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THE SPACE OF UTOPIA: CHRISTIANS FOR SOCIALISM IN CHILE

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THE SPACE OF UTOPIA: CHRISTIANS FOR SOCIALISM IN CHILE

Denisa Jashari

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intellectual production of the Chilean clerical movement, Christians for Socialism (CpS). It does so by contextualizing the emergence of CpS within the Chilean Church's own transformations in theological practices and in grassroots interactions with workers and the poor. The election of self-declared Marxist Salvador Allende in 1970 inspired a sector of the clergy to rethink both the role of the Church in society and the role of the poor in the nation. I draw on Ernst Bloch's concept of concrete utopia to argue that in Chile Christians for Socialism not only creatively converged Marxist and religious thinking but contributed to altering conventional notions of the two. The notion of transcendence and the construction of a "New Man" appealed to the utopian aspects of both religious and Marxist thinking. Moreover, the Chilean CpS had a Latin American impact, as evidenced by the First Latin American Encounter of Christians for Socialism in Santiago, Chile, in 1972, and a world impact, seen in the formation of the Ecumenical Association of Third-World Theologians in 1976. While the legacy of CpS and liberation theology in Chile is far more visible in the grassroots work undertaken during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, an examination of this movement's theological and ideological productions before the coup is critical to comprehending members' subsequent material, on-the-ground actions.

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina la producción intelectual del movimiento clerical chileno, los Cristianos por el Socialismo (CpS). Lo hace contextualizando el surgimiento de CpS dentro de las propias transformaciones de la Iglesia chilena en las prácticas teológicas y en las interacciones de base con los trabajadores y los pobres. La elección de Salvador Allende en 1970 inspiró a un sector del clero a repensar el papel de la Iglesia en la sociedad y el papel de los pobres en la nación. Me baso en el concepto de utopía de Ernst Bloch para argumentar que el movimiento los Cristianos por el Socialismo en Chile no solo convergieron creativamente el pensamiento marxista y religioso, sino que contribuyeron a alterar las nociones convencionales de ambos. La noción de trascendencia y la construcción de un "hombre nuevo" apelaban a los aspectos utópicos tanto del pensamiento religioso como del marxista. Además, el CpS chileno tuvo un impacto latinoamericano como lo evidencia el Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo en Santiago de Chile en 1972, y un impacto mundial en la formación de la Asociación Ecuménica de Teólogos del Tercer Mundo en 1976. Mientras que el legado de los CpS y la teología de la liberación en Chile es mucho más visible en el trabajo de base emprendido durante la dictadura de Augusto Pinochet, un examen de las producciones teológicas e ideológicas de este movimiento *antes* del golpe es una parte fundamental para comprender las acciones concretas de sus miembros y participantes posteriormente.

In April 1971, a group of eighty priests in Chile's capital, Santiago, released a statement to publicly declare to the nation, "As Christians, we do not see incompatibility between Christianity and socialism." They reinterpreted the Gospel within the nation's sociopolitical context and affirmed, "God is committed to the history of men and at this time, loving one's neighbor fundamentally means to strive so that this world may resemble as much as possible *the future world that we hope for and that we are now building*" (emphasis mine).¹ The priests' communiqué sparked uproar in the upper echelons of the Catholic Church and within conservative Christian sectors. Not only did the priests recognize evangelical values in socialism but they also advocated a convergence between the tenets of Marxism and Christianity.

Since the election of self-declared Marxist Salvador Allende on 4 September 1970, the Church hierarchy had maintained a position of neutrality. The polemic declaration, however, triggered passionate responses by theologians, members of the clergy, and political party representatives from all sides of the political spectrum. Most significantly, it forced the authorities to define the Church's position vis-à-vis Allende's socialist project. In doing so, they propelled the beginning of a new, albeit short-lived period for the Chilean Catholic Church. Allende's short but explosive term had far-reaching consequences for the Church. This period inspired a sector of the clergy to publicly support a socialist transformation, utilize the tenets of what would become liberation theology, and re-think the Church's structure and role in society. The affirmation that the poor had the potential to be active agents determining their fate, as opposed to mere recipients of Catholic charity, had profound consequences both for the Church as an institution and for the everyday interactions between clergy, laity, and Chile's urban poor both well before and during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990).

Although participation in the Christians for Socialism (CpS) movement was not extensive—membership did not exceed 300—members' mere presence and theological and

¹ "Comunicado a la prensa de los sacerdotes participantes en las jornadas 'Participación de los Cristianos en la Construcción del Socialismo in Chile,'" 16 April 1971, Santiago, Chile, Sergio Torres Personal Archive. Shortly after, the communiqué became simply known as the "Declaration of the 80," because the eighty participating priests signed it. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Sergio Torres is a Chilean theologian and was a leading participant in Christians for Socialism. He shared his uncatalogued personal archive with me after several recorded interviews in Santiago, Chile, between the months of May and July 2017. The cited CpS declaration is also reproduced in, "Comunicado a la prensa de los sacerdotes participantes en las jornadas 'Participación de los Cristianos en la Construcción del Socialismo in Chile,'" *Mensaje* 20, no 198 (May 1971): 176.

political declarations caused fierce internal debates within the Chilean Catholic Church and among conservative and progressive sectors, and received considerable press coverage.² The group became highly influential both inside and outside Chile and reflected a growing trend of leftist Christianity in Latin America. The CpS movement attracted a heterogeneous group of both Chilean and foreign-born priests belonging to the Society of Jesus, Congregation of the Sacred Heart, and Congregation of Holy Cross. Much of the group's leadership, such as Jesuit Gonzalo Arroyo, Martín Gárate CSC, and Guillermo Redington, CSC, were prominent intellectuals who penned articles in the Jesuit publication *Mensaje* or participated in research centers such as the Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Sociales (Latin American Institute of Social Studies, ILADES). Others, such as diocesan worker-priest Mariano Puga and Movimiento Obrero de Acción Católica (Catholic Action Workers Movement, MOAC) advisor Alfonso Baeza, had long worked among urban dwellers and working-class sectors. What united them was a shared desire to rethink the role of clergy in society and to reconsider what the participation of Christians would entail as Chile embarked upon a path to socialism. Most CpS members were of the same generation, and their theological and pastoral outlooks had been profoundly shaped by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and the conference of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) in Medellín, Colombia in 1968.

Christians for Socialism grew out of the initial gatherings of the eighty priests who surprised the nation with their open support for socialism. But they also drew from grassroots traditions of socially inspired pastoral work both within and outside the borders of the Chilean nation-state. The rise of CpS pushed back against the efforts of European and US organizations, which, under the umbrella of the Alliance for Progress, funneled large sums of money to prevent the infiltration of anti-capitalist models into Chile.³ As a clerical movement infusing socialism into its religious work, the CpS cannot be properly understood without situating it within the context of ideological battles between reformists and revolutionaries in a polarized Cold War

² To my knowledge, there is no record of the exact number of CpS members. This figure comes from Brian H. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 276.

³ US attempts at curtailing a leftward trend in Chilean politics through so-called development organizations and via more open counter-revolutionary actions have been described in Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende, 1964–1973* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002) and Edward Murphy, *For a Proper Home: Housing Rights in the Margins of Urban Chile, 1960–2010* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

world. The coup d'état of 1973 put an end to CpS and forced many of its most prominent members into exile. The secretariat of the CpS destroyed many documents that would potentially harm its members. Given the polemical condemnations by the conservative press and the subsequent silence surrounding CpS in the aftermath of the coup, this paper makes use of personal archives, published primary sources by CpS members, and oral interviews to comprehend the group's intellectual and theological production in its own terms. The paper also makes use of press coverage to fully grasp the nature of contemporary public debates surrounding CpS.

The relationship between religion and political transformation in Latin America has been an ongoing concern of social and historical scholarship. Studies on Latin American social movements of the twentieth century point to the important confluence of liberation theology and Marxism.⁴ While liberation theology fostered the formation of class consciousness and became the governing ideology during moments of revolutionary upheaval, religious narratives and rituals more broadly facilitated people's ability to comprehend the suffering and persecution of loved ones during times of war.⁵ Both liberation theology and Marxist-inspired social movements shared a notion of transcendence and the construction of a "New Man."⁶ Over time, however, liberation theology's emphasis on continuity between the profane and the sacred, the everyday and the transcendent, contributed to declining membership in Catholic institutions, as people searched elsewhere for relief from the pressures of everyday life.⁷

⁴ Michael Löwy and Claudia Pompan, "Marxism and Christianity in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 20, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 28–42. They show a "selective affinity" between Marxism and liberation theology, which converged based on mutual reciprocity and analogies.

⁵ On liberation theology's influence on the Sandinista revolution, see Roger N. Lancaster, *Thanks to God and the Revolution: Popular Religion and Class Consciousness in the New Nicaragua* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). See also Philip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984). On religious narratives providing images of a future without violence and inequality, see Anna L. Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997).

⁶ For Anna L. Peterson this was a shared utopian impulse; see "The Left and the Reign of God," *Rethinking Marxism* 19, no. 1 (Jan. 2007): 72–91. On the other hand, Jeffrey L. Gould in, "Ignacio Ellacuria and the Salvadoran Revolution," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47, no. 2 (May 2015): 285–315, stresses that transformation is both personal and rooted in a communal context, but that collective action and group consciousness are also fraught with misunderstandings of the kind that plagued the Salvadoran Left of the 1960s and 1970s.

