



THE NEW CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA:

A CONFERENCE REPORT

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Abstract

This paper is a rapporteur's report from a conference on "The New Catholic Church in Latin America," sponsored by the Kellogg Institute of the University of Notre Dame in April 1983. The conference focused on the changes the Church has undergone during the last 25 years, concentrating on Brazil, Peru, and Nicaragua, countries where the national Church has been particularly important in recent years. In addition to briefly summarizing the conference papers, the report identifies major themes and debates which characterize the current discussion about the Latin American Church. (1) Whereas some participants emphasized the potential the Christian base communities and other grass roots Church groups have to transform the Church and the political order, others argued that these communities are subject to tight hierarchial control and cannot make significant contributions in democratizing society. (2) Some participants view the turn towards the right in the international Church as a well orchestrated, clearly defined trend, while others, despite acknowledging the trend, disputing its magnitude. (3) The significant frictions between the Vatican, CELAM, and the hierarchy and the Nicaraguan revolution point to the continuation of tensions between the Church and revolutionary regimes, but there were debates about the inevitability of these conflicts. (4) Some papers attributed to the Church a high capacity to control the nature and direction of institutional change, while others pay more attention to the way political and social changes shape the Church's institutional identity in ways it does not wholly fore see or control. (5) Several participants addressed the important and under studied question of the role women play in the Church. (6) Several people also addressed the issue of popular religiosity and its linkages to the institutional Church. (7) Finally, participants discussed some of the theoretical and methodological problems in studying such a complex, heterogenous institution.

Resumen

Este trabajo es un informe del seminario sobre "La Nueva Iglesia Católica en América Latina" patrocinado por el Kellogg Institute de la University of Notre Dame, en abril de 1983. El seminario se concentró en los cambios que la Iglesia ha sufrido en los últimos 25 años tomando como ejemplos los casos brasileño, peruano y nicaraguense, dado que en estos países el papel de la Iglesia ha sido particularmente relevante en el período reciente. Además de un breve resumen del seminario el informe identifica los temas y debates más significativos que caracterizan la presente discusión sobre la Iglesia latinoamericana. (1) Mientras algunos participantes enfatizaron las potencialidades de las Comunidades eclesiales de base y otros movimientos de base para producir transformaciones en la Iglesia y en el sistema político, otros argumentaron que estas comunidades están sometidas al control de la jerarquía y debido a ello no pueden contribuir significativamente a la democratización de la sociedad. (2) Mientras algunos participantes consideraron el viraje hacia la derecha en la Iglesia internacional como una tendencia claramente orquestada y definida, otros, a pesar de reconocer aquella tendencia, minimizaron su magnitud. (3) Las fricciones entre el Vaticano, CELAM y el episcopado nicaraguense, de un lado, y la revolución Sandinista, del otro lado, muestran una continuidad de las tensiones entre la Iglesia y los regímenes revolucionarios, aunque hubo discordancias acerca de la inevitabilidad de estos conflictos. (4) Algunos papeles atribuyeron a la Iglesia una alta capacidad para controlar la naturaleza y la dirección del cambio institucional, mientras otros apuntaron hacia el modo en que los cambios políticos y sociales redefinieron la identidad institucional de la Iglesia de un modo no totalmente previsto o controlado. (5) Se señaló la importancia de estudiar el rol de la mujer en la Iglesia. (6) Se destacó la cuestión de la religiosidad popular y sus vínculos con la Iglesia institucional. (7) Finalmente, los participantes discutieron algunos problemas metodológicos específicos al estudio de la Iglesia.

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REPORT ***

During the past 25 years, the Catholic Church in Latin America has undergone a significant transformation. Previously closely linked to the state and dominant classes, during the late 1960s the Church began to criticize authoritarian regimes and sever some ties with conservative elite groups. Throughout most of the continent, the Church began to call for social justice, and in Chile (1970-73) and Central America (mid-1970s to the present), significant numbers of practicing Catholics have worked for socialism or revolution. Inspired by new theological conceptions, Church progressives have sought a closer relationship with the popular classes. Particularly through small neighborhood worship and discussion groups known as ecclesial base communities, there has also been a move towards a more lay oriented Church. Yet despite the changes, the conservative, hierarchical sectors continue to be an important force within the Church, resisting further change and insisting that the Church remove itself from the political realm.

