



GRASSROOTS CATHOLIC GROUPS AND POLITICS IN BRAZIL,
1964-1985

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ABSTRACT

During most of its lengthy history, the Catholic Church in Latin America has been identified with dominant elites and the state. This situation has changed in recent decades as Church leaders have supported popular protest aimed at changing unjust social structures. At the forefront of the process of ecclesiastical change have been a panoply of new grassroots groups, the most famous of which are the ecclesial base communities (CEBs). This paper examines the relationship between such grassroots groups and politics in Brazil. The author calls attention to the strong linkages between these groups and the hierarchy. He also underscores the central religious character of CEBs and other groups, even while arguing that these groups did have a political impact. The paper traces how the political activities of CEBs and other grassroots groups evolved over time, largely in response to macropolitical changes. It pays particular attention to the difficulties poor Catholics often encountered in acting in the political sphere.

RESUMEN

Durante la mayor parte de su larga historia, la Iglesia Católica en Latinoamérica se ha identificado con las élites dominantes. Esta situación ha cambiado en las décadas recientes ya que líderes de la Iglesia han apoyado la protesta popular dirigida al cambio de estructuras sociales injustas. Al frente del proceso de cambio eclesiástico ha habido una panoplia de nuevos grupos de base, entre los cuales los más famosos son las comunidades eclesiales de base (CEBs). Este trabajo examina la relación entre estos grupos de base y la política en Brasil, subrayando los fuertes lazos entre estos grupos y la jerarquía. También hace hincapié en la importancia del carácter fundamentalmente religioso de las CEBs y otros grupos, aún cuando esos grupos sí tuvieron un impacto político. Se señala cómo las actividades políticas de las CEBs y otros grupos de base evolucionaron a través del tiempo, en gran parte como respuesta a cambios macropolíticos. El ensayo pone particular atención a las dificultades que con frecuencia encontraron los Católicos de las clases populares para actuar en la esfera política.

During most of its lengthy history, the Catholic Church in Latin America has been closely identified with dominant elites. In exceptional places, Church leaders supported the poor in their struggles to win a better place in society, but generally they allied themselves with the privileged. There were many cases of religiously inspired popular protests, but most often the Church lined up against, rather than with, such movements. This has changed in the past three decades, though with great differences in the extent and nature of change from one country to the next. At times with dramatic gestures, at times through silent, courageous, and unpublicized acts of solidarity, a significant number of Church leaders have taken stances alongside the poor, encouraging them to fight for social change. CEBs (Ecclesial Base Communities) and other grassroots groups have become very controversial as they have threatened to change the religious and political landscapes of a number of countries. Politicians and grassroots activists, theologians and social scientists, conservatives and revolutionaries have all become embroiled in the debate about CEBs. Many analysts have overstated the magnitude of Church change, but the fact remains that in several countries (Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Peru) the Church has changed in conspicuous ways.

Nowhere has change gone farther in the Roman Catholic world than in Brazil. Brazil has the most progressive Catholic episcopate in the Roman Church world, and the size of the episcopate (over 350, making it the second largest in the world, behind the Italian episcopate) and of the Church itself (the largest Church in the Western world) have given it particular weight. The available information suggests that Brazil had the first CEBs in Latin America, created around 1963, and it certainly has the most CEBs, estimated (though probably overestimated) at 100,000, with over two million participants. The Brazilian Church has also been a pioneer in creating other kinds of organizations that attempt to link the institutional Church with the grass roots.

Given its size, the importance it has assumed internationally, and the centrality of grassroots groups within it, the Brazilian Church deserves particular attention. And within the Brazilian Church, the nature and role of CEBs and other grassroots groups is a particularly vital issue because of their importance to progressive Church efforts and their role in encouraging opposition to military rule. No other innovation within the Brazilian Church has been so central to the efforts to create a new Church. I begin the analysis with some theoretical observations on the interaction between religion, politics, and grassroots groups.

Religion, Politics, and Grassroots Groups: Theoretical Notes

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many leading social scientists proclaimed, and generally applauded, the demise of religion as a major force in social life. Feuerbach dismissed religion as a projection, a response to a perceived need for protection against nature. For Marx and Engels religion was, to use the famous expression, an "opiate of the people." This does not mean (as some interpreters have suggested) that they placed great weight on religion as a primary cause of oppression, but they clearly considered religion a mechanism that drew attention away from the "real" (i.e. economic and political) issues. Nietzsche saw religion as a projection that fosters unhappiness. Freud considered religion an illusion that stems from the individual's need for protection and society's need to impose moral guidelines to maintain social order. Among the classics, Weber was the most nuanced and least negative thinker about religion. Much of Weber's sociology revolved around the notion of rationalization, seen as the basic feature of the contemporary world. Although Weber perceived rationalization as an almost inexorable process, he was concerned about its effects, which he saw as having some deleterious consequences. In this sense, he was not as quick to applaud

rationality as Freud, for example. Moreover, Weber argued that religion, and more broadly the sphere of the suprarational, had important positive functions.¹

At this point in history, it is not novel to point out that the predictions of Feuerbach, Marx and Engels, Nietzsche, and Freud have not been entirely borne out. Nevertheless, until recently, the assumption that modernization would ultimately erode the basis for religious faith was common in sociological literature.² Religion was often portrayed as an atavism. Analyses of religion and politics frequently saw religious motives as a stepping stone to political action, without taking seriously the nature of those motives.

The past two decades, however, have once again underscored that religion remains a dynamic and important force in social and political life. In the past decade, religion has spawned violent political strife in countries as otherwise distinct as Iran, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, El Salvador, South Africa, and Nicaragua. The religious conflicts in question may be (and generally are) connected to other cleavages--class, region, ethnicity--but this in no sense makes the religious issues reduceable to other, supposedly more fundamental cleavages. Religion has played a salient political role in many other countries around the world. Poland, where the Catholic Church has been the outstanding voice representing civil society against the claims of an oppressive socialist state; the United States, where religious conservatives and liberals alike have been prominent in public life; and Brazil, where progressive religious groups played an outstanding role in the opposition to military rule between 1968 and 1985, stand out as noteworthy cases.

Even more mundane examples illustrate the ongoing importance of religion in political life. In many Western democracies, religion is the best sociological indicator of voting and political behavior. Marxism and even some strains of liberalism conventionally argued that economic interests were somehow more "real" than ideological (including religious) questions. Nevertheless, religion is often a better indicator of political behavior than class.³

In response to this ongoing centrality of religion in political life, an impressive body of literature has emerged in recent years. Spanning a wide range of disciplines, methodologies, ideological perspectives, and geographic specializations, this literature nevertheless has some important common points. First, there is a consensus that religion is not necessarily a conservative force, even though it continues to be so in most instances. Second, religious values are important in their own right, and should not be treated as mere expressions of other, more fundamental issues. Finally, religion has an extraordinary ongoing appeal, even when so many aspects of social life have become highly rationalized. Religion is important in some highly and some less modernized societies, and among highly educated individuals as well as illiterate people.

Religion's vitality reflects the fact that, contrary to Freud's hopes and expectations, science leaves unanswered many key questions of human existence. Religion addresses questions about the meaning of life and death. It also provides individuals with a set of values and norms that help structure their lives. Alternative values and norms do exist--religion is not functionally indispensable to modern society in that sense--but for a variety of reasons have not displaced those created by religion. Durkheim's writings remain a valuable contribution in underscoring the powerful character of religious motivations: "(The believers) feel that the real function of religion... is to aid us to live. The believer who has communicated with his god is not merely a man who sees new truths of which the unbeliever is ignorant, he is a man who is stronger. He feels within him more force, either to endure the trials of existence, or to conquer them. It is as though he were raised above the miseries of the world, because he is raised above his condition as a mere man." Durkheim goes on to argue, in sharp contrast to Marx, Feuerbach, and Freud, that

"the unanimous sentiment of the believers of all times cannot be purely illusory."⁴

Recent cases of religion playing an important political role also call attention to the vitality and dynamism of many religious institutions. Churches have adapted to the challenges Marx, Freud, and Feuerbach felt would lead to their demise. They have been capable of responding to secularization, modernization, and democratization, among other social changes. They have done so in a large variety of ways, sometimes by seeking integration within a new social order, sometimes by successfully affording masses of individuals protection against some of the evils of that new order, sometimes by rejecting and defeating attempts to create a more secularized society. Among the major institutions that form contemporary society, only the family and the state could claim to have been as capable of adjusting to the challenges of the times--and such a claim on behalf of either institution would be disputable. In brief, churches, like other institutions, change to meet the demands of their times and their constituencies. They are part of society, and as such respond (consciously or not) to changing social contexts, even in the case of fundamentalist groups who reject many elements of social changes. Of course, not all churches change in equally "successful" (in the limited sense of maintaining and expanding a constituency) ways. Some churches decline and even disappear; others emerge and expand. Very few, however, can survive without changing in significant ways. They may even claim that change is intended to bring the church back to the "original" ideals--but whatever such ideals may have represented in times long past cannot be duplicated today, given the radically different context.

While very general and abstract, these comments are directly relevant to understanding the grassroots religious communities that have played an important role in Brazil's Church and political life. It is impossible to understand such groups without reference to the powerful motivating force that religion provides. While the middle and upper strata in urban areas in Brazil usually have a secularized world view, religion is an important part of the world view of many poor people, especially those who live in rural areas. Of course, this is nothing new, nor does it mean that religious people regularly participate in organized religious expressions. Nevertheless, the fact that a strong popular religiosity permeates major sectors of the society is an indispensable starting point for understanding why CEBs have had reasonably wide appeal.

At the same time, the Brazilian case cannot be comprehended without reference to the unusual vitality of the Catholic Church. Arguably no Catholic Church in the world has changed in such deep ways since 1964; by the mid-1970s, no other Catholic Church in the world was so progressive. Clearly, religious issues would not have become as salient in political life without such changes.

The above arguments suggest the importance of analyzing how institutional elites and constituencies interact in any religious context.⁵ This interaction is particularly interesting in the case of "grassroots" Catholic groups throughout Latin America. In some senses, such groups represent a profound challenge to the institutional Church. In others, however, they are part of the Church, are susceptible to control by institutional leaders,⁶ and derive their own sense of legitimacy and affirmation from their linkages with the institution. I will expand on these remarks by first addressing the nature of the linkages between the institutional and the popular, and then considering the senses in which the popular has represented a major challenge to institutional leaders.

Throughout Latin America, CEBs were created by "pastoral agents"--priests, nuns, bishops and lay people commissioned by the Church. The linkages between CEBs and the institutional Church are enduring. In most dioceses, pastoral agents visit CEBs on a regular, although usually infrequent, basis, and most dioceses also sponsor occasional gatherings of the CEBs found in a given parish

or set of parishes. The materials used by the CEBs are produced by the diocese or by any of a multitude of Church institutes and organs. Most dioceses also hold training sessions for CEB leaders.

The central importance of the hierarchy is even more apparent in other initiatives of the Brazilian Church such as the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the Workers' Pastoral Commission (CPO) and the Indians' Missionary Council (CIMI). None of these can unequivocally be called grassroots organizations since they are part of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB). However, all three organizations attempt to serve poor, marginalized people; all three function partially on the basis of small local groups not terribly distinct from CEBs. There is a continuity from the CEBs to these three organizations (and others I do not analyze here) in terms of how local groups function and of their political perceptions. It is misleading in the case of both the CEBs and these other groups to say "These are (or are not) grassroots groups." What is important to address is not whether we are dealing with grassroots groups, but rather how the grass roots are related to the institutional Church.