⁷ John Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil: The Progressive Catholic Church in Urban Brazil's Religious Arena* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

The diversity of liberation theology experiences across the region as well as within individual Christian communities is far too extensive to recount.⁸ Scholars of Chilean liberation theology emphasize the importance of the lived experiences of the poor as building blocks for the formation of Christian communities that later, in conversation with theologians and academics, “mature” into a well-defined corpus of texts.⁹ The emphasis on a historical Christ and his presence among the poor guided Catholics’ activities to construct a more just society in the present moment. Liberation theology provided grassroots organizations with an important framework and language through which to interpret oppression and social suffering.¹⁰ Most studies of the Chilean Catholic Church during the dictatorship point to the pivotal work of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity) and Archbishop Raúl Silva Henríquez in denouncing human rights abuses, providing legal services to victims, and sheltering activists during days of anti-regime protests.¹¹ These scholars demonstrate the ways in which the Catholic Church centralized support for base communities through the work of centers like the Vicariate. It was partly this institutionalization, they contend, that prevented the Chilean Catholic Church from fomenting lasting “autonomous social movements.”¹² Other scholars emphasize that democratization has radically restructured Catholic activism through the concomitant shift away

⁸ For a brief overview of liberation theology in Latin America see Pablo Richard, ed., *Raíces de la teología Latinoamericana: Nuevos materiales para la historia de la teología* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI and CEHILA, 1985); Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987); Christopher Rowland, “Liberation Theology,” in John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 634–652.

⁹ For the Chilean context see David Fernández Fernández, “La teología de la liberación en Chile,” *Tocado* 6 (1995): 249–266; and *La “Iglesia” que resistió a Pinochet: Historia, desde la fuente oral, del Chile que no puede olvidarse* (Madrid: Iepala, 1996).

¹⁰ See Rosario Montoya, “Liberation Theology and the Socialist Utopia of a Nicaraguan Shoemaker,” *Social History* 20, no. 1 (Jan. 1995): 23–43; and Jennifer Scheper Hughes and Maria das Dores Campos Machado, “Introduction” in “Spirits, Bodies, and Structures: Religion Politics, and Social Inequality in Latin America,” special issue, *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 3 (May 2016): 4–14.

¹¹ Viviana Bravo Vargas, “Iglesia liberadora, rearticulación de la política y protesta social en Chile (1973–1989),” *Historia Crítica* 62 (Oct.–Dec. 2016): 77–96; Hugo Cancino Troncoso, *Chile, iglesia y dictadura 1973–1989: Un estudio sobre el rol político de la Iglesia Católica y el conflicto con el régimen militar* (Odense, Denmark: Odense University Press, 1997); Pamela Lowden, *Moral Opposition to Authoritarian Rule in Chile, 1973–90* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1996); Mario Aguilar, “Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime, 1973–1980: Public Responses to a National Security State” *The Catholic Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (October 2003): 712–31.

¹² Carol Ann Drogus and Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino, *Activist Faith: Grassroots Women in Democratic Brazil and Chile* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 68.

from the single target of dictatorship to the plural choices made available by the return of partisan politics, thus threatening internal cohesion.¹³ The overwhelming focus on the Vicariate of Solidarity tends to overlook the existence of prior theological and religious practices that laid the groundwork for important human rights work during dictatorship.¹⁴

In-depth historical studies of Christians for Socialism are scarce.¹⁵ In most studies of the Chilean Catholic Church, the CpS experience is mentioned as a short, ineffective, far-left blip in a longer history of accommodation and moderation within the Church.¹⁶ Even scholars who recognize the importance of CpS in dispelling the long-held illusion that the Church could remain neutral in politics by avoiding direct partisan participation labeled CpS as an elitist group that failed to establish grassroots connections.¹⁷ A competing interpretation by David Fernández suggests that by shifting focus away from the CpS leadership, it is clear that at the grassroots level the critical awareness along left-leaning lines developed by CpS was the driving force behind the Chilean Catholic Church's human rights work during the dictatorship.¹⁸ However, Fernández claims that ultimately CpS limited itself to confrontations with the Church hierarchy

¹³ For example, Scott Mainwaring, "Democratization, Socioeconomic Disintegration, and the Latin American Churches after Puebla," in Edward L. Cleary (ed.), *Born of the Poor: The Latin American Church since Medellín*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 143–167.

¹⁴ For an important exception, see Alison J. Bruey, *Bread, Justice, and Liberty: Grassroots Activism and Human Rights in Pinochet's Chile* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018).

¹⁵ A notable exception to this trend is Marcos Fernández Labbé, "Sacerdocio y política: Fragmentos del debate político-intelectual en torno a Cristianos por el Socialismo," *Revista de Historia* 23, no 2 (July–Dec., 2016): 211–239. The majority of works about CpS have been authored by theologians who were either in the movement or closely affiliated with it, such as Pablo Richard's *Cristianos por el Socialismo: Historia y documentación* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1976), which contains important primary source documents. See also José Aldunate Lyon, Roberto Bolton García, Juana Ramírez Gonveya, Humberto Guzmán Rubio, Mariano Puga Concha, Oscar Jiménez Lazo, Margarita Westwood Gil, Rosa Parissi Morales, *Crónicas de una Iglesia Liberadora* (Santiago, Chile: LOM Ediciones, 2000); Diego Irarrázaval, "Voz Cristiana en un proyecto socialista," in Manuel Ossa B. and Sergio Torres (eds.), *Experiencia de liberación en Chile: Desafíos para la cultura y la religión en el contexto neo-liberal* (Santiago, Chile: Centro Ecueménico Diego de Medellín, 2000).

¹⁶ Such is the case with Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*, and Michael Fleet and Brian H. Smith, *The Catholic Church and Democracy in Chile and Peru* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Michael Dodson, "The Christian Left in Latin American Politics," in "The Church and Politics in Latin America," special issue, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 21, no 1, (Feb. 1979).

¹⁸ See, for example, David Fernández Fernández, "Oral History of the Chilean Movement 'Christians for Socialism,' 1971–1973," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, no 2 (April 1999).

and largely abandoned its grassroots commitment, and that in turn its ideological work in many areas during the Allende years took the form of a rigid, doctrinal Marxism.¹⁹

I argue that neither the elitist nor the dogmatic Marxist perspective fully captures the rich intellectual thought of the Christians for Socialism movement or its subsequent influence on resistance work within popular Christian sectors during the Pinochet dictatorship. The CpS had a regional impact in Latin America in the organization of the First Latin American Encounter of Christians for Socialism in 1972 in Santiago, and a transnational impact in the formation of the Ecumenical Association of Third-World Theologians in 1976 (La Asociación EcuMénica de Teólogos del Tercer Mundo, ASETT). Moreover, I suggest that scholars have often overlooked the utopian elements that shaped the discourse and outlook of Christians for Socialism. Marxism gave CpS socio-analytical tools and an ideological framework with which to analyze and re-read religious texts historically. As I show, the CpS was also firmly rooted in what Ernst Bloch refers to as “concrete utopia,” converging Marxist ideals with the religious practice of building a fraternal and just Kingdom of God on earth. While for CpS adherents religion contained an embedded hope, Marxism aided them in desiring and hoping for a better life on earth.²⁰ If in CpS declarations one senses a structured or even dogmatic expression, it is because the language of their contemporaries constrained them, even as they tried to defy it.

REACTIONS TO CHRISTIANS FOR SOCIALISM

Conservative Christian sectors and members of the Church hierarchy attempted to dismiss CpS as a group of utopians—in its simplest, most derogatory definition—and as a Marxist front.²¹ An in-depth analysis of CpS documents reveals, however, that Christians for Socialism espoused

¹⁹ Fernández Fernández uses the example of one popular Christian community established by Spanish-born priest Ignacio Pujadas in Forestal Alto when he suggests that this community mimicked a highly dogmatic and structured Marxist form of life. See Fernández, “Oral History,” 289–90.

²⁰ I am drawing the idea of “learning to desire better and differently” from E. P. Thompson’s notion that the function of utopia is exploratory and educational; it is precisely that of “the education of desire,” cited in Ruth Levitas, “Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia,” *Utopian Studies* 1, no 2 (1990): 13–26. See also: Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Volume 1*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

²¹ For a very reactionary response to CpS, see Teresa Donoso Loero, *Los Cristianos por el Socialismo en Chile* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Vaitea, 1975). Donoso goes as far as to argue that CpS “perverted” and “prostituted” the Church with its “Marxist ideas,” thus tempting the religious “family” with sin. The whole book is dedicated to de-legitimizing the priests associated with Christians for Socialism.

neither an ahistorical, phantasmagorical utopia, nor a strictly scientific Marxism. Utopian elements, or the envisioning of a better future, have long been a central component in social and religious movements seeking to bring about profound change. In fact, dogmatic Marxists have criticized the utopian drive as mere wishful thinking that distracts from the exigencies of class struggle. In recent decades, scholars have sought to revindicate aspects of utopian thinking and even rehabilitate it as a Marxist category.²² Toward this end, Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* represents an effort to think about cultural forms, such as art, music, and religion, as repositories of both hope and future potentials waiting to be expressed. His ontology of the "not-yet" suggests that the future we envision is immanent in the present in the very process of its becoming.²³ As Peter Thompson asserts, "[t]he utopian dimension in Bloch is an attempt to claim back for humanity that which they have ceded to the Holy Spirit without denying the value of the spiritual."²⁴ Thus, Bloch's notion of utopian thinking, while dialectical, is rooted in humanistic historicism; he sees religion and other cultural forms as a product of human activity containing immense emancipatory potential, and in so doing suggests that human beings are not already made, but rather incomplete, unfulfilled, and in a constant process of attainment. Bloch does not dismiss religion as false consciousness but recognizes that it contains an embedded hope, one that provides the necessary subjective conditions required for revolutionary action.

Years after his participation in CpS, Diego Irarrázaval of the Congregation of Holy Cross reflected upon the affective dimensions of CpS in an interview with the author: "What moved us... was a utopia, but without calling it that way, and in Christian, evangelical terms, it is the utopia of the Kingdom of God; in human, social terms, it is the utopia of overcoming the capitalist system, the organization of life around the market, and the consumption of things."²⁵ Present in Irarrázaval's statement is the attempt to link the Christian conception of the Kingdom of God and its implied hope for the future with the Marxist project of overthrowing capitalism to bring about a better world. He further elaborated that the utopia envisioned was a "kind of utopia

²² Levitas, "Educated Hope"; Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia," *New Left Review* no. 25 (Jan.–Feb. 2004): 35–54; Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

²³ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*.

