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Selection from *Una Iglesia Desaparecida:*
The End of an Era for the Chilean Catholic Church

September Porras
Swarthmore College '20

Chapter Two: The Transition

On October 5, 1988 a national referendum was held in Chile to decide if the ruling military regime of Augusto Pinochet would be extended yet another eight years. Young and old alike filled the street distributing pamphlets with voting directions and information; flyers papers all over Santiago read “NO,” a reference to the vote against Pinochet. Not only did those publicizing the referendum have to work against a confusing ballot where a negative answer meant a positive outcome, but they also had to convince citizens that they wouldn’t be subject to terrorism and intimidation by the government when they showed up at the polls. Yet, despite the uphill battle, the NO campaign won with a 53% vote.¹ Not quite ready to lose the long game, Pinochet met with other members of the junta to discuss the action they might take in response to the vote. According to reports, it was in this meeting on the evening of the plebiscite that he suggested a violent overthrow of the vote and a reinstatement of the coup.² However, with growing pressure from international powers due to the many human rights violations published by the Vicaria de Solidaridad, as well as this standing promise of a fair election, members of the junta turned against Pinochet’s plan to violently retain power. The referendum had been allowed, and thus it had to be followed through. Over the course of the next year, Augusto Pinochet and his military dictatorship would be phased out of the Chilean government. For the first time in fifteen years, the Chilean people would be allowed to elect their leader. For many, this was the beginning of an era free of repression, a restoration of agency and community in the absence of terror. For the Chilean Catholic Church, however, this was a moment of crisis. Political

¹ Eugene Robinson, “Chile’s Pinochet Beaten in Plebiscite on Rule,” The Washington Post. WP Company, October 6, 1988.

² United States Department of Defense. *Chilean Junta Meeting the Night of the Plebiscite*. Information Report. 01 January 1989. Accessed November 6, 2019.

liberation also meant social liberation, and combined with the legacy of the Vicaria de Solidaridad's ability to create resistance within institutions themselves, leaders in the Church began to fear they would lose their hold on the Chilean people. As a reaction to the changing political landscape, conservative Church leaders began the transitioning the structural makeup of the Church, putting the spiritual and political power back into the hands of the clergy.

This chapter's focus is on this moment of change. In covering the cruelty of the military junta, and the Church's resistance as a response, we have established the stakes of this political moment as one of deep emotion for the Chilean people. In order to know and explore this emotion, it is important to understand the mechanisms behind the change itself. This chapter will address historiography and various academic readings of this transition, as well as trace the actions of main players and the broader nature of Chile in the nineties. The main argument calls into question the motives of Church leaders and ties it to the consequences of their actions. The active and successful resistance of the Catholic Church in Chile through the Vicaria, and the increased presence of liberation theology in Latin America, created an imminent threat to the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. Where leftist ideologies promoted community-based organizing and solidarity, the Catholic Church pushed hierarchy and religious obedience. The ability of the Chilean Church to occupy the role of religious leadership while also providing aid and sanctuary against a conservative military regime placed them in a precarious position with various Church leaders. Even if the Chilean Church itself was not a leftist political force, their opposition to Pinochet's repression as well as the human rights violations generally disregarded by the Vatican made them a thorn in the side of both parties. However, there was no doubt that the work of the Vicaria was indeed beneficial for the public image of the Vatican, and thus rejecting it or even attempting to close it down under the regime would have incited international chastisement; Pinochet knew this as well as the conservative forces in the Church. Instead, the strategic move was to await the re-introduction of democracy to Chile, and then declare the Vicaria and its community counterparts unnecessary to the development of a healthy democracy.

Academic coverage of this historic moment is ample, however there are various readings and arguments as to why and how this transition of political and religious power occurred. Liesl Haas authored a chapter entitled "The Catholic Church in Chile: New Political Alliances" in the collection *Latin American Religion in Motion*. In this chapter she identifies the end of the dictatorship as a time of crisis for the Catholic Church and acknowledges the subsequent switch from progressive human rights advocacy to conservative preoccupation with social morals. Since the Catholic Church has historically held socially conservative views around abortion, marriage, and so on, the post-dictatorship era switched their concern from human rights to keeping hold of the morality of their diocese.³ As a result, many of the homilies and teachings turned from encouraging community solidarity to upholding many right-wing political perspectives. According to Haas, the Church didn't necessarily lose those social views when the coup occurred

