Holy Cross, was taken over by the military and the priests were interrogated and accused of indoctrinating students with Marxism.45 Tensions between the Church and junta momentarily rose in September when the junta moved to take control of the Pontifical Catholic University in Santiago and appointed a military rector. However, by pontifical privilege the Church had always controlled the University, with the Archbishop of Santiago serving as chancellor. The Episcopal Conference considered stripping the University of its pontifical right and declaring it a “university under military intervention.” However, the Cardinal chose a more conciliatory route, deciding that they could have more influence on the military regime by avoiding a direct

confrontation. Thus, he resigned as chancellor and agreed to have Fr. Jorge Medina, a supporter of the military regime, appointed in his place.46

Church publications and radio broadcasts were either shut down or censored.47 A local military chief told Jorge Hourton, the bishop of Puerto Montt, that all church declarations would have to be authorized by the military before being made public.48 The Episcopal Conference even released a declaration, requesting that apostolic groups use only the Bible and documents of the Catholic Church, as well as respect the regime’s suspension of social organizations and suspend their meetings. These apostolic groups were associations of lay Catholics that met regularly in small community based units. Examples included the Christian Family Movement and Catholic Action, an association which sought to promote the influence of Catholicism in society. The reason for the restrictions, according to the declaration, was that “It is very possible that some would like to use the apostolic movements or other Church groups as a refuge for political activities. One should exercise great discretion in the face of possible exploitation.” 49

The junta’s repression touched not only the general Chilean society and those on the left, but the Church itself. Therefore, it is unlikely that the Church’s public support for the junta was the result of a decision to protect the Catholic Church’s own

47 Cavallo, Salazar, and Sepúlveda, La historia oculta del régimen militar: memoria de una época 1973-1988, 94.
institutional interests at the expense of those of society. Rather, the Church sincerely believed that offering public support for the junta was the most effective avenue for securing guarantees that the junta would respect human rights. This underlying motivation did contrast with some of the other churches. While Lutherans, Anglicans and non-Pentecostal Methodists collaborated with the Catholic Church in pressing for human rights, most Pentecostal denominations, representing the vast majority of Chile’s one million Protestants, did not.  

Most Pentecostal ministers stayed neutral during this time, preferring to focus exclusively on religious activities. A significant number of Pentecostal ministers, however, actively cooperated with the junta. In 1974 a group of Pentecostals ministers, known as the Consejo de Pastores, accused the Catholic Church of being infiltrated by Marxists and organized a meeting of 2,400 evangelical Protestants to show support for the junta. These ministers also organized various religious ceremonies with the purpose of providing legitimacy to the actions of the dictatorship. In response to these demonstrations of support, the junta built a large Pentecostal church in downtown Santiago and provided funding to Pentecostal denominations. Therefore, the Catholic Church could have more effectively advanced its institutional interests by actively supporting and providing legitimacy to the junta as did many Pentecostal ministers. Instead, the Church pursued a strategy of offering public support and conducting private diplomacy. This not only caused the Church to miss out on potential financial assistance, but also resulted in repression.

51 Gill, Rendering unto Caesar: the Catholic Church and the State in Latin America, 143.
However, the Catholic Church’s objective was not the advancement of its own institutional interests, but rather the improvement of human rights.

The Church Offers the Junta Public Support

In his memoirs, the Cardinal writes that the Church knew about most of the human rights abuses happening at the time, from the mass detentions, to summary killings and the murders of priests. Nonetheless, the Church’s unequivocal public offers of support to the junta continued through the few months following the coup. In late September the Episcopal Conference met with the junta and expressed its appreciation “for the deference that the new authorities have extended to the bishops in every part of the country.” It offered its collaboration in the work of reconstruction, in particular, helping with “the pacification of the spirits and in enhancing the social gains of the workers.” In a November 8 declaration by the Archdiocese of Santiago, Silva affirmed the Church’s neutrality with respect to the government, asserting, “The Church is not called upon to provide legitimacy to the civilian authorities, to establish governments or to topple them.” Two weeks earlier, the Cardinal even said that the Junta could expect more support from the Church than the previous communist

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52 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 15.
54 La Tercera, October 10, 1973, reproduced in Chile: masacre de un pueblo; cristianos frente a los hechos; resistencia y solidaridad, (Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1974), 122. [“La Iglesia chilena se siente llamada a dar la patente de legitimidad a las autoridades civiles, a establecer gobiernos o a derrocarlos.”]
government because they both were Christians (Allende was not a practicing Christian).\(^5\)

However, many in the junta and the government controlled media felt that this level of support was inadequate as the Church did not express sufficient criticism of the previous Marxist administration. In a November 8 declaration by the Archdiocese of Santiago, Silva stated, “I offer to the new government of Chile the same collaboration that the Church had given, in all of the works for the common good, to the Mr. Allende’s Marxist government.”\(^5\) The junta was incensed at this comparison with Allende’s government. Pinochet wanted to confront Silva over the statement, although his advisors dissuaded him from doing so.\(^5\) Instead the junta released a statement, saying, “The government junta has publicly indicated that it desires to reconstruct Chile within a humanist and Christian spirit. That is why we do not conceive that our relations with the Church have the same intensity as the Church maintained with the Marxist regime.”\(^5\) As the savior’s of Chile from Marxism, the junta expected to receive treatment superior to that of the previous regime.

However, while the junta exhibited restraint, the media proceeded to directly attack the Cardinal. Ex-Senator Francisco Bulnes wrote an editorial in the newspaper, Tribuna, accusing the Cardinal of “interference in politics” which he characterized as

\(^5\) Religious News Service, 29 October 1973, quoted in Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 291.

\(^6\) Raúl Silva Henríquez, “Declaración a su Regreso de Roma,” Arzobispado de Santiago, November 8, 1973 reproduced in Chile: masacre de un pueblo; cristianos frente a los hechos; resistencia y solidaridad, 133 [“…ofrecí al nuevo gobierno de Chile la misma colaboración que la Iglesia había dado, en todas las obras de bien común, al gobierno marxista del señor Allende.”]


\(^5\) El Mercurio, November 6, 1973, quoted in Desde Chile, (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1974), 102. [“La junta de gobierno ha señalado públicamente que desea reconstruir Chile dentro de un espíritu humanista y cristiano. Por eso no concebimos que nuestras relaciones con la iglesia tengan la misma intensidad que mantuvo con el régimen marxista”]
a “cancer” within the Church.59 Bulnes went on to write, “it is necessary to break that silence and to say with total clarity that Mr. Silva Henríquez does not have the right to continue using his priestly authority and his position as Cardinal Archbishop in order to defend [Allende’s] regime, which opposed the principles that he, more than anyone else, is obligated to protect and defend.”60

Despite this public hostility and repression against the Church, Silva insisted on using quiet diplomacy to influence the junta. This led to a conflict with the Vatican when the Pope publicly criticized the situation in Chile. On October 7, speaking in Saint Peter’s square, he said, “Those sad reports about the violent repression that we have received from Chile…profoundly move our spirit…Every day it is more evident, the irrational and inhumane character of blindly and cruelly using murderous arms in order to establish order, or more precisely, the repressive domination of some people over others”61 In light of the junta’s displeasure with its mostly supportive declaration on September 13, the Episcopal Conference was deeply concerned with the Pope’s words.

The leaders of the junta visited Cardinal Silva two days after the speech in order to express this concern and articulate their conclusion that the Pope was badly misinformed. Towards the end of the conversation Cardinal Silva said that the Church

60 Francisco Bulnes, La Tribuna quoted in Ibid. [“…hay que romper ese silencio y decir con toda claridad que el señor Silva Henríquez no tiene derecho a seguir usando su investidura sacerdotal y su dignidad de Cardenal Arzobispo para defender un régimen opuesto a los principios que él está, más que nadie, obligado a resguardar y difundir”]
61 Pope Paul VI, Alocución Dominical. L’Osservatore, October 14, 1973, reproduced in Chile: masacre de un pueblo; cristianos frente a los hechos; resistencia y solidaridad, 120. [“aquellos tristes sobre las violentas represiones que nos llegan de Chile, y…conmueven profundamente nuestro espíritu…es cada día más evidente el carácter irracional e inhumano del recurso a la ceguera y a la crueldad de las armas homicidas para establecer el orden, o, más exactamente, la dominación represiva de algunos hombres sobre otros”]
asked nothing for itself and only asked the junta to respect the rights of the poor.

After the meeting, the Cardinal released a declaration from the Santiago Archdiocese, seemingly disconnected from the reality in Chile and the sentiments he himself had conveyed to the junta: “The image that the Holy Father has formed of Chile is not the one that we would like him to have.”62 That charge that the Pope was misinformed was not well received at the Vatican. Later, the Cardinal himself conceded that the statement was not entirely true, writing in his memoirs that with all of his sources, the Pope had formed a complete understanding of what was happening in Chile, “even in its finest shades.”63 The Cardinal, thus, was unswerving in his commitment to his strategy of quiet diplomacy; even to the point that he was willing to distort what he must have known to be true in order to maintain strong relations with the junta.

Underpinning this strategy was the belief that this was the most effective way to influence the junta and thus protect human rights.

This logic was what guided Cardinal Silva’s efforts to dissuade others from publicly criticizing the junta. On October 19, a group of bishops met to discuss a possible public denunciation of the junta’s abuses. The Cardinal strongly opposed this effort saying that “it could be used for political purposes” and secured a promise from the bishops that they would not issue any declarations as individuals.64 Seven days earlier, a larger problem emerged for the Cardinal, when he learned that the pope wanted to publicly release a letter expressing his dismay over the mass detentions and violence, as well as calling for the respect of human rights and the urgent need to

62 La Tercera October 10, 1973, reproduced in Chile: masacre de un pueblo; cristianos frente a los hechos; resistencia y solidaridad, 122. [“la imagen que el Santo Padre se ha formado no es la que nosotros quisíramos que tuviera de Chile.”]
63 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 13.
64 Ibid., 15. [“nuestras palabras podían ser usadas con propósitos políticos”]
reestablish democracy. To prevent serious damage to his strategy of private diplomacy, the Cardinal traveled to Rome and on November 3 met alone with the Pope, convincing him that the best way to secure human rights was to maintain good relations with the junta. Two years later when his relations with the junta soured, the Cardinal would regret this decision, and ask the Pope to release his letter. However, the Pope responded that the opportunity to do so had passed.

**Social Services**

In addition to its strategy of offering public support while conducting private diplomacy with the junta, the Church provided social services to those persecuted by the junta. With tens of thousands of people killed or detained during the weeks following the coup and thousands fired from their jobs, there existed a dire humanitarian situation. Since the military regime had taken control of or destroyed most major social organizations in society, rendering civil society unable to help, the Church was the only organization capable of providing assistance. It was inundated with requests for help from thousands of newly unemployed workers, people in need of shelter from persecution, and relatives searching for detained or disappeared family members.

To better organize their efforts, on October 9th, the Catholic Church, along with Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish leaders, formed the Comité de Cooperación

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para la Paz en Chile. In creating this organization, also known as Pro Paz, the Archdiocese of Santiago announced, “a special commission to attend to Chileans that, as a consequence of recent political events, find themselves in dire economic or personal need.” 70 In an unplanned way the Church started providing assistance. As Father Cristián Precht, a priest who was instrumental in organizing Pro Paz, recalled,

There was not any clarity, only urgencies and emergencies. Someone had to defend human rights and we did. Someone had to go to the war tribunal, we went to the war tribunal. Pro Paz was armed by hand. We only had the clarity that someone had to do something about the rising level of poverty and exhaustion... 71

Pro Paz came to provide legal aid to help people request information about relatives that were either in detention or disappeared, provided help with legal defense, helped people hide, provided resources to help people gain self-employment and established a network of soup kitchens. 72 Argentina Valenzuela, a social worker, remembered that his work ranged from assisting the hundreds of people fired from public service jobs to escorting a fugitive to the bus. 73

Thus, while initially reluctant to challenge the junta publicly for its brutal repression, the Church was unwavering in its efforts to assist the victims of this repression, through its array of social services. This steadfast support for the persecuted would eventually become a source of tension between the Church and the

70 Archdiocese of Santiago, quoted in Vicaría de la Solidaridad: historia de su trabajo social, (Santiago: Ediciones Paulinas, 1991), 44. [“una comisión especial para atender a los chilenos que, a consecuencia de los últimos acontecimientos políticos, se encuentren en grave necesidad económico o personal”]
71 Father Cristián Precht, quoted in Ibid., 11. [“No había ninguna claridad, sólo urgencias y emergencias. Había que defender los derechos humanos y hacíamos. Había que ir a un consejo de guerra, íbamos 1 consejo de guerra. El Comité se fue armando muy artesanalmente. Sólo teníamos claridad de que había que hacer algo por el grado de pobreza y postración que aumentaba...”]
73 Vicaría de la Solidaridad: historia de su trabajo social, 6.
junta, and damage the Church’s ability to pursue private diplomacy. Already, in its first month, Pro Paz was becoming a target for criticism from the government controlled media. A November 4 newspaper article by María Correa Morandé asked why the Catholic Church was currently so interested in providing assistance to workers when it did not provide any to workers under “Marxist slavery.” According to her, the sudden provision of social services created the impression that the workers were worse off under the junta. This was not only false, she claimed, but also harmed Chile by projecting a negative image of the junta to the rest of the world.74

Initially, the Churches conceived of Pro Paz as a response to a temporary emergency that would last no more than two to three months.75 However, as the repression grew and became more systematic, so too did Pro Paz. Throughout 1974, Pro Paz expanded its services in order to meet the needs of the increasing number of relatives looking for legal and economic help, growing from its original eight workers to 103 in Santiago and 95 in the outer provinces.76 By the end of 1975 Pro Paz had provided legal services to 40,000 people, medical assistance to 70,000 people and was feeding 35,000 children daily.77

Pro Paz quickly realized that to convince the junta to respect human rights, it had to win the battle over information. Thus, it started maintaining detailed documentation on all of the cases presented to it and sent the information to the

75 *Vicaría de la Solidaridad: historia de su trabajo social*, 47.
bishops, the courts, and later international human rights organizations.\textsuperscript{78} Fully engaged in providing social services to the persecuted, it became more directly aware of the abuses being perpetrated by the junta. Nina Pérez, another social worker, described how Pro Paz became “a great room of horror…where the most atrocious stories arrived.” Often after listening to one familiar story about a disappearance after another, she would end the day in anguish.\textsuperscript{79}

In January of 1974 Pro Paz used its burgeoning documentation of abuses to file for a writ of habeas corpus and initiate its first public confrontation with the Pinochet regime. While the writs were rarely successful, they presented a challenge to the absolute power of the regime and provided a channel for directing moral opposition against its abuses. These legal requests also increased the visibility of those arrested, which perhaps secured them a greater level of security. The first writ was rejected by the Supreme Court in January 1975 on the grounds that the State of Siege revoked the court’s authority to review the arrests made by the government. By the time Pro Paz was closed in December 1975, it had issued 2,342 writs of habeas corpus with only three resulting in successes.\textsuperscript{80}

\textbf{Beyond Pro Paz}

The Church’s support for the persecuted often extended beyond providing social services, with the Church challenging the junta’s ability to shape the narratives surrounding the detainees and their suffering. On March 15\textsuperscript{th} 1974 José Tohá, the former Minister of Defense from the Allende government, died in military detention.

\textsuperscript{79} Vicaría de la Solidaridad: historia de su trabajo social, 11.[“…esta gran sala del horror que era el Comité donde llegaban los relatos más atroces…”]
\textsuperscript{80} Lowden, \textit{Moral Opposition to Authoritarian Rule in Chile, 1973-1990}, 42.
after enduring severe physical and psychological torture. According to military
authorities, he committed suicide and hanged himself. However, Tohá’s wife
contested that claim, saying that his head was intact, precluding suicide by asphyxia.
After Tohá’s death, the Cardinal communicated to the military authorities his
intention to celebrate a public mass for the repose of Tohá’s soul. The military
refused permission for a mass at the Metropolitan Cathedral, so the Cardinal
immediately made arrangements for the mass to be celebrated at his own residence.
Further, he told the military that he was not sure that Tohá had committed suicide.
The Mass was attended by ambassadors, the wives of political prisoners, as well
thousands of other people who lined the streets around the Cardinal’s house.81

To defend the persecuted and protect human life, at times the Cardinal resorted to
breaking the law. In one such instance, Jaime Hernández, a former member of
Allende’s military escort (GAP), was arrested by the military’s security services in
1974. After enduring severe interrogations and torture, he managed to escape and
went into hiding. Silva located him and personally brought him in his diplomatic car
to the Italian Embassy where he was granted political asylum. This allowed
Hernández to leave Chile and directly saved his life.82 More often, it was priests
rather than bishops that broke the law in order to save lives. During the months
following the coup, a number of priests worked tirelessly to hide and find asylum for

81 Aguilar, A Social History of the Catholic Church in Chile: The Pinochet Government and Cardinal
Silva Henríquez, 259; Eugenio Ahumada and Atria Rodrigo, Chile, la memoria prohibida: las
82 Patricio Quiroga Zamora, Compañeros: el GAP, la escolta de Allende (Santiago: Aguilar, 2001),
230.
fugitives sought by the junta. Unlike the Cardinal, when priests broke the law, they did so at great risk to their own lives. 83

The Lack of Information Theory

In separate interviews Bishop Manuel Camilo Vial and Deacon Enrique Palet insisted that the Church’s public support for the junta and failure to criticize abuses reflected the censorship of the media, which prevented many bishops in less repressed regions from learning about the abuses in other parts of the country. 84 It took several years for Church officials to realize the extent of the regime’s repression and to become convinced of the necessity for a more direct condemnation of torture and other abuses. This is an account supported by Brian Smith who writes that the lack of severe repression in rural areas prevented many bishops from realizing the extent of the abuses. 85

However, while many bishops may not have had firsthand knowledge of the atrocities, they were still presented with evidence of them at Chilean bishops’ conferences. Bishop Sergio Contreras Navia, wrote that during the first several months bishops’ attention came to “focus on the bloody effects of the initiated process. Every time we met, we recounted the killings, fighting, summary trials, and the negotiations with the military leaders asking for clemency and justice. Next was the theme of the detained, the internment camps and later the disappeared and the concern about the repeated cases of torture.” 86

83 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 295.
84 Bishop Manuel Camilo Vial, interviewed by author, August 8, 2008; Deacon Enrique Palet, interviewed by author, August 13, 2008.
85 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 291.
**Private Diplomacy**

In his memoirs, Cardinal Silva makes clear that from the first moments of the coup, he knew that the Church’s obligation was to safeguard human rights. “We needed to be on the side of the victims, without regard for color or ideology”\(^{87}\) And, indeed the Cardinal’s actions demonstrated a clear and unequivocal concern for the plight of the persecuted. The Church fervently believed that it could save more lives through quiet diplomacy than through public denunciations. It was convinced that the junta would be more willing to listen to requests from the Church, if it was not perceived as openly hostile. Much of this faith in dialogue was based on the Chilean Catholic Church’s long history of working with the state. For instance, when the Church strongly opposed Allende’s education reform plan, the ENU, the government promptly suspended the plan.

However, it is not clear that there was much evidence that this strategy of was having much success. For example, on December 20\(^{th}\) 1973, neighbors, relatives and priests witnessed the arrest of five young people in Santiago. After several days their bodies turned up, each marked with multiple bullet wounds. The government claimed that the youth were carrying evidence of a subversive plot and that the youth had confronted the security services. Nevertheless, documentation from the Church contradicted this account, so the Cardinal sent a personal letter to General Pinochet about the case. When the head of police conducted an investigation and concluded that the security services had committed a crime, he was immediately removed from

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\(^{87}\) Silva Henriquez, *Memorias*, 292.
his job and put into detention in an island off of Chile. A subsequent reply to the Cardinal from Pinochet denied any government wrong doing. 88

As the abuses continued over the months following the coup, the plausibility of attributing them to the coup itself diminished. While the bishops lost any pretension that the abuses were a mere temporary occurrence, they still did not blame the leaders of the junta. Rather, the bishops believed that the abuses were being perpetrated by low level officials and that the leaders did not know what was happening. 89

It is true that there are some examples of the successful use of private diplomacy to secure a specific concession from the junta. In an anonymous interview conducted by Brian Smith in June 1975, a bishop said “There are specific cases calling for public denunciation but this is not common. There were cases of torture here in my diocese during the first days of this government. I went to the authorities and was successful in my complaint.” 90 However, not only were private conversations often not effective in specific instances, as described above, but they were rarely successful at securing systematic changes, such as respect for the rule of law or the end of torture. Eventually, the junta, for a time, was able to deter the Church from issuing a public criticism by offering concessions in individual cases.

Given Chile’s inexperience with authoritarian rule and previously amicable Church state relations, it is understandable that bishops were unable to anticipate the junta’s refusal to head its spiritual advice. The Cardinal recognized this point in his

89 Ibid.
90 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 298.
memoirs when reflecting on his role in dissuading the Pope from publicly criticizing
the junta. “It is true that I could not predict the unjust impacts caused by a state of
affairs where passion obscures reason.”