²⁴ Peter Thompson, "Religion, Utopia, and the Metaphysical of Contingency," in Peter Thompson and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *The Privatization of Hope: Ernst Bloch and the Future of Utopia*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013): 92.

²⁵ Diego Irarrázaval interview by author, 21 Aug. 2017, Santiago, Chile.

around the axes of equality and freedom, both social and personal.” Given the primacy of the individual in neoliberal Chile, it is perhaps unsurprising that Irarrázaval would emphasize not just personal or individual equality but social or collective aspirations as well. This attempt to envision collective projects for liberation that do not subsume the individual, however, can be located in other Latin American liberation projects of the second half of the twentieth century.²⁶ Yet, throughout the interview, Irarrázaval struggled to capture the meaning of utopia discursively, alluding to notions of realizing “the project of Jesus, here and now, [which] has consequences for what comes next.”

I rely upon Bloch’s notion of “concrete utopia” as a way to delve into the intellectual production of Christians for Socialism in Chile. Ruth Levitas describes concrete utopia as that “part of reality which is coming into being on the horizon of the real.”²⁷ By seeing reality as a process of becoming rather than fixed, Bloch emphasizes the range of future possibilities. However, as Levitas makes clear, Bloch’s “Real-Possible” futures are *politically* and *subjectively* dictated; Bloch wishes for only *certain futures* to come to fruition.²⁸ The contradictions of utopian thinking do not limit its importance for historical and social research. On the contrary, the contradictions in such thinking as evidenced in my analysis of CpS documents are generative for considering the ways in which major political transformations, such as Salvador Allende’s Popular Unity coalition (1970–1973) (Unidad Popular, UP) in Chile, may both lead to openings in alternative, smaller-scale projects for the future and simultaneously constrain their language and reach.²⁹ Thus, the space of utopia is a space of generative contradictions.

I employ Bloch’s concrete utopia as an analytical tool in this paper for two reasons. First, a few surviving members of Christians for Socialism suggest that some read and were to some extent in conversation with Bloch and his utopian thinking. Second, Bloch’s philosophy of hope highly influenced renowned German theologian Jürgen Moltmann’s conception of eschatology

²⁶ On the notion of “insurgent individuality” see Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

²⁷ Levitas, “Educated Hope,” 17.

²⁸ Levitas, “Educated Hope,” 19.

²⁹ For further discussions on utopia and differences between the process of utopia and the content of utopia see Jameson, “The Politics of Utopia,” and David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), respectively.

and its importance for political theology.³⁰ Thus, I highlight how Bloch's thinking has been important to theological and religious debates and suggest that some CpS members were aware of these influences and at times in direct dialogue with them. There are recognizable utopian elements resembling Bloch's intellectual production in the attempts by Christians for Socialism to think through a dialectical relation between Marxism and Christianity. An analysis of their reflections, correspondence between theologians, and concluding statements after national and regional congresses demonstrates that CpS thinking approached utopian dimensions as conceived by Bloch. First, CpS developed a historical understanding of reality, one that profoundly transformed both their reading of religious texts and praxis and allowed them to see that the poor could be agents of social change and not mere passive recipients of Christian charity. Second, in the process of articulating the compatibility between religious values and Marxist ideology CpS altered the meaning of both. Third, much like Bloch, CpS saw their faith as having creative dimensions necessary for renovating society.

During its short lifespan, the Christians for Socialism movement was the target of widespread criticism from conservative elements within the Church, and these polemical debates largely took place in the public eye through fierce exchanges in the press. The documents of the Chilean Episcopal Conference written between 1970 and 1973, especially the document titled "Christian Faith and Political Action," reflect the stance of the Chilean bishops on the role of Christian clergy and laity in the political, economic, and social realms during Allende's short-lived government. The bishops' intent was to delimit the parameters of the Church's actions and avoid "distortions" of its evangelical morality. The bishops likewise pointed to the need to "take disciplinary measures that safeguard the true mission of the Church and its Hierarchy."³¹ The document was largely directed at participants in the Christians for Socialism movement and reveals the heightened tensions and controversies surrounding CpS and its tenuous relationship with the Church hierarchy. In fact, the CpS is alluded to directly throughout the episcopal documents.

³⁰ See Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Grounds and Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). Moltmann here explicitly mentions Bloch's influence on his thinking on eschatology as future and hope.

³¹ Conferencia Episcopal Chilena, *Documentos del Episcopado de Chile, 1970–1973* (Santiago: Ediciones Mundo, 1974): 179.

In their writings, the Chilean bishops established a distinction between the temporal and supernatural planes, which in turn guided their thinking on the proper role of Christians in the sociopolitical sphere. They claimed, “our will is to keep up with any misuse of the Church in the civic domain. We affirm that the above-mentioned ways of thinking and acting disfigure the Church and the Gospel and obscure its universality.”³² For the bishops, the Church was to remain firmly outside the civic and political domain of the quotidian struggles of everyday life. Subsequently, the bishops chastised participants in the CpS movement for not maintaining the distinction between the Church as a religious institution and as an actor within the civic sphere. They further claimed that CpS participants “confuse the temporal mission of the laity, which is precisely that of ordering temporal things according to the evangelical spirit, with the universal and supernatural mission of the Church itself and its Hierarchy, which does not consist in resolving economic, social, legal issues, etc..., but in sanctifying, teaching and governing.”³³ The bishops then distinguished between the laity and the Church hierarchy, undermining Vatican II’s efforts to rethink the Church as an inclusive body. Most importantly, they envisioned the role of the Church as instilling evangelical values and the teachings of the Gospel in the laity, where they would guide individual actions in the temporal (or civic) realm. The Church, as an institution, was to remain above the politics of everyday life, completely removed from juridical, economic, or social questions.

The bishops’ publication of their condemnation of CpS participants in October 1973 took on a different set of meanings after the coup of 11 September 1973, when the military junta targeted not only union activists, students, political leaders but also the clergy.³⁴ After accusing the CpS of distorting the Church’s mission, of confusing the faithful with their “ambiguity” and suggesting that their intentions were more in line with a political party, the Chilean Episcopal Conference declared: “we prohibit the priests and religious who are part of that organization to carry out—in whatever form, institutional or personal, organized or spontaneous—the type of action that we have denounced in this document.”³⁵ The junta forced CpS priests and sisters, both Chilean and foreign-born, into exile, and the violence that ensued for the next seventeen

³² See Conferencia Episcopal Chilena, *Documentos del Episcopado de Chile*, 180.

³³ Conferencia Episcopal Chilena, *Documentos del Episcopado de Chile*, 181.

³⁴ See Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, “Fe Cristiana y actuación política,” Oct. 1973 in *Documentos del Episcopado de Chile*,

³⁵ Conferencia Episcopal Chilena, *Documentos del Episcopado de Chile*, 206.

years effectively silenced public mention of CpS. Thus, unearthing the largely ignored intellectual and theological foundations of Christians for Socialism is not only an exercise in historical revindication or a matter of rescuing memories long suppressed. It is also important if we are to fully comprehend the roots of the prophetic and martyrial work of countless priests and sisters in Chilean *poblaciones* (poor working-class neighborhoods) throughout the dictatorship. The enduring legacy of liberation theology among priests and sisters working among Chile's most marginalized populations pushed the Church to adopt a more critical stance toward Pinochet's authoritarianism.

THE TRAJECTORY OF CATHOLIC PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Catholic involvement in social questions existed decades before the grassroots, pastoral organizing that helped foment anti-dictatorship dissent. The formation of Acción Católica Chilena (Chilean Catholic Action) in 1931 was a response to the global economic crisis and signaled two important shifts. First, it showed a shift away from the historic alliance between the Catholic Church and the Conservative Party, which often had helped strengthen a Conservative political identity in Chile. Second, Catholic Action groups began to demonstrate renewed concern for solving Chile's "social question"—with which they had engaged in the decades following the 1891 *Rerum novarum*—thus beginning to splinter the Catholic and Conservative Party alliance. Chilean priests trained at European universities (such as the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) guided a new generation of Chilean Catholics in Catholic activism. As historian Stephen Andes argues, Chilean priests adapted French and Belgian methods of Christian social activism, such as the formation of Christian youth organizations, study circles, and labor unions.³⁶ Members of this generation would become leaders in the Christian Democratic Party, including Eduardo Frei, elected president in 1964.

This European connection, however, was reflected not only in the back-and-forth travels of native Chilean priests, but also in the move of European priests to Chile for missionary work. One such project, the Work of Hispanic-American Priestly Cooperation (Obra de Cooperación Sacerdotal Hispano-Americana, OCSHA) was created in 1949 by the Spanish Episcopal

³⁶ Stephen J. C. Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile: The Politics of Transnational Catholicism, 1920–1940* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 128.

Conference to prepare Spanish priests undertaking missionary work in the Americas. According to Mario Amorós, the first Spanish diocesan priests arrived in Chile in the 1950s, and their numbers increased in the early 1960s, due to requests made to the Spanish Church by Pope John XXIII. By 1969, approximately 1,003 Spanish priests hailing from sixty dioceses were assigned to Latin American ecclesiastical duties.³⁷

It was through the OCSHA that Spanish priests, such as Antonio Llidó and Antonio Sempere, who would become members of CpS, arrived in Chile. Llidó undertook the long trip to Latin America by boat, accompanied by fellow priest Miguel Sáez, and they docked in the port of Valparaíso on 15 July 1969. When Llidó traveled to Paris in 1962, he had encountered the critical perspectives of European democrats on General Francisco Franco's regime. Perhaps most importantly, Llidó was introduced to different religious traditions, such as the Paris Missions and the French Catholic Worker experiments. These experiences had made Llidó more critical of the Spanish Catholic Church and its ties to Franco's regime.³⁸ Thus, because of his proximity to the rural poor in Spain and his encounters with different, more open, religious practices and traditions, Llidó recognized the persistence of social injustices and made a commitment to the poor. He brought his lived experiences in Spain with him to Chile. His commitment to social justice and the poor would only grow, as would his conflicts with conservative Christian bishops in Chile.