³ Liesl Haas, "The Catholic Church in Chile: New Political Alliances," in *Latin American Religion in Motion: Tracking Innovation, Unexpected Change, and Complexity*. Florence: Routledge, 2004, pp. 45.

in 1973, they just became a second priority to the defense of human rights. While much of Haas' interpretation follows through with historical analysis, her implication that the foundation of the Church remained unchanged fails to acknowledge the historical context of liberation theology, as well as the dissolution of the Vicaria de Solidaridad. To view the changing political alignment of the Church as "ironic" in light of its progressive history, and to see these changes as secondary factors to a preoccupation with social morals, is to ultimately overlook the legacy of the Catholic Church's engagement and interest in maintaining political power.⁴ There was indeed a concern over a newly realized social liberation, and this no doubt contributed to the Church's turnover, but it was a *revival*. Pope John Paul II's papacy was famous for its desire to reestablish Church power in hierarchy, and Chile's Church seized the end of the dictatorship as a time to fall in line with the Pope's new agenda.⁵ The end of dictatorship coincided with the end of the Cold War, and the Catholic Church was doing its best to move away from this era of progressive religious rhetoric.

Cristian Parker puts forth a similar argument in his chapter on religion and culture in *Chile in the Nineties*. For Parker, "Democracy proposed not only the transformation of the State, but also the liberalization of culture."⁶ This, he argues, was a catalyst for the Catholic Church to increase their hold over the social and moral aspects of religious life. Like Haas, Parker excludes that the Church was already beginning to tighten controls under Fresno's leadership, and that liberation theology's prevalence under the regime directly threatened the hierarchical control of the Church. The Church certainly made its public statements for a return to social conservatism in relation to the liberal promises of democracy, however their previous actions and organizing away from the laity made it clear this change had ulterior motivations. Another argument that Parker puts forth, which is a common framing, is that the decrease of religious importance in daily life was a result of democracy itself.⁷ This argument posits democracy as a modern form of governance, and so with modernity comes a decreased interest, or loyalty, to religion. This argument requires too many assumptions to be taken as historically viable. It assumes that democracy is the highest evolved form of government, and additionally that religion fills some primitive function in a distraught society. It also assumes that progress happens linearly; that today we are more progressed than our ancestors before us. However, there is no high or evolved form of society, and such an assumption is Western-centric thought. It is also incredibly condescending to assume that religion is a need that melts away once modernity, which remains undefined by Parker, presents itself. Besides the broader historical problems of Parker's argument, in the Chilean context it also overlooks the actions of the Church. The decision of the Church to push towards conservatism in order to retake its stronghold on Chilean society had a

⁴ Haas, "The Catholic Church in Chile," pp. 51.

⁵ James Martin, "Opus Dei In the United States." *America- The National Catholic Weekly*. America Press, February 25, 1995. <https://web.archive.org/web/20090116173841/http://www.americamagazine.org/content/articles/martin-opusdei.cfm>.

⁶ Cristián Toloza, Eugenio Lahera, Michael A. Keller, and Roberto G. Trujillo. *Chile in the Nineties*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Libraries (Publisher, Michael A. Keller), 2000, pp. 638.

⁷ *Ibid* pp. 640.

direct impact on religious participation. By attempting to negotiate with the regime, taking more conservative positions on social organizing, and eventually dissolving the Vicaria de Solidaridad, the Church effectively alienated the majority of its base. The consequences of these actions can be seen to develop slowly over time, as different communities filtered out religion from their lives once it became clear the Church no longer represented them in their poverty and struggle. Thus, the documented decrease of religious participation in Chilean society at the end of the twentieth century was a direct result of the Church's actions, and not a consequence of the introduction of democracy.

Michael Fleet and Brian Smith's research confirms the decrease of Catholic participation, but also delves into the personal and political outlooks of Chileans in order to assess their motivations in turning away from the Church. They argue that the institutional Church had great impact and influence over the transition into democracy, but members of the Church did not. They also acknowledge that such a transition began much earlier than the 1988 plebiscite, especially for the Church.⁸ When looking into changing ideology in Chile, they surveyed Chileans and recorded their political affiliations and opinions regarding the government. They found that most low-income members of the Church, especially those involved in activism, had progressive views, though not excessively left. However, they point out "the openness of these low-income Catholics to collaboration with Marxists and to a political regime in which Christians and Marxists could work together permanently is worth noting."⁹ This is relevant as later they discuss how many of these grassroots organizers, once deeply involved in liberation theological methods to resist the regime, felt excluded from the Church as it phased out social and political organizing from its interests and structure. This, Fleet and Smith argue in conjunction with this thesis, was the result of Church actions that had been brewing for a decade.