The nature of clerical and episcopal leadership has been a major factor in determining the orientation and success or failure of the groups. In fact, it is impossible to comprehend their successes and limits without emphasizing the linkages to the hierarchy. On the one hand, it was precisely the close linkages between the grass roots and the hierarchy which made the Brazilian Church so dynamic in the 1970s. Without support from the hierarchy, grassroots pastoral agents would have been ineffectual in implementing innovations, and the Church as a whole would have been ineffective in defending human rights. In this sense the situation of grassroots Church groups in Brazil differs significantly from that in Central America, especially Nicaragua, where there has been sharp conflict between progressive grassroots groups and the hierarchy.⁷ On the other hand, the dependence on the hierarchy implies limits to these movements. The movements involve the grass roots, but they are part of what remains a very hierarchical institution. At a period when the international Church is moving in a conservative direction, this fact could have significant implications for the future of these Catholic groups.

Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to infer that the official Church imposes its programs upon groups of poor people, or that the poor would prefer a more autonomous relationship vis-à-vis the Church. CEBs welcome and need their contact with the Church. Individuals and groups gain legitimacy, a sense of pride, and contacts in a society that has denied the popular classes all three. It is often though not always the case that CEBs fold if the pastoral agent who has most directly supported them departs.

While CEBs and other groups are a product of the Church, they are not infinitely malleable or susceptible to complete control. In their initial phases, CEBs tend to be more dependent on pastoral agents than they are at a later time. The CEBs attempt to develop more autonomous leadership, so they acquire a greater capacity to sustain themselves without weekly contact with a pastoral agent. This increasing autonomy also implies the possibility of conflict with the parent institution. The potential for serious conflict has occurred where conservative priests and prelates have been relentless in their attempts to control CEBs that have already reached an independent assessment of their needs. Such conflict has been common in Nicaragua, but in Brazil it has been the exception. Generally, relations between the base and the hierarchy have been harmonious in Brazil.

The average CEB in Brazil is more conventionally religious, and less political, than many analysts have suggested. People participate in CEBs because of their faith and because they enjoy the social experience. Many people acquire a rudimentary political consciousness (often accompanied by radical rhetoric learned through primers) in CEBs, and in the most politicized

parts of the country many also participate in social movements. But in the vast majority of cases, CEBs remain a haven for religious activity, above all for praying, reading the Bible and religious materials prepared by the diocese, discussing the social and political implications of Christian faith, and discussing issues of central importance in their members' daily lives. Notwithstanding all the emphasis placed on CEBs and partisan activity, the typical CEB probably spends more time discussing family life than party politics.⁸

Analyses of grassroots religious groups often draw a sharp distinction between religious and political motives for action. Among the vast majority of grassroots participants this distinction makes little sense, even if it sometimes proves useful to social scientists. Whether a grassroots participant is praying or organizing a petition to obtain improved transportation facilities, there is a unity of logic and action that makes our neat analytical distinctions break down. In both cases, what is at stake is acting in the name of certain principles of faith.⁹ To most grassroots members who participate in collective action, such participation is every bit as religious as prayer. Conversely, even though some of the faithful may not understand this to be the case, the content of prayer, and the way it is organized, are deeply political acts. Many liberation theologians seem to have understood this point in recent years, as they have increasingly turned their attention to spirituality.¹⁰

If grassroots groups are created by and influenced by the institutional Church, and if they are less political than many people have suggested, why all the attention? In the first place, such groups are a novelty in terms of the Latin American Church, not only because of their efforts on behalf of social justice, but also because they have created a new role for poor lay people. In the past, the Church often voiced a concern about its pastoral work with the popular classes, and it did undertake some efforts to reach the masses, ranging from service work (hospitals or schools that were accessible to the poor) to lay movements. However, the poor never had such a vital, relatively autonomous role in the Church as they have acquired in the CEBs.

Although these groups in Brazil were almost universally sponsored by pastoral agents, they themselves became such an important Church constituency that they had some influence on the institution as a whole. Once an institution creates an important, large constituency, it faces dilemmas in how to respond to that constituency.¹¹ Once the grassroots groups had become one of the most important, dynamic aspects of the Brazilian Church, only at a high cost (assuming it had wanted to) could the Church have failed to respond to the demands generated by the grass roots and by the pastoral agents who worked with the people. In this sense, the argument by theologian Leonardo Boff, that the CEBs were "reinventing" the Church,¹² is not entirely far-fetched. This does not, of course, mean that individual CEBs set about attempting to change the entire Church.

In the second place, although the political potential of grassroots Catholic groups has often been overstated,¹³ in the late 1970s a wide range of observers, from CEB ideologues to leaders of Brazil's military regime, were impressed with their potential for transforming society. Today it may seem difficult to understand this impression, but in the context of the late 1970s it made some sense. For years, the military regime had virtually extirpated popular protest. When popular movements resurfaced in the second half of the 1970s with surprising vitality, the regime was caught off guard.

The nature of political involvements of base communities throughout Latin America has depended a great deal upon the broader political context. In revolutionary contexts, such as those found in Nicaragua and El Salvador, CEB participants have generally supported revolutionary struggles. Conversely, the profoundly conservative character of Brazil's transition to democracy certainly contributed to defusing CEBs' political involvement. But this outcome, although

always probable considering the strength of Brazil's military regime, the lengthy elitist tradition, and the weakness of the opposition, was not inevitable. In a different scenario, grassroots groups might well have played a different political role.

Finally, these groups stimulate the development of popular leadership, encourage a transformation of political consciousness, and attempt to promote popular participation. While the short-term impact of these groups has been blunted by the character of Brazil's transition, there is some possibility that CEBs can promote long-range change by encouraging a transformation of the cultural underpinnings of political life. I return to this point later.

The Origins and Early Development of CEBs, 1964-1974

Considering how significant CEBs have become in many Latin American countries, they had an inauspicious origin. For decades, the Brazilian Church had been concerned about a shortage of priests, seen as the Church's most important problem. Pope John XXIII shared this view and, in the aftermath of the Cuban revolution, encouraged North American and European priests to become missionaries in Latin America. There was a widespread perception that the shortage of priests prevented the Church from effectively reaching the masses. By the early 1960s, this concern was magnified by fears that if the Church did not reach the masses more effectively, Communists or competing religious groups would.

By the late 1950s even some relatively conservative clerics had encouraged greater lay initiative within the Church in response to this shortage. Given the shortage of priests and the enormous territory they had to cover in rural areas, there was no possibility of saying Mass everywhere once a week. One response to this situation was to give nuns more responsibility. Another was to encourage lay people to assume more active leadership so as to help compensate for the shortage of Church personnel. This strategy was not only practical; it also coincided with the thrust of theological change at the time. The issue of lay responsibility and autonomy was salient in Brazilian and international Church discussions of the period.

During the 1950s and 1960s, an increasing number of Church leaders also became interested in themes like community and social justice. In the face of a society undergoing rapid changes, Church leaders of all stripes were concerned with what they perceived as a breakdown of community. The interest in social justice issues reflected broader Church currents of the papacy of John XXIII, as well as the political effervescence in Brazil.¹⁴

The first base communities were created around 1963 in response to this conjunction of concerns.¹⁵ Progressive priests working in rural areas realized that they could not come close to covering their entire geographical region on a given Sunday, so they began to encourage the peasants to hold a religious ceremony without them. Initially, these gatherings of peasants were known simply as Sunday religious services without the priest.¹⁶ Clerics took the initiative in creating these early CEBs, and they did so more out of a desire for more effective evangelization than out of political concerns. While this initiative in lay autonomy marked a rupture from past ecclesiastical practices, the early CEBs were not very involved in politics (nor were they known as CEBs at the time).

Present almost from the outset and decisive in the dissemination of CEBs was a religious populism. Long accustomed to working primarily with elites, an increasing number of clergy "discovered" the people in the second half of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Some of the first wave of pastoral agents--especially the middle class activists who had participated in Catholic Action movements--were scornful of traditional popular religiosity, seen as inimical to the formation of a critical political consciousness. Over time, however, this initial stance gave way to a veneration of popular practices that idealized o

povo in romantic terms. The people were often seen as the bearers of humankind's potential: pure, generous, spiritual. The search to work with "the people" led hundreds of clerics to move to poor urban neighborhoods and even more destitute rural areas where, almost always with the blessing of their bishops, they encouraged the creation of CEBs. The drive to be with "the people" and to learn from them is evinced in countless statements of the period. From the diocese of Goiás came the following report: "The true Evangelical values which the people live will lead us to a rethinking of our own beliefs.... In the silence of their hope and suffering, the people question us and give us lessons of faith. In the encounter with the people, we want to learn to be like the people, to have their generosity, their hospitality, their courage, their openness."¹⁷

If these diverse concerns motivated the Church's move to the people, what explains popular receptivity to this new pastoral work? Far too often the question is assumed away as if popular proclivities were endlessly malleable, when in fact the Church's many failures in reaching out to the masses attest to the opposite. Above all, popular receptivity to the Church's new pastoral line reflected the ongoing strength of popular religiosity in combination with the fact that, for the first time in its history, major sectors of the Brazilian Church overcame a notable elitism and paternalism, and gave up erudite approaches to religion. In addition, the popular sectors valued the experiences of friendship, human warmth, community, and personal empowerment that came in many CEBs.

While the broad set of concerns raised by Vatican II internationally and by a host of religious innovations in Brazil explains the motives behind the emergence of CEBs, in no sense does this mean that the Church had a consciously formulated plan. On the contrary, CEBs surfaced without that name, independently, in dozens of places around the country, most of which were remote. Paradoxically, the term "base communities" was initially used by Church leaders who had little if anything to do with the first CEBs. Responding to Vatican II themes and to the need for more effective Church structures, in the General Pastoral Plan of 1965 the CNBB began to use this term to denote small groups within the parish. By no means did the bishops envisage anything like what eventually emerged. To the limited extent that they had an idea of what base communities were, it was as "the lowest level expression of the Church." The bishops did not conceive of CEBs as groups of poor people; on the contrary, they imagined that they would be equally significant among all social classes. The early discussions of base communities insisted on strong clerical control, and they did not see CEBs as groups that would have a political impact.¹⁸ The CEBs never would have become as significant as they did if they had evolved as envisioned by the Brazilian bishops who called for their creation in 1965.

During the years following the military coup of 1964, a few progressive dioceses began to promote CEBs, especially in rural areas. In João Pessoa, Vitória, São Mateus, Goiás Velho, and other dioceses, CEBs began to appear. Nevertheless, it was not until after the Medellín gathering of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) in 1968 that the CEBs started to become more widespread. At Medellín, CELAM proclaimed the base communities one of the most promising innovations in the Latin American Church. This official endorsement helped encourage their dissemination to other dioceses during the following years.

Originally largely limited to rural areas, by the early 1970s CEBs began to emerge in a few dozen cities. The intersection of religious and political events was essential in this dissemination. On the religious side, CELAM and the Vatican encouraged progressive innovation. The conservative retrenching in CELAM began later (in 1972), and the Vatican, while squelching innovation in the Dutch Church, continued to support Church progressives in Brazil until the end of the 1970s. Meanwhile, the Brazilian military government became notably more

repressive after 1968. The combination of widespread repression that directly affected Church people and a highly inegalitarian development model had a decisive impact on the Church. More and more bishops opposed the government, spoke out on behalf of social justice, and encouraged or supported grassroots innovations.

