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THE CHRISTIAN LEFT IN LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS

by Michael Dodson
Texas Christian University

After decades of neglect, interest in the political impact of Latin America Catholicism rose dramatically in the late 1960s. Attention focused on the church because it began to appear that Catholicism might have unimagined potential for promoting social change, particularly in a continent wracked by social upheaval and political instability. (Drekonja, 1971: 59-65) In both word and deed, the post-conciliar church showed a changing orientation toward society, openly involving itself in social questions. In fact, by the time of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) in Medellín, Colombia in August 1968, the church seemed to be changing so rapidly in its social and political attitudes that reports of a revolutionary church began to accompany discussions of the political situation in Latin America. Since 1968, an important literature has grown out of the effort to understand this change in Latin American Catholicism. The Latin American experience sent students of the church back to a question first posed by Marx and Weber: can a traditional religious institution become a source of energy for changing society? (Silvert, 1967; Smith, 1975).

The search for an answer to this question has resulted in a variety of perspectives and arguments about the relationship of religion to social change. Depending on which country one studied and at what point in time, writers have argued that the church was a dynamic force for social change (D. Smith, 1970; Sanders, 1970; Drekonja, 1971; Williams, 1969, 1973; Turner, 1971; Vallier, 1967, 1970), a moderate force for social change (B. Smith, 1975, 1976; Levine and Wilde, 1977), a mild obstacle to social change (deKadt, 1967, 1970, 1971), and a serious obstacle to social change (Mutchler, 1969; Vekemans, 1964).[1] Such diverse points of view are not necessarily contradictory because the post-conciliar Catholic church in Latin America has spawned a wide range of groups possessing an array of strategies for political action. A major difficulty in the literature, however, is the tendency to explain and judge the entire range of groups and points of view from a single interpretive framework. Despite shadings of interpretation and nuance in the literature, the predominant conceptual approach to the study of the Latin American church and its role in social change is

derived explicitly from the developmental paradigm which shaped the study of comparative politics in the 1960s.[2] Thus, there is more overlap in the interpretations mentioned above than first meets the eye.

In shifting through the literature one is struck by the tendency of North American writers to generalize about the "progressives" who are changing the church in the wake of Vatican II and Medellín. Although the term "revolutionary" is sometimes (loosely) used, it is clear that the term is often used as a synonym for progressive. The impression one is left with is that since 1968 the progressives have been the dynamic force in Latin American Catholicism and have effectively defined the church's viable range of sociopolitical options. The right and left have received markedly less attention. Both conservatives and radicals are either ignored in the theoretical writings, or assigned a negative, counter-developmental role. For example, the leading theorist of church change in Latin America, Ivan Vallier, has demonstrated repeatedly in his work how the underlying conceptual paradigm of this literature precludes the possibility that Catholic radicalism could produce "constructive" social change. The present essay questions the assumption on which that paradigm rests. While the anti-developmental role of church conservatives may perhaps be assumed, the counter-developmental consequences of radicalism require documentation since the explicit goal of the radicals is to make the church an agent of social change.

In the present essay I have selected three writers who have been notably prominent among the students of the Latin American church. I attempt to explicate briefly the framework of interpretation which they have used to criticize and evaluate the political behavior of progressives and radicals in the Church. It is important, I believe, to clarify how the developmentalist perspective shapes the way in which these writers distinguish the progressives from the radicals. (Later in the paper I will attempt to show how the distinction looks from the point of view of the radicals.) Analysis will be based on a comparison of religious change in three countries — Argentina, Chile, and Colombia — where struggle and innovation in the church has been notably intense. In each case, both progressive and radical groups have emerged among the clergy. Moreover, the radical group in each country became sufficiently organized to enter the political arena. Thus, we are able to compare the thought and practice of the Argentine Movement of Priests for the Third World, the Chilean Christians for Socialism, and the Colombian Golconda movement. Through comparison of these three radical movements I will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the development paradigm which informs the literature on the

church and social change in Latin America.

The second question guiding this analysis follows logically from the first and has two parts. On the one hand, there is a need to allow the radicals to construct their own paradigm. Hence, I explore the way church change in the post-conciliar period looks from the point of view of the left. What interpretive framework is employed by the left to explain and criticize the Latin American church's role in social change? The answer to this question entails an implicit critique of the development paradigm. On the other hand, the radicals themselves must be criticized, but in terms of their own paradigm. Starting from its own goals, what have been the successes and failures of the Christian left in achieving religious and social change?

The Developmental Paradigm and the Study of the Christian Left

Religious innovation raised high expectations that the church might assume a constructive role in promoting social change and political development. Imbued with the hope and optimism that pervaded the "decade of development," North American writers were attracted to the prospect that so traditional and conservative an institution as the Roman Catholic Church would embrace and promote the values of modernization. With the church at least nominally commanding the loyalty of over ninety percent of the Latin American people, a visible shift on its part in a modernizing direction was envisioned as a great stimulus to the "nation-builders." The case of the Chilean church, which actually had begun its modernizing shift before Vatican II, stood out among the national churches of the region; indeed, it became a model in the minds of North American observers. Just as United States policy makers looked to Chile as a test case of "religious system development" (Vallier, 1967: 466). It is no coincidence, then, that the bulk of this literature on religion and social change shares so fully in the language, concepts and perspectives of the broader development literature (Almond, 1966; Pye, 1966; Huntington, 1968 and 1971).