"Two additional developments worth noting in connection with the local Church were carried out shortly after Msgr. Oviedo became archbishop of Santiago. The first was the formal dissolution, in March 1990, of the Coordinating Council of Christian Communities that brought together politically oriented Catholic activists during the years of transition. The second was the dismantling of the Vicaria de Solidaridad, in November 1991. In both cases, conservative bishops succeeded in getting rid of organizations that had troubled them in the past. Without having to call their activities or their political impact into question, they could point to the availability of secular agencies or outlets capable of carrying them on in the post military period. In doing so, they denied the Catholic activists in these organizations at least some of the respectability that their Church ties lent them."¹⁰

⁸ Michael Fleet and Brian H. Smith. "The Chilean Church and the Transition to Democracy." In *The Catholic Church and Democracy in Chile and Peru*, 111-58. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997. Accessed March 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvpj79tq.8, pg. 114

⁹ Ibid., pg. 146

¹⁰ Ibid., 182

This quote acknowledges the inner workings and political decisions the Church made without the consent of its members. By purposefully changing the way the Church functioned in order to restore hierarchical structure, Church leaders effectively alienated the base which had so actively participated during the regime. Diminished membership and deteriorating leadership were perhaps not consequences which the Church had foreseen, but they were nevertheless the results of cutting off the support and community organizing of the majority of its members.

In addition to the changing religious landscape, the Church had also given little protest to Pinochet's introduction of neoliberalism to the economy.¹¹ The advent of democracy only strengthened this economic framework, supported by the United States after the fall of the USSR. This economy had, and continues to have, very little positive impact on the majority of Chileans. Large swathes of low-income Chileans were targeted by the regime, and so turned to the Church with their own progressive politics as a place of safety and resistance to oppression. When capitalist policies were a part of Pinochet's regime, they were also a part of what was being resisted. However, when these policies were pulled through into the era of democracy, it became much more difficult to resist what continued to be unjust economic frameworks. Many were exhausted from nearly two decades of advocacy and protest, and with no institutional support from the Church, it became an increasingly uphill battle. José Cademartori, the minister of economics under the Allende administration, makes a study of the neoliberal structure of Chile in the 1990's, arguing against the view of the 90's as some kind of "golden era" for economics. He writes, "There has been a loss of confidence in the free market because the benefits of 'modernity' have been concentrated in a small minority who enjoy First World standards of living while the general population remains firmly ensconced in the Third World."¹² He notes that this model has left the majority of Chileans as "defenseless" and forced to "sacrifice [them]selves for the sake of maintaining the system."¹³ Fleet and Smith corroborate this view, writing "Chile's transition to democracy was not a categorical victory for the opposition. Despite economic crisis, protests, and the development of a strong and increasingly united opposition movement, Pinochet held out for his format and timetable, and made it difficult for any government that followed him to break decisively with his economic policies."¹⁴ Thus, neoliberalism served the wealthy and excluded the rest, all while continuing to benefit the fading power of Pinochet, who remained unaccountable for his crimes. It is relevant to note the impact of negative economic policies as their capitalist tendencies were yet another force which pushed out progressive political and religious thought. The Church failed to resist these policies as Cardinal Fresno, Silva's successor, denied any political or economic affiliation in favor of centrist placation of the regime. In attempting to wash away the past and move peacefully into

¹¹ Neoliberalism here refers to the ideology which relies on the free-market and "trickle-down" economics.