This intersection between religious change and the rise of national security states has been treated simplistically by many analysts of the Latin American Church. It was not simply the case that repression generated progressive Church change throughout Latin America. In some cases, notably Argentina and Uruguay, repressive military regimes wiped out progressive pockets of the Church without provoking any significant response from the hierarchy; indeed, in Argentina, the hierarchy helped legitimize the military government.¹⁹ In Brazil, however, the fact that there had already been a critical mass of progressives before 1964 prevented the government from effectively isolating Church radicals. Instead--and in contrast to what happened later in Argentina and Uruguay--repression against the Church catalyzed further ecclesiastical change.

Between 1964 and 1970, grassroots innovations clearly outpaced those at the level of the hierarchy. The CNBB initially retreated from its reformist positions of the 1958-1963 period. Deeply divided, the bishops as a collective body did not begin to criticize the regime until the end of the 1960s. Meanwhile, however, in many dioceses, especially in the Northeast and the Amazon region, Church change was rapid and deep. After 1970, this gap between developments at the grass roots and the CNBB narrowed as the CNBB began to criticize the military government in no uncertain terms. For example, in May 1970 the CNBB issued a denunciation of the government's repressive practices.

We cannot accept the lamentable manifestations of violence in the form of physical beatings, kidnappings, deaths, or other forms of terror.... The postulates of justice are frequently violated by trials of a delayed and dubious nature, by imprisonments realized on the basis of suspicion or precipitous accusations, by interrogations that last for months, during which the person is held incommunicado in poor conditions, frequently without any right to defense.... We would be remiss if we did not emphasize our firm position against any and all kinds of torture.²⁰

The most important impact of the repression upon CEBs was indirect; that is, repression pushed an increasing number of bishops and pastoral agents towards a progressive understanding of the Church's mission. In turn, these progressives went out and created CEBs. In addition, the repression and inegalitarian development models directly affected the lives of CEB participants. Poor people had to work longer hours to make as much money. Colleagues in unions were imprisoned and tortured. Unions and neighborhood associations were dismembered. Among the masses at large, such developments did not have a politicizing effect, but among poor people who had already organized and who were discussing issues of social justice, they did.

As the CNBB's criticisms of the military government deepened, its support for CEBs did likewise. By the mid-1970s, CEBs occupied the center stage of the Brazilian Church. Three related developments reflected the transformation of CEBs from groups in a dozen or so isolated dioceses into the leading edge of Church innovation in Brazil. First, the best Brazilian theologians turned their attention to CEBs and other issues related to work with the popular sectors. Second, the CNBB became actively involved in supporting CEBs. Finally, the Church sponsored national meetings of CEBs, thereby enhancing their visibility. The following pages discuss these changes in further detail.

The years between 1968 and 1975 marked a decisive change in the direction of progressive theologies in Brazil. Some early radical Brazilian theologians, most notably Hugo Assmann, were deeply interested in the linkages between

Christian faith and revolution. Belgian Joseph Comblin, who was a missionary in Brazil and had a deep influence on Brazilian theology, also flirted with this trend.²¹ This particular variant of liberation theology was generally less seasoned and more vulnerable to attack than other lines that by the mid-1970s had clear hegemony in Brazil. Although this earlier line of liberation theology assumed that the poor would be the major beneficiaries of socialism, it did not extensively address popular themes.

During the late 1960s, a different line of progressive theology that focused on popular themes, including base communities, also emerged. The theologians who developed these themes had a diverse set of interests, but they all actively worked with CEBs, and their reflections were influenced by this work. Popular religiosity was a salient theme. The Brazilian (and more generally Latin American) Church had historically perceived popular religiosity in an ambivalent way, attempting to encourage and capitalize on the deep faith found among some people, while also frequently scorning popular religious beliefs and practices. With the reforms encouraged by the Second Vatican Council, this ambivalence frequently gave way to direct attacks, especially among Church progressives, who assessed popular religiosity as a form of alienation. Pastoral agents working with CEBs, however, discovered that such an attitude posed serious obstacles to communication with the people. With Comblin and fellow Belgian Eduardo Hoornaert leading the way, some prominent intellectuals of the Brazilian Church began a re-evaluation of popular religion that had a major impact on work with CEBs.²²

The veneration of "the people" came to include admiration of their religious values. Moreover, priests who sharply criticized popular religious beliefs usually found themselves without much of a following. "The people" virtually demanded the continuation of many traditional practices--however "alienated" they may have been. As a priest from Crateús, Ceará wrote, "The people always want masses, baptisms, marriages. They forget that the major priority of the priest is to announce Christ's message through his words and his life. The people only want us to be religious functionaries."²³

Most progressive dioceses and pastoral agents came to feel, in Eduardo Hoornaert's words, that "our action was too secularist to be understood and accepted by the people, who live in a universe whose reference points are predominantly religious."²⁴ The attacks on popular religion gave rise to efforts to support aspects of it, even while attempting to impart a more progressive understanding of faith. The re-evaluation was strongly influenced by Paulo Freire's method for teaching adult literacy and other pre-1964 approaches to popular education, all of which insisted upon the importance of respecting popular values. This re-evaluation has continued to the present. In the late 1970s, Leonardo Boff, Clodovis Boff, and Frei Betto, arguably the three most influential Brazilian theologians, worked extensively around the themes of popular religiosity and popular education.²⁵

The ascendant line of liberation theology also dealt extensively with Bible themes and their relevance to CEBs. Two pioneer works stand out in this regard. In 1971, Leonardo Boff published his classic work, *Jesus Christ, Liberator*, an interpretation of Christ's life that emphasized his predilection for the poor. Although clearly aimed at an elite audience, Boff's book (as well as his prolific subsequent production) deeply influenced theological currents in Brazil. Carlos Mesters's book, *Palavra de Deus na História do Homem* [God's Word in Man's History], also published in 1971, is an interpretation of the Old Testament that emphasizes the struggle of the Israeli people for land and justice. Written in accessible language, it never achieved the international fame of Boff's book but, along with many other works Mesters produced, helped shape the kinds of materials used by pastoral agents in working with CEBs.²⁶

Brazilian theologians and social scientists who worked with the Church also began to write extensively about the importance of CEBs in the Brazilian

Church and society. The earliest theological discussion about CEBs emerged before Medellín, at a time when there was limited clarity about what the CEBs were. Spurred on by Medellín, theologians began to write on CEBs with a more progressive focus after 1968. Comblin was again prescient on this issue, publishing a book on ministries in the Latin American Church in 1969 and an article on CEBs in 1970.²⁷ The first Intereclesial Meeting of CEBs, held in 1975, spawned a number of works by the leading intellectuals of the popular Church, including Leonardo Boff, Mesters, J. B. Libânio, and Eduardo Hoornaert. In the late 1970s, several important theological books appeared on the CEBs.²⁸ Leonardo Boff's book *Eclesiogênese: As Comunidades Eclesias de Base Reinventam a Igreja* [Ecclesiogenesis: The Ecclesial Base Communities Reinvent the Church] (1977) captured much of the tone of the discussion, with its emphasis on the novelty and importance of CEBs. Virtually all of the leading intellectuals of the popular Church in Brazil have now written on the CEBs. This inordinate attention given to CEBs reflected changes that were already under way, but it also helped to legitimate those changes and to provide directions for further innovations.

A second reflection of the growing importance of CEBs in the life of the Brazilian Church was the CNBB's direct interest in and support for base communities. Numerous CNBB documents and three studies specifically on CEBs expressed a strong commitment. In 1982, the CNBB published a short study on CEBs, stating that "the Ecclesial Base Communities... express one of the most dynamic elements of the life of the Church.... Inspired by the teachings of Vatican II, our CEBs have become instruments of the construction of the Kingdom and of the realization of the hopes of our people.... We are increasingly convinced of the immense wealth the CEBs bring to our churches and to the revitalization of evangelizing activities."²⁹

A third visible reflection of the importance CEBs acquired were the national encounters of base communities. In response to the proliferation of CEBs throughout many dioceses in a country of continental dimensions, a group of bishops and popular Church intellectuals who worked with CEBs decided to bring together CEB participants and advisors from all over the country. The first such meeting was held in 1975, in Vitória, Espírito Santo, a diocese that had been among the pioneers in experimenting with CEBs. The purpose was to share ideas and experiences, discover what was happening in other dioceses, and talk about progress and difficulties in the CEBs. Up until that point, there had been little systematic collective reflection about CEBs beyond a diocesan level, even though groups of bishops and popular Church intellectuals were interested in the subject. Subsequent meetings involving pastoral agents and CEB participants from all over the country were held in 1976, 1978, 1981, 1983, and 1986. These meetings generated intense interest in and reflection about CEBs. The 1986 meeting included 70 bishops and hundreds of pastoral agents among the more than 1500 participants.³⁰

The fact that CEBs became so prominent in a short period of time should not lead the analyst to overlook some tensions and dilemmas that were present from the beginning. One frequent tension involved the relationship between religion and politics. In the often uncritical enthusiasm of the years immediately following Medellín, many radical clergy were committed to creating base communities, but focused so much on politics that workers and peasants rejected their message.

The popular sectors participated in CEBs not because they had progressive political views, but because they were religiously motivated. Progressive clergy were stymied by what to do about popular Catholicism, traditional religious beliefs and practices often falling outside what the institutional Church sanctions. Their progressive politics told them to reject what had traditionally been seen as alienated religion while the progressive Catholic emphasis on respecting popular values pushed them in the opposite direction.

Finally, the early CEBs faced the difficult dilemma of what to do in a period of significant repression against the popular classes. Despite the generally cautious political nature of the base communities, the military regime tended to see them as subversive.

This repression against the base communities was one of the factors leading to the creation of some other Catholic organizations in the early 1970s, including the Pastoral Land Commission, CPT; the Workers' Pastoral Commission, CPO; and the Indian Missionary Council, CIMI. Later, in the mid to late 1970s, human rights organizations linked to popular needs and pastoral groups for favela dwellers were also formed in some progressive dioceses. These organizations were created because of both the successes and some shortcomings of the CEBs. The pedagogy, theology, and political and religious ideals of the later organizations closely paralleled those of the CEBs, but their creation also reflected the CEBs' inability to deal with the authoritarian regime during its most repressive period. Some church people felt the need for ecclesiastical organizations that could go beyond the very limited political involvement of CEBs. Moreover, they felt the necessity for organizations of a regional or even national character, both to have greater impact within the Church and to increase visibility and thereby enhance protection against repression. The CEBs grew in number, but they remained less political than the CPO, CPT, and CIMI, and they had no national or regional organizations.

The CPT and CIMI were created by pastoral agents in the Amazon region, though both organizations acquired a national identity within a short period of time. The precursor to the CPT was created in 1972 at an Amazon regional encounter. Officially created in 1975 in its present form, the CPT quickly became active in many dioceses in the Northeast, and during the rest of the 1970s began to work in other parts of the country as well. The CPT has played a leading role in defending legal rights of the peasants, documenting violations of human rights, developing religious publications for use with peasants, and encouraging peasants to organize. CIMI was created in April, 1972 as a means of helping missionaries to do effective pastoral work with the Indians. Its work has ranged from defending the Indians' legal rights to holding workshops for the missionaries. Because of their work with some of the poorest people in what has been the most violent region in Brazil, both the CPT and CIMI leaders experienced significant government repression during the Médici and Geisel years. They were able to survive thanks only to the protection of Latin America's most progressive hierarchy.