Edward J. Williams (1969: 335, 342), for example, conceived modernization in the church as a process of reformulating religious values so that they promote "value integration directed to consensus-making," and culminate in "religiously inspired political integration." Of course, the traditional church had promoted value consensus. But the new value consensus which Williams perceived emphasized "the state as the ultimate integrator of the emerging pluralistic society." This was to be a value consensus in

which "Catholic modernizers" sought "to minimize the competition between the old and new elites and to avoid unnecessary and counterproductive conflict." More prophetic church forces are dismissed as utopian and counterproductive.[3]

The perspective which informs the work of Einaudi and Williams is most fully elaborated in a series of works by Ivan Vallier (1967, 1970, 1972). Also using the Chilean case to develop the theoretical criteria of religious system development, Vallier constructs a model of church development in which the church initiates and sponsors "a framework of order" relevant to "injustice" and "a generalized need for rapid and deep changes in the institutional system." Vallier's developed church in fact represents "a new conception of order." The focus on "order" is not accidental for Vallier's theory requires that church development produce "symbols and normative principles that legitimate fundamental change but in such ways that continuity with certain elements can be observed" (Vallier, 1967: 466). Achieving this objective requires the avoidance of "partisan politics." Success promotes social integration and political stability. Political stability, in turn, enables the church to remain above partisan politics. Remarkably, Vallier's developed religious system promotes "fundamental" social change without ever soiling itself with what one writer has called the "messiness" of politics. The church exercises its religious power in socially relevant ways without exercising political power.

Like Einaudi, Vallier is quite aware that Medellín stimulated a range of approaches to religious innovation. He neatly captures this diversity by dichotomizing "pastoral" and "clerical" radicals; the former correspond to Williams' and Einaudi's modernizers. The latter are those in the church who opt for a non-liberal analysis of society and a more clearly prophetic interpretation of the gospel. Vallier's virulent criticism of the clerical radicals typifies the normative framework of the developmental approach which informs the literature now under discussion. In one of his last contributions to the literature, Vallier (1972) made abundantly clear what had only been implicit in his earlier work as well as that of Williams and Einaudi---that a prophetic "modernizing" church is not radical but liberal, and, indeed, apolitical. Taking Chile and Colombia as polar types of church political involvement, Vallier expounded the differences between "pastoral radicalism" and "clerical radicalism" as seen from a developmental perspective. In pastoral radicalism the priest avoids using his religious office as a basis for building up social and political authority. He carefully sidesteps all partisan political involvement or identification. In his pastoral activity

"the religious floor is a generalized source of certainty and identity for other roles in society, but it is not the base on which all choices are made" (Vallier, 1972: 22). The religious norms fostered by the priest are suprapartisan in this model, transcending specific political options and therefore rising above political conflict. Thus, pastoral radicals can promote the "christian revolution," while at the same time helping to "de-politicize" society and foster "civic development" and "nation-building."

The clerical radicals present a sharp contrast. By stressing the Colombian example, Vallier converts the case of Camillo Torres, the well-known guerrilla priest who died in a skirmish with government troops in February, 1966, into a prototype of clerical radicalism. By doing so he identifies the Christian left with Camilismo, guerrilla warfare, and in his words, violent "assaults on the establishment." In Vallier's view the clerical radicals are politically "retrogressive" (counter-developmental) for the following reasons: First, they engage in direct political action through religio-political movements of the left. They try to "lead the social revolution." Since such activity is partisan it must be conflictual in its impact and therefore retrogressive with respect to nation-building. Second, they organize their religious roles from the perspective of a "comprehensive closed religious framework." Like the protagonists of the Protestant Reformation, the clerical radicals are fanatical men who define all issues in terms of a single, unchangeable religious perspective. Thirdly, and with unintended irony, Vallier charges the clerical radicals with having a unidimensional and dogmatic religious perspective <u>because</u> they utilize Marxist social analysis, which is intrinsically dogmatic. Finally, the clerical radicals make a "traditionalizing demand" for the laity to "defend" the church's institutional structures and dominance in society, or to augment the corporate interests of the religious institution (Vallier, 1972: 22-23). The analysis which follows examines this dichotomy between pastoral and clerical radicals, measuring it against the actual experience of the religio-political movements of the left in Argentina, Chile and Colombia. I will try to determine whether any or all of the characteristics attributed to the left by Vallier are valid. Are the clerical radicals uniformly committed to Camilismo? I have tried to suggest here that Vallier's approach prejudges these issues. Within the theoretical framework of developmentalism there is no place for the left. It is for this reason that we must judge the left in terms of its own goals and then relate our findings back to the charges made by Vallier.

Two important points emerge from the preceding discussion. First of all, the terminology which has been used to describe church change in Latin America has been excessively loose and broad. At one level, by lumping everything from Chilean Christian Democracy to the guerrilla priesthood of Camilo Torres under one set of labels (thus making modernizers and revolutionaries synonymous) the literature leads any casual observer to the conclusion that a single, homogeneous, change-oriented church has evolved in Latin America. Skepticism in this regard leads one to take a closer look, and doing so reveals that underlying the seemingly inclusive language of the literature is a normative framework which sharply limits the range of what is to be included in the "left." Not only does this underlying framework preclude Camilo Torres' being regarded as a modernizer, it leads students of the church away from the study of priest groups consciously organized for direct political action. Such groups have appeared in virtually every country in Latin America, including Chile, yet they have scarcely been noticed by North American writers preoccupied with the search for agents of development.

Secondly, how are we to determine who and what constitutes the Christian left? What criteria can be used to sharpen our analytical focus? I will argue that an effective definition of the Christian left lies between the two extremes of Christian Democracy, which represents a liberal progressivism, and Camilismo, which represents a fully developed revolutionary position. Between "reform and revolution" lies a significant field of Christian radicalism which rejects both reformism and violent revolution and thus the underlying assumption that these are the only two options Latin Americans possess. The fact is that the religio-political movements to be discussed here only look radical when compared to the Christian Democrats and when evaluated in terms of developmental criteria; when compared to Camilismo they look moderate indeed! What unites the Christian left is a common political theory, the theology of liberation, which encompasses a radical theology, a radical social analysis borrowed largely from the neo-marxist literature on dependency, and a moderate political program of democratic socialism. As thus defined the Christian left does include those who have engaged in direct political action and who utilize marxist analysis, as Vallier contended. It remains to be seen whether this has made their activities inherently retrogressive. On the other hand, the theology of liberation and a "liberating praxis" do not necessarily imply a "closed religious framework" and a call for the laity to "defend" the church's corporate interests. On the contrary, as I will attempt to show, liberation theology requires the opposite. The Christian left has struggled to remain within the church, and yet has worked consistently to undercut its traditional institutional prerequisites and bases of power.