* I wish to thank Alexander Wilde for his many helpful comments on this paper.

To discuss some of the dilemmas and questions facing the contemporary Church, about three dozen scholars from North and Latin America met at the Kellogg Institute of the University of Notre Dame from April 21 to 23, 1983. The conference responded to a new moment in the Latin American Church, when, alongside the institutionalization of some post-Medellín changes, there has been a crystallization of forces attempting to curtail ecclesial change. The conference papers and discussions covered a lot of territory, including the reasons for the Church's transformation, the limits of change in the Church, the role of Christian base communities in society and politics, the place of women in the Church, and the strengthening of the conservative sectors in recent years.¹

The conference focused on three of the most important national churches: Brazil, Nicaragua, and Peru. The Brazilian Church has served as a model for Church progressives throughout the continent, and because of its unparalleled importance in Latin America, the conference devoted more attention to it. It has more members than any other Church in the Western world, and since the mid-70s, it has been the most progressive Catholic Church in the world. Many of the most important pastoral innovations in Latin America first emerged and remain strongest in Brazil, including the Catholic neighborhood groups of workers and peasants known as base communities.

¹ The conservative sectors can be differentiated from the progressives along several dimensions. Although they share a concern about social justice, they have a more cautious conception about the Church's role in politics and eschew radical and structural approaches to change. The modernizing sectors also are more concerned about preserving hierarchical authority lines within the Church.

The Brazilian Church has also been a major political actor during the nineteen years of military rule. In the most repressive period, 1968-1974, the Church became virtually the only institution capable of defending human rights. Today, with political liberalization well under way, the Church continues to play an important political role, largely through the Christian base communities (CEBs) and other grass roots Catholic organizations.

The Brazilian Church poses important questions about how far a single national Church can go in a progressive direction. It also raises questions about the impact of political change upon the Church. Some participants suggested that economic and political changes after the 1964 military coup had a significant impact upon the Church and that the current political liberalization may do likewise. Finally, it poses the important and controversial question of whether the Church can make significant contributions towards social change.

Although Nicaragua has less than 3% of Brazil's population and only six bishops as compared to almost 300, the Nicaraguan Church is, in the eyes of Rome and all sides of the political spectrum concerned about Central America, one of the most important national churches in the world. Nicaragua tests the extent to which the Church can help support the kind of radical change many ecclesiastical leaders have called for since the Medellin gathering of the Latin American bishops in 1968. Several factors in Nicaragua created the hope of working out a harmonious relationship between the Catholic Church and a revolutionary government: widespread

participation of practicing Catholics in all phases of the revolution; the episcopal declarations against the Somoza regime; the Sandinistas' attempts to respect the Church; the essentially cautious nature of the regime on many social, economic, and political questions. After a brief initial harmonious period, however, Rome, CELAM, and five of the six Nicaraguan bishops have become increasingly critical of the Sandinista government, and tensions between the hierarchy and the regime have escalated. The hierarchy fears that the revolution may attempt to subordinate or utilize the Church for its own purposes. They generally favor a liberal, pluralistic system which they feel is threatened in contemporary Nicaragua. Conversely, in the midst of internal and external challenges to the regime, the Sandinistas have viewed the Church's criticisms as counter-revolutionary. This does not necessarily mean that similar conflicts will arise in other revolutionary situations, but it does pose serious questions about the compatibility of revolutionary regimes and the Catholic Church.

The Nicaraguan situation also poses critical questions about the limits of lay authority within the Church. Since the Second Vatican Council and especially since Medellin, the Latin American Church has become more lay oriented, especially through the Christian base communities which have proliferated in many countries. Some theoreticians of the popular Church have expressed the hope that the CEBs will "reinvent the Church,"² but the fact remains that when the

² The expression comes from Leonardo Boff's book, Eclogênese: As Comunidades Eclesiais de Base Reinventam a Igreja (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1977).

CEBs are in conflict with the institutional Church, the bishops have reasserted hierarchical authority lines. In Nicaragua, in contrast to Brazil and Peru, these communities emerged relatively autonomous of the hierarchy, and since 1980 they have moved in opposition to the hierarchy on political questions. As the communities have continued working for the Revolution, the hierarchy has become increasingly more insistent on the themes of unity and authority in the Church, suggesting, once more, the limits of change in the Church.