¹² José Cademartori "The Chilean Neoliberal Model Enters into Crisis." *Latin American Perspectives* 30, no. 5 (2003): 79-88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3184960>, pg. 79.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pg. 86

¹⁴ Michael Fleet and Brian H. Smith. "The Chilean Church and the Transition to Democracy." In *The Catholic Church and Democracy in Chile and Peru*, 111-58. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997. Accessed March 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvpj79tq.8, pg. 136.

the future, the Church fell short in truly reckoning with the oppression of not only the military regime, but also the economic policies which it brought. It is worth mentioning that these policies also benefited the Church, which would, over time, see their congregation change from majority low income to majority wealthy. Further still, the normalization of neoliberal culture would ensure the gradual death of Marxist thought and liberation theology. Without spending money or putting in an excess of effort, the Church was able to sit back and let the democratic transition shape society into a capitalist venture which benefited them greatly.

The result of this transition towards both neoliberal economics and conservative social values, some would argue, was the decline of liberation theology in mainstream religious discussion. Many academics have pondered the question of liberation theology in a modern age and have struggled with the possibility of a religious movement independent of a Church. It is clear that the institution has rejected this ideology, but there are many disenfranchised people across Latin America that have deep spiritual passion, and that suffer greatly. According to academics such as Judith Soares, this alone is enough to hold optimism for a revival of what once was a cornerstone of Latin American Catholicism and grassroots organizing.¹⁵ However, in Chile it is important to acknowledge the various barriers that have been put in place both by politics and the Church in an attempt to steer away from leftist ideologies. The economic policies are only a small piece of what became an active and direct attempt to exclude the values and needs of large populations of religious members. Many of these historians and academics have pointed to democracy as the advent of change in the Church, however this thesis argues that democracy was a mere tool used by the Church in order to frame their changing value system as progressive as opposed to regressive, which it certainly was. Pope John Paul II had an affinity to the Church of the past, before the small allowances of Vatican II allowed for Marxist thought and advocacy for the impoverished. The Vatican certainly supported a return to hierarchical structures, especially in Chile, where grassroots activism and the Vicaria had placed much of the agency in the hands of its members.

Thus, upon the eve of democratic transition, the Chilean Catholic Church adjusted its narrative to fit its opportunity. They used the liberated government as a way to say goodbye to any and all forms of oppression, and in doing so reasoned away the need for institutional support systems like the Vicaria. By ignoring the continuation of unjust living conditions and rampant poverty, and the disenfranchisement and continued missing status of the *desaparecidos*, the Church had set itself up to lose a significant amount of its membership over the next three decades. While Cardinal Juan Francisco Fresno pushed for a Church that took a much more centrist position against the government, democracy opened doors for a complete move away from the fascist history of the regime. Instead of dealing with the decades of oppression and persecution, they chose to turn towards a future with no reconciliation of the past. The Church advocated for a peaceful transition into a “liberated” democratic society, while still publicly expressing wariness in regard to democracy’s effect on social society. In addition to the

¹⁵ Judith Soares, “A Future for Liberation Theology?” in *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, no. 20:4 (2008), 480-486. Accessed June 04, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650802495080>.

continuing changes from outside the Church, leadership within also made a transition. Upon the decision of the plebiscite, a conference was held in Punta de Tralca to bring together a “majority” of ‘conservative’ and ‘moderate’ bishops. They met to decide how the national Church would adjust to this inauguration of democracy, and also how to best encourage national reconciliation of the crimes of the dictatorship.¹⁶ It was notable that three of the bishops missing from the conference were well-known progressives, and furthermore the concluding decision expressed a hope to rely on more “traditional church doctrine,” clearly an attempt to move away from the leftist antics of their Latin American peers.¹⁷ This meeting signals the true mark of transition. Cardinal Fresno’s power as the conservative archbishop of Santiago may have been stifled by the international support of the Vicaria, but with the end of the dictatorship came the opportunity to reframe the Church’s political position. With the introduction of democracy, conservatives would argue, surely there was no longer a need for an organization which documents human rights violations. They purposefully reframed the duties of the Vicaria, and various other local organizing networks, in order to regain the hierarchical approach to power they had held before Vatican II.

Perhaps one of the key strategies in this moment of transition was the reframing of human rights as something entirely separate from political alignments. As a general concept, of course advocacy for human rights is not a position which belongs to any singular political party. However, the legacy of human rights in Chile, and more broadly in Latin America, was consistently tied to a leftist struggle against right-wing authoritarian regimes.¹⁸ When Cardinal Fresno took up the mantle of archbishop, he was clear to state “Don’t take me as a rightist or a leftist, just take me as a pastor who is trying to stress the unity that the Lord asks of us.”¹⁹ Thus, he made clear his position in favor of human rights, and yet also against the politics of liberation theology. In doing so, he pulled the popularly received human rights advocacy of the Church away from the leftist ideology of many of its lower ranking clergy and laity. Essentially making it so his socially conservative views around society and the structural formation of the Church could stay intact, whilst also not completely abandoning his parishioners to the brutality of the regime; a political move which would have caused a great deal of international backlash. This reframing of human rights advocacy from a radical fight to a keeping of the peace was carried on by Cardinal Cavada in his public calls for forgiveness.