Liberation Theology: The Normative Criteria for Religio-Political Action

It is essential to examine the relationship between thought and practice in the study of the Latin American Christian left. Methodologically speaking, a dialectical approach to the church-world relationship is the central theme of liberation theology. Below I discuss briefly the crisis in the church with respect to development which occurred after 1965 and the subsequent turning away from the capitalist model toward socialism. This discussion will show how the crisis in perspective made necessary the creation of new clerical roles, "prophetic" roles which seemed to necessitate the organization of individual ministries into religio-political movements of the left. In the process I will outline the liberation values which inform the political program of such movements.

Officially the Catholic church acknowledged that capitalism as well as socialism produced detrimental social consequences as early as 1891 with the publication of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum. But by 1960 the Latin American church had shown no inclination to condemn capitalist expansion in Latin America on the grounds that it brought little or no improvement in the lives of the vast majority of people. Only in Chile (Sigmund, 1973) and Brazil (deKadt, 1970) had criticisms of capitalism been clearly voiced within the church. In the case of Chile, the Christian Democratic movement attempted to carve out a "third way" between capitalism and socialism. With the election of Eduardo Frei to the presidency in 1964, Chilean Christian Democrats got a chance to demonstrate that a "third position" could transform social structures and bring real change for the better in the lives of the poor. In power Christian Democracy became closely identified with the reformist position of the Alliance for Progress, a position supported by the United States and based on capitalist development. Frei's "revolution in liberty" meant reform within capitalist economic structures and formally democratic electoral processes; it excluded the more profound change implied in socialism.

The general failure of the Alliance for Progress, and the specific failure of the Frei regime to bring about land reform, to "denationalize" the Chilean economy or to raise the living standard of the great mass of poor undercut the appeal of a reformist path to development. Indeed, these failures led to a rethinking of the very concept of development and a gradual rejection of its premises. Activist clergy began to sense that capitalist development (dependent development)[4] implied not progress but deepening poverty in their countries and less likelihood that democratic institutions

of a participatory nature would flourish. Gradually there emerged in the church (as in society at large) a perspective which saw "development" as exploitation, benefiting the rich nations and select elites in Latin America at the expense of the great majority of ordinary people. From this changing awareness came the development of a theology of liberation which adopted a conflict model of social analysis to replace the consensus model of the developmentalists, and attempted to articulate a vision of the good society quite different from that presented by Western capitalism. Let us turn first to the prophetic ministry which is developed to meet the exigencies of a conflictual social order. Then we will examine the character of the political alternative envisioned in liberation theology.

When seen from the vantage point of the poor, Latin America's social order now appeared laden with "structural" obstacles to change. Poverty was less a function of individual failure than "systemic" failure. The political interests and policies of both local and foreign elites came to seem not only inconsistent with but diametrically opposed to those of the Latin American masses. This appraisal of the social order recalled the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament gospels. That ministry had been fashioned precisely to meet a condition of captivity, exploitation and oppression. Priests adopting this new perspective found it necessary to revise both their theology and their ministry in terms of the ancient prophetic tradition in order to struggle against "structural sin" (Schillebeeckx, 1970: 27).

Moving out of a purely confessional role and into the public domain brought with it the need to clarify the priests' social role. Two broad themes evolved. First, for radical priests a prophetic ministry involves the interpretation of the gospel in light of social conflict and exploitation, not with an eye to transcending or avoiding such conflict for the sake of some "higher" consensus. A prophetic ministry interprets the "signs of the times," an activity with two dimensions, one negative, the other positive. Negatively, a prophetic ministry calls for the denunciation of structural sin, cause and consequence alike. This means attempting, through social analysis, to determine where the chain of exploitation begins. Assuming the cause of exploitation can be found, a prophetic ministry also entails the public exposure and critique of those causes. Radical clergy have thought of this as "desacrilizing" or delegitimizing the current social order in its repressive aspects. It is obvious here how sharply Christian radicalism differs from Christian reformism. The latter, as Williams (1969 and 1973) and Vallier (1967 and 1970) make abundantly clear, has no provision at all

for a denunciatory role for it is not imagined that the social and political orders could require "desacrilization."

Second, the tearing down of unjust structures must be accompanied by the building up of a new order. Hence radical clergy also have assumed a role of community leadership. They have attempted to organize their followers for political action. In this role they have been guided by their vision of the Christian eschatology (historical project), and a vision of "hope" for the future that is both spiritual and temporal, and therefore political. Liberation theology (theory) and priests organizing for social change (praxis) are thus bound together in a single prophetic action.

Finally, as to the social goals which inform this prophetic Christian vision, two themes form the core of liberation theology. First, liberationists argue that meaningful social change in Latin America implies the full participation of ordinary people in the shaping of their own lives. Profound dependence and passivity must give way to an equally profound participation. Second, social structures must be reordered to promote human cooperation and to redistribute social values in a more egalitarian fashion. These two propositions imply participatory democracy and humanist socialism.[5]

Radical Latin American clergy follow the democratic tradition associated with the name of Rousseau rather than the more cautious and skeptical tradition deriving from Locke (Sabine, 1952). Each tradition is grounded on the concept of freedom, but their points of view with respect to freedom differ. The Lockeian conception is based on a model of "bourgeois" social relations (MacPherson, 1964) appropriate to a market society which rewards egocentrism, individualism, and competition. In their view, as in Rousseau's, such a society is inherently conflictual. Its core value of freedom is "freedom from" norms imposed by the collectivity (Berlin, 1967). In the eyes of radical clergy this view of freedom corresponds to the social conditions of liberal democracies and implies materialism, social conflict, and exploitation. They opt instead for an egalitarian approach to freedom which seeks not to disengage individuals from the collectivity but rather to enable them to be free within it. Liberation theology thus emphasizes a "positive" kind of liberty, a "freedom to," which stresses participation and self-determination and seeks to create social conditions which make both available to all citizens. Following Rousseau, liberationists seek to operationalize the value of equality in their society, to render it inseparable from the equally important value of freedom.