The rise of Eduardo Frei's Christian Democratic Party (Partido Demócrata Cristiano, PDC) in the late 1950s, with roots in Catholic efforts to organize workers, lent prestige and national visibility to social Catholicism. In carving out a third way between liberal capitalism and Marxist socialism, the emergence of Christian Democracy signaled a break from the decades-long alliance between the Church and the Conservative Party.³⁹ It further legitimized the developmentalist paradigm that so marked the study of "Third World" societies during the

³⁷ Mario Amorós, *Antonio Llidó: Un sacerdote revolucionario* (València, Spain: Universitat de València, 2007), 50. Some Spanish priests who departed for Latin America had progressive tendencies and were escaping Franco's Spain whereas others became politicized once they encountered Chilean politics.

³⁸ Amorós, *Antonio Llidó*, 37.

³⁹ For a history of the evolution of the Chilean Catholic Church from roughly the nineteenth century through to the late twentieth century, see Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile*. For a comparative perspective, see Fleet and Smith, *The Catholic Church and Democracy in Chile and Peru*.

1960s.⁴⁰ Within the conceptual framework of “development,” the Church’s role would include reforming religious values to promote modernization and increase national integration, avoiding charged political conflicts. This reformist position, within both the Church and national politics, was reflected in the Christian Democrats’ embrace of the Alliance for Progress, an early 1960s US program that advocated reform, rather than radical change, within capitalist economic social structures.

Yet, the shortcomings of Frei’s so-called “revolution in liberty” had ramifications both for the PDC and Christian political outlooks. European and Spanish priests who arrived in Chile in the 1960s encountered a country on the verge of momentous political and social changes. The PDC was not immune to the more radical ideologies circulating on the Left. Frei promised to bring social change to Chile and ameliorate the conditions of the poor; however, his government (1964–1970) fell short of meeting such goals, and a sector of the party decided to split in 1969 and form the Movement of Popular Unitary Action (Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitaria, MAPU), a party that later joined Popular Unity to bring about socialism to Chile. These internal crises in the PDC encouraged Christian members to seek out more radical alternatives. Likewise, the death at the hands of the police of ten *pobladores* (residents of poor, urban settlements) who resisted eviction from Pampa Irigoín in the southern city of Puerto Montt only increased dissatisfaction with Frei’s government and its inadequate housing policies.⁴¹ The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and its public declaration of commitment to the poor inspired many priests and sisters to move to *poblaciones* and work in factories in Chile and become involved in the world of the poor through the practice of work. Domestic and foreign-born priests and sisters renounced financial support from their families and the Church and became workers. Ultimately,

⁴⁰ The existing literature argues that development helped shape a particular kind of citizen and framed political subjectivities in terms of transcendence and improvement; see María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Development paradigms have also been used to contain the spread of communism; see Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*. Carl E. Pletsch argues that the Cold War led to the conceptualization of the globe as “three worlds,” with consequences for the organization of social scientific labor; see “The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, Circa 1950–1975,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (Oct. 1981), 565–590.

⁴¹ Angela Vergara, “Revisiting Pampa Irigoín: Social Movements, Repression, and Political Culture in 1960s Chile,” *Radical History Review* 124 (Jan. 2016), 43. Vergara traces the land occupation by *pobladores* and the ensuing confrontation between more than 200 heavily armed police and occupants who refused to vacate the occupied lands, resulting in police firing their weapons on the crowd, killing ten and wounding more than fifty.

the everyday experiences among the working poor, as well as the politicized climate of Latin American politics of the mid-twentieth century, helped radicalize priests and sisters in Chile, often in the current of liberation theology.

Although socially conscious work was already taking place in Chile and Latin America, the Second Vatican Council and Medellín provided necessary institutional guidance and support.⁴² The Christians for Socialism movement in Chile emerged from the dynamic historical conjuncture of the 1960s, which married liberation theology and Marxist ideas in an explosive combination. Such was the threat posed by this epistemological rupture from traditional ecclesiastical paradigms that by the mid-1980s, a reactionary Vatican had vowed to de-legitimize liberation theology as an infiltration by the international communist community.⁴³ As Michael Löwy has argued, however, we cannot understand the importance of the confluence of liberation theology and Marxism for Latin American social movements of the twentieth century unless we understand liberation theology as a development from *within* the Church's own traditions and culture. To explain the attraction to Marxist models by large sectors of Latin American Catholics, Löwy utilizes Max Weber's concept of "selective affinity" between two cultural structures that, during a specific historical period, converge on the basis of mutual reciprocity and analogies.⁴⁴ It is this dynamic, dialectical affinity between Marxist ideology and Christianity that is revealed through an analysis of Christians for Socialism's documents, oral interviews, and press clippings.

⁴² Padre Alberto Hurtado and Manuel Larrain are considered to be two important precursors to the liberating trends within the Chilean Church before the Second Vatican Council even took place. Hurtado embodied and practiced the Church's social doctrine during the 1940s and later opened the Hogar de Cristo as a form of solidarity with the poor, and Larrain was considered the apostle of the laity and Catholic Action during the 1950s and early 1960s. See Aldunate Lyon et al., *Crónicas de una Iglesia Liberadora*.

⁴³ Löwy and Pompan, "Marxism and Christianity in Latin America."

⁴⁴ Löwy and Pompan, "Marxism and Christianity in Latin America," 30. Max Weber developed his concept of "selective affinity" (or *Wahlverwandtschaft* in the original German) in his study of the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the economic ethos; see *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and Other Writings* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001).

“THE DUTY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN IS TO ENGAGE IN THE REVOLUTION”⁴⁵

On 11 August 1968, less than a month before the Conference of Latin American Bishops took place in Medellín, Colombia, Chile’s Iglesia Joven (Young Church) took over the main Cathedral in Santiago in a public protest that outraged the hierarchy and many Christian onlookers.⁴⁶ Young Christians, led by anarcho-syndicalist Clotario Blest, criticized the centralized structures of the Church and its ties to wealth and power.⁴⁷ Nine priests and three sisters, accompanied by nearly 200 laypersons—mainly workers from the Catholic Youth Workers (Juventud Obrera Católica, JOC) and Catholic university students—took over the Cathedral for nearly fourteen hours, holding press conferences and preaching sermons. In one of their pamphlets, the Young Church proclaimed: “It is the institutional structure of the Church we denounce. It impedes the Church’s real commitment to the people and their struggle.”⁴⁸ The Archbishopric condemned the action as “damaging” to the Church and “at odds with the spirit of the gospel.”⁴⁹ The Church hierarchy, including Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, deemed the protest of the Young Church as one of the most profane and saddest actions in ecclesiastical history, calling for suspension of the priests who had taken part.⁵⁰ In response, the priests publicly asked for the Cardinal’s pardon for having offended him and for his reversal of their suspension so they could exercise their apostolic ministry. They clarified, however, that they neither regretted their actions nor retracted their statements. Blest went as far as to announce: “We will be hand-in-hand with our Marxist brothers on the barricade of the people against

⁴⁵ This famous quote by guerrilla priest Camilo Torres was frequently used by the Iglesia Joven in its declarations as well as by Christians for Socialism.

⁴⁶ “Ocupada la Catedral por sacerdotes y laicos,” *El Mercurio*, 12 Aug. 1968, p. 1.

⁴⁷ In their press declaration, Iglesia Joven members said they were protesting the “distancing of the Church from the poor sectors.” See “Ocupada la Catedral por sacerdotes y laicos,” *El Mercurio*, 12 Aug. 1968, p. 1. The syndicalist Clotario Blest best embodies the seemingly contradictory confluence of Christianity and Marxism. After he was expelled from the seminary, Blest was the spokesperson for a Left, socialist Christianity and even started the National Association of Fiscal Employees (Agrupación Nacional de Empleados Fiscales, ANEF) in 1943 before becoming the president of the United Labor Federation (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores, CUT). See Maximiliano Salinas Campos, *Clotario Blest, profeta de dios contra el capitalismo* (Santiago, Chile: Edición Rehue, 1987).

⁴⁸ “Ocupada la Catedral por sacerdotes y laicos,” *El Mercurio*, 12 Aug. 1968, p. 23.

⁴⁹ “Ocupada la Catedral por sacerdotes y laicos,” *El Mercurio*, 12 Aug. 1968, p. 23.

⁵⁰ “Cardenal califica de profanación la toma de la iglesia Catedral,” *El Mercurio*, 13 Aug. 1968, p. 18.

capitalism, following the example of Camilo Torres,” a Colombian priest who was one of the leaders of his country’s Marxist armed group, the National Liberation Army.⁵¹

The ultra-conservative Christian movement FIDUCIA proclaimed, “we worship the Church, but we do not want pro-Marxist priests” as they gathered signatures for a petition to be sent to the Pope, denouncing the take-over of the Cathedral.⁵² On the other side of the Atlantic, the Vatican took the time to denigrate Young Church participants as persons “intoxicated with sociological visions.” Faithful to Rome’s line, Francisco Maldonado, director of the Archdiocesan Secretariat, described the occupation as an “exhibitionist gesture” and a product of “intellectual colonialism.”⁵³

Indeed, the Vatican was right to worry. Members of the Young Church had made history by occupying the main Cathedral of Santiago and demanding concrete changes within the Church. With their protest, they attempted to make Christian action compatible with Marxist thinking. In so doing, the Young Church set the course for future public confrontations between hierarchical authority and priests and/or nuns engaged in grassroots pastoral work. The group’s efforts foreshadowed the emergence of a politicized clergy, one that would take up their call to build a Church of the Poor and join the people in their struggle for liberation. Only a few years later, Christians for Socialism would do just that.