The Peruvian Church has been one of the more progressive national churches and has also established an important presence in national politics. As in the other two cases, the issue of the relative importance of internal and contextual factors in determining the Church's direction arises in Peru. In 1968, a progressive military government came to power as the Church was promoting internal reforms. The period until 1975 raised interesting questions about the Church's role under a reformist government, and subsequent years have posed questions about its response to a less progressive military government (1975-1979) and to a centrist elected government (1979-1983). Discussion of the Peruvian case also helped serve as a reminder that the other two cases--Brazil, because of the dynamism of the Church; Nicaragua, because of the relationship between the Church and the Revolution--have strong national specificities which should not be overlooked.

Although the conference focused on these three countries, two comparative papers, by Rubem César Fernandes and Margaret Crahan,

brought the Polish and Cuban Churches into the discussion. Other participants have written on the Church in Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, and other Latin American nations, so the conference had a strong comparative dimension.

While there was a consensus about the major issues and significant contributions to the debate about these issues, there were many disagreements about how to study the Church, its role in contemporary Latin America, the position of lay groups within the Church, and the current struggles within the Church. These themes and debates are discussed in the rest of this paper.

THEMES AND DEBATES

1. The Role of Grass Roots Movements in the Church. The Church is a hierarchical institution, and throughout most of its history it has tended to marginalize lay and grass roots movements which it cannot effectively control. Yet since the 1950s, the Church has attempted to increase the responsibility and participation of the laity and grass roots levels. The traditional conception of the Church as a hierarchically ordered perfect society gave way, especially with Vatican II, to a notion of the Church as People of God, a concept which emphasizes corresponsibility more than hierarchy. This change, however, is complex and often even contradictory, for the Church remains committed to a belief in hierarchical authority lines. Since Vatican II, the issue of the proper role and limits of lay participation has been one of the most important debates within the Church.

In Latin America this debate has been particularly intense because of the political significance some lay organizations have had. In all three countries, members of grass roots Catholic organizations have worked for social change. Clear examples of this have occurred in Nicaragua (Dodson), where base community participants have worked for the revolution, and in Brazil (Bruneau and Krischke) where base community members have participated in popular movements.

Four papers (Bruneau, Krischke, Mainwaring, Dodson) focused principally on the role lay organizations have played in politics or in the Church, and three others (Paiva, Della Cava, Fernandes) addressed this question at length. While there was general agreement that authority lines within the Church have changed, there was significant disagreement over the role lay and grass roots movements have played during recent decades. The debates focused around two main questions: the relative degree of lay autonomy and hierarchical control, and the importance of the grass roots organizations in political life.

The four papers which focused on grass roots lay organizations all suggested they play an important role in the Church and the society. Thomas Bruneau's paper, "The Church and the Communities: Religion in the Amazon," examined the political impact of ecclesial base communities (CEBs) in a municipality of the Amazon region. Bruneau noted that because the Brazilian base communities are extremely diverse according to region and diocese, generalizations easily become inaccurate or meaningless. Further, although the CEBs

are a very important phenomenon, little concrete work has been done on their political impact. Bruneau's study presented some suggestive survey evidence about the religious and political views of base community participants in this region. CEB participants were much more prone (66% to 30%) to attend Mass whenever it is offered, underscoring the strong linkages between the CEBs and the institutional Church in Brazil. They were more active in the producers' cooperative (9% to 2%), the sindicato of rural workers (51% to 17%), and community projects (mutirão) (51% to 34%). They were also more likely to have a definite political party preference (56% to 48%) and to prefer the Workers Party (PT), the most progressive of the extant parties (18% to 6%). CEB members were less likely to express attitudes of political passivity; 22% said that there was no solution to major problems or that only God could resolve them as opposed to 41% of other people. Conversely, they were far more likely (26% to 12%) to believe that the community should resolve these problems.

Bruneau emphasized the importance of nationally based ecclesiastical initiatives in this seemingly remote area. He argued that while the CEB pastoral strategy seems to be working, local Church leaders are less convinced of its success. He also gave evidence of a competition between the Church and state agencies, a point picked up by others in discussion.

