



religions

Religion and Violence, Rights and Reconciliation

Edited by

Daniel H. Levine

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Editor

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About the Editor

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Introduction: Religion and Violence, Rights and Reconciliation

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Planning for this Special Issue began in late 2019, well before the COVID-19 pandemic changed the conditions of life for all of us. I want to begin by thanking the contributors and the editors of the journal for working under difficult conditions to help make this issue a reality. The papers presented here shed important and varied light on the continuing relations of religion and violence, rights and the possibilities of reconciliation. The data and reflections offered in these six papers are grounded in contemporary and historical reality, working with a rich range of information from archival and documentary sources, and from contemporary interviews and observations. The papers work with materials from Latin America, an area that presents scholars and observers with a reality that has undergone dramatic changes over the last half-century, as both religion and politics have changed in fundamental ways. Throughout this period, the relations among religion and violence have remained prominent in the public sphere, where religiously linked and inspired activism around issues of human rights have contributed to reshaping the terms of public debate.

The primary materials presented here may be from Latin America, but the issues are general. What we see in Latin America is not unique: these experiences are echoed across a wide range of cultures, religious traditions, and historical eras. Religious individuals, groups and institutions have been victims and perpetrators of violence. They have rallied to action (including protests, civil conflicts, and wars) to engage with opposing religions, to support or oppose existing states and social orders, or to advance or enforce policy agendas. These actions have at times been impelled by religious leadership to support or oppose existing states and social orders. The influence is never just one way: political or dynastic authorities of all kinds have also reached out to religions, mobilizing them for support and legitimization, but also working to suppress or marginalize.

The 20th century has also witnessed a surge of movements that advance and articulate organizational nets intended to justify and defend human rights. The concept of rights draws on civil law and religious tradition, with important links to religious organization networks and resources. The root concept is that if all humans are children of God, made in the image of God and of intrinsic value, then all are entitled to life. Religious ideas and networks were especially important in the civil rights movement in the US, and have been prominent in recent Latin American experience. These ideas have also inspired important efforts in post-violence reckoning and reconciliation, for example in the experience of truth commissions, and efforts to identify victims, and in this way they allow survivors and families to grieve.

Attention to the mutual impacts of religion and violence should not obscure lengthy traditions of non-violence, with roots in core religious ideas. Non-violence is both a personal and group belief, and also a tactic for opposing state power. Notable modern instances of non-violence as a commitment and tactic include the U.S. civil rights movement (grounded in the African American churches), the Indian experience of non-violent resistance inspired by Gandhi, peace and rights activists in the last days of the East German communist regime, and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Pacifists like Quakers and Mennonites, and group such as Witness for Peace, also provide mediation and neutral spaces for conflict resolution. They have often been present at areas of intense conflict throughout the region. Priests and sisters in Peru trying to maintain a presence



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in areas of severe violence took active training in non-violence. As these brief comments suggest, no single direction or model can make sense of the tangled relations between religion and violence, rights and reconciliation. The papers in this issue shed new light on these realities from a variety of perspectives.

Cecilia Tovar of the Instituto Bartolomé De Las Casas, Lima, Peru, documents how and why the churches came to take up the defense of human rights in Peru. During the war with Shining Path (1980–2000), violence in Peru was brutal and extensive. Massive violations of human rights were common, with victims from all regions and social classes, but were particularly intense in rural areas where the insurgency began. The choice to defend human rights in theory and in action is rooted in transformations within the church, which drew strength and inspiration from the “option for the poor”, articulated at the Catholic bishops meetings in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), and in numerous statements and organizational efforts since then. Those churches who identified more closely with the poor were more active in the promotion of rights. The churches supported and defended rights by providing organizational space, legal defense, publicity (through their radio networks), and by remaining among populations in danger, working with them and often sharing their fate. Important elements in the churches, including leaders, priests, members of religious orders, sisters, catechists, and ordinary people working through church organizations, were prominent among the victims. They were attacked both by Shining Path (who saw them as competitors) and by army and police forces, who saw their commitment to social justice and collective action as subversive. Professor Tovar works with a wealth of documentation at the national, regional and local level: reports from the Peruvian Commission for Truth and Reconciliation and others from the Peruvian Catholic Church, as well as from regional and local groups.

Maria Soledad Catoggio of CEIL Conicit, Argentina, looks closely at a remarkable facet of the post-violence reconciliation in Argentina. Her research examines in detail the multiple links between the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF)) and the world of religion. The EAAF worked over-time to recover and identify victims of repression by the last military regime. Catoggio defines this as “forensic activism”, set in motion and advanced outside the state, and independent of both the human rights movements and the national system of universities and research centers. This kind of work brought the living and the dead together, by making it possible for families and relatives of the dead to engage in mourning rituals that situate and make sense of suffering. Religious beliefs and the tools they offer for coming to terms with grief coexisted with the EAAF’s development. These findings emerge from a qualitative research design combining document analysis, in-depth interviews, and the participative observation of scientific disclosure open to the public, provided by the EAAF over the past three years.

Stephan Ruderer of the Institute of Historical Studies of the Catholic University of Chile sheds new light on the politics of religion during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) in Chile. Much historiography has examined this relation from the point of view of the Catholic Church, which took a prominent role in opposing the dictatorship, defending victims, and promoting human rights and a return to democracy. Professor Ruderer expands this view. Working with archival materials from the Chilean Foreign Ministry and correspondence with the Chilean ambassador to the Vatican, he examines in detail efforts by the Chilean state to shape relations with the Church and to change the position of bishops who were critical of the regime. After a short period of accommodation and legitimization, the Chilean episcopate started to confront the dictatorship in the name of the poor and persecuted, but never breaking entirely with the regime. This led to a complicated relationship between the Church and the dictatorship, which tried to legitimize authoritarian rule by reference to Christian values and the defense of “Christian civilization.” Examining the relations from this point of view helps us understand better the dynamics of conflict between Church and State in Chile during the dictatorship: this was a continuous relation of conflict, accommodation, and on-going efforts to shape reality.

Silke Hensel of the University of Muenster, Germany, works with a wealth of archival data to re-examine the history of church–state disputes and often violent religious conflicts, which were a central axis of political conflict in early 19th century Mexico. Church–state disputes often hinged on questions of legal status, rights, and property. Conflicts over the proper role of religion in society and culture touched on valued symbols and routines of daily life, and often involved significant violence. Global histories commonly attribute conflicts surrounding the secularization of the state exclusively to Europe, but in fact such disputes have long been an important thread in Latin America in general, and in notable cases, like Colombia or Mexico, where issues about the role of religion and the church in society became a major political conflict after independence. Best known in the Mexican case are the disputes over the constitution of 1857, which established the freedom of religion, and the Cristero Revolt in the 1920s. However, the history of struggles over the separation of church and state and the secularization of society goes back further. In 1835, the First Republic ultimately failed, because of the massive protests against the anticlerical laws of the government, which were motivated by people seeing the social order as a whole threatened by what they considered to be anti-religious measures. Hensel shows that the failure of the first government system of republican Mexico was not only due to struggles between federalists and centralists or conservatives and liberals, but also came about because political and religious conflicts became intertwined, and many Mexicans engaged in the struggles over the appropriate social order.

Hensel shows that this failure is understood as a genuine religious conflict over the question of the proper social and political order, in which large sections of the population were involved. Beginning with the anticlerical laws of 1833, political and religious reaction in Mexico often began with a *pronunciamiento* (a mixture of rebellion and petitioning the authorities), and evolved into conflicts over federalism vs. centralism.

Virginia Garrard, University of Texas, brings us to the present, which, in Latin America, has been profoundly marked by a notable surge of Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism throughout the region. Historically, Evangelical and Protestant churches in Latin America regarded the “world” as a realm of sin and impurity. The proper focus of the church, they believed, was on salvation, and building a community of the saved. However, this has begun to change with a new engagement by the churches in society and politics as part of an effort to create a better world. Important elements of this movement have found inspiration in Dominion Theology, a long covert movement that works to bring conservative Christians to political power in order to affect “dominion” over the earth, and thus hasten the Kingdom of God. Many Dominionists belong to NAR (New Apostolic Reformation), a loose network of “apostles” with a large popular following, given their presence in megachurches or as televangelists. Although its origins are in the United States, this is a global movement, hidden in plain sight, with an important presence in Latin America, notably in Guatemala and Brazil. The movement is much contested within Latin American Protestantism, but its advocates already have a visible presence and major political allies. They are committed to waging “spiritual warfare” so as to cleanse what they see as tainted people and societies. This commitment has contributed to an upswing in violence related to religious intolerance.

Danielle Boaz, of the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, takes the theme of religiously linked violence in a new direction. She shows that since at least 2005, drug traffickers in the cities and favelas of Rio de Janeiro have been carrying out systematic and violent assaults on Afro-Brazilian religious communities. Motivated by their conversion to sects of Evangelical Christianity that regard Afro-Brazilian religion as devil worship, these gangs of traffickers have forcibly expelled devotees of these faiths from their homes and temples, destroyed shrines and places of worship, and threatened priests with death if they continue to practice their religion. Boaz argues that a stress on “spiritual warfare” is not the best approach for making sense of this phenomenon. She advances a thesis grounded in the defense of human rights. In her view, this is not a two-sided struggle between Evangelized drug traffickers and Afro-Brazilian religions. Rather, the former is

unilaterally committing gross violations of the latter's human rights, which contravene international norms prohibiting crimes against humanity and genocide. This rich and innovative analysis demonstrates how profoundly the whole field of religion, society and politics is changing.

The wide-ranging papers gathered in this issue show clearly that the old Enlightenment dream that religion would simply fade away needs to be reconsidered. This dream took a sociological form in conventional secularization theory, which has proven at the very least to be a poor guide to the realities of religion, society and culture, which remain dynamic and ever-changing. The prominence of violence may and likely will fade, but religious institutions, groups, norms and values will continue to shape the reality of our world.

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Article

Being a Church in a Time of Violence: Peruvian Church during the Armed Internal Conflict 1980 to 2000

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Abstract: During the war with Shining Path (1980–2000) violence in Peru was brutal and extensive. Massive violations of human rights were common, with victims from all regions and social classes, but were particularly intense in rural areas like Ayacucho where the insurgency began. The churches supported and defended rights by providing organizational space, legal defense, publicity (through their radio networks) and by remaining among populations in danger, working with them and often sharing their fate. Important elements in the churches including leaders, priests, members of religious orders, sisters catechists, and ordinary people working through church organizations, were prominent among the victims. They were attacked both by Shining Path (who saw them as competitors) and by army and police forces, who saw their commitment to social justice and collective action as subversive. The choice to defend human rights in theory and action is rooted in a long term process of transformation in the church which drew strength and inspiration from the “option for the poor” articulated at the Catholic bishops meetings in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), and in numerous statements and organizational efforts since then. The process of violence in Peru and the role of the churches is documented in the reports of the Peruvian Commission for Truth and Reconciliation and others from the Peruvian church as well from as regional and local groups.

Keywords: violence; human rights; church; liberation; option for the poor; Peru; Shining path

1. Introduction

In 2001 the government of President Valentin Paniagua created the Truth Commission and charged it with elaborating a full report on the twenty years of violence that had bloodied the country starting in 1980¹. The succeeding government of President Toledo ratified the Commission and added the term Reconciliation to its name, along with several more members². The CVR (Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) presented its final report on 28 August 2003. This report dedicates an entire chapter (3) to the role of the churches, and states:

Through its analysis of many documents, interviews, and other studies, the CVR affirms that during the process of violence, the Catholic and Evangelical Churches contributed to

¹ This article draws on the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume III (CVR 2003), Tomo III, Chapter 3.1, on “La Iglesia Católica”; on (Tovar 2006); on “(Tovar 2011); and on (Coll and Tovar 2005), on (DESCO 1989); on (Informativo CEP n.d.), on (Signos n.d.). On (CENDOC IBC n.d.) for the documents and communiques cited here.

² The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación) worked with many experts and specialists in the study of armed conflicts. Members of the Commission included figures like Carlos Iván Degregori (2018), Enrique Bernales (1989), Rolando Ames, Carlos Tapia, along with others who had studied the causes of the outbreak of massive violence, its duration and how it ended. Others had examined the particular characteristics of Shining Path which made it so violent, and coordinated gathering systematic data on human rights violations. Following the publication of the CVR’s Final Report there have also been numerous studies, seminars and publications on these issues. An extensive list is in the Bibliography.

defending the people from crimes and violations of their human rights . . . The CVR pays tribute here to those Christians who defended life during the period of political violence and condemns the assassination of numerous priests and sisters who were fulfilling their mission among the poorest and most marginalized populations of the city and the countryside". (CVR 2003, *Informe Final*, Conclusions, n 141)

The section devoted specifically to the role of the Catholic Church (3.1) begins with the following paragraphs:

"The Commission of Truth and Reconciliation (CVR) has found that during the period of violence in Peru, the Catholic Church played an important role in accompanying and protecting people battered by the violence inflicted on them [both] by subversive organizations and by the security forces of the State. In numerous regions of the country, the Catholic Church was a voice in denouncing crimes and violations of human rights, in proclaiming and defending the right to life and the dignity of all people, The majority of bishops priests and sisters, along with a great many lay men and women, constituted a moral force and a source of hope. At the same time, the Commission has also confirmed the in certain regions ecclesiastical authorities kept deplorable silence in the face of violations of human rights perpetrated by the forces of order.