Cracks in the Church’s unity were visible during the late 1960s, but the divisions rapidly accelerated with the Popular Unity government. The slow pace of Frei’s reforms in housing, education, and employment frustrated the countless priests, sisters, and lay activists living and working in Santiago’s *poblaciones* and throughout the country. They saw in Allende’s socialist project the potential to further the cause of the poor. Indeed, Chile’s dynamic political landscape during the early 1970s demanded concrete responses. The group of priests, from working-class parishes throughout Chile, and theologians, both Chilean and foreign-born, who gathered in Santiago in April 1971 to inaugurate Christians for Socialism understood the urgency of that moment.⁵⁴ Like the Iglesia Joven before them, the newly formed clerical movement advocated the quotidian participation of Christians in building a just, fraternal, and socialist society. While

⁵¹ “Ocupada la Catedral por sacerdotes y laicos,” *El Mercurio*, 12 Aug. 1968, p. 34.

⁵² “Cardenal califica de profanación la toma de la iglesia Catedral,” *El Mercurio*, 13 Aug. 1968.

⁵³ “Vaticano condena ocupación de la Catedral de Santiago,” *El Mercurio*, 14 Aug. 1968, p. 20.

⁵⁴ “Los sacerdotes declaran: ‘Nos sentimos comprometidos en este proceso en marcha,’” *El Siglo*, 17 April 1971.

the Chilean bishops maintained a relatively neutral role during Allende's presidency, issuing statements urging respect for constitutional procedures when they deemed it necessary, they did engage in more open confrontations with CpS, whose polemic declarations they deemed threatening to their ecclesiastical authority.

After their 1971 Annual Plenary Assembly, the Chilean bishops issued a statement on April 22 in direct response to the "Declaration of the 80."⁵⁵ Citing the conclusions of the Medellín conference, they reaffirmed the importance of a Christian commitment to social renovation. Yet, they maintained that as outlined by the Second Vatican Council, the Church must not become linked with a particular political system:

The political option of the priest, if presented as in this case, as a logical and inescapable consequence of his Christian faith, implicitly condemns any other option and threatens the freedom of other Christians. The political choice of the priest, when made public, threatens to disturb the unity of the Christian people around their pastors. 'In the construction of the community of Christians, priests are never at the service of a human ideology or faction, but work as witnesses of the Gospel and pastors of the Church for their spiritual growth' (Second Vatican Council, Decree on Priests, 6).⁵⁶

In their attempts to dissuade left-leaning tendencies among priests, the bishops exposed the conflictive nature of their statements. On one hand, the bishops asserted that Christians must be committed to the liberation of mankind, while on the other they claimed that priests should not show preference for a particular sector of the population. How then could priests both show a preferential option for the poor and maintain neutrality about their exploitation? It was this very illusion of Church neutrality that Christians for Socialism questioned and subsequently sought to reveal.

BETWEEN FANTASY AND DOGMA

CpS leaders drew from liberation theology not only in their desire to maintain an active dialectic between theory and practice, but also in suggesting that salvation and social conflicts such as class struggle occur in the contemporary moment rather than in the afterlife, accentuating in the process the importance of politics. In his talk during the Fifth International Week of Theology, Giulio Girardi, an Italian theologian and member of CpS, expounded upon the issue of class

⁵⁵ See note 1.

⁵⁶ Declaration of the Chilean Bishops, "El Evangelio exige comprometerse en profundas y urgentes renovaciones sociales," 22 April 1971, Temuco, Chile. Sergio Torres Personal Archive.

struggle for the Church. He questioned the traditional religious paradigm that God created nature and men and that the evils of the world were simply the result of God's will; thus the job of the Christian would revolve around bettering his/her own life and that of others. This perspective suggests that since Man has already been made, there is little to be done in this world to alter the conditions that structure his life. Class struggle, according to this position, is unnatural, since it disturbs the order of things. Girardi criticized this view as a "Christian doctrinal conception of reality as static, fixed, hierarchical, with exaggerated human interdependencies based on this same nature."⁵⁷ The *historical* conception of human and social development transformed Christian religious life and social commitment. By recognizing that class struggle was an undeniable feature of Latin American social upheavals of the period, CpS leaders questioned the notion of the unity of the Church. Thus, according to Gerardi, "[to] accept class struggle also among Christians does not mean that we want to divide the Church, but to become aware of a division that already exists" between poor and rich Christians.⁵⁸ Liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez had long advocated that a new way of doing theology required what Clodovis Boff calls a "socio-analytical mediation," which entails a contextual, concrete, and historical knowledge of society.⁵⁹ In addition to foregrounding praxis as the fundamental place where theology occurs, liberation theologians rejected a solely spiritual hermeneutics and instead sought to highlight the political aspects in their reading of scripture.

The epistemological shift toward a historical conception of reality likewise impacted how priests read and discussed the Bible. CpS prepared theological reflections for use in base communities, with a particular emphasis on the book of Exodus's advocacy for the liberation of the oppressed.⁶⁰ The CpS writers begin the document of reflections with select passages from the Old Testament about the enslavement of the people of Israel, the way they slowly grow conscious of their misery and recognize that God is among them and does not desire their oppression. According to this reading, God is unequivocally on the side of Moses and the

⁵⁷ Giulio Girardi, "Cristianismo y lucha de clases," Presentation to the V International Week of Theology, Bilbao, n.d., Sergio Torres Personal Archive.

⁵⁸ Girardi, "Cristianismo y lucha de clases."

⁵⁹ Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, Robert R. Barr, trans. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987). Boff received his PhD in theology from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, like many Chilean theologians, and his work has been greatly influenced by European political theology.

⁶⁰ Secretariat of Christians for Socialism, "Reflexión teológica: Una parte de la sección bíblica del proyecto 'Cristianos y la Revolución,'" 27 Sept. 1972, Santiago Chile. Sergio Torres Personal Archive.

oppressed and walks alongside them as they break the chains of slavery. The working group that prepared the text added detailed reflections on the relationship between the figure of God and people's lives. In the text, they affirmed, "God does not reveal himself in a 'sacred history,' a history different from the real and concrete history of men."⁶¹ The document ends with yet another textual passage from Exodus reiterating that God takes the side of the oppressed against the oppressors. By historicizing the gospel and religious texts, CpS and their supporters sought to aid people in reflecting about their own everyday experiences and struggles, and in doing so, transform them.

Members of Christians for Socialism did not abandon grassroots work; in fact, many of them hailed from it. Leading clerical members of CpS had lived for years in *poblaciones* and had close contact with the labor movement. For instance, friars Santiago Thijssen and Renato Giavio had served in *población* La Victoria; Esteban Gumucio was an integral part of *población* Joao Goulart, where he helped found the San Pedro San Pablo Parish; Father Mariano Puga, a worker-priest, lived in *población* Villa Francia; and Alfonso Baeza had long been an active member of MOAC.

Given that the formal CpS movement ended with the military coup in 1973, the grassroots commitment of many of its former members is far more visible during the dictatorship of Pinochet (1973–1990). The CpS documents from 1971 to 1973 are mainly theological reflections and plans of action. However, testimonies by sisters and priests who worked for a living during the early 1970s reveal that it was the concrete experience of labor and the everyday interactions with workers that convinced a sector of the Catholic clergy of the need for radical change. For many, renouncing financial support from the institutional Church and their own families was a way to bypass notions of superiority and privilege so often attributed to priests and sisters. It was also a way of better integrating themselves into the new communities in which they served. "My work as a domestic servant gave me the opportunity to talk to women about common issues, and I got to know all the injustices that exist in the employer-employee relationship," recounted sister Margarita Ortiz to the *Jornada de Evangelización*.⁶² Such decisions, however, were often fraught with tension, as sisters and priests navigated the

⁶¹ Secretariat of Christians for Socialism, "Reflexión teológica: Una parte de la sección bíblica del proyecto 'Cristianos y la Revolución,'" 3.

⁶² Margarita Ortiz, Trabajo Poblacional, relatada en una Jornada de Evangelización en Copiapó, Oct. 1971, Sergio Torres Personal Archive.

expectations of their new communities and warded off criticism by the majority of those in their religious orders. Immediately after being ordained as a priest in his native Spain, Antonio Sempere was sent to Copiapó in the north of Chile to serve as a parish priest for two years. Like Margarita, his realization that the Church was distant from the working class drove him to join the mass of unskilled laborers in the copper mines. “I tried to be one with the work mates and neighbors in the *población*,” he recounted in an interview with Margarita Velasco.⁶³ Sempere did not initially plan to join a worker union, fearing that by doing so he would abandon his “universality as a priest.”⁶⁴ After all, such was the official Church line. But through his interactions with miners and work in the mine, Sempere realized that remaining neutral in the face of exploitation meant supporting the status quo. Thus, he joined the union struggle to be on the side of the workers. While Sempere did not become an official Left party member, his union activities marked him as a politicized priest—or as his comrades would call him, “*el cura choro*” (“choro” is a popular Chilean expression meaning “cool/daring”—thus, “the cool priest”). As these examples show, although sometimes priests and nuns had a romanticized notion of working-class militancy, they nonetheless recognized the agency of workers and began to see the role of religious leaders in terms of strategic allies in worker struggles, as opposed to moral and paternalistic guides.