Scott Mainwaring's paper, "The Catholic Youth Workers Movement (JOC) and the Emergence of the Popular Church in Brazil, 1958-1970," analyzed an important lay movement and its contributions to the

emergence of the popular Church. Before the late 1950s, JOC was a politically moderate movement, primarily concerned with the Church's sacramental and parish life and with recreational activities for young workers. By 1970, it had become politically radical, was distanced from the parish structure and the Church's sacramental life, lost touch with its concern with recreational activities, and was ultimately decimated by several waves of severe repression. In this process, Mainwaring argued, JOC developed significant autonomy with respect to the hierarchy and conflicted with the Church's predominant orientation.

Mainwaring argued that JOC and other lay and grass roots movements played an important role in the emergence of the popular Church in Brazil. These movements developed new conceptions of faith and a new understanding of the relationship between the Church and the popular classes, influenced clergy and members of the hierarchy, formed a cadre of lay leaders who continue to have leadership positions in the Brazilian Church, and involved the whole institution in a repressive cycle. Mainwaring cautioned against attributing too much weight to lay and grass roots movements in promoting ecclesial change; this process also required a hierarchy open to change. He also noted that, despite the strong similarities between JOC and the popular Church, there were some differences: JOC had a more politicized conception of faith than the base communities; JOC had negative attitudes towards popular religiosity; and the movement was further removed from the Church's sacramental life than the CEBs.

Paulo Krischke's paper on "Utopia e Cidadania na Crise do Autoritarismo: Igreja, Motivações e Orientações Políticas dos Moradores em Loteamentos Clandestinos em São Paulo," analyzed the Church's role in the popular movement in São Paulo to legalize land titles of irregular lots³ and obtain other urban rights. During the past two decades, the combination of declining real wages and escalating real estate prices has forced large numbers of popular class families to live on land to which they have no title or an irregular title. Since 1975, when the movement began, Church organizations have acted as an entry place into the movement, as loci of communication, and as network institutions. Krischke argued that they have also helped encourage democratic, participatory practices. His paper called attention to some ways in which the Church can help empower civil society.

Michael Dodson, whose paper is discussed in greater detail below (#6), joined the three papers on Brazil in underscoring the autonomy and political significance of grass roots organizations. Dodson argued that in Nicaragua, base communities were created largely independent of the hierarchy and that they remain autonomous from and even in conflict with the bishops.

Vanilda Paiva and Ralph Della Cava presented a markedly different view of the grass roots movements. In her paper on "The Modernization of the Brazilian Catholic Church," Paiva argued that Catholic organizations and lay movements are used by the hierarchy

³ Irregular lots refer to lots where there is no legal land title. Some occupants paid for the land and received falsified titles while others were squatters.

as part of an overall strategy of broadening the Church's social bases. In her view, these lay movements and organizations are closely controlled by the hierarchy and have little autonomy. The grass roots organizations allow the Church to develop a new relationship with the popular classes without abdicating its ties to other social classes. The dissemination of a radical populist ideology is the principal means through which the institution establishes this control over the popular Catholic organizations.

Ralph Della Cava's paper, "The Struggle for Hegemony in the Church," provided an essentially pessimistic analysis of the role the base communities might have in creating a new Church. Della Cava argued that the Church can be likened to an archaeological dig; the emergence of Catholics who link faith to radical political options has not led to the extinction of traditional forms of religiosity linked to more conservative or passive political expressions, or to a weakening of the conservative members of the hierarchy, who continue to hold key leadership positions in the institution. Brazil has multiple layers of religious representation, and the base communities are by no means the majoritarian form of worship within this spectrum. Partially as a result of the decreasing space the popular Church will play in the overall institution, Della Cava cautioned against expecting that the base communities will be a tool for changing society.

2. The Conservative Tendencies in the International Church. One of the most important subjects at the conference was the conservative turn in the international Catholic Church. Alongside

the changes of recent decades, important sectors of the Church have been concerned with limiting the nature of change. In Europe, the rapid pace of innovations of the 1958-65 period was followed by a reaffirmation of the hierarchical character of the Church, and a similar process occurred in Latin America during the 1970s. After a decade of cautious modernization (1955-1965), the Church went through a period of more rapid change (1965-1972), marked by the emergence of liberation theology, the first ecclesial base communities, and radical political options of many Catholics. In many countries, the period since 1972 has seen a strengthening of the cautious sectors which are concerned with perceived excesses in liberation theology and in the Church's involvement in politics. The conservatives believe that these tendencies threaten the Church's unity and its ability to appeal to people of different social classes. They feel that the Church's identity as a religious institution precludes the kind of political involvement progressive leaders favor.