The era where progressive liberation theology shaped Catholic practice was quickly drawing to a close, and Cardinal Fresno’s time would end even before the Vicaria, as he reached the age limit of seventy-five in 1990 and handed in his resignation to Pope John Paul II. His chosen successor was Carlos Oviedo Cavada, a conservative as well, though his character was certainly much less vibrant. As the archbishop of Santiago in the time directly following a

¹⁶ Cristina D. Ferrer, “Bishops View Political Role of Church,” In *Que Pasa*. Dec 22, 1988.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, Brazil, etc.

¹⁹ “Church Leader Plays Pivotal Role in Chilean Political Conflict,” The Associated Press. February 23, 1984, Thursday, PM cycle. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SJ4-JSCO-0011-62VJ-00000-00&context=1516831>.

military regime, Cavada insisted on “a spirit of forgiveness and understanding.”²⁰ Considering the brutal torture many civilians underwent, as well as the loved ones who were disappeared, a “spirit of forgiveness” was a relatively conservative stance to take against the war crimes of a regime. Furthermore, this is all with the knowledge that Augusto Pinochet would not face human rights abuse allegations, and instead would *continue* to serve as commander of the armed forces until 1998. In this position, Pinochet would purposefully disrupt attempts at human rights trials against those who had been involved with the regime, and he retained immunity until a fateful trip to Europe in the late 90s, which put him in a precarious diplomatic position.²¹ Thus, even in a democracy, the past trauma of human rights violations was discarded with little healing and no retribution. Cardinal Cavada’s encouragement of forgiveness and understanding was, for many, proof that the institution which had once heavily catalogued human rights abuses and their legal ramifications no longer cared for the pursuit of such justice. Societal trauma following something as intense as a seventeen-year regime no doubt presented many problems to larger Chilean society, and yet the dismissal of it by the Church showed a significant lack of urgency and community-based networking that had once made it a sanctuary to many.



Despite efforts to erase the past, echoes of the regime remain. This image was taken in the Londres neighborhood of Santiago, where there was an infamous detention center. On the street there are plaques which give the names, ages, and affiliations of all disappeared there. The paint on the door reads “Here [there is] torture.”

However, despite Fresno and other leaders’ best efforts to reconcile Church participation with conservative hierarchical views, Catholic membership was already beginning to decline by 1990. As previously referenced, the closing of the Vicaria in 1992 provides an example of the extent to which the Church was willing to go to close down community based religious organizations. The dissolution of the Vicaria can be seen as a landmark for the political transition of the Church. An organization which had provided sanctuary and legal representation for those suffering under the regime, as well as catalogued and published human rights violations of the

²⁰ “Pinochet Reacts to Contreras Court Ruling,” In *El Mercurio*. Jun 5, 1995.

²¹ “Europe | Pinochet Arrested in London,” BBC News. BBC, October 17, 1998. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/195413.stm>.

government, was suddenly deemed useless in a new democratic era. According to the Church, in its now changing conservative leadership, the duties of the Vicaria were transferred to that of the Social Pastorate, a new office that put the Vicaria's responsibilities exclusively into the hands of the clergy. This new office was inaugurated by known conservative forces in the Church, most notably Cardinal Juan Francisco Fresno who had previously relinquished his position as Archbishop of Santiago to Carlos Oviedo Cavada, the man who presented the Pastorate to the audience.²² The facade of the Pastorate was briefly lived, a feeble attempt to not make the transition so abrupt. It is widely acknowledged today that the legacy of the Vicaria de Solidaridad is carried on through its continued archives, the Documentation and Archive Foundation of the Vicaria de Solidaridad located in a tangential neighborhood of Santiago.²³ In fact, besides the news articles reporting on the inauguration ceremony, there is little to no information available on the Social Pastorate. Most likely relegated to being a side project of already busy clergy, the Pastorate quickly faded out of the Church's main frame.

The Vicaria's end was a blow to impoverished and struggling communities across Santiago, but it was certainly not the only factor of this political transition. When Fresno took office in the 1980s, he stayed fairly distant from the Vicaria itself, as well as other activist groups, and was publicly vocal concerning his socially conservative views. This was a sign for many that the Church was quickly becoming closed to the members who had made up its base structure. Father Francisco Sampedro of the Catholic Church in Santiago spoke of this development in a news publication, stating "some sectors of the hierarchy do not appreciate the lay person..."²⁴ This same article pays close attention to the rise of Evangelicalism, specifically the Pentecostal church, which provides specific roles to members seeking to engage with community activism. According to the author, "As a result of this activism, which makes them channel most of their energy towards spiritual betterment, they becomes more responsible and then they feel more valued by society."²⁵ The same sense of reasoning can be seen with the actions of *comunidades de base*—the base communities for local churches which engage in spiritual and communal organizing, vigils, support, and resistance.²⁶ These *comunidades de base* are few and far between today, but during the time directly before and during the dictatorship they made up much of the Catholic communities, and undoubtedly provided this sense of responsibility and value the article underlines. *Comunidades de base* consisted of neighbors and families who took action in their own barrios for the protection of their own children, the return of *desaparecidos*, security against other militant groups and criminal issues, and the overall amelioration of their community. When churches needed organizing for holidays, volunteers for roles such as legal or medical aid, spreading of human rights pamphlets, and the gathering of

²² Jose Gonzalez, "Vicariate Renamed, To Continue Social Work," *La Nacion*, May 12, 1993.

²³ "La Vicaría De La Solidaridad (1973-1992) - Memoria Chilena," Memoria Chilena: Portal. Accessed November 30, 2019. <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-3547.html>.

²⁴ Daniel Seisdedos, "Declining Influence of the Catholic Church Viewed," In *Que Pasa*. Nov 12, 1990.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Antonio Bentue, Interview by September Sky Porras. Personal Interview. Universidad Catolica en San Joaquin, Santiago de Chile, July 20, 2019.

information, the *comunidades de base* were the on the frontlines. Once the agency of volunteering and organizing for a cause which benefited their communities was taken from them, many turned away from the Church. It was not such a direct hit that the Church attendance immediately plummeted, but over the course of the 1990's it would become clear to many that the Church had much different goals and motivations than it had ten years before. Without that feeling of community and value present, the appeal of regimented Church practices and politics faded for many Chileans.

Many studies have confirmed this downward trend. In a sociological survey conducted by Matías Andrés Bargsted and Nicolás De la Cerda, they use political alignment, religious affiliation, and church attendance as a means through which to measure the trends of political de-alignment experienced in Chile in the beginning of the twenty-first century. The research shows a sustained decline in the Chilean Catholic population, specifically those that attend mass regularly.²⁷ Another interesting take away from the survey and accompanying analysis is the downward trend for right-wing Catholics. At first glance, this finding is in tension with an argument for a rise in Catholic conservatism, but the survey itself does not separate its findings between Church attending and non-Church attending Catholics, nor does it account for the general decrease in the population of Chilean Catholics specifically. Thus, this decrease can be accounted for in the makeup of mass itself, as the changing dynamics of the Church in the 90's allowed for much more conservative homilies focused on social morals.²⁸ Therefore, it is still fair to assume those who actually attend the mass will likely be of a more conservative variety. Another finding in this research which underlines the centrality of the Catholic Church specifically, is that the same trends of decrease are *not* found in the Evangelical community.²⁹ In fact, as the previous news article mentioned, there has been a continual rise in the Evangelical community in Chile, and more broadly in Latin America. In the context of this discussion, this is likely due to the fact that Catholics and Evangelicals do not have the same leadership nor the same history in the nation of Chile; the guidance of Catholic Church leaders has then found their Church in a very different situation in the twenty-first century.