During a meeting in Coronel-Lota in the south of Chile, demonstrating his own Christian-Marxist syncretism, theologian Giulio Girardi similarly reassured miners that their Christian upbringing and Marxist-inspired political organizing were not in conflict with one another.⁶⁵ On the contrary, Girardi recognized the value of Marxism as a “mobilizing doctrine.”⁶⁶ He also acknowledged that the increased everyday interactions between and among Christians and Marxists in Chile could no longer be avoided. He suggested that conversations such as the one taking place in Coronel had to occur *with* the workers, otherwise the CpS’s intellectual work

⁶³ Margarita Velasco, “Antonio Sempere, sacerdote, Presidente del Sindicato Único del Paipote,” Oct. 1971, Sergio Torres Personal Archive.

⁶⁴ Velasco, “Antonio Sempere.”

⁶⁵ The Coronel-Lota mines in Concepción province were emblematic sites for working-class militancy and for the formation of multi-class alliances throughout the twentieth century; see Jody Pavilack, *Mining for the Nation: The Politics of Chile’s Coal Communities from the Popular Front to the Cold War* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

⁶⁶ Giulio Girardi, “Cristianismo y Marxismo,” Texto de una charla dada en Coronel a un grupo de trabajadores. No date, Sergio Torres Personal Archive.

would be rendered useless: it “could fill books, but it could not fill our life.”⁶⁷ Girardi likewise explained that the traditionalist and dualist perspectives on the relationship between Marxism and Christianity had contributed to mischaracterizing both. As Bloch had done earlier, Girardi insisted that one must not dissociate the ideology of Marxism (which had often been seen as incompatible with religion) from its socio-analytical elements. Such a distinction, he explained, is the result of the spread of Althusserian ideas and the implied epistemological rupture it demanded between Marxism as science and Marxism as ideology.⁶⁸ Instead, Girardi advocated:

[W]e must consider, on the one hand, Christianity as a dynamic reality, as a dynamic way of living and thinking; and Marxism, on the other, also as a dynamic system, as a system which cannot be considered as complete, but rather as something in motion. Christianity, then, is presented in this perspective as the historical expression of faith in Jesus Christ and that assumes in the various stages, human categories for its organization, for its moral orientation, for its theoretical elaboration.⁶⁹

Girardi went as far as to say that one could not dialogue with dogmatic Marxists and that a strictly rigid interpretation of Marx was not Marxism. For him and the CpS, the relationship between Marxism and Christian faith had to be a “creative” one. Only by seeing both Marxism and Christianity as open, dynamic systems could faith assume its “force of contestation and transformation of the world.”⁷⁰

The secretary of CpS, the Jesuit Gonzalo Arroyo, expressed similar sentiments on the critical relationship between Marxism and Christianity and on the role of the Secretariat in this process. “Our Secretariat must have a minimum of institutionality, without a policy that is too narrow, without a rigid orientation, leaving enough autonomy to the groups,” he stated.⁷¹ It is significant that Arroyo maintained a certain openness toward the future. Likewise, it is also significant that he was able to critically analyze the role of the Secretariat, given that this was written shortly after the October 1972 truckers’ strike, which sought to destabilize Allende’s

⁶⁷ Girardi, “Cristianismo y Marxismo.”

⁶⁸ Girardi, “Cristianismo y Marxismo.”

⁶⁹ Girardi, “Cristianismo y Marxismo,” 8.

⁷⁰ Girardi, “Cristianismo y Marxismo,” 11. Girardi used the word “creative” to describe the relationship between Christianity and Marxism.

⁷¹ Gonzalo Arroyo, “Significado y sentido de Cristianos por el Socialismo,” Jornada Nacional 1972, 26 Nov. 1972, Sergio Torres Personal Archive. By “groups,” Arroyo is referring to the base communities, as well as to groups such as the Juventud Obrera Católica (JOC), Movimiento Obrero de Acción Católica (MOAC), and others, in which CpS members overlapped.

government and further polarized Chilean society. He too emphasized that a Christian way of life and thinking changed with the experience of living in the *poblaciones* and interacting closely with workers. There exists, he said, “a certain solidarity, a certain fraternity, which anticipates the solidarity that we seek for all society, which is the anticipation of the Kingdom of Christ in which there will be truly effective love for others, in which there will be justice for all, in which there will be true peace, peace founded not on inequalities and privileges for some and misery for others.”⁷² This notion of a present that already anticipates the future—or of a future that is already somewhat immanent in the present—reveals Bloch’s utopian influence.

Like Bloch too, the “Final Document” that resulted from the First Latin American Encounter of Christians for Socialism in 1972 expresses the notion that faith can have a critical, creative dimension. “The Christian committed to revolutionary praxis discovers the liberating force of the love of God, of the death and resurrection of Christ. He discovers that his faith is not the acceptance of a world already made and of a history already predetermined, but that his faith is the creative existence of a new and fraternal world, or historical initiative fertilized by Christian hope.”⁷³ The kind of utopianism embedded in the quote is certainly non-teleological, and self-interrogating. Likewise, the Final Document imbues faith not only with critical valences, but also with the writers’ notion of a socialist society. For the delegates meeting that day, “[the] construction of socialism is a creative process in conflict with all dogmatic schematics and with every a-critical position. Socialism is not a set of ahistorical dogmas but a critical theory, in constant development.”⁷⁴ In “¿Que hacer? Cristianos en el proceso socialista,” Diego Irrázaval thinks of consciousness-raising (*concientización*) along the same lines, as “a dialectic between the present and the future, that is to say, as an eschatological force.”⁷⁵

However, members of the CpS movement did not always have a shared vision of how to practically build a socialist society. They agreed on the need to maintain an open, dialectical

⁷² Arroyo, “Significado y sentido de Cristianos por el Socialismo,” 3.

⁷³ Final Document, 1er Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo, Segunda Parte, Punto 3.5, April 23–30, 1972, Official Version, Santiago, Chile. Sergio Torres Personal Archive. Reproduced in Juan Ochagavía, “Documentos: Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo,” *Mensaje* 21, no. 209 (June 1972): 365.

⁷⁴ Final Document, 1er Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo, Segunda Parte, Punto 1.6, April 23–30, 1972. Reproduced in Juan Ochagavía, “Documentos: Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo,” *Mensaje* 21, no. 209 (June 1972): 362.

⁷⁵ Diego Irrázaval C., “¿Que hacer? Cristianos en el proceso socialista,” *Jornada Nacional* 1972, 25 Nov. 1972, Sergio Torres Personal Archive.

relationship between Marxism and Christianity and to avoid becoming either a rigid political party or a mere intellectual group without grassroots connections. At certain moments, however, their socio-analytical reading of the realities of Latin America shaded back to the kind of scientific reasoning they tried to avoid. For example, in Irarrázaval's essay, he criticizes Christian Democracy for inculcating Christians with bourgeois values. This kind of social-Christian ideology he argued, is reformist and has:

Always instilled peace, thus legitimizing the current unjust society. Social-Christianity does not recognize that violence comes from the system of capitalist domination. None of us denies that the people seek peace and that God promises peace. But peace will come when the society of exploitation is destroyed and for that *revolutionary violence* is used. It is very ideological to translate the evangelical message of peace into a legitimization of the current Chilean society⁷⁶ (emphasis mine).

Irarrázaval draws from the conclusions of the Medellín Episcopal Conference when he references revolutionary violence. That is, Medellín legitimized certain kinds of violence but only when used to counteract structural violence.⁷⁷ However, Irarrázaval does not mention how one might escape the implied hierarchical, militarized structures required to carry through revolutionary violence to its logical ends. He suggests, “[it] is not enough to participate in unions and neighborhood organizations, or to dedicate ourselves solely to consciousness-raising. The effective collaboration of Christians of the Left takes expression in disciplined and organic proletarian actions and organizations.”⁷⁸ Irarrázaval's statements reflect the diversity of ideological positions within CpS and its difficulties as it attempted to encourage organized direct action among workers at a moment of polarizing political activity in Chile.

One factor that helps provide a balanced perspective on the discourses of CpS is the experience of time in moments of radical transformation. As historian Peter Winn has argued, the Popular Unity government experienced a “revolution from below,” propelled by a rapid worker takeover of factories and land seizures by *pobladores*, which greatly accelerated the pace of UP's planned structural transformations and radicalized the revolutionary process to previously

⁷⁶ Irarrázaval C., “¿Que hacer? Cristianos en el proceso socialista.” Jornada Nacional 1972.

⁷⁷ “II Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano, Documentos finales de Medellín,” CELAM, p. 16. Accessed at http://www.celam.org/conferencias_medellin.php.

⁷⁸ Irarrázaval C., “¿Que hacer? Cristianos en el proceso socialista,” Jornada Nacional 1972.

unthought-of dimensions.⁷⁹ Such hastened experiences, according to Winn, “underscored the tension between revolution from below and revolution from above, the contest between workers and politicians, the clash between leaders and masses.”⁸⁰ The short period of the Popular Unity government was feverishly intense, and class antagonisms reached such heights that one could hardly remain neutral. The polarization of Chilean society likewise demanded the taking of concrete political positions and pushed people into diametrically opposed ideological camps. Within this context, the concrete political party positions of certain CpS members make sense.

Temporality is significant in utopian studies. Luisa Passerini explores the triangular relationship between subjectivity, desire, and utopia when conceptualizing the 1968 counterculture movements. She labels the 1968 moment as an “acceleration of time” and “intensification of experience,” a process that curtails the distance between the now and the “not-yet” and demands to implement change in the immediate present.⁸¹ The “utopian tension” of ’68, as she calls it, results from putting desire into practice immediately, not waiting for an unforeseen future. The changed parameters of time accelerate utopian projects, such as that of the CpS during Popular Unity. This is not to suggest that the CpS attempts to have their utopic ideal materialize in the Chilean present eroded the subversive elements of their dream. However, the very condensing of time and space—innate to utopia and its desires—contains inherent contradictions and challenges.