Conference participants agreed that there is some tendency towards conservatism in the Latin American Church, but there were different perceptions about how far this movement has gone in different countries. Dodson and Crahan's presentations on the Nicaraguan Church suggested that the hierarchical pressures against the popular sectors of the Church have gone farther there anywhere else in Latin America. Crahan even suggested that the Church may become one of the principal foci of counter-revolutionary activities.

According to both Iguíñiz and Mooney, in Peru there has been a visible but slight shift to the right in recent years. The sharpest disagreements occurred over how far this process has gone in Brazil. Della Cava and Paiva argued that the movement against the "liberationists" is decisive. They argued that episcopal statements, recent nominations of bishops, and Vatican actions all point in this direction. For them, the conservative sectors of the Church are organizing and gradually forcing the popular sectors into a marginal position. Internationally, this shift began around 1972 with the election of Alfonso López Trujillo as Secretary General of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM), and in Brazil it began towards the end of the decade. Della Cava cited as some of the indicators of this shift the April 1983 CNBB elections in Brazil; the highly visible role of D. Eugênio Salles, conservative Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro; the measures against the popular Church in Nicaragua; the election of Wojtyla as pope; and the disciplinary action against Hans Kung. He argued that the strengthening of the conservative sectors at the international level imposes major constraints on the Brazilian Church because it is impossible to win hegemony in a single national Church. Paiva argued that in formulating the new model of influence which enables it to establish a dialogue with all social classes, the institutional Church has consistently established limits to change and controlled the direction of that change. The move towards the right represents the institutions's attempt to continue a dialogue with the state and dominant sectors of society.

Others stated that it is not clear how far this movement has gone in Brazil. The most progressive documents of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) were issued in 1980 and 1982, and the dynamism of the base communities continues unabated. In sharp contrast to the tensions between the pope and the progressive sectors of the Nicaraguan Church, relations between the Brazilian Church and Rome have generally been good, and in his visit to Brazil in 1980, the pope largely supported the progressive sectors. In this perspective, the fact that in Peru and Brazil the progressive sectors have been closely linked to the hierarchy may stave off a sharper turn to the right, even if it leads to compromises on the part of Church progressives.

Connected to this question is one about the meaning of the Wojtyla papacy, which Della Cava and Paiva see as the Church's attempt to restore order (and even conservatism) in the house. Many papal statements support this view, but there are also some counter-indications. Rubem César Fernandes suggested that John Paul II may fit the description of an article by Leszek Kolakowski on how to be a socialist, liberal, and conservative at the same time. If so, the question is when and for what issues the three tendencies will prevail.

3. The Church and Revolution. Since the French revolution, the relationship between the Catholic Church and revolutionary regimes has been very strained. On the one hand, the Church has a lengthy history of antagonistic attitudes towards Marxism, socialism, and revolutionary regimes. On the other, the majority of revolutionary

governments, including those of the Soviet Union, Cuba, China, and Mexico (1910-1929) have been anti-clerical and have repressed the Catholic Church. In the past 25 years, however, there have been some efforts to construct a new dialogue between the left and the Church. The efforts to rethink more humanistic paths to socialism led some revolutionary leaders to reconsider their views towards religion. On the Catholic side, papal encyclicals became more critical of liberal capitalism and more favorable to egalitarianism and other goals which are shared by revolutionary regimes. During the 1960s, in Europe there emerged a Marxist-Christian dialogue, and in Latin America an increasing number of practicing Catholics came to see radical political options as an integral element of their faith. The conference addressed the question of the possibilities and limits of this rapprochement between socialists and Catholics.

Both papers on Nicaragua addressed this question at length. Margaret Crahan's paper, "The Catholic Church and Revolution: A Comparison of Cuba and Nicaragua," compared the two Church situations and responses during the early years of the two revolutions. Crahan's comparison included the relative strength of the Church; issues of conflict; basic positions of the hierarchy, clergy, and lay groups vis-a-vis the revolution; relative unity or conflict within the Church; and the position of the international Church. Her basic argument is that despite the many changes the Church underwent between 1958 and 1979 and despite the fact that the internal Church situation differed considerably in the two cases, the institution's ability to live with revolutionary regimes has not changed dramatically.