CIMI and the CPT helped serve as a model for the creation of the Workers' Pastoral Commission and other organizations like archdiocesan commissions for favela dwellers and for the marginalized population. These organizations had a specifically Catholic character, but they were more involved in political work than the base communities. Even though the base communities have received more attention, these other Catholic organizations have also been important in Brazilian politics and in the Brazilian Church. These organizations involved pastoral agents and lay people who were interested in a Church group that would be more political than the CEBs. Among the laity, the participants were generally CEB members with the greatest interest in politics. Even though I focus primarily on the CEBs here, the existence of a vast network of different organizations and groups linking the institutional Church to the grassroots is noteworthy.³¹

Grassroots Groups and Politics, 1974-79

Before 1974 Catholic groups engaged in political actions of a very limited scope. In urban areas, they occasionally petitioned the state to provide rudimentary services. In rural areas, they occasionally protested land expulsions; or in the case of the CPT and CIMI, they denounced some particularly egregious incidents of violence against peasants and Indians. Nevertheless,

Catholic groups held a virtual monopoly among opposition popular organizations. This was not because they were politically sophisticated or effective, but rather because other popular organizations were dormant. The peasant movement was the first to go, victim of savage private and public repression in the aftermath of the coup in 1964. After the strikes at Osasco and Contagem were crushed in 1968, the labor movement disintegrated. Neighborhood associations had somewhat varying fates, but by the end of the 1960s they too had been silenced. Because of the government's tendency to perceive all popular groups as subversive, Catholic groups became a target of repression.

Politically, church groups did not change much during the 1970s; they continued to focus primarily on religious activities and on community. However, the context in which they operated changed considerably and, as a result, their linkages to social movements, political parties, and the state changed. Two changes in the political context stand out as particularly important. First, in 1974, newly installed President Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979) began the lengthy and cautious process of political liberalization that, after many vicissitudes, finally culminated in the restoration of democracy in March 1985.³² Over a period of time, repression against popular organizations generally decreased, even though in vast parts of the countryside elite violence and state complicity are still rampant under the new democratic government.

Second, by the end of the Geisel presidency, popular movements were burgeoning all over the country. Urban popular movements were the first to revive, springing up in the major cities in the middle 1970s. In São Paulo, the Cost of Living Movement, organized by base community leaders in response to poor living conditions, garnered well over one million signatures in 1977. In 1978, the movement in greater São Paulo exploded with the first major strike in a decade, beginning a wave of strikes that surprised the government and opposition alike. Extant peasant unions began to reorganize and new ones were created.

Grassroots Catholic participants played a major role in the strengthening of many--though not all--popular movements, including the New Union movement. Many individuals with no prior history of political involvement became active in popular movements as a result of their work in the Church. Catholic activists emerged as leaders of a large number of movements. Although only a minority of CEB members actively participated in popular movements, most others lent passive support.

Yet the relationship between popular movements and Catholic groups was far from consistently smooth. Conservative clerics generally opposed the popular movements, and even in progressive dioceses many tensions arose. The following pages suggest the nature of some of these tensions.

Because they had arisen after the coup in a period of significant repression, the Catholic groups had never faced the problem of defining their identity in relation to popular movements. They had promoted a discourse committed to popular liberation and popular struggles, but had never needed to translate that discourse into political practice. The CEBs and other groups faced the problem of defining their own role in the new situation. What is the proper function of CEBs and other Catholic groups? To what extent should they become involved in politics? On paper, the answer was clear. All of these groups stated their support for popular movements, but they clearly enunciated a principle of not becoming the vehicle for channeling popular demands. As the CPO of São Paulo stated,

The Workers' Pastoral Commission is not an organization to defend and struggle for workers' rights and interests. It is a Church organization for the working class. Its goal is to develop activists for the Church and not for the labor movement.... It often activates movements which include other groups, but it is not able to organize these groups.³³

In practice, however, the problem was more complex: Church documents often simultaneously overstated both the political involvement of grassroots Catholic groups and the autonomy of popular movements vis-à-vis the Church. On the former account, the greater part of the CEBs remained relatively aloof from politics. Eduardo Hoornaert described his experience with CEBs in a report for the First Intereclesial Meeting of CEBs in 1975: "The leaders are well trained, (but) without a critical consciousness in the political sphere... with a strong spirituality open to domestic and neighborhood problems, but not political ones properly speaking."³⁴

Likewise, the autonomy of popular movements vis-à-vis the Church was often not so clear as the discourse indicated.³⁵ In some regions of the country, including most rural areas, the level of repression remained high. In the most conflictual regions, like vast parts of the Amazon, the peasants were incapable of organizing effective unions which could withstand the repression. There the Church, with the CPT leading the way, continued to be the only institution which could defend the popular classes. Even in developed urban areas there continued to be sporadic repression against popular movements, which were still fragile. In progressive dioceses, the Church legitimated the movements, and a significant number of leaders were Catholic activists. In many cases the same people were leaders of the local base community, the CPO or CPT, and the labor movement or neighborhood association.

The close linkages between the Church and the popular movements were apparent even in the case of the best organized and most autonomous movement, the metal workers' union in greater São Paulo. In successive years between 1978 and 1980 the union went on strike, only to incur the wrath of the state, which declared the strikes illegal, imprisoned some leaders, and attempted to intimidate the rank-and-file into returning to work. Each year the Church intervened on behalf of the union when the going got especially difficult. When union offices were closed, the church opened its doors as a meeting place for workers. The Church's highly visible support for the workers and sharp criticisms of the government made possible a continuation of the strike. CEBs all over the country collected funds for the ABC workers, and Bishop Cláudio Hummes was one of the negotiators for the union.³⁶ Even in São Paulo, where popular movements were generally strongest, Catholic groups frequently served as a substitute for autonomous popular organizations. The largest unions and the largest neighborhood federation (Society of Friends of the Neighborhood) had a history of close linkages to the state which made them unreliable in the eyes of most grassroots Church activists. Consequently, the CEBs often directly attempted to obtain urban services,³⁷ and the CPO was involved in efforts to transform the unions.

Church discourse encouraged Catholics to participate in autonomous popular movements. In practice, however, this issue was again more complex than the discourse suggests. A small minority of radical pastoral agents encouraged the Catholic groups to become political vehicles, neglecting the specifically religious work. In this case, the popular movement would absorb the Catholic groups; thus encouragement to participate was real, but the autonomy was not. By the late 1970s, this tendency had virtually disappeared, both because this politicized work was generally ineffectual and because the emphasis on the religious specificity of Catholic groups had counteracted it. At the other end of the spectrum, many clerics who were hostile to more autonomous popular organization argued that outside groups would exploit or manipulate the people. Consequently, they discouraged people from participating in popular movements that were not controlled by the Church. In this case, there was neither real encouragement to participate in popular movements nor autonomy between these movements and church groups. A recurring problem in popular movements was tension between the Church and the Marxist Left. During the late 1960s and early 1970s the Marxist Left, decimated by the repression, began to form tacit

alliances with the progressive Church. Rethinking a Leninist past, much of the Left became more concerned than ever with human rights, liberal democracy, and popular organizing.³⁸

Because of the concomitant changes in the Left and the Church, by the end of the Médici period there was a confluence of some objectives in many progressive dioceses. Both opposed the dictatorship; both were interested in popular organization. The Church frequently provided to young Leftists the space and protection they needed to do any popular organizing. By the end of the Geisel period, however, the initial harmony between the Left and the Church had evanesced in many cases. With the strengthening of popular organizations, there emerged competing conceptions of how to lead the popular movements, often causing sharp conflict among forces which had earlier been allies in the struggle against the dictatorship. Some pastoral agents were concerned that participation in autonomous popular movements would subject the popular sectors to manipulation. They feared that the popular movements would coopt and undermine Church groups. Even many progressive pastoral agents criticized the politically motivated popular organizers ("external agents" in the Brazilian lexicon) for failing to respect popular values. Non-Catholics engaged in grassroots organizing countered that these clerics simply wanted to dominate the movement themselves. They viewed the Catholic groups as somewhat naive and limited, unrealistic in their assessment of how to change Brazilian society. In their perception, what was needed were mass organizations which could effectively mobilize large numbers of people, not small discussion groups like the CEBs.³⁹

Despite these tensions, Catholic groups deeply influenced popular movements. Many leaders of Catholic groups became leaders of popular movements, and the majority of CEB participants, while not active politically, nevertheless lent passive support to the movements. Equally important, the style and values of the new popular movements frequently drew upon those of the Catholic groups. Partially in response to the failures of previous efforts at popular organization, but also partially in response to the success of the Church's work, issues like grassroots participation, internal democracy, and greater autonomy vis-à-vis the state became more salient concerns. Prior to 1964, most popular organizations had been hierarchical, and mass participation had been restricted. Many of the movements of the 1970s, including most notably the New Unionism movement, attempted to overcome this hierarchical organization and create more participatory mechanisms, like union factory commissions. Neighborhood associations proliferated in hitherto unprecedented fashion, also frequently reproducing practices found in Catholic organizations.

The nature of the relationship between progressive grassroots Church groups and the popular movements differed significantly according to diocese, parish, region of the country, and kind of movement. For example, in São Paulo, because the network of neighborhood associations was closely linked to the state, the base communities played a significant direct role in seeking urban services. In Nova Iguaçu, where the problems were quite similar, base communities supported the neighborhood movement, but the movement was more autonomous. In urban areas, neighborhood associations were generally more closely linked to the Church than were the labor unions. In part, this was because labor had a stronger history of previous mobilization, and many of the pre-1968 leaders contributed to the movement's reorganization in the second half of the 1970s. In addition, like the Church, neighborhood associations were organized on a territorial basis, so people who had been active in the Church groups were already well known in the neighborhood. Especially in the most repressive rural areas, Church groups remained actively involved in defending peasants' rights.

The relationship of Catholic groups to political parties and the state, which became the outstanding political dilemma after 1979, did not yet loom as a

central concern during the Geisel years. Catholic groups maintained a profound skepticism regarding political parties. During the course of the authoritarian regime, the MDB, the official opposition party, had not distinguished itself by its active defense of the popular sectors, so that by the Médici period, Catholic movements neither expected nor sought support from it. Prior to the 1974 elections, the issue of political parties was not even a subject of discussion in the CEBs and other Catholic groups. Basic group survival and development was the main concern. Due to the combination of the MDB's surprising victory in 1974 and the regime's decision to promote political liberalization, which enabled the opposition party to become more assertive in the ensuing years, by the 1978 elections the party question had become more important. In many dioceses, Catholic groups discussed the elections and the parties and what they both represented. While still maintaining a basic skepticism, most Catholic groups voted for the MDB. In São Paulo some went even further. Several Catholic activists, convinced of the importance of the elections, decided to run for political office, and a couple (Irma Passoni and Aurélio Peres) were elected with most of their support coming from CEBs.

During the Geisel years, these Catholic groups generally rejected the state as an arena of political action. They saw the state as corrupt and unresponsive to popular demands. They often dismissed the abertura as a government ploy to gain legitimacy without resolving popular problems, and to a significant extent this perception was grounded in reality. While the regime made meaningful concessions in liberalizing the political arena, repression against the popular sectors did not diminish overnight.

Although their discourse generally expressed a radical rejection of the state, sometimes in practice Catholic groups had to work with it. Even the limited community actions during the early Geisel years frequently led Catholic groups to petition the state for social services, i.e., relying on "favours" from politicians to obtain social services. What was, however, a relative novelty was the rejection of clientelistic practices. Even in cases where Catholic groups engaged in community actions that involved making demands upon the state, they maintained greater autonomy vis-à-vis politicians than had been the practice in the past. The insistence upon avoiding clientelistic linkages to politicians and upon maintaining autonomy became one of the characteristic trademarks of the grassroots Catholic groups. In this sense, they helped introduce new practices which would affect other social movements and even political parties.

Grassroots Groups and Politics, 1979-1985

Generally speaking, the most important Catholic grassroots groups had been created prior to the 1980s, so there were fewer dramatic innovations during the Figueiredo presidency (1979-85). The functioning of the CEBs, CPT, CPO, CIMI, and other groups became more institutionalized over time. Nevertheless, the changing political climate created by political liberalization constantly created new challenges and dilemmas for these groups.

This is not the place for a detailed account of political changes between 1979 and 1985, but we should briefly note the most relevant evolutions. First, the use of repression declined even though it did not come to an end. Second, labor unions, peasant unions, and urban social movements were considerably more visible than they had been since at least 1968. Third, the opposition political parties became stronger--enough for them to help displace parts of the military regime by 1985. In 1979, a change in party legislation precipitated a move from a two-party system to a multi-party system, with some key schisms in the opposition resulting. Finally, electoral channels became more meaningful as state governorships were disputed in 1982 for the first time since 1965. These changes meant that Catholic groups faced a new political landscape.

As the abertura allowed popular organizations to become stronger and as the party debate intensified, the intellectuals of the popular Church found it necessary to emphasize the specifically religious identity of Catholic groups. In an article which was disseminated throughout progressive dioceses, Frei Betto argued,

The Church cannot attempt to substitute for political parties, unions, neighborhood associations, which are the mechanisms specific to the political struggle.... Asking the base communities to also become the union movement, a grassroots party organization, or a social center is a mistake.... The specificity of the base communities lies in their religious character. The people who participate are not motivated by professional, education, or political interests. They are there because of their faith.⁴

In a similar vein, in 1982 an important CNBB document on CEBs stated,

We need to maintain clearly the distinction between CEBs and popular movements. Popular movements are social movements of the poor classes and they work towards the liberation and socio-political promotion of the people. They are not Church movements, and they do not depend on the Church. The CEBs must become aware of this to avoid occupying a space which is not theirs. In the same vein, the CEBs would lose their identity if they changed their mode of being and their explicit religious values to accommodate popular movements.⁴¹

This attempt to establish limits to the political involvement of Catholic groups and to define their specificity also reflected the changing mood in the international Church. Radical Catholic politics, liberation theology, and base communities all came under attack from the Vatican, the Latin American Bishops Conference, and conservative Brazilian prelates. The neo-conservative movement was weaker and emerged later in Brazil than most countries in Latin America, but by 1982 it became a force to be reckoned with. Conflict between the Vatican and the Brazilian Church became serious, although rarely did the Vatican directly confront the Brazilian Church until the sanctions imposed against theologian Leonardo Boff in 1985. The latter move had sharp repercussions among pastoral agents working with CEBs, as Boff was extremely well known and venerated. In a less publicized case, sanctions were also imposed against Clodovis Boff in 1984. Then in June 1985, in response to Vatican pressures, the CNBB issued a statement critical of some versions of liberation theology, addressed to pastoral agents and CEBs. Other measures, although not specifically aimed at the Brazilian Church, nevertheless were perceived (and surely intended) as warnings to

progressive Church people throughout the continent. Particularly important in this regard were the September 1984 document on liberation theology, published by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the lengthy litany of conflicts in Nicaragua with the Vatican and the hierarchy on one side, and the grassroots Church and the government, on the other.

The main thrust of the neo-conservative movement in Brazil has been that as a religious institution, the Church should refrain from political involvement. For example, in 1983, D. Eugênio Salles, Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro and the leader of the neo-conservative movement in Brazil, argued, "A new period for the Brazilian Church is beginning. The Church had a very active role in the period when Brazil was becoming a closed society. It was the 'voice of those who had no voice.' Today, the parliament, press, and parties are functioning fully. They should speak, and the Church should take care of its own affairs."⁴²

Along with liberation theology, CEBs, the CPT, and CIMI have been objects of attack from the neo-conservative Church leaders. These leaders state that they favor the idea of such groups, but are concerned about their excessive political involvement and about an absence of spirituality and religious preparation. In this view the grassroots groups threaten hierarchical authority lines within the Church. These lines of authority were established by Christ, and they are immutable over time. Therefore, while the neo-conservatives accept the idea of small ecclesial groups, they argue that such groups must be closely supervised by the hierarchy. As Archbishop Salles states the case, "The CEBs are Church and therefore are born from Christ; their mission is not determined by the people."⁴³

The attack on the progressive Church caught many progressives by surprise. In 1981, I interviewed an outstanding leader of the popular Church who has worked extensively with CEBs. I asked him whether he wasn't worried about the Pope's response to the grassroots Church. He replied no, that it was the Pope who was worried about the grassroots Church. He was indeed correct about the latter part of his assertion, but this very fact underscored why he should also have been concerned about the Pope's responses. In the early 1980s, this kind of confidence was common among progressive Church people; by 1985, a series of pressures and sanctions had changed the landscape, even though the future is still somewhat open. The issue of how to face these pressures and sanctions had become a major concern among leaders of the grassroots Church network. The general proclivity was to make minor concessions to the new, more conservative Vatican line so as to avoid major sanctions. In light of the importance of institutional directions in determining the nature of grassroots activities, it is not surprising that the neo-conservative challenge impelled grassroots Church leaders in a somewhat more cautious direction.

The problems in the relationship between Catholic groups and popular movements did not change markedly during the Figueiredo years. The same issues which had existed by the end of the Geisel period--especially the question of autonomy vis-à-vis popular movements--continued to be present. During the Figueiredo period, the relationship between these groups and political parties also became a salient issue.

There had always been some tensions in the Catholic groups and in popular movements, but the party reorganization of 1979 exacerbated those tensions, exactly in accordance with the government's hopes. On paper, there was a consensus among the intellectuals of the popular Church that the party question was important, but that the Church would not promote any particular party. But in practice many issues were difficult to resolve. Some leaders of the popular Church initially maintained that the parties were too distant from the popular classes to merit support. They argued that the parties were elitist, and that primary efforts should be directed towards popular organization. Leaders with this orientation did little or nothing to encourage the grass roots to discuss

or participate in the party restructuring. They so strongly insisted upon autonomy of the grassroots organizations that they essentially rejected the parties. This exclusive emphasis on grassroots groups is apparent in a report about CEBs in Minas Gerais: "The poor people have to organize themselves, believing in each other, without being dependent on politicians or the wealthy."⁴⁴ In doing so, they doomed themselves to political marginalization, for the parties were becoming an increasingly important arena. Most grassroots participants themselves were relatively uninterested in the party debate. As J. B. Libânio summarized, "Some groups refer to an aversion the people have to discussing politics.... The CEBs are not inclined towards party politics, but towards local and union struggles.... Firmly engaged in concrete popular struggles, the communities view politicians and parties with a certain discredit. They don't put much hope in them."⁴⁵

At the opposite end of the spectrum were those who were absorbed by the parties. Many leaders of grassroots organizations felt the party question was so important that they devoted themselves principally to partisan politics. Some of the most politically astute Catholic participants often found themselves with little time for their Church involvement. While they remained deeply marked by their Church experiences and committed to radical Catholic principles, it was impossible to actively participate in a political party, a popular movement, the CPO, and a base community all at once. By the mid-1980s, the withdrawal of former CEB leaders from Church groups was a common issue.

Compounding the divisions between those who were uninterested in parties and those who were absorbed in them was a second problem: which party to support. Most grassroots leaders who opted for a party chose the PT or the PMDB. But a large number did not opt for any party, and others (especially in Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul) joined the PDT, which is a left-of-center populist party. In the Northeast some grassroots activists even supported the government party, the PDS.⁴⁶ Within the grassroots movements, differences and tensions multiplied over the party question as some people went in one direction and others went in another. Especially where popular leaders used their position to further the situation of a given party, these divisions frequently led to the weakening of the movement.

There was a particular affinity between the PT and grassroots Church groups. Indeed, it is difficult to even imagine the existence of the PT had these grassroots Church groups not existed. The PT was inspired by progressive Catholic ideas emphasizing popular participation, grassroots democracy, popular organization, and basic needs.⁴⁷ Like the popular Church, the PT placed greater emphasis on popular needs than on liberal concerns such as electoral arrangements. In many parts of the country, grassroots Catholic leaders played the predominant role in the PT. According to one study, in 1983 71% of CEB participants who made a party option supported the PT.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, progressive Catholic groups never uniformly supported the PT. Progressive Catholic influence was pronounced in the PT partially because the party failed to win broad support elsewhere.

Until the early 1980s, the view that parties were unimportant was still widespread among grassroots groups, especially the CEBs. Many CEB activists perceived the parties as elitist and unworthy of support. They believed that popular mobilization, and not political parties, was the best means of effecting profound political change. As the 1982 elections approached, however, most politically aware Catholic activists, realizing that elections mattered more than in the past, became interested in, and sometimes even involved in, partisan politics. A large number of dioceses issued electoral pamphlets to be discussed among grassroots groups. The most influential pamphlet, developed by the Archdiocese of São Paulo, noted the importance of elections:

The distance which separates the popular sectors from the state cannot be overcome just through the dynamics of the popular movements. The living and working conditions of the great majority of the exploited and marginalized population can only be transformed if the popular classes are capable of influencing the centers of decisions and power.⁴⁹

By the November 1982 elections, most of the CPO leaders had made party options, and a number of CPT and CEB leaders had done likewise. Even where grassroots participants did not make a clear decision for one party or another, they were at least exposed to discussion about the significance of the parties.

The debate about parties at the grassroots level had as a counterpart debates among leading Church intellectuals about the proper linkage between religion and politics. Most Church intellectuals were concerned with the conservative character of the transition, but they still felt that the CEBs should focus primarily on religious issues. Frei Betto was the leader of this trend, arguing that CEBs should concentrate on prayer above politics. A minority position was represented by Clodovis Boff, who argued that the CEBs should get more involved in party politics as a means of enhancing their efficacy.⁵⁰

By 1982 one of the most significant problems was a tendency for the parties and social movements to remain distant from one another. The social movements did not work with the parties on issues that had a major impact on the political struggle as a whole, and the parties did not become as responsive to the demands of the social movements as many had hoped. The PMDB in particular moved in a conservative direction following its merger with the center-right PP in December 1981. Over time, some of the more flexible political elites who had been wedded to the authoritarian regime flocked to the PMDB or the PFL, with which the PMDB established an alliance in 1984. The PMDB thus had a constant infusion of "new" conservative blood. Given the emphasis which was placed on the party question, the fact that there continued to be a wide gap between social movements and parties in the post-November 1982 period proved a major disappointment to many.

The PT was the only party which managed to overcome this problem, but it was plagued by an amalgam of difficulties. It maintained an image as a Leftist party, committed to strong linkages with social movements, but because the party itself fared badly in the elections,⁵¹ it was incapable of altering the conservative character of the transition to democracy. Other parties and the state were engaged in the politics that were deciding Brazil's future as the PT foundered, incapable of generating a broader impact because of its poor electoral performance. Diadema, São Paulo, was the only major city where the PT won in November 1982, but even that experience proved disappointing as severe internal infighting occurred. Despite another disappointing performance in the 1986 elections, the PT promises to remain an important actor on the political scene as the only Leftist party that wins more than token representation.

Many expected the victory of opposition governments to enhance the role of social movements in states such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where well established social movements already existed. These expectations were largely frustrated. With the exception of the PT, the opposition parties generally moved in a conservative direction following the merger of the PP and the PMDB in January 1982. After becoming more responsive to social movements and popular demands following the party realignment in 1980, the PMDB became less so after 1982, partially because of the incorporation of the PP. The dramatic exacerbation of the economic crisis in 1982 had the effect of dampening opposition demands in the socio-economic realm, even though it simultaneously contributed to eroding the government's legitimacy. Finally, and most importantly, when the opposition came to power in São Paulo, Rio, and other states, it was faced with the classic dilemmas of governing, which differ from those of opposing. In opposition, the PMDB and the PDT supported strong,

autonomous social movements, which helped further the parties' objective of eroding the military regime. In government, they attempted to contain these movements through traditional mechanisms of clientelism and cooptation. Primary attention turned from coming to power to consolidating bases for stable rule. This involved a panoply of concessions to conservative political actors, which in turn led to some distancing between moderate opposition forces and social movements. Even in São Paulo and Rio, traditional clientelistic practices reemerged as the state governments attempted to regulate the challenges represented by social movements.

From the viewpoint of religious activists, the political parties (except the PT) were to blame for the breakdown in communication between grassroots groups and the partisan opposition. Not surprisingly, party leaders took a different view. Federal Senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso of the PMDB, explaining the misunderstandings between the Church and the PMDB government of the state of São Paulo, stated in 1984, "At times, the Church demands moral solutions for a structural crisis, leading to a certain lack of communication."⁵²

Cardoso's comments call to mind some traditional difficulties religious activists have found in the political sphere.⁵³ The leading intellectuals of the popular Church have sophisticated understandings of the contemporary world but, at the grassroots level, alongside many pastoral agents and lay activists who have some awareness of complexity are many others whose political views are somewhat sectarian. Religious activists are often motivated by strong and clear conceptions of what is right and wrong. Compromise can therefore become unacceptable on moral grounds. Conversely, especially in a country like Brazil, which has notably elitist and conciliatory political traditions, compromise and negotiation are an indispensable feature of party politics and of governing. This is not to suggest that all grassroots Catholic activists failed to come to terms with the importance of compromise in political life, or that all opposition politicians outside the PT reneged on their commitments to popular concerns. But the conflict between the logic of moderate opposition politicians and that of religious activists was ubiquitous after 1982, contributing to ongoing tensions between opposition state governments and the Church.

For years, the notion of "liberation," with its utopian overtones, had been prominent in popular Church discourse in Brazil, yet in practice liberation was far from attainable. Popular Church intellectuals sketched out and encouraged a view of politics that made popular participation the primary vehicle of political change. They did not, however, address issues such as what institutional mechanisms would encourage this change, how participation would be encouraged, or how popular movements would deal with state institutions.

Parties, politicians, and the state are frequently scorned. Politicians are generally portrayed as self-interested and self-serving, with no sincere interest in popular causes.⁵⁴ These perceptions are not entirely misguided, and indeed conform to Schumpeter's more general characterizations of how politicians function even in advanced democracies.⁵⁵ However, this view of the political world overlooks the fact that beginning with the 1978 elections, a number of elected officials proved to be genuinely committed to popular causes. Moreover, this view easily generates lack of interest in democratic institutions on the grounds that all politicians are the same. These attitudes suggest a gap between what were becoming the dominant mechanisms of political life (parties and the state) and grassroots Catholic groups. In this sense, the radical Catholics' critique was not only aimed at the extant parties (again, in good measure excluding the PT), but also at the essence of politics.

Catholic activists at many levels (but not the leading intellectuals of the Church), ranging from poor peasants to grassroots pastoral agents to a few radical bishops, tend to view politics in ethical terms. Injustice exists because the wealthy and politicians are evil or egotistic, as though the poor

were never egotistic, or as though all politicians and wealthy people were. Evil and egotism, in turn, are results of capitalism. One CEB report captured this attitude in affirming that the root of the current situation (poverty, marginalization) "is egotism and the power of money. In the first instance, this is capitalism, . . . a form of exploitation where some people keep the profits and others do the work."⁵⁶

Purity is an important motivating principle for community and political action. There is considerable difficulty in grasping the fact that politics inherently involves domination, and that some individuals will strive for power in ruthless ways, regardless of how "good" or "bad" the social system is. Similarly, there is little awareness that conflict of interests inheres in society. Politics is seen (as it also is by the Catholic Right) as an expression of the search for the common good rather than, as from a liberal perspective, an expression of necessarily competing interests. The view that there is a "common good" can lead to the suppression of viewpoints that oppose this good. In this sense, among the more sectarian pastoral agents and grassroots activists there is often an indifference towards liberal democratic institutions. One expression of this occasional indifference is the view that the new government is no different from the military government. (It must be noted that there are indeed many continuities; the new government is not unequivocally democratic. Moreover, the capacity of even a clearly democratic government to address the abject poverty that faces millions of Brazilians, without profound structural changes, is questionable.)

The ramifications of this attitude are multiple. Catholic activists often tend to reject outsiders, whether politicians, intellectuals, or leftist militants interested in community organizing. The "people" are pure, and they need to organize themselves for their own liberation. Outsiders, in contrast, are self-interested, unprincipled in comparison to the Catholic activists. "People from the universities always show up to do research, wanting to enter into the popular organizations. We saw that these people aren't peasants and that they want to take advantage of the people."⁵⁷

Connected to this, one often finds among grassroots activists a simplistic conception of society: society is divided into the rich and the poor; the rich exploit the poor; the government is allied with the rich and foreign interests⁵⁸ against the poor; the poor need to rely on themselves to change society. These characterizations contain important kernels of truth, but it is also the case that Brazilian society has become quite heterogeneous, that the class structure is more complex than a simple division into exploited and exploiters suggests, that the poor frequently have conflicting interests, and that there are meaningful divisions within the elite.

There emerges an inchoate view of a popular utopia, of a harmonious world to be brought about by popular organization. "Someday we shall have a party of the people, formed exclusively by elements of the people, based on love of our country. The candidates of such a party will not be academics, nor wealthy people, but simple workers and peasants."⁵⁹ This kind of view is not limited to Catholic activists but it is particularly strong among them.

In the context of a society in which parties and politicians rarely have served the needs of the poor, widespread skepticism among Catholic activists about traditional politics is neither surprising nor indefensible. But this skepticism made it more difficult for Catholic activists to act in the political sphere at a time when conventional politics were not challenged in broad ways.

Conclusion: The Political Impact of Grassroots Catholic Groups

The preceding section suggested some of the ways in which Catholic groups participated in the struggle for democracy: Catholic activists participated in popular movements and political parties; Catholic practices affected other social movements. Having outlined aspects of the political evolution of these

grassroots Catholic groups, now I will address some questions regarding their contributions and limits in promoting democratization.

It is difficult to argue that grassroots movements (Catholic or otherwise) played any significant role in the military government's initial decision to promote political liberalization. Liberalization began in 1974 when popular movements were very weak and when the military regime enjoyed its greatest popular support. In fact, elsewhere I have argued that the weakness of popular movements, although not a necessary condition, certainly increased the military's confidence that it could promote liberalization with minimal risks.⁶⁰

The liberalization process in Brazil was remarkable for how long it took and for how well the military was able to control key aspects thereof. Nevertheless, once liberalization began, different actors gradually penetrated the political arena and were able to influence it. Liberalization, which began as an initiative by the government, came to involve oscillating initiatives between regime and opposition, as well as negotiations between the two sides. Among the actors in this process were grassroots movements, whether or not of Catholic origin.

Just as the opposition in general encouraged the government to make some changes so, too, did grassroots movements. During the early 1970s, the government was concerned about and hostile towards these grassroots organizations. However, as electoral politics became more meaningful, the regime realized that it needed broad popular support. The Figueiredo administration was less inclined to repress social movements, and more willing to accept them as legitimate political actors, especially in urban areas. Its strategy changed from marginalization and repression, where movements could not be marginalized, to cooptation and isolation. While generally hostile to grassroots Catholic groups, the government attempted to maintain popular support by responding to the material demands they raised.

It would be a mistake to attribute the government's changing policies towards the popular sectors exclusively to grassroots movements, but it seems apparent that the presence of these movements contributed to these changes. Even though these movements never involved more than a small minority of the population, they seemed to pose a threat because they were so difficult to coopt. Furthermore, the government sensed that the movements could influence popular demands and expectations as a whole. Therefore, around the end of the Geisel period and beginning of the Figueiredo administration, finding a means of dealing with them became a priority. The party reform of 1974, the reorientation of economic policy, and changes in attitudes towards the popular sectors all reflected the government's efforts to blunt the thrust of the grassroots movements by responding to just enough popular demands to maintain its legitimacy.⁶¹

The party reform of 1979 reflected a complex governmental strategy of going ahead with political liberalization while attempting to ensure that the regime would continue to remain in control. Party reform had long been a demand of the opposition, which argued that the two-party system imposed by the government in 1965-'66 was artificial, and the government was able to satisfy this demand while dividing the opposition and enhancing its own electoral prospects. Later, in November 1981, the government imposed further electoral changes that seriously debilitated the Workers Party and other small parties. The party reform succeeded beyond the government's hopes in isolating grassroots movements and the Left. But at the same time, it did so only because the regime was willing to make concessions to some demands of these movements, especially the demand of continuing the move towards democracy and becoming more responsive to the popular sectors.

Economically, too, the administration pursued a strategy of making some concessions to the popular sectors while attempting to enervate the most combative popular movements. In an effort to obtain popular support, the

Figueiredo administration initially promoted some income redistribution towards sectors at the bottom of the income scale. In urban areas, the government built housing projects and improved services in popular districts. At the same time, its efforts to isolate the most combative popular movements were apparent in the willingness to resort to repression to deal with the ABC labor movement and in the repressive practices pervasive in the Amazon. Generally speaking however, the policy of neglecting and repressing popular demands, characteristic of the Médici years, gave rise to efforts to coopt the popular sectors through traditional clientelistic practices.

In addition to indirectly encouraging the government to change its strategy towards the popular sectors, grassroots movements encouraged opposition parties to espouse popular issues. The revitalization of the electoral arena after 1974 enabled the MDB to open up towards the popular sectors, but this process was dialectic. In an effort to attract the support of grassroots movements so that they could work together against the regime, progressive sectors of the MDB began to articulate greater concern about popular demands. In part because of the conservative nature of the transition, the PMDB itself moved in a conservative direction after 1981, and especially after 1985. But this end result should not obscure the fact that during an extensive period (1978-1981), there appeared to be some real potential that the PMDB would become more receptive to popular participation and popular political issues.

Finally, grassroots groups may contribute to changing elitist patterns in Brazil's political culture. CEBs and other Catholic groups have helped develop leadership qualities among people who were previously afraid to speak out; have promoted participation and group equality; and have encouraged people to feel that, as citizens, they have basic rights that the state should respect. In a society that is still marked by the remnants of slave culture, this represents a significant change, at least for the people involved in these groups. The more general significance of this can be debated; there is little conclusive evidence about how important cultural patterns are with respect to other factors in political life such as institutions, leadership, or material considerations.⁶² At a minimum, however, it seems clear that cultural patterns in Brazilian society have reinforced elite political domination, and that CEBs represent a challenge to those cultural patterns.

Over time, the political struggle increasingly became defined by conventional actors. The very democratization process which Catholic groups had helped work for resulted in their marginalization. By the time of the March 1985 inauguration of a democratic government, Catholic groups had lost part of their political impact, both as a result of their own political ingenuousness and of the consolidation of a traditional Brazilian pattern of elitist style politics.

While Catholic movements became marginalized during the political struggle of the first half of the 1980s, this certainly does not mean that they have lost their relevance. The political issues they raise remain as important as ever in Brazil.⁶³ Questions of popular participation, grassroots democracy and socio-economic justice have been relegated to a secondary role in the last years of Brazilian politics, yet it is evident that these issues have hardly been resolved. If anything, twenty-one years of military rule reinforced the inegalitarian and elitist nature of Brazilian society.

The January 15, 1985 election marked the demise of the regime which had been the longest military regime in Brazil's history and by far the most successful bureaucratic-authoritarian regime in South America. While the elections signalled a return to democracy, they said nothing about the quality of that democracy. The tendency in the early stages of the new government was towards the emergence of a conservative regime, relatively unreceptive to efforts to encourage greater participation, more concerned about institutional issues than about changing socio-economic conditions.

The Sarney government will almost certainly face its greatest challenges from the Right, which remains a major force in Brazilian politics. However, it will also face challenges from progressive sectors, including the grassroots Catholic groups. While these groups prefer liberal democracy to the military regime, they are unhappy about the elitist nature of the new democracy. They are certain to continue attempting to place questions about popular participation and justice on the political agenda. In isolation, these Church groups are unlikely to significantly affect the nature of democracy in Brazil, but they may be able to influence other social movements and political parties, much as they did in the past. Catholic groups continue to be very important in popular struggles, especially in the countryside.

The difficulties confronting these Catholic groups in encouraging the transformation of Brazilian politics in a progressive direction are great. They represent a small minority of the population in a society with powerful conservative elites. The groups themselves have continued to be uncertain about what to do politically. The relative weakness of popular movements, the electoral failures of the PT, the conservative character of the Sarney government, and the absence of political allies were salient concerns for many leaders, but they did not know how to respond. Particularly disconcerting in this regard was the pattern of clientelism and cooptation faced by so many movements in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Equally difficult was the party question. Many leaders had thrown themselves into party work beginning 1979 or 1980, but by 1985 the disappointments had been severe. The PT's electoral performance in 1982 and 1986 was not what the party had hoped for, and the PMDB, successful in challenging the military regime, was nevertheless considered by most grassroots Church activists a failure in terms of breaking the traditional elitist pattern of politics. Withdrawal from party politics then appeared as a distinct possibility, but withdrawal would only reinforce the marginalization grassroots activists already faced. In this sense, Catholic groups faced a difficult choice between exposure to constant frustration in mainstream politics, or withdrawal from the same to focus principally on internal dynamics, which would tend to further marginalize them politically.

On top of all this were the criticisms against the popular Church in Brazil, coming from the Vatican, CELAM, and conservative Brazilian prelates. The neo-conservative ecclesiastical movement could have a profound impact upon the grassroots groups. Consequently these groups have begun a new period in Brazilian democracy, caught between an increasing marginalization in politics and in the Church. But this marginalization should not detract from the significant impact these groups had in working toward the re-establishment of democracy, nor from the importance of the questions they continue to raise about the quality of that democracy.

NOTES

1 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1957); Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1964); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1961); Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1964); Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963). In contrast, in the 1830s, commenting on the United States, Tocqueville wrote that "Eighteenth-century philosophers had a very simple explanation for the gradual weakening of beliefs. Religious zeal, they said, was bound to die down as enlightenment and freedom spread. It is tiresome that the facts do not fit this theory at all." *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1969), p. 295.

2 Despite some nuances, David Martin's *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) is illustrative. It is noteworthy that some leading theologians shared the viewpoint that secularization is inexorable. See, for example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). In Brazil, Michel Schooyans, *O Desafio da Secularização* (São Paulo: Herder, 1968), was representative of this line of theological inquiry. My own view, which is close to Weber's, is that secularization has occurred in many societies, but it does not, as many assumed, imply the demise of religion. In part, this is because secularization is uneven and incomplete and allows for non-secular spaces of public interaction; in part, it is because secularization creates new problems or recasts old ones in different terms that reinvigorate religion and other non-secular forms of interaction.

3 See, among others, Juan J. Linz, "Religion and Politics in Spain: From Conflict to Consensus above Cleavage," *Social Compass* 27 (1980), pp. 255-277; Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), pp. 185-229; Vincent McHale, "Religion and Electoral Politics in France: Some Recent Observations," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 2 (1969), pp. 292-311; Richard Rose and Derek Urwin, "Social Cohesion, Political Parties, and Strains in Regimes," *Comparative Political Studies* 2 (April 1969), pp. 7-67.

4 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 464. Durkheim, however, also agreed with the view that religion in its traditional form was declining: "The old gods are growing old or already dead, and others are not yet born" (p. 475). For a reflection on the relevance of religion in contemporary life written in response to Freud, see Hans Küng, *Freud and the Problem of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

5 The argument that follows owes much to discussions with Daniel Levine. See our "Religion and Popular Protest in Latin America," Kellogg Institute Working Paper # 83 (October 1986), to be published in a book edited by Susan Eckstein on popular protest in Latin America. Several of Levine's recent contributions on this subject are fundamental. See, for example, "Conflict and Renewal," in Levine, ed., *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 236-255.

6 This issue of clerical influence in the base communities has been addressed by several works, one of the most poignant of which is Vanilda Paiva,

"Anotações para um Estudo sobre Populismo Católico e Educação Popular," in Paiva, ed., *Perspectivas e Dilemas da Educação Popular* (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1984), pp. 227-266. For a highly critical perspective on CEBs and the popular Church, see Roberto Romano, *Brasil: Igreja contra Estado* (São Paulo: Kairos, 1979).

7 See Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984); Micael Dodson and Tommie Sue Montgomery, "The Churches in the Nicaraguan Revolution," in Thomas W. Walker, ed., *Nicaragua in Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp. 161-180; Tommie Sue Montgomery, "Liberation and Christianity: Christianity as a Subversive Activity in Central America," in Martin Diskin, ed., *Trouble in Our Backyard: Central America and the United States in the Eighties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 75-100; Jorge Cáceres, et al., *Iglesia, política y profecía* (San José: Educa, 1983).

8 For social science analyses of Brazilian CEBs and how they function, see Thomas Bruneau, "Basic Christian Communities in Latin America: Their Nature and Significance (Especially in Brazil)," in Daniel H. Levine, ed., *Churches and Politics in Latin America* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979), pp. 111-134; Thomas Bruneau, "The Catholic Church and the Basic Christian Communities: A Case Study from the Brazilian Amazon," in Levine, ed., *Popular Religion, the Churches, and Political Conflict in Latin America*, pp. 106-123; Cândido Procópio Ferreira de Camargo, et al., "Comunidades Eclesiais de Base," in Paul Singer and Vinicius Caldeira Brant, eds., *São Paulo: O Povo em Movimento* (Petrópolis: Vozes/CEBRAP, 1980), pp. 59-81; Francisco Cartaxo Rolim, *Religião e Classes Populares* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1980); Gottfried Deelen, "The Church on its Way to the People: Basic Christian Communities in Brazil," *Cross Currents* 30 (Winter 1980-81), pp. 385-408; José Ivo Follmann, *Igreja, Ideologia e Classes Sociais* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1985); William Hewitt, "The Structure and Orientation of Comunidades Eclesiais de Base (CEBs) in the Archdiocese of São Paulo," Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1985.

9 This point is developed by Karen Fields, writing on a quite different religious experience, in her recent contribution, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), especially pp. 3-23.

10 See, for example, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984); Jon Sobrino, *La oración de Jesus y del Cristiano* (México: Centro de Reflexión Teológica, 1981); Segundo Galilea, *The Future of Our Past* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1985).

11 See the classic book by Gianfranco Poggi, *Catholic Action in Italy: The Sociology of a Sponsored Organization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967).

12 See his *Eclesiologênese: As Comunidades Eclesiais de Base Reinventam a Igreja* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1977).

13 Among many examples, see Frances O'Gorman, "Base Communities in Brazil: Dynamics of a Journey," (Rio de Janeiro: FASE-NUCLAR, 1983); João Carlos Pettrini, *CEBs: Um Novo Sujeito Popular* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1984); Clodovis Boff, "A Influência Política das CEBs," *Religião e Sociedade* 4 (1979), pp. 95-119.

14 I discuss the Church's evolution at length in *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil, 1916-1985* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986). See also Thomas Bruneau, *The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Thomas Bruneau, *The Church in Brazil: The Politics of Religion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); Ralph Della Cava, "The Church and the 'Abertura,' 1974-1985," in Alfred Stepan, ed., *Democratizing Brazil* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

15 In my view, the best work on the origins of CEBs in Brazil is Marcello Azevedo, *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base e Inculturação de Fé* (São Paulo: Loyok, 1986), pp. 39-86. Azevedo's book is essential reading on CEBs. An extensive and careful analysis of the origins of CEBs, but one whose central argument I question, is Faustino Luiz Couto Teixeira, "Comunidade Eclesial de Base: Elementos Explicativos de Sua Gênese," M.A. thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica, Rio de Janeiro, 1982. See also Luiz Gonzaga Fernandes, "Gênese, Dinâmica e Perspectivas das CEBs no Brasil," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 42 (1982), pp. 456-464. Many people date the first CEBs back to the late 1950s, but this oft repeated viewpoint seems wrong to me.

16 The earliest discussion of these Sunday services without a priest are Bernardo Leers, "A Estrutura do Culto Dominical na Zona Rural," *Revista da Conferência dos Religiosos do Brasil* 99 (September 1963), pp. 521-534; and Antônio Rolim, "O Culto Dominical e os Religiosos," *Revista da Conferência dos Religiosos do Brasil* 100 (October 1963), pp. 631-636.

17 *Uma Igreja que Nasce do Povo* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1975), pp. 76-77.

18 Examples of the earlier, relatively less political vision of CEBs are Raimundo Caramuru de Barros, *Comunidade Eclesial de Base: Uma Opção Pastoral Decisiva* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1968); and José Marins, *A Comunidade Eclesial de Base* (São Paulo, n.d.).

19 See Emilio Mignone, *Iglesia y dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Militar, 1986).

20 Statement of the CNBB's Eleventh General Assembly, SEDOC 3 (1970-71), pp. 85-86.

21 Assmann's most important work was published in Spanish. See his *Opresión-liberación: Desafío a los Cristianos* (Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1971). By Comblin, see *Théologie de la Pratique Révolutionnaire* (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1974).

22 Joseph Comblin, *Os Sinais do Tempo e a Evangelização* (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1968); Joseph Comblin, "Prolegômenos da Catequese no Brasil," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 27 (1967), pp. 845-874; Eduardo Hoornaert, "A Distinção entre 'Lei' e 'Religião' no Nordeste," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 29 (1969), pp. 580-606; Eduardo Hoornaert, "Problemas de Pastoral Popular no Brasil," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 28 (1968), pp. 280-307.

23 *Uma Igreja que Nasce do Povo*, p. 83.

24 "Comunidades de Base: Dez Anos de Experiência," SEDOC 11 (January-February 1979), p. 727.

25 Leonardo Boff, "Teologia à Escuta do Povo," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 41 (1981), pp. 55-119; Clodovis Boff, "Agente de Pastoral e Povo," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 40 (1980), pp. 216-242; Frei Betto, "A Educação nas Classes Populares," *Encontros com a Civilização Brasileira* 2 (1978), pp. 95-112.

26 Boff's book, now available in English, was published in Portuguese as *Jesus Cristo, Libertador* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1971). Mesters's book was also published by Vozes. A recent book brings together many of Mesters's most important subsequent contributions. See *Flor sem Defesa: Uma Explicação da Bíblia a Partir do Povo* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1983).

27 *O Futuro dos Ministérios na Igreja Latinoamericana* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1969); "Comunidades Eclesiais de Base e Pastoral Urbana," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 30 (1970), pp. 783-828.

28 Clodovis Boff, *Comunidade Eclesial, Comunidade Política* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978); Almir Guimarães, *Comunidades de Base no Brasil* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978); Alvaro Barreiro, *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base e Evangelização dos Pobres* (São Paulo: Loyola, 1977).

29 *As Comunidades Eclesiais de Base na Igreja do Brasil* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1982) pp. 5, 11, 32. The other CNBB studies are *Comunidades: Igreja na Base* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1977); and *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base no Brasil* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 1979).

30 Reports from the first five Intereclesial Meetings of CEBs are published in SEDOC 7 (May 1975), pp. 1057-1216; SEDOC 9 (October 1976), pp. 257-448; SEDOC 9 (November 1976), pp. 454-576; SEDOC 11 (October 1978), pp. 257-447; SEDOC 11 (January-February 1979), pp. 705-862; SEDOC 14 (September 1981), pp. 131-255; SEDOC 16 (October 1983), pp. 259-384; SEDOC 16 (December 1983), pp. 603-640.

31 There are few secondary sources on the creation and development of the CPT and CPO--an interesting lacuna, especially when compared to the mass of literature which has been produced about the CEBs. On the CPT, see Ivo Poletto, "As Contradições Sociais e a Pastoral da Terra," in Vanilda Paiva, ed., *Igreja e Questão Agrária* (São Paulo: Loyola, 1985), pp. 129-148; and Cândido Grzybowski, "A Comissão Pastoral da Terra e os Colonos do Sul do Brasil," also in Paiva, ed., *Igreja e Questão Agrária*, pp. 248-273. On CIMI, see Fany Ricardo, "O Conselho Indigenista Missionário, 1965-1979," *Cadernos do ISER* (1980); and Paulo Suess, "A Caminhada do Conselho Indigenista Missionário, 1972-1984," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 44 (Sept. 1984), pp. 501-533. More broadly on pastoral efforts with indigenous populations, see also Erwin Krautler, "Povos Indígenas e Pastoral Indigenista Hoje," *Vozes* 79 (May 1985), pp. 281-286; and Paulo Suess, "Alteridade-Integração-Resistência," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 45 (September 1985), pp. 485-505.

32 The literature on the transition is extensive. I analyze it in "The Transition to Democracy in Brazil," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 28 (May 1986), pp. 149-179.

33 Mimeo, May 1975.

34 *In Uma Igreja que Nasce do Povo* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1975), p. 62.

35 See Luiz Gonzaga de Souza Lima, "Notas sobre as Comunidades Eclesiais de Base e a Organização Política," in Moisés, et al., *Alternativas Populares da Democracia*, pp. 41-72.

36 On the Church's role in the strikes of 1978-1980, see *Religião e Sociedade* 6 (1980), pp. 7-68; Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação, "1980: ABC da Greve," *Aconteceu* (May 1980); Centro Pastoral Vergueiro, "As Greves do ABC," *Cadernos de Documentação* 3 (December 1980); Francisco Cartaxo Rolim, "A Greve do ABC e a Igreja," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 44 (1984), pp. 131-151.

37 On the relationship between Church groups and the neighborhood movement in São Paulo, see Anna Luiza Souto, "Movimentos Populares Urbanos e suas Formas de Organização Ligadas à Igreja," in ANPOCS, *Ciências Sociais Hoje* 2 (Brasília, 1983), pp. 63-95; and Paul Singer, "Movimentos de Bairros," in Singer and Brant, eds., *São Paulo: O Povo em Movimento*, pp. 83-108. Paulo Krischke and Scott Mainwaring, eds., *A Igreja na Base em Tempo de Transição* (Posto Alegre: L&PM/CEDEC, 1986) offers a collection of articles on the relationship between the Church and neighborhood movements in different parts of the country.

38 No single source details these changes in the Brazilian Left, and given the significant heterogeneity of the Left, it would be misleading to generalize too much. A good overview is provided by Robert Packenham, "The Changing Political Discourse in Brazil, 1964-1985," in Wayne Selcher, ed., *Political Liberalization in Brazil: Dynamics, Dilemmas, and Future Prospects* (Boulder: Westview, 1986), pp. 135-173. An excellent discussion of the re-evaluation of liberal democratic freedoms is Bolivar Lamounier, "Representação Política: A Importância de Certos Formalismos," in Lamounier, Francisco Weffort, and Maria Victória Benevides, eds., *Direito, Cidadania e Participação* (São Paulo: Tao, 1981), pp. 230-257. Statements by leading Marxist intellectuals which imply a significant change in thinking about democracy are Leandro Konder, *A Democracia e os Comunistas no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1980); and Carlos Nelson Coutinho, *A Democracia como Valor Universal* (São Paulo: Ciências Humanas, 1980). Many ex-guerrillas have written memoirs highly critical of the vanguardist approach to politics; see, for example, Alfredo Sirkis, *Os Carbonários: Memórias da Guerrilha Perdida* (Rio de Janeiro: Global, 1980).

39 See, for example, Ricardo Abramovay, "Marxistas e Cristãos: Pontos para um Diálogo," *Proposta* 16 (March 1981), pp. 11-20.

40 "Da Prática da Pastoral Popular," *Encontros com a Civilização Brasileira* 2 (1978), pp. 104, 95. On the Church's attempts to define its role in the new political conjuncture, see also Paulo César Loureiro Botas, "Aí! Que Saudades do Tempo em que o Terço Resolvia Tudo," *Tempo e Presença* 26 (March 1980), pp. 3-10; Frei Betto, "Prática Pastoral e Prática Política," *Tempo e Presença* 26 (March 1980), pp. 11-29; Frei Betto, "Oração: Uma Exigência (Também) Política," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 42 (September 1982), pp. 444-455; Antônio Alves de Melo, "Fé em Jesus Cristo e Compromisso Político-Partidário," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 42 (September 1982), pp. 562-587.

41 CNBB, *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base na Igreja do Brasil*, p. 29.

42 *Jornal do Brasil*, July 7, 1983. I discuss the post-1982 demise of the popular Church at length in Chapter 11 of *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil*. See also the important article by Della Cava, "The Church and the 'Abertura'." Among works critical of liberation theology and the progressive Church, see Herbert Lepargneur, *Teologia da Libertação: Uma Avaliação* (São Paulo: Convívio, 1979); and Boaventura Kloppenburg, *Igreja Popular* (Rio de

Janeiro: Agir, 1983). For an overview of the controversy about liberation theology, see Quentin Quade, ed., *The Pope and Revolution: John Paul II Confronts Liberation Theology* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982). A conservative who correctly foresaw John Paul II's mission as restoring order and hierarchy is Paul Johnson, *Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Restoration* (New York: St. Martin's, 1981). On the theological debate in Latin America, see Joseph Comblin, "A América Latina e o Presente Debate Teológico entre Neo-Conservadores e Liberais," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 41 (1981), pp. 790-816.

43 "Comunidades Eclesiais de Base," *Boletim da Revista do Clero* 19 (September 1982), p. 21.

44 SEDOC 14 (September 1981), p. 200.

45 "O IV Encontro das CEBs," SEDOC 14 (September 1981), pp. 153, 154, 155.

46 On the relationship between CEBs and political parties, see Bruneau, "The Catholic Church and the Basic Christian Communities;" Luiz Alberto Gómez de Souza, *Classes Populares e Igreja nos Caminhos da História* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981), pp. 247-268; Ricardo Galleta, "Pastoral Popular e Política Partidária." *Comunicações do ISER*, 2 No. 5 (September 1983), pp. 14-24; Ivo Lesbaupin, "As Cartilhas Diocesanas de 1981-1982," in Ivo Lesbaupin, ed., *Igreja, Movimentos Populares, Política no Brasil* (São Paulo: Loyola, 1983), pp. 57-74.

47 On the PT, see Margaret Keck "From Movement to Politics: The Formation of the Workers' Party in Brazil," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1986; José Alvaro Moisés, *Lições de Liberdade e de Opressão* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1982), pp. 205-228; Emir Sader, ed., *E Agora, PT?* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1986).

48 Ricardo Galleta, "Pastoral Popular e Política Partidária no Brasil," M.A. thesis, Universidade Metodista de Piracicaba, 1985. I obtained the data from a newspaper article on this thesis: "Tese indica interação crescente entre Igreja e política." *Folha de São Paulo*, June 8, 1986.

49 Comissão Arquidiocesana de Pastoral dos Direitos Humanos e Marginalizados de São Paulo, *Fé e Política* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981), p. 29. Over the years, SEDOC has published a large number of electoral pamphlets from various dioceses.

50 Frei Betto, "Oração: Uma Exigência Também Política"; Clodovis Boff, "Os Cristãos e a Questão Partidária," *Tempo e Presença* 212 (September 1986), supplement, pp. 3-16; Frei Betto, "Os Cristãos e a Política," *Tempo e Presença* 212 (September 1986), supplement, pp. 17-22.

51 For an interpretation of the PT's electoral performance in the 1982 elections by a leading popular Church intellectual, see José Oscar Beozzo, "PT: Uma Avaliação Eleitoral," *Vozes* 77 (May 1983), pp. 18-30.

52 "Igreja e Montoro se reaproximam mas ainda existem divergências," *O Globo*, July 29, 1984.

53 I make some related points from a different perspective in Chapters IX and X of *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil*.

54 "In some CEBs, there is an infiltration of politicians. In others, the politicians are not infiltrating but the communities are reflecting on why

politicians are taking advantage of what the people have." Fourth Intereclesial Meeting of CEBs, SEDOC 14 (September 1981), p. 181.

55 Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), pp. 240-302.

56 Third Intereclesial Meeting of CEBs, SEDOC 11 (October 1978), p. 432.

57 Fourth Intereclesial Meeting of CEBs, SEDOC 14 (September 1981), p. 181.

58 "The government, oriented by the Trilateral Commission, carries out the party reorganization. Japan, the United States, and Europe decide what policies will be applied for the Brazilian people." Fourth Intereclesial Meeting of CEBs, SEDOC 14 (September 1981), p. 220.

59 Boletim da Pastoral da Terra 19 (November-December 1978), p. 2, quoted in Azevedo, *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base e Inculturação da Fé*, p. 124.

60 Donald Share and Scott Mainwaring, "Transitions Through Transaction: Democratization in Brazil and Spain," in Wayne Selcher, ed., *Political Liberalization in Brazil* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1986), pp. 175-215.

61 For discussions of the impact and limits of grassroots popular movements, see Scott Mainwaring, "Grassroots Popular Movements, Identity, and Democratization in Brazil," *Comparative Political Studies*, Summer 1987; Scott Mainwaring, "Grassroots Popular Movements and the Struggle for Democracy: Nova Iguaçu, 1974-1985," in Stepan, ed., *Democratizing Brazil*; Renato Raul Boschi, "Movimentos Sociais Urbanos e a Institucionalização de uma Ordem" (Rio de Janeiro: IUPERJ, 1983); Ruth Cardoso, "Movimentos Sociais Urbanos: Balanço Crítico," in Bernardo Sorj and Maria Hermínia Taves de Almeida, eds., *Sociedade e Política no Brasil Pós-64* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983), pp. 215-239.

62 For a fine recent work on religion and politics that argues for the fundamental importance of cultural patterns, see Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

63 The current discussions about transitions to democracy run the risk of focusing too much on institutional questions at the expense of issues like participation and socio-economic justice. Reacting both to the atrocities of the military regimes and to the often facile earlier neglect of liberal freedoms, most scholars engaged in the question about transitions have reversed the tendency of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In my view, both liberal freedom and participation and justice are important concerns, and neither ensures the other.