91 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 18. [“…es verdad que no podía prever los injustos efectos causados por
un estado de cosas donde la pasión oscurecía la razón.”]
Chapter Three: A Struggle to Express a Unified Voice in Defense of Human Rights

A New Stage of Repression

During the coup and immediately afterwards, the military engaged in arbitrary repression, without any centralized control. It sought to change this by issuing Decree-Law 521 on June 14, 1974, which officially established the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA), a military organization directly responsible to the junta. The DINA which had existed in a more unofficial capacity since November 1973, was charged with “gathering all information…in order to provide the intelligence needed for policy formulation and planning…”¹ It quickly moved beyond intelligence gathering, taking all measures it found necessary to protect national security or promote national development. In doing so it enjoyed practically unlimited power and was not bound by the law.²

Thus, the DINA became the chief organization charged with systematically exterminating all enemies of the state, namely leftists and those that expressed dissent. One primary tool in this effort was to make people disappear. Here the government would kidnap people, detain them in clandestine locations where they were often tortured, and then murder them. The bodies would then be hidden, often dumped in the ocean, so that they would never be found. The government would then deny that they had any information about the persons, often claiming that they did not legally exist, had left the country, or just had not been arrested. Chilean newspapers

² Ibid., 473.
contributed to this campaign to discredit claims of disappearances by publishing articles, for instance, detailing the deaths of the disappeared abroad during infighting among leftists.³ This tactic of forced disappearances had the benefit of eliminating perceived enemies of the state, intimidating other political activists and allowing the government to avoid taking responsibility for its actions.⁴

Between the coup and 1976, the DINA made disappear most activists in Chile’s Communist Party, Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), a militant leftist group. Those that escaped this fate usually managed to do so by entering a foreign embassy and seeking diplomatic asylum.⁵ Moreover, many of victims were not even activists, but rather happened to be arrested together with other activist.⁶ The detainees were often not of political value, but in the DINA’s efforts to gather information, they were severely tortured. As a result, many detainees often either died while being tortured or ended up in such a state that the DINA concluded it would inappropriate for others to see them and they should be made to disappear.⁷

One victim who managed to be released described her experience with the DINA:

I was arrested at about midnight on the 26th of December, 1975. Around eight civilians arrived at my house, all armed with machine guns and small arms…handcuffed me together with my wife, put tape over our eyes and dark glasses over that. The whole operation was carried out without them identifying themselves at any moment…Immediately I was taken to the torture chamber. They made me undress and with my hands and feet tied to the metal frame of the lower part of the bunk bed they began to apply electric current to me. This is the ‘grill.’ During the rest of the night they had me, applying electricity over my whole body, accompanied by blows with sticks, because of which I came out with several fractured ribs. While they applied electricity they threw water on my whole body. It was already dawn when I

³ Ibid., 495-506.
⁴ Ibid., 496-97.
⁵ Ibid., 496.
⁶ Ibid., 498.
⁷ Ibid., 497-98.
was taken off the grill and thrown, with my feet and hands chained, on the patio of the Villa….Until the 31st of December I was taken to the “interrogation” every day and every night.\(^8\)

These actions by the DINA were hardly done in self defense. Between October 1973 and August 1977 militants killed only nine soldiers or policeman.\(^9\) It was this lack of armed resistance that posed a problem for the junta. The junta’s entire rationale for existence was to restore order to a country wrought by turmoil. As the junta had been successful during the first month after the coup at eliminating all potential sources of violence, it would have to manufacture an atmosphere of internal war in order to justify its continued rule. This was demonstrated in October 1973 when General Sergio Arellano Stark went on a helicopter tour of detention sites in order to review sentencing guidelines. At each site that Arellano landed, in what became known as the “Helicopter of Death,” prisoners were brought to him and shot. When Arellano arrived in Talca, he asked Colonel Efraim Jaña how many of his troops had been killed while securing the area. When Jaña responded that he secured the area without incident, Arellano grew angry. Later, when reflecting on the incident, Jaña explained that “[my attitude] did not square with the superior’s plans, which called for exacerbating military fury against the left.”\(^10\)

Much of the brutal repression carried out by the DINA was, therefore, not a response to threats, but rather an effort to create an atmosphere of hostility that would in turn justify the repression and the need for the junta. Throughout the years of

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dictatorship, the junta constantly worked to remind the public of the ongoing threat from militant leftists. The DINA also aided this effort of manufacturing enemies. The bodies of people disappeared periodically turned up in medical centers and were presented by the government as having been killed in shootouts with the police.\footnote{Chile Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, \textit{Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation}, 502.}

Torture sessions themselves also served to justify the torturer’s brutality by creating an atmosphere of urgently needing to get answers. While the forced confessions were often false, they helped reinforce the necessity of the junta’s violence.

In its pursuit of leftists, the DINA soon came to suspect that priests and nuns were hiding fugitives sought by the regime. In response, it began to conduct intelligence gathering activities on the Church, involving the constant surveillance for fugitives outside parishes, youth centers, the Pro Paz headquarters and the Cardinal’s own house.\footnote{Mario I. Aguilar, \textit{A Social History of the Catholic Church in Chile: The Pinochet Government and Cardinal Silva Henríquez}, vol. 2 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 262.} The issue of fugitives and the Church’s decision to protect them would soon become a source of tension between the Church and junta.

\textbf{Declaration of Principles}

In its “Declaration of Principles of the Government of Chile,” issued on March 11, 1974, the military government sought to establish itself on the foundation of Christianity and Chilean nationalism. The declaration asserted the importance of authority and criticized the threat to national unity posed by sectarian political parties, promising to “assure the independence and depoliticizing of all the intermediate society between man and state.”\footnote{Junta Militar de Gobierno, \textit{Declaración de principios del gobierno de Chile} (Centro de Estudios Miguel Enríquez, 1974 [cited October 30 2008]); available from} Moreover, it eliminated any possible illusion that
the military rule was temporary, promising not be a mere “parenthesis between similar partisan governments.” Rather, the government declared that, “The armed forces do not fix a time table for its assumption of government, because the work of reconstructing the country’s moral, institutional and material character requires a profound and prolonged action.”

The declaration stated that “…the government of the Armed Forces and of order exercises with energy and principle of authority, punishing drastically every outbreak of indiscipline and anarchy.” Moreover, it sought to enforce national unity and reprimand those that ferment “the irreducible antagonism between classes…foreign ideologies, sectarian political parties… and the invasion of foreign culture.” Yet the declaration did affirm the importance of human rights, stating that the Chilean legal system has always “reflected the profound appreciation that the Chilean feels for the spiritual dignity of the human person and consequently their fundamental rights.” However, it makes clear that these fundamental rights do not protect expression that promotes or provides aid to Marxism, which “rejects the most fundamental values of any authentic civilization.”

http://www.archivochile.com/Dictadura_militar/doc_jm_gob_pino8/DMdocjm0005.pdf. [“Asegurar la independencia y despolitización de todas las sociedades intermedias entre el hombre y el Estado.”]
14 Ibid. [“…paréntesis entre gobiernos partidistas similares”]
15 Ibid. [“…las Fuerzas Armadas y de Orden no se fijan plazo a su gestión de gobierno, porque la tarea de reconstruir moral, institucional y materialmente al país, requiere de una acción profunda y prolongada.”]
16 Ibid. [“…el gobierno de las FF.AA. y de Orden ejercerá con energía el principio de autoridad, sancionando drásticamente todo brote de indisciplina o anarquía.”]
17 Ibid. [“…el antagonismo irreducible entre las clases sociales…las ideologías foráneas, el sectarismo partidista…y la invasión cultural extranjizante”]
18 Ibid. [“…niega los valores más fundamentales de toda auténtica civilización”]
The Church Issues Cautious Public Criticism

On April 24, 1974, the Episcopal Conference released “Reconciliation in Chile,” its first public criticism of the junta. With this the Church added a third component to its strategy of pursuing private diplomacy and providing social services. Sending private letters was having little effect, so the bishops decided that the Church needed to enlarge its audience.19 Before drafting the declaration, Pro Paz had shaped the discussions by providing the bishops with a report detailing the junta’s practices of torture, disappearances and other abuses.20 The document expressed the need for reconciliation on three levels, with God, with each person’s self and with others.

The bishops tried to strike a balance between praise and criticism of the regime. First, they commended the junta for allowing them to release the declaration, stating that this “constitutes the best proof of the existence of the right to dissent in Chile”21 The bishops went on the praise the “explicit Christian inspiration” of the government’s declaration of principles, “notwithstanding certain insufficiencies in the junta’s formulation of the Christian ideal of the social and political life.”22

However, what made this declaration significant was a section expressing their unease over the climate of insecurity and fear, the increase in poverty and unemployment, the arbitrary firing of workers, and the overhaul of the education

21 Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, La Reconciliación en Chile (April 24, 1974 [cited December 10 2008]); available from http://www.jesus.cl/iglesia/paso_iglesia/documentos/conf/documentos_sini.ficha.php?mod=documentos_sini&id=152&sw_volver=yes&descripcion=.[“...lo que constituye la mejor prueba del derecho a disentir que existe en Chile.”]
22 Ibid. [“...no obstante ciertas insuficiencias en la formulación del ideal cristiano para la vida social y política...”]
system that limited the involvement of families. Finally in their key passage, the bishops charged that:

in some cases, the lack of effective judicial safeguards of personal security leads to arbitrary or excessively prolong detentions in which neither those arrested nor their relatives know the concrete charges that motivate them; in interrogations with physical or moral compulsions; in the limitation of the possibility of legal defense; in unequal sentences for the same charges in different places; in restrictions on the normal use of the right to appeal. We understand that particular circumstances can justify the transitory suspension of the practice of some civil rights. But there are rights that touch the very dignity of the human person, and they are absolute and inviolable. The Church ought to be the voice of all, especially of those that do not have a voice.

While this declaration expressed the Episcopal Conference’s most candid criticism to date, its language was still indirect. While expressing their concern over general abuses and situations, the bishops neither identified those responsible for these problems nor provided specific examples of the abuses themselves. They utilized euphemisms: the word “compulsions” is probably a reference to torture. Moreover, in its introduction, the declaration provided some justification for the abuses it later criticized. “…[T]he Chilean situation is incomprehensible if one does not have in mind the state of chaos and the enormous exacerbation of passion that existed during the previous government,” nor the “armed resistance that even now endures on the part of some politicians against the current government.”

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23 Ibid. [“Nos preocupa, finalmente, en algunos casos, la falta de resguardos jurídicos eficaces para la seguridad personal que se traducen en detenciones arbitrarias o excesivamente prolongadas en que ni los afectados ni sus familiares saben los cargos concretos que las motivan; en interrogatorios con apremios físicos o morales; en limitación de las posibilidades de defensa jurídica; en sentencias desiguales por las mismas causas en distintos lugares; en restricciones para el uso normal del derecho de apelación. Comprendemos que circunstancias particulares pueden justificar la suspensión transitoria del ejercicio de algunos derechos civiles. Pero hay derechos que tocan la dignidad misma de la persona humana, y ellos son absolutos e inviolables. La Iglesia debe ser la voz de todos y especialmente de los que no tienen voz.”]

24 Ibid. [“…la situación chilena es incomprendible si no se tiene en cuenta el estado caótico y de enorme exacerbación pasional que existió durante el Gobierno anterior.”; “…a resistencia armada que aún ahora subsiste de parte de algunos políticos contrarios al actual…”]
Thus, at the same time the bishops expressed concern over abuses, they minimized the junta’s responsibility for them by citing mitigating circumstances. As a result, the bishops made it less likely that the leaders of the junta would feel under pressure to change. Moreover, the Episcopal Conference’s statement that there was continued armed resistance to the regime was in hindsight disingenuous. As mentioned earlier, Chile’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that between October 1973 and August 1977 militants killed only nine soldiers or policeman. However, while the bishops received ample evidence of the regime’s abuses through Pro Paz and interactions with parishioners, these sources provided little information with which to challenge the claims of continued resistance. Thus, while the bishops were clearly wrong, it is not evident that they knew they were wrong.

Despite the moderate nature of the criticism, the junta reacted very negatively. General Pinochet told the Cardinal “…this is a stab in the back.” Another member of the junta, General Gustavo Leigh of the Air Force, said that he had “great respect for the Church, but like many men, without realizing it, they are vehicles for Marxism.” Many newspapers tried to direct more pointed criticism at the declaration through their letters to the editor pages. In this way, they were able to communicate harsh criticism without taking responsibility for the opinions expressed. One such letter asked in response to the declaration’s concern about the climate of

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26 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 28. [“…esto es una puñalada por la espalda”]
fear and insecurity: “[does the Cardinal] believe by chance that Chileans are going to accept his Marxist diatribes?”

**Internal Deliberations**

Even among the bishops there was considerable disagreement concerning the declaration. Some bishops viewed the threat of communism as too dire to risk weakening the government with public criticism, while others believed that the bishops should not remain complicit to the regime’s abuses. During the deliberations, Cardinal Silva held fast to his commitment to private diplomacy. He insisted that the Episcopal Conference delay releasing the declaration, telling the bishops that the junta had assured him it would issue an order putting an end to the arbitrary detentions and persecution. However, a majority of bishops had lost faith in the junta and decided to make the declaration public.

Still, while many bishops supported more open criticism of abuses than was expressed in the declaration, the canonical independence of individual bishops (who are only subject to the pope), made reaching a consensus in the Episcopal Conference difficult. Fearing that the military regime would exploit disunity among the bishops, those favoring a more critical stance tended to compromise and accept a more ambiguous position in order to maintain unity. In this light, the section justifying the abuses is more understandable, as it was probably added to placate more conservative bishops and help secure a consensus within the Conference.


30 Juan Mihovilovich Hernández, *Camus, obispo* (Santiago, Chile: Rehue, 1988), 74-75.

According to Brian Smith, during their deliberations four bishops voted against certain sections of the declaration. Among these, The Archbishop of Valparaiso (the second largest city in Chile and a site of severe repression), Emilio Tagle Covarrubias, and the Archbishop of La Serena, Juan Francisco Fresno, were the only members of the Episcopal Conference to publicly express their dissent. In a pastoral letter read in every church in his diocese, Tagle cast Marxism as the root of Chile’s problems and the army as the savior of Chile. Chile, he said, was in such dire need for reconciliation, because “Marxism produced…the most profound breakdown and division in its history”32 Tagle went on to praise the armed forces as “the guardians of security and honor in Chile,” thanking them for “saving it from falling forever into the abyss.”33 Finally, in his most direct rebuttal to the Episcopal Conference’s declaration, Tagle wrote, “There are concentrations of aggression that form a real danger for national security…The government should therefore establish severe restrictions.”34 While the declaration and Tagle agreed that some restrictions might be necessary, the Episcopal Conference asserted that the restrictions must be transitory and that some rights were inviolable. In contrast, Tagle acknowledged no such moral limitations on the government’s repression.

Statements such as these by Archbishop Tagle undermined the Episcopal Conference’s criticisms, making it easier for the junta and the Chilean people to ignore the bishops’ declaration. An editorial in the newspaper, El Mercurio, thanked

32 Emilio Tagle, "Obispo Tagle: Acerca de la reconciliación," Ercilla, no. 2.025 (May 22, 1974): 11. [“La reconciliación es, para nosotros, una tarea indispensable, pues el marxismo produjo en Chile la quiebra y la división más honda de su historia.”]
33 Ibid. [“La Fuerzas Armadas, guardianes de la seguridad y el honor de Chile…dieron el paso para salvarlo de caer para siempre en el abismo.”]
34 Ibid. [“…se mantuvieron focos de agresión que configuraban un real peligro para la seguridad nacional…El Gobierno debió establecer entonces severas restricciones.”]
Archbishops Tagle and Fresno for “clarifying” the Episcopal Conference’s declaration and helping “to avoid erroneous interpretations.”

It praised the Archbishops for explaining that the call for reconciliation did not include Marxists.

“...[N]o one can demand that the Armed Forces abandon their state of vigilance in search for a reconciliation that the Marxists do not offer, do not desire and in any case are not inclined to carryout, since it contradicts with their doctrine of social conflict.” While this assertion is a logical inference from Tagle’s letter, it clearly contradicts the bishops’ declaration, which never sought to place limits on who was eligible for reconciliation. Rather, the declaration asserted “It is necessary to know how to forgive whoever has offended us. To forgive the enemy, to pray for whomever persecutes us and bless whomever disparages us.”

The editorial also took advantage of the fact that the declaration only lamented the existence of abuses without placing any blame. El Mercurio, therefore, tried to clear the junta of responsibility by characterizing the abuses as aberrations and claiming that the junta always investigated them and punished those found guilty.

Finally, the editorial thanked the archbishops for not adopting “political positions” and “maintaining their legitimate independence as religious leaders.” In this way it implied that positions contrary to those expressed by the two archbishops, specifically

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35 Editorial, El Mercurio, May 19, 1974, reproduced in Chile: masacre de un pueblo; cristianos frente a los hechos; resistencia y solidaridad, 167. (“Los dos Arzobispos no se apartan de la declaración de la Conferencia Episcopal, pero la precisan en su contenido, lo que sirve para evitar interpretaciones erróneas.”)

36 Ibid., 166. (“Pero nadie podría exigir que las Fuerzas Armadas abandonaran su régimen de vigilancia en busca de un reconciliación que los marxistas no ofrecen, no desean y no estarían dispuestos a cumplir en ningún caso, puesto que contradice su doctrina de lucha social”)

37 Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, La Reconciliación en Chile. (“Es necesario saber perdonar a quien nos ha ofendido. Perdonar al enemigo, orar por quien nos persigue y bendecir a quien nos maldice”)

38 Chile: masacre de un pueblo; cristianos frente a los hechos; resistencia y solidaridad, 166.

39 Ibid. (“posiciones políticas”; “mantengan su legítima independencia de jefes religiosos”)
those seeking reconciliation with Marxists, were not appropriate positions to be taken by religious leaders.

Others in the media more directly attacked the Episcopal Conference’s declaration instead of reinterpreting it. An article by the Federation of Students of the Catholic University (FEUC) claimed that the declaration demonstrated that, “the Marxist groups are finding it sufficiently easy to penetrate pastoral and Christian organizations.” The article went on to echo the line repeated throughout the government and the media, that “the reconciliation between Chileans in national unity, necessarily demands the definitive defeat of Marxism in our land.”

“Reconciliation Does not Fall from the Sky in a Parachute”

While most bishops confined their attempts at influencing the junta to private diplomacy and the Episcopal Conference’s public declarations, there were a few that refused to heed the Cardinal’s caution concerning independent public criticism. Among these, Bishop Fernando Ariztía was the first figure to independently and publicly voice criticism. However, in accordance with the bishops’ commitment to private diplomacy, he targeted his criticism at the Chilean people and not the government. As the auxiliary bishop for the Western Zone of Santiago and the co-chairman of Pro Paz, he was in constant contact with evidence of the junta’s abuses. Thus, in December 1973 he released an open letter that while recognizing the order in the streets, laid out a formulation of what the Chilean people needed to do in order to promote reconciliation.

41 Ibid. [“...la reconciliación entre los chilenos en la unidad nacional, exige necesariamente la derrota definitiva del marxismo en nuestra patria.”]
For Ariztía, reconciliation first required a concern for those that were in distress. He criticized Chileans that were so absentminded or isolated in their affluent social groups, as to not realize that people were suffering. He went on to specify this suffering in a detail not found in the Episcopal Conference’s April 1974 declaration. “For those that take seriously their Christianity, the happiness is hidden by the pain of others: the disappeared, the dead, those without work.” The Conference would not acknowledge the growing ranks of the “disappeared” until 1977. Ariztia went on to lament the pain caused by people turning in each other to the police.

It is easy to speak of a “climate of hate,” pushing blame on to others, and to not acknowledge the vengeful attitudes in one’s own heart. It is easy to accuse a neighbor or a colleague; to give free reign to so many old grudges. “You do not know the pain that we have created...” I explained, crying to a woman whose house had been leveled and her husband detained (although liberated two days later), as a consequence of a false denunciation.

Ariztía then implored Chileans to actively seek out reconciliation. “Reconciliation does not fall from the sky in a parachute. Reconciliation is not closing one’s eyes in order to not see that which separates us. It is not passivity. It is also fighting, or removing the obstacles that oppose it.” This countered those in the government and

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42 Fernando Ariztía, "Signos e instrumentos de reconciliación," Mensaje, no. 224-225 (November-December, 1973): 578. [“Es muy grave ‘no saber nada,’ y no haberse encontrado con gente que tengas problemas. O se es un ‘despistado’ que vive al margen de la vida real o todas sus conexiones son con un determinado sector de personas que ‘están bien.’”]
43 Ibid. [“Pero para los que toman en serio su cristianismo, la alegría les es velada por el dolor de los otros: los desaparecidos, los muertos, los sin trabajo”]
44 Ibid. [“Es tan fácil hablar de ‘clima del odio’ echándole la culpa a los otros, y no ver las actitudes vengativas en el propio corazón. Es tan fácil acusar a un vecino o a un compañero de trabajo; se da así rienda suelta a tantos viejos rencores. ‘No sabe Ud. El daño que nos han hecho...’ me explicaba llorando una señora cuya casa había sido allanada y su esposo detenido (aunque liberado dos días después), como consecuencia de una falsa denuncia.”]
45 Ibid.: 579. [“La reconciliación no cae del cielo en un paracaídas. La reconciliación no es cerrar los ojos para dejar de ver lo que nos separa. No es pasividad. Es también lucha, o sea quitar obstáculos que se oponen a ella.”]
media who asserted that reconciliation was not possible with Marxists, who rather had to be defeated.

While the junta is never mentioned in Ariztía’s letter, its effects are felt throughout. There is an unspoken implication that the junta is the source of much of the suffering. However, Ariztía did not seek to undermine the Church’s strategy of private diplomacy by making the government the target of his criticism. Rather he sought to advance the strategy by inspiring people to promote reconciliation with the enemies of the junta and solidarity with those persecuted by the junta. Ariztía called on people to develop a sense of solidarity with the persecuted by visiting families with relatives detained or terminated from their jobs.46 “We must become accustomed to situating ourselves and viewing the world and its problems from the perspective of the most poor.”47 By encouraging people to help the persecuted and not to denounce others, he was promoting a society where there would be less suffering and where it would be more difficult for the government to cause harm.

Brian Smith claims that Ariztía did actually reject the Church’s commitment to private diplomacy by making specific demands on the junta in his letter. Specifically, Smith quotes Ariztía as requesting “freedom of the press and of assembly…liberty for unions and political freedoms.”48 However, it is not clear where this quote comes from. While Smith cites the letter, these demands are not

46 In every neighborhood, make contact, visit, be close with all of the families that have people detained or who have lost a job” [“En cada barrio, tomar contacto, visitar, estar cerca, de todas las familias que tienen personas detenidas o que han sido cortadas del trabajo.] Ibid.
47 Ibid. [“Acostumbrémonos a situarnos y a mirar la vida y los problemas desde el lado de los más pobres.”]
48 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 293.
found in the text of the letter printed in the magazine Mensaje, and they are in tension with the letter’s focus on the people of Chile.49

Ariztía also did not shy away from criticizing Church officials who he felt did not exhibit a sufficient compassion for the suffering. He sent an open letter to Father Raúl Hasbún, a prominent broadcaster on the Catholic University TV station and a strong supporter of the junta. Hasbún had recently made disparaging comments about leftists, saying for instance, “The only way to defeat Marxism is to confront it...with a volume of moral and spiritual energy stronger than it.”50 In his letter Ariztía reminded Hasbún of his influence and that his words were not promoting reconciliation. “How is it possible that in your words the suffering of those that have defeated in these events are so absent?...I do not refer to a specific group. I refer to...the most humble of people that have the right to a Church that gives them, in some way, their voice.”51

This letter was swiftly attacked in the media. In a newspaper article the Federation of Students of the Catholic University (FEUC) expressed its “public indignation” and “offense as Catholics and students” at Ariztía’s letter. The article went on to describe the dangers of Marxism as an immoral, oppressive and unchristian ideology. It added that Ariztía’s language corresponds “to the same demagogic language that dominated our debate for so much time and that drove us to

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49 As Smith’s Church and Politics in Chile is one of the foundational books on the Catholic Church in Chile, this mistake has permeated other books as well. For example, William T. Cavanaugh repeats this claim in Torture and Eucharist, citing Smith rather than the original letter. Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: theology, politics, and the body of Christ, 90.
50 El Mercurio, November 18, 1973, quoted in Desde Chile), 129. [“El único modo de derrotar el marxismo es enfrentándolo...con un caudal de energía moral y espiritual más fuerte que el mismo.”]
51 Fernando Ariztía, “Carta abierta al Presbítero Raúl Hasbún,” Santiago, November 20, 1973, quoted in Chile: masacre de un pueblo; cristianos frente a los hechos; resistencia y solidaridad. [“¿Cómo es posible que en tus palabras esté tan ausente el sufrimiento de los que han sido vencidos en estos acontecimientos? No me refiero a un bando determinando. Me refiero al obrero, al poblador, al soldado, a los niveles de las personas más humildes que tienen derecho a que la Iglesia les preste en cierto modo su voz”]

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the edge of the ultimate abyss.”52 Another article by Catholic University professor Manuel Andrado Alvarado accused Ariztía of making “declarations with political repercussions” during moments of demanding circumstances.53

**Support among Bishops for the Regime**

While many bishops viewed the junta as a temporary necessity, a minority of bishops were more unequivocal in their support of the junta. These bishops reflected a minority view that held Marxism to be the principal enemy and its doctrine to be intrinsically anti-Christian. They believed that it was their responsibility to provide the junta with their utmost support in its campaign against Marxism. Even though they were a minority, these bishops received wide coverage in the government-controlled media, providing them with outsized influence in Chile and allowing them to provide the Junta with disproportionate moral legitimacy. Moreover, this vocal minority prevented the Church as a whole from expressing a coherent unified public criticism of the regime.54

In contrast, the repressive atmosphere and the junta’s control of the media limited the ability of Church officials to express more critical opinions publicly. In private, though, these opinions were strongly felt within the Church. For instance, the Cardinal recounts that in the days after the coup, many priests streamed into his house, asking him not to attend the Te Deum service, in order to avoid granting the

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52 “Carta de FEUC a Obispo Ariztía,” *El Mercurio*, December 6, 1973. [“Haremos publica la expresión de nuestra indignación…nosotros ofende como católicos y como estudiantes…”]; [“Su lenguaje corresponde a la misma palabra demagógica que dominó nuestro debate ideológico por tanto tiempo y que nos condujo al borde del definitivo abismo.”]
53 “Reflexionando sobre la carta de un Obispo,” *El Mercurio*, December 17, 1973. [“…haya hecho declaraciones con repercusiones políticas en los momentos que las circunstancias así lo exigieron.”]
54 Daubechies, "Obispos Chilenos: el difícil camino de la colegialidad," 585.
Church’s legitimacy to the act of violently seizing political power. Moreover, this disproportionate public influence of conservative Church officials troubled the Cardinal. A declaration by the Archdiocese of Santiago, affirmed “We consider it unacceptable that [the media] presents as the view of the Church that which is only believed by a few that have easy access to the means of social communication, while the great majority of active Catholics continue together with their bishops their silent work.”

Among the efforts to legitimize the regime, one of the most extravagant was that of Alfredo Cifuentes, a retired archbishop of La Serena. In early October he publicly presented his episcopal ring to the junta, describing it as a “modest contribution to the work of reconstruction of Chile.” In mid-November, Archbishop Emilio Tagle, praised the junta on television, emphasizing the perils Chile had faced under the Marxist government. In his televised address, he described the country as “a sickness condemned to death that has been liberated with an appropriate operation.”

As late as March 1974, Bishop Augusto Salinas of Linares reiterated this point, describing the coup as a justified rebellion against an illegitimate government. If the military had not executed the coup, said Salinas, “the country would be a slave to

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56 Ruiz-Tagle, "La Iglesia frente a la prensa," 267. [“Consideramos inaceptable que se presente como opinión de la Iglesia lo que es parecer de algunos que tienen fácil acceso a los medios de comunicación social mientras la gran mayoría de los católicos activos continúan junto a sus Obispos su trabajo silencioso.”]
58 *El Mercurio*, January 20, 1974, cited in Yañez, 55) Eugenio Yáñez Rojas, *La Iglesia chilena y el gobierno militar: itinerario de una difícil relación (1973-1988)* (Santiago: Editorial Andante, 1989), 55. [“Como un enfermo condenado a morir que se ha liberado por una acertada operación, la país ha perdido alguna sangre, ha sufrido algún dolor, hay heridas que deben cicatrizarse. Pero se ha salvado la vida de Chile como nación libre y soberana”]
Marxism, with the consequence of tyranny, theft, persecution, and foreign domination…”

This fixation on the menace of Marxism led some of the bishops to justify the junta’s occasional excesses as well as the need to make sacrifices to “liberate Chile.” Tagle explicitly made this point in his television appearance. While he conceded that “the country has lost some blood” he said that this was outweighed by the need to save “Chile as a free and sovereign nation” Salinas repeated this theme by justifying the sacrifices that Chile had to make. “We are in a time of great sacrifices. Let no one deceive themselves into thinking that it is possible to reconstruct Chile without strengthening ourselves and suffering. The most fruitful times of nations are those of pain. In these Chile was born, in these she forged her greatness.”

Thus, some bishops supported the junta in the face of overwhelming evidence of human rights abuses. When the United Nations condemned the junta in November 1974 for its human rights violations, Tagle sent General Pinochet a letter of support, writing, “Chile has given the world an exemplary lesson…The Armed Forces have

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60 El Mercurio, January 20, 1974 cited in Yáñez Rojas, La Iglesia chilena y el gobierno militar: itinerario de una difícil relación (1973-1988), 55. [“Como un enfermo condenado a morir que se ha liberado por una acertada operación, la país ha perdido alguna sangre, ha sufrido algún dolor, hay heridas que deben cicatrizarse. Pero se ha salvado la vida de Chile como nación libre y soberana”]

61 El Mercurio, March 23, 1974, quoted in Rojas and Vanderschueren, "La Iglesia Católica y la junta militar," 110. [“Estamos en hora de grandes sacrificios. Que nadie se engañe pensando que podemos reconstruir a Chile sin esforzarnos y sufrir. Las horas más fecundas de las naciones son las del dolor. En ellas nació Chile, en ellas forjó su grandeza”]
liberated Chile from Marxism…Nevertheless, Chile continues to be the target of their attacks."

It is true that there were some bishops who supported the coup and the junta, yet expected a return to democracy. For instance in December 1973, Bishop Francisco Valdés of Osorno, a supporter of the junta, affirmed in a pastoral letter that “to reconstruct the homeland is to establish fraternal relations within the coexistence of democracy and authentic liberty.” However, other bishops were less supportive of democracy, distrusting the general population and convinced that sustained military rule was the best protection against Marxism. Thus, Bishop Eladio Vicuña of Chillán declared in December that it was “very beneficial that the honorable junta has imposed a long period of political silence;” the coup, he said, was “an act of patriotic heroism.” This support for political repression and the declarations of support from bishops over six months after the coup, demonstrates that many of the bishops were not only interested in legitimizing the coup itself, but also legitimizing the continued presence of the military in the government.

While many bishops viewed the junta as a temporary necessity, this explanation cannot explain these unequivocal expressions of support for the junta. Rather, these bishops reflected a minority view that held Marxism to be the principal enemy and its doctrine to be intrinsically anti-Christian. They believed that it was their responsibility to provide the junta with their utmost support in its campaign

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62 Letter to President Pinochet, December 3, 1974 cited in Ibid. [“Chile ha dado al mundo una lección ejemplar...Las FF.AA. lo han liberado del Marxismo...Sigue siendo sin embargo el blanco de sus ataques”]
63 Ibid.: 109. [“reconstruir la patria es establecer relaciones fraternales en la convivencia democrática y en la autentica libertad.”]
64 El Mercurio, December 24, 1973 [“Es un gran bien para el país que la Honorable Junta de Gobierno haya implantado por largo tiempo silencio político”]
against Marxism. Even though they were a minority, these bishops received wide coverage in the government controlled media. This provided them with outsized influence in Chile and allowed them to provide the Junta with some moral legitimacy. Moreover, this vocal minority prevented the Church as a whole from expressing a coherent unified public criticism of the regime. Rather, they muddled the Church’s message and diminished the power of the criticism that individual bishops were making.

**Attacks on Pro Paz and the Church**

As the Church’s increasingly vocal defense of human rights attracted attacks by the media, so too did Pro Paz’s work documenting human rights abuses. The report by Pro Paz for the bishops, outlining the junta’s abuses, ended up being leaked to the media. While it was meant to be confidential, the Mexican newspaper *El Excelsior* was able to obtain it and without Pro Paz’s permission, published large excerpts on May 15, 1974. Under the headline “Repression of all Forms Overwhelms the Chilean People,” it was known as the Scherer Report, after the newspaper’s director, Julio Scherer, who secured it. While previous articles had been published about the abuses occurring in Chile, this article for the first time made clear that Pro Paz was systematically documenting the junta’s human rights abuses.65

The Chilean press jumped on the story, labeling the officials in charge of Pro Paz as traitors and criticizing them for using the Church’s special legal status to fabricate with impunity libelous attacks on the junta. In one such instance the newspaper, *La Segunda*, published a bold front page headline in a style that might

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normally be reserved for declarations of war, “SLANDERERS AGAINST CHILE!”66 The Evangelical support for Pro Paz was vulnerable to accusations of engaging in politics and these attacks had the affect of weakening their support. The Scherer report and subsequent media attacks precipitated the withdrawal of the Baptist, Methodists-Pentecostal and the Orthodox Churches from Pro Paz.67

In April 1974 the director of the DINA, Manuel Conteras, visited Cardinal Silva to inform him that the Church and Pro Paz were engaging in dangerous activities and that it would be regrettable if something were to happen to the Cardinal. Specifically Contreras said, “There are many crazies walking about.” Contreras offered to provide continuous security, which would also provide the government with around the clock surveillance. The Cardinal rejected the offer, knowing that accepting it would provide the DINA with knowledge of all of his movements.68 In another incident at the end of 1973, the Cardinal’s house was even searched by members the Air Force, claiming to be looking for a piece of a plane that had fallen from the sky.69

The Cardinal Fluctuates between Open Criticism and Neutrality

In a 1974 Easter homily, Cardinal Silva used his most dramatic language since the coup, implicitly blaming the Junta for human rights abuses and affirming his willingness to die in defense of the persecuted. “We have said to our nation, to our

66 La Segunda, “¡CALUMNIADORES CONTRA CHILE!” May 16, 1974 reproduced in Ruiz-Tagle, "La Iglesia frente a la prensa."
69 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 296.
authorities, that they cannot lack the principles of respect for man, that human rights are sacred, that no one can violate them. We have told them, in every tone, this truth. They have not heard us.” 70 The Cardinal added, “I love my nation, I love my people and if it were really necessary to die for them, I would ask the Lord to give me the strength to carry the cross until the end.” 71

However, when trying to disseminate his message, the Cardinal ran into the state controlled media. Most publications refused to publish his homily, although radio Balmaceda of the suspended Christian Democratic Party was one of the only outlets to run it. When the station tried to retransmit the homily for a third time, the junta closed it down for a week. 72 Despite the homily’s more forthright, the Cardinal was still intent on maintaining good relations with the junta. TheIn a June homily he expressed the need to work with those in the government and said that they have goodwill, patriotism and that one can count on them. 73

In September, as the government prepared to mark the first anniversary of the coup, the Cardinal refused to preside over a special anniversary Mass and instructed all priests that there would be no official religious ceremonies to mark the day. 74 Nevertheless, the Cardinal did participate in the traditional Te Deum service on September 18, in order to recognize the partnership between the state and Chile’s

70 Raúl Silva Henríquez and Juan B. Fernández, Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez: coherencia de un mensaje (Chile: Hoy Ediciones: Empresa Editora Araucaria, 1987), 183. [“Hemos dicho a nuestro pueblo, a nuestras autoridades, que no se puede faltar a los principios del respeto al hombre, que los derechos humanos son sagrados, que nadie puede violarlos. Les hemos dicho, en todos los tonos, esta verdad. No se nos ha oído.”]
71 Ibid. [“Amo a mi pueblo, amo a mi gente y realmente si fuera necesario morir por ella, yo le pediría al Señor que me diera fuerzas para cargar con su cruz hasta el extremo”]
72 Silva Henriquez, Memorias, 25.
73 “Queremos el amor que edifica,” Mensaje, no. 230 (July 1974): 304.
different religious faiths. In his homily, the Cardinal did not betray the increasingly
critical attitude of the Church toward the junta. Nor did he reiterate the previous
criticisms made by himself or the Episcopal Conference in its April declaration.
Rather, Cardinal Silva spoke of general values and attempted to use Chile’s common
history and culture to forge a consensus around the need to respect basic human
rights.

In the homily, Silva addressed the importance of liberty and the legal order
in guarding against oppression, anarchy and the arbitrary use of power. He sought
to ground these values in a lecture on Chile’s history, concluding that “[i]n Chile
there is no capacity or validity to any historical project, nor social model that means
infringing on the personal liberty or the national sovereignty.” This homily was
striking for its lack of criticism, specific suggestions and references to detailed human
rights. The focus on general values makes clear that despite the fraying relations
between the Church and junta in private, Cardinal Silva was still committed to
maintaining positive relations with the junta and using his public speeches in
furthering that goal.

Two months later, Cardinal Silva spoke at the dedication for the newly
constructed Maipu Temple, built in honor of the battle where Chile secured
independence. This time he did speak about human rights, saying, “[t]here is not
peace nor reconciliation but where the rights of men—all the rights; and all the men–

75 Raúl Silva Henríquez, *Los Te Deum del Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez en el régimen militar*
(Santiago: Ediciones Copygraph, 1988), 26, 28.
76 Ibid., 28. [“En Chile no tiene cabida o vigencia a ninguna proyecto histórico, ningún modelo social
que signifique conculcar la libertad soberanía nacional”]
are ardently respected,” and he went on to detail basic human rights, such as the right to not be tortured and the free access to information. However, he did so, not in relation to the situation in Chile, but in the context of describing the documents that came out of the recent Synod of bishops in Rome. According to Cardinal Silva, these speeches were successful in ameliorating the tensions with the junta.

**A Concern about Poverty**

In contrast to the Church’s public treatment of human rights, it was more forthright and specific in discussing issues of poverty in Chile. In their Christmas letter the Episcopal Conference stated,

“For many the Christmas this year will be sad: there is not any money. The salaries do not rise. There is unemployment. We remember those that are prisoners or that have relatives that are prisoners, or outside the country, or far from the house. Those that are sick and elderly. Those that are unemployed and those that do not have the necessities to live with dignity.”

The bishops also advocated solidarity with the poor, asking those with the ability to spend freely not to do so out of respect for those less fortunate. Nowhere in the letter did the bishops place any blame or offer any significant suggestions for change. The most controversial section was the Episcopal Conference’s lamenting of the poverty and prisoners in Chile. Nevertheless, the junta did not appreciate such a blunt

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78 Ibid.

79 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 51.

portrayal of Chile’s problems, later stating that the bishops had intended with their letter to paint a “black picture” of the situation in Chile.81

Much of the Episcopal Conference’s criticism was in response to the economic changes that the junta was beginning to implement. In mid 1974, University of Chicago economists, known as “Los Chicago boys,” began gaining influence within the junta and introducing neoliberal economic reforms. These reforms, termed “shock treatment,” forced dramatic changes onto Chile. In 1975 the junta cut government spending by 27 percent and between 1974 and 1976 slashed import tariffs from 70 percent to 33 percent. Moreover, it curtailed credit, raising interest rates from 49.9 percent to 178 percent in 1975. As a result, between 1974 and 1975, GDP fell by 15 percent, industrial production dropped by 25 percent, real wages fell to 62.9 percent of their 1970 levels and unemployment jumped from 9.7 percent to 18.7 percent.82 These economic austerity measures also had the effect of worsening income inequality. Between 1969 and 1978 the consumption of the poorest 20 percent fell by 31.1 percent, while the consumption of the richest 20 percent rose by 15.6 percent.83

Private Diplomacy Becomes More Forceful

In the face of the growing poverty and the systematization of repression, the Church remained committed to influencing the junta through private diplomacy. In April 1974 the Episcopal Conference sent another private letter to the junta expressing its concerns. First, the letter asked for the “…return to the ordinary

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81 Silva Henriquez, Memorias, 51.
83 Ibid., 186.
practices that guarantee more completely respect for human rights.”84 Second, the bishops also expressed their distress over the stifling of social organizations by the imposition of military order on Chile’s civil society. Specifically, the bishops were worried about the repression of small community-based groups of laypeople, known as base communities. “The Armed Forces…rely on a vertical command structure. Instead, the Chilean people, for more than a half century, have been fighting to construct their base organizations, by the initiative and with the participation of their own activists, through a long and difficult fight.”85 Third, the bishops also criticized the junta’s economic policies, asking whether the neoliberal economic reforms “were too violent or excessive, and if we haven’t fallen from one bad to another bad.”86 Finally, the Church expressed its distress over the “insufficient recognition of the right to disagree.”87 The junta responded to the letter as an affront against its efforts to protect Chile, claiming the Church was being deceived by Communists.88

In August 1974, the Cardinal, along with other religious leaders in Pro Paz, sent a letter to Pinochet, putting the Church’s call for reconciliation into more concrete requests. They appealed for an end to Chile’s “state of war,” amnesty for political prisoners and a review of all military trials by the judiciary. On August 23, 1974 Pinochet responded by having the letter published in the press and issuing a response explaining the reasons for the “state of war” and criticizing the Church’s

84 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 55. [“…el retorno a las practicas ordinarias que garantizan más plenamente el respeto a los derechos humanos”]
85 Ibid. [“Las Fuerzas Armadas…se apoyan en la verticalidad del mando. En cambio, el pueblo chileno, desde más de medio siglo, viene luchando por construir sus organismos de base, por iniciativa y con la participación de sus propios militantes, a través de una lucha larga y difícil.”]
86 Ibid., 56. [“demasiado violento o excesivo, y si no hemos caído de un mal en otro mal.”]
87 Ibid. [“un insuficiente reconocimiento del derecho a discrepar.”]
88 Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: theology, politics, and the body of Christ, 93; Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 56.
intrusion into the political sphere. He went on to explain that even if Marxists were to infiltrate the Church, he would not interfere with its internal workings. 89

Days later, Pinochet sent a letter to the Cardinal expressing his objections to the work of Pro Paz and accused the Church of denigrating the world’s perception of the military government. 90 Moreover, Pinochet wrote that while he was worried about the infiltration by Marxists in the churches, he would not consider it appropriate to make suggestions regarding the Church’s internal affairs. The Cardinal responded by defending Pro Paz as an organization with the support of not just the Catholic Church but also all other Christian Churches. He suggested that Pinochet establish a “democratic military government” that respected the human rights of all people and judicial tribunals apply the law. 91

It was becoming increasingly evident that private diplomacy was having no effect on the junta’s policies. As Carlos González, bishop of Talca, remarked after the end of the dictatorship, “Everything done in private was useless.” 92 As a result, a debate emerged among the bishops around the efficacy of maintaining this strategy. According to the Cardinal’s memoirs, many found private diplomacy not just ineffective, but counterproductive. While its goal was to influence the government in a manner that would not be interpreted as hostile, the junta was becoming increasingly upset with the Church’s private letters. At the same time, the Chilean

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89 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: Odense University Press, 1997), 45; Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 36.
91 Ibid., 64-65; Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 36-37.
92 Bishop Carlos González, quoted in Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: theology, politics, and the body of Christ, 95.
people were left in silence and without a clear idea of what the Church truly thought on the human rights situation in Chile.93

Nevertheless, despite one and a half years of evidence that private diplomacy was ineffective, the bishops concluded that they should continue with the strategy. This decision was not due to any lack of commitment to human rights. Rather, the bishops feared the potential outcome of the alternative, public denunciation. According to Cardinal Silva, many conservative bishops feared that their criticism could worsen the human rights situation. At a time when the Church was advocating peace and reconciliation, some bishops believed that denunciations would provide support to leftist militant groups that were intent on harming the government.94 Such a consequence would provoke civil unrest and increased violent repression by the government. While many bishops opposed the junta’s human rights violations, they also saw violent resistance as contrary to the Gospel and thus were hesitant to speak out; for fear that their words would be used towards such an end.

This attitude must also be understood in the context of the threat posed by the USSR and the spread of communism to Latin America with the Cuban Revolution 15 years earlier. While the bishops had been accepting of Salvador Allende’s presidency, they were unequivocally opposed to totalitarian communism, viewing it as irrevocably anti-Christian. The significant popular support for Salvador Allende’s communist government and the earlier strength of militant communist groups demonstrated that Chile was highly vulnerable to a communist takeover. Thus, not only did the bishops fear a violent clash between the junta and leftist groups, but they

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94 Ibid.
further feared that if the groups were triumphant, the outcome would be worse than
the current military dictatorship.

This sentiment was confirmed by an internal Church strategy document
written by Father Pablo Fontaine in 1976. The document was written to explain to
those working within the Church why the bishops were so reticent to criticize the
junta. “The Church does not want to be the cause of the country someday falling into
the orbit of Russia…It thought that a Communist dictatorship is harsher than ours and
will leave less room for the preaching of the Gospel.”95

Fontaine also explains that the bishops feared a forceful criticism would
divide the Church and provoke a fierce conflict with the state. The former would
diminish the Church’s moral authority by generating a sense of disunity. The later
would lead to severe restriction of the Church’s ability to provide social services and
fulfill its religious mission. Both occurrences could have the effect of undermining
the good the Church could do through its social services, cautious criticisms and
private diplomacy. Thus, Fontaine asserts, “The Church needs to carve out a place for
itself in the world and cannot continually put its own survival or lives of its adherents
in danger. It needs to preserve the progress of its institutions and to maintain its
presence in all corners of the world.”96 If the Church’s forthright criticisms were to
provoke severe restrictions on endeavors such as that of Pro Paz, the bishops feared
the result could have been an overall worsening of the humanitarian situation.

95 Pablo Fontaine, "Unidad, profecía y evangelización en la Iglesia Chilena 1976," (Archive of the
Vicaría de la Solidaridad, July 1976). [“La Iglesia no quiere ser la causante de que el país caiga algún
día en la órbita de Rusia…Se piensa que una dictadura comunista será más dura que la nuestra y dejará
menos cabida a la predicación del Evangelio.”]
96 Ibid., 9. [“La Iglesia necesita hacerse un hueco en el mundo, y no puede poner en peligro a cada
momento su propia subsistencia o la vida de sus fieles. Necesita preservar la marcha de sus
instituciones y mantenerse presente en todos rincones del mundo.”]
One bishop interviewed anonymously in April 1975 expressed the Church’s decision making process in explicitly utilitarian terms:

Torture isn’t everything…The person tortured affects 50 to 100 persons. But there are many other social and economic problems that affect more Chileans. For many the situation is now better—no strikes, no chaos, order has returned…A prophetic challenge is not useful—not because the structure of the Church must be maintained…but rather to preserve the presence of the Church…I am content with the present Church—it has the independence and freedom to criticize. More than that is not useful or prudent.97

Thus, the Church’s objective was to help as many people as possible. While the bishops held torture to be an absolute moral wrong, the bishops did not hold denouncing it to be an absolute obligation. Rather, they were more pragmatic and took other actions when they felt it would help more people. Moreover, while private diplomacy did seem ineffective in influencing the general policies of the junta, it was often successful in individual cases. An anonymous bishop interviewed by Brian Smith made this point, saying that he successfully convinced the local military officials in his diocese to not torture.98

Nevertheless, the Church could also conclude, after analyzing all of the risks and benefits, that public denunciation was the best tool for improving human rights. For this reason, Fontaine writes that the Church’s concern for maintaining its own survival as an institution is not “absolute value” and “can be set aside for a serious reason.”99 Thus, he asserted that the Church must both accept compromises with those in power while still issuing public denunciations when viewed to be most

97 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 299.
98 Ibid., 298.
effective. Bishop Alejandro Jiménez agreed with this sentiment, stating, “Private conversations were important and had to be done, but they were insufficient. I believe that what the military most feared and what the greatest effect on it was the courageous, objective and public denunciation of the situations that existed...In cases of extreme violations of human rights, a word from the Church was very important.”

100 “…the area of the necessary compromises with the powerful, an acceptance of transitory and partial concessions in view of greater goods, specifically in order to exercise its mission. But this policy should not override the prophetic spirit. Both dimensions are in the action of the Church.” [“...la esfera de los compromisos necesarios con los poderosos, un aceptar concesiones transitorias y parciales en vista de mayores bienes, concretamente de ejercer su misión. Pero esta política de no debe predominar sobre el espíritu profético. Ambas dimensiones están en la acción de la Iglesia.”] Ibid.

Chapter Four: Church-State Tensions Escalate

Zamora Incident

While the Church sought to promote good relations with the government through private diplomacy, its policy of not discriminating among the persecuted quickly became a source of tension as the recipients of Church aid came to include fugitives pursued by the junta. On May 15, 1975 DINA agents brought Jaime Zamora, a socialist and prisoner, outside the Pro Paz building so that he could identify those at Pro Paz that had previously helped him. Zamora then managed to escape and entered the Pro Paz building. As DINA agents followed him into the building, they were told that they had entered a Church building and were requested to leave. DINA subsequently called in reinforcements to surround the building. As the situation intensified, Cardinal Silva called Pinochet, saying “Mr. President, the DINA has surrounded the Comité Pro Paz and I am told that they might produce an act of violence against the Church. A person has been protected in a building of the Church, and we trust in the inviolability that these buildings have always had in Chile. I beg that you put an end to this situation.” Pinochet complied with the Cardinal’s request and within minutes the DINA agents withdrew.¹

In the meantime, Zamora was moved out of the building and placed into hiding with some priests. While he was there, the Cardinal’s physician examined Zamora’s body and made a diagram of the locations where there appeared signs of torture. According to the Cardinal’s memoirs, this illustration profoundly affected

¹Ibid., 59-61. [“Señor Presidente, la DINA ha rodeado el Comité Pro Paz y me dicen que puede producir un hecho de violencia en contra de la Iglesia. Una persona se ha aislado en un recinto de Iglesia, y nosotros confiamos en la inviolabilidad que estos recintos han tenido siempre en Chile. Yo le ruego que usted ponga atajo a esta situación”]
him and many other bishops. Upon first seeing the diagram, the Cardinal writes he wanted to scream, “How is it possible that in our country there will always be evil committed against man?”² For many of the bishops, the Cardinal states, the diagram had a lasting impact and “…determined the energy with which they began to assume the defense of human rights.”³ Moreover, he wrote a letter to Pinochet about what had happened:

I think, first, it is inevitable that a Catholic priest will express judgment on the methods and evidence too often attributed to the DINA...And their moral judgment cannot be otherwise, with a Christian and honest conscience, the absolute repudiation on behalf of values that have been a fundamental part of mankind’s ethical heritage…Any attempt at a justification based on incorrect facts will end with the further discrediting of our country and will create even greater tension and mistrust. ⁴

In response, General Pinochet announced that he considered the situation a case of “self torture.”⁵ Once more, this incident demonstrated the capacity of private diplomacy to save the lives of individuals, while at the same time revealing its inability to change the junta’s policies and pattern of human rights abuses.

**The Junta Turns Against the Cardinal**

In the face of Cardinal Silva’s commitment to protecting enemies of the junta, together with his forceful private diplomacy, the generals quickly came to see Silva as an obstacle to their efforts at ridding Chile of communism. Therefore, they hoped to get rid of Silva. But they never considered attempting an assassination as regimes in

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² Ibid., 61. [“¡Cómo era posible que en nuestra patria de siempre se cometiera tanta maldad contra el hombre!”]
³ Ibid. [“…determinó la energía con que comenzaron a asumir la defensa de los derechos humanos.”]
⁴ Ibid., 62. [“Creo, en primer lugar, inevitable que un sacerdote católico exteriorice juicios sobre los procedimientos con demasiada frecuencia y evidencia imputados a la DINA. Ellos son, desde luego, conocidos ampliamente en Chile, y en forma particular por los hombres de la Iglesia. Y la calificación moral que merecen no puede ser otro, para una conciencia cristiana y honesta, que el absoluta repudio, en nombre de valores que son ya parte sustantiva y definitiva del patrimonio ético de la humanidad... Cualquier intento de justificación basada en hechos inexactos termina en ulterior descrédito de nuestra patria y genera desconfianzas y tensiones todavía mayores”]
⁵ Ibid., 61.
other Latin American countries did. Rather, they hoped that the Pope would assign
the Cardinal to a position in Rome and appoint another Archbishop of Santiago. To
instigate this outcome, the junta tried to manufacture a scandal. In July 1975 the
Vatican received an anonymous communication accusing the Cardinal of using
Church funds for political purposes and exploiting his ecclesiastical taxation rights in
order to enrich himself.6

The Vatican took the accusations very seriously and launched an independent
investigation. As a result, the Cardinal was forced to write a report outlining in detail
all of the charitable and social services run by the Archdiocese of Santiago, as well as
to travel to Rome in order to explain himself to the Pope.7 In a letter to Cardinal
Sebastiano Baggio, prefect of the Congregation of Bishops, the Cardinal wrote of the
growing campaign to undermine his work. “There are many things that they say about
the Archbishop of Santiago. The papal envoy has told me that I am the most hated
and the most discussed man in Chile. I would like to clearly establish who my
adversaries are...”8 To the junta’s dismay, the Vatican cleared Silva of all wrong
doing, reiterated its support for his work and assigned him more funds for the
Church’s social services.9

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6 In 1961 Cardinal Silva was forced to sell the Archbishop’s palace so that the government could widen
the street it was on. The Cardinal invested the money in a vineyard, which his brother administered,
and used the income to fund the Archdiocese’s charitable works. In the communication the Cardinal
was accused of using this for personal gain and political purposes. Ibid., 63-64.
7 Ibid., 67.
8 Ibid., 65-66. [“Hay muchas cosas que se dicen del arzobispo de Santiago. El señor nuncio me ha dicho
que soy el hombre más odiado y más discutido en Chile. Quisiera establecer claramente quienes son
mis adversarios y quiénes son los que me discuten y están en contra mia...”]
9 Ibid., 66.
**Gospel and Peace**

In early September of 1975, a year and a half after the Episcopal Conference published “Reconciliation in Chile,” the bishops released another document, “Gospel and Peace.” This document maintained the Episcopal Conference’s strategy of using private diplomacy to influence the junta and issuing mild public statements to rally public support around general values. Both documents refrained from criticizing the junta and sought to balance their promotion of human rights with praise for the government.

However, despite the media attacks on the Church, the false accusations against the Cardinal and the growing evidence of human rights abuses, including the explicit documentation of torture from the Zamora incident, the “Gospel and Peace” did not intensify the Episcopal Conference’s criticism of abuses. Rather criticism became much more guarded. In “Reconciliation in Chile” the bishops had expressed their concern over the existence of abuses within Chile such as “arbitrary or excessively long detentions” and “interrogations with physical or moral compulsions.”

While this document never blamed the junta for these abuses, it at least had acknowledged their occurrence. Moreover, the document had expressed an implicit criticism of the junta’s failure to maintain the rule of law and protect the people of Chile. However, in “Gospel and Peace” the bishops never acknowledge either the existence of human rights abuses or the harsh affects of the neoliberal economic reforms. Instead, the bishops outlined a series of basic human rights as preconditions for peace, although

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never acknowledged their violation in Chile. Among these was the “right to physical and moral integrity. [A person] cannot be subjected to physical torture.”11 The bishops even sought to emphasize how this right to bodily integrity was not an implicit criticism targeted at Chile but rather a global issue, stating, “[Torture] is still used in many parts of the world.” The Episcopal Conference also asserted importance of equality under the law and participation in a nation’s decisions and responsibilities.12 Moreover, the document affirmed the right to food, asserting, “When a person is hungry, Christ is hungry.”13

The Episcopal Conference also noted some general societal problems, although for the most part not specifying if these problems were specific to Chile. They criticized any form of patriotism that is restricted to “only a part of the population” or used support only a “particular government.”14 They also critiqued capitalism, stressing the costs to the poor of unrestrained economic development. Here they did directly criticize the government, stating, “We note with concern the tendency of the government to reduce social services”15 In defending the value of these services, they discussed how the poor do not have the means to pay for the requirements of life.

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12 Ibid. [“El patriotismo exige que todos sean iguales ante la ley. “…pueblo adulto, quiere también ser oído, tomar parte en la discusión y en las decisiones que afectan a la comunidad nacional. Ya lo dijimos: quiere participar.”]
13 Ibid. [“Cuando un hombre tiene hambre, Cristo tiene hambre”]
14 Ibid. [“Una primera deformación del nacionalismo consiste en estrechar su ámbito. Reducir el patriotismo a la manera de pensar y de sentir de un sector solamente de los habitantes de un país. Así algunos hacen coincidir el patriotismo con la adhesión irrestricta a un determinado régimen de gobierno, incluso a un determinado gobierno.”]
15 Ibid. [“Comprobamos con inquietud la tendencia del Gobierno a reducir los servicios públicos…”]
“The protection Government is a necessity for survival.”  

However, “Gospel and Peace” weakened this assertion of governmental responsibility for the poor by stating that “if it is necessary to remove this help, it should only be done gradually.” This seems to imply that the government is not required to provide the poor with their basic necessities, but only to refrain from withdrawing its aid abruptly.

The Episcopal Conference sought to balance its criticism of capitalism with a criticism of Marxism. Thus, it thanked the army for “liberating” Chile from a “Marxist dictatorship that appeared inevitable and that would have been irreversible.” Then the bishops condemned Marxism for employing an ends justify the means doctrine with the goal of defeating an economic class. Such conduct, “is a source of violence, it is a permanent threat to those that are legitimately disposed to resist Marxism, and it is often a justification for applying to Marxism those practices that it itself employs. It is, without a doubt, an obstacle, a tremendous obstacle to peace.” This seems to be an outright justification for the junta’s human rights violations. The logic seems to imply that as long as these abuses were carried out to resist Marxism, they were necessary since Marxists are predisposed to committing the

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16 Ibid. [“…la protección del Gobierno es una necesidad para la supervivencia…”]
17 Ibid. [“…si es necesario quitar este apoyo, sólo debería hacerse paulatinamente.”]
18 Ibid. [“Nosotros reconocemos el servicio prestado al país por las FF. AA. al liberarlo de una dictadura marxista que parecía inevitable y que había de ser irreversible.”] This claim is not supported by much historical evidence. Later in the same paragraph the bishops also engaged in a revision of history by placing full responsibility on the previous Marxist Popular Unity (UP) government for “bringing Chile to a civil war or a solution of force.” The state of violence towards the end of the UP administration, however, had nothing to do with their intentions and little to do with their policies. Rather, much of the problem had to do with the breakdown in civil political discourse within society. It was the hyper-polarization and the proliferation of armed groups using violence to effect political change that was the source of crisis in Chile. [“llevaba a Chile a una guerra civil o a una solución de fuerza.”]
19 Ibid. [“Esta conducta, oportunista e implacable muchas veces, es un factor de violencia, es una amenaza permanente a quienes legítimamente están dispuestos a resistir al marxismo, y es muchas veces un justificativo para aplicar al marxismo los procedimientos que él mismo emplea. Es, sin lugar a dudas, un obstáculo, un tremendo obstáculo para la paz.”]
same abuses. However, later in the document the bishops disavow such an interpretation, stating, “To hold that any means is permissible when used in the fight against Marxists is to apply the same ethics that we have condemned in them.”

This declaration presents Marxism as a dangerous threat to Chilean society and provides only muddled guidance on what means are permissible in defeating Marxism. By not criticizing any of the junta’s conduct in its war against Marxism and providing only muddled guidance, this document represents an implicit endorsement of the status quo. As the status quo is characterized by the junta’s systematic violation of human rights, this document is an implicit endorsement of that as well. Ironically, by this time the threat of Marxism was only an illusion manufactured by the media and the junta. The Church was in essence condemning the same people who were the target of the junta’s persecution, substantiating the fears and apprehensions that the regime used to support its actions. Instead of being an “obstacle of peace,” Marxism was a defeated political ideology in Chile, with absolutely no responsibility for the continued violence. Between October 1973 and August 1977 militants killed only nine soldiers or policeman, while hundreds of leftist activists were being persecuted, disappeared and tortured. It was the junta that was responsible for the lack of peace and the sense of fear that pervaded Chile. Despite this, in “Gospel and Peace” the bishops never criticized the junta’s actions.

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20 Ibid. [“Estimar que cualquier medio es lícito cuando se le usa en la lucha contra los marxistas es aplicar la misma ética que hemos denunciado en ellos.”]
21 Ibid. [“Obstáculo para la paz”]
The Church, however, did have some motivation to criticize Marxism apart from the perceived threat it posed to Chile. The junta and the media often sought to undermine the Church’s credibility by claiming that it was being infiltrated by Marxists. In this way the Church’s opponents could criticize the Church’s efforts to promote human rights and protect the persecuted without criticizing Catholicism itself. By categorically condemning and distancing itself from Marxism the Church sought to reinforce its credibility in the support of human rights.

The Episcopal Conference sought to balance its affirmation of basic human rights and its analysis of general problems in society, with praise for the junta. They repeated the junta’s complaints that there “exists an international campaign against Chile that distorts the truth.”23 This had the effect of undermining those working abroad to improve the human rights situation in Chile. They, also, affirmed a conception of the Armed Forces as apart from class interests and an institution uniquely capable of creating national unity. “The Armed Forces…represent the totality of the country. They are not, nor have ever been classists…They have traditionally maintained their separation from partisan politics. In this sense, they occupy a privileged position for being a factor of national unity.”24 The bishops even offered praise for the wives of the junta generals, thanking them for their tireless work in helping the people of Chile.25

23Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Evangelio y Paz [“Sabemos que existe una campaña internacional contra Chile que deforma la realidad.”]
24Ibid. [“Las Fuerzas Armadas, como muchas veces se ha señalado, representan a la totalidad del país. No son ni han sido nunca clasistas. Sus miembros viven de un sueldo fijo y no están ligados a intereses económicos. Se han mantenido tradicionalmente alejadas de lo partidismos políticos. En ese sentido, ocupan una posición privilegiada para ser factor de unidad nacional.”]
25Ibid. [“Reconocemos…la labor incansable de las señoras esposas de los miembros de la H. Junta de Gobierno…”]
This praise had the effect of clearing the junta of blame for the problems that the bishops had discussed. A logical conclusion to take from the document is that a government that embodies national unity and had saved Chile from a repressive dictatorship must not be capable of committing human rights violations or unjustly persecuting leftists. This is striking given the mounting evidence, gathered by Pro Paz, that the junta was systematically violating human rights in its persecution of suspected leftists. Moreover, by this time the Church had spent two years trying to improve the junta’s human rights record, and had unequivocally failed.

**A Paralyzed Episcopal Conference**

The inclusion of praise for the army in “Gospel and Peace,” and the mild nature of the document’s criticism were necessary in order to attain a consensus within the Episcopal Conference. The Conference was especially concerned with unity, given that two archbishops publicly rejected the intended meaning the April 1974 declaration, thus undermining its impact on the Chilean people. According to Brian Smith’s interviews with Bishops at the time, the original draft of “Gospel and Peace” did not include much praise for the junta, but it was later added to satisfy a few bishops who strongly supported the junta. Even with these compromises, the bishops could not agree on giving the document the status of pastoral letter. Rather, they designated it a working document, a theologically inferior status. These compromises were successful and no bishops expressed public dissent from the document.

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According to a survey conducted by Brian Smith in 1975, the year of “Gospel and Peace,” 50 percent of bishops favored denouncing human rights abuses, while the other 50 percent favored teaching only about social justice and Christian values. Among those that favored denouncing abuses, 80 percent of them supported “denouncing every form of repression or injustice specifically.” The other 20 percent only supported denouncing general injustices. This breakdown is confirmed by an analysis, mostly conducted by Yañez Rojas, of each bishop’s public statements. In this analysis, among bishops active in 1975, 14 had issued statements expressing support for the persecuted and poor, while 12 had issued statements supporting the junta.

This does not mean that many bishops supported denouncing the government explicitly, even if they deemed it the source of injustice. According to Smith’s survey, only ten percent felt that the Church should “publicly confront governments,” whose “ideologies or practices are in conflict with Catholic doctrine (e.g., Nazi Germany, various communist governments in Eastern Europe and Asia).” The other 90 percent preferred “private conversations better than public denunciations” and were “satisfied with [the] present stance of the Chilean Catholic Church.”

However, while there was significant support for denouncing human rights abuses (although not the abusers), the Episcopal Conference functioned on a

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28 The specific question asked was “What stance toward social problems is more fitting for a bishop?” 13 percent answered, “Preach Christian morality and its virtues.” 36.7 percent answered, “Teach social justice from a doctrinal perspective.” 10 percent answered, “Energetically denounce, but in general, situations of injustice” (italics in original). Finally, 40 percent answered, “Give a witness of solidarity with the oppressed, denouncing every of repression or injustice specifically” (italics in original). This survey included all 30 of Chile’s active bishops. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*, 29.

29 Ibid. Italics in original.

30 For a breakdown of all of the Chilean bishops by name, please see appendix one.

31 Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*, 302.
consensus basis, allowing a group of conservative bishops to prevent it from issuing critical declarations. At the same time the bishops were expected to support the statements of the Episcopal Conference and to keep their dissent private, so as not to weaken the bishops’ ability to influence the Chilean people. As Bishop Bernardino Piñera wrote in a 1977 document to his fellow bishops while Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference:

With an apparent disunity, one’s position is weakened in his own diocese. What is the word of one’s own bishop worth, if the neighboring bishop says or does the opposite? He doesn’t govern them, when the faithful follow the bishop that they like most, whether or not he is their bishop…Each one of us will become good for some and bad for others. We should accept…that, for the good of the unity, we should give the appearance of a great majority, even when we do not share it.32

However, among those bishops supportive of the junta, many did not share this commitment to unity. While the Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference recommended that Church officials not hold ceremonies on September 11, 1975 commemorating the coup, several bishops did so anyway. Bishop Francisco Gillmore most notably held a mass at the military academy, which was broadcast on television and attended by the members of the junta, as well as 24 military chaplains. At the mass the bishop granted a general absolution for sins to everyone present, even though the practice is usually reserved for soldiers in war when private confession would not be possible. In his homily, Bishop Gillmore thanked God that “the torch of

32 Bishop Bernardino Piñera “La Iglesia en Chile hoy,” quoted in Eugenio Yáñez Rojas, La Iglesia chilena y el gobierno militar: itinerario de una difícil relación (1973-1988) (Santiago: Editorial Andante, 1989), 40-41. [“Con una aparente desunión, la posición de cada uno se debilita en su propia diócesis. ¿Qué vale para sus propios fieles la palabra de su obispo, si el obispo vecino dice o hace contrario? Ya no rige aquello de que los fieles siguen al obispo que más les gusta, sea o no su obispo propio…Cada uno de nosotros llega a ser bueno para los unos y malo para los otros… Debemos aceptar también que, por el bien de la unidad, debemos acatar el parecer de una gran mayoría, aún cuando no la compartamos”]
freedom reappeared in the hands of the armed forces.” Thus, despite the Episcopal Conference’s efforts to reach consensus and preserve unity, conservative bishops still sought to undermine even the Conference’s mild criticism with such public expressions of support for the junta and the coup.

Among those bishops supporting more criticism by the Church, most refrained from doing so independent of the Episcopal Conference. While according to Smith’s survey 12 bishops favored denouncing specific instances of repression, up until 1975 very few bishops had spoken critically of the junta’s human rights violations. Among those that did, the only notable instances were Bishop Fernando Ariztía’s December 1973 pastoral letter and Cardinal Silva’s 1974 Easter homily. However, Ariztía’s letter was limited to calling on Chileans to help the persecuted and actively seek reconciliation and did not openly denounce abuses. The Cardinal’s homily was more of an outlier. He said, “We have said to our nation, to our authorities, that they cannot lack the principles of respect for man, that human rights are sacred, that no one can violate them. We have told them, in every tone, this truth. They have not heard us.” By specifically targeting the junta in its criticism, this speech reached a level of criticism not repeated elsewhere. Nevertheless, the criticism was indirect, only implying that there were human rights violations. It did not actually specify any

33 “Misa de Acción de Gracias en la Escuela Militar,” El Mercurio, September 12, 1975, quoted in Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 300.
35 Raúl Silva Henríquez and Juan B. Fernández, Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez: coherencia de un mensaje (Chile: Hoy Ediciones: Empresa Editora Araucaria, 1987), 183. [“Hemos dicho a nuestro pueblo, a nuestras autoridades, que no se puede faltar a los principios del respeto al hombre, que los derechos humanos son sagrados, que nadie puede violarlos. Les hemos dicho, en todos los tonos, esta verdad. No se nos ha oído.”]
abuses, nor did it place responsibility for them with the junta. At the most, it implied that the junta was not doing enough to prevent abuses.

This unwillingness of bishops to independently denounce the junta’s human rights violations may, in part, have reflected the Church’s commitment to private diplomacy and the reticence of many bishops to undermine this strategy. This was the argument Silva made to the Pope on November 3, 1973, when the Cardinal asked him not to release a letter critical of the junta’s abuses. Rather, Silva asserted that the best way to secure human rights was through private diplomacy and that would only be successful if the Church had good relations with the junta.\(^\text{36}\)

Nevertheless, as repression continued, the Church’s commitment to private diplomacy and unity became a source of frustration for many bishops. As one anonymous bishop remarked in July 1975, “There are divisions among us. There is a game going on between collegiality and unity (badly understood) and uniformity. The pope wants unity in the Church…However, unity can result in a position of supporting the government.”\(^\text{37}\)

As a result, in 1975 more bishops started speaking out independently about human rights abuses. Bishop Carlos Gonzalez of Talca held a mass celebrating Saint Joseph the Worker on May 1 where he brought up the issue of the disappeared. “Many people have arrived to narrate their anguish for disappeared relatives that they do not know where to find. It is a situation that causes pain and that, as a Church,
together with priests and religious we cannot ignore that we must do that which is in
our hands in order to help.’’38

Even the Cardinal, in his 1975 Te Deum speech, while not expressing any
direct criticism still made some specific requests of the junta. Earlier that year
Pinochet had introduced his desire to write a new Constitution for Chile. The Cardinal
sought to influence that change and demanded that “a new Constitution be the
guardian of rights and the promoter of the energies of all the inhabitants of this
land.”39 He even went so far as to assert that a Constitution that did not adequately
protect the people of Chile would have devastating consequences. “We cannot allow
a generation or a part of our people to feel impotent because their only opportunity to
live humanely has passed.”40 However, in accordance with his strategy of not openly
criticizing the junta, Silva targeted his criticism towards decisions that lay in the
future rather than in the past.

The Cardinal also praised the junta; however, unlike in “Gospel and Peace,”
he did so in a way that sought to influence their actions. “The President of the
Republic has said that he should be the defender of the weak, those who cannot make
their voices heard. We thank him for his public testimony, of the highest moral value

38 Carlos González, “1º de Mayo Día Internacional del Trabajo,” (Archive of the Vicaría de la
Solidaridad, May 1, 1975). [“Han llegado muchas personas a narrarme su angustia por familiares
desaparecidos que no saben donde encontrarlos. Es una situación que duele y que, como Iglesia, junto
da los sacerdotes y religiosas no podemos desconocer que hacemos lo que esté en nuestras manos para
ayudar.”]
39 Raúl Silva Henríquez, Los Te Deum del Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez en el régimen militar
(Santiago: Ediciones Copygraph, 1988), 48. [“En una nueva Constitución que ha de ser la tutora de los
derechos y la propulsora de las energías de todos los habitantes de esta tierra.”]
40Ibid. [“Nuestro compromiso, de amor y justicia, es reconstruir la sociedad chilena sobre bases sólidas
y ojalá definitivas; sí, ¡pero démonos prisa! No podemos permitir que una generación o un sector de
nuestro pueblo sienta transcurrir y pasar, en amarga impotencia, su oportunidad única de vivir
humanamente.”]
and the most genuine Christian character.” Thus, Silva hoped to make it more likely that the junta would defend the weak, or at the least, not obstruct the Church’s work in that area. This speech made evident the Cardinal was fully committed to maintaining his strategy of refraining from open criticism while using private diplomacy to influence the junta. However, the speech also demonstrated that Silva was not interested in merely lavishing praise on the junta, but wanted to use his public statements to exert pressure on it.

**Off-the-Record**

On September 30, 1975 the bishops’ suppressed criticism finally broke out to the open. Bishop Carlos Camus Larenas, the Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference, held a conversation with several foreign correspondents where he spoke frankly about the Church’s efforts in protecting the persecuted and the Church’s disagreements with the junta. The text of the conversation was widely disseminated in the Chilean press. Camus spoke of a “climate of hate” in Chile, and for the first time, put a public voice to the fear, by discussing the suffering and torture being endured by Chilean leftists.

Yes, they [the Marxists] have had a harsh experience of suffering, yes they have seen that another person, that has the same situation has been detained and has been tortured and has been destroyed, etc…To speak with a person who has been tortured, is to speak with a person who remains destroyed for many years. I have known active leaders, very brave people, who are now very humanly destroyed.”

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41Ibid. [“El señor Presidente de la República ha dicho que él debe ser el defensor de los más débiles, de los que no pueden hacer oír su voz. Le agradecemos su público testimonio, del más alto valor moral y del más genuino sello cristiano.”]
42“Conversación de Obispo Camus con corresponsales extranjeros,” *El Mercurio*, October 8, 1975. [“…clima del odio…”]
43Ibid. [“Sí ha tenido una experiencia dura de sufrimiento, sí ha visto que a otra persona, que tenía la misma situación lo han detenido y lo han torturado y lo han destruido, etc., yo creo que algo se amedrentan. Si no por la convicción, por lo menos por miedo. Mucha gente esta amedrentada….Hablar con una persona que ha sido torturada es una persona que queda destruida por muchos años. Yo he
Elaborating on the criticism of Marxism in “Gospel and Peace,” Camus asserted that while Marxism might be a threat, Marxists were not. He then went further and affirmed the Church’s commitment to defending the persecuted, regardless of political affiliation, from the “brute force” of the regime. He even sought to lessen the stigma associated with Marxists by defending the Pro Paz’s employment of them.

There are many officials in the Comité Pro Paz who have Marxist ideas, because it is logical…they were the ones who remained unemployed. Then, it also was an obligation to attend to them and give them employment…That there were people who in their private lives continued with their ideology, or developed some type of activity, is also possible. But we asked them that in the Comité they make any partisanship abstract.

In describing the progress made since overthrowing the Marxist government, Camus directly criticized the regime. “We have escaped the fire only to fall into the embers, and that has been the great error.” This contrasts markedly with the more unconditional praise in “Gospel and Peace” to the armed forces for “liberating” Chile from a “Marxist dictatorship that appeared inevitable and that would have been irreversible.” Camus also accused the government of trying to cover up the

conocido dirigentes muy activos, gente muy valiente, que están ahora muy destruidos humanamente…”

44 Ibid. [“Entonces, el hecho de que haya alguien que tenga el valor de enfrentamiento a la fuerza bruta el siempre aplaudido…La Iglesia ha defendido al perseguido político…”]
45 Ibid. [“Hay muchos funcionarios del Comité Pro Paz que son de ideas marxistas, porque es lo lógico….Así que muchos fueron en un comienzo de ideas marxistas, además que eran los que quedaron cesantes. Entonces, también era una obligación atenderlos a ellos dándoles un trabajo….El que haya personas que en su vida privada sigan con su ideología, o desarrollen algún tipo de actividad es posible, también. Pero nosotros les pedimos que en el Comité se haga abstracción de cualquier partidista.”]
46 Ibid. [“Salimos del fuego para caer en las brasas y ese ha sido el gran error”]
47 Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Evangelio y Paz [“Nosotros reconocemos el servicio prestado al país por las FF. AA. al liberarlo de una dictadura marxista que parecía inevitable y que había de ser irreversible.”]
economic pain being felt by the population, saying that unemployment was certainly higher than the official 20 percent figure.48

Even when the bishop offered praise to the wives of the junta generals, as was also done in “Gospel and Peace,” he did not do so in a way that concealed the country’s economic problems. He said the wives’ social work was “very commendable, but it is a palliative.”49 Therefore, through his praise, he made clear that Chile needed not just the services by a few wives, but more structural changes in order to truly help the poor.

Camus’ conversation with the foreign press was hugely significant, because it made public the voice of one of the most important officials in the Chilean Catholic Church as he challenged two years of government propaganda. Camus sought to make the case that people with Marxist sympathies were not an incurable threat that needed to be destroyed. He sought to rather give voice to their pain and humanize them in the eyes of Chileans.

Most of the secondary sources covering this event do not interpret it as the case of a frustrated bishop finally deciding to take public his candid opinions about the junta and its victims. Rather, they characterize it as off-the-record and interpret its subsequent publication as a breach of journalistic ethics by a rogue journalist. They then focus on the ensuing media attacks as part of a larger campaign against the Church.50 Nevertheless, this interpretation is incorrect. Only one segment of the

48 “Conversación de Obispo Camus con correposales extranjeros.” [“La cesantía ciertamente pasa del 20 por ciento.”]
49 Ibid. [“Eso es meritorio, pero es un paliativo.”]
50 Brian Smith called the conversation “An off-the-record news briefing to foreign correspondents...” Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 301. According to William Cavanaugh, the it was “one bishop’s off-the-record comments to a foreign journalist.” William T. Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: theology, politics, and the body of Christ (Oxford, UK
published conversation, discussing the Evangelical churches rather than the regime, was off-the-record. In response to a question on the great increase in Protestant evangelization, Camus said, “I would like to give an opinion, but outside the program. I would not like it to leave. I don’t know if you are interested in an opinion outside the program. Off the record, because it would be a lack of respect and charity for others.” Camus’s emphatic insistence that this answer be off-the-record, demonstrates that the entire conversation was not understood to be off-the-record.

Many news agencies published this conversation. It is true that Álvaro de Pineda de Castro, a Bolivian journalist, violated journalistic ethics by selling a tape of the entire conversation, including the off-the-record section, to the newspaper, La Segunda. However, the news agency Latin also published a summary the conversation that did not include Camus’s discussion on the Evangelical churches and it was never accused of publishing an off-the-record conversation. The Latin dispatch included many of Camus’s strikingly candid observations. Describing the “profound” disagreements between Church and government, it quoted Camus as saying, “We (the Church) are irrevocably for the defense of human rights, while the government is irrevocably for the defense of national security.” He then went on to discuss the

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51 “Conversación de Obispo Camus con corresponsales extranjeros.” [“Me gustaría dar un opinión, pero fuera de programa. No me gustaría que saliera. No sé si les interesa una opinión fuera de programa. Off de record, porque sería como una falta de respeto y caridad para con los demás.”]

52 Pineda was subsequently expelled from the Foreign Press Correspondents Association of Chile. La Asociación de Corresponsales de la Prensa Extranjera en Chile, "Acuerdo de los Corresponsales," El Mercurio, October 8, 1975.

53 “Dos versiones,” El País, October, 21 1975. [“Nosotros (la Iglesia) somos irrenunciables en la defensa de los derechos humanos, mientras es Gobierno es irrenunciable en la defensa de la seguridad nacional”]

“distressing social picture in the country” and explain the Church’s commitment to defend a person as he is, whatever his political ideology…54 Latin expressed the essence of Camus’s conversation, demonstrating that the Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference had decided to place the Church’s public voice squarely in defense of the poor and persecuted, and in opposition to the government’s repression.

The widely accepted interpretation that the entirety of Camus’s conversation was off-the-record has the effect of minimizing the significance of his words and of shifting the focus from him to the allegedly unethical behavior of the media. None of these secondary sources interpreted Camus’s statements as asserting the Church’s role as a defender of the persecuted, no matter one’s political ideology. Rather, they cast the conversation as an admission that there were Marxists working in Pro Paz. Pamela Lowden wrote that Camus gave “…remarks to the effect that the staff of the Committee did indeed include people of Marxist sympathies, since they were the ones prepared to undertake the work involved.”55 Brian Smith provided a slightly fuller description, writing, “Included in the excerpts were some frank criticisms of government economic policies, and an admission by the bishop that some Chileans with Marxist sympathies were working in the Committee of Cooperation for Peace.”56 Cavanaugh provided the fullest account of the conversation, covering the major points of the conversation over several sentences.57

54 Ibid. [“Monseñor Camus pintó un cuadro social angustioso en el país.”]; [“Expresó que la Iglesia defiende al hombre como tal, cualquiera sea su ideología política, pero que su posición en torno a distinto problemas generalmente repercute dentro del plano político.”]
55 Lowden, Moral Opposition to Authoritarian Rule in Chile, 1973-1990, 47.
56 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 301.
57 Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: theology, politics, and the body of Christ, 98.
The attacks that followed the publication of Camus’s conversation were swift and fierce. The paper that bought the transcript, *La Segunda*, published it in installments over several days, under sensationalized headlines that put Camus in the worst possible light.58 One such headline exclaimed, “Disparaging references to the wives of the Generals,” even though Camus had praised their work and merely called their efforts palliative. 59 There were also media stories about how Radio Moscow ran a piece on Camus’ interview 24 hours before it was first published in *La Segunda*, asking suggestively, if Camus had any connection with the Soviet Union. The truth behind the rumor was that before the article was published, *Latin* had sent out a cable with the information and it was picked up by Radio Moscow.60

If the goal of Camus’s comments was to highlight the humanity of Marxists and the importance of defending them, the media sought to emphasize their danger and to discredit the Church by claiming that it was under the influence of a Marxist infiltration. As one article asserted, “Public opinion knows well that the Marxist infiltration is not innocent, and it can easily interpret the tone and the orientation of

59 “Despectivas referencias a esposas de Generales,” *La Segunda*, October 6, 1975. Quoted in Ernesto Murúa, “Análisis de un periodismo de compañas,” *Mensaje*, December 1975, 582. Specifically, Camus said, “There is a preoccupation with mitigating the effects and a recognition including among the domestic wives of the generals, governors, etc., that to some appears to be very charming. Some dislike that. I disagree, because I recognize that instead of staying in the house playing canasta, they are working. That is meritorious, but it is a palliative.” [“Hay una preocupación por paliar los efectos y por eso hay un reconocimiento incluso casi como muy doméstico a las señoritas de los generales, gobernadores, etc., que a algunos les pareció que era muy demasiado gentil muy versallesco. A algunos les disgustó eso. Yo creo que no, porque es reconocer que es lugar de estar en su casa jugando canasta, están trabajando. Eso es meritorio, pero es un paliativo.”] “Conversación de Obispo Camus con corresponsales extranjeros.” In response to this journalistic spin, the National Association of Female Journalists called Camus’s words “offensive to all Chilean women.” [“…ofensivas para la mujer chilena.”] "La Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Periodistas," *El Mercurio*, October 9, 1975.
the aforementioned Comité.”61 Another article accused the Church of protecting subversive activity, “Under the religious cloak [the Marxists] have participated in the international campaign against Chile and their malice is not easy to oppose, because it provokes the appearance of conflict between the government and the churches…”62

The government for its part remained mostly silent, while its agents in the media attacked Bishops Camus.63 General Augusto Pinochet, President of Chile, was quoted as saying, “as a Christian I keep religious silence. [Pro Paz] is a project of the Church and I lament it profoundly.”64

The monthly Jesuit magazine, Mensaje, was one of the few public voices to rally around Camus in the midst of the vicious press campaign. “Monsignor Camus’s opinions represent a critical point of view in relation to some aspects of the national reality, that do not go beyond the every Chilean’s obvious right to dissent…Why then, so much anger against him?”65 It also criticized “a monolithic press that is dedicated to tearing apart a person it has chosen; by repetition, on the one hand, of myths and ambiguous affirmations and, on the other, of violent personal attacks with

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61 “Una conversación inconveniente” El Mercurio, October 8, 1975. [“La opinión pública bien sabe que la infiltración marxista no es inocua y puede fácilmente así explicarse el tono y orientaciones del mencionado Comité.”]
62 “Infiltración marxista,” El Mercurio, October 12, 1975. [“Bajo capa religiosa han participado activamente en la compañía internacional contra Chile y sus insidias no son fáciles de contrarrestar, pues hacerlo provoca una apariencia de conflicto entre el Gobierno y las Iglesias, apariencia falsa y calumniosa, pero que sirve da más alimento a la publicidad anti chilena.”]
63 This claim that the government was not directly involved in the incident is contradicted by Timothy Cavanaugh who asserts, “the government demanded [Camus’s] removal as secretary of the CECh [Episcopal Conference].” Cavanaugh cites Juan Mihovilovich Hernández on this point; however, while this book does detail the media attacks against Camus, it does not mention any demands by the government for his removal. Cavanaugh, Torture and Eucharist: theology, politics, and the body of Christ, 99. Juan Mihovilovich Hernández, Camus, obispo (Santiago, Chile: Rehue, 1988), 78.
64 “Presentó su renuncia Obispo Carlos Camus,” El Mercurio, October 11, 1975. [“como cristiano guardo religioso silencio. Es un proyecto de la Iglesia y lamento profundamente.”]
65 “Ataques a Monseñor Camus,” 499. [“Volviendo ahora a las opiniones de Monseñor Camus, ellas representan un punto de vista crítico en relación a algunos aspectos de la realidad nacional, que no va más allá del obvio derecho a disentir que tiene todo chileno…¿Por qué entonces, tanta furia contra él?”]
no shadow of respect.”66 Camus was defiant in the face of these attacks. While qualifying his remarks as only his opinion and not that of the Episcopal Conference, he asserted, “The truth demands its price. The pain of incomprehension is sometime the only way that a bishop can share today, with Christian love, the suffering of the poor and the persecuted.”67

Camus’s comments caused some tension in the Church, with six bishops issuing public criticisms. For instance, Bishop Augusto Salinas said he was in “complete disagreement with regard to the disparaging words he had for the government.”68 However, most of the six bishops restricted their criticism to Camus’s comments about the Evangelical churches.69 In his off-the-record remark, Camus had been critical of the Protestant churches that received government funds in order to build a cathedral in Santiago. “They have committed a tactical error…of grand proportions…as they say in the bible, they exchanged their birthright for a mess of pottage…it signifies a compromise that will inflict much pain.”70 Most of the

66 Ibid. [“…una prensa monolítica que se dedica a despedazar al personaje elegido; reiteración, por una parte, de mitos o afirmaciones [sic] ambiguas y, por otra parte, de violentos ataques personales que acababan con cualquier sombra de respeto.”]

67 “Declaración del Obispo Camus,” El Mercurio, October 8, 1975. [“…mis palabras representan mi opinión personal, que en ningún caso, compromete a mis demás hermanos obispos.”; “La verdad tiene su precio. El dolor de la incomprensión es quizás la única manera cómo puede un obispo compartir hoy, con amor cristiano, el sufrimiento de los pobres y de los perseguidos.”]

68 “Comité de episcopado analizará declaraciones del Obispo Camus,” El Mercurio, October 10, 1975. [“completo desacuerdo en cuanto a las palabras despectivas que tuvo hacia el Gobierno.”]

69 None of the secondary sources consulted mention that Camus spoke so critically of the Evangelical churches, let alone that this was the section that was off-the-record. Aguilar interestingly referred to how the Episcopal Conference’s Permanent Committee “apologized…for any offense given to the Protestant churches…” However, Aguilar never mentioned Camus’s criticism of their acceptance of government money, leaving the reader to wonder why they received a specific apology. Aguilar, A Social History of the Catholic Church in Chile: The First Period of the Pinochet Government 1973-1980, 93.

70 “Conversación de Obispo Camus con corresponsales extranjeros.” [“Pienso que por los menos los grupos evangélicos que han hecho esta inauguración de la Catedral y todo lo demás, han cometido, un error táctico, estratégico, pastoral, como se quiere de grandes proporciones. Generalmente…tienen un complejo de inferioridad. Querían tener una gran Catedral y querían tener reconocimiento oficial…Yo
concerns of these bishops revolved around potential harm to the Church’s ecumenical relations. As Bishop Orozimbo Fuenzalida of Los Angeles said, “we very sincerely worry that there has been a regression to concepts and attitudes that injure and harm the desired perfect unity.”

Two weeks later the Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference met to discuss the growing controversy. In response to the mounting attacks, Camus submitted his resignation as secretary general of the Conference. However, he also sent a letter to the bishops insisting that the newspaper excerpts omitted large sections of the conversation in which he had discussed internal issues exclusive to the Catholic Church. Excluding this information, he said, had the effect of creating the false impression that the conversation was focused on political topics and issues of the Evangelical churches.

The Permanent Committee deferred the decision on whether to accept his resignation for the meeting of the entire Episcopal Conference in December. It also released a statement apologizing to the Protestant Churches for any offense caused by Camus’s comments. Two weeks later the Permanent Committee, realizing the extent of the media campaign against the Bishop Camus, and by extension against the...
Church, released another statement expressing support for him. The Committee expressed its disapproval of the deceptive tactics used by newspapers to manufacture a scandal and disparage Camus and the Church.\textsuperscript{74} In December the Episcopal Conference reelected Camus to another term as secretary general.\textsuperscript{75} One bishop commented that this demonstrated “that yellow journalism does not govern the Church.”\textsuperscript{76}

**War against Pro Paz**

In addition to the Church’s prominent leaders, such as Cardinal Silva and Bishop Carlos Camus, the junta also viewed Pro Paz as an obstacle impeding its control over society. By mid-1974 Pro Paz employed a staff of 103 in Santiago and 93 in the provinces, providing legal services, and helping people obtain employment, food, health care and education.\textsuperscript{77} In a small way, Pro Paz almost constituted a parallel state. For a government that detained anyone suspected of being a leftist and constantly monitored organizations for subversive activity, Pro Paz was deeply threatening. By providing a place for people to organize, it undermined the government’s efforts to isolate individuals from one another by creating a fear that


\textsuperscript{76}“Hora de decisión,” *Mensaje*, no. 264 (January-February, 1976): 4. [“que la prensa Amarillo no gobierna a la Iglesia”]

any colleague, neighbor or friend could turn one into the government, even on false
charges.

In contrast, Pro Paz created a space where people could organize freely and
receive social services irrespective of political beliefs. Those who had lost their jobs
either for political reasons or because of the government’s neoliberal economic
reforms could pool their resources to meet basic needs.78 People whose relatives had
disappeared were able to come together, discuss the regime’s abuses, organize
politically and receive legal assistance. As Monica Araya, both of whose parents were
among the disappeared, recounted, “In those times I began to organize help for the
prisoners…In the organization we could cry for those that no longer were, remember
with confidence what we had lost and what remained as part of a project cut short”79
For these relatives the mere act of remembering was both essential and subversive,
given how the government often sought to deny the existence of those that had
disappeared. Pro Paz allowed the junta’s victims to counter the silencing affects of the
regime’s control over society. Another person named Aída recalled, “Once we began
to participate in the organizations, that enormous fear and disorientation that we felt
began to dissipate”80

The junta knew that Pro Paz was sheltering fugitives, and the Zamora incident
only confirmed Pro Paz’s willingness to defy the government in doing so. Moreover,
the release of the Scherer Report and the filing of habeas corpus petitions

79 Ibid., 34. [“Eran los tiempos en que empezaba a organizar la ayuda para los prisioneros…En la
organización pudimos llorar por los que no estaban, recordar con confianza las cosas que habíamos
perdido y que habían quedado como parte de un proyecto trunco.”]
80 Ibid., 39. [“Una vez que empezamos a participar en las organizaciones, ese miedo y esa
desorientación tan enormes que sentíamos, se empezaron a ir. “]
demonstrated that Pro Paz was actively working to undermine the government’s brutal campaign against Marxism. However, the junta, as the purported restorer of Christianity to Chile, could not just shutdown Pro Paz as it would any other social organization. So it sought rather to undermine it. One of the government’s strategies was arresting Pro Paz’s employees and accusing them of being leftists. The first such arrest occurred in December 1974 when Yessica Ulloa was accused of collaboration with the militant Revolutionary Left Movement (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario or MIR). Subsequent arrests included Georgina Ocaraza, secretary of Pro Paz, on September 10, 1975, and the Protestant Pastors Dennis O’Shea and Juan Polanco (Chief of the National Synod of the Chilean Evangelical Presbyterian Church) on September 29, 1975.

In mid-1975, the government launched a public disinformation campaign to discredit Pro Paz. On May 21 Pro Paz had presented a mass habeas corpus petition on behalf of 163 disappeared people, about one tenth of the cases in its files, requesting a special judge to investigate the disappearances. Two months later the media published information about 119 leftist militants that had been killed throughout South America. The names of those killed all corresponded to those Pro Paz had claimed were made to disappear in Chile. The objective of these media stories was to demonstrate that those seeking to blame the government were not only wrong, but also were attempting to protect Marxists and disparage Chile’s image in the outside world. At the end of 1974 the United Nations voted to condemn the Chilean government’s human rights record. These votes became an annual occurrence and media campaigns

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82 Ibid., 96.
such as this one allowed the junta to blame Pro Paz and the Church for the international community’s negative perception of Chile.  

The junta also tried to weaken Pro Paz by undermining its ecumenical support. Many of the Evangelical Churches withdrew their support in mid-1974 after the Scherer Report revealed Pro Paz’s work in documenting the junta’s abuses. To undercut the remaining non-Catholic churches that remained supportive, the junta made insinuations that they could lose their special legal status as religious organizations. Unlike the Catholic Church, whose special legal status was enshrined in the Constitution and bared government intervention, the legal privileges of the other churches were statutory and could be easily revoked. The junta also offered increased financial incentives to encourage the churches to withdraw their support for Pro Paz.

The non-Catholic denomination most fiercely targeted by the junta was the Lutheran Church. Lutheran bishop Helmut Frenz was co-president of Pro Paz with Catholic bishop Fernando Ariztía. Nonetheless, most Lutheran parishioners were strong supporters of the regime. Thus, media campaign sought to undermine Frenz, attacking him as a Marxist who engaged in financial fraud. This prompted efforts to oust him from his office and in June 1975 a schism occurred within the Lutheran Church, resulting in the creation of the Chilean Lutheran Church, which rejected Frenz. Finally, in October after he spoke at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Frenz was denied reentry into Chile. By this time the only remnants of Pro

Paz’s ecumenical origins was the continued participation of the Methodist Church and support of the Grand Rabbi.85

**The Closing of Pro Paz**

The Church’s commitment to protecting the persecuted finally brought Church-state conflict to a head at the end of 1975. On October 16, after two years of arresting, torturing and disappearing hundreds of members of the paramilitary Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (the Revolutionary Left Movement, also known as the MIR), the DINA discovered the location of the MIR’s top leadership. After the DINA agents engaged in a four-hour firefight with members of the MIR (Miristas), one leader was killed and the other five managed to escape, and sought refuge with Catholic priests, who hid them in church properties.86 This created a difficult situation for the leaders of the Church, as providing refuge to the fugitives would be a direct challenge against the junta. However, in his memoirs the Cardinal wrote that his decision came down to one simple truth, “…if those fugitives were to be captured, they would confront a sure death...the mandate of the gospel is unequivocal.”87

One of the Miristas, Nelson Gutiérrez, was badly injured in the shootout, so Father Fernando Salas asked an English doctor, Sheila Cassidy, to attend to him. When Cassidy arrived, one priest remarked, “I hope to God that Christ goes disguised as a wounded Mirista.”88 Despite Cassidy’s best efforts, Gutiérrez required

87 Silva Henríquez, *Memorias*, 77. [“esos fugitivos, de ser capturados, se enfrentaban una muerte segura...el mandato del Evangelio es inequívoco.”]
immediate hospital treatment, so the priests secured asylum for him at the residence of the Papal Nuncio, from where he could escape abroad. Various other priests were also able to deliver three of the other fugitives to foreign embassies.

The DINA was beginning to detect the Church’s involvement in sheltering the Miristas. On October 31 DINA agents surrounded the house of some Columbian missionaries, where Cassidy was staying. They opened fire with machine-guns, spraying the maid, Enriqueta Reyes Valerio, with bullets as she stood at the door. Cassidy was subsequently captured and tortured until she confessed the Church’s role in helping the Miristas escape. On November 4 the DINA located the fifth Mirista in the house of Father Gerardo Whelan, which directly implicated the Church in the sheltering of enemy fugitives.

The revelation that officials in all levels of the church had helped provide refuge to leaders of the MIR caused a firestorm of criticism in the media and an escalation of public attacks by the junta against the church. The newspapers published one sensationalized article after another, casting the Church as divided, infiltrated by Marxists, and an extremist organization. The priests implicated in the incident were accused of participating in a terrorist organization and even the Cardinal and Papal

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89 Ibid., 161.
90 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 77-78.
91 In an autobiography, Sheila Cassidy described her interrogation. “I found it quite impossible to lie for the shocks came with such frequency and intensity that I could no longer think. Little by little I answered their questions. It was a slow and painful business for I told them as little as I could, always hoping that a minimum of people would be involved. The irony of it all was that they found the truth more difficult to believe than the lies I had told them at first, and I received many gratuitous shocks because they could not believe the nuns and priests were involved. Their disbelief was very hard to bear for there seemed no escape from the white hot sea of pain in which I found myself.” Cassidy, Audacity to Believe, 188, 89.
Nuncio were accused of harboring communist sympathies.\textsuperscript{92} The government arrested scores of Pro Paz employees and most of the priests and nuns involved in hiding the Miristas. All the foreign born clergy who were arrested were later expelled from the country.\textsuperscript{93}

Two of the priests most involved in the efforts to protect the Miristas, Fathers Fernando Salas and Patricio Cariola, spent several days in the Cardinal’s house while the press declared them to be fugitives, although there was no order for their arrest. Eventually they both turned themselves in to the police.\textsuperscript{94} When Salas and Cariola entered the penitentiary to serve their sentence, the prisoners lined both sides of the extensive path leading to their cell, through stairways and courtyards. As the two priests passed, the prisoners broke into a thunderous applause. Upon hearing this story, Cardinal Silva writes that he almost fell to tears with pride, exclaiming to himself, “These were my fathers, the fathers of the Church, the fathers of the Chilean Church, that was their blessed madness!”\textsuperscript{95}

In the face of these attacks, the Cardinal quickly realized that he could no longer rely on private diplomacy to protect Pro Paz and the Church’s efforts to defend human rights. Rather, he needed to mount a public theological defense of the Church’s actions and to embrace the priests that sheltered the Miristas. Cardinal Silva released a declaration on November 5, proclaiming that while he denounced the support of clergy for hate or violence, “The case is different for those who, inspired

\textsuperscript{94} Silva Henríquez, \textit{Memorias}, 79, 81.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 82. [“¡esos eran mis padres, los padres de mi Iglesia, los padres de la Iglesia de Chile, ésa era su bendita locura!”]
by the demands of the gospel, have believed in full conscience that they should give
to whoever needs it, the basic aid for the preservation of life, irrespective of one’s
political choices.”96 The next day Jaime Guzman, the junta’s chief legal advisor and a
leader in the Catholic Integralist movement, went on national television and
announced his opposition to the declaration. The statement “contains a grave error,”
he said, and asserted that while one can tend to injuries, sheltering fugitives was a
severe violation of Chilean law.97 He continued that anyone coming across a fugitive
was legally obligated to turn the person over to the authorities.

Cardinal Silva responded swiftly, releasing a declaration four days later
insisting that Guzman’s statements were contrary to the Gospel. In the statement the
Cardinal provided a more robust explanation for why it was in accordance with the
Gospel for priests to protect fugitives from the law, articulating an implicit challenge
to the legitimacy of the Chilean legal system. He wrote that the Church respects the
right of the state to arrest and try criminals when the accused are guaranteed their
rights and are tried by a competent judiciary conforming to legal norms.98 This

96 “Declaración pública del Arzobispado de Santiago,” Mensaje, December 1975, 596. [“Distintos es el
caso de quienes, inspirados en las exigencias de mensaje evangélico, han creído en consciencia que
debían brindar a quien lo requería, los auxilios elementales para la preservación de la vida,
cualesquiera que fuesen sus opciones políticas.”]
97 “Comentario de Jaime Guzmán Errazuriz transmitido por Televisión Nacional el 6 de Noviembre y
repetido el 8,” Mensaje, December 1975, 597. [“contiene un grave equivocación”]
98 “Evangelio y Misericordia: Réplica a un comentarista de TV Nacional,” Mensaje, December 1975,
598. Cardinal Silva quoted a speech by Pope Pius XII to the Sixth Congress on Penal Law, saying,
“The role of law… demands that punitive action is based not on arbitrariness and passion, but on
strong and clear legal rules … Even the first step of punitive action, arrest, cannot obey the caprice but
rather must respect the law. It is unacceptable that even the most irreproachable man can be detained
arbitrarily and disappear in a prison.” [“…la función de del derecho…exigen que…la acción punitiva
se base no en la arbitrariedad y en la pasión, sino en reglas jurídicas claras y firmes…Ya el primer paso
de la acción punitiva, la detención, no puede obedecer al capricho, sino que debe respetar las normas
jurídicas. No es admisible que aun el hombre más irreprochable pueda ser detenido arbitrariamente y
desaparecer sin más en una prisión.”]
implied that Church was justified in protecting the Miristas, as they would not have received proper judicial protection.99

The Cardinal further insisted that the priests’ actions had the effect of advancing justice rather than subverting it. “Any other attitude [by the Church] would, in practice, encourage the establishment of a spontaneous kind of justice in Chile, beginning with the moral degradation of the image of the accused and concluding, almost inevitably, with one’s physical destruction.”100 Silva concluded his declaration by threatening Guzmán with excommunication for undermining the authority of the Catholic Church, asserting, “The Catholic Church will not accept that the authority of its Pastors will be usurped or hindered, nor that the honor of the name Catholic be injured, with grave detriment to its unity and its mission of service to the people of Chile.”101 Two days later Guzmán publicly retracted his statement.102

The forcefulness of Silva’s statement represented a direct challenge to the junta. Silva was coming to believe what Bishop Carlos Camus had already expressed one month earlier, that the government was inexorably on the side of national security without respect for human rights or the Church’s role in defending them. In the face of such an attitude, private diplomacy had proven to be ineffective. Rather than working with the government in order to create a new reality in Chile, the Church

99 Silva also asserted that the Church could not limit who is eligible for its assistance. “Christ and the Church have never made repentance a precondition for mercy. Rather the reverse: the mercy of Christ led him to die, asking the father to forgive those who had no mercy with Him.” [“Nunca Cristo ni la Iglesia han puesto el arrepentimiento como condición previa para tener misericordia. Más bien a la inversa; la misericordia de Cristo le llevó a morir pidiendo al padre el perdón para quienes no tuvieron misericordia con El.”] Ibid.
100 Ibid. [“Cualquier otra actitud equivaldría, en la práctica, a propiciar la instauración en Chile de un tipo de justicia espontánea, que comienza por la degradación moral de la imagen de los acusados y concluye, casi inevitablemente, con su destrucción física.”]
101 Ibid., 599. [“La Iglesia Católica no aceptará que la autoridad de sus Pastores sea usurpada ni entorpecida, ni de dañe la honra del nombre católico, con grave detrimento de su unidad y de su misión de servicio al pueblo de Chile.”]
needed to go into the opposition and publicly express an alternative vision. However, Cardinal Silva’s defense of the priests was not universally held throughout the Chilean Church. Archbishop Emilio Tagle, for his part, said “The collaboration that some priests gave to the Marxists is completely contradictory to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Nevertheless, the Church did temporarily accept a setback in its efforts to promote human rights. With the controversy surrounding the protection of fugitive Miristas by the Church, General Pinochet finally had an opportunity with which to demand the closing of Pro Paz. Thus, in early November held a meeting with Cardinal Silva, where he asserted that Pro Paz had become a “source of subversion” dedicated to attacking the government and defending terrorists, as had been demonstrated by the past month’s events. As a result, Pinochet demanded that Silva close Pro Paz, telling him, “If you do not want to dissolve it, I will dissolve it.” Silva asked for the request in writing, wanting to make clear that the Church was being forced to make this decision. The Cardinal remained defiant, telling Pinochet, “Look, President, we can close Pro Paz, but we cannot renounce our obligation. If you want to impede it, I will have to bring the people to my house, because I will put them underneath my bed if necessary.”

103 Terrazas Guzmán, Quien se acuerda de Sheila Cassidy?: crónica de un conflicto religioso-político-diplomático, 224. [“La colaboración que algunos sacerdotes otorgan a los marxistas es totalmente contradictoria con el Evangelio de Jesucristo.”]
104 Vicaria de la Solidaridad: historia de su trabajo social, 52.; Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 79. [“foco de subversión”]
105 Vicaria de la Solidaridad: historia de su trabajo social, 52. [“Si usted no lo quiere disolver, se lo disuelvo yo.”]
106 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 80. [“Mire, Presidente, podemos cerrar Pro Paz, pero no podemos renunciar a nuestro deber. Si usted quiere impedirlo, tendrá que ir a buscar a la gente a mi casa, porque los meteré debajo de mi cama si es necesario.”]
Upon receiving the written request from Pinochet, Silva did order the closing of Pro Paz, effective December 31, 1975. However, upon signing the order in November, Silva began looking for an alternative way to continue the work of Pro Paz. After numerous meetings with his auxiliary bishops and vicars, he decided on a clever solution: the creation of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity). Under Chilean Constitution, the Catholic Church is a *persona de derecho público*, “person of public law,” a legal status that prevents the state from interfering in any activities under the legal framework of the Chilean Catholic Church. Pro Paz, as an ecumenical organization independent of the Church, existed on much weaker legal footing and was thus vulnerable to being dissolved by the government, as Pinochet threatened to do. By creating a vicariate within the structure of the Archdiocese of Santiago, Silva was able to continue the work of Pro Paz, but with a much higher level of legal protection. The creation of the Vicaría was also a remarkable departure for the Church. Vicariates had traditionally only existed to divide up the governance of large diocese. Never before had one existed for the sole purpose of promoting human rights.

On January 1, 1976 Cardinal Silva signed the decree creating the Vicaría de la Solidaridad. It soon opened its doors in the Plaza de Armas, Santiago’s central square, and next door to the Metropolitan Cathedral. To establish this new organization, the Cardinal appointed Father Cristián Precht as vicar, a position that

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107 *Vicaría de la Solidaridad: historia de su trabajo social*, 55. This was enshrined in the Constitution in 1925 and came about as a result of the concordant between Chile and the Vatican that created a legal separation between Church and state.


109 *Vicaría de la Solidaridad: historia de su trabajo social*, 54.

made him the legal representative of the Cardinal. Precht, having served as executive secretary of Pro Paz, took some lessons learned to the Vicaría. First among them was to avoid the needless controversy Pro Paz encountered in the media for employing members of the MIR. To this end, Precht instituted a rule barring anyone who did not oppose violence from working in the Vicaría.  

Pinochet was not pleased about the establishment of the Vicaría. Upon hearing the news he exclaimed, “Stubborn monkey! He is like a stubborn monkey!” Proprio, Pinochet ordered that Cardinal Silva be invited to his office. The following conversation ensued.

– What is this of the Vicaría, Cardinal? You are not going to tell me that you are going to return to filling the Church with communists!
– General, I told you that the Church cannot and will abandon the defense of human rights…
– So we are going to begin again with the same! It seems that the Church does not want to understand, hear!
– You cannot impede the Vicaría! And if you try to do so I will put the refugees under my bed, if necessary!

One weakness with the new structure was that as part of the Archdiocese of Santiago, the Vicaría had little ability to provide assistance to people outside of Santiago. Thus, every diocesan bishop would have to establish a Vicaría in order for all Chileans to be able to avail themselves of its services. Pinochet hoped that opposition by conservative bishops to the Vicaría would undermine its credibility. However, the vast majority of bishops embraced it, with conservative bishops such as

111 Ibid., 169.
112 Ibid., 171. [“¡Mono porfiado! ¡Es como un mono porfiado!”]
113 Ibid. [“– ¿Qué es esto del la Vicaría, cardenal? ¡No me va a decir que va a volver a llenar la Iglesia de comunistas!
– General, le dije que la Iglesia no puede ni va a abandonar la defensa de los derechos humanos…
– ¡O sea que otra vez vamos a empezar con la misma! ¡Parece que la Iglesia no quiere entender, oiga!
– ¡Ustedes no pueden impedir la Vicaría! ¡Y si tratan de hacerlo yo voy a poner los refugiados debajo de mi cama, si es necesario!”]
114 Ibid., 169.
Emilio Tagle creating their own Vicarias.\textsuperscript{115} The Church thus entered a new phase in its relations with the junta. With its strategy of private diplomacy proven ineffective, the Church began to adopt a more public and forceful advocacy for human rights.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Bishop Camus and Cardinal Silva did not decide to publicly criticize the junta merely to express moral opposition to its abuses. Similarly, their initial decision to engage in private diplomacy and not issue public criticism during the first year and a half of military rule was not a function of their lack of moral outrage. Rather, the bishops usually evaluated their possible courses of action and chose the one that would be most effective at improving human rights. Father Ronaldo Muñoz, a Chilean Priest, explained this strategic thinking in an internal Church document.

We know in fact, that as Christians and as the Church we cannot remain silent; that to the extent of our freedom and our audience we should be the “voice of the voiceless.”…Here enters the crucial game of prudence, which should measure if the concrete \textit{efficacy} of a specific denunciation compensates for the \textit{risks} involved…1) What is the \textit{efficacy} that is really desired? The most “political” of short term improvements, or the most “prophetic” of preventing our society from further being shaped according to inhuman and anti-Christian plans? 2) What are the \textit{risks} that are most feared? The \textit{inefficacy} or the counterproductive effects of our denunciation; or that the actions of some political groups coincide with our denunciation; or to have to pay, in our own people and institutions, the price of persecution and ambiguity that has always existed with any prophetic denunciation?\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 171.

\textsuperscript{116} Ronaldo Muñoz, "La acción solidaria de la Iglesia: diagnostico teológico – pastoral," (Archive of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, April 1976), 11. [“Sabemos en efecto, que como cristianos y como Iglesia no podemos callar; que en la medida de nuestra libertad y de nuestra audiencia debemos hacernos “voz de los sin voz”….Aquí entra el indispensable juego de la prudencia, que debe medir si la eficiencia concreta de una tal denuncia compensaría los riesgos implicados en ella….1) ¿Cuál es la \textit{eficacia} que se busca realmente?, ¿la más “política” de correcciones a corto plazo, o la más “profética” de impedir que nuestra sociedad se siga moldeando según esquemas anticristianos e inhumanos? 2) ¿Cuáles son los riesgos que más se temen realmente?, ¿la \textit{ineficacia} o el efecto contraproducente de nuestra denuncia para la situación del pueblo; o la coincidencia de hechos con la denuncia de ciertos sectores políticos y por ser esos sectores; o tener que pagar, en las propias personas e instituciones, el precio de ambigüedad y persecución que ha tenido siempre toda denuncia profética?”] Italics added.
While the Church’s pragmatism can be inferred from analyzing bishops’
actions and statements, this passage clearly demonstrates the extent to which it
pervaded their thinking. In the bishops’ cost benefit analysis, they evaluated the
objectives and weighed the risks and benefits, in the short and long term, in order to
come to a decision. Before Bishop Camus and Cardinal Silva expressed their more
forthright criticism, most of the bishops had held the costs of direct criticism to
outweigh the benefits. Even after they realized that private diplomacy was not
effective, they feared their criticism would harm the Church’s ability to provide social
services and would give support to militant leftist groups.

However, after two years of oppression, it became indisputable that the leftist
groups had no capacity to challenge the junta. The junta’s attack on the MIR’s top
leadership in November 1975 brought this fact to the front door of bishops’ churches.
The government’s campaign against Pro Paz further demonstrated that the bishops
didn’t need to issue denunciations to elicit the junta’s repression. Merely providing
social services would do so. Thus, the junta arrested employees, spread false
information and fractured Pro Paz’s ecumenical support. This was enough to spur
Camus to criticize the junta and forcefully defend Pro Paz’s work in helping the
leftists persecuted by the junta.

When the junta forced the dissolution of Pro Paz and the media attacked the
Church’s responsibility to provide shelter to the persecuted, Silva realized he needed
to speak out as well. In the face of the ongoing repression, the risks of forthright
criticism no longer appeared so harsh. Moreover, an additional benefit of criticism
would be to counteract the junta’s media campaign against the Church. Thus, Silva
challenged the legitimacy of the junta’s law requiring people to turn over fugitives, declaring implicitly that it would be immoral turn a fugitive over to authorities that were not subject to the rule of law and did not provide judicial protection.

The lack of criticism from the Episcopal Conference demonstrates that the conservative bishops blocking more forthright declarations viewed the costs and benefits of a denunciation differently. For them, the cost to the Church’s presence as an institution as well as the cost of giving support to militant leftists was greater than that of the more progressive bishops. How each bishop assessed these risks was the major dividing line within the Conference.
Chapter Five: The Episcopal Conference Finds its Voice

The Episcopal Conference’s Criticism Escalates: 1976-1980

During the next year, the junta continued its efforts to dismantle any potential for political opposition. Throughout 1974 and 1975, it had focused on eliminating the MIR and Socialist Party. In 1976 the regime turned its wrath against the Communist Party, making almost all of its top leadership disappear, 94 people in total.\(^1\)

Previously, the continued existence of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) had created the appearance of at least a semblance of tolerance for political dissent; however, this veneer vanished as the junta moved to crack down on the party. In September of 1975, the DINA attempted to assassinate the PDC dissident and former Vice-President of Chile, Bernardo Leighton, who was living in Rome. While he survived, he suffered debilitating injuries.\(^2\) Several Party leaders living in Chile were either jailed or exiled. Among those exiled were Jaime Castillo, a former Minister of Justice, and Eugenio Velasco, a former justice on the Supreme Court. They had been among five lawyers that presented an account of human rights violations during a meeting of the Organization of American States held in June of 1976 in Santiago.\(^3\)

While a year earlier, the bishops might have responded to such abuse by holding a private conversation with the junta, by this time they had realized that such a strategy would be unsuccessful. Instead, the Permanent Committee of the Episcopal

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Conference expressed its first criticism of a particular abuse. The Committee criticized the arbitrary nature of the action for not being sanctioned by the judiciary, calling it “a moral issue on which we cannot remain silent.”\textsuperscript{4} The bishops further sought to connect the expulsion with the other abuses that were occurring, asking the alarming question, “If this happens to two prestigious professionals of recognized intellectual capacity and who have had high positions of responsibility, what could happen to modest and ignored citizens?”\textsuperscript{5} Nevertheless, the bishops were cautious in expanding their criticism, unwilling to answer their own question.

Meanwhile, the junta continued to attack the Church. The Vicaría was a major focus of this hostility. One of its principle lawyers, Hernán Montealegre, was arrested in May by the DINA and accused of collaborating with the Communist Party. The Cardinal personally requested his release and visited him in jail, where he heard horrific stories about torture and unending screaming heard throughout the night. Despite the Cardinal’s efforts, the junta did not release Montealegre until November.\textsuperscript{6}

The other main focus of repression was the progressive bishops. On August 12, three Chilean bishops and thirteen others from Latin American, where arrested in Riobamba, Ecuador while attending a pastoral conference. When the bishops, Carlos González, Fernando Ariztía, and Enrique Alvear returned to Chile, they were met by


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid. [“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?”]

a crowd of protestors denouncing them as communists and subversives. As they exited the airport, the protestors threw stones and physically attacked the bishops. It quickly became clear that the entire incident had been organized by the DINA. The bishops recognized one protestor as an aid to Pinochet and saw another drop a blank detention order.⁷

The Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference was swift in issuing a condemnation of the incident. The declaration expressed the bishops’ “indignation” at the protests and affirmed that the punishment for perpetrating violence against a bishop is automatic excommunication; however, the declaration went further and for the first time expressed a candid criticism of the regime itself. The bishops asserted that the abuses taking place were not spontaneous or accidental but were rooted in the very nature of military government.

The actions that we denounce and condemn are not isolated. They are part of a process or system with clearly defined characteristics, and which threatens to rule without rival in Latin America. Always invoking the justification of national security, to which there is no appeal, it increasingly consolidates a model of society that stifles basic liberties, violates the most basic rights and subjugates the citizens within the framework of a feared and omnipotent police state…

The Church cannot remain passive or neutral in such a situation. The legacy that it has received from Christ demands the announcement of human dignity and the protection of freedom and individual rights.⁸

⁸ Comité Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Declaración sobre la detención y ataque en Pudahuel a 3 obispos chilenos detenidos en Ecuador (August 17, 1976 [cited April 12 2009]); available from http://www.jesus.cl/iglesia/paso_iglesia/documentos/conf/documentos_sini.ficha.php?mod=documentos_sini&id=179&sw_volver=yes&descripcion=. [“Las acciones que denunciamos y condenamos no son aisladas. Se eslabonan en un proceso o sistema de características perfectamente definidas, y que amenaza imperar sin contrapeso en nuestra América Latina. Invocando siempre el inapelable justificativo de la seguridad nacional, se consolida más y más un modelo de sociedad que ahoga las libertades básicas, conculca los derechos más elementales y sojuzga a los ciudadanos en el marco de un temido y omnipotente Estado Policial…La Iglesia no puede permanecer pasiva ni neutral ante situación semejante. El legado que ella ha recibido de Cristo comporta el anuncio de la dignidad humana y la protección eficaz de su libertad y sus derechos de persona.”]
While this was the first instance of the Episcopal Conference criticizing the junta, it was not the first time that member of the Church hierarchy had done so. Many bishops had already realized that private diplomacy was ineffective and that abuses required a public response. Eleven months earlier, Bishop Carlos Camus had talked to journalists about the Church’s efforts to protect the persecuted from the “brute force” of a regime grounded in the defense of national security.⁹ Two months later Cardinal Silva asserted that the Church was required to help fugitives escape from Chile, because the government was failing to provide them with adequate legal protection. Moreover, this was not a minority position among the bishops. According to one analysis, 15 of Chile’s 31 bishops strongly felt it was the Church’s obligation to criticize human rights violations.¹⁰

There was, however, a small minority of bishops who viewed Marxism as too dire a threat to risk weakening the government with public criticism.¹¹ Given the consensus basis of the Episcopal Conference, these bishops held an effective veto and were able to prevent the approval of overly critical statements. However, the attacks by the junta against the Catholic hierarchy made unequivocally clear that the government was a hostile force. This undermined the position of these conservative bishops that it was in the Church’s best interests to not publicly criticize the junta.¹²

Thus, they were no longer able to justify blocking critical statements, and the

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⁹ "Conversación de Obispo Camus con corresponsales extranjeros," *El Mercurio*, October 8, 1975; "Dos versiones," *El País*, October, 21 1975. ["Entonces, el hecho de que haya alguien que tenga el valor de enfrentamiento a la fuerza bruta el siempre aplaudido…La Iglesia ha defendido al perseguido político…"]

¹⁰ For more information, see appendix one.


Episcopal Conference was empowered to start denouncing abuses; However, while the Episcopal Conference was only to issue criticism once it came under attack, this was not true for the Church as a whole, as is evidenced by the bishops who independently issued public criticism.

With the junta’s hostility towards the Church now undeniable, the Episcopal Conference continued denouncing instances of repression. In late 1976 and during 1977 General Augusto Pinochet announced under the justification of national security that the military would continue to hold power indefinitely.\textsuperscript{13} In the face of indefinite military rule, the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) began to express its dissent. It reported on the government’s repression through its radio station, Radio Balmaceda, and started internal discussions on how to force the end of military rule. In response, the junta shut down Radio Balmaceda in January 1977 and on March 12 issued a ban on all political parties, groups and movements. In justifying this move, Pinochet claimed that the PDC had violated its ban on political activity, instituted in September, 1973.\textsuperscript{14}

On March 25 the Episcopal Conference issued a declaration, “Our Life Together as a Nation.” The declaration for the first time broached the topic of the disappeared, calling on the government to cooperate with the judiciary and to clear up the fate of everyone listed as disappeared. Without such action, the bishops wrote, “there will be neither peace for their families, nor real peace in the country, nor will Chile’s image abroad be clean.”\textsuperscript{15} The bishops also sought to influence the junta’s

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 307-08.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 308.
\textsuperscript{15} Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, \textit{Nuestra convivencia nacional} (March 25, 1977 [cited April 10 2009]); available from
institutionalization of power. “There will be no guarantees of full respect for human rights, while the country does not have a Constitution, old or new, ratified by popular vote…And while all agencies of the state, from the highest to the lowest, are not subject to the Constitution and the law.”¹⁶

This declaration was clearly a break with past documents. The bishops for the first time made clear requests of the junta. Moreover, they implied that the junta’s governance by decree was the source of human rights violations. This contrasted with previous statements that merely asserted general values and instead increased pressure on the junta to change. The bishops, however, were still prepared to go so far. The declaration only implied human rights violations and did not place any explicit responsibility for their occurrence on the junta.

Nevertheless, the media and government fiercely attacked the bishops for what they viewed as interfering in politics. An editorial in El Mercurio denounced the bishops for their “dangerous clericalist tendencies.”¹⁷ Minister of Justice Renato Damilano expressed more explicitly disparaging remarks. He called the bishops “useful idiots, ambitious, ill-intentioned and resentful.” Damilano also accused the bishops of “colluding with politicians and Marxists” and “leaving their sacred

http://www.jesus.cl/iglesia/paso_iglesia/documentos/conf/documentos_sini.ficha.php?mod=documentos_s_sini&id=182&sw_volver=yes&descripcion=. [“Aprovechamos ahora la oportunidad para pedir respetuosamente al Sr. Presidente de la República que disponga que el gobierno preste a los Tribunales de Justicia toda la cooperación necesaria para que se esclarezca de una vez y para siempre el destino de cada uno de los presuntos desaparecidos desde el 11 de Septiembre hasta la fecha, sin lo cual no habrá tranquilidad para sus familias, ni verdadera paz en el país, ni quedará limpia la imagen de Chile en el exterior.”] ¹⁶ Ibid. [“Y sin embargo, Creemos que no existirán plenas garantías de respeto a los derechos humanos, mientras el país no tenga una Constitución, vieja o nueva, ratificada por sufragio popular. Mientras las leyes no sean dictadas por legítimos representantes de la ciudadanía. Y mientras todos los organismos del Estado, desde el más alto hasta el más bajo, no estén sometidos a la Constitución y a la ley.”] Italics in original.
¹⁷ “Posición política de los obispos,” El Mercurio, March, 27 1977. [“…debemos denunciar tendencias clericalistas peligrosas.”]
ministry to take the place left by those parties which in one way or another helped to
destroy the country.”18 The bishops responded, stating their shock that “Never in the
history of Chile has a Minister of the State…spoken in such an offensive manner to
the Bishops of the Catholic Church.”19 They also expressed their conviction that they
were fulfilling the Church’s obligation.20 Subsequently, Pinochet removed the
minister from his post, but he did not undertake any of the reforms called for in the
Declaration. Instead, In July 1977 Pinochet announced that the military would not
cede power to a civilian government until 1985.21

Throughout the next several years the Episcopal Conference’s criticism
continued unabated. On January 4, 1978 Pinochet called a national referendum on the
junta. However, he sought to prejudice the vote as much as possible, phrasing the
ballot question as, “Facing the international aggression unleashed against our
Fatherland, I support President Pinochet in his defense of the dignity of Chile, and I
reaffirm the sovereign legitimacy of the government of the Republic to lead the
process of institutionalization of the country: Yes – No.”22 Over the “Yes” option

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18 Renato Damilano quoted in Comité Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Carta al Sr.
Ministro de Justicia, Don Renato Damilano, respecto a calificaciones públicas hechas sobre los
obispos (April 14, 1977 [cited April 12 2009]); available from
s_sini&id=183&sw_volver=yes&descripcion= [
“tontos útiles, ambiciosos, mal intencionados y
resentidos”]; [
“se confabulan con politiqueros y marxistas”]; [
“abandonan su sagrado ministerio para
tomar el puesto que dejaron aquellos partidos que en una u otra forma contribuyeron a destruir el
país”]
19 Ibid. [
“Nunca, en la historia de Chile, un Ministro de Estado…se había referido en una forma tan
injusta a los Obispos de la Iglesia Católica…”]
20 Ibid. [
“Sus expresiones, Sr. Ministro, no nos afectan porque tenemos conciencia de estar cumpliendo
con nuestro deber.”]
21 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 309-10.
22 [“Frente la agresión internacional desatada en contra de nuestra Patria, respaldo al presidente
Pinochet en su defensa de la dignidad de Chile y reafirmo la legitimidad del gobierno de la República
para encabezar soberanamente al proceso de institucionalización del país.: Sí – No.”] Cavallo, Salazar,
there was a Chilean flag and over the “No” option there was a black box. In response to such a manipulated vote, the Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference called for a postponement. Nevertheless, it went ahead and Pinochet prevailed with a total of 75 percent of the vote, according to the government.

Besides the continuing abuses, there also remained the issue of accountability for the human rights violations on which the Vicaría was amassing evidence. In order to prevent such an occurrence, in April 1978 the junta decreed a general amnesty for “all authors and accomplices of crimes committed under the State of Siege in force between September 11, 1973 and March 10, 1978.” The Church was not adopted an exclusively critical position against the junta, and many bishops expressed their support for the measure. Cardinal Silva thought that the law would cover all crimes and would serve as a source of reconciliation. He thus released a statement, “celebrating [the amnesty law] as an encouraging sign of brotherly reunion.”

However, while there were a few political prisoners released, the law was mainly used to shield members of the government and military from accountability. The courts immediately dismissed 300 of the Vicaría’s habeas corpus cases shortly after the law was issued. In response, the Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference again issued a declaration calling on the junta to clear up the fate of the

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23 Ibid.
24 Smith, The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism, 310.
27 Silva Henríquez, Memorias, 120. [“…celebrándola como signo alentador de un reencuentro fraterno.”]
disappeared.\textsuperscript{28} When the junta’s subsequent investigation led nowhere, the
Permanent Committee followed by condemning the government’s handling of the
issue. In a November declaration the bishops declared,

On several occasions we have addressed representatives of the government on
the problem of disappeared. The answers obtained so far have been
unsatisfactory. The people known as the detainees-disappeared
detainees…were, in our view, arrested by government security
services…Unfortunately, we have concluded that the government will not
conduct a thorough investigation of what happened…We regret to say that we
have come to the persuasion that many if not all the missing detainees have
died, outside the law…. No end can justify the use of unlawful means. Killing
a man, regardless of any law, is a crime which we protest in the name of God,
Creator and Father of all men…We will denounce each case that comes to our
knowledge. We trust that the government will take steps necessary to prevent
abuses and punish them if they continue to occur. In the name of God…we
demand it.\textsuperscript{29}

This declaration represented a further escalation in the Church’s criticism of
the junta. With it becoming increasingly evident that more general criticism was
having little impact in motivating the junta to investigate the disappeared, the
Permanent Committee decided to issue a more direct statement. The declaration
affirms the severity of the issue of the disappeared and places the Church’s full moral

\textsuperscript{28} Comité Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Informa sobre gestiones para investigar
situación de los Detenidos Desaparecidos (July 13, 1978 [cited April 12 2009]); available from
s_sini&id=201&sw_volver=yes&descripcion=.
\textsuperscript{29} Comité Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Declaración acerca de los Detenidos
Desaparecidos (November 9, 1978 [cited April 12 2009]); available from
s_sini&id=211&sw_volver=yes&descripcion=. [“En varias oportunidades, nos hemos dirigido a
personeros del gobierno acerca del problema de los desaparecidos. Las respuestas obtenidas hasta
ahora no han sido satisfactorias. Las personas llamadas detenidos-desaparecidos…a nuestro parecer,
darse por detenidas por los servicios de seguridad del gobierno…Desgraciadamente, hemos llegado a
la conclusión de que el gobierno no realizará una investigación a fondo de lo ocurrido… Lamentamos
tener que decir que hemos llegado también a la persuasión de que muchos, si no todos los detenidos
desaparecidos han muerto, al margen de toda ley….no podemos callar ante lo ocurrido… Ningún fin
puede justificar el uso de medios ilícitos. Matar a un hombre, al margen de toda ley, es un delito del
cual protestamos en nombre de Dios, Creador y Padre de todos los hombres…Denunciaremos cada
caso que llegue a nuestro conocimiento. Confiamos que el gobierno tomará las medidas necesarias
para prevenir los abusos y reprimirlos, si siguieran ocurriendo. En nombre de Dios…se lo exigimos.”]
weight it. Importantly, the bishops increased their pressure by placing full responsibility with the junta for failing to investigate the issue and full responsibility with the military for the disappearances themselves.

Throughout 1978 and 1979, the bishops continued denouncing different instances of repression and abuse. In an April 1978 declaration, they criticized the junta for adopting the same authoritarian model as Marxism in combating Marxism. Specifically the Episcopal Conference denounced the suspension of civil liberties and rights, as well as the repression of autonomous intermediary organizations within civil society. They criticized the restrictions on workers’ rights, attacks on the clergy, efforts to undermine the cultural identity of the Mapuche Indians and agrarian policies that harmed small farmers. In 1978 a retired miner discovered human remains in abandoned lime near Lonquén. It was later determined that they were the remains of people who had disappeared shortly after the coup. While relatives were allowed to identify the bodies, the junta did not turn the bodies over to be buried. Instead the government placed all of them in a mass grave.

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30 “We are increasingly bewilderment that the struggle against Marxism to which the State of National Security is dedicated, maintains an authoritarian praxis similar to the criticized Marxist model: the suspension of civil liberties, suspension and sometimes trampling of individual or collective rights, absorption of the legitimate autonomy of intermediate bodies, public institutions, universities, media, etc.” [“…nuestra perplejidad aumenta cuando advertimos que la lucha antimarxista a la que se entrega el Estado de la Seguridad Nacional, mantiene una praxis autoritaria semejante a la que critica en el modelo marxista: suspensión de las libertades públicas, suspensión y a veces atropello de los derechos personales o sindicales de los ciudadanos, absorción de las legítimas autonomías de los cuerpos intermedios, instituciones públicas, universidades, medios de comunicación social, etc.”] Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, *Humanismo Cristiano y nueva institucionalidad* (April 10, 1978 [cited April 10 2009]); available from http://www.iglesia.cl/breves_new/archivos/documentos_sini/207.pdf.

31 Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*, 310.

In August 1980, Pinochet abruptly called a plebiscite for the next month to approve a new authoritarian constitution. The document delineated maintained restrictions on civil liberties and established an eight year transition period during which Pinochet would exercise almost unlimited executive power. Pinochet would then be able to run for another eight year term. The new constitution also eliminated all civilian control over the armed forces and institutionalized their influence over all major national decisions.33 The Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference expressed concern, stating that opponents must be given equal access to the media, that citizens must be able to vote freely and with privacy, and that there be safeguards to ensure that the votes are tabulated correctly.34 Nevertheless, there were reports of fraud and the government prevailed in the vote, garnering 67 percent.35

Finally, in December 1980, the Church’s growing criticism reached a peak when a group of seven bishops issued a decree of automatic excommunication (excomunión latae sententiae) for all those that practiced torture, those that ordered it, as well as those that could have but failed to stop it. However, the bishops made clear that the purpose of their decree was not to register moral opposition to torture, but rather it had the more utilitarian purpose of stopping torture. They described the punishment as something they hoped would affect the consciences of people, writing, “The excommunication does not represent a definitive expulsion or damnation of the people, rather it has a medicinal character which the Church employs with the

33 Angell, "Chile since 1958," 187.
intention of correcting and preventing this crime.’’\textsuperscript{36} Thus, priests could absolve the excommunication as long as the person had stopped his involvement in torture.

\textsuperscript{36} Bishop Alejandro Jiménez and Bishop Carlos González, "La excomunión para quienes practican la tortura y su significado," (Archive of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, December 9, 1980). [“La excomunión no significa la expulsión o condenación definitiva de las personas, sino que tiene carácter medicinal que la Iglesia emplea con la intención de corregir e impedir este delito.”]
Conclusion

In March 1999, almost a decade after the return of democracy, Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez died. The Chilean government declared a national day of mourning and ordered all flags to be flown at half-mast. Radio and television programming paid tribute to the Cardinal.\(^1\) Along the path of the funeral procession, Chileans waved their handkerchiefs and covered the road with flowers, balloons, and confetti. Among them were the relatives of the disappeared who carried posters of those they lost. Behind the procession, a youth escort marched with the flags of leftist groups.\(^2\)

While serving as Cardinal, when Silva spoke on the significance of human rights, worshippers would often respond, “Raul! Our friend, the people are with you!”\(^3\) During the funeral masses, whenever the Vicaría de la Solidaridad was mentioned, those in attendance once again chanted that common refrain.\(^4\) One year later, Silva’s likeness was placed on the 500 peso coin. At the time, he and independence leader Bernardo O’Higgins were the only figures to adorn one of Chile’s coins.

Chile had come to see the Church during military rule as a true champion of human rights for its public opposition to oppression; however, the Church had not desired to adopt such a public role at the outset of the military takeover. Rather, it took two years of continued human rights violations before it was willing to publicly denounce the junta’s abuses.

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A Theology-Based Explanation

At its core, this thesis has argued that the Church’s initial reluctance to denounce abuses publicly was rooted in a belief that private diplomacy was the best means for protecting human rights, This explanation, however, has not been widely accepted among historians.

William Cavanaugh, a professor of religion, employs a theology-based explanation for the Church’s transition from private diplomacy to public denunciations. Thus, while this thesis asserts that the Church chose to alter its strategy in response to a changing cost-benefit analysis of various actions to promote human rights, Cavanaugh asserts that the ends themselves of the Church’s strategy changed. He interprets the Church’s reticence to denounce abuses at the outset of military rule as reflecting its implicit belief in a division between the spiritual and temporal spheres. This, Cavanaugh claims, was a product of the Church’s desire to serve as a source of unity, above the divisiveness of politics.

The “New Christendom” ecclesiology which dominated the Chilean Catholic Church…had theorized the church not as social body, but as the “soul of society.” The church would be responsible for the souls of Chileans, in effect handing their bodies over to the state for political and military duty. The church would supposedly form their individual consciences, and people would enter public life as individual Christians, but the church as a body would not act politically.5

When the Church did eventually began to forthrightly denounce abuses, Cavanaugh attributes this transformation to a change in the Church’s theology. He asserts that “…the slow evolution of the bishops’ position was not due to a lack of

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courage or information, but rather was a process, never completed, of unlearning a set
of ecclesiological presuppositions firmly engrained in the Chilean Catholic Church.”6

This new theological framework expanded the Church’s goals to include
protecting human rights and empowered it to influence the temporal sphere.
Moreover, under this changed theology, the Church did not necessarily denounce
abuses with the goal of protecting human rights. Rather the goal was to make visible
the junta’s abuses and in the process to counteract the disappearance of the Church.7
One could imagine a situation where forceful denunciations led the junta to persecute
the Church and prevent it from providing social services, thus negatively affecting the
human rights situation. Cavanaugh, however, views such persecution as positive, as it
makes the Church more visible by “creat[ing] martyrs out of victims” and “calling the
church to acts of self-sacrifice and remembrance…”8 Cavanaugh asserts this was
important, because the junta’s practice of torture made the Church disappear. For
him, torture represented an “ecclesiological problem” as it atomized society,
destroying individuals’ ability to form social groups and thus resulted in the
“disappearance of the Church.”9

According to Cavanaugh, what prompted this theological shift was not the
worsening human rights situation but the escalating attacks on the Church. Thus, the
Church only took “extreme measures” in order to defend itself from a “challenge to
the authority of the bishops, and not…the systematic abuses daily inflicted by the

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6 Ibid., 73.
7 Ibid., 280-81.
8 Ibid., 281.
9 Ibid., 70-71, 280-81.
regime’s apparatus of order.” Therefore, according to this interpretation, it was only through the process of being oppressed that the Church realized that it could not merely take responsibility for the souls of Chileans while “handing their bodies over to the state.” Therefore, Cavanaugh claims, there was a fundamental shift in the theological framework within which the Church’s cost-benefit analysis was embedded.

A Strategy-Based Explanation

As chapter one demonstrates, Cavanaugh’s supposition that there were theological obstacles to the Church’s public involvement in the temporal sphere is not supported by trends in Chilean Catholic theology before the coup. Since the days following the official separation of Church and state, the Church had openly defended its authority to influence political matters as long as it did not become directly involved in the political process or with political groups. Previous papal encyclicals, Vatican II and the Medellín Bishops Conference lent additional theological support for the Chilean Church’s active advocacy for both human rights and the economic rights of the poor.

Nor did the Church’s reticence to denounce abuses reflect a lack of commitment among the bishops for human rights. During the 1960’s the Church had actively advocated economic rights of the poor and called for economic and social reforms. It even tried to spur change with its own initiatives, starting labor unions and giving Church-owned land to landless farm workers. In the weeks following the coup, Cardinal Silva, while not denouncing abuses, demonstrated a clear concern for the

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10 Ibid., 106.
11 Ibid., 71.
poor and those persecuted by the junta. He visited detainees held in Santiago’s National Stadium and founded Pro Paz. By providing social services and a space where people could organize free of the security services, this organization challenged the junta’s persecution and its efforts to dismantle civil society. Moreover, by meticulously documenting human rights abuses and filing writs of habeas corpus, Pro Paz expressed moral opposition to a regime that sought to hide its abuses by making its victims disappear. 12 Thus, there was not a point when the Church was not concerned with social issues. Rather, this involvement was inherent in its response to the junta’s abuses.

In contrast to Cavanaugh’s theology-based explanation, this thesis has asserted that the Church’s changing behavior can be more effectively explained through the lens of strategy. What changed over the first two years of the dictatorship was not the bishops’ system of values or goals. Rather, it was their understanding of the human rights situation and how best to influence it.

Initially, during the first weeks following the coup, the Church did not display any displeasure at the idea of a military dictatorship and even offered its full cooperation. Many conservative bishops went further and explicitly gave moral legitimacy to the junta. This general support for the junta can be explained given the lack of information about human rights violations, and the bishops’ gratitude for the end of the polarization and civil strife that had characterized Allende’s term in office.

However, throughout the first year of military rule, evidence mounted of abuses that included torture, disappearances, and indefinitely long detentions without

recourse for appeal. It was also becoming increasingly clear that these abuses were
being perpetrated systematically and were not mere accidental excesses committed by
rogue elements in the military. Moreover, the junta was instituting a “shock
treatment” of neoliberal economic reforms whose burdens, the bishops thought, were
disproportionally hurting the poor.

Nonetheless, the bishops were reticent to confront these problems with open
opposition. Rather, they decided that the optimal strategy for promoting human rights
would be to build trust with the junta through demonstrations of public support, while
at the same time using private diplomacy to convince it to stop committing abuses. In
addition, it sought to ameliorate the growing social and economic problems by
providing expanded social services.

During the first two years of military rule there were three primary reasons
that led most bishops to decide private diplomacy was the most effective means for
protecting human rights. First, they believed that by maintaining a constructive
relationship with the junta, they would be able to exert some influence. And, the
bishops were often able to successfully negotiate with local military commanders and
secure the release of some individuals. In another instance, when leftist prisoner
Jaime Zamora sought refuge in Pro Paz, Cardinal Silva was able to convince Pinochet
not to pursue him.

Many bishops also believed that militant leftist groups posed a real threat to
the junta and Chile’s security. While this threat was largely manufactured by the
junta, the bishops initially had little way of knowing this. They feared that public
criticism would instigate increased conflict rather than promote human rights, thus
creating further problems. This was the rationale underlying a conversation between the Cardinal and the Papal Nuncio to Chile, Sótero Sánz, concerning the letter the Pope had drafted criticizing the junta. During the discussion the Cardinal concluded that such a letter would encourage armed resistance to the junta and destroy the Church’s positive relation with the regime.

The Church was also providing a significant amount of assistance to victims of the junta’s persecution and economic policies. It feared that if it was viewed by the junta as a hostile force, its capacity to provide social services would be restricted. Moreover, the two internal Church strategy documents analyzed in this thesis clearly demonstrate that the Church’s goal was to improve the human rights situation and that it was looking for the most effective means for doing so. These documents support the conclusion that these three factors led the Church to decide that private diplomacy was its best strategy.

The attitude of the bishops towards the junta was of course not uniform throughout these initial two years. At different points individual bishops and the Episcopal Conference expressed concerns about general abuses occurring in Chile; however, the bishops never specified who was responsible for the problems nor proposed concrete solutions that would remedy the situation. At the same time, a number of conservative bishops expressed fairly consistent support for the junta.

However, by the end of 1975 there was a growing frustration among the bishops with private diplomacy. Conversations and letters were having little influence on the junta’s systematic violation of human rights. Moreover, it was becoming increasingly evident that leftists had little capacity to challenge the junta.
weakness of leftist groups became indisputable when in November of 1975 the MIR leadership, pursued by the DINA, sought refuge with the Church. The junta’s attacks on Pro Paz and finally its forced dissolution, also demonstrated that the strategy of private diplomacy was not securing any protection for the Church’s efforts to provide social services. For this reason, the Church found it necessary to abandon the ecumenical structure of Pro Paz and incorporate this work within the Catholic Church, thus guaranteeing it greater legal protection.

Nevertheless, despite this growing frustration, the significant number of conservative bishops and the consensus basis of the Episcopal Conference prevented the Chilean Church from articulating a unified criticism of the junta. As a result, individual bishops started publicly expressing their frustrations with the government. In a major turning point, Carlos Camus was the first bishop to do so with his September 1975 conversation with foreign journalists. One month later, the Cardinal issued a vigorous defense of the Church’s authority to protect fugitives when the state would most likely not respect their rights. Silva even threatened to excommunicate Jaime Guzmán, the junta’s chief legal advisor, for publicly challenging his assertion.

Finally, in August 1976 the Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference issued a declaration labeling the government a hostile force. According to Cavanaugh, this shift resulted from two pivotal attacks on the Church hierarchy, Jaime Guzmán’s challenge to Cardinal Silva’s declaration and the demonstrations targeted at the bishops on their return from the Riobamba Conference.

However, Cavanaugh’s further assertion that the Church only decided to criticize human rights abuses in response to attacks on the hierarchy, rests on a
perceived correlation between the attacks and the Episcopal Conference’s declarations. This claim confuses the consensus-driven nature of the Episcopal Conference with the Chilean Church itself. It was only after attacks by the regime began to threaten the Church itself that the more conservative bishops began to allow the Episcopal Conference to issue direct criticism. Nevertheless, this reflected only a shift in the opinion of fewer than half of the bishops, while many others, including Cardinal Silva and Bishop Camus, had already adopted an openly critical position. This change among many of the bishops resulted not from attacks on the Church, but from the failure of private diplomacy to improve the human rights situation.

This analysis demonstrates that when there are a significant number of progressive bishops in a national Catholic Church, there are not major theological barriers to the Church involving itself in political issues. At the same time the Church is a pragmatic institution and often seeks to affect change rather than denouncing problems solely for the sake of registering moral opposition.

However, the converse is also often true, where the Church is reticent to involve itself in temporal affairs when the incentives to do so are not as strong and the bishops not as progressive. In Chile, the Church has been increasingly hesitant to involve itself in political issues since the return to democratic rule. Some of this change has been a product of the Vatican appointing predominantly conservative bishops since the early 1980’s. Another factor was the delicate balance between the military and the new civilian government. In 1990, immediately following the return to democracy, the Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference called for a full

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13 Michael Fleet and Brian H. Smith, *The Catholic Church and democracy in Chile and Peru* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 162.
investigation into the past atrocities and accountability for those responsible. The military, however, soon made clear that it would not tolerate investigations into its actions and would defend itself with force if necessary. Since then, the bishops have spoken on the importance of justice and truth for reconciliation, but have not strongly pursued the issue, understanding the fragility of civilian rule.\textsuperscript{14}

This change within the Church was reflected in Cardinal Silva’s funeral. During the service, the reading of Silva’s final statement calling for the eradication of poverty drew a thunderous applause; however, the pope’s message of condolence was met with silence. According to one reporter, David Molineaux, this reflected a sadness felt by those in attendance at the Church’s more recent turn towards conservatism.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 163-69.
\textsuperscript{15} Molineaux, "Chile Honors Memory of Cardinal who Opposed Pinochet: Cardinal Raul Silva Henriquez's Death."
The bishops continued to offer criticisms of human rights violations throughout the 1980’s. However, the Church sought to serve less as a force of opposition to the junta and more as a mediator promoting reconciliation and a peacefully return to democracy. In April 1981, Cardinal Silva announced a downsizing of the Vicaría. Nevertheless, he still continued to criticize the national security focus of the junta and its tendency to trample upon human rights. The Cardinal made this point in 1982 in a working paper entitled, “Solidarity.”

In 1982 Cardinal Silva reached the mandatory age of retirement for bishops. Early the next year, the Vatican chose Francisco Fresno to replace him as Archbishop of Santiago and later in 1985 promoted Fresno to Cardinal. The decision provoked some worry among many of Chile’s progressive bishops. As Archbishop of La Serena, Fresno had been an outspoken supporter of the junta. He, for instance, was one of two bishops to publicly express dissent over the Episcopal Conference’s April 1974 declaration, “Reconciliation in Chile.” When First Lady Lucia Hiriart learned of the decision, she reportedly exclaimed, “At last, God has heard us.” Many were in fact fearful that Fresno would close the Vicaría; however, in an interview he made clear that the difference between him and Silva was mostly of style. “I never, ever thought that the Vicaría should be closed…I made it clear to the Holy Father that my style was going to be somewhat different. Don Raul [Silva] has an aggressive, strong

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3 Lucia Hiriart, quoted in Eugenio Yáñez Rojas, La Iglesia chilena y el gobierno militar: itinerario de una difícil relación (1973-1988) (Santiago: Editorial Andante, 1989), 93. [“Por fin Dios nos ha escuchado.”]
style, whereas I, by nature, am a man of dialogue." Thus, Fresno kept many of Silva’s advisors and continued support for the Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

While the Church retreated from outright opposition, it still on occasion denounced abuses. Most significantly, the entire Episcopal Conference issued a declaration excommunicating torturers, agreeing with the seven bishops who had done so earlier. Pinochet also continued to attack the Church when he viewed its actions as threatening. In March 1983, he expelled three Irish priests for participating in a hunger strike, organized by lay people advocating for more information about the disappeared. Throughout the next year, a French-born priest was shot while reading a bible and seven churches were bombed. Moreover, in April Pinochet even sent a minister to the Vatican in order to ask for a greater role in appointing bishops.

In 1982, an economic crisis hit, and in May 1983 street protests erupted throughout Chile. Chile’s shantytowns were a major source of support for many of these demonstrations. Thus, in the fall of 1984 the army launched a brutal campaign of repression in these areas. Nevertheless, the protests continued and Pinochet’s hold on power came to increasingly rely on the military’s repression. Still, the opposition

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7 Michael Fleet and Brian H. Smith, *The Catholic Church and democracy in Chile and Peru* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 117.
8 Ibid., 121-22.
10 Angell, "Chile since 1958," 190-91.
11 Ibid., 191-92.
remained divided and was unable to take advantage of the more public displays of opposition.12

In his new efforts at mediation, Archbishop Fresno tried to broker talks between centrist opposition leaders and Interior Minister, Sergio Onofre Jarpa in September 1983. However, the dialogue broke down two months later, in large part over the opposition’s unwillingness to accept the 1980 Constitution.13 In March 1985 Fresno tried again, this time mediating between the opposition groups themselves, so that they would be able present Pinochet with more unified demands. Within five months, the parties agreed on a document called the National Accord on the Transition to Full Democracy. It outlined a set of common principles that would guide a transition to democracy and a future civilian government. Nevertheless, Pinochet rejected the agreement.14 However, Fresno’s success in uniting the opposition paved the way for the opposition to defeat Pinochet in the 1988 plebiscite on a new eight-year term. The opposition won the vote with 55 percent to Pinochet’s 43 percent. 15

Silva had served as a more forceful and public critic than Fresno; however, during that time the Church was also the only source of opposition to the junta. Fresno was effective not at opposing the junta, but at helping political groups unite and oppose the junta on their own. This was made possible by the junta’s decision to give political groups greater freedom to act; however, due to Fresno’s desire to serve as more of a mediator, he tried to enforce more neutrality on the Church, thus

12 Ibid., 192.
13 Fleet and Smith, The Catholic Church and democracy in Chile and Peru, 120.
14 Ibid., 122-23.
15 Angell, "Chile since 1958," 194-95.
retreating from Silva’s previous efforts to be an incubator for civil society. Rather, Fresno ordered priests to not allow outside groups to use Church facilities for political or human rights activities.¹⁶

¹⁶ Fleet and Smith, *The Catholic Church and democracy in Chile and Peru*, 127.
Appendix: Chilean Bishops 1973-1979

Analyzing the theological differences among Chile’s bishops is exceedingly difficult. This is especially true given the emphasis on unity and doctrinal cohesion within the Church. As Bishop Carlos Camus said in 1975 while Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference, “in the doctrine of the Church…there cannot be disagreements, because we have the same source of training.” While these differences may exist, they were not something the bishops openly discussed and they must be inferred from their public statements. Moreover, there are many types of theological positions (such as approval of liberation theology and position with respect to the junta), some often independent of others.

While this probably oversimplifies the subject matter, the bishops were divided in how to address human rights violations and to the extent that this analysis helps to visualize this disagreement, it is valuable. Therefore, this section posits a rough breakdown of the theological positions of the bishops, based on their position with respect to the junta. “Progressive” denotes a strong willingness to criticize human rights violations in Chile, while “conservative” denotes a strong willingness to support the government. This breakdown is largely based on an analysis by Eugenio Yañez, who divided the bishops based on their public statements. However, Yañez’s breakdown did not capture all of the bishops and, I have additional bishops based on an analysis of their public statements. The positions of some bishops could not be determined and they are included in the “Not Known” section.

1 (Yañez, 39). [“Ahora, la parte doctrina, o sea la doctrina de la Iglesia, en la doctrina de la Iglesia, en las consecuencias del Evangelio no puede haber discrepancias, porque tenemos la misma fuente de formación.”]
2 (Yañez, 25-29, 35-36)
**Progressive (8)**
Carlos Camus*
Sergio Contreras*
Carlos González*
Jorge Hourton†
Enrique Alvear
Fernando Ariztía
Alejandro Goic (appointed in 1979)
Tomás González (appointed in 1974)
Alejandro Jiménez (appointed in 1975)

**Center Left (7)**
Raúl Silva Henríquez** †
Bernardino Piñera*
José Manuel Santos*
Ramón Salas
Sergio Valech
Juan Luis Ysern

**Center Right (4)**
Juan Francisco Fresno** †
Francisco de Borja Valenzuela** †
Francisco José Cox (appointed in 1974)
Polidoro Van Vlierberghe

**Conservative (10)**
Carlos Oviedo** †
Manuel Sánchez†
Emilio Tagle†
Eladio Vicuña†
Bernardo Cazzaro
Orozimbo Fuenzalida
Sixtio Parzinger (appointed in 1977)
Augusto Salinas (retired in 1976)
Francisco Valdés
Francisco Gillmore

**Not Known (4)**
Alejandro Durán
Guillermo Hartl
Raúl Silva Silva
José Valle

* Denotes a bishop that has served more than once in either a leadership role within the Episcopal Conference or on the Permanent Committee. Eugenio Yañez
characterizes these bishops as the “protagonists” and they were the most visible leaders of the Church.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{†} Denotes archbishop.

\textsuperscript{3} Yañez, 35-36
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