Before 1958, the Cuban Church was much weaker institutionally than the Nicaraguan Church before 1979. The Cuban Church was highly dependent on foreign clergy, it had a very limited presence in rural areas, and it could claim only 70-75% of the population as Catholic, as compared to 90% in Nicaragua in the 1970s. In contrast to the Nicaraguan situation, the Cuban Church was markedly anti-revolutionary from the outset. Very few priests were ever sympathetic to Castro, and by mid-1959, the Church was a principal focus of anti-revolutionary activity. This sharp anti-revolutionary sentiment continued to prevail until the late 1960s, when some Catholic leaders started to urge the Church to insert itself as a critical voice within the revolution. By contrast, in Nicaragua the hierarchy was sharply anti-Somozista, and shortly after the Sandinistas came to power, in late 1979 the bishops issued a statement supportive of the revolutionary reforms. Furthermore, a large number of lay leaders and clerics still strongly support the regime. Over time, however, internal conflict has increased sharply as five of the six bishops and the pope have become more critical of the popular Church and of the government.

The Nicaraguan situation poses doubts about whether the Church can coexist with or support revolutionary regimes. Crahan's paper was pessimistic on that score, and her logic seems strong, especially considering that the situation in Nicaragua was more favorable to a harmonious relationship between the Church and the regime than in other revolutionary cases. However, since the Church's future is open ended, it is possible that under different

historical circumstances a different outcome could result, especially if the popular sectors of the Church had the support of a larger part of the hierarchy.

4. Change in the Church: Institutional Autonomy versus Insertion in a Broader Context. In recent years, as the number of leading social scientists and historians who have studied the Latin American Church has increased, a theoretical debate about how to study the Church has developed. The best analyses of the Church emphasize that it has some institutional autonomy, yet that its institutional identity can be reshaped by the broader social, political, and economic context. They are also aware that the Church is an international institution, with some interests which it attempts to protect, and with a model for influencing society, even though that model is not necessarily fully conscious. However, beyond these agreements, participants differed in significant ways in their approach to studying change in the Church.

Paiva and Della Cava emphasized the Church's institutional autonomy, hierarchical character, and coherence. They maintained that ecclesial change represents the institution's attempts to broaden its social base. This emphasis on the coherence and intentionality of the overall project was especially clear in Paiva's overview of the the Church's transformation in Brazil, covering roughly the last 25 years. Paiva sees this transformation as part of the universal Church's attempt to develop a broader social base in the post-World War II period. In doing so, the Church would develop a new model of influence, one of acting

directly in civil society rather than using an alliance with the state to obtain its objectives. The new model of influence, however, still uses the force acquired in civil society to influence the state, and despite the changes, the Church has not abdicated its control over the masses.

Paiva discussed three periods in the formulation of a new model of influence. From 1945 to 1961 was a period of formulating a modern doctrine which would enable the Church to be a mediator between countries and between civil society and the state. Between 1961 and 1971, this doctrine was incorporated into the predominant Church discourse through encyclicals such as Gaudium et Spes and Mater et Magistra. Roughly around 1971 began a period of contraction of the Church, of establishing clear limits as to how far Church reform will go.

The papers by Mainwaring and Iguñiz represented a different side of the spectrum. They pay more attention to the way political and social changes shape the Church's institutional identity in ways the Church does not necessarily foresee or control. Where Paiva and Della Cava implicitly emphasize the coherence of the Church's strategy, the latter two implicitly suggest that the different sectors of the Church have markedly different strategies or models of influence. For them, the popular sectors of the Church have a model of the Church which sharply contradicts many of the goals of the modernizing sectors, such as having strong Church influence among the dominant classes and the state.

Mainwaring emphasized the importance of seeing JOC's transformation in relation to broader political and social changes. For example, during the 1964-70 period, JOC's radicalization resulted only partially from new Church practices and theologies; repression against popular movements and inequalitarian economic policies had a radicalizing effect upon JOC participants which was equally important.

Catalina Iguiniz's paper on "The Church and Social Change in Peru" gave an overview of the transformation of the Peruvian Church during the past twenty-five years. While concerned with showing how social change helps shape change in the Church, Iguiniz emphasized that the Church has some specificity and also helps shape the nature of change in the society. She argued that the changes in the Peruvian Church have resulted from changes in the international Church, either in a more democratic or hierarchical direction; social processes, such as regime transitions; and the social organization of the national Church.