Like Bloch, other scholars have explored the utopian dimensions of religious narratives. One such scholar is Anna Peterson, who has studied Christian base communities and popular Catholicism in the context of the Salvadoran Civil War. She suggests that Salvadoran revolutionaries expressed their political aspirations in a religious language. Among the Salvadoran Left, aspirations of solidarity and building a “Christian society,” as well as the “New Man,” were some of the positive attributes of progressive Catholicism. She further suggests that religious narratives powerfully combine ontological and collective dimensions: “social-ontological or religious narratives can contribute to political and social change ... through the formation of collective identity, by motivating different forms of action, and by providing a

⁷⁹ Peter Winn, *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile’s Road to Socialism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986). It must be noted that in no way does Winn blame the quick radicalization of workers and *pobladores* for triggering a counter-reaction by Chile’s middle and upper classes.

⁸⁰ Winn, *Weavers of Revolution*, 7.

⁸¹ Luisa Passerini, “Utopia and Desire,” *Thesis Eleven* 68 (Feb. 2002), 19.

utopian horizon.”⁸² Thus, religious narratives have provided alternative visions of the future, even when based upon a recognizable past. For Peterson, there is value in utopian thinking, and religious utopianism can offer useful resources to the socialist Left. As this example and the experience of Christians for Socialism in Chile demonstrate, while Marxists and Christians were in dialogue, there was not a particular ideological model to which they subscribed. On the contrary, radical Christians drew inspiration from a variety of sources, from the utopian Left to Marxism, and especially from their own religious texts.

CHRISTIANS FOR SOCIALISM BEYOND CHILE

On 29 November 1971, during a visit to Chile, Cuba’s revolutionary leader Fidel Castro met members of Christians for Socialism together with laypeople in Santiago.⁸³ Castro indicated that he was genuinely interested and curious to meet leftist Christians in Chile, for he realized that Christians could play a crucial role in the revolutionary process.⁸⁴ During the session, Castro emphasized that “the strategic alliance between revolutionary Marxists and revolutionary Christians is possible,” once bourgeois values had been extirpated from the Christian faith.⁸⁵ The meeting with Castro reaffirmed the conviction of CpS that unless they contributed to fomenting meaningful collaboration between Christians and Allende’s Popular Unity coalition, the Chilean Church would run the risk of remaining on the sidelines of history. Although Castro’s visit electrified CpS members, some of the attendees wondered: “Can a ruler impose not only a lifestyle, but an ideology, to an entire people, even if it is for the sake of a deeply respectable ideal?”⁸⁶ The meeting with Fidel Castro and the kinds of anxieties and questions it produced pushed CpS toward a more regional and global understanding of world historical events, and it began the process of its own internationalization.

Such was the degree of mutual curiosity that after an official invitation by the Cuban government, twelve Chilean priests visited Cuba between 14 February and 3 March 1972. CpS

⁸² Anna L. Peterson, “Religious Narratives and Political Protest,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 1 (1996), 30.

⁸³ Julio Silva Solar, “La visita de Fidel Castro,” *Mensaje* 20, no. 205 (Dec. 1971): 578–579.

⁸⁴ Hubert Daubechies, “Fidel Castro habla a ‘Los 80,’” *Mensaje* 21, no. 206 (Jan.–Feb. 1972): 57–63.

⁸⁵ Daubechies, “Fidel Castro habla a ‘Los 80,’” 59.

⁸⁶ Daubechies, “Fidel Castro habla a ‘Los 80,’” 62. Daubechies, the author of the *Mensaje* article, was present in the meeting with Castro and posed the question I cite above.

members could hardly pass up the opportunity to observe firsthand a triumphant socialist revolution. In Cuba, they issued a “Message to the Christians of Latin America,” which was a call to all Christians of the region not to give in to divisions between Christians and Marxists but to realize that the real divisions among them were between the exploiters and the exploited. They felt compelled to announce to their Latin American brothers that it was time to build a “new Latin American Church” and a “new Latin American people.”⁸⁷ They ended their statement with a slogan previously used by the Iglesia Joven in Chile, and which in turn comes from the Colombian guerrilla priest Camilo Torres: “The duty of every Christian is to be a revolutionary. The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution.”⁸⁸

A little over a month after the return of the Chilean delegation from Cuba, the First Latin American Encounter of Christians for Socialism began on 23 April 1972, in Santiago, Chile. The planning for the regional congress had started in December 1971, when a working group of priests from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Peru discussed the need to reflect theologically about Latin American conditions and to share ideas about the continent’s path of liberation.⁸⁹ The Chilean “road to socialism” had sparked fervent interest worldwide, so they chose Santiago as a symbolic location in which to hold the congress. The weeklong meetings were held in the gymnasium of the Hirmas textile factory’s industrial union, where more than 400 Chilean and foreign delegates gathered.⁹⁰ The organizers planned the meeting to coincide with the Third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), taking place in Santiago at the same time, to receive better press coverage and to symbolically suggest an alternative to economic dependency. The Chilean Minister of Foreign Relations, Clodomiro Almeyda, gave opening remarks, and he read a supportive statement from President Salvador Allende at the end of the meeting.⁹¹

⁸⁷ “Message to the Christians of Latin America,” March 3, 1972, Havana, Cuba. Sergio Torres Personal Archive.

⁸⁸ “Message to the Christians of Latin America,” March 3, 1972.

⁸⁹ Fernando Montes, “Primer encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo,” *Mensaje* 21, no. 209 (June 1972): 347–352.

⁹⁰ Montes, “Primer encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo.”

⁹¹ Montes, “Primer encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo,” 348.

The only high ecclesiastical authority present at the First Latin American Encounter of Christians for Socialism was the Bishop of Cuernavaca, Mexico, Sergio Méndez Arceo.⁹² This can be explained in part by noting that by 1972, the year of the conference, CELAM appointed the conservative Colombian Archbishop Alfonso López Trujillo as secretary general. According to Edward Cleary, this election moved CELAM toward a more “cautious, spiritualizing tendency.”⁹³ The shift was further solidified after the Puebla Conference, when the Vatican closely surveilled developments in liberation theology.⁹⁴ The language and tone of Gonzalo Arroyo, the Jesuit leader of CpS, indicates not only a full embrace of liberation theology, but also of ideologically charged categories that further increased tensions between CpS and the Chilean Episcopal Conference. Arroyo stated that the Latin American Encounter of Christians for Socialism was meant as a theological reflection to “purify our faith from those *bourgeois ideological elements* that often cover it and from those blocks that prevent it from expressing in all its intensity the renewing power of the Gospel”⁹⁵ (emphasis mine). In an increasingly polarized Chilean political climate, the CpS language and public declarations, though still rooted in their faith, made the Chilean bishops increasingly uneasy.

Although the CpS organizing committee had issued personal invitations to Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez and other Chilean bishops informing them of the meeting, the hierarchy kept a safe institutional distance from the gathering. Members of the hierarchy went as far as to write confidential letters to different National Episcopal Conferences across the continent to warn them that the planned congress did not have the institutional backing of the Chilean Catholic Church, so as to dissuade participation.⁹⁶ Although both the Chilean hierarchy and members of CpS reiterated their desired mutual autonomy and emphasized the freedom of the clergy to organize similar conferences, the confrontation between them signaled a widening gap between the hierarchy and CpS.

⁹² On Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo, see Robert Sean MacKin, “Becoming the Red Bishop of Cuernavaca: Rethinking Gill's Religious Competition Model,” *Sociology of Religion*, 64, no. 4 (2003): 499–514; and Jennifer Scheper Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix: Lived Religion and Local Faith from the Conquest to the Present* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹³ Edward L. Cleary, *Crisis and Change: The Church in Latin America Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 45.

⁹⁴ Cleary, *Crisis and Change*, 50.

⁹⁵ Montes, “Primer encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo,” 348.

⁹⁶ Montes, “Primer encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo,” 349–350.

During the First Latin American Encounter of Christians for Socialism, each delegation shared national socio-analytical reports informing other participants about the political conflicts in their respective countries. The “Final Document” that resulted from the gathering placed these varying national experiences within a larger global focus of the structural violence produced by Latin America’s neocolonial capitalist relations.⁹⁷ This regional reality, the writers argued, placed Latin America in a dependent position vis-à-vis capitalist economies and generated inequalities that further worsened the conditions of the poor. For this reason, a regional, united Latin American response was necessary: “a second struggle for independence, where the revolutionary forces of a continent that has in common a past of colonization and a present of exploitation and misery can unite.”⁹⁸ These Latin American Christians were inspired not only by their continent’s independence leaders, such as José Martí and Simon Bolívar, but also the anti-colonial struggles then unfolding throughout the “Third World,” such as in Asia and Africa.⁹⁹ Thus, for conference participants, the revolutionary commitment of Christians required a “global historical project for societal transformation.”¹⁰⁰

The plans of the Chilean CpS for a united Latin American liberation struggle were cut short by the country’s coup. However, the work of politically motivated priests and sisters was hardly over in Chile. Although shortly after the coup the CpS as a movement officially dissolved, and their members subsequently participated in grassroots organizing, the leadership of CpS continued to maintain links with liberation theologians the world over. In 1975, the Second Latin American Encounter of Christians for Socialism would take place clandestinely in Quebec, Canada.¹⁰¹ And by 1976, the leadership of the Chilean CpS would partake in the organizing directive of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (ASETT), which held its first meeting in Dar-es-Salaam.¹⁰² The encounter with theologians from Africa and Asia

⁹⁷ “Final Document,” 1er Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo, Introducción, April 23–30, 1972, Official Version, Santiago, Chile. Sergio Torres Personal Archive.

⁹⁸ “Final Document,” 1er Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo, Punto 2.1.

⁹⁹ See “Final Document,” 1er Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo, Punto 2.1 on Latin American independence struggles; see interview with Gonzalo Arroyo, where he speaks about the influence of the Vietnam War on him and the CpS in “Arroyo on Chile’s Christians for Socialism.”

¹⁰⁰ See “Final Document,” 1er Encuentro Latinoamericano de Cristianos por el Socialismo, Punto 1.1.