Their attempt to integrate the values of freedom and equality has led radical priests to promote the value of

socialism as well. In practice, structural sin means that capitalist social and political institutions are the chief obstacle to the fulfillment of democratic values. The only way to expand the range of choice within which poor and exploited peoples can identify and meet their own goals is to transform capitalist society into a socialist society. The following assessment by the Argentinian José Míguez Bonino (1976:) illustrates how democracy and socialism go together in the thought of liberation theology:

> Humanization is for capitalism an unintended by-product, while it is for socialism an explicit goal. Solidarity is for capitalism accidental, for socialism it is essential. In terms of their basic ethos, Christianity must critique capitalism radically, in its fundamental intention, while it must critique socialism functionally, in its failure to fulfill its purpose.

Three Case Studies of Liberation Praxis

The Formation of Radical Movements

Radical priest movements did not bloom as suddenly in Latin America as events suggested. Particularly in Argentina and Chile such movements had been coalescing for nearly a decade through the worker-priest experiment which, by placing priests in factory jobs to share the daily life of the working class, became an important catalyst in "politicizing" the clergy. Initially backed by the hierarchy in order to recapture flagging interest in the church among the working class, the experiment passed through a rapid evolution as immersion in the life of working people brought priests face to face with massive poverty, social dislocation and individual alienation. Worker-priests discovered a vast rift in the working class, between a labor aristocracy on the one hand, and a vast sea of unemployed or underemployed on the other for whom the pursuit of "development" brought no improvement in living standard. Between the conclusion of Vatican II in 1965 and the convocation of the CELAM meeting in Medellín in 1968, worker-priests in virtually all countries of Latin America began to interpret this as the inevitable consequence of "dependent" capitalist development.

The worker-priest phenomenon also developed in Colombia and with much the same consequences as in Argentina and Chile, but it came later and involved a more rapid transition through the stages of pastoral commitment which culminated in political activism. This seems to have been the result of the more

conservative character of the church as a whole in Colombia, and to the fact that a much lower ratio of its priests were foreign or foreign trained. It may also derive from the less industrial and European socio-economic profile of the country. The later arrival and more rapid assimilation of the worker-priest experience to political radicalism in Colombia seems to have fostered a more intense militancy and less tactical flexibility on the part of the Christian left there.

Thus, the process of turning away from developmentalism to embrace liberation matured among Argentine and Chilean clergy for a decade or more. In its early phases it involved informal exchanges among priests with similar experiences. The earliest issue was how to gain elbow room for further and more effective social commitment within the existing organizational structure of the church. How far would the hierarchy permit the clergy to go? Priests worked alone or in teams in their own parishes, in factories, in working-class barrios or in shanty-towns with only informal networks of communication to bind them together. Initially they sought to expand their social role and buttress their commitment by obtaining the support of their hierarchy. In Chile such support came more easily than it did in Argentina or Colombia. Indeed, its own gradual movement leftward during the 1960's made the Chilean hierarchy an example to rank and file clergy, particularly those of the worker-priest variety.

In Argentina the reaction at this stage was much harsher. In many areas of the country the hierarchy not only resisted the leftward drift of the clergy but sought to crush such a move by suspending priests, moving them to remote parishes, or even acquiescing in the government's deportation of foreign clergy. In this respect, the early experience of Argentina's radical priests resembles that of Colombia more than Chile, confirming Vallier's (1967: 471) characterization of the churches in the three countries. What is significant, however, is that the history of the radical priest movement in Argentina does not conform to the pattern predicted in Vallier's model; in retrospect, Argentina's experience resembles that of Chile far more than that of Colombia. Chile became more radical than Vallier's theory predicted and Argentina became less so. Neither reached the degree of radicalism or confrontation that occurred in Colombia. Yet only Colombia continues to have an organized radical priest movement today.

What factors helped to precipitate the transition from a loose network of social-activist priests serving diverse parishes to organized, nationwide movements of politically committed clergy? The answers vary among the three countries.

In Argentina two factors stand out. The first is the maturity of the worker-priest experiment as discussed above. By May, 1968, when the Movement of Priests for the Third World was formally created at Córdoba, the worker-priest experiment was a decade old. In the urban, industrial setting of Argentina, this meant that a "pooling" of highly motivated priests with common, radicalizing experiences took place. These priests were exposed in the process to a working class political culture heavily influenced by the legacy of peronism. Thus, a marked uniformity of perspective was encouraged by the nature of the social and cultural milieu in which the priests worked and this uniformity lent a considerable coherence to their movement even in its early stages.

The second factor is the role of the hierarchy, which is paradoxical. On the one hand, the obdurate resistance of certain preconciliar bishops to the overt activities of radical priests in their dioceses and the heavy-handed penalties meted out by such bishops pushed radical priests to one another's defense. expelled from one diocese were welcomed in another. And the complicity of government authorities in several such incidents made it seem all the more essential for priests to band together. Mutual assistance led to collective action and finally to the construction of an organizational apparatus. On the other hand, at crucial points there were members of the hierarchy in Argentina who openly supported radical priests when they needed that support most. As early as 1965 Bishop Antonio Quarracino, Alberto Devoto and Jeronimo Podestá attended meetings of radical priests and gave them public support. In 1967 Bishop Podestá lost his diocese as a result of promoting social activism and worker organization (Dodson, 1972: 62), and thereby became a powerful symbol to the fledgling Third World Priest movement. After the movement's formation in 1968 a small number of bishops gradually moved to a position of open, active support for the Third World priests. Thus, both the obstructive actions of preconciliar bishops and the supportive actions of post-conciliar bishops played an important role in the formation of the Third World Priest Movement.