The paper demarcated the changes in the Peruvian Church according to three periods. Between 1958 and 1968, in response to changes in the international Church and Peruvian society, the Church distanced itself from the traditional oligarchy, began to emphasize a reformist social doctrine, and sought to strengthen its pastoral work. Between 1968 and 1975, the Church reached its highest level of institutionalization and enjoyed a period of relative ecclesial consensus and of fluid communication between the grass roots and the hierarchy. The Church generally supported the reform programs of

the progressive military government. Since 1975, and especially since 1979, there has been some retraction of the progressive sectors, marked by a new turn towards pastoral work with the dominant classes, more conflict regarding the Church's social mission, a concern with the perceived excesses of liberation theology, and greater attention to hierarchy and unity in the Church. This movement has been encouraged by the international Church, but also reinforced by a political liberalization process which pushed some Church leaders away from political issues. Since 1975, there has been more Church/state conflict, with the progressive sectors leading the ecclesiastical protests about political and socio-economic conditions. Between 1975 and 1979, these protests had some impact on the return to political democracy.

Although it did not explicitly address the debate on why the Church has changed, Rubem César Fernandes's paper on "A Igreja, os Movimentos Civis e o Estado no Brasil e na Polônia," comparing the role of two of the most important Catholic Churches in the world, offered a suggestive description of how the Church operates in different contexts. In both societies, the Church has been a highly important political actor since the late 1960s, partially in response to a rupture between an authoritarian state and civil society. In both societies, it has been allied with social movements attempting to democratize the political order. Equally important, however, are the differences between the two contexts and the two Churches. In Brazil, the Church has attempted to construct a new dialogue with the "povo," the popular classes, whereas in

Poland, the dominant image has been that of the Nation. The Brazilian Church may be the most progressive in the world, and the greatest dynamism occurs through grass roots organizations, while the Polish Church is relatively traditional, and the parish is still the center of its life. In response to the totalizing character of the Polish state, the Church is relatively closed, and sacramental concerns and liturgy form the core of the Church's life, whereas in Brazil, the renovation has most sharply affected the linkages between faith and politics. The Brazilian Church has not particularly emphasized the family or been especially innovative in terms of liturgy and sacraments. In Poland, the totalitarian control over public life led to a deepening appreciation of the family, including within the Church.

5. Women in the Church. Mary Mooney's paper on "Women Religious and Changing Authority patterns in the Church in Peru" raised the important and little researched question of the role of women in the Church. Traditionally, women have been the outstanding clientele of the Church without having much authority in what has been a male dominated institution. In recent years, this has changed some, yet the role of women religious and laity seems to exemplify the contradictory character of the changes in the Church as a whole. Women religious have played an important role in the Church throughout Latin America, particularly in working with ecclesial base communities, but the limits regarding change in their role are still quite sharp.

Mooney discussed the changing roles of women religious in relation to a cyclical history of religious orders over the centuries. She argued that religious orders generally arise as the result of charismatic leaders or movements, which are later absorbed and constrained by the hierarchy. Since 1948 and especially since Vatican II, the Church has allowed more autonomy to the orders. This movement has coincided with the opening of the Peruvian Church, thereby encouraging the orders to change in a more progressive direction.

Mooney's periodization of the changes in orders of women religious coincided with that sketched by Catalina Iguiñiz for the Peruvian Church as a whole. From 1958 to 1968, there was a large influx of foreign orders which permitted a reinforcement of traditional work in parishes, elite schools, and charity organizations. From 1968 to 1974, women religious became more involved in working with the poor, and there was some movement away from the more traditional activities. For example, many women religious gave up working in the traditional school system to devote themselves to basic education and alternative schooling. Since 1974, the pace of innovation has slowed down, and the more traditional orders have attracted larger numbers of recruits.

Despite the changes in the role of women religious, Mooney emphasized that there are many unresolved tensions and contradictions. While there are calls for greater dialogue within the Church, there is still little real support for women religious. Lack of communication with the clergy and hierarchy and lack of participation in decision making are ongoing sources of frustration.

Mooney was not alone in her interest in women's role in the Church. Della Cava asserted that most CEB participants are women. Given the CEBs' importance, the predominance of women may assume considerable significance.

6) Popular Religiosity and the Institutional Church. The conference focused largely on the institutional Catholic Church, ranging from grass roots Catholic organizations to the Vatican. There were, however, many reminders of the importance of what is commonly called popular Catholicism, the religious beliefs and practices of the majority of the Catholic population throughout Latin America. Fernandes and Della Cava emphasized that in Latin America there has always been a gap between the religious beliefs of the masses and those of the clergy and institutional Church. Despite all the change in the institution, the mass of Catholics continue to practice their faith much as they did decades ago. Consequently, as we focus on the ways the Church has changed, we should not overlook the continuing existence of forms of popular Catholicism which remain very traditional. One of the outstanding reminders of this fact is the great appeal traditional religious festivals continue to have.

While most of the discussion about popular Catholicism emphasized its continuity, Michael Dodson's paper, "Changing Religious Consciousness and the Popular Church in Nicaragua," underscored the possibility of radically changing some aspects of popular religion. Ever since Medellín, the Church has been concerned about finding ways to work with popular religious beliefs which would respect

popular values while promoting a more progressive understanding of Christian faith. Dodson discussed a particularly effective transformation of popular religion, from a basically conservative faith to a progressive one. He argued that the Nicaraguan revolution and the sectors of the Church supporting it have succeeded in channeling a deep popular religiosity behind the institutional Church for the first time in Nicaraguan history.

The paper focused on a poor agricultural region in the north of the country and covered the period beginning roughly 1970, when the CEBs were created, until the present. It outlined three periods in the development of the base communities in this particular region. From 1970 until 1975, the base communities and the Delegates of the Word were fairly spiritualistic and individualistic in their orientation. Between 1975 and 1978, Canadian priests worked in the area and attempted to link faith to local social and political questions, and beginning 1977, the Sandinistas began to make contact with the Delegates. By late 1978, many Delegates were actively participating in the Sandinista struggles. Since 1979, the communities have continued to support and participate in the revolutionary government. In this latest period, the communities, which sprang up relatively autonomous from the hierarchy, have conflicted with the institutional Church. The communities are working for an internally more democratic Church, and they actively support the revolution. They have always considered themselves part of the Church, but some local priests and the Nicaraguan bishops feel the CEBs constitute a parallel Church and have been very

critical of them. This case illustrates the kind of religious conflicts which have been experienced throughout the country.

7. Conceptualizing the Church's Political Role. Through the wide range of papers, the conference underscored the diversity and complexity of the contemporary Catholic Church. Different papers focused on the political orientation of the hierarchy, on the relationship between grass roots organizations and popular movements, on a nationally organized lay movement, on women's religious orders, and on the role of Christian base communities in local political and ecclesial life.

The diversity and complexity of the contemporary Church poses difficult theoretical and methodological questions about how to study the Church. Alexander Wilde's paper, "The New Latin American Church and Politics: Context and Role," addressed these theoretical and methodological problems at length. Wilde argued that social science analysis of the Church should strive to meet three general criteria. First, it should be historical, have a sense of change over time, and attempt to identify the causes of that change. Wilde conceptualized the Church's transformation as a response to institutional factors (the need to remain relevant in the contemporary world) and new historical social processes, such as the emergence of bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes, which frequently led the Church to take a more active, progressive political role. While focusing on change, Wilde underscored that there are limits to the change, that some aspects of the change may be temporary rather than permanent, and that there are sharp national differences as to

how much the Church has changed. Second, the analysis should be comparative so as to understand similarities and specificities in the role the Church plays in different societies. Third, it should focus on the interaction between Church, society, and polity. While taking note of the Church's institutional autonomy vis-a-vis social processes, Wilde also emphasized the way broader social and political changes can shape the institution. For example, changes in political regime can have a strong impact on the Church, as the papers by Iguñiz, Dodson, Crahan, and Mainwaring underscored. At the same time, Wilde noted that the Church does not merely react to broader political and social changes but also helps shape the nature of political and social life. The Church has played an important role in delegitimizing authoritarian regimes in recent years, and in the past, it played some role--though an overstated one, in Wilde's view--in legitimating conservative regimes. In terms of different national churches, Wilde argued that three notable dimensions vary between countries and over time: the degree of episcopal leadership, the level of lay mobilization, and the degree of coherence of the overall social impact.