¹⁰¹ Interview by author with Sergio Torres, 16 May 2017, Santiago, Chile.

¹⁰² Sergio Torres, Pablo Richard, and Diego Irarrázaval from CpS are some of Chileans who had an active role in ASETT see Aldunate Lyon et al., *Crónicas de una Iglesia Liberadora*. Gustavo Gutiérrez and others emphasized the critical role that the Chilean Sergio Torres played in the creation of ASETT and its intellectual

challenged the Chileans to consider the critical role of race and gender, and not just class, when it came to liberation projects inspired by the Gospel.¹⁰³ ASETT went further than the Latin American experience of liberation theology in announcing that it was necessary to construct a fraternal society through the recognition of difference (be it cultural, racial, or sexual).¹⁰⁴ The work of ASETT would continue until 2006, and although a more in-depth reflection on these various “Third World” meetings is beyond the purview of this paper, it is important to recognize that the Chilean experience with liberation theology as embodied in the Christians for Socialism movement played a critical role in the elaboration of a Global South liberation theology.

EXILE, DETENTION, AND DEATH

Leading CpS theologians and priests largely disbanded following the 1973 coup. Diego Irrarrázaval left Chile in April 1974 because he was falsely accused of “terrorism.” He continued his pastoral duties in the Andean region of Peru and returned to Chile only in 2004.¹⁰⁵ Sergio Torres, who shared with me his personal archive of CpS documents rarely examined in the past, likewise fled Chile in 1973. Torres helped start liberation theology groups during his stay with the Maryknolls outside New York City. He returned to Chile in 1980.¹⁰⁶ Pablo Richard, perhaps the best known of Chile’s liberation theologians, fled to France, where he received a doctorate in the sociology of religion at the Sorbonne and later settled in Costa Rica, where he remained until his death. While the coup displaced and isolated CpS leaders, for grassroots priests and lay Christians who remained in Chile, the consequences were far worse and included detention, torture, and even death. Such was the case for both domestic and foreign-born priests who have peppered my analysis of the Christians for Socialism movement.¹⁰⁷

orientation; see Rosario Hermano and Pablo Bonavía, *Construyendo puente entre teologías y culturas: Memoria de un itinerario colectivo. Homenaje a Sergio Torres en sus 80 años de vida* (Montevideo, Uruguay: Fundación Amerindia, 2009).

¹⁰³ Aldunate Lyon et al., *Crónicas de una Iglesia Liberadora*, 61.

¹⁰⁴ Hermano and Bonavía, *Construyendo puente entre teologías y culturas*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Diego Irrarrázaval interview by author, 21 Aug. 2017, Santiago, Chile.

¹⁰⁶ Sergio Torres interview by author, 16 May 2017, Santiago, Chile.

¹⁰⁷ For an account of priests who were detained and disappeared, see Miguel Jordá Sureda, *Martirología de la iglesia chilena: Juan Alsina y sacerdotes víctimas del terrorismo de Estado* (Santiago, Chile: LOM Ediciones, 2001) and Amorós, *Antonio Llidó*.

Despite the threat of violence, priests and sisters who lived in marginalized areas helped shelter victims of Pinochet's regime, provided a physical space where people could gather, and played important roles in human rights work. Former CpS members who remained in Chile likewise joined these solidarity efforts and spread the tenets of liberation theology, which deeply influenced them as well as other Chilean theologians, priests, and lay Christians. During the early 1970s, Christians for Socialism members first brought the writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez to Chile. In the late 1970s and 1980s, Chile's popular sectors enthusiastically embraced liberation theology. In 1980, Popular Christian Communities (Comunidades Cristianas Populares or CCPs) in Chile read and discussed a series of theological-pastoral studies that dealt with what it entailed to opt for the poor. Among the documents used was a transcription of the talk Gutiérrez gave at the Congreso Internacional Ecueménico de Teología (International Ecumenical Congress of Theology) in São Paulo, Brazil, that same year. In his talk, Gutiérrez spoke of the entry of the oppressed and the poor into the Latin American historical process and within the Church. He called this entry an "irruption," writing: "It is a hard entry, which does not ask permission from anyone, violent even. The poor person comes 'with his poverty on his back' as Bartolomé de las Casas said, with his suffering, with his culture, with his race, his language, with the exploitation he experiences. When the poor person breaks in, he does it with everything that he is."¹⁰⁸ In his writings, the Peruvian theologian affirmed that liberation theology is nothing more than the "expression of the right to think that the poor and oppressed have," one that is simply a "manifestation of their own right to exist."¹⁰⁹ It is not difficult to imagine why many working-class and poor, urban dwellers would embrace liberation theology; it gave them the necessary theological backing to really believe what they already knew to be true, that their voices and lives mattered. Liberation theology became both a lens through which to understand the place assigned to the poor and a tool with which to undo that order.

Given the growth of Popular Christian Communities in Chile and their embrace of liberation theology, the Pastoral Commission (Comisión Pastoral, COP) of the Chilean Episcopal Conference (Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, CECH) organized a gathering in August 1982 to

¹⁰⁸ "Apuntes para Comunidades Cristianas Populares," *Vicaria de Pastoral Obrera*, Documento de Trabajo 3:1, (1980), 1.

¹⁰⁹ "Apuntes para Comunidades Cristianas Populares," 3.

discuss the “risks” that the CCPs posed for the Chilean Church.¹¹⁰ In a patronizing tone, the COP expressed fear that political parties were taking advantage of CCPs for their own interests. The ideological dimensions of the CCPs also concerned the Chilean bishops. For them, CCPs could easily “slip” from an authentic conception of the option for the poor to a radical commitment to working-class struggles.¹¹¹ While recognizing that CCPs did not want to construct a parallel church, the COP scolded them for not recognizing the Church as an authority. In addition, COP indicated its concern that the CCPs were becoming too closely allied with liberation theology.¹¹² At the root of COP’s discomfort lay several factors. First, the CCP’s autonomy threatened Church hierarchy, directly impacting the power of the bishops and of the CECH. Second, COP suggested that the CCPs were “contaminated by a Marxist language,” which given the anti-Marxist rhetoric of the Pinochet regime, would have grave consequences for the Church as a whole. COP likewise expressed worry that priests who previously belonged to Christians for Socialism were involved with the Popular Christian Communities.¹¹³ COP participants correctly identified overlap between CpS priests and those in CCPs, but in exalting the role of the priests they overlooked the prominence of the laity.

Popular Christian Communities helped *pobladores* petition authorities to locate their imprisoned or tortured loved ones, organized Stations of the Cross processions that criticized the Pinochet dictatorship using religious language, and provided a somewhat safe space for *pobladores* to meet and discuss liberation and the place of the poor in Chile. In their work within Popular Christian Communities, former members of the Christian for Socialism movement played a critical role in the prophetic resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship. Their influence had a practical, grassroots impact that went far beyond the intellectual production analyzed earlier.

¹¹⁰ Coordinadora de las Comunidades Cristianas Populares, “Reunion de la Comisión Pastoral sobre las Comunidades Cristianas Populares,” Anexo No. 2, Aug. 1982, Centro Ecumenico Diego de Medellín. Uncatalogued archive.

¹¹¹ “Reunion de la Comisión Pastoral sobre las Comunidades Cristianas Populares,” 2.

¹¹² “Reunion de la Comisión Pastoral sobre las Comunidades Cristianas Populares,” 3.

¹¹³ “Reunion de la Comisión Pastoral sobre las Comunidades Cristianas Populares,” 5.

CONCLUSION

Beginning in the mid-1960s, when liberation theology gained transnational appeal, scores of priests and religious sisters in Chile moved to *poblaciones* and lived among the urban poor, urging social and political transformation while epistemologically breaking with traditional evangelical paradigms. This wave of liberation within the Chilean Church reached its peak with the formation of the Christians for Socialism movement, which stood in unequivocal support of Allende's socialist project. For many of its participants, what they deemed Allende's socialist utopia was an attractive concept as it temporally projected the Kingdom of God. Inspired by Marxist dialectics, CpS pushed for a historical and sociopolitical reading of Biblical texts as well as of the reality then unfolding before Chileans. CpS members' embrace of Marxist concepts was polemical and caused rifts within the Church hierarchy and tensions with other priests and nuns who advocated a more apolitical role for the Church. The notion of transcendence and the construction of a "New Man" appealed to the utopian aspects of both religious and Marxist thinking. CpS likewise committed itself to the struggle of the Chilean masses, which sought uplift from socioeconomic and political marginality. Yet, its commitment to the poor departed from notions of Catholic charity or paternalist Catholic guidance, instead advocating an active role for the poor not only in their local communities but also in national politics. By recognizing Catholic values and rituals among the large swath of Chilean workers and *pobladores*, CpS leaders and members sought to make Christianity compatible with leftist political tendencies and chart a new way for the liberation of the poor.

Studies of the Christians for Socialism movement have overlooked the ways in which members' utopian thinking transformed the conventional notions of both Marxism and Christianity. Such thinking allowed CpS to navigate uncharted epistemological territory as it sought to undo the hold of dogmatic perspectives that so influenced the Latin American Left of the 1960s and 1970s. In so doing, CpS pointed the way forward for a dynamic and creative convergence between the single two most important forces behind twentieth-century social movements, Marxism and Christianity. Christians for Socialism in Chile likewise shaped theological paradigms locally, regionally, and globally. Its most enduring legacy is visible in the grassroots resistance work that countless priests and nuns carried out in Chile's margins during the dictatorship. Liberation theology during those years of state repression took on prophetic and

denunciatory dimensions as Popular Christian Communities became spaces of opposition to the regime and of the renewal of a Christian commitment to the poor. While the legacy of CpS and liberation theology in Chile is far more visible in the grassroots work undertaken during the dictatorship, an examination of this movement's theological and ideological production is a critical part of comprehending their material, on-the-ground actions.

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