In Chile, the events which led to the formation of the Christians for Socialism are somewhat more complex, and the movement appeared later than in Argentina. (We must bear in mind here that the developmentalist approach does not anticipate the appearance of any radical priest movement in Chile.) In the complex history of Chile during the 1960s three factors seem significant in contributing to the formation of Christians for Socialism. First, like Argentina, the Chilean church encouraged the development of a core group of worker-priests who shared a common social experience among the poor. These

priests were concentrated in the capital of Santiago though there appears to have been greater interaction among urban and rural-based priests than was true in the early stages of the Argentinian movement. Both the closer proximity-of city and countryside in the smaller Chile, and the early encouragement by the Chilean hierarchy of land reform which involved clerics in rural projects would seem to account for this. In Chile, then, a basis for cooperation among urban and rural priests was laid down before the Christians for Socialism was actually formed. In Argentina the Third World Priests used their organized movement to promote such cooperation.

Second, it is important to stress the prominent role played by Christian Democrats during the 1960s both in religious and political life. In a variety of ways the existence of a lay political party of Catholic inspiration encouraged clergy to become cognizant of political issues. The Jesuit research center, Centro Bellarmino, kept clergy constantly aware through its publications and research activities of the need for far-reaching social reform. The Catholic orders in Chile, particularly the Jesuits, sponsored numerous research and teaching centers, as well as the publication of the monthly journal Mensaje. Although organized primarily to promote "development" these centers had the effect also of focusing attention on underdevelopment. For example, the Latin American Institute for Doctrine and Social Studies (ILADES), created in 1966 with the support of the Chilean hierarchy and President Frei, and with funding from foundations created by the West German government to promote development, made the connection between underdevelopment and the interpretation of the church's social doctrine the central theme of its investigation. Its director during the 1960s, Gonzalo Arroyo, S.J., became the leading figure in the Christians for Socialism (Collins, 1972: 4-8).

The third factor which is crucial in the formation of Christians for Socialism is the 1970 elections and the highly charged partisan political activity that preceded it and which inevitably involved the church due to its close association with Christian Democracy. As the Frei years wore on disenchantment among some sectors of the clergy increased. Reform programs of the Christian Democrats failed to bring about the change hoped for in the early 1960s. These failures were reaching crisis proportions by 1968, when it became apparent that in the 1970 elections the Christian Democrats would face stiff competition from the left. A growing number of clergy wished to disassociate themselves from Christian Democracy and be free to support the more radical options that appeared to be necessary to change Chilean society at

the roots, where they were working. The formation of a leftist Christian party (composed of both lay and religious members, but headed by lay Christians), the Movement of United Popular Action (MAPU), which supported Allende's Popular Unit (UP) coalition, and the appearance of an overtly leftist Christian movement centered in the university, the Iglesia Joven, gave strong impetus in the period 1969-1970 to the formation of a national religio-political movement.

In Colombia the Golconda movement was born in July, 1968, just months after the formal creation of Priests for the Third World in Argentina. Golconda, however, was not the outgrowth of a gradual process of deepening solidarity among priests who had been encouraged to live and work among the lower classes, as in Argentina and Chile. Although the Chilean church had provided a wider umbrella of support than the Argentinian, both countries had given a wide latitude for worker-priest activities to flourish since the beginning of the decade. In Colombia, worker-priests were never given support by the hierarchy. When Camilo Torres tried to organize an activist Christian movement for social change in 1964-65, he found no network of priests in existence upon which to build. Ministries were still highly individualized and tightly controlled by the hierarchy. Camilo, of course, felt driven to by-pass the church when his early struggles met with strong, unified resistance within the church. Thus, it was not as a living activist but as a martyred symbol that Camilo Torres became important to the formation of a radical religio-political movement in Colombia. In the aftermath of Camilo's death, priests who had, on their own, taken up ministries in the shanty-towns of Bogotá began to correspond informally to discuss how they might pool resources to struggle more effectively for social change within the church. In retrospect it appears that the successful formation of a priest movement in Argentina and the convening of CELAM in Medellín helped to focus and crystallize these efforts. With the Argentinian example before them and with the assembly of bishops preparing to meet right in their own domain to discuss the church's future in Latin America, a small group of about fifty clergy, including one bishop, gathered on a finca outside Bogotá in July, deliberated for several days, drew up a list of agreements on basic principles, and issued the declaration which inaugurated their movement (Edwards, 1970: 2; Dunn, 1971: 18). From the beginning, therefore, Golconda was looser and less mature organizationally than the Third World Priests. It was thus less well prepared to deal with hierarchy and regime resistance.

A second factor which is relevant to considering the formation of Golconda is the nature of the church-state system in Colombia. From the outset Golconda confronted a

tighter church-state bond, and therefore more unified resistance than either the Third World Priests or the Christians for Socialism. And the church-state tie has to be evaluated in light of the unusual political history of Colombia reaching back to 1948. A decade of la violencia[6] had culminated in an agreement by the two major parties to alternate the presidency between them in successive elections and to lower sharply the level of political contestation in the country. The success of this arrangement, the National Front, or FRENOL, meant that Colombian politics resembled Argentina's in 1968 because, in spite of the trappings of democratic government, political opposition to the regime in power was minimal. To priests working in Bogotá shanty-towns this arrangement looked as politically repressive and socially retrogressive as did the government of Onganía to the Third World Priest. Their position was made more precarious, however, because the church-state tie in Colombia made the church dependent upon the state for most of its institutional prerequisites and therefore more highly vulnerable to government sanction than was true in either Argentina or Chile. As it turned out, Golconda priests made an attack on the church-state tie one of the major focal points of their religio-political effort. Not surprisingly, they met a more unified and determined resistance from church and regime than either of the other two movements.

Political Action Strategies

Let us turn now to the question of strategies for political action adopted by the three movements. In this regard we can compare the movements in terms of the two political roles outlined above, the denunciatory role and the organizational role, and as to the degree of militancy taken with respect to radical social change. Of course, none of the movements was ever entirely united over either a single strategy or level of militancy. I will thus speak of general tendencies which appeared to predominate.

The Movement of Priest for the Third World brought itself national attention through effective exercise of the denunciatory role. Indeed, their skill in publicizing social problems and the ineptitude of the Onganía regime in dealing with them was remarkable. From the "Rebel Christmas" of 1968, in which Third World Priests organized a nationwide protest tied to the symbols of one of the year's major religious seasons, through the coup of June, 1970, the movement was a constant thorn in the side of the regime as well as a perpetual goad to the church hierarchy. Yet what stands out is the ability of the movement to become associated with workers strikes,

student demonstrations, barrio protests and peasant mobilization efforts without alienating the hierarchy sufficiently to bring about the hierarchy's active collaboration with the regime. On the one hand, the criticisms of the regime often hit home in telling ways. The Third World Priests publicized the government's neglect of the working class at a time when inflation was wreaking havoc with workers everywhere in the country. The jailing of priests along with union leaders seemed to heighten the nation's awareness of the costs of proscribing political parties. On the other hand, the priests carefully cloaked all their actions in the rhetoric of Vatican II, Medellín, and statements of Latin American bishops from Helder Camara to their own Eduardo Pironio. Thus, when the government sought to counterattack, it seemed often to attack the church as a whole. Since the Argentine church was less dependent and vulnerable than the Colombian, this tended to drive a wedge between regime and church. Gradually, individual bishops, their own consciousness raised by the wide range of publications and activities of the Third World Priests in their dioceses, began to speak out in support of the movement; perhaps more significantly in the short run, a growing number began to join their own voices to the chorus an anti-regime protest that seemed to originate with the Third World movement.

Only the denunciatory role was markedly effective at the national level. The leadership role was confined largely to the parish level. In this area, the movement's greatest effectiveness was clearly among shanty-town dwellers and rural workers. The industrial working class had its own organizations in the Peronist movement. After 1970 the movement's major organizational thrust was in linking the unorganized working class poor to the peronist movement. Its major denunciatory role in this period was to promote the growing demand throughout the nation for the return of Perón. We will discuss its successes and failures in these two roles below.

Finally, as has been suggested in the foregoing analysis, the Third World Priests chose a relatively moderate political strategy during the crucial early years of the movement's existence, in spite of the radical character of its theology and its social analysis. While denouncing imperialism, capitalism and militarism and calling for democracy and socialism, it never became identified in the eyes of the public or the hierarchy with the extreme political left. Attempts were made to so identify them but with little success, particularly when compared to Colombia. Between 1969 and 1972 the movement served as the focal point of protest against the repressiveness and austerity associated with military rule. It bore a striking resemblance, through its peaceful protest, to the

civil rights movement in the United States under Martin Luther King. By 1972 the Third World Priests were also a major focal point of the movement to bring about a return of electoral politics and particularly the full participation of Peronists (Dodson, 1974: 63-67).

Since the Christians for Socialism in Chile did not really appear until the formation of the early nucleus called Los Ochenta in early 1971, it is necessary to examine priest activism on the left in Chile by focusing on the activities of MAPU, Iglesia Joven, and the leftist priests associated with the many research and teaching centers of Centro Bellarmino. It must be remembered that the Chilean context differs sharply from that in Argentina and Colombia. The latter were both "de-politicized" in comparison with Chile, although Colombia did hold national elections in 1970 just as Chile did. But the proliferation of parties and movements and the relative freedom in which all functioned was vastly greater in Chile. Within this context, the priests who eventually formed Christians for Socialism pursued both denunciatory and organizational roles, but (prior to July 1971) within the framework of the existing secular party system. Leftist priests from ILADES, for example, actively worked for MAPU prior to Allende's election. Iglesia Joven members, on the other hand, refused to join MAPU and warned against "opportunism." This latter group, composed primarily of students, focused their energies on "apostolic work" in the shanty-towns geared to conscientizing the poor. Thus, Iglesia Joven emphasized the grass-roots organization of "base-communities" which would serve as vehicles for raising the political consciousness of the working class poor. Such work closely parallels the work of the Third World Priests in the early years of their movements, before events propelled them to center stage in national politics in 1969.

The major difference between the Argentinian and Chilean cases seems to be the presence of an open and highly active secular political process in Chile. Left Christians, possessing opportunities to vent their political energies, did not themselves become the focal point of political protest. The protests against the Christian Democrats came in the form of active support of the Popular Unity through MAPU. Los Ochenta, and the Christians for Socialism movement which grew out of it, served as vehicles to publicize the goals of a socialist regime (denunciatory role) but had no need to be the organizational focal point for realizing such goals. (It is interesting to note, however, that a general leftist Christian party, Izquierda Cristiana (Christian Left) did splinter off from MAPU in July 1971. The Christians for Socialism denounced their overtly partisan character!)

The Golconda priests in Colombia developed both the denunciatory and leadership roles, and like their counterparts in Argentina and Chile, gave greater emphasis to the denunciatory role. What sets the Golconda movement apart is the militancy of their ideological position from the very beginning. As we have seen, Golconda was formed in July, 1968, only months after the Third World Priest movement. Like the Argentinians, Golconda used Christmas 1968 to dramatize their views. They utilized the occasion for issuing manifestos calling for an immediate overthrow of the capitalist system and the oligarchy in Colombia, and urged an all-out attack on dependency and the pursuit of socialism. They specifically linked themselves to class struggle, utilizing strong Marxist language. Their declaration of Buenaventura explicitly called for separation of church and state, and for "revolutionary action" to bring about social change. Finally, a leading spokesman for Golconda, René Garcia, linked Golconda to Camilo Torres with his assertion that Camilo represented "the model of authentic commitment." To make this tie even more vivid in the eyes of the hierarchy and regime, Golconda revived the newspaper Camilo had begun, Frente Unido, and made it the vehicle of their denunciatory effort.

At the organizational and leadership levels, Golconda shares to some extent the strategy of the other two movements, but again is notably more militant. Golconda priests also supported worker demonstrations, strikes, efforts at collective bargaining, and attempted to organize peasant groups. More importantly, they consciously spoke of seeking alliances with secular revolutionary movements, including guerrilla movements. In Argentina, the Third World Priests stood clear not only of the Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ERP) but also on the Montoneros, or left-wing of the Peronist movement. In Chile only the Izquierda Cristiana supported the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR). To compound this militancy, Golconda actively worked to dissuade working class people from voting in the 1970 elections. This tactic of promoting abstention touched a most sensitive nerve of the FRENOL governmental arrangement, since low voter turnout was a most obvious way to undercut its legitimacy. Thus, Golconda was perceived by both hierarchy and regime as a hostile and dangerous movement from its inception. Its strategy of overt attack upon both hierarchy and regime, individually and collectively, marked it for a concerted effort at repression which neither the Third World Priests nor the Christians for Socialism had to endure.

The Results of Prophetic Action

Let us now compare the successes and failures of the radical priest movements, particularly in light of their own goals as articulated in the theology of liberation. The Movement of Priests for the Third World set out in 1968 to make their success in both respects was notable. Clearly their greatest success was in gaining a hearing within the institutional church for a liberation point of view. The hierarchy's own declarations at San Miguel in May,1969, bore the influence of the Third World Priests and provided a powerful veil of legitimacy for the priests which they were able to utilize with great success over the next five years. The Movement deserves credit for "forcing" an open rupture between the church and the regime of Ongania. The loss of this ally certainly hastened Ongania's demise. The movement also turned the church around from open hostility toward peronism to a cautious acceptance, again helping to pave the way for the return of elections and of peronists to active political participation. Thus, the Third World Priests helped to change their church, were a strong voice of protest during a period of national political crisis, assisted materially in discrediting military rule and helped to promote a return to democratic politics.

In their very strength lay their weakness. As the Movement evolved, most of its members became increasingly convinced that the road to socialism and participatory democracy lay in peronism. Thus, after 1972 they actively promoted peronism and forged an alliance with the peronist movement at a variety of levels. But, like many Argentines, they placed too much hope in the healing powers of the peronist movement. They failed to recognize the serious splits which were latent in peronism and seriously overestimated the degree to which Peron would be either willing or able to change Argentine society according to the norms of liberation theology. When faced with the practical exigencies of politics, Peron turned away from the masses to whom the priests were linked and, in his famous May 1, 1974, speech, read the left, including the Third World Priests, out of his movement. The disarray and disillusion which followed revealed that the priests had failed to lay the foundation for grass-roots organization that would enable it to retain its coherence through this crisis. With Peron's death and the erosion of peronism leading to the military coup of March 1976, the Third World Priest movement declined and returned to a pre-1968 stage of loose-knit, individualized ministries at a local level, bound together only by a common dedication to the poor. Today many Third World Priests are in hiding or in exile and the Argentine Church is a muted voice of resistance to authoritarian rule.

It is more difficult to discern the successes of the Christians for Socialism and Golconda. Each movement was much shorter lived than the Third World Priests. Golconda was clearly on the defensive throughout its short-lived existence. The Christians for Socialism did succeed in conscientizing large numbers of shanty-town dwellers and working class people, particularly in the urban centers. They had a marked impact in the universities, where student movements of Christian inspiration formed to support the Popular Unity. Moreover, the Christians for Socialism were able to assemble Christians from the entire hemisphere in Santiago in April,1972, for a meeting of "Christians for Socialism." The concrete result was to put much of the weight of the Chilean Catholic Church behind Allende's Popular Unity government at a time when he clearly needed the support. Less tangibly, the Santiago meeting established ties of communication among activist clergy throughout Latin America which endure to the present.[7]

On the negative side, it would appear that the Christians for Socialism, like the Priests for the Third World, took too sanguine a view of the potential which popular movements possess in Latin America for effective political action. They believed, with Allende, that a peaceful road to socialism was possible. Ironically, while they opposed the strategy on the MIR on the grounds of its commitment to violent class struggle and revolution, their own denunciatory efforts had probably raised the consciousness of the lower classes to the point that they were more receptive to the MIR than they might have been and thus, indirectly, the Christians for Socialism contributed to the destablization which undermined the Allende regime. On the other hand, they did help to build up the network of base-communities which has survived the military coup in Chile and now serves as a source of resistance to repressive authoritarian rule. Thus, the remnants of the movement and the legacy of Christians for Socialism may be keeping alive the ideals of democracy and socialism during a period of severe political crisis and loss of faith in these ideals by the middle and upper classes.

As to Golconda, their success was to generate a very short-term burst of political activism among students, laboring groups and the peasantry. Their activities in Bogota's shanty-towns undoubtedly contributed both to the decline of FRENOL support in 1970 and to the near victory of the populist candidate Rojas Pinilla. In this sense, Golconda successfully desacrilized the political party system of the oligarchy. The obverse side of this success, however, was the generation of massive, concerted reaction by politicians, the press and the hierarchy to <u>all</u> Golconda activities. Born in July 1968,

by the end of 1972 the Golconda movement had completely died out.[8] With the single exception of Bishop Gerardo Valencia Cano, who helped inaugurate the movement, no Colombian bishops were persuaded to assist the movement, either actively or passively. In contrast to the open support generated in Argentina among a strong and visible minority of bishops, and the indirect support of the hierarchy in Chile prior to 1973, Golconda sparked only hostility and open resistance. Ironically, in its weakness lay an unexpected strength. United resistance at the hierarchical level seems to have provoked an enduring sense of solidarity and commitment among rank and file clergy who share a liberation outlook. These priests survived the destruction of their Golconda movement. And their ranks have been swelled by lay and religious leftists who have fled the inhospitable political climates of Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. The result is the resurgence of left Christian activism in Colombia after 1973 in the form of a movement called Priests for Latin America (SAL). Thus, in 1978 when the Christian left is effectively in exile from Argentina and the hierarchy has returned to the silence of the pre-1968 period, when the only legacy of the Christians for Socialism in Chile is the base community which is but a weak source of succor to the poor and has been driven underground, it is in Colombia that Christian radicalism maintains its presence and a voice for a liberation point of view within Latin American Catholicism.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show that the Christian left did not conform very closely to the description implicit in developmental analyses in at least two of three cases in Latin America. The Third World Priests in Argentina were less radical theologically and politically than Vallier (1972) imagined them to be and were more successful in uniting the Church around a program calling for social change and the return of democratic politics. On the other hand, the Christian Democratic experience in Chile was hardly the non-partisan, socially integrating movement development theory expected it to be. Nor can the political and religious fragmentation of the late 1960s and early 1970s be blamed exclusively on the left. All political sectors were "partisan" and the extensively documented record of the efforts by the center and right (with substantial assistance from the United States) to prevent the left from achieving victory <u>within</u> the boundaries of the electoral process belie the claims of developmentalists to the contrary.

Finally, although the Colombian case would seem to confirm Vallier's worst fears about left radicalism, that it promotes

polarization and conflict, a strong case can be made there too, that the fault does not lie exclusively with the left. Indeed, it is exceedingly difficult to see how even a liberal program of social change can get on the church's agenda in Colombia when the hierarchy is largely anti-liberal and is encouraged to be so by the degree of its dependence on a secular oligarchy which is itself locked into the most cautious of political programs. The Argentine case is instructive here. It shows that when it is in the church's corporate interests (as seen by the hierarchy, not the left) to disassociate itself from the regime, an alliance between the left (which gives the church linkages at the grassroots,) and the hierarchy, however informal, can be effective in mounting a powerful campaign of denunciation aimed at encouraging social reform. Vallier saw the importance of disassociating church and regime. But his theory had prevented his seeing the possibility which developed in Argentina, of a radical left movement providing the energy to bring about such disassociation and making the church a prominent voice for social change.

On the other hand, the Christian left fell far short of its long term goals, even in the Chilean and Argentine cases. In Argentina, the program of the Third World Priests to promote democratic socialism had little prospect of success outside the mainstream of Peronist politics. Peronism, however, was both highly fragmented and, in 1973-74, little interested in building its program around the target groups of the Third World Priests. The Peronist leadership utilized the support provided by radical clergy, but the tangible basis of coinciding interests between Third World Priests and Peronists was slim. Both were against imperialism and the power of the domestic oligarchy, but beyond this, little brought them together. Peronism was in no position to promote democratic socialism and made no effort to do so. The clergy had no choice but to return to its earlier, decentralized character and fall back on the leadership and organizational roles which it had always given less attention. The coup of 1976, and the subsequent wave for repression against the left, including the Christian left, has driven what remains of the movement into exile or underground.

In Chile the Christians for Socialism fell with the Allende regime, their vision of democratic socialism obliterated by the chaotic social conflict which that regime provoked. Like the Third World Priests, they could only be successful within a larger coalition (which is what they denied). The broader Christian left out of which Christian Socialism has been formed did, however, lay a foundation in Chile successfully than in Argentina) for keeping the liberation perspective alive under repressive government. The base communities nurtured throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s survive in Chile today.

So long as such grass-roots organizations continue to exist, the liberation point of view and the political goals it entails will endure. Certainly the present political climate of Latin America would seem to make liberation goals appropriate. We may expect, therefore, to see these goals and the Christian left which embodies them, reappear in Latin America in the years to come.

NOTES

[1]It is interesting to note that of the five writers who saw the Church as a dynamic force for social change, three had worked in Chile during the 1960's. Of those who see the Church as a moderate force for change, one (Smith) had looked at the Chilean case in 1974, after the fall of Allende. Levine and Wilde studied Colombia in the 1970's. Writers who focused on the Church as an obstacle to social change had studied the Brazilian case, where Catholic radicals were crushed after the military coup of 1964 (de Kadt), or they studied the church from a frame of reference in which radicalism was institutionally (Mutchler) and ideologically (Vekemans) precluded.

[2]The content and evolution of that paradigm can best be seen in the essay by Huntington, (1971).

[3]Other writers who have made a similar argument include de Kadt, (1970), and Sanders, (1973).

[4]Major works in the dependency literature are summarized and critiqued in two recent essays: James and Bath, (1976), and Fagen, (1977).

[5]The political theory of liberation theology is treated at much greater length in Dodson, M. (1974) Religious Innovation and the Politics of Argentina: A Study of the Movement of Priests for the Third World, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Indiana University. See specifically chapter three.

[6]The term "la violencia" refers to a period of violent civil strife verging on civil war which wracked Colombia from the late 1940's until the early 1960's pitting partisans of the Conservative and Liberal parties against one another. This conflict left more than 200,000 dead and was brought under control only with the formation of a united front in which the two parties agreed to share electoral power. The impact of La violencia on both church and politics is thoughtfully discussed in (Levine and Wilde, 1977: 227-234).

[7]In the wake of the 1972 meeting in Santiago, movements of "Christians for Socialism" spread to other countries in Latin America, most notably Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico.

[8]This assessment is based on discussions with Father Noel Olaya, a prominent member of the Golconda movement held at CIDOC, Cuernavac, Mexico, December 1972.

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