In the majority of dioceses, the emphasis on solidarity strengthened bonds of cooperation within communities affected by terrorism, in the Andes, in the jungle, and in poor neighborhoods of the cities. There was a clear orientation to the defense of life. Inspired by this, many bishops, priests, sisters, catechists and committed lay people stood with the people against threats from terrorists and from the forces of order This kind of commitment has its roots in the Second *Vatican* Council (1962–65) and in its expression in different parts of the world". (CVR 2003, ch. 3.1, pp. 263–64)

In effect, this deep commitment by the religious community to the defense of life and of human rights, above all among the poorest of the poor, during the worst years of the armed conflict in Peru, is the fruit of an intense process of renovation within the Church of Peru that began in the middle of the twentieth century. This is no sudden improvisation, but rather forms part of a broad process of intense change in the Catholic church at all levels: global, Latin American, and specifically in Peru; a transformation that has gained form and substance in only a few moments of the church's long history³. I mention it here to underscore the general context before passing to a detailed analysis of the role of the Peruvian church in this time of violence.

In the first section of this article I present a chronology of the major events that affected the Peruvian Catholic Church during the various phases of armed internal conflict. The second section, "The Core Theme: Option for the Poor and the Defense of Life", discusses how the Church responded to this situation through its pastoral work in the defense of life., through organizing actions along with moments and spaces for Christian reflection on the meaning of events and how to respond.

2. The Church in the Times of Armed Internal Conflict

The political violence in Peru emerged and took form during democratic governments, and not under military dictatorships as was the case in the Southern Cone of Latin America [Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay]. The CVR's Final Report shows that in certain regions and in particular moments, the security forces of the state were also guilty of systematic and generalized violations of human rights, and guilty of a third of the total of 70,000 deaths that the CVR estimates for the period. Nonetheless,

³ Cf. (Romero and Tovar 1987). Also (Romero 1987; Gutiérrez 1968, 2018; Mons Dammert 1989).

the major perpetrator of violence, responsible for more than half the deaths, was clearly the Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path (PCP-SL) a group of Maoist origins whose cruelty and fundamentalist fanaticism reach levels seen only in cases like Cambodia's Pol Pot. This is a radical difference with the experience of other countries in the region where security forces of the state were responsible for most abuses. Another subversive organization, the Revolutionary Tupac Amaru movement (MRTA) was also active, but accounted for only 1.5% of the total number of victims. The distinctive elements of the violence in Peru (democratic government and the specific character of Shining Path) provide a basic context for understanding events and the response of the churches, who often found themselves, like the much of the population, caught between two fires⁴.

Shining Path attacked the Church for several reasons (cf. CVR 2003, Vol III, 380 ff). They saw religion as the opium of the people, destined in the long run to disappear and they saw the institutional church and its associations and social efforts as competition, part of the old order of things which they hoped to abolish through armed struggle. Shining Path wanted total domination. Their long term goal of territorial control, part of expanding the war from the countryside to the cities, lead them to attack other institutions in areas they saw as of strategic importance. This process was advanced steadily and aggressively and in 1989 Shining Path declared that it had reached a "strategic equilibrium" with the Peruvian State. The violence rose to new heights of intensity and barbarity.

At the same time, the Peruvian State and its security forces also had issues with respect to the Catholic Church. Accusations of subversion, verbal attacks and repressive actions were common. The basic cause of these actions was a confusion by public authorities of demands for social justice with subversion, and resentment of accusations of violations of human right committed by agents of the state. (CVR 2003, Vol III, p. 386) The solidarity of the church [bishops, priests, sisters, catechists and organizations) with the poor and with their demands were viewed with suspicion by the authorities, who commonly saw the defense of human rights as a defense of terrorism.

The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR 2003, Vol 1, pp. 74–92) states that he twenty years of armed internal conflict can be divided into five distinct periods. I discuss these as they relate to the Church⁵.

First Phase: The onset of armed violence (May–December 1980), runs from the first public act of violence committed by Shining Path in Chuschi, Cangallo (Ayacucho) in the Andean South on 17 May 1980⁶ to the presidential decree of 29 December 1982 which provided for an a rive role of the Armed Forces in the anti subversive struggle in the Department of Ayacucho. This period witnessed various armed actions like Shining Path's attack on the Institute of Rural Education Juli (Puno) but these were for the most part isolated incidents with little follow up, perhaps because of the strong negative reaction they aroused in the population. During this period, the Church also experienced tension with the State, arising from the denunciations by CEAS (*Comisión Episcopal de Acción Social*, Bishops' Commission for Social Action) of torture inflicted on detainees and of a police raid on the offices of the Prelature of Ayaviri, in Puno, where several employees, including peasants, and young people from the parish, were arrested In their first Assembly since the initiation of the violence, the Bishops made a strong statement denouncing the growing violence in the country.

⁴ Nonetheless, during the long years of the conflict, the violence spread throughout the county, and many pre-existing disputes within peasant communities turned violent. For an excellent study of this phenomenon see (Theidon 2004).

⁵ Data from (CVR 2003), (DESCO 1989), (Informativo CEP n.d.), (Signos n.d.) and (CENDOC IBC n.d.).

⁶ Burning ballot boxes and other materials for the elections of 18 May, which marked the country's return to democracy after twelve years of military rule. This was the first public statement of Shining Path's armed rejection of "bourgeois democracy". The name of the Department, Ayacucho, comes from a Quechua word that means Place (literally Corner) of the Dead, a name that sadly came to characterize this period. From its origin in Ayacucho, it spread rapidly to neighboring Andean departments including Huancavelica, Apurímac, Puno, Junín, Cusco, Ucayali, San Martín. Peru is divided from North to South by the Sierra of the high Andes, with only a narrow coastal strip to the west and to the east the lightly populated Amazon region which occupies 60% of the national territory Ayacucho is located in the Andean South.

“The political and social context of Peru is marked by grave phenomena of violence and terrorism. Though only a few groups have assumed responsibility for these acts of terror and intimidation, the resulting harm caused and the larger repercussions of these actions have created an enormous social cost. We must not forget that violence engenders more violence, thus creating a vicious cycle which can lead the country to unpredictable situations.” (Conferencia Episcopal Peruana 1981)

The Assembly’s strong concerns and its repudiation of violence were echoed in documents and declarations across the country, which also affirmed the church’s commitment to stand with the poor.

Second Phase: Militarization of the Conflict (January 1983–June 1986). This period begins with the creation of the Ayacucho Political Military Command, under the direction of General Roberto Clemente Noel Moral, and runs through to the prison massacres in 18–19 June 1986⁷. During this time, violence reaches unheard of dimensions of cruelty in the South Andean Departments of Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Apurímac. The civilian population of the region was trapped between Shining Path and the Armed Forces whose encounters took an increasingly violent and barbaric toll of victims. But for the most part, the rest of the country remained relatively untouched by the violence and indifferent to its effects, despite some, still limited violence in Central Andean regions like Lima or Junín.

The Peruvian Church was active at the national level and in many regions working through the Bishops Commission on Social Action (CEAS, *Comisión Episcopal de Acción Social*), the Pastoral Net of Human Dignity, the Defense of Human Rights Commissions in (CODEH, *Comisión de Derechos Humanos*) in Puno and Huacho (a city to the north of the capital, Lima), and related groups. The Bishops Conference, along with many individual bishops, priests, sisters and lay movements made repeated declarations rejecting terrorism, violations of human rights, torture and disappearances. The following statement is representative:

Shining Path must be told that a more just society cannot be built on a foundation made from the blood of innocent people whose democratic agreement has never been sought or given. At the same time, the government has to change its strategies of political and military control and find ways to combat injustice. The Armed Forces and Police must be told that the life of every citizen is sacred and that they cannot continue with practices that are contrary to a basic respect for life . . . We are obliged to point out firmly that there is no excuse, no political ideology or military or state belief that can justify the murder of a human being. We denounce the tortures, the deaths and disappearances, and any other act of violence. All are in radical contradiction with our basic humanity and our faith in the God of Life. We hereby commit ourselves, in all our activities, and wherever we may be, to see that not another life is lost. (El Quinto: no Matar 1985)

There were, of course, other positions in the Church, in particular, as the CVR Report notes, in some of the regions hardest hit by violence (like Ayacucho, Huancavelica, and Apurímac) where ecclesiastical leaders were more conservative or affiliated with Opus Dei. In these regions church leaders refrained from denunciations and discouraged human rights work.

Local and national authorities leveled many accusations against the church for its supposed toleration of subversion. A case in point was the police raid on the offices of CAAP (*Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica*) (Amazonian Center for Anthropology and Practical Applications) a group related to the Church of the Jungle region One of the worst incidents affecting the Church in

⁷ On these dates prisoners accused of terrorism mounted a rebellion in various prison centers in the Lima. In response, the government of then President Alan García ordered the Armed Forces to control the situation. More than 200 prisoners were killed. Cf. (Ames 1986).

these years was the assassination of F. Vicente Hondarza, from the diocese of Huacho (north of Lima) in 1983, presumably by the police.

Third Phase. The Spread of the Violence Nation Wide (June 1986–March 1989). This period opens with the prison massacre of mid-1986 and runs through to a 27 March 1989 attack by Shining path (in alliance with drug traffickers) on the police post of Uchiza (Department of San Martín) in the north of the jungle region of the country. Throughout this period, the violence intensifies and expands geographically spreading across the Central and Southern Andes (Departments of Junín and Puno). A new paramilitary group emerges the Rodrigo Franco Front (named after a leader of APRA, then the governing party who had been assassinated).

In a widely publicized incident that tells the tenor of the times, security forces in Ayacucho arrested a human rights delegation which included members of CEAS, the Bishops Commission for Social Action. They were liberated after considerable pressure from the civil society and from the Church.

During this period, the church created and sponsored a series of local and regional human rights organizations including the Archdiocesan Commission of Social Action of Huancayo (capital city of the Department of Junín) the Vicariates of Solidarity in the Andean South, The Vicarial committee of Human Rights of Pucallpa (Capital of the Department of Ucayali in the Central Jungle region) the Archdiocesan Office of Social Action, *Oficina Arquidiocesana de Acción Social*) established in Ayacucho by the Jesuit priest Carlos Schmidt). Numerous lay movements participated in the widely diffused 1986 public statement *Death is not the Way (La muerte no es el camino)* which followed the prison massacres. In 1986 the Church in Puno promoted a broad based front, *Puno Wants Peace (Puno Quiere la Paz)* with the goal of keeping Puno from turning into another Ayacucho. The national conference of religious congregations organized several missions to Ayacucho. There were bi-annual Days of Fasting and Prayer for Peace, numerous marches for peace and for life in different regions and in the capital city of Lima in the face of threats from both Shining path and the security forces of the state. There were multiple documents and declarations by bishops, priests, sisters and lay movements in defense of life and in condemnation of the seemingly endless acceleration of violence both by subversives and by official security forces:

Violence in Peru has deep roots in the massive poverty of the country and in the marginalization of our countryside and poor city neighborhoods. The massacres of prisoners in the jails of Lima and Callao has horrified us and caused great indignation. This terrible event is only the most recent manifestation of the deep moral crisis our country finds itself in. The horror we see is not the result of what some might label excesses but rather from the very logic that maintains that blood must be shed in order to change a society or to defend its institutions. It is important to affirm that terrorism is not the way. What happened in the prisons of Lima and Callao has brought the whole spectacle of death and violence closer to all of us. Defending the life of every person is a fundamental ethical demand, no matter what they may be guilty of. (*Pronunciamiento de sacerdotes y religiosas sobre la masacre de los penales 1986*)

During this period, there was important theological reflection on the God of Life (Gutiérrez 1989), which inspired and accompanied all these groups as they worked to defend life, a theme which became central to much pastoral action. At the same time, in the ecclesiastical church there was a change in leadership, as Cardinal Landázuri (a major leader in the heritage of Medellín and the option for the poor) retired in 1988. His replacement, Mgr Ricardo Durand, was a noted conservative.

Fourth Phase. The Crisis Become Extreme: This period (March 1989–September 1992) witnessed a major offensive by Shining Path which was met with a counter offensive by the forces of the state. The period began with an assault by Shining Path on the security forces' post at Uchiza and ends 12 September 1982 with the capture and arrest of Shining Path's leader, Abimael Guzmán Reinoso in a safe house in Lima. Other leaders of the group were also arrested and important computer files were seized leading to an extensive dismantling of the group. The raid was carried out not by the military, but by the national police, specifically by the GEIN (*Grupo Especial de Inteligencia, Special Intelligence Group*).

This period is without a doubt the bloodiest and most difficult of all (CVR 2003, Vol I, pp. 86–89). In its effort to achieve strategic equilibrium with the Peruvian state, Shining Path drove violence to new heights, murdering students in the Central University of Huancayo, and assassinating local elected authorities like Maria Elena Moyano in Villa El Salvador (a district of Lima South) Alfredo Aguirre and Fortunato Collazos in Cantogrande (Lima East), committing violent and cruel attacks in the cities, including major bomb attacks on the Channel 2 TV station, and at Tarata, in Miraflores (a central area in Lima) with significant loss of life. Violence also intensified in Ucayali, where Shining Path controlled and defended the production of coca leaves, in the Padre Abad area. At the same time, the Armed Forces changed their own strategy, replacing massive repression with a policy of selective assassination. This was applied, for example, in the central regions of the country, where large scale massacres declined to be replaced by kidnapping and disappearances (for example of students in Huancayo the capital of the Department of Junin). The Armed Forces also supported and promoted the militarization of local selfdefense committees, new para military groups were created, like Colina which kidnapped and killed a professor and nine students at the technical University of La Cantuta in 1992, and also murdered residents in Barrios Altos (Lima) in November 1991. When he closed Congress and assumed exceptional powers with the support of the armed forces in a “selfcoup” in April 1992, President Fujimori increased the prerogatives of the military effectively ensuring impunity for continued violations of human rights.

During this period, the Church experienced the assassination by Shining Path of several priests and members of religious congregations: Fathers Michel Tomaszek, Zbigniew Strzalskowski and Alessandro Dordi in Ancash (a Department on the coast and Central Andes), Father Teodoro Santos, Sisters Agustina Rivas and Irene Mac Cormack and layman Jorge Cerrón in Junín. Shining Path also destroyed the Institute of Rural Education in Ayaviri (Puno) and also tried to kill Father Miguel Company in Chimbote (Ancash) and dynamited a building of the Diocese of Chulucanas (Piura). Radio stations at Quillbamba at (near Cuzco) and in Puno (Blue Wave) were also dynamited by unknown hands. The parish of Nazca was raided by the Armed forces and the priest arrested for supporting protests by peasants in the region.

In response to the violence, the Bishops Conference issued a series of major declarations and documents: *We Want Peace (Queremos la Paz, Conferencia Episcopal Peruana 1996*, February) and *Peace on Earth (Paz en la Tierra, Conferencia Episcopal Peruana 1992*, December), the same month as the killing in Barrios Altos.

Although it is true that all of us have been affected by the violence, it is important to point out that the victims are above all poor peasants and residents of the poorest city neighborhoods (*barrios*) . . . We must underscore the hatred and contempt for life that terrorist groups have demonstrated to the poorest and weakest among us, in this way they reveal not only that they do not represent them, but also that they fear them [referring to the assassinations of popular leaders] . . . We also condemn the violence perpetrated by the security forces. It is intolerable that those who have sworn to uphold the Constitution and the laws should be violating basic rights. (*Paz en la tierra, Conferencia Episcopal Peruana 1992*)

Eight hundred priests and sisters signed a document entitled “Firm in Hope” in December 1990. There were also declarations from the church in many regions of the country. The Episcopal Commission on Social Action CEAS (*Comisión Episcopal de Acción Social*) did important work on the theme of active non violence, and APEP (Asociación Peruana de Estudios por la Paz, Peruvian Association of Peace Studies) also carried out extensive studies and training on the culture of peace⁸. The armed conflict created many internal refugees and church groups organized campaigns of solidarity with the displaced, and intensified popular mobilizations for peace. The organization Peru Vida y

⁸ APEP was founded by Father Felipe Mac Gregor SJ.

Paz (Peru: Life and Peace) was established. An important moment came in November 1989, when in the face of an armed shut down (*paro armado*) declared by Shining Path throughout the nation, two Presidential candidates (Mario Vargas Llosa and Henry Pease) convoked a massive march to reject the shut down. Many christian groups and church related organizations participated, defying threats from Shining Path. As noted earlier, in this same period Cardinal Landázuri retired and was replaced as Archbishop of Lima by a more conservative figure, Msgr. Augusto Vargas Alzamora. At the same time, Msgr Jose Luis Cipriani, who had been Auxiliary Bishop, took over as administrator of the Diocese of Ayacucho. One notable result of these changes in leadership was a reduction in funding for OASA (Oficina Arquidiocesana de Acción Social, Archdiocesan Office of Social Action) in Ayacucho and a cut back of its outreach programs; another was a denial of the fact of human rights violations by the army.

Fifth Phase: Decline in Subversive Actions, authoritarianism and corruption in government (September 1992–November 2000). This period opens with the capture of Abimael Guzmán and other Shining Path leaders and ends with President Alberto Fujimori’s exit from the country. This is a period of intense neo liberal economic reform (“shock therapy” for the economy to address hyperinflation) growing authoritarianism and corruption in the Fujimori government, which resulted in effective impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations in the security forces of the state. This policy was affirmed in the Amnesty Law of 1995. The capture of Abimael Guzmán and other leaders led to a general defeat of Shining Path and the collapse of its organization many more leaders were arrested. Isolated acts of violence and terrorism continued, most notably in the occupation of the Japanese Embassy in Lima by a command of the MRTA, with dozens of hostages. A long siege ensued, ending with an assault by security forces and the death of all guerrillas and one of the hostages. Violations of human rights continue in the country, although on a reduced scale. Condemning a public effort to deny the very existence of continued abuse more than 400 Catholics published a communique stating that

Violations of human rights do continue in Peru, with impact above all among the poor. These are carried out not only by Shining Path and the MRTA, but also by the armed forces and police, who appear to enjoy complete immunity. ([Comunicado de más de cuatrocientos católicos 1993](#))

One of the most important mobilizations of this period was the campaign against the death penalty. There was an effort to include this penalty in the new 1993 Constitution, and in response, the Coordination of the Pastoral Office of Human Dignity (of CEAS) together with the National Coordination of Human Rights, the Movement Peru: Life and Peace and the Bartolomé de las Casas Institute organized a campaign to oppose this penalty. Msgr Jose Dammert lead a delegation that presented the President of the Congress with a document signed by 45,280 people asking that the Constitution be modified so that it excluded the death penalty in Peru. CVR 2003 Tomo III, p. 394). In June 1993 the Episcopal Conference issued a communiqué opposing the death penalty (CVR 2003, Tomo III) Earlier that year in March they had also issued a message entitled “For a just and solidary society” (por una sociedad más justa y solidaria) This message also opposed the Law of Amnesty and demanded that those guilty of abuses be sanctioned by law.

In 1995, Msgr Jose Luis Cipriani is named Archbishop of Ayacucho, and intervenes in the occupation and siege of the Japanese Embassy. Another important leadership change for the church comes in 1999 as Msgr Vargas Alzamora retires as Archbishop of Lima, and is replaced by Msgr. Cipriani. But the Archdiocese itself had diminished in size, having been divided in three: the north cone (Carabayallo), the South (Lurin) and the east (Chosica) This new structure made it possible for the church to maintain close relation with the poor in the region of the capital city, which, swollen by migrants fleeing the war was by now a genuine megalopolis.

3. Core Theme: Option for the Poor and the Defense of Life

The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission makes it clear that the positions and actions taken by the Church in the face of Peru’s violence find their origins and

explanation in the trajectory of changes within the church, specifically in the extent to which leaders, organizations and members accepted and incorporated the conciliar renovation articulated at the Bishops' Conferences at Medellin Colombia (1968) and Puebla Mexico (1979) Thus, In general, where the church had renovated itself along the lines of the Second Vatican Council, and the Bishops' Conferences of Medellin and Puebla, there was much more resistance to the discourse of Shining Path, the churches had already developed and active social pastoral that linked them closely with the population, which responded to their needs and concerns, with the promotion of change and demands for justice while steadily rejecting violence. On the other hand, where the Church had not taken up the renovations advanced by the Council, subversive armed movements found a much more fertile ground in which to take root. (CVR 2003, Vol. III, pp. 415–16)

This renovation within the Church is best expressed in terms of a “preferential option for the poor”, a position outlined at Medellin and further affirmed at Puebla where the term itself was coined⁹. The central point here is that the poverty that afflicts the majority of Latin Americans is something evil, inhuman, contrary to the Gospels and must be challenged and eliminated. This poverty is not something natural, a fate to be endured: it is a social and historical creation with clear and identifiable causes in unjust social and economic structures. As unjust historical creations, they can and must be changed. A preferential option for the poor considers the poor as both subjects and protagonists of their own process of development and liberation, and not simply as objects of charity or clients of some powerful patron. The goal is to respect and promote their own participation in actions and decisions, to support, strengthen and promote popular organizations, and to respect their autonomy. The point is for the poor to advance their own interests and goals to commit to and with the poor in many forms, from sharing their lives, to solidarity in social struggles, to providing material and moral support to popular organizations, support for initiatives of community development, production, health, formation of christian communities, and broad participation as lay persons in the church community. This position is accompanied by a theological reflection and the development of a kind of spirituality that affirms the presence of God among the poor and the presence of Christ within them. It takes off from a reading of the Bible along with a theology of liberation that sustains the community and the promotion of its dignity as people with human rights rights as children of God. This position anchors the mission of the church in an active defense of human rights, a and a continuing struggle against poverty and injustice. In a gloss on the German philosopher Theodore Adorno, who had asked how it was possible to do philosophy after Auschwitz, Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez asked

How to do theology during Ayacucho? How to speak about the God of Life in the face of such massive and cruel murders in the “corner of death” [Quechua term for Ayacucho]? How can we announce the love of God in the midst of such profound contempt for human life? How can we proclaim the resurrection of the Lord in a land where death seems to rule all, the death of children, women, of the poor and the indigenous of the “worthless and insignificant” of our society? (Gutiérrez 1986, pp. 222–23)

During the years of armed internal conflict in Peru, the ecclesiastical jurisdictions, communities, and groups that in earlier years had developed a pastoral work oriented by the preferential option for the poor responded to the challenge of violence in ways that were coherent with that general position. The question before us is to be clear about how and why and in what ways that position was taken up. A close look at this issue reveals some key traits which we lay out below, and which are also recognized in the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

A first trait to note is that church people *remained* in their regions during the worst moments of the violence, accompanying the people and in many cases attending to basic needs when agents and

⁹ (Cf. Medellin 1968; Gutiérrez 1988, 1978, 1996; Echegaray 1980a, 1980b; Tovar 2007; Menard 1995).

offices of the Peruvian state had left. This was notably the case in Pucallpa, and in other places that experienced extreme violence, such as Huancayo. Sometimes simply maintaining a presence was the only thing that could be done. But it was important. Priests and sisters and church groups stayed as part of being true to the people and to their ties with them. In many cases, their presence served to shield the people from some of the worst abuses. Unfortunately, the forces of “order” often did not understand this position which they attributed to complicity with terrorism. This was the cause of much tension.

Another important trait is that church people and groups created and inspired efforts in the *defense of life*, for example in CODEHs (Comités de Derechos Humanos, Human Rights Committees) in Huacho, Sicuani and Puno¹⁰), which played an important role in documenting and denouncing abuses, in following cases and helping victims and survivors regardless of whether or not they belonged to the church. They also worked to articulate rights efforts on a national level through the National Coordinator of Human Rights (of which they were members), to strengthen civil society on the regional level by providing relatively safe spaces where groups could join their efforts at a time when public organization was difficult and dangerous. The Coordinator of the Pastoral Office of Human Dignity played an important role, in Lima and on the national level inspiring and promoting initiatives like the national days of fasting and prayer for peace, and the national meetings of pastoral agents sponsored by CEAS. In the critical case of the Andean South region, these efforts clearly helped avoid an even worse escalation of the dirty war.

We have believed that it is indispensable that in Puno, citizens of all kinds, the Church the municipalities the university and professional associations, organizations representing peasants and workers, the CODEHs, public authorities and political parties all commit ourselves **A**. to affirm that human life is a fundamental right, and that there is no reason—not political, not military, not defense of the state, or any other—that can justify the assassination of a human being; **B** to the preservation and defense of democracy, of a state of law, the development of the lives of all (especially of the poorest among us) and the preservation of human rights; **C**, to the promotion of a peaceful and respectful dialogue between all political parties; **D**, to turn the anti subversive strategy of the State to methods that embody a strict respect for human rights, above all the right to life and respect for the right to organize; **E**, to call all those who have taken up arms, urging them to cease violence, to lay down their arms and respect human rights, and the democratically expressed will of the popular organizations, **F**, to demand justice and effective sanctions for any persons, members of the security forces or otherwise, who is responsible for the violation of human rights; and **G** to prevent the militarization and the declaration of states of siege in our departments, and thus closing the door on solutions to our problems that rely only on violence. ([Encuentro “Puno Quiere la Paz” 1986 August](#))

Another important aspect of the Church’s response to the violence is visible in the extent to which ecclesial communities *supported popular organizations* who were in danger of being cornered or destroyed by subversive groups or by the forces of order. Many social leaders were assassinated by Shining Path which did not tolerate group not under its own control. They were also often detained, killed or simply ‘disappeared’, by the forces of order, who as we have seen often confused demands for social justice with terrorism. The moral support and resources that the Church provided over many years extending into the period of internal war made it possible for many groups to withstand pressure from Shining Path and gave them some legitimacy in the eyes of the public authorities. The Church’s network of radio stations also played an important role, in denouncing abuses and publicizing the

¹⁰ In Puno the CODEH was made up of various actors in civil society with an active presence of the church. In other cases, the church created the CODEHs, as in Huacho, and also Vicariates that later were turned into CODEHs, as in Pucallpa. All these groups were active members of the National Human Rights Coordinator.

fate of those arrested. This helped prevent disappearances (a common tactic at the time) while also transmitting information and warnings that enabled those in danger to hide or move out of the region to safer location. These radio networks also helped in transmitting information about human rights to the communities general while providing a space in which they could air their views. This general commitment to support popular organizations sometimes brought tension with other social groups and as noted with public authorities who saw any kind of popular demand as subversive when in fact the ability to express demands and work for social goals strengthened resistance the appeals and pressures of violent groups. The following statement is illustrative:

We hereby express our support for and solidarity with the clearly expressed will of our brothers and sisters in the province of Melgar. Spurred to action by the age old denial of their needs and by the current situation of hunger and misery, they have recovered (invaded and occupied) lands from Kunurra Rural Enterprises, as part of a demand for democratic restructuring of all rural enterprises of this kind. We hereby assume a pastoral commitment to 1. Work tirelessly to rescue and defend a space of hope, identity, and dignity for the community constituted by their lands, which is indispensable to their integral liberation; 2. Support peasant organizations fighting for the recovery and possession of their communal lands; 3. Reject those agrarian policies which under the pretext of "rational use" of the land, have excluded and marginalized the poor majorities of the countryside, denying their justified claims for communal lands. ([Pronunciamiento de la Iglesia del Sur Andino 1986](#))

It is important to underscore the fact that these christian groups organized and carried out *public actions* as marches, workshops, cultural events and religious celebrations with public masses, in this way standing against the prevailing fear and violence, rejecting the widespread violation of human rights, expressing solidarity with victims (often from other regions) and calling for peace and presenting solutions. All this strengthened local civil society in multiple ways: with hope, with resources and with connections to other groups. The great march of solidarity with leaders killed by Shining Path in San Juan Lurigancho (Lima) marked an important turning point in the rejection of violence in that area. Here, as in Huacho, there were numerous public acts expressing solidarity with those in other regions suffering from the heightened violence. This was at a moment when urban populations in the coastal region were still relatively untouched by the violence thus indifferent to what was going on in the rest of the country. The public forum Puno Wants Peace (*Puno Quiere La Paz*) brought many sectors and institutions together in a common effort to keep this region from becoming a second Ayacucho.

In all these regions, numerous *declarations*, statements and pastoral letters were published and widely diffused identifying concrete instances of violence and abuse, analyzing events and proposing solutions. In these difficult and dangerous times,, this was often the only public voice available and able to inform and orient the people Taken together, these documents expressed a way of "being church" that actively joined faith with social and political responsibility. They demonstrate a permanent attention to reality, they do not turn their backs on events but rather work to understand what is happening and to take a specifically christian position. They reject violence and abuses from all sides: be they from Shining Path or the security forces of the state. They proclaim solidarity with victims and propose concrete measures to reduce violence and sustain victims and survivors. The call for peace was forceful and consistent.

There are more than 20,000 dead, about 500 a month in the last period. Thousands of families have been forced to flee in search of safely. More than 3500 have disappeared, which is all the more scandalous given official attempts to hide this fact. To the structural violence of the existing social order and the victims it claims through poverty and disease, we now must add the criminal toll of violence from terrorism and repression. There is no sign of change in the anti subversive strategies whose limits have been pointed out by many. We must understand, once and for all, that respect for human rights is not an annoying obstacle or a

luxury to be set aside in the conflict. It is a vital necessity, essential to any true victory over violence, a victory that will affirm democracy, not destroy it. (Firmes en la Esperanza 1990)

The Church (hierarchy, clergy, media, groups of all kinds) advanced regular everyday program of reflection, *education* and leadership on violence and the value of human life, of violence, rights, with the goal of providing the people with criteria and norms of conduct that would help orient their response to the continuing crisis. Through workshops and guided discussions, the effort was to analyze the realities of violence and politics in the community and the country, and to debate how construct a stand in opposition to the violence. In many ways this helped prevent many in poor neighborhoods and in the schools and universities, from being seduced by the appeal of subversive forces who worked hard to infiltrate and ultimately to control these spaces.

Taken together, these educational activities, declaration and public actions provided the basis for a *sustained ideological struggle against violence*, a struggle for the conscience of the people, a debate of ideas that rejected resorting to death as a legitimate tool for social change, or for the restoration of order. To achieve real peace it was essential to keep people from accepting that path as necessary or inevitable. This goal acquires even greater significance when we realize that the political parties—whose prime responsibility this is—were incapable to achieving this task. Some were too distant from the people to even see the need, others had ambiguous ties with the perpetrators of violence, be they from left or right. Extensive theological reflection on the value of life was essential to this process¹¹.

Last but by no means least important, *christian communities* throughout the country provided social and cultural spaces where people could meet in a climate of mutual trust, something all too lacking elsewhere. These safe and welcoming spaces provided people with an opportunity to speak freely, to heal, to recover strength and to find mutual support in the midst of fear and violence. These were often the only groups able to continue meeting. The communities provided people with resources and moral support, opportunities to repair their lives, to acquire allies, to become informed about events, and a to make contact with regional and sometimes national institutions even in the face of severe limitations.

Underlying all these characteristics of the christian response to violence in Peru is the firm conviction that *faith cannot be divorced from life*. This is why the defense of life and of human rights is not foreign to the mission of the church: it is an essential part of it. The mission of the church is not purely “religious” in the sense of being limited to ritual, sacraments, or catechism. This is the position of sectors of the church who have a very narrow understanding of what Christian religion means. For this reason they stood apart from the problems caused by the armed internal conflict, which they saw as not an appropriate part of their task¹². But to the contrary, spreading the Gospel and promoting human welfare are closely tied together, and the Church cannot separate itself or stand silent from the forms of violence that attack the lives of real people.

In its Final Report the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) affirmed that:

Through much testimony, public hearing and analyses, the CVR has confirmed the role of the Catholic and Evangelical Churches during the violence, as actors who helped to protect the population from crimes and violations of human rights. From the outset, the institutions of the Catholic Church condemned violence committed by armed insurgents, and in equal measure, violations of human rights by the forces of the state. These positions were made concrete through activities in defense of human rights and public denunciations of the violence. These began early through organizations like CEAS (Comisión Episcopal de Acción Social, Episcopal Commission for Social Action) and many others. The CVR has concluded

¹¹ Cf. (Gutiérrez 1989).

¹² Some conservative groups maintain that the church should not involve itself in “politics” and on this basis they opposed the defense of human rights. But of course they were involved in any case, by tolerating the abuse of human rights and endorsing or at least not questioning the government and authorities who committed them.

that many lives were saved and many abuses were prevented thanks to these actions, which were called for and recognized by the population. The same is true for the activities of so many priests, sisters and lay people who worked above to carry out their theological and pastoral orientations. In departments like Puno, Cajamarca, Ancash, Ucayli, or Amazonas, the role of priests, sisters, lay people and catechists helped to strengthen the social fabric and in this way create a barrier to the advance of Shining Path and the expansion of the so called “dirty war”. The CVR hereby pays tribute to those Christians who defended life during the time of political violence, and repudiates the assassination of priests and sisters who were fulfilling their mission above all among the poor and marginalized of the countryside and the city. (CVR 2003, Informe Final, Conclusions n. 141)

4. Conclusions

As noted at the the outset, the Peruvian case differs from many others in Latin America. In Peru extreme violence emerged during democratic rule, whereas in the other leading cases like of other countries, such as Brazil, Chile or Argentina, this occurred under military dictatorships, or with civil-military governments like Uruguay. A further difference is that insurgent movements in Argentina and Uruguay were nationalist or *castrista* (following the Cuban model) or resistance to dictatorship as in Chile, whereas in Peru the Shining Path insurgency was clearly Maoist in character. In these other countries the principal perpetrator of violence and abuses of human rights was the State, but in Peru it was Shining Path. A further difference lies in the response of the Church. In Brazil, Chile, and Peru central elements in the Church denounced violations of human rights and worked to defend victims of abuse whereas in Argentina (as in some regions of Peru, like Ayacucho) the response was silence. Further research could fruitfully take up a comparative study of these varied responses.

Studies of the Peruvian case, for example by the CVR and by the present author strongly affirm the importance of the broad renovation in the Church begun at the Second Vatican Council and the option for the poor assumed at the Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellin in 1968 in shaping the response of the Peruvian Church to the violence. In effect regions where the Church had not experienced a renovation and remained untouched by the option for the poor, Church leaders remained silent in the face of human rights violations and even sided openly with the Army and security forces. But in contrast, where the Church had assumed the option for the poor, solidarity with the population and active defense of victims was the norm. The Council had underscored the close and necessary relation between faith and life, between pastoral action and social and political reality, a connection often ignored or rejected by more conservative sectors, who also rejected the option for the poor, in the same way that they now reject much of the teaching of Pope Francis. This fundamental theological and pastoral divergence within Catholicism, along with the similarities and differences between Catholics and evangelicals, offers an important area for future research.

It is the profound hope of our people that *never again* may there be in our country an explosion of political violence of the kind we suffered between 1980 and 2000) This must be the firm commitment of all. What we Peruvians do or fail to do will determine our future. We need to overcome the factors that made caused and enabled the rise and expansion of the conflict. We need to build a real political community in which all Peruvians can enjoy the same rights, without marginalization and without discrimination. This is the core of the true national reconciliation called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in its final Report. At issue is not only to rebuild social relations broken by the years of violence, but *also*, and most importantly, to correct the injustices that existed in our society before the conflict and which contributed to its unleashing and development.

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Article

“Change Direction”: Influencing the National Church through the Vatican during the Pinochet Dictatorship in Chile

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Abstract: The relations between the Chilean Church and the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) are often characterized as conflictive. After a short period of accommodation and legitimation, the Chilean episcopate started to confront the dictatorship in the name of the poor and persecuted, but never breaking entirely with the regime. This led to a complicated relationship between the Church and the dictatorship, which tried to legitimize authoritarian rule by reference to Christian values and the defense of “Christian civilization”. Much historiography has examined this relation from the point of view of the Church. When examined from the point of view of the State important nuances appear. Documents from the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Relations and correspondence with the Chilean ambassador to the Vatican, shed new light on efforts by the Chilean state to shape relations with the Church and to change the position of bishops who were critical of the regime. These data help understand better the dynamics of conflict between Church and State in Chile during the dictatorship.

Keywords: Chile; Church; episcopate; Pinochet; dictatorship; Vatican; diplomacy

1. Introduction

In May 1983, the Vatican announced the names of three new bishops for the most important dioceses in Chile: Santiago, Valparaíso, and Concepción.¹ In his weekly secret report, the Chilean ambassador to the Vatican spoke about these appointments as follows: “We have been working closely on these matters for more than a year and a half, and we intensified our efforts over the past few months with the goal of achieving the best appointments possible. Meetings were held with almost all the voting Cardinals, with numerous officers of the Curia, as well as with others who might have some influence on these matters [...]. These nominations represent a clear improvement in the line followed up to now by the Holy See. The undersigned considers these to be a great triumph and with decisive influence for the political future of Chile”.² In another letter earlier the same year, the ambassador laid out his reasons: “The nominations reflect an effort to change direction, to correct a course of action that was excessively politicized—politicized in favor of the left—by the Chilean Church.”³

These citations demonstrate a fact that received little attention in the historiography of the relations between the Catholic Church and the dictatorship in Chile (1973–1990): the efforts by the government

¹ This article was prepared as part of the project ANID/FONDECYT/REGULAR/FOLIO N° 1200145.

² Letter from the Chilean embassy to the Holy See (ESS, *Embajada ante la Santa Sede*) to the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Chile (MREx, *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores*): Informe semestral, secret, 1 August 1983, in: Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Chile (Amrech, *Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile*), Acta Santa Sede, 1983.

³ Letter ESS to MREx: Nominations of bishops, Santiago, Valparaíso, Concepción, secret, 13 May 1983, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1983.

of Augusto Pinochet to influence the content of this relation through diplomatic negotiations with the Vatican. The relation between the Catholic Church and the Chilean dictatorship evolved in a complex and highly conflictive manner. After an early period of support and legitimation of the regime by the Catholic hierarchy, the majority of Chilean bishops came to constitute the most important moral opposition to the military government. This opposition arose out of the Church's work with victims of the dictatorship and expanded and consolidated in many ways, but never led to an open break in relations with the government. Neither the Church nor the Pinochet government, which justified the coup and all subsequent actions in Christian terms, had any interest in a complete break.

Much historiography has given detailed attention to accounting for how the Catholic Church transformed itself into a major opposition to the dictatorship while at the same time maintaining stable relations with government itself. This article returns to the issues, but now from the point of view of the state, a topic that has received much less attention. Understanding how the Pinochet government perceived the Church and following and paying close attention to state efforts to influence the attitude of the Church helps us explain more fully the conflictive relations between these two institutions during the dictatorship. In this way, this study contributes to analysis of the relations between the Church and the dictatorship, which is central to any effort to understand the impact and consequences of human rights violations in this period. To achieve this goal, the present study is based on correspondence between the Chilean embassy to the Holy See and the dictatorship's Ministry of Foreign Relations. This correspondence shows the position the Pinochet government took with the Vatican and its effort to influence the Chilean national Church through higher ecclesiastical channels. Until now, this material has not been considered in efforts to explain the conflicts between the Church and the dictatorship.⁴

To arrive at a full understanding of the relations between the authoritarian government and the Church, in what follows, I begin by reviewing the existing bibliography on the Chilean Church and its actions during the dictatorship in Chile. I then sketch out the opinions of several important actors in the Chilean Church concerning some of the most important events in this relation. This provides a foundation for a broader view of the situation in which we can situate the position of the Church and its reactions to approaches by the Chilean state to the Vatican. These approaches, and the general policy behind them, are then examined in light of the correspondence between the Chilean embassy to the Vatican and the Ministry of Foreign Relations. I close with conclusions that underscore the importance of taking both sides of the conflict into account as a basis for complete understanding of the attitude of the Church to the government, and of the government to the Church during the years of the Chilean dictatorship.

2. Historiographic Judgments about the Chilean Church and the Dictatorship

Overall, historiographers have noted an "ambiguous and cautious" reaction (Cancino Troncoso 1997, p. 24) by the Chilean Church to the coup and the installation of the dictatorship in Chile. In their early public statements and in private actions, Chile's bishops accorded legitimation to the military junta and accepted the new regime. There are several reasons for this position. Many authors note that following the coup, negative judgments about Marxism by some bishops led the episcopal conference to be content with the end of the Allende government and thankful to the military (Cancino Troncoso 1997; Smith 1982). These sentiments were encouraged by the perception that the military regime would be transitional, and that Chile would soon return to democracy, or as Smith puts it in his study of the Chilean Church, there was a "naive trust" in the military's promises (Smith 1982) There were also "pragmatic and tactical" reasons (Cancino Troncoso 1997, p. 29): the ecclesiastical hierarchy was clear that it had to accept the military junta as the only real power in the country, and in order to maintain the Church's position it was necessary to engage in dialogue with the new political authorities. The Church

⁴ One notable exception is the excellent work by Antje Schnoor on the changing position of the Jesuits in Chile. Schnoor uses some of this correspondence, (Schnoor 2019, pp. 427–35).

never made a complete break with the dictatorial government: this was a prerequisite for preserving some liberty of action and the ability to carry out its humanitarian programs in aid of victims through institutions like the Ecumenical Committee for Peace in Chile (*Comité Pro Paz*) and the Vicariate of Solidarity (*Vicaría de la Solidaridad*) (Timmermann 2017; Lowden 1996). This accords with the idea that many bishops, among them Cardinal Silva Henríquez, believed they could be more effective helping victims of the dictatorship through private actions. They did not engage in direct public denunciations of the violence which they considered to be ineffective (Schnoor 2019, p. 369).

Recent studies give more weight to a “civil society” within the Church (e.g., Levine 2015). They consider the Church not as a homogenous institution, but instead take into account many voices and actors within the Church itself. In this way, Antje Schnoor explains that Chile’s Jesuits, through their publication *Mensaje* did not deny legitimacy to the coup because they believed that the Allende government had been unable to maintain public order. At the same time, however, they insisted on a return to democracy, and found themselves subject to regime censors who labeled them as progressive clergy. Although the bishops got direct support from the Jesuits (Schnoor 2019), at the same time they were a target of criticism from conservative Catholics like the Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP, *Tradición, Familia y Propiedad*) or the Military Chaplains. They strongly legitimated the dictatorship and criticized the bishops for what they called a “weak” attitude towards Marxists (Ruderer 2012; Ruderer 2015). This mix of support and criticism from within the Church must be taken into account in order to understand the ambiguous reaction of the hierarchy to the regime. In the same way, there were critical voices raised from the “Church of the poor”, which reproached the bishops for their own authoritarianism, given that on the one hand they supported and helped victims but on the other they never criticized the authoritarian structures of the dictatorial government (Fernández 1996).

In the historiography of this period, there is an almost unanimous judgment that the ambiguous public stance of the bishops was accompanied by an immediate humanitarian reaction in which the Church mobilized wide range of resources in support of victims: publicizing cases, providing food, shelter, and legal assistance, and naming and locating those detained who often simply disappeared (Hensel and Ruderer 2011). This work was carried out in the early years by the Peace Committee and after 1976 through the Vicariate of Solidarity (Lowden 1993, 1996; Wilde 2015; Kelly 2015; Ruderer and Strassner 2015; Del Villar Tagle 2018). Thanks to the work of these institutions, the bishops became more and more aware of the scale of the violations of human rights, leading to a clear shift of position between 1974 and 1976. Beginning at the latest in 1976, the Chilean Church became the only institution opposed to the regime capable of open criticizing the repression. This shift can be explained on the one hand by the bishops’ growing awareness of human rights violations and their understanding that the regime was not planning to leave power in the short term (if ever), and on the other hand by pressure from progressive elements within the Church which predate the coup. The evolution of these progressive elements is part of a long-term process of change within the Chilean Church which brought it closer to the world of the poor (Botto 2018). Others (Gill 1998) argue that these new positions represented a reaction to the growth of evangelical Protestantism among the poor, to the influence of certain progressive figures in the Church like Father Alberto Hurtado or Bishop Manuel Larraín (Larios Mengotti 2017), or are due to the application to Chilean realities of the changes stemming from the Second Vatican Council, a process guided by the Chilean hierarchy itself (Fernández Labbé 2019). Together, these processes helped the Chilean Church transform itself into one of the most progressive in the continent, which made it impossible for the bishops to remain silent in the face of the abuses and violations of the dictatorship.⁵

⁵ This attitude contrasted with the stance taken by the Argentinean Episcopate, which, with few exceptions (Catoggio 2016), backed the military dictatorship in 1976 and even delivered religious legitimation for the violent repression of Argentine citizens (Mignone 2006; Obregón 2005; di Stefano and Zanatta 2009; Ruderer 2010). The Brazilian Church took a more engaged attitude against the dictatorship (1964–1985), but, due to divisions in the hierarchy and the goal of

It is interesting to see, that only one of the first studies of the Church during the dictatorship emphasizes that the Church began to change its position only when it came under direct attack by the Government (Smith 1982, p. 331). According to Smith the turning point came after mid-1976 when the regime organized an attack on a group of “progressive” bishops and shortly thereafter expelled lawyers associated with the Christian Democratic Party (itself close to the bishops). The hierarchy abandons its hitherto ambiguous and cautious stance and develops a much more critical position, one that remained in place until 1983 when the changes in the episcopate noted at the outset of this article began to make themselves felt. This idea, that the turn to critical position by the Church was due, among other factors, to the hostile actions of the dictatorship, has not been prominent in current historiography. We will examine this further here.

Another factor that has received scant attention is the role of the Church during the 1980s. Many studies note a clear change of position with the appointment of a new Archbishop for the capital city, Santiago, when Cardinal Silva Henríquez retired due to age, and was replaced by Cardinal Francisco Fresno, who was one of the bishops who had publicly applauded the 1973 military coup. With Cardinal Fresno, the Church assumed a more conciliatory position, reaching out to the regime and positioning itself as a mediator between the government and the opposition (Meacham 1987; Cancino Troncoso 1997; Fleet and Smith 1997; Strassner 2006). This stance allowed the Church to play an important role articulating the views of the emerging political opposition while retaining its own freedom of action with a view to a possible political transition to democracy. At the same time, it is important to note that these changes in ecclesiastical personnel and the emergence of a more conciliatory attitude to the regime did not make for any essential change in work on human rights. In this area the Church continued to develop its humanitarian work confronting the dictatorship over its violations of human rights, but now mixing denunciations with calls for a return to democracy. In this sense, the Church continued to play an active political role: insisting on the return to democracy provided a political alternative that complicated its relations with the government of Pinochet (Strassner 2006). The changes and continuities in the stance of the Church after 1983 have yet to be examined adequately from the point of view of the State, that is, as a reaction to the policies and specific actions of the Chilean state. Before getting into detail on how the dictatorial government viewed the Church, it is important to lay out the most important events and the judgments these government actions provoked in important Church members.

3. The Chilean Church under the Dictatorship

As mentioned before, the early reaction of the Church to the dictatorship can be characterized as one of cautious legitimation.⁶ Along with this legitimation there was an almost immediate (October 1973) commitment to humanitarian work with the establishment of the peace committee (Comité Pro Paz) due mostly to the initiative of Lutheran bishop Helmut Frenz (Frenz 2006; Lowden 1993). This work with and for the victims of human rights violations would become the principal source of conflict between the Church and the dictatorship. Thus, in its first major public declaration (April 1974), a pastoral letter on “Reconciliation in Chile”, the bishops still expressed gratitude for the coup but for

negotiating with the military, never was able to establish an institution similar to the Vicariate of Solidarity (Serbin 2000; Kelly 2015). In the Uruguayan case, too, the Church never could play an important role in the opposition to military rule (Ruderer and Strassner forthcoming). So, despite its ambiguous first reaction, and due to the foundation of the Vicariate of Solidarity, the actions of the Chilean Church confronting the military dictatorship stand out in the overall context of Latin America.

⁶ In this section I will lay out some important events in the church-dictatorship relation, using the impressions of the protagonists themselves, above all Memoirs of Cardinal Silva Henríquez and the Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago, Jorge Hourton, to gauge in this way the main reactions of the church in the face of the actions of the dictatorship. I am conscient that the impressions of both bishops don't represent the opinion of the church as whole, but, mostly due to the predominant position of Cardenal Silva Henríquez as archbishop of Santiago, I will use, in the following section, his point of view as representative for the Chilean church, having in mind that there has been other voices, for example, the much more conservative one from archbishop Tagle in Valparaíso.

the first time they also publicly criticized the regime's own violence. These criticisms were enough to spur strong attacks from the press friendly to the regime, attacks that were reinforced by conflicts within the Church, as two bishops, Msgr. Tagle and Msgr. Fresno, publicly voiced their dissent from the criticisms expressed in the pastoral letter (Smith 1982, p. 296). The visible lack of unity among the bishops became an important factor in the dictatorial government's efforts to delegitimize Church critiques of its repressive policies. Attacks on the Church by elements in the press and persons close to the regime escalated and grew sharper in tone in 1975 following the publication of a second pastoral letter which once again mixed positive judgments on the regime with criticisms of its violations of human rights. At the end of that same year there were several incidents that made for a visible deterioration in relations between the Church and the regime. A newspaper close to the regime took statements by Bishop Carlos Camus (given in an off the record interview) out of context making them look like severe criticisms of the military. This was a clear effort to discredit the Church in the eyes of public opinion (Smith 1982, p. 301). In October 1975, the regime denied entry to the country to Helmut Frenz, in an effort to silence one of the most prominent voices critical of its repressive policies (Frenz 2006). Shortly thereafter, the government arrested several priests and collaborators associated with the Peace Committee, because they had attended to wounded members of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR, *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*) who had sought shelter from the regime's secret police DINA (*Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*). This incident provoked a sharp public discussion between Cardinal Silva Henríquez (who did not defend the militants but insisted on the duty of helping the wounded whoever they were), and the regime's chief ideologue, Jaime Guzmán, who strongly attacked the Cardinal. The incident also led to demands by Pinochet to disband the Peace Committee. The Cardinal acceded to this demand but proceeded to establish the Vicariate of Solidarity, under the direct supervision of the Church and hence with a measure of protection (Lowden 1993; Ruderer and Strassner forthcoming). All these attacks led Cardinal Silva to the conclusion that "the hostility of the government had given way now to a climate of open warfare" (Cavallo 1991, p. 83). The hierarchy clearly believed that attacks by the government were responsible for the deterioration of relations. This "open warfare" came to a peak in 1976 when the regime did not just expel lawyers associated with the Christian Democrats but above all when it launched direct attacks through the DINA on three Chilean bishops who had attended a meeting in Riobamba (Ecuador), where they were arrested by the military government for supposed political activities. On their return to Chile, they were assaulted in the airport by civilian agents of the DINA. This led to a sharp reaction by the Permanent Committee of the Episcopacy which threatened the aggressors with excommunication (Hourton 2009, p. 251). Earlier the same year, in the words of Bishop Jorge Hourton, "there were strong attacks on the Church and on its bishops by the so called Fiducia" (Hourton 2009, p. 250). This is a reference to the publication of a book by the ultra-conservative Catholic group TFP (*Tradición, Familia y Propiedad*) better known in Chile as Fiducia, which strongly attacked Cardinal Silva Henríquez himself (Ruderer 2012). The Church explicitly linked these attacks, along with the assault at the airport, to an official government policy, given that neither the publication nor the attacks would have been possible without the official sanction. In the opinion of the Church, these attacks simply "throw more fuel on a fire which has been created by previous incidents" (Cavallo 1991, p. 100).

In succeeding years, that fire never went out, and relations remained tense but with no effort by the Church to make a public break with the dictatorship. Although the hierarchy began to accept the fact that the regime was likely to remain in place for some time to come, the bishops never abandoned their commitment to work for human rights. As a result, the topics of human rights and the fate of the detained and disappeared became the core issues of conflict between the Church and the dictatorship. The memoir of bishop Jorge Hourton and Cardinal Silva Henríquez show very clearly how government attacks on priests, sisters and lay people committed to human rights continued and how these worsened relations over time (Hourton 2009, p. 266). The discovery of the bodies of regime victims in the ovens of Lonquén in 1978 was still another moment in which the Church came face to face with the regime's silence and indifference concerning its victims. The judgment of Cardinal Silva

clearly affirms that violence and abuse were central to the Church's relations with the government. He saw the regime's silence in the face of the issue of the detained and disappeared as "its most serious mistake" (Cavallo 1991, p. 123).

Nonetheless, the proclamation of the Constitution of 1980 lent a certain legitimacy to the dictatorship and relations calmed down a bit. The Cardinal was convinced that the task of the Church was neither to "overthrow nor to sustain governments" (Cavallo 1991, p. 114). For this reason, he offered a *Te Deum* mass in the Cathedral to celebrate the new constitution. This gesture to the military brought much criticism from more progressive sectors of the Church but also showed that the hierarchy recognized the facts on the ground, that is, the political power of the military regime and its own desire to maintain stable relations with the political authorities (Cavallo 1991, p. 213). At this point, and in his own words (Cavallo 1991, p. 220) to maintain an equilibrium within the Church and to calm progressive critics, Cardinal Silva gave an interview to the Italian press, in which shortly after the *Te Deum* for the Constitution, he strongly criticized the dictatorship for its violations of human rights and for being a totalitarian regime. This interview led to renewed attacks on the Church in the press. The result was that relations remained very tense until mid-1983 when the changes in the episcopacy noted earlier took effect (Hourton 2009, p. 310; Cavallo 1991, p. 217).

To understand the relation between these institutions in the 1980s, we need to take account of the agency of the state as well. In his memoirs, the Cardinal is explicit that the regime sought to "limit the bishops within a certain model of contact and hold them to a highly disciplined exchange" (Cavallo 1991, p. 228). This is confirmed by Pinochet's orders, which, in 1980 changed the intermediary between the Church and the government, replacing General Court, who had gained the respect of the bishops, first for General Guillard and later for a catholic civilian, Sergio Rillón. These personnel changes were first received well by the bishops for what they saw as Rillón's closeness to the Church, but in the end only served to worsen relations. The hierarchy soon realized that Rillón had neither the interest nor the orders required to fulfill the role of intermediary. His goal, rather, was to push for a reconstitution of the hierarchy in the hope of influencing Vatican views of the Chilean Episcopate (Cavallo 1991, p. 229). For the Church, it remained very clear that they "did not share a common language with the government" (Cavallo 1991, p. 228).

This situation of limited and distorted communication persisted until the new episcopal appointments mentioned at the outset. The new Archbishop of Santiago Msgr. Francisco Fresno was considered an ally by the government which anticipated an improvement in relations with his accession to the post. This view is confirmed by the reaction of one bishop highly committed to human rights when he heard the news: "I just heard of the naming of Msgr. Francisco Fresno. PLOP!! This is not what we hoped for (Hourton 2009, p. 353)". In effect, with a new archbishop of Santiago in place, the Church adopted a more conciliatory position with the government, manifest in several attempts by the Archbishop to mediate political accords between the opposition and the government, among them the National Accord which helped draw together the various political positions within the opposition (Meacham 1987; Strassner 2006). Once again, however, the theme of human rights violations and the violence of the regime upset efforts to improve the relations between the Church and the government. At the beginning of 1984, a serious incident arose between the Church and the dictatorial government when four *miristas* [members of the movement of the Revolutionary Left or MIR] fled to the Vatican embassy in Chile and requested political asylum. The papal nuncio, who belonged to the more conservative sector of the Church, refused pressure from the government to hand over the *miristas*, citing diplomatic immunity. This incident notably worsened relations between the two institutions (Wilde 2015, p. 192). A further incident came with the death of Father André Jarlan in mid-1984. Father Jarlan was killed by bullets fired by a *carabiniero* [member of the national Police of Chile] during a protest in the township of La Victoria while he was reading the Bible. These cases, added to the general intensification of repression during nationwide protests between 1983 and 1986 led the Church, now under the leadership of Cardinal Fresno, to take up again its role of critic and defender of human rights. If the military believed its problems with the Church would

disappear with a more conservative leader like Fresno, they were clearly mistaken. Violations of human rights remained the central issue for conflicts between the Church and the dictatorship and relations remained tense, interrupted only by the visit of Pope John Paul II to Chile in April 1987 (Navasal Kunstmann 2017). That visit raised hopes within the Church for a broad “democratizing impact”, and as we shall see, fear in the government of precisely that possibility.

In general, it is clear that for the Church, the central issue in its relations with the government were violations of human rights and the multiple attacks on Church institutions, groups, and people as a result of their active defense of victims. Its stance throughout the dictatorship cannot be understood without taking into account these attacks and the government’s efforts to paint the Church as an enemy. The fact that the regime perceived it as an enemy never made sense to the hierarchy and they never accepted this status. This shaped their conduct throughout the dictatorship. In the words of Cardinal Silva Henríquez: “The Church cannot refrain from denouncing abuses of human dignity, [. . .] seeing this as the actions of an enemy or opponent is as wrong as seeing this as the acts of an ally who can be used” (Cavallo 1991, p. 114).

4. Gaining Influence within the Church: The Dictatorship and the Vatican

Two points are central to any effort to understand the stance taken by the Pinochet dictatorship to the Catholic Church. Of basic importance is the military’s perception of communism and its relation with Christianity. For insight into the views of the generals I base myself on a series of conferences about Marxism given by the Opus Dei priest José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois,⁷ to the military junta on the personal invitation of Pinochet himself. Ibáñez Langlois explained to the generals that Marxism is “a religion in reverse with hatred raised to a mystical level”⁸ and for this reason, “Christians tempted by Marxism or infiltrated by Leninism, for example in theologies of liberation, are today one of the most tragic phenomena in the Catholic world”.⁹ To the military authorities and their allies, it was clear that any and all Catholics close to the theology of liberation were simply “useful allies”¹⁰ of Marxism and therefore automatically classified as enemies of a government that claimed to be inspired by Christian values. This interpretation was addressed by priests close to liberation theology like the Jesuit José Aldunate, a strong opponent of the dictatorship, who stated in his clandestine publication *Policarpo*, that “[Ibáñez Langlois] has tried to strengthen the regime in its conviction that those Christians, every more numerous, inspired by the theology of liberation, are enemies infiltrated by Marxism”.¹¹ The Chilean regime believed that there were numerous priests and bishops in effect closer to Marxism than to their own Catholic faith and therefore felt free to denounce them to the Vatican.

This understanding brings me to the second point which led the Church to denounce a so called *Banzer Plan* to combat progressive forces in the Church.¹² This plan, according to the clandestine catholic journal *Policarpo*, envisioned three basic tactics: “take advantage of existing divisions within the Church, [. . .] slander and persecute progressive leaders, [. . .] intimidate foreign priests and sisters and expel them from the country into exile.”¹³ The central point for our purposes is not so much if the

⁷ Ibáñez Langlois was one of the priests most visible in official media, praising the government in his radio and television programs.

⁸ Ibáñez Langlois: *Marxismos. Religión al revés. Síntesis de las ocho conferencias desarrolladas por el sacerdote José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois ante las autoridades de gobierno*, in: Archivo CIDOC (Centro de Investigación y Documentación, Universidad Finis Terrae, Santiago) (copy donated to the archive by General Patricio Arancibia Clavel, p. 13).

⁹ See (Ibid., p. 14).

¹⁰ See (Ibid., p. 14).

¹¹ *Policarpo*, Año 1, Nr. 2 (ago. 1981, p. 9).

¹² The *Banzer Plan* (named for Hugo Banzer, a military President of Bolivia) was, according to church sources cited here, an agreement among military dictatorships in the Southern Cone of Latin America to discredit liberation theology and stifle progressive forces in the Church. During research for this article, we could not find government or military sources to prove the existence of the *Banzer Plan*, but, for the purpose of our topic, it is not necessary neither. What matters here, is the perception of the church that this plan indeed existed.

¹³ *Policarpo*, Año 1, Nr. 5 (nov. 1981, p. 10).

Plan really existed but rather the extent to which the Chilean Church perceived its consequences and felt itself to be under attack. Cardinal Silva Henríquez underscored its significance for Church-State relations as follows: “I cannot say if the ‘Banzer Plan’ really existed or not. But there can be no doubt that its recommendations fit closely with the positions that some in the Chilean government have taken towards us” (Cavallo 1991, pp. 205–6). In effect, as we shall see, the stances assumed by the Pinochet dictatorship fit very closely with what was outlined by F. Aldunate in *Policarpo* (divide, slander, force into exile) and had a significant impact on the how the Church understood its relations with the government. For these reasons, it is important to take a closer look.

The correspondence between Héctor Riesle, the regime’s ambassador to the Vatican and the Ministry of Foreign Relations provides valuable insights. Riesle belonged to the ultra-conservative Tradition, Family and Property movement and was also a member of the Conservative Party. He was prominent among those political figures who defended the regime on religious grounds (Ruderer 2012).¹⁴ On assuming his position as ambassador in April 1974, Riesle realized right away that the Vatican “had a critical view”¹⁵ of the new regime. He thus took it as his explicit task to “refute the falsehood that have reached the Vatican concerning the actions of the Government of Chile, [a task] which must be accompanied by sustained efforts to calm spirits and to smooth the rough edges in a context shaped by a distorted vision of our realities”.¹⁶ On the same occasion, the Minister of Foreign Relations, Vice Admiral Ismael Huerta, emphasized “the extraordinary importance that the Supreme Government accords to its diplomatic efforts with the Vatican”.¹⁷ Securing favorable opinions from the Vatican was of great importance to the Pinochet government, given that a central pillar of its legitimation rested on a religious discourse of the defense of Christian values (Ruderer 2010). To achieve this goal, the regime needed to be able to identify influential figures within the Vatican.¹⁸ A sustained effort was also made to advance a theory about the proper separation of temporal and religious spheres of action: “As a result, the Government of Chile has no desire to intervene in the internal affairs of the Church [. . .]. At the same time, our position requires us to insist that the Church itself respect these limits and refrain from intervening in the temporal actions of the Government”.¹⁹

Of course, the most important obstacle to achieving any real separation of these spheres was the government’s own systematic violation of human rights which, as we have seen, made it impossible for the Church to remain silent about the “temporal actions of the Government”. Within the embassy to the Vatican there was great awareness of this situation. This is clear in Riesle’s efforts to explain to the government that a central issue in relations with the Vatican was the doctrine of national security [foundational for the regime] which the Church considered to be a “logical antecedent to violations of human rights and authoritarian tendencies”.²⁰ In the same way Riesle emphasized that “what can still be considered to be the most difficult point of all, is the problem of the detained and disappeared”.²¹ The violent repression had clearly become the central problem in relations between the Church and the dictatorship. Both institutions were aware of the problem, but since the government could not and would not alter its policies, it had to have recourse to other arguments.

¹⁴ Writing shortly after the coup, Riesle cited Thomas Aquinas on the right of rebellion against tyranny as a justification for the actions of the military (Riesle Contreras 1973).

¹⁵ Letter Embassy to the Holy See (ESS) to the Ministry of Foreign Relations (MREx): Presentation of Credentials, confidential, 12 April 1974, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1974.

¹⁶ Letter from MREx (Vice Admiral Huerta) to ESS: Dirección de Asuntos internacionales, confidential, 6 May 1974, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1974.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Letter from MREx (Vice Admiral Huerta) to the ESS: Dirección de Asuntos internacionales, confidential, 8 April 1974, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1974.

²⁰ Letter ESS to MREx: “Actitud de la Iglesia frente a la doctrina de Seguridad Nacional”, secret, 10 June 1976, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1976.

²¹ Letter ESS to MREx: “Se refiere situación desaparecidos”, secret, 18 October 1977, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1977.

One important element in the government's strategy was to paint human rights denunciations by the Church as part of a campaign by international communism to discredit the Chilean military. Central to this argument was the military's understanding, noted earlier, of the relations between communism and Christianity, according to which progressive Christians were the objects of infiltration by communists who hoped to use the Church in psychological warfare and media attacks being waged by international communism against the government of Chile. According to Riesle, this tactic required "erasing the proper image of utter incompatibility between Christianity and Marxism, for what it needs a group that had already been infiltrated".²² In the same way, international communism exercised "pressure within the country to make it difficult for the Church and for many Catholics to take up clearly anticommunist positions and, in this way, to commit themselves to the 'revolutionary process'".²³ In these ways, the Chilean government tried to present to the Vatican the idea that all the denunciations and criticisms directed at the dictatorship owed more to the effort of international communism than to the true opinions of the Church. Chile was depicted as a valiant "David" struggling against the "Goliath" of the Soviet Union which had managed to infiltrate the Chilean Church.²⁴

Now, given the "personal ideological position of the Pope and his group",²⁵ who Riesle in 1976 saw as still close to the Christian Democrats, arguments about communist infiltration did not seem sufficient to change relations with the Vatican in any major way given the importance that issues of human rights had acquired in the early years of the regime. For this reason, in September 1976 Riesle writing about "the most conflictive points in relations with the Church" makes specific mention of "everything related to arbitrary arrests and mistreatments, [. . .] the state of siege and the Doctrine of National Security."²⁶ The issue of state violence remained at the heart of the problems between the Church and the government of Chile.

To counter the negative image the regime had in the eyes of the Vatican, the Government used a tactic that fits perfectly with the recommendation of the *Banzer Plan*, noted earlier. The tactic was to take advantage of divisions among Chilean bishops as a pretext for raising doubts about some with the Pope. Thus, on several occasions, Riesle transmitted the "sense of surprise and unease the government experienced about the activities of the Cardinal Archbishop of Santiago, Msgr. Raúl Silva Henríquez",²⁷ about whom Riesle left no doubt that "his statements [. . .] reveal a position that is highly antagonistic to the Supreme Government, politically and above all with reference to economics".²⁸ The Cardinal thus became the prime target of the government, which also accounts for attacks against him in the Chilean press, which aimed to undermine his standing not only in the public opinion within Chile but also within key circles at the Vatican. As we have seen, these attacks backfired, which only made the government even more irritated with the Cardinal.

Along with the Cardinal, a group of Chilean bishops were identified, who, in the eyes of the government, were responsible for the bad image of the dictatorship and for the conflicts between Church and State. Thus, Riesle noted not only that "on the part of a group of bishops there was a desire to seek conflicts with the Government". He went further to identify "the bishops most opposed to the government as González Cruchaga, Camus, Ariztía, Hourton y Alvear, [a group that] is waging a

²² Letter ESS a MREx: entrevista con monseñor Agostino Casaroli, 22 March 1974, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1974.

²³ Letter ESS a MREx: Remite estudio, 17 June 1977, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1977. This letter contained a detailed analysis of the strategies of international communism and was received with great approval by the Ministry: a handwritten note shows the importance the regime gave to this argument. Thus: "Congratulations. We look forward to its publication".

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Letter ESS to MREx: Situación relaciones entre Santa Sede y Chile, secret, 22 September 1976, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1976.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Letter ESS to MREx: Acto litúrgico en Catedral, secret, 9 June 1976, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1976.

²⁸ Letter ESS to MREx: Declaraciones del cardenal, 12 August 1977, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1977.

mounting campaign of confrontation with the Government.”²⁹ This effort to depict some bishops as instigators of conflict responded to the idea of convincing the Vatican that not all bishops opposed the regime, and that the government was not in any case responsible for the conflict. The problem was, rather, that some bishops were exceeding their proper role. To be sure, the bishops identified as “opposition” were of course those most outspoken about official violence and abuse. In this way, the regime sought to plant suspicions in the Vatican about those in the Chilean Church who were fighting for human rights.

One clear indication that this was the tactic comes from a report, signed personally by Manuel Contreras (the director of the DINA), that the government transmitted to the ambassador. This report concerned Msgr. Cristián Precht, head of the Vicariate of Solidarity, and accused Msgr. Precht of carrying out numerous “activities against the Supreme Government”. The Vicariate was depicted as an institution that “is overstepping the bounds of its legitimate spiritual functions developing campaigns in opposition to the Supreme Government.”³⁰ In the same tone, in his annual report for 1979, Riesle insisted that he regularly brings to the attention of the Vatican “the negative consequences that the activities of the Vicariate have for the Church itself, for peace and for rebuilding the nation, for Catholics, and for relations between the Church and the government.”³¹

Although in the same embassy reports it is evident that these accusations do not always have much influence with Vatican personnel,³² at the same time it is clear, as we shall see in the following, that the tactic of dividing the bishops and accusing those closest to the defense of human rights of being the catalyst for the problems between Church and State, had some long term benefits for the regime, which was able to use these arguments when preparing its position in negotiations over future episcopal appointments. These appointments, above all those which came into effect in 1983 with the retirements due to age in the dioceses of Santiago, Valparaiso, and Concepción as well as in the Military Vicariate, became central to the regime’s strategy for dealing with the Vatican. Writing in September 1980, Riesle warned the government that “nominations of new pastors for the most populous dioceses and for the bishop of the Armed Forces are of such importance that they could not be viewed passively by the Government of Chile. These four appointments will be absolutely decisive for the future direction and actions of the Chilean Church during the next twenty years”.³³ In the same letter, as part of his search for greater influence, the ambassador proposed the possibility of arriving at a “*modus vivendi* with the Holy See [. . .] that would include a procedure for regular consultation over the nomination of future bishops”.³⁴ Conscious of the fact that it would not be easy to convince the Vatican to sign such an agreement with a dictatorial regime, the ambassador laid out several arguments that the government of Chile could use, among these the making it possible to deduct contributions to the Church from national taxes, given that the Chilean Church “is very poor”.³⁵

²⁹ Letter ESS to MREx: Entrevista con sustituto Secretaria de Estado, 23 September 1976 in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1976. A written note on the document shows that the letter was brought to the personal attention of Pinochet, which demonstrates the extent of coordination within the government concerning relations with the Vatican.

³⁰ Both citations in Letter from MREx to ESS: Remite antecedentes del presbítero Cristian Precht, 15 July 1977, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1977.

³¹ Letter ESS to MREx: Remite “Memoria Anual”, confidential, 27 November 1979, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1979. The coincidences with the Banzer Plan are not limited to accusations against progressive Catholics and the exploitation of division among the bishops, but also include the expulsion of progressive foreign priests, who, according to the Ministry “are carrying out activities with clear political implications”. Letter MREx to ESS: Información semanal, secret, 4 September 1981, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1981.

³² The Vatican always maintains multiple channels of information, including *ad-liminam* visits used by bishops to highlight the state of things in their dioceses. These provided those accused with a means of transmitting their own version of events to Vatican personnel.

³³ Letter ESS to MREx: Problema sucesión episcopal, secret, 3 september 1980, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1980.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. The letter also mentions Catholic universities, a complex theme we cannot go into here above all for reasons of space. The juridical status of the church was also raised, because, according to Riesle, the new Constitution left a space in which to put pressure on the church in “extreme cases”, Ibid. In all likelihood the possibility of a *modus vivendi* is what brought Sergio Rillón to Rome in 1984 to propose “a bilateral formula [. . .] that would be similar to the old Patronage” as Cardinal Silva

The fact that the government was planning well in advance about these nominations underscores the importance they held for the regime. Despite the multiple arguments proposed by Riesle for these negotiations, the central point for the government continued to highlight the divisions within the Chilean Episcopal Conference, accusing some bishops of undue politicization. This strategy was reinforced in 1979 with the accession of Pope John Paul II, a much more conservative pontiff who promised to be attentive to the “problem” posed by bishops who had close relations with socialism or communism.

For this reason, in mid-1980 Riesle underlined the divisions within the Chilean episcopate and claimed that he had made it clear to the new Vatican authorities that “some bishops had clearly taken a socialist, even fully Marxist option [. . .], for this reason, I pointed out the need for decisive action by the Holy See to moderate the Chilean episcopacy [. . .] with direct reference to the nomination of future bishops.”³⁶ In the same line, he mentioned, some months before, that “concrete actions were needed on the part of the Holy See that will demonstrate a different orientation from the pro socialist sector of the episcopacy, for example with nominations in a much more centrist and pastoral line.”³⁷

In the coming years, the regime used this combination of long-range planning and emphasis on divisions within the Chilean hierarchy by forwarding each critical commentary on the Chilean Church to Vatican officials. For example, following on an Pastoral letter critical of the 1980 plebiscite for the new Constitution, Riesle explained to the Vatican that “the bishops have transformed themselves [. . .] into an opposition political force of a pro socialist orientation and that this needed to be corrected.”³⁸ One year later, the ambassador warned that “any episcopal nomination in the line of the so called ‘theology of liberation’ or something similar would not contribute to the unity of Chilean Catholics, nor would it facilitate relations between the Church and the State which the Government wishes to improve.”³⁹ Another year later, the government used an incident between Bishop Hourton and the regime, in which Hourton sided with students on strike. The government accused Hourton of provoking violence and Riesle wrote to the Ministry, stating: “This event gives the undersigned a perfect opportunity to insist [. . .] that situations of this kind are not the fault of the government, which, much to the contrary, for more than nine years now has shown an extraordinary patience, a fact that has been recognized and appreciated by the Holy See. We are now coming to a point where the Church itself needs to do something to prevent attitudes of this kind, a call to attention.”⁴⁰ In the same vein the government linked the 1982 Pastoral Letter “The Rebirth of Chile” (*El Renacer de Chile*), in which the bishops criticized the economic situation in the country and called for democratization, with the issue of new episcopal appointments. The bishops’ criticisms were presented not as an understandable reflection on the state of the country, but rather as an improper intrusion by the Church into the political sphere: “Given the weight within the Church of the now vacant sees of Santiago, Valparaiso, and Concepción, an episcopal position like the one visible in this letter only worsens the political problems of the country, which entails grave damage to the Church itself.”⁴¹ Dealing now with a more conservative Vatican led by Pope John Paul II, the Chilean dictatorship advanced arguments about the unity of the Church and the politicization of the hierarchy to make the case that the government was not responsible for the deterioration of Church-State relations. This was the fault of “philo-socialist bishops”, a situation that needed to be changed in the future.

It is important to mention, that this interpretation did not always get a favorable reception in the Vatican, which had many more sources among the bishops and the Nuncio. In any case, Riesle

noted with a certain irony for the limited possibilities of success (Cavallo 1991, p. 229). In the end, none of these ideas was realized (Schnoor 2019, p. 430).

³⁶ Letter ESS to MREx: Entrevista con Monseñor S.E.R. Achille Silvestrini, 18 July 1980, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1980.

³⁷ Letter ESS to MREx: Conversación del suscrito . . . , reservado, 8 November 1979, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1979.

³⁸ Letter ESS to MREx: Informa conversación con . . . , secreto, 26 September 1980, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1980.

³⁹ Letter ESS to MREx: Conversaciones sostenidas . . . , secret, 7 October 1981, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1981.

⁴⁰ Letter ESS to MREx: Informe mensual, reservado, 3 October 1982, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1982.

⁴¹ Telex MREx to ESS: Nr. 034, December 1982, en: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1982.

was a person who enjoyed exaggerating his role in events (Schnoor 2019, p. 428). Bearing this in mind, what I suggest is not that the dictatorial government could determine the names of future bishops, but rather that we can see clearly how and with what arguments they tried to influence not only the naming of new bishops, but also the general tone and public stance of the Chilean Episcopal Conference. This is the case not only with respect to bishops nominated but also to those priests who in the end were not considered by the Holy See. Riesle's persistent criticism of the Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago, Jorge Hourton, and of Jesuits close to the theology of liberation like Fernando Montes clearly influenced the fact that they were never nominated to be diocesan bishops.⁴² At the end of his term as ambassador, Riesle judges himself to have had a major triumph by averting the nomination of Msgr. Cristián Precht, first head of the Variate of Solidarity. He writes, "it is very clear that the fact that he is not a bishop is due in large measure to the work of this embassy."⁴³

As I noted at the outset, the eventual nominations in 1983 of new bishops for Santiago, Valparaiso, and Concepción, and above all the naming of Msgr. Fresno for the capital city, were also considered to be a significant triumph by the embassy.⁴⁴ The Chilean government publicly shared this judgment in a September 1983 statement which praised the incoming Archbishop given that "the fundamental work of Msgr. Fresno in recent years has won him the admiration and support of the great majority of Chileans."⁴⁵

The view of the government was, that it had managed to influence the shape and outlook of the Chilean episcopacy through its work with the Vatican, in this way changing the direction of a national Church that had been perceived as a clear political enemy. The dictatorship had successfully used the channels of the global hierarchy to influence the national Church whose actions could not be repressed as directly as those of the political opposition without losing religious legitimacy.

It is, however, also clear that working with the higher levels of the Vatican required negotiation and hence compromise of a kind the dictatorship was not accustomed to at home. This is why, with the passage of time, both the government and the Chilean embassy to the Vatican became aware that their great "triumph", Cardinal Fresno, was not in fact disposed to change the Church's position on human rights which made for continuing tension in relations with the state. At first, the ambassador explained Fresno's stance as owing to the "circle in which he found himself",⁴⁶ thus throwing the weight of responsibility on others (priests and bishops) who were influencing his hostile attitudes to the government. However, in the coming years, as Fresno developed a conciliatory and mediating role in the country, he himself became a target of criticism. Riesle considered his idea of a National Accord to be little more than a "subtle and apparently moderate position and therefore all the more dangerous",⁴⁷ because all these actions by the Church had as their end goal democratization, and therefore the end of the dictatorship.⁴⁸

By the mid-1980s it became more difficult for the government to find interlocutors in the Vatican as willing to listen to its proposals as was the case at the beginning of the reign of John Paul II. The Vatican's conviction that democracy was the best political system for all the world, based on its politics towards the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe, was also applied to Chile. Riesle was well

⁴² Jorge Hourton reveals his strong disappointment about not being nominated, which in his autobiography he does not link directly to Riesle's influence (Hourton 2009, p. 362). But the letters cited here affirm the extent of Ambassador Riesle's efforts. For the case of the Jesuit Fernando Montes, see (Schnoor 2019, p. 431).

⁴³ Letter ESS to MREx: *Apreciación . . .*, reservado, 8 January 1987, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1987.

⁴⁴ For a similar interpretation taking into account the role of Riesle, see (Schnoor 2019, pp. 427–35).

⁴⁵ Letter MREx to ESS: *Remite informaciones periódicas*, 15 September 1983, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1983.

⁴⁶ Letter ESS to MREx: *Entrevista con . . .*, 1 December 1983, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1983.

⁴⁷ Letter ESS to MREx: *Remitir apreciación mensual*, secret, 12 December 1985, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1985.

⁴⁸ Along the same lines, Riesle also strongly criticized the Nuncio in Chile, when the Nuncio defended the four wounded *miristas*, who had sought sanctuary in the Vatican embassy in January 1984 after an encounter with security forces. Because the regime feared a church that might favor an end to the dictatorship, they turned even conservative figures like the Nuncio or Fresno into enemies in so far as they denounced official repressive policies. Letter ESS to MREx: *Informe semestral*, secret, 2 July 1984, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1984.

aware of this more critical situation, and wrote the following illustration of the relations between the government of Chile and the Vatican: “Relations between the Government and the Holy See are complex and difficult, because by direct and indirect means both the Vatican and the national Church hope to install a more ‘democratic and Christian government’ in our country. For its part, the national government is working to neutralize these by appealing to the Holy See to intervene with certain Church people in Chile and get them to cease their destabilizing activities. Also, that appointments of future bishops go to those who will concentrate on strictly pastoral issues.”⁴⁹

Within this climate of mutual expectations, mostly unfulfilled for both sides, the visit by Pope John Paul II in April 1987 marks the last great event in relations between the dictatorial government and the Vatican. The embassy viewed this visit with considerable concern and saw his primary task of the year as in some way to “minimize the objective risks that the Pope’s visit to Chile represented.”⁵⁰ For the government and the embassy a prime risk was that the Pope might encourage the opposition and call for substantial changes by the government, as he had done in recent visits to Haiti and the Philippines where dictatorial regimes fell shortly after his visit. In light of these possibilities, Riesle warned his government that “with respect to the coming visit by the Pontiff to Chile [. . .] this Embassy has pointed in repeated communications to the Ministry to the many possible dangers, dangers that are all the more real given the fact of what happened in Haiti and the Philippines.”⁵¹ In all his letters the ambassador shows himself to be deeply concerned about the visit and warns the regime at length about the many risks it entails.⁵²

These concerns turn into a clear sense of triumph following the visit when Riesle recounts the post visit impressions of Chile among Vatican personnel and the Pope himself. According to the ambassador, the Pope was not impressed by the press campaign critical of Chile and maintained his distinct pastoral style and focus. For Riesle, this attitude by the Pope “confirms the wisdom of the course of action proposed by the embassy, which was based on confidence in the Holy Father’s sense of justice and paternal love. In sum, the government managed a dangerous situation and emerged stronger at home and with good, even strengthened relations with the Holy See.”⁵³ Statements of this kind by Riesle must of course be taken with a grain of salt. They respond to the ambassador’s own desire to highlight his role. Still, despite some exaggeration (and the fact that both sides, government and opposition tried to interpret the Pope’s visit to their favor (Elgueta Rosas et al. 2019)), Riesle’s letters on the Pope’s visit to Chile allow us to affirm that the event was in no case a basic factor in the destabilization of the regime and the democratization of Chile.⁵⁴ The Pontiff had indeed a positive effect, as contemporary commentators stated, on the political opposition, including the Communist Party, and meant a possibility for the people to feel the force of mobilization (Ruiz-Tagle 1987). So, for the political opposition, it is not exaggerated to speak about a “democratizing effect” as long as the visit reinforced the unity of the political parties against the dictatorship, a work which had been catalyzed by Cardenal Fresno and his efforts for the National Accord. At the same time, the analysis here shows the importance of also taking into account the point of view of the government, which interpreted the Pope’s visit as a triumph of its own and made no change at all to its plans for political transition to

⁴⁹ Letter ESS to MREx: Remitir apreciación mensual, secret, 12 December 1985, en: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1985.

⁵⁰ Letter ESS to MREx: Remitir fotocopias . . . , 16 December 1986, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1986.

⁵¹ Letter ESS to MREx: Remite apreciación . . . , reservado, 6 March 1986, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1986.

⁵² These risks included a possible meeting between the Pope and Carmen Gloria Quintana, a young woman who had been badly burned by security forces, the Pope’s speech in the National Stadium, and also the possibility that the Pope might spend some hours in the Italian embassy where, at the start of the dictatorship, agents of DINA had thrown the body of Lumi Videla, an early human rights victim. Riesle feared that the Pope’s visit to the embassy would revive memories of that “incident”, Letter ESS to MREx: Sugerir tomar conocimiento . . . , 27 November 1986, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1986.

⁵³ Letter ESS to MREx: Remitir Apreciación . . . , secret, 29 April 1987, in: Amrech, Acta Santa Sede, 1987.

⁵⁴ This analysis is close to the interpretation given by Jorge Hourton in his memoirs. Hourton believed that the Pope’s visit had not changed things much for the government (Hourton 2009, p. 437). Together they help provide nuance to the impressions of Cardinal Silva Henríquez who did believe that the change of climate in the country was due to the visit by the Pope (Cavallo 1991, p. 265).

democracy as laid out in the Constitution of 1980. The point to stress here is that we are looking at a complex and multi layered process that requires effort in order to understand the evolving views of *both sides*.⁵⁵ The stance taken by the Church in the fact of dictatorship and violence is not determined by local or national events or personalities alone. Attention to the international relations between the Chilean dictatorship and the Vatican sheds important additional light on any effort to evaluate judgments about the Church and to understand the evolution of its relations with the Chilean state.

5. Conclusions

To hold on to its claimed status as a legitimate government that defended “western Christian values”, the Pinochet regime needed to avoid a complete break with the Church. Since the Chilean hierarchy opposed the regime on the central issue of human rights, the dictatorship had recourse to all the powers of the State to secure a more favorable stance by the Church. These included intensive use of diplomatic channels,⁵⁶ working with its embassy to the Vatican, to reach an understanding with the superiors of the Chilean bishops. This effort to shape the composition and the state of opinion in the Chilean Church has not been taken into account much in the historiography of the period. This is why we think that our contribution here substantially advances the discussion.

Any reflection on understanding the actions taken by the government in its relations with the Vatican requires us to appreciate in detail how the military saw the Church. For the generals, those Catholics with progressive positions, including stances associated with the theology of liberation or the option for the poor, were above all enemies infiltrated and tainted by communism. In the eyes of the military, they were more communist than Catholic, and their denunciation of human rights violations were aimed primarily at damaging the government at home and before the international community. This explains the regime’s strategy of frontal attacks on certain clergy and bishops along with efforts to bring accusations about them before Vatican personnel including the Pope. The goal was to divide the Church, to moderate the influence of those critical of the regime and to build up the status of more friendly bishops.

There are several clear stages in this process, visible in the content and tone of letters from the Chilean embassy to the Vatican. In the first years of the dictatorship the effort was to soften opinion in Rome that was critical of the Chilean military. The hope was to secure broader influence within the Church. As the government became aware of continued defense of human rights in the Church, starting in 1976, there were escalating attacks on certain bishops including Cardinal Silva Henríquez who all formed part of a clear list of enemies. This tactic yielded few results given the positive reputation the Cardinal enjoyed in the Vatican. The regime continued to insist with its attacks and denunciations until 1978 with the accession of Pope John Paul II, who was seen as much more conservative than his immediate predecessors. So, the regime continued and intensified its campaign, laying the groundwork for influencing the naming of future bishops. This strategy proved relatively successful which also explains the post dictatorship evolution of the hierarchy to more centrist and conservative positions (above all in moral issues) (Elgueta Rosas et al. 2019). In retrospect, it is also clear that the persistent efforts of Chilean diplomacy with the Holy See helped moderate more open “democratizing” effects of the Pope’s 1987 visit to the country.

⁵⁵ This also makes it possible to modify judgments in a recent publication on the Pope’s visit, which still argues for a “strong positive impact on the return to democracy” in the country (Navasal Kunstmann 2017, p. 423). The author herself mentions the photo of Pinochet together with the Pope on the balcony of the Moneda [the Presidential palace] as having a strong legitimating effect on the dictatorship. (Pinochet tricked the Pope into appearing with him on the balcony) (Ibid., p. 402). Moreover, the fact that transition itself was carried out according to design set in place by the dictatorship itself (which provided for the 1988 plebiscite) and that this plan did not change at all following the papal visit, argues strongly against the idea of this visit as a powerful democratizing event.

⁵⁶ This obviously also includes the aggressive use of violence in effort to repress clergy, lay Catholics and bishops identified with the opposition.

The preceding notwithstanding, it is also important not to overestimate the dictatorship's influence over the Holy See. As the ambassador's letters and reports demonstrate, it is more likely that there was an over-estimation of their own role by both sides of the conflict, as each side retained substantial autonomy and independent agency. With its attacks on the press, its harassment of clergy and sisters and its regular denunciations to the Vatican, the government of Pinochet hoped to secure for itself a more submissive and controllable Church which, with Vatican supervision, would soften its criticisms of the regime, above all in the area of human rights. This did not happen. On the contrary, it is clear that the very fact of sustained official attacks led the national Church to close ranks in self-defense. This explains the continuity in defense of human rights between Cardinal Silva Henríquez and Cardinal Fresno. Both reacted to government attacks by affirming the autonomy of the Church and insisting even more strongly on the issues of violence and the defense of human rights. This defense included continued development of humanitarian work and a more confrontational stance to the military. This confrontational stance was not just the result of already existing progressive tendencies (of which Cardinal Fresno was not a part) but can be seen rather as an institutional defense to attacks from the dictatorial government. So, the interactions between the Church and the military regime come to be an important factor when we try to understand the role of the Church in the Chilean dictatorship.

Now, there are also some interpretations that are closer to the Church, which may overestimate its real influence and autonomy vis a vis the dictatorship. The ambassador's letters clearly show that the Chilean government was able to get its point of view heard in Rome. Although they were unable to change positions on human rights, the regime achieved its goals with the selection of new bishops, avoiding the designation of progressives and pressing for more moderate and more conservative candidates. In this way, actions by the state also helped reshape the Church's future actions as the added weight of conservative opinion made itself felt not only in the rapprochement between Church and State during the 1980s but also in events like the papal visit, where the regime managed to moderate views on Chilean reality within the Vatican.

Taking these conclusions into account, it seems reasonable for future analysis of the relations between Church and authoritarian regimes to stress the agency and interpretation of individual actors, the importance of conjunctural factors and the complex ties between local, national and international elements. The position of the Church towards political violence does not only depend on long-term structural tendencies or on political affiliations, but also on conjunctural reactions to attacks of the state, on personal interpretations of the intentions of the other side and on a national and international game of action and re-action to influence the views respectively of the Church or of the state.

The goal of the present analysis is not to invalidate previous efforts at explaining the evolution of the Church's relations with the dictatorship, but rather to add an important element that has been downplayed or simply absent in much current historiography. Strong opposition to the dictatorship can also be explained as a reaction to government attacks. The changing role of the Church in the years after 1983 must also be attributed to the government's impact on the naming of new bishops. However, neither of these can be fully understood unless they are situated in the context of a richly detailed, dynamic, and multi layered relation between the Church and the government which takes into account the autonomous agency of both institutions. In this way, my goal here has been to throw new light on the ideas, actions and specific plans of the government in its dealings with the Church, and in this way at the same time to understand in richer terms the Church's own evolving role in the opposition to the systematic violence of Chile's military dictatorship.

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Article

Religion, Human Rights, and Forensic Activism: The Search for the Disappeared in Latin America †

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Abstract: This paper systematizes and analyzes the links and exchanges between the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF)) and the world of religion. My hypothesis is that these links are inextricable from the mode of operation that defined the EAAF, which can be called “forensic activism”. This kind of activism, outside the State, combined scientific expertise with humanitarian sensitivity, defined by its autonomy from the human rights movement and the national scientific system (both academic and university). Moreover, religion emerged constantly from the type of work undertaken, between the living and the dead. Thus, beliefs, with their prohibitions, rituals, and ways of making sense of suffering and their tools for coming to terms with grief, coexisted with the EAAF’s development. These findings emerge from a qualitative research design combining document analysis, in-depth interviews, and participative observation of scientific disclosure open to the public provided by the EAAF over the past three years.

Keywords: religion; beliefs; human rights; forensic activism; Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense; Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team

1. Introduction

The Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense), or EAAF according to its acronym in Spanish, helped to form a network of teams in Latin America and the world. Their history includes many references to religious leaders, churches, and religious institutions or those who are part of the global social movement associated with religions that we can call “religious world”. I am referring to the set of international agencies, foundations, cooperatives, and so on who have some organic link with religious institutions either through institutional endorsement, membership, or financing. It is a vast network where avowed believers often join forces in solidarity with secular activists committed to humanitarian values with no religious affiliation.

References to this religious world are often portrayed as anecdotal, casual, and unsystematic in the many existent accounts of the origins and current performance of the EAAF. In this article, we aim to challenge this view.

Among the literature on the subject, an early set documents the history of how the team was formed and its first works (Stover and Joyce 1991; Cohen Salama 1992). In the same vein, a more recent set of papers focuses on the iconic character of the EAAF, highlighting its internationalization and scientific consolidation process as well as the resounding character of the cases it resolved (Clacso-Quilmes 2019; Celesia 2019). Another group of papers applies different approaches to document the developments of forensic sciences based on the work of the EAAF and the different teams that were established in the region, following its example. Some of these take a regional stance or comparative approach (Casallas and Piedrahita 2004; Dutrénit Bielous 2017; Garibian et al. 2017; Rosenblatt 2019), while others are case studies on Argentina (Bernardi and Fondebrider 2007; Salado and Fondebrider 2008;

Somigliana 2012; Levin 2015), Chile (Padilla and Reveco 2004; Bustamante et al. 2009), Uruguay (Marín Suárez 2016; López Mazz 2017), or Guatemala (Pinzón González 2007), among many others. Finally, there is a group of papers focusing on so-called counterforensics, i.e., the set of images, discourses, and evidence generated through the work of forensic anthropology as “politicized knowledge”, to make visible “what has been made invisible” through repressive and mass disappearance processes in the country and the region (Tcach and Iribarne 2014; Huffschnid 2015, 2019).

As noted earlier, these papers include many references to the world of religion and the diversity of beliefs that emerge during the process of searching for the disappeared and restituting human remains. However, there is a void with regard to systematic, comprehensive problematization of these emerging beliefs and connections. Indeed, the memorial narrative that can be read in these texts by following the different voices of the EAAF, victims’ family members, and other actors affords a glimpse of the systematic character of the modes of relationship of the EAAF with “the religious” over time. On the one hand, religious institutions or agencies are mentioned as part of the broader philanthropic network that nourished the EAAF with infrastructure and financial resources without questioning its religious origin. On the other hand, the role of religious leaders in mortuary rituals and/or evolving beliefs in the process of identification and restitution of human remains are treated as emergencies that are part of the usual cultural or folkloric background that every anthropologist has to take account of, along with attention to the particular people studied.

A fresh look at those exchanges reveals that beyond contributing infrastructure and essential financial resources during the early days of the team, this religious fabric played a key role and still does. My hypothesis is that the links with the world of religion cannot be dissociated from the work mode that defined the EAAF: forensic activism, as I call it. Indeed, I consider that this type of activism, outside the State, combined scientific expertise with humanitarian sensitivity and was defined by the autonomy of the human rights movement and the national scientific system (both academic and university)—from that time to the present day. This humanitarian sensitivity of the EAAF was akin to the solidarity of the religious world that I described above. Religion also emerged constantly from the type of work undertaken—between the living and the dead. Beliefs—with their prohibitions, rituals, and ways to make sense out of suffering, and their tools for coming to terms with grief—thus coexisted with the team’s development.

Within this framework, this paper proposes to systematize and understand the importance of these links and exchanges between the EAAF and the world of religion. It also analyzes the various ways in which religion—in its broader sense—emerges as an inherent part of the scientific work during the identification and restitution of human remains, and fulfills different purposes within this framework, thereby shaping forensic activism.

2. Results

Below, I will consider (1) how the EAAF arose within the global framework of articulation between scientific teams and human rights; (2) the specificity of the EAAF, constituted as an organization outside the State, associated with a religious framework and defined by “forensic activism”, and (3) the different ways in which the EAAF related to the world of religion through three different modes: *sponsors*, *insiders*, and *spiritual brokers*.

3. The Origins: Science and Transnational Activism Networks

In Argentina, the search for the disappeared and their children appropriated by the military dictatorship made use of the formation of transnational activism networks, which included victims, family members, exiles, religious actors, intellectuals, scientists, international organizations, and political figures (Keck and Sikkink 1998). These networks have been defined as those conducting campaigns or mobilizations simultaneously in different contexts with the aim of calling upon governments of different countries and international organizations to deploy different resources (Keck and Sikkink 2002). From this perspective, the logic of this type of network is often at odds with

the State regarding fundamental principles and is overtly distinct from the logic followed by other transnational actors that provide symbolic resources and materials for States (Keck and Sikkink 2002, p. 99). In Argentina, this type of network was key to achieving international denunciation of “human rights violations” committed by the dictatorship, and also to seeking answers to concrete situations of violence against and suffering of the victims and their families.

Over that time, in the 1980s, a group of women from the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo Association (Asociación Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo