



THE CATHOLIC YOUTH WORKERS MOVEMENT (JOC)
AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE POPULAR CHURCH IN BRAZIL

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Abstract

This paper traces the history of the Catholic Youth Workers movement (JOC) of Brazil during the 1958-1970 period and analyzes JOC's contributions to the transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church. During the period under consideration, JOC was one of the most important lay movements in Brazil. It was also one of the most important precursors to the popular Church which flourished during the 1970s. JOC itself virtually died out in 1970, a victim of strong repression from the military regime and insufficient support from the bishops. But the movement helped introduce a kind of faith and pedagogical practices which would conquer increasing space within the Brazilian Church. In this regard, it helped transform an institution noted for being hierarchical, authoritarian, and unresponsive to grass roots or lay movements.

At a theoretical level, the paper attempts to make two principal contributions. First, it emphasizes the importance grass roots and lay movements had in the transformation of the Brazilian Church. Second, it argues that analysis of changes in a lay movement like JOC should focus both on the movement's linkages to the Church and to the society as a whole, especially the working class.

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza la historia de la Juventud Obrera Católica de Brasil durante el período 1958-70, focalizando las contribuciones de la JOC en el proceso de transformación de la Iglesia Católica Brasileña. Durante el período aquí considerado la JOC fue uno de los más importantes movimientos laicos en Brasil y uno de los más importantes precursores de la Iglesia popular que floreció en la década del 70. Aunque la JOC desapareció en 1970-víctima de la fuerte represión del régimen militar y del insuficiente apoyo del episcopado-su lucha contribuyó a introducir una nueva concepción de fe y prácticas pedagógicas que conquistarían espacio creciente dentro de la Iglesia brasileña. En este sentido la JOC cuestionó una institución caracterizada históricamente por sus jerarquías rígidas, el autoritarismo y el control sobre los movimientos de base.

A nivel teórico, el trabajo intenta aportar en dos áreas. En primer lugar, enfatiza la importancia que los movimientos de base y laicos han tenido en la transformación de la Iglesia brasileña. En segundo lugar, argumenta que el análisis de los cambios en un movimiento laico como la JOC debería focalizar sus vínculos con la Iglesia y la sociedad global, especialmente la clase obrera.

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During the past three decades and particularly since the military coup of 1964, the Brazilian Catholic Church has undergone a profound transformation. Once closely linked to the state and the dominant classes, during the 1970-78 period the Church became the most significant institution defending human rights. Through the statements and actions of bishops, priests and nuns, and laity, it continues to be one of the most important institutions in Brazilian politics. By the late 1970s, it had also become the most progressive Catholic Church in the world.

The importance of the Brazilian Church in national politics and international Catholicism are striking. Yet little has been written about the major precursors to the contemporary popular Church. This article attempts to respond to this lacunae.

The article traces the history of the Catholic Youth Workers movement (JOC) of Brazil during the 1958-70 period.¹ Part of a set of lay movements known as Brazilian Catholic Action, JOC was and is a movement for the urban working

¹ A lengthier version of this article was published in the Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira 43 (March 1983).

class. During the period under consideration, JOC was one of the most important lay movements in Brazil. It was also one of the most important precursors to the popular Church which flourished during the 1970s. JOC itself virtually died out in 1970, a victim of brutal repression from the state and insufficient support from the bishops. But the movement gave a testimony of a kind of faith which would conquer increasing space within the Brazilian Church. At a time when most of the Church was still closely linked to the state and dominant classes, JOC helped the institution understand the needs and values of the working class and the importance of developing more adequate pastoral practices with the popular classes. In this regard, JOC helped transform an institution noted for being hierarchical, authoritarian, and unresponsive to grass roots or lay movements.

The JOC experience was particularly interesting because of the rapidity with which the movement changed in a relatively short time. Before 1958, JOC was politically moderate, with little involvement in popular movements, more concerned about youth activities and the Church's sacramental life than about politics. By 1970, it had become one of the military regime's primary targets of repression because of its leadership in popular movements, its radical critiques of the regime, and its commitment to a socialist project. It also lost its concern with youth activities and became distanced from the institutional Church.

² Márcio Moreira Alves has a short discussion of JOC and Catholic Workers Action, ACO, in A Igreja e a Política no Brasil (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1979), 152-157. In 1981, the archdiocesan newspaper, O São Paulo, ran a series of brief articles on JOC's history.

Despite its importance, little has been written about JOC.² More generally, little has been written about the emergence of the popular Church. Through discussing JOC and its transformation, this article hopes to contribute to a richer understanding of the broader process of the Church's transformation. Although there is a marked difference between a movement like JOC, closely attuned to the needs and values of a segment of the working class, and the whole Church institution, which purports universality, it is significant that the same political changes which helped cause JOC's transformation after 1964 (a highly inegalitarian economic model and widespread repression) were major factors in the Church's transformation as a whole.

The article traces JOC's history from 1958, when the changes in the Brazilian Church started to accelerate, to 1970, when repression decimated the movement. The article has three main parts. Part 1 discusses some theoretical considerations regarding change in a Church movement. Part 2 discusses JOC's evolution for four different periods: 1947-57 (briefly), 1958-61, 1962-64, and 1964-70. Part 3 examines JOC's contributions to the creation of the popular Church.

The article does not attempt to address some other questions worthy of study, such as a more detailed description of JOC's growth, its structures, its relationship to specific popular movements, major events in the movement, or its relationship to the international structure of the movement. It considers the 1947-57 period only briefly, without discussing the changes which occurred during that decade, and only touches on the post-70 period in passing. In addition, especially after 1964, political positions sometimes changed with a rapidity which the article does not intend to capture.

As a final caveat, the article describes JOC's vision as expressed through the movement's publications and the reflections of ex-leaders. This "hegemonic" vision cannot take into account the complex multiplicity of visions at the grass roots. During the entire period under consideration, JOC had some regional differences and internal differences regarding levels of conscientization and politicization. In the Northeast, discussion about factory problems was less salient than in the industrial cities of the South and Southeast; conversely, unemployment was always a more important topic in the Northeast. Furthermore, there were differences between the grass roots, the local level leaders, the regional leaders, and the national leaders, with levels of conscientization and politicization generally higher at the peak levels.

THEORETICAL NOTES ON STUDYING CHANGE IN A CHURCH MOVEMENT

Throughout the article I examine the changes in JOC with respect to two principal references, the political vision of the Catholic Church as a whole and the political struggle in society at large. Since it was a Church movement, JOC's development was conditioned by changes in the hierarchy; changes within other lay movements, especially in Catholic Action; changes in the international JOC movements; and by new theologies. Even during the late 1960s, when its conception of faith was far more progressive than the hegemonic line within the Brazilian Church, JOC was marked by its religious character. Nowhere was this fact more evident than in JOC's pedagogy, which retained a Christian humanist emphasis on respecting the individual, especially respecting the popular classes' values and capacities. Its religious ties also showed up in JOC's critical attitude towards clandestine groups and in the

fact that despite profound differences it always maintained its relationship with the institutional Church.

The second major reference point for understanding JOC's evolution is social, political, and economic change in Brazilian society. A central argument of the article is that the Church's vision of faith has been strongly influenced by the political ideologies in Brazilian society. In turn, these ideologies and visions of politics have been largely determined by the society's conflicts and the way the state has attempted to resolve or suppress those conflicts.

If a religious organization or movement believes that its mission dictates a political involvement, its vision of faith will be more affected by the political struggle. When a Church enters the political debates, it is also affected by them, thereby opening itself to change through channels it does not completely control. Then the analysis of why the institution changes must focus more on this broader political struggle.

This is what happened to the Catholic Church in Brazil. As the Church developed a growing consciousness concerning its social mission, it started to be affected by social change and political conflict in new ways. As the conflicts in the society changed, different social forces developed new conceptions of politics, and the debates about the nature of the good state were mirrored in the Church's discussion about its mission.³

³ On this point, see Luiz Gonzaga de Souza Lima, Evolução Política dos Católicos e da Igreja no Brasil (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1979). For an interesting Marxian interpretation of the way religion is shaped by social conflicts, see Otto Maduro, Religião e Luta de Classes (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981), 69-112.

This does not mean that institutional identities are passive reflections of the real history which is being carried out by the struggle of classes and other social forces; on the contrary, ideas and social identities have a dialectical interrelation with the social conflicts, shaping the way different social forces react politically. Politics is as much a struggle to define symbolic elements as to define material needs.⁴ The political struggle is shaped as much by the way institutions and groups perceive themselves as by material needs or concrete institutional interests.

Nevertheless, the political struggle helps cause social identities and ideologies to be rethought, creating new identities and ideologies. Most social practices and institutional identities change principally because the social struggle imposes a new way of understanding reality.⁵ JOC's institutional identity--its conception of faith and of its mission--did not change so much as the result of debates about what the movement should be or about how it should protect its institutional interests as because the political struggle generated new conceptions about the society and JOC's role within it. After 1958, JOC became increasingly open to political questions and more directly affected by the political struggle. Jocistas (the people who participated in the movement) were not only participants in a Church movement, they also were workers, and as such, they were affected by the same changes and policies that

As Max Weber wrote,

⁴ "Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest." From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 280.

⁵ The essays by Fernando Henrique Cardoso in As Idéias e seu Lugar (Petrópolis: Vozes/CEBRAP, 1980) provide a fine introduction to the way social conflict causes the emergence of new ideas, focusing on changing ideas in the social sciences.

affected other workers. As Jocistas assumed a deep political commitment, they were affected by political happenings just like other people active in popular movements or on the left. Jocistas made their living as wage earners, so they were affected by economic policy. They participated in popular movements, so they were affected by the state's policies towards those movements. And JOC participated in the debate about Brazil's political future, so it was affected by the events that determined that future. Thus, the changes in the political climate over the 1958-70 period-- the nationalistic optimism of the 1958-64 period; the repression, declining real wages, and growing disillusionment with capitalism after 1964--strongly influenced JOC's development.

While insisting on the way broader social and political changes helped reshape JOC's conception of its mission, we should also be careful to avoid reducing analysis of a Church or a Church movement to the class constituency of the participants. Religion can be a powerful force in determining political orientation, sometimes even more so than class.⁶ Furthermore, political change does not inevitably change the way different institutions or movements view themselves. All institutions have a specificity in the way they respond to social changes, and they can maintain some impermeability vis-a-vis the conflicts in society at large, especially when they participate only peripherally in the political struggle.⁷ If a Church or a religious movement remains

⁶ Many studies have shown how strongly religion influences political views independent of class in the advanced industrial societies, where, it should be noted, conflicts tend to occur less sharply along class lines. See, among others, Gerhard Lenski, The Religious Factor (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 120-191, 288-330; Juan J. Linz, "Religion and Politics in Spain: From Conflict to Consensus above Cleavage," Social Compass 27 (1980), 255-277; Lawrence Hazelrigg, "Religious and Class Bases of Political Conflict in Italy," American Journal of Sociology 75 (January 1970), 496-511.

⁷ In this insistence upon the institutional specificity of the Church, I differ from the interesting study of Luiz Gonzaga de Souza Lima, Evolução Polí-

outside of political debates and defines its mission as being above politics,* it is possible that the political process will not directly affect the way it perceives its mission. For example, in the United States the Amish have retained many 18th century customs despite the dramatic changes in the society and polity around them. Their understanding of faith has been relatively impermeable to social change and conflict.

Thus analysis of the Church or a Church movement should neither see its transformations as direct, inevitable results of broader historical change, nor neglect the impact of these broader changes. Like other organizations, the Church has an institutional specificity and interests that make it respond in unique ways to social changes and conflicts. We must understand both this institutional specificity--the institution's self-identity as expressed through its discourse and practices--and the social changes which can alter that institutional identity.

JOC'S DEVELOPMENT, 1947-1957

The Catholic Youth Workers movement was found by Father Jose Cardijn, a Belgium priest from a working class family, in 1923.' From the beginning the

tica dos Católicos e da Igreja no Brasil (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1979).

- * No Church is ever really above politics. Religious practices and discourse necessarily either reinforce or challenge the predominant values, hence ultimately the system of domination. Daniel Levine argues that all religions have a political content in his fine introductory chapter in Religion and Politics in Latin America: The Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 18-55. Nevertheless, a church can believe it is above politics and can stay outside of political discussions. In this case, it can more easily avoid being affected by the political struggle.
- ' See Michael de la Bedoyere, The Cardijn Story (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1958) for a brief biography.

movement was aimed towards the urban working class, both in Europe and in Brazil, where the first JOC groups were created in the mid-1930s. JOC was part of Catholic Action, a lay organization created to strengthen the Church's penetration of different segments of the society. In Brazil, it was not until 1947, when Catholic Action was reorganized that JOC started to become an important movement.

From the institutional Church's viewpoint, JOC represented part of an overall effort of cautious modernization through developing more effective pastoral work with the working class. Pope Pius XI had lamented that the greatest scandal of the 19th century was that the Church lost the working class, and both Pius XI and Pius XII saw recapturing that class as an important goal. In Brazil, the process of secularization, the erosion of the Catholic religious monopoly, and declining Church attendance in rural areas made the more lucid minds within the Church aware of the need to develop more effective pastoral practices, especially among the urban working class.¹⁰

One of the principal expressions of this awareness was a belief that the working class was religiously ignorant and that the Church needed to implant a more mature faith. This concern with the religious deficiencies of the working class is clearly expressed in JOC documents of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

"Most workers don't know what Baptism is; it is simply done because everyone always did it. . . Many people aren't baptized until they are one, two, or even three years old. . . Few young workers go to mass. . . There is great religious ignorance. . . As a result, Spiritism has penetrated many places. . . The cinema, the press,

¹⁰ These changes in Brazilian society and their effect on the Church are described in Thomas Bruneau's classical work, The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 55-104.

and the radio are also a grave danger, breaking the youth away from the Church as they develop the cult of sensuality and immorality."¹¹

Within this vision, JOC was seen as a way of "Christianizing" the working class, of implementing a more mature faith. There was a widespread view that "the need for a working class Christian movement is urgent. . . . The Church gave JOC the mission of rechristianizing the young workers."¹²

In fact, JOC was not the only attempt to Christianize the Brazilian working class. Another movement, the Bible Circles, predated JOC by a few years, and until the 1950s was more prominent. Organized in the early 1930s, the Circles expanded rapidly and became a national movement in 1937. Like JOC, they incorporated a concern with the Church's social doctrine, but from the outset they were more conservative and clerical than JOC.¹³

Until the mid-50s, JOC had strong "triumphalist" overtones. Its mission was to "conquer and convert young workers."¹⁴ Along with this conception went a strong concern for the movement's numerical expansion. By 1956, JOC had 8500 activists and several regular publications, most significantly the monthly newspapers Construir and Juventude Trabalhadora.

During its early years, JOC's primary emphasis was on religious questions, but it also held campaigns on health, housing, minors who worked, and other social questions. The movement was structured on a parish basis and was

¹¹ "Situação da Juventude Trabalhadora," 1950.

¹² "Conferência Nacional," May 5-13, 1951.

¹³ On the Bible Circles, see Howard Wiarda, "The Catholic Labor Movement," in John Rosenbaum and William Tyler, Contemporary Brazil: Issues in Economic and Political Development (New York: Praeger, 1972), 323-347.

¹⁴ "Situação da Juventude Trabalhadora," 1950.

fairly clerical. However, even during this period, there were some tensions between the parish structure, usually self-contained, and JOC, which had concerns about the world at large that went beyond those of the parish. Lay leaders already played a more significant role than in the Bible Circles, and by 1957, the movement hired some workers to devote themselves full time to its cause. JOC also gradually had more full time assistants, priests who worked with the movement rather than in a parish, thereby creating more autonomy vis-a-vis the parish structure.

Especially until around 1950, JOC had a relatively traditional, individualistic conception of faith. One assistant defined the movement's goals as "the glory of God and the salvation of souls."¹⁵ There was little sense that salvation could imply working for a more just society. Even though JOC was not oblivious to social problems, the movement generally proposed religious solutions to these problems. Political and social action was secondary and was usually seen in moralistic ways.

During this period, JOC's world view was more strongly marked by its character as a youth Church movement than by its working class character. It was closely linked to the Church's sacramental life and celebrations. Jocistas discussed at length issues related to the family (relations with parents, dating, marriage, parenthood) and personal problems such as getting jobs, strains within the family, and career hopes. The movement also organized recreational activities ranging from picnics and dances to assemblies and minor excursions. As a 1964 document recapitulated,

¹⁵ Father François Rioux, "A Técnica Jocista e o Assistente," Primeira Semana Nacional de Assistentes, Rio de Janeiro, January 19-24, 1948.

"In the first phase (1948-57), the youth and educational aspects predominated. There was a stronger concern for the young worker. A concern with educating for responsibility, with the family, dating, marriage, recreation, culture, etc. A constant concern with marriage and family life."¹⁶

Despite the fact that JOC was more oriented towards religious, personal, and recreational questions than political or social issues, it always had some interest in the latter. An early (1948) document stated, "Contrary to some associations exclusively concerned with religious activities, JOC has a social mission."¹⁷ JOC's pedagogy--"See, evaluate, act"--always expressed a concern for social reality. The pedagogical method was supposed to start with concrete facts in the lives of Jocistas, analyze these facts, and act upon the analysis. The kind of analysis and action were limited until the late 1950s, but the method always lent itself to involvement in social questions.

As early as 1950, the movement had a peripheral interest in the working class struggle. A document from that year states, "JOC was always interested in the labor struggle. Through study groups and its newspaper, it has insisted that young workers, especially the Jocistas, join the unions."¹⁸ In 1956, a document noted the importance of participating in popular movements as a means of responding to the the material problems most young workers faced. "JOC teaches young workers to be authentic leaders of working class organizations in addition to good fathers and mothers."¹⁹

¹⁶ "Evolução do Movimento," 1964, on the 1948-57 period.

¹⁷ Father François Rioux, "A Técnica Jocista e o Assistente," Primeira Semana Nacional de Assistentes, January 19-24, 1948.

¹⁸ "Situação da Juventude Trabalhadora," 1950.

¹⁹ "Relatório da Situação Atual da Juventude Trabalhadora e da JOC no Brasil," 1956.

But there were limits to JOC's political participation and vision. During its first decade, the movement became more concerned with discussing questions such as safety in the factory, work hours, having enough time to eat in the factory, and wages, but few Jocistas were leaders in the labor movement. JOC's lay leaders were fairly politicized, but the movement as a whole was far less so. Its publications frequently criticized the "Communist agitators" and insisted that a good Catholic should not vote for a Communist.

1958-1961

During the late 1950s JOC started to become more involved in political questions, beginning what would become a rapid and profound transformation of one of the more important lay groups in the Brazilian Church. This transformation was the result of changes in the Church's vision and the political situation in society at large. Starting the late 1950s, the society underwent a process of rapid politicization and mobilization.²⁰ JOC started these final years of the populist period already open to social and political questions and with a belief that its religious mission required some attention to these questions. This relative openness to political questions meant that it would be affected by the conflicts in society at large. The politicization throughout the society led JOC to become increasingly identified with the working class struggle and to start participating more actively in politics.

²⁰ There is an abundant literature on the late populist period, 1956-1964. Good starting points include Thomas Skidmore, Politics in Brazil: An Experiment in Democracy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 163-302; Peter Flynn, Brazil: A Political Analysis (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978), 190-309; Ricardo Maranhão, O Governo Kubitschek (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981).

This tendency was reinforced by changes in the Church. During the first period of JOC's existence, on the whole the Brazilian Catholic Church was still a relatively conservative institution. The predominant orientation was one of cautious modernizing to meet the challenges of the increasingly secular society and of attempting to "Christianize" society, that is, deepen its influence among state elites, in the school system, among the media, among different social strata.²¹ During the late 1950s, although most of the institution was still conservative, there emerged more thrusts for change, supported by the CNBB and by a new Pope, John XXIII. This situation helped stimulate pastoral innovations among the popular classes, providing support for progressive experiences like JOC.

In addition, beginning 1959, other movements within Brazilian Catholic Action, particularly the Catholic University Youth, JUC, began a process of radicalization out of which emerged a Catholic Left. By 1961, the Catholic Left had already entered into serious conflict with the hierarchy and had established an important presence in national politics. It represented the first attempt in Brazil to link radical political options and faith.

In 1961, the hierarchy, with support from the state, created the Movement for Grass Roots Education, MEB, a popular education movement intended to help educate and conscientize the popular classes. Although instituted by the bishops, MEB was dominated by the Catholic Left until 1964, with JUC participants playing a key role. Within the Church, MEB represented a new way of working with the popular classes.

²¹ On this point, again see Bruneau, The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church, and Moreira Alves, A Igreja e a Política no Brasil.

The Catholic Left exercised a deep influence on the Brazilian Church by helping to create a new vision of faith, linked to a commitment to radical social change. The Catholic Left's impact on JOC was strong, not only because it served as a model for a different conception of faith, but also because JOC had some interactions with other movements in Brazilian Catholic Action, especially at the peak level. JUC militants sometimes met with Jocistas, encouraging them towards a more progressive vision of faith. On some occasions, JUC militants gave courses to Jocistas to help the latter develop a deeper understanding of Brazilian reality. MEB helped stimulate thinking about pedagogical practices, and there was a limited amount of direct exchange between the two movements.²²

During the 1958 to 1961 period, JOC continued to be concerned with the expansion and structure of the movement. Through its publications, through more frequent contact between leaders of different geographic regions, JOC became better organized and with a more expressive national level leadership. More attention was paid to preparing lay leaders. By 1961, JOC's monthly newspaper had a circulation of 40,000, and the movement had 25,943 members.²³

²² Two brief but good overviews of the Catholic Left are Luiz Gonzaga de Souza Lima, Evolução Política dos Católicos e da Igreja no Brasil, 30-51, and Thomas Sanders, "Catholicism and Development: The Catholic Left in Brazil," in Kalman Silvert, ed., Churches and States: The Religious Institution and Modernization (New York: American Universities Field Staff, 1967), 81-99. On JUC, see the important book by Luiz Alberto Gomez de Souza, JUC: Os Estudantes Católicos e a Política (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, forthcoming). Also see José Oscar Beozzo, "Les Mouvements des Universitaires Catholiques au Bresil," unpublished thesis, Catholic University of Louvain. On MEB, see the fine book by Emmanuel de Kadt, Catholic Radicals in Brazil (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); and José Pereira Peixoto, "Movimento de Educação de Base: Alguns Dados Históricos," Proposta 3 (December 1976).

²³ O São Paulo, March 13-19, 1981.

Brazil's JOC had become one of the most active in the world and one of the most important lay groups in the Brazilian Church.

During this period, the movement became less triumphalist, more oriented towards working class questions, and more progressive politically. By the late 1950s, influenced by the dynamism of the labor movement, JOC started to spend more time discussing professional training, wages, work conditions, unions, and neighborhood associations. Earlier the movement had been concerned with saving the working class in a moralistic sense; in the late 1950s, it began to evince more concern with material problems in working class life. The principal problems of the young worker were no longer seen as moral questions in the narrow sense but rather as political and economic issues. JOC opened towards the working class as a whole rather than focusing on young Catholic workers. As one document stated, there was "an awakening of the young workers to their value as workers, as poor people, and the importance of their work, their social group, and the responsibilities they have."²⁴

1961 was a turning point. The year was marked by three important conferences in Rio de Janeiro: the Second World Congress of JOC, the I National Congress of Young Workers, and the Congress of Young Domestic Workers, organized by JOC. In addition, the movement launched the Campaign of Working Class Consciousness to "alert the workers, especially the youth, to the gravity of the problems they face: inadequate wages, cheating on the minimum wage, unemployment, exploitation in their work . . . (and to) call attention to working class organizations: unions, cooperatives, neighborhood associations, etc."²⁵

²⁴ II Congresso Mundial da JOC, Rio de Janeiro, November 1961.

²⁵ Untitled document, 1961.

The conclusions of the I National Congress of Young Workers (Rio, November 1961) are revealing of JOC's political positions during this time. The document contains strong traces of the political optimism that marked most progressive groups within the populist pact, specifically that the "base reforms" of the Goulart government would resolve the country's major problems. Alongside this optimism went a more critical political awareness. For the first time JOC started to criticize capitalism. "Because of its failure to respect the human individual, capitalism is as much an evil as socialism."²⁶ The movement also expressed sharp criticisms of Brazil's model of development, recognizing, at least in inchoate form, that development does not necessarily resolve the problems of the popular classes. "The development race does not necessarily benefit the working class. In Brazil, it has made the poor poorer, and the rich richer."²⁷

The changes JOC underwent during these years were significant, but we should not exaggerate how deeply JOC had changed by 1961. In terms of its political vision, the movement still expressed a basic optimism in the populist system. The document from the I National Congress of Young Workers, for example, the most progressive document of the period, falls within the progressive nationalistic developmentalist perspective. It calls for statist development, sharply criticizes multinational corporations, proposes control of foreign capital, and has other strong nationalist overtones. It believes that the necessary reforms can be realized through the capitalist system, and, more specifically, through having better politicians direct the development process.

²⁶ I Congresso Nacional de Jovens Trabalhadores, November 1961.

²⁷ I Congresso Nacional de Jovens Trabalhadores, November 1961.

The faith that the state and dominant classes can resolve the situation of the working class appears more strongly in other documents. In 1959, JOC assistants called for "the intelligent and disinterested collaboration of all the classes."²⁸ The annual queries for 1960-61 expressed a belief in class harmony. "The working class, along with other classes, wants to participate in human progress."²⁹

Several interviews also helped identify the limits of JOC's political consciousness during the period.

"At that time, our consciousness was to evaluate the situation, denounce injustices and hope that the authorities would resolve the situation. . . . We demanded that the government make the changes. We believed that by putting a good person, a conscientious Christian, in office, everything would be OK. We didn't understand that there were structural problems. We didn't question the structures."³⁰

"It was a movement which still made a lot of efforts to dialogue with the owners, with the government, with authorities, even while it maintained a critical line."³¹

At the same time as it was opening to working class issues and starting to emphasize the importance of participating in unions and neighborhood associations, JOC remained strongly marked by its religious character. Its reading of social reality was marked by its vision of faith, and it also continued to be deeply involved in the Church's sacramental life. A religious moralism pervaded some texts. "The depraved, skeptic, and non-religious ambience of the work place, with its bad examples, scandals, pornography, obsession with

²⁸ Segunda Semana Nacional dos Assistentes, February 1959.

²⁹ Inquérito Anual, 1960-61.

³⁰ Interview, September 4, 1981 - I.

³¹ Interview, June 22, 1981.

sex, solicitations, revolts, injustices, hatred and plots, corrupts the working youth."³²

Despite the fact that JOC was still closely linked to the parish and relatively moderate in its political vision, the first tensions between the movement and the institutional Church started to surface. JOC's practices and vision of faith were already more advanced than the average position within the Church. One document stated that "A large part of the clergy is completely oblivious of the problems and aspirations of the working class and is more concerned with other social classes. The Church's pastoral work is almost completely out of touch with the reality of the working class."³³

Interviews also noted the emergence of some conflicts.

"At that time, JOC was as advanced as anything in the Church. Often we weren't accepted because the bishops didn't understand."³⁴

"The JOC World Congress was held in the Metal Workers Unions. A lot of bishops frowned on this. How could JOC have a congress in a union? They felt this was going too far. JOC was always doing things that went beyond most of the Church."³⁵

1962-1964

The intensity of the political debate in the society increased between 1962 and 1964. The politicization of society accelerated, and the popular movements acquired a dynamism they had never had before. In Pernambuco, the Peasant Leagues and unions organized tens of thousands of peasants. Neighborhood associations sprang up in the major urban areas, and the labor movement estab-

³² "Segunda Semana Nacional dos Assistentes," February 1959.

³³ I Congresso Nacional do Trabalhador Jovem, November 1961.

³⁴ Interview, September 4, 1981 - I.

³⁵ Interview, September 4, 1981 - II.

lished its presence more strongly than ever. '6

The general political effervescence and the dynamism of the popular movements exercised a strong influence on JOC's development. As citizens and workers, Jocistas participated in the political discussions in the society at large, and by this period, a large number of Jocistas participated in the popular movements which were a central actor in the political arena. The fact that JOC had opened to a vision of faith which emphasized political involvement meant that its development would be more directly shaped by political change.

During this period, a number of new experiences in progressive popular education, including MEB, the work of Paulo Freire, and the Centers for Popular Culture, generated new reflections on the role of the popular classes in the society.'7 These movements helped create an atmosphere of questioning that

'6 An excellent study of the peasant movement is Jose de Souza Martins, Os Camponeses e a Política no Brasil, 21-102. See also Cynthia Hewitt, "Brazil: The Peasant Movement of Pernambuco, 1961-1964," in Henry Landsberger, ed., Latin American Peasant Movements (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 374-398; Manuel Correia de Andrade, "Ligas Camponesas e Sindicatos Rurais no Nordeste, 1957-1964," Temas de Ciências Humanas 8 (1980), 115-132; Clodomir Moraes, "Peasant Leagues in Brazil," in Rodolfo Stavenhagen, ed., Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 453-502. On urban social movements, see José Álvaro Moisés, "Classes Populares e Protesto Urbano," Ph.D. dissertation, University of São Paulo, 1978; and José Álvaro Moisés, "Experiências de Mobilização Popular em São Paulo," Contraponto III, No. 3 (1978), 69-86. There is an extensive literature on the labor movement for the 1945-64 period. A fine starting point is Francisco Weffort, "Sindicatos e Política," Ph.D. dissertation, University of São Paulo, 1972.

'7 There is a rich literature on these movements. An excellent overview is Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, "Da Educação Fundamental ao Fundamental da Educação," Proposta Suplemento 1 (September 1977). Also see Vanilda Paiva, Educação Popular e Educação de Adultos (Rio de Janeiro: IBRADES, 1972); and Aida Bezerra, "As Atividades em Educação Popular," in Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, ed., A Questão Política da Educação Popular (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981), 16-39. By Paulo Freire, see especially A Educação como Prática da Liberdade (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1967), and Pedagogy of the

indirectly influenced the innovative pastoral experiences with the popular classes, including JOC.

The conjuncture within the Church also favored JOC's deeper and more progressive political involvement. Not that the Church as a whole made an option for the popular classes; on the contrary, the bulk of the institution remained allied with the state and the dominant classes. But the Second Vatican Council started to call for a more progressive vision of faith, and an increasing number of individuals within the Brazilian Church made progressive pastoral options. The hierarchy, while divided, issued its most progressive documents. In 1962, the CNBB, under the leadership of D. Helder Camara, criticized the "social imbalances produced by the egotism and profit promoted by economic liberalism."³⁸ In 1963, the bishops issued a document calling for land disappropriations to effect an agrarian reform. The document insisted that all people should have access to land.³⁹ Progressive innovations with the popular classes started to multiply.

The Catholic Left continued to deepen its political commitments, leading to the creation of Popular Action in 1962. Although it was a non-denominational group with no formal ties to the Church, Popular Action was created by Catholics as a means of working towards social transformation. It quickly became one of the most important groups in the Brazilian Left.⁴⁰

Oppressed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). A critical work which places Freire's work and writings in historical perspective is Vanilda Paiva, Paulo Freire e o Nacionalismo-Desenvolvimentista (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1980).

³⁸ "Declaração dos Cardeais, Arcebispos e Bispos do Brasil," Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira 22 (June 1962), 488.

³⁹ CNBB, Pastoral da Terra (Sao Paulo: Loyola, 1977), 128-129.

Although as a general rule JOC maintained some distance from Popular Action, MEB, and other expressions of the Catholic Left, in isolated cases, Jocistas also participated in these movements. The only candidate Popular Action ever managed to elect for a public office was a Jocista from Minas Gerais. JOC's limited participation gave Popular Action a working class base that it would otherwise have lacked.

The 1962-64 period marked a decisive turning point in JOC's history. JOC entered the period already in transition, towards increasing political involvement and away from a more sacramental conception of faith. It was already leaning towards greater involvement in working class questions and away from personal issues such as dating and marriage, and many Jocistas had a strong political awareness and participated in popular movements. These choices were consolidated during the 1962-64 period, with the 1963 conference a visible turning point.

The politicization and polarization of the society and the Church did not escape JOC. Like JUC earlier and like the whole institution later, JOC was faced with different conceptions about what its mission should be. At the apogee of its young history, with more participants than it had ever had, the movement began to suffer serious internal divisions. A clear split emerged at the 1963 National Council over how far JOC's political commitment should go. The groups from São Paulo and Recife pushed for more radical positions, more

*° There has been a generalized tendency to understate how important the Catholic Left became during the final years of populist government. Two exceptions to this rule are Márcio Moreira Alves, O Cristo do Povo (Rio: Sabiá, 1968); and Cândido Mendes de Almeida, Momento dos Vivos: A Esquerda Católica no Brasil (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1966).

critical of capitalism, with a more structural vision, including acceptance of class struggle. The National Committee and National Assistant felt that the Church had to work within the capitalist system, albeit a reformed one. The former position won out, and the National Committee and Assistant resigned. The incident had many important consequences for the movement, including the start of a decline in participation and the start of a period of deeper and increasingly radical political participation. Concomitantly, concern with traditional spirituality waned. A 1964 document noted,

"Many leaders are more concerned about their personal political involvement than about developing new leaders. There is an absence of spiritual discussion. The activists aren't receiving enough support. At the grass roots, JOC is weaker."⁴¹

During these years JOC deepened its commitment to the working class struggle. Whereas during the early 1950s, JOC principally reflected its Church affiliation, during the years prior to the coup, it more strongly reflected its working class character.

"The working class character of the movement is felt more strongly. . . . JOC is more open to the world. The activists are more oriented towards the realities of life and work. There is a greater concern with reaching and supporting the factory struggle. . . . There is a stronger working class consciousness among the activists, who are more committed to an integral promotion of the workers. There is greater involvement in the unions, in politics, and in the labor movement."⁴²

The optimism that pervaded most of the Brazilian left was felt in JOC.

"There is an awareness of the situation of misery of the workers. There is a desire to change things, to transform mentalities and structures, a desire for justice, for a better distribution of wealth and better life conditions for all. We are in a revolutionary moment of demanding the reforms desired especially by the oppressed."⁴³

⁴¹ "Evolução do Movimento," 1964. Although it is not dated, the document was clearly written before the coup.

⁴² "Evolução do Movimento," 1964.

In 1962, ex-Jocistas created Catholic Workers Action, ACO, as a means of giving continuity to JOC's work. ACO defined itself as

"a movement of Christians engaged in the life and movements of the working class, acting with all other activists; an apostolic movement which reveals to the working class the presence and message of Jesus, not so much through words as through friendship, courage, and fidelity; a movement which represents the working class within the Church, with the right to demand from the Church that it be faithful to the working class."⁴⁴

From 1962 on, ACO would play an important role in the Church and in popular movements, complementing JOC's efforts. A large percentage of ACO activists were people who had graduated through the ranks of JOC.

Despite the political awakening JOC experienced during the years preceding the coup, it continued to be reformist. JOC sensed that the "base reforms" would successfully transform the country. Some publications noted that not enough Jocistas participated in popular movements, and an anti-Communist ideology was still pervasive. The publication for JOC leaders stated in a pre-election edition, "Catholics should not vote for Communist candidates or people who preach class struggle or hateful or violent revolution."⁴⁵ The idea that JOC still lacked a structural vision or was reformist was clearly expressed in several interviews. "We didn't have any consciousness about the capitalist system or about political tactics. The only thing that existed was an awareness that we were being exploited."⁴⁶

⁴³ "Colaboração da JOC e da ACO para uma Pastoral Operária," 1963.

⁴⁴ "Dez Anos de Ação Católica Operária," SEDOC 6 (September 1973), 314. This statement was part of the original 1962 statement of objectives.

⁴⁵ Carta aos Dirigentes 16 (September-December 1962).

⁴⁶ Interview, September 4, 1981 - II.

JOC's political options were not without some costs.⁴⁷ In addition to the fact that membership started to decline, relations between JOC and the bishops became less amiable. One priest who worked as a JOC assistant during that time noted that "JOC lost some of its support. It was well supported when it was concerned with youth questions. But when it began to take positions, when it began to discuss class issues, that changed."⁴⁸

1964-1970

It took the peak level of the Brazilian Church a while to react to the new regime, but the coup quickly effected major changes in JOC's vision of its faith and of the world. During the second half of the 1960s, JOC's political vision changed at a remarkably rapid pace. It was during this period that JOC broke with its reformist perspectives and became a staunchly anti-capitalist movement. Although JOC's views still differed sharply from the Marxist Left, it became committed to radical social change as an element of Christian faith. This vision of faith and the pedagogical practices developed in JOC would make it one of the most important precursors to the popular Church.

Changes in Brazilian society and in the Church serve as the basic reference points for understanding JOC's evolution during this 1964-70 period. In the post-64 period, two political/economic changes had a particularly significant

⁴⁷ The JOC case supports arguments I made in "A Igreja e a Política: Notas Teóricas," forthcoming in Síntese 27 (March 1983), where I argued that the transformation of the Brazilian Church cannot simply be seen as the institution's attempt to maximize its influence in society. JOC's options after 1964 incurred heavy institutional costs (the sharp decline in membership) and significant personal sacrifices (imprisonments and tortures). JOC made these options not to "maximize its influence" among the working class but rather because it felt a sincere calling to do so, regardless of the costs.

⁴⁸ Interview, June 22, 1981.

impact on JOC. First, the military regime which came to power in March 1964 pursued a highly inegalitarian model of development, leading to a decline in real wages that exacerbated already difficult living conditions.⁴⁹ Between 1958 and 1969, real wages for industrial workers fell 36.5% in Sao Paulo,⁵⁰ and between 1960 and 1976, the share of the bottom 50% in total national income decreased from 17.71% to 11.80% while the share of the top 5% increased from 27.69% to 39.00%.⁵¹ Second, it unleashed strong repression against the most significant popular movements, leading to the imprisonment of many Jocistas.

Not only this changing reality, but also the new ways in which that reality was perceived by other groups and movements affected JOC's development. The fact that the Left as a whole was entering a more radical phase, increasingly critical of capitalism, and that new theological conceptions helped legitimate progressive visions of faith, were particularly important. The 1964 coup and the repression and economic policies that followed it affected profound changes not only in the nature of the political regime, but also in the way different social classes and institutions perceived the state and their own political role.

⁴⁹ There is an extensive bibliography on the military regime and its policies. Good starting points include Alfred Stepan, The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); and Alfred Stepan, ed., Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies, and Future (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

⁵⁰ Cândido Procópio Ferreira de Camargo, et.al., São Paulo 1975: Crescimento e Pobreza (Sao Paulo: Loyola, 1981), 67.

⁵¹ Ciência e Cultura 30, No. 8 (August 1976).

JOC's development was influenced by other groups on the Left, many of which gradually lost their hope that the needed reforms could happen within the capitalist system. Most of the Left came to believe that capitalism affords virtually no room for change, especially in the Third World. Although JOC never followed the most radical movements, a large part of the Left went underground and saw clandestine struggle as the only solution.⁵² Also, because of its concerns and its linkages to other groups interested in transforming the society, JOC came into contact with new forms of analyzing reality. At this time, Marxism and dependency analysis were becoming important intellectual tools in Latin America. Like other Church movements interested in transforming social reality,⁵³ JOC was influenced by the development of these forms of analyzing society, especially after 1968.

The political changes in themselves do not adequately explain JOC's transformation, as is apparent by the fact that other working class religious movements, including the Bible Circles, remained relatively conservative. It was rather the combination of JOC's institutional identity, which emphasized social justice, participation, decent wages, and a special concern with the

⁵² Given the tremendous fragmentation of the Left after 1964, these generalizations must be made cautiously. Popular Action entered a process of rapid radicalization described in the moving personal statement by Herbert José de Souza in Pedro Celso Uchoa Cavalcanti and Jovelino Ramos, eds., Memórias do Exílio: Brasil 1964/19?? (São Paulo: Livramento, 1978), 67-112. The Brazilian Communist Party was the only major Marxist group which did not follow this extreme radicalization. See Moises Vinhas, O Partidão: A Luta por um Partido de Massas, 1922-1974 (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1982), 235-253; and Denis de Moraes and Francisco Viana, eds., Prestes: Lutas e Autocríticas (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1982), 175-196. There is an extensive bibliography on the trajectories of other groups in the Left.

⁵³ Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the impact of dependency theory on the early stages of the development of liberation theology. On this point, see Gustavo Gutierrez, Teologia da Libertação (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1975), 75-88; and Samuel Silva Gotay, El pensamiento cristiano revolucionario en América Latina y el Caribe (Salamanca: Ed. Sígueme, 1981), 203-232.

poor, and political changes which closed channels for participation, reduced wages, and adversely affected the popular sectors, which was crucial.

Changes in the Church as a whole also help explain JOC's evolution during the 1964-70 period. While the Brazilian episcopacy essentially retreated during the 1964-68 period and even issued a document which largely supported the coup,⁵⁴ other changes within the Church were more favorable to positions JOC started to adopt. The Vatican Council, which ended in 1965, gave a tremendous force to progressive Catholic thought and pastoral practices. At the grass roots, an increasing number of pastoral agents became concerned with the popular classes and social justice. The first base communities sprang up, and the first systematic reflections about pastoral work among the working class occurred. A new Latin American theology started to emerge, developing many themes discussed in JOC: faith and politics, faith and liberation, Jesus's preferential option for the poor, pastoral practices and pedagogy among the popular classes. The gathering of the Latin American Bishops' conference in Medellin in 1968 captured much of the richness of this new theology and the grass roots pastoral innovations.

The coup did not take long to affect JOC. Immediately after the coup, several Jocistas were detained or imprisoned for the leadership roles in popular movements, and the 1964 and 1965 National Councils had to be cancelled for political reasons. In September 1964, the National Committee issued a major document defining JOC's position with respect to the coup.

⁵⁴ The bishops' response to the coup, "Declaração da CNBB sobre a Situação Nacional," is published in Souza Lima, Evolução Política dos Católicos e da Igreja no Brasil, 147-149.

"For the workers who are more involved in the labor movement and politics, the military government is not an attempt to satisfy the workers' aspirations, but on the contrary, to block the labor movement, prevent the advance of new ideas, and take out of circulation the principal labor and popular leaders."⁵³

JOC's position showed not only how far the movement had gone politically, but also how different its vision was from the other major working class movement within the Church, the Bible Circles. Conservative and clerical as they had always been, the Bible Circles supported the coup in the name of anti-Communism. From the outset, the Circles had a predominantly middle class leadership, were more clerical, had a markedly dualistic vision of faith, and lacked a pedagogical method which raised questions about social reality. They remained more closed to social reality, hence more closed to the influences which helped transform JOC. In addition, they lacked the linkages to progressive experiences in the Church (especially other movements in Catholic Action) that played an important role in JOC's transformation.

The rapid destruction of the pre-coup ideals and optimism posed new questions for the popular movements and the Left. What had gone wrong? What was the next step? Along with other movements, JOC became more concerned with searching for theoretical solutions to these questions, to reflecting as well as acting. The suffering caused by the repression, the feeling that previous political practices had been flawed, the disillusionment with capitalism, and the difficulty in acting because of the repression, all led to a desire to come to a better understanding of Brazilian reality. As one ex-Jocista stated,

"The repression forced the movement to close. It could no longer be a mass movement. It became a movement for leaders, for activists. When the possibility for mass action was eliminated, we spent more

⁵³ "A JOC diante dos Acontecimentos de Primeiro de Abril," 1964.

time studying, and this led to greater political sophistication. The activists began to understand the working class problem at large--the social, political, and economic system."⁵⁶

The movement's earliest criticisms of the regime were somewhat timid, focusing on specific issues such as jobs and wages. There was still little sense of the futility of asking the military government for concessions. A 1965 document requested the government leaders to make the needed reforms. "What we request from the government and the firms are new opportunities to work and urgent measures so that the nation is not built with the hunger and sufferings of the poor."⁵⁷

But as more Jocistas were persecuted or saw colleagues persecuted for their involvement in popular movements and as the nature of the authoritarian project became clearer, the critiques became more radical. We have already seen that a first step in this direction came at the 1963 National Council, when the movement started to criticize "neo-capitalism," previously defended by JOC's documents. But in 1963 it was still only the peak levels which had made such an option. A second step came in 1965 at the First Week of Studies in Nova Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro, when the bulk of the movement started to question capitalism.

This process culminated at the April 1968 National Council, held in conjunction with ACO in Recife. Here the leaders, with the full support of the regional and local movements, made a theoretical break with capitalism, which they started to consider the root of the problems of the Brazilian working class. The Council concluded that it was necessary to overcome capitalism and

⁵⁶ Interview, July 13, 1981.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Márcio Moreira Alves, A Igreja e a Política no Brasil, 154.

fight for a socialist system.⁵⁸

The conclusions of the Recife Council were the most radical any Church movement had adopted and caused JOC to come under fire from the bishops and the military. The bishops asked JOC to write a report defining its positions. This report, the "Yellow Document," finished in July 1969, reaffirmed the condemnation of capitalism. "The fundamental cause of the working class problems is an economic system based on profit, which does not take into account the needs of the people. . . . We denounce capitalism as an intrinsically bad system."⁵⁹ JOC declared itself committed to working for radical social transformation.

"JOC should contribute to the radical changes of the current society through the formation of Christian activists, authentically involved in this process. The movement wants to contribute to all those organizations which are fighting for the construction of a New Humanity and a New Society, where the fundamental rights of all people will be respected."⁶⁰

JOC's attitude towards Marxism had changed dramatically since 1964.

Another important document stated,

"Marxism, for us, is a doctrine like any other. Communism does not frighten us. If Marxism helps the workers get what they need and allows their human realization, we will not be against it. . . . We are not Communists, but we do not fear Communism; rather, we fear poverty, hunger, alienation."⁶¹

⁵⁸ Unfortunately the military confiscated the Recife document and burned all but a few copies. Márcio Moreira Alves quotes some excerpts in A Igreja e a Política no Brasil.

⁵⁹ O Documento Amarelo, July 1969.

⁶⁰ O Documento Amarelo, July 1969.

⁶¹ "Manifesto da JOC," September 29, 1967.

The Recife National Council marked more than the culmination of JOC's turn towards more radical political analysis and options. It also initiated a period of violent repression against the movement, and, to a slightly lesser extent, against ACO.

Several Jocistas were imprisoned in 1964 and during the ensuing years, but these imprisonments were a result of participation in popular movements, not a direct result of participation in JOC. In fact, participation in JOC sometimes helped a popular leader avoid repression. However, as JOC became more radical, it also became a target of the repressive apparatus. Between 1966 and 1970, many of the most serious conflicts between the Church and state involved JOC or ACO. The first serious Church/state conflict after the coup arose in July 1966 when the Northeast bishops issued a statement of solidarity with an ACO document which was highly critical of the regime. The regime initially prohibited the circulation of the bishops' statement and launched several attacks against D. Helder Camara. As would happen repeatedly, these attacks against the Church created greater cohesion within the ecclesial institution.⁶²

The repression against JOC and ACO did not occur only because of their documents. Both movements played an important role in the efforts to create a stronger, more autonomous labor movement, marking an important presence at the

⁶² On this conflict, see Alves, O Cristo do Povo, 58-63; Bruneau, The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church, 182-187; Charles Antoine, Church and Power in Brazil (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 84-89. Indicative of how important JOC and ACO were in generating Church/state conflict is the fact that Bruneau devotes 14 of 27 pages on Church/state conflicts between 1966 and 1968 to ACO and JOC. The study published by the Centro de Pastoral Vergueiro, As Relações Igreja-Estado no Brasil, includes nine cases of conflict between JOC or ACO and the state, of which six developed into major confrontations.

strikes at Contagem and Osasco in 1968. At Osasco the regime imprisoned and later expelled a French worker-priest who served as JOC's assistant, Pierre Wauthier, leading to one of the most publicized Church/state conflicts of the period.⁶³

Wauthier was imprisoned and expelled because of his alleged role in the strike, not because of his linkage to JOC. Direct repression against JOC occurred only after the Recife Council. The government confiscated the Council documents and distributed them to several conservative bishops, hoping that the hierarchy would take reprisals against JOC just as it had done earlier with JUC.

Before the CNBB dealt with the question, the repression fell. This occurred during one of the most conflictual periods of the 19 years of authoritarian rule, on the eve of Institutional Act V, decreed December 13, 1968, which eliminated habeus corpus and marked the beginning of the regime's most repressive period.

The repressive wave started with the imprisonment and torture of three JOC priests and a JOC deacon in Belo Horizonte, November 28, two weeks before Institutional Act V was decreed. The military alleged that the four had helped instigate the strikes at Contagem and that they were responsible for

⁶³ On the Contagem and Osasco strikes, see the fine study by Francisco Weffort, "Participação e Conflito Industrial: Contagem e Osasco, 1968," CADERNOS CEBRAP 5 (Sao Paulo: CEBRAP, 1972). Weffort provides significant information on the role of Catholics at Osasco but does not mention their role at Contagem. On the Church/state conflict at Osasco, see SEDOC 1 (December 1968), 815-837; Bruneau, The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church, 199-202; Alves, A Igreja e a Política no Brasil, 203-204; Antoine, Church and Power in Brazil, 187-194. On the development of the Church's pastoral work at Osasco, 1964-70, see Domingos Barbé and Emmanuel Retumba, Retrato de uma Comunidade de Base (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1970).

other subversive activities. This incident started another of the most controversial Church/state conflicts of the period. The fact that the four were tortured was widely publicized and denounced by even relatively conservative Church leaders, many of whom had hitherto dismissed reports of torture as apocryphal. The case helped generate a greater consciousness within ecclesial ranks about the nature of the regime. It also helped create a greater sense of cohesion within the Church at a time when the institution was still profoundly divided in its response to the regime. After the imprisonments, several leading conservative prelates, including the Archbishop of Belo Horizonte; the President of the CNBB, D. Agnelo Rossi; the cardinal of Rio de Janeiro, D. Jaime Câmara; and the cardinal of Porto Alegre, D. Vicente Scherer, wrote letters protesting the government's actions. On December 4, the Central Commission issued a note denouncing the incarcerations and the accusations the government had voiced.⁶⁴ This was one of the first times the Church had so strongly protested a violation of human rights.⁶⁵

Immediately after Institutional Act V was decreed, the regime started to track down many JOC assistants and leaders. The assistants were the first targets because they were seen as responsible for JOC's radicalization. In early 1969, JOC assistants were imprisoned in Recife, Porto Alegre, Rio, São Paulo, and Nova Hamburgo. The Central Office in São Paulo was invaded in January, and other invasions of JOC offices occurred in Rio, Terezina, Crateus, and elsewhere. A large number of activists were imprisoned and tortured.

⁶⁴ This document is published in José Marins, ed., Praxis de los Padres de América Latina (Bogota: Paulinas, 1978), 69-71.

⁶⁵ Details are in SEDOC 1 (March 1969), 1207-1256; Bruneau, The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church, 203-209; and Antoine, Church and Power in Brazil, 195-202.

On May 25, 1969, a JOC assistant in Recife, Father Antonio Henrique Pereira Neto, became the first priest to be assassinated by the regime.⁶⁶ One general told a JOC leader that as long as there was a single Jocista left, his work wasn't over; he wanted to wipe out the movement.⁶⁷ JOC had become one of the regime's primary targets under the spurious pretext that it was working with clandestine groups. In reality, even though there were isolated cases of Jocistas joining clandestine groups, the relationship between JOC and the underground parties was conflictual. These parties considered JOC reformist, while JOC's Christian humanist perspectives, its option to remain in the Church, its commitment to not go underground, and its sharp criticisms of the elitist and authoritarian methods of the clandestine parties established strong differences.

In addition to the problems caused by the repression, JOC faced difficulties with the institutional Church. Isolated bishops put their own security at stake to defend JOC, but on the whole the hierarchy did little to protect the movement. A majority of bishops had reservations about JOC's political options and decreasing involvement in the Church's sacramental life. The movement had equally serious reservations about the hierarchy, which, far from reaching out to defend the working class, remained silent until the end of the decade. Many Jocistas left the Church, disgruntled with its silence towards the military regime and proximity to the dominant classes. The groups that continued to function became increasingly distant from parish life, so contact between JOC and the institution was reduce to a bare minimum.

⁶⁶ On the death of Father Henrique, see SEDOC 2 (August 1969), 143-148.

⁶⁷ Interview, September 4, 1981 - I.

Faced with severe repression and a relative lack of support from the bishops, JOC turned to JOC International for help--and received it. Throughout the world, JOC groups demonstrated and protested on behalf of Brazil's JOC. JOC International sent the International Assistant, Australian priest Brian Burke, to help defend JOC vis-a-vis the hierarchy. Burke supported JOC, but the CNBB granted him only 15 minutes at its annual session to explain what was happening.**

A second repressive wave, which effectively silenced JOC for a couple years, occurred in October 1970. The police raided the national headquarters in Rio and imprisoned and tortured the National Committee and four assistants. This began another series of encarcerations of Jocistas, including the jailing of activists and priests in São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, and Volta Redonda. The JOC groups in all these cities were wiped out.

By this time, the CNBB was finally beginning to respond to the regime's violations of human rights, especially the widespread use of torture. The torturing of Jocistas in Volta Redonda led to another serious conflict between D. Waldir Calheiros and the regime, with a number of conservative bishops coming to the defense of D. Waldir and the individuals who had been tortured.**

The search for Jocistas in Rio caused one of the most dramatic conflicts between Church and state during the two decades of military rule. In addition to the fact that the regime tortured several Jocistas and detained four assistants, in searching for other Jocistas the military invaded a Jesuit

** This chapter in JOC's history is described by Antoine, Church and Power in Brazil, 182-187.

** On the Volta Redonda incident, see As Relações Igreja-Estado no Brasil, Part 3 (São Paulo: Centro de Pastoral Vergueiro, 1981), 13-21.

study center and detained the Secretary General of the CNBB, D. Aloísio Lorscheider; the head of the Catholic University of Rio; and the head of the Jesuits in the Southeastern region of the country. The torturing of so many Church people and the violation of Church property caused such an uproar that D. Eugenio Salles (then Archbishop of Salvador) and D. Vicente Scherer (Porto Alegre) flew to Rio to speak with government officials. This was a clear example of the way repression against the Church frequently started out at the grass roots and ultimately affected the highest levels of the institutions.

Faced with this frontal attack against the Church, the Central Commission of the CNBB issued one of its most energetic protests to that date.

"The promotion of the human individual should be sought by all levels of political and administrative organizations. This objective will not be attained when, to eliminate the terrorist subversion, the concern for National Security generates a climate of increasing insecurity. The terrorism of the repressive apparatus is not a legitimate response to the terrorism of the subversives."⁷⁰

The case even received international attention. The Vatican Radio denounced the imprisonments, and the Osservatore Romano, official organ of the Holy See, published the Central Commission's statement on the front page and expressed its support editorially. All over Europe, Jocistas bombarded Brazilian consulates and embassies with calls protesting the tortures. Pope Paul VI also announced his solidarity with the Brazilian Church, helping to legitimate the sectors of the clergy committed to denouncing the regime's abuses.

JOC was unprepared for this kind of repression. One ex-Jocista stated,

"We never imagined we could be imprisoned. We didn't believe that they would get people who were Christians. It didn't make any sense. We thought we were doing the most beautiful thing in the

⁷⁰ The document is published in SEDOC 3 (November 1970), 648-650. The most complete information on the invasion in Rio is found in As Relações Igreja-Estado no Brasil, Part 4, 18-20.

world. There was a pureness in our actions. . . We acted as Church people, and nobody was going to touch the Church."⁷¹

The fierce repression of the Médici years, coupled with the internal crisis that JOC faced and the lack of support it received from the bishops, eventually reduced the movement to a shadow of what it had been, both in terms of numbers and of efficacy in stimulating the popular movements. From 26,000 members in 1961, participation declined to 654 by 1968.⁷² At one point, over 100 Jocistas were in prison, and in many places the movement was wiped out. At best, small groups continued to meet irregularly and semi-clandestinely. The repression was so bad that it was difficult to find lay people and priests willing to continue. One person stated,

"Everyone wanted me to assume the National Committee. No way! I have a girl friend. I'm planning to get married. How can I assume the National Committee? Most of the people were terrified when they left prison. They were really tortured badly."⁷³

The repression forced the movement to abandon attempts at popular organizing. It is hard to exaggerate the extreme difficulties, bordering on the impossible, of any popular organizing between 1969 and 1974. Even rudimentary popular discussions were seen as subversive, and efforts to organize the popular classes were almost suicidal.⁷⁴ Within this context, the most Jocistas could do was maintain contact with their colleagues and friends.

⁷¹ Interview, June 25, 1981.

⁷² Marcio Moreira Alves, A Igreja e a Política no Brasil, 153.

⁷³ Interview, June 25, 1981.

⁷⁴ On the factory level repression, see Celso Frederico, "Organização do Trabalho e Luta de Classes," Temas de Ciências Humanas 6 (1979), 177-194; and the personal reflections of labor leaders in Frente Nacional do Trabalho, "Vinte Anos de Luta," Part 5 (São Paulo: Frente Nacional do Trabalho, 1980).

As a consequence of the repression, JOC virtually lost its youth character during the late 1960s. Recreational activities and personal questions were no longer part of the movement. Everyone was deeply involved in political questions. Though not completely by choice, this deep politicization made JOC a movement for leaders within the popular movement. Its mass character was something of the past.

Jocistas ended up having an increasingly sophisticated and radical understanding of the capitalist system, but with few possibilities for political action. In addition to the fact that the repression reduced JOC's numbers, the emphasis on study generated a certain elitism. The more sophisticated understanding of politics often led to a distancing from the average worker. One person said,

"You can never get out of touch with your fellow-workers. When this happens, you start to intellectualize. There was a time when this happened in JOC. We began to study and see things in such a way that we didn't know how to talk with other workers at the grass roots. We discussed capitalism, socialism, Marxism, and the worker doesn't have any of that stuff in his head."⁵

By the late 1960s, JOC was so caught up in its political work that it did not have time for colleagues whose political vision was "backwards." Today many ex-participants criticize the elitist character that JOC acquired during the most repressive years, and even at the time there was some awareness about the problem. One document written in 1970 stated, "JOC is not reaching the mass of young workers. The groups are small, closed, and disconnected from the masses. The groups are gradually disappearing, so the movement lives in permanent instability."⁶ But given the level of repression and the hier-

⁵ Interview, June 25, 1981.

⁶ "Resumo do Conselho Nacional," 1970.

archy's lack of support, the movement had trouble overcoming these problems. Because of the repression, JOC was not able to continue its publications, which had been one of the principal means of recruitment. In any case, the risks in participating were high enough that few were willing.

Throughout this period, it is surprising how little JOC criticized the institutional Church considering the differences between visions of faith and the hierarchy's failure to come to JOC's rescue. Even though the institutional Church neither identified with the working class world nor supported JOC, the movement remained committed to staying within the Church, and its vision of politics remained pervaded by its religious character. JOC saw its activities as part of a testimony of faith based more on action than words. According to this vision, faith requires a commitment to working for a more just world as a way of realizing God's design. This religious vision and the desire to work within the Church were very clear in the Yellow Document, one of the most radical JOC ever produced.

"JOC remains faithful to its apostolic mission as a Church movement present among the young workers. It wants to help young workers find Christ in their lives and help them discover the power of the Bible. . . . JOC of Brazil wants to remain part of the Church. However, it wants to be faithful to young workers and therefore to the working class. For us this fidelity is the only way of being faithful to the Church of Christ."''

This religious vision, the insistence upon staying in the Church, the rejection of clandestine political struggle, and the fact that JOC's work was relatively quiet helped keep the movement immune from attack by the hierarchy at a time when its positions were as radical as anything JUC had ever adopted. There was never an official action against JOC, even though in some cities JOC met the resistance of the bishop. The conflicts assumed the form of a lack of

'' Documento Amarelo, July 1969.

institutional support for the movement rather than ecclesial repression. JOC escaped the bishops' attack at the two moments when it was most likely, in 1966 when the hierarchy closed down other branches of Catholic Action and in 1969 when the regime pressured the bishops into taking reprisals against JOC.

JOC AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHURCH

Most studies on the Catholic Church have focused principally on the hierarchy and the clergy, often for good reason. The Church has been highly hierarchical, and in general lay movements have had limited impact within the Church.⁷⁸ However, in studying the Church, it can be important to remember that it comprises more than the institutionally paid professionals, even though all formal decision making powers rest with the clergy. Neglecting to consider the entirety of the Church--hierarchy, clergy, and laity--can lead to some oversights. Despite its hierarchical character and despite the historical tendency to squelch lay movements which threaten the institution's interests as perceived by its leaders, the Catholic Church has from time to time allowed some space for progressive movements. Even if these movements are eventually repressed or coopted, they can help change the institution.

This was the case with JOC and other lay movements in the Brazilian Church during the 1960s. To see the transformation of the Brazilian Church as a process initiated exclusively from above, in response to the Church's attempts to defend its own corporate interests, overlooks the role these lay movements

⁷⁸ Two interesting studies deal with the difficulties Catholic lay movements have had in gaining more autonomy in the institution in Europe. See Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, Papal Power: A Study of Vatican Control over Catholic Lay Groups (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); and Gianfranco Poggi, Catholic Action in Italy: The Sociology of a Sponsored Organization (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967).

played in introducing new conceptions of faith, new theologies, and new pastoral practices; in "converting" nuns, priests, and bishops to a new understanding of their mission; and in involving the Church in a repressive cycle which transformed the hierarchy. JOC helped effect the transformation of the Brazilian Church that would lead the institution into an increasingly closer approximation with the popular classes. In this sense, it is an interesting example of how a grass roots movement can effect change within an institution noted for its authoritarian, hierarchical structures.''

The repressive wave of 1970 effectively silenced JOC for a couple years just as the popular Church was starting to make itself heard and as the institution started assuming the defense of human rights. During the Médici years (1969-74), other Church groups acquired a dynamism that surpassed JOC and ACO. The base communities flourished, and the Workers Pastoral Commission and Pastoral Land Commission were established, becoming the dynamic centers of Church innovation.

JOC never fully recovered even though the movement started to expand again after 1972. As other Church experiences were born, JOC remained eclipsed, a victim of many years of repression and of internal problems. Today the movement continues to face an identity crisis that first appeared at the 1963 National Council, was greatly exacerbated by the repression, and was complicated by the emergence of the base communities and other innovations in pastoral practices. The crux of this problem is whether JOC should be oriented

' ' A similar point is made by Luiz Alberto Gomez de Souza in "Igreja e Sociedade: Elementos para um Marco Teórico," Síntese 13 (April/June 1978), 15-29; and in A JUC: Os Estudantes Católicos e a Política (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, forthcoming). See also Luiz Gonzaga de Souza Lima, Evolução Política dos Católicos e da Igreja no Brasil (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1979).

towards the common worker or should form a cadre of working class leaders. How deeply politicized should the movement be? How should it deal with popular Catholicism? How should it differ from other contemporary Church movements such as the Workers Pastoral Commission, the base communities, and parish youth groups?

Despite internal divisions and problems, JOC fulfilled an important historical role in the Brazilian Church. Perhaps JOC's most important contribution was as a precursor to the popular Church. JOC developed a conception of faith, a commitment to the popular struggle, and pedagogical practices that served as a model and influenced other experiences. Even though JOC's level of political militancy and rejection of popular religiosity differentiate it from the Church movements of the 1970s, JOC influenced the theological reflection and practices of these younger movements.

JOC and ACO carried on a tradition that JUC, MEB, Popular Action, and other movements had started, of living a faith linked to radical political options. But JOC and ACO also developed a unique contribution. Whereas the earlier movements were led by middle class intellectuals, JOC and ACO articulated their vision of faith from a working class perspective. The starting point in JOC, and the popular Church more generally, was the material situation, faith, and values of the popular classes. An integral part of this new faith was seeing Christ as a poor person who chose other poor people and workers for disciples, who came to save the poor above all others, and who attacked the wealthy and powerful in calling for social justice. Whereas the fundamental interlocutor of JUC and MEB's faith was the middle class, in JOC and the popular Church it became the popular classes. This popular perspective would

become the center of the popular Church that started to become more important around 1970.

JOC was originally conceived as a means of bringing the Church to the working class, of Christianizing the working class. But its real historical significance resided in doing the opposite, in helping the Church understand the working class. JOC and ACO were part of a number of progressive pastoral experiences with the popular classes which started to emerge in the early 1960s. Among these experiences, JOC and ACO were particularly important, both because of how far they took their vision of faith, and because they were the only major national movements. Through its publications and congresses, JOC promoted an exchange of ideas between people working all over Brazil and gained a dissemination that few local experiences had.

JOC was one of the most important experiences which helped the Church reassess its traditionally paternalistic and elitist tendencies in working with the popular classes. In the period before the coup, JOC assistants were already beginning to reflect about the working class world and values. Along with the Jocistas, the assistants started to reject the traditional belief that the working class had left the Church because of religious ignorance. In a prescient document (1961), a group of JOC assistants concluded that the working class had left the Church because the institution did not understand the workers' world, because the workers lived in subhuman conditions which did not permit a strong religious life, because they identified the Church as an oppressive force, and because of the lack of Catholics in the labor struggle. The document concluded, "The Church has committed sins of omission: its absence in working class matters and problems. The workers are completely

oblivious to the fact that the Church has a social doctrine capable of resolving their problems."¹⁰

Another early (1964) reflection on pastoral work with the popular classes is even more critical of the Church.

"For the workers, the priest represents knowledge and authority, but is distant and belongs to a different medium. There is often a contradictory attitude; in front of the priest, the worker is very respectful, but in commentaries in the factory or at home, his attitude is different. In our contact with workers in the factory or the neighborhood, many people start off by affirming their religiosity. Later, when there is an atmosphere of trust, they start to mention their prejudices about the Church. Probably the most common idea is that priests are connected to the wealthy. . . The problem isn't that some priests have weaknesses; they understand that. It is the bourgeois attitudes of the priests that scandalizes the workers."¹¹

As early as 1964, JOC assistants criticized the Church for "its compromises with capitalism, its neglect of the temporal order, its moralizing attitudes."¹² They were pioneers in calling for a popular liturgy, popular catechism, and accessible language in working with the poor, and in emphasizing popular values and capacities. They were also among the first to call for a preferential option for the poor. A 1963 document stated, "If the Church does not become concerned with the workers' problems and attempt to overcome the chasm which separates it from the workers, it will be failing in its mission: evangelizing the poor."¹³

¹⁰ "Encontro da Pastoral Operária," January 9-12, 1961.

¹¹ "Pastoral da Igreja no Meio Operário," 1964.

¹² "Encontro Nacional de Assistentes," June 1964.

¹³ "Colaboração da JOC e da ACO para uma Pastoral Operária."

As the final years of populist government stimulated a rich political dialogue and a significant popular presence in national politics, Jocistas and JOC assistants became more concerned with understanding the working class world. This world was one of poverty, oppression, and marginalization, but it was also a world of human wealth. Working with, talking with, living with the poor, JOC assistants discovered the human richness that coexists alongside material poverty.

As the assistants became more involved in trying to understand the working class world, they began to reflect more on how to work pedagogically with the popular sectors. Influenced by other experiences in popular education and popular culture, JOC assistants were among the first priests to reflect deeply on pedagogical principles in pastoral work with the popular classes. These reflections not only adumbrated the popular Church's discourse on the subject, they also helped change the Church's vision of the popular classes.

JOC assistants came to feel that the priest must listen to and learn from the workers. They affirmed that the workers have something to teach and that the workers are complete human beings, worthy of as much respect as any others. This emphasis on the fundamental human worth of all individuals and the importance of respecting the popular classes, characteristic of the contemporary popular Church, surfaced in JOC around 1963.

The attempt to respect the human worth of the working class is a pedagogical principle that requires sensitivity in working with the popular sectors. "A fundamental characteristic of our commitment is sensitivity to working class values. We should value their work and their solutions and respect their capacity to receive and give. We should believe that they can and do

help us."⁴⁴ JOC assistants emphasized the importance of living like workers, of talking their language, of participating in the events that are important to the working class, of not accepting privileges that workers lack. "We must gain acceptance among the workers, have a normal and spontaneous life among them, identify with them, become one resident among others."⁴⁵ Anticipating the pedagogy of the base communities, JOC assistants expressed the importance of "living with the workers, participating in all their manifestations of sorrow and joy; acting against the bourgeois habits and attitudes which divide our world from theirs; not considering ourselves superior because of our background, but a brother among them."⁴⁶

In this perspective, the priest should listen and not impose. At their national encounter in 1964, JOC assistants concluded that "Our mission is not to resolve problems in a paternalistic manner, but to encourage, awaken, motivate."⁴⁷ Superior, omnisapient attitudes are inappropriate. In a similar vein, the National Assistant stated in 1963 that "The solution of working class problems should come from the workers themselves."⁴⁸

As the assistants became more politicized and more conscious of the pedagogical issues, the lay participants made most of the major decisions. Priests did not take part in the local weekly meetings. One Jocista commented, "We didn't let the priest control the group."⁴⁹ Another noted, "We decided what to -----"

⁴⁴ "Encontro Nacional de Padres no Meio Operário," JOC/ACO, May 1966.

⁴⁵ "Encontro Nacional de Padres no Meio Operário," JOC/ACO, May 1966.

⁴⁶ "Encontro Nacional de Assistentes," June 1964.

⁴⁷ "Encontro Nacional de Assistentes," June 1964.

⁴⁸ Lecture by Father William Silva, February 27, 1963.

discuss regarding working class life. We made the decisions regarding actions in the factory, the association, the neighborhood."⁹⁰

The people who participated in JOC see this emphasis on pedagogy as one of the movement's most important contributions. JOC helped start inverting pedagogical practices within the Church, which, like the rest of society, had traditionally largely excluded the popular classes and had been fairly elitist. Workers assumed the leadership in JOC and were encouraged to do so in popular movements. This was an important step in a society where the popular classes have historically had limited opportunities to participate.

This is not to say that JOC's pedagogy was above criticism. At times, assistants excessively dominated discussions. Other times, the reverse problem appeared, a somewhat naive veneration of popular values, capacities, and consciousness. By the late 1960s, there was a certain glorification of the working class and a rejection of elements not from that class. One ex-Assistant comments,

"There were elements in JOC convinced of the self-sufficiency of the labor movement as a means of transforming reality. This position was predominant in the Brazilian JOC during the 1960s, and even today many people have that attitude. This creates an isolation, a feeling that the truth is in the working class. Anyone outside the working class is bourgeois and doesn't understand."⁹¹

Found throughout many parts of the contemporary popular Church, this obreirista or basista tendency dismisses the contributions that non-workers can make and supervenerates popular consciousness and practices. These positions easily lead to rejecting the kind of information that intellectuals can

⁸⁹ Interview, June 25, 1981.

⁹⁰ Interview, July 13, 1981.

⁹¹ Interview, July 9, 1981.

provide the popular movement, rejecting the Left regardless of its practices and proposals, and rejecting political parties as an important arena for struggle since they are "too distant" from the popular classes.

In addition to living a new model of faith and developing the kind of pastoral practices which would later emerge in the popular Church, JOC helped transform the Church by sensitizing many priests to the problems of working class life and the importance of supporting popular movements. Many individuals who participated are still important figures in the Church. Among those who note their personal indebtedness to JOC is D. Antonio Fragoso, bishop of Crateus, Ceara, one of the outstanding figures of the popular Church. D. Fragoso, who worked with JOC for ten years, stated that the experience changed his vision of faith and helped him to "see that the weak are the great."²

JOC and ACO also created a new cadre of lay leaders who continue to hold leadership positions in Church and popular movements and political parties. The Workers' Pastoral Commission in most major cities in Brazil is largely a product of ex-JOC and ACO participants, and in some cases, JOC assistants and participants helped create early base communities.³

JOC also helped transform the Church by forcing the institution to face the repressive nature of the authoritarian regime. Initially only the Jocistas who were leaders in popular movements were affected by the repression, but eventually the movement as a whole and the assistants were also

² O São Paulo, February 10-16, 1979.

³ Early base communities in Osasco, São Paulo, and rural Maranhão were initiated by JOC assistants and Jocistas. See Domingos Barbé and Emmanuel Retumba, Retrato de uma Comunidade de Base, on early base communities in Osasco, and "Relatório do Maranhão," in Uma Igreja que Nasce do Povo (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1975), 98-105.

affected. In some cases, most noticeably those of Father Wauthier in Osasco, the three priests and deacon in Belo Horizonte, the assassination of Father Henrique Pereira in 1969, and the systematic imprisonments and tortures in 1969 and 1970, conflicts between JOC and the regime provoked major Church criticisms of the military, with even relatively conservative bishops coming to the defense of the victims.

This repression against the Church was one of the outstanding factors which produced its transformation, and it was principally the actions of lay leaders and pastoral agents working at the grass roots which brought on the repression. Until around 1970, the main conflict was not between the hegemonic group in the Church and the state, but rather between the state and popular organizations or student groups and the pastoral agents working with or defending these organizations. JOC played an important role in getting the Church involved in the repressive cycle. Consequently--and ironically--the process which almost led to JOC's extinction simultaneously helped bring JOC's message alive within the Church. While the repression effectively decimated JOC, it also caused changes within the Church that would lead the institution closer to positions that JOC, among other groups, had first introduced.

Thus far I have mentioned the ways in which JOC was a precursor to the popular Church of the 1970s and helped change the Church. Yet it would be misleading to see the Church's transformation simply as a result of grass roots movements or to overlook some differences between JOC and the most significant expressions of the popular Church of the 1970s.

Even though JOC's political vision was always informed by its faith, by the late 1960s it had developed a faith based almost exclusively on testimony through action. Political practice was the primary expression of JOC's religious convictions. The movement had become distanced from the Church's sacramental life. Many Jocistas did not attend Mass and had little contact with the hierarchy or even with active Catholics outside of JOC. As a movement, JOC spent little time on spirituality; prayer, for example, was not particularly cultivated. The dual attitude of attempting to live a faith but rejecting the traditional expressions of the institutional Church appears clearly in a 1970 document. "For most activists, the Bible reinforces the commitment to the working class struggle. However, most Jocistas oppose the Church's traditional religious expressions (mass, sacraments, etc.), not for intrinsic reasons, but because in their current form they are not linked to life."⁴

Most Jocistas saw traditional forms of popular Catholicism as alienated. The rejection of traditional religiosity increased the distance between the common worker and the Jocistas, reinforcing elitist tendencies created by JOC's political positions. Many ex-participants are critical of the attitude JOC manifested towards popular religion.

"JOC never really dealt with the question of popular religiosity. On the contrary, we considered popular religiosity a form of alienation. . . JOC is still indifferent to popular religiosity. That is one of its problems; it is elitist."⁵

Perhaps more clearly than anything else, this negative attitude towards popular religiosity sharply distinguishes the kind of faith practiced by JOC and that practiced in the base communities. Although influenced by experi-

⁴ "Resumo do Conselho Nacional," 1970.

⁵ Interview, June 10, 1981.

ences such as MEB, JOC, and ACO, the CEBs emerged out of traditional religious practices which gained a politically liberating message. In the CEBs there coexists a rich mixture of traditional religiosity and politically liberating practices. Even though they have been given a new content, prayer and Biblical discussion are at the core of these religious communities. This kind of religious expression was weak in JOC by the end of the 1960s.

The base communities also continue to participate actively in the Church's sacramental life and parish structure. The relations with the institutional Church are far closer than JOC maintained by the late 1960s. Serious tensions between CEBs and the hierarchy have been unusual. And whereas JOC ended up being an elite movement for leaders in the popular movement, the CEBs have become a mass movement with perhaps as many as two million people. There is nothing elitist about CEBs. The level of political involvement varies greatly, but having a developed political awareness is no prerequisite for participating. CEBs are fundamentally religious communities. Frei Betto, one of the most important popular Church intellectuals, writes, "As Church communities, the base communities have a specific character which should not be forgotten. A Church community should be a community of faith."''

Despite their importance in popular movements and recognizing sharp regional and individual differences, most CEBs continue to be politically cautious. The observation made six years ago by J.B. Libânio, another important CEB advisor, that "The political level of the CEBs is the weakest," is still

'' Frei Betto, "Da Prática da Pastoral Popular," Encontros com a Civilização Brasileira 2, 104. In a similar vein, see Betto's O que é Comunidade Eclesial de Base (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981); and J.B. Libânio, "Igreja--Povo Oprimido que se Organiza para a Libertação," Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira 41 (June 1981), 279-311.

true.''' As the government's political liberalization project has advanced and as the popular movements have conquered increasing space in the political struggle, the exigencies of the conjuncture have forced the CEBs to mature politically, but they are still more heterogenous and less politically involved than JOC was in the late 1960s.

In a similar vein, it would be a mistake to attribute the transformation of the Brazilian Church exclusively to lay groups and grass roots movements. The transformation process was dialectical. Most innovations originated at the grass roots, but it was not until the hierarchy accepted and promoted them that the Brazilian Church became the most progressive in the world. None of this is to deny the important role that JOC played in the emergence of the popular Church. But its elitist character, its negative attitude towards popular religion, and its tenuous links to the bishops ultimately constituted weaknesses for the movement. Whereas JOC and the other elite movements of the 1960s were ultimately marginalized from the institution, the base communities and other expressions of the popular Church have conquered increasing space within the institution, helping the Church to become one of the most important political forces in the society, and, along with the Polish Church, one of the most important experiences in contemporary Catholicism.

'' J.B. Libânio, "Uma Comunidade que se Redefine," SEDOC 9 (October 1976), 305.