Another set of research which documents this decrease in the importance of Catholic life in Chile is a survey conducted by the World Values Survey. WVS is a network of social scientists attempting to document changing values within communities, and how those values impact social lives and perspectives. Their surveys ask questions which range from opinions on social morals and family life, to involvement in political organizations. In order to track the value which participants place on various sectors of their life, the surveys functions which a numerical system; participants use 1 to indicate Very Important, 2 as Rather Important, 3 as Not Very Important, and 4 as Not At All Important. In the questionnaire from 1990, a large majority

²⁷ Matías Andrés Bargsted and Nicolás De la Cerda, "Ideological Preferences and Evolution of the Religious Cleavage in Chile, 1998–2014," *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 2 (June 25, 2019).

²⁸ I have taken this view upon reflection on my interview with Antonio Bentue, a Chilean theologian whom I interviewed on the topic of this changing political dynamic in the Chilean Catholic Church.

²⁹ Matías Andrés Bargsted and Nicolás De la Cerda, "Ideological Preferences and Evolution of the Religious Cleavage in Chile, 1998–2014," *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 2 (June 25, 2019).

of participants individually ranked belonging to a human rights group, belonging to a religious organization, doing unpaid volunteer work for a religious group, and doing unpaid volunteer work for a human rights group as either 1 or 2 in the set of importance. By the time of the next questionnaire, in 1996, answers changed drastically. While a large majority still answered that they were religious, there was a striking decrease in the value with which they placed active membership to a voluntary religious organization, now marked at an indifferent 3. This change is only further substantiated by the questionnaire from 2000, which shows a much more diverse set of responses when participants were asked how often they attend Church.³⁰ In a country once highly religious, many across the board responded by saying they attended only once a month, and certainly less than they used to. The downward trajectory exemplified by the World Value Survey questionnaire continues to support the claim that spiritually and emotionally, Chileans feel more and more removed from their religious life.



Photo taken at the entrance of the Vicaria de Solidaridad. Military police hose down civilians attempting to enter the Vicaria. Circa 1980.



Photo taken at the entrance of what is today the offices of the Archdiocese. There is a plaque on the wall that pays tribute to the Vicaria, and where the fire truck once was stands a statue of Cardinal Silva. 2019.

We are attempting to understand the motivations the Catholic Church had in Chile to transition political alignments, especially when the result of such an action would directly lead to a decrease in Church membership and participation. Various authors have argued for democracy's power in such a moment and have pointed to political change as a catalyst for religious change.³¹ However, this thesis argues that the transition to democracy was instead used as a tool through which the Church was able to complete their return to hierarchical power

³⁰ Inglehart, R., C. Haerper, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Three - Country-Pooled Datafile Version: www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV3.jsp. Madrid: JD Systems Institute.

³¹ E.g. Haas, Parker, etc

structures and conservative social morals. The question of why they would go through with such an abrupt change can be traced back to power; John Paul II's stricter Vatican and Cardinal Fresno's placation of the regime all point towards a desire within the leadership of the Catholic Church to return to a time before Marxist meddling and the introduction of liberation theology. This desire was balanced on the misreading of liberation theology, and its influences such as grassroots organizing and the Vicaria de Solidaridad, as a threat to the control of the Church. Instead of acknowledging the vast participation and active membership of the Chilean population, especially in Santiago, the Church felt it did not exercise enough control over the social and cultural aspects of citizen life. Furthermore, they underestimated low-income Chileans' belief in resistant institutions such as the Vicaria, and their continued abuse by the economic systems of neoliberal democracy. The Church put its faith in democratic promises of liberation and excess, and continued to harbor negative sentiments towards the ideologies of Marxism which advocated for the dissolution of religious institutions. It is likely that they did not realize the consequence of changing political alignments and religious routine would have such a negative impact on Catholic Church attendance and the popularity of spiritual life. There are many remaining questions which inquire too deep for us to speculate, such as why these consequences were unforeseen, and how removed the clerical bodies were from impoverished living. However, it is true that many priests and clergy in impoverished areas remained dedicated to their communities in spite of the directions of the larger national church. A prime example would be Padre Mariano Puga, who continued for decades after the regime to promote liberation theology and advocacy for the poor. Still, it was difficult to live or organize in a certain way so unsupported by the institution one belongs to, and thus many of these communities continue to fade out of history. The eventual move into the Concertacion government at the beginning of the twenty-first century, would turn eyes towards larger national problems, and time would take its toll on the many poor, religious communities of Santiago.³²

³² The Concertacion government refers here mostly to the presidency of Michelle Bachelet, beginning in 2006, and the ensuing educational and social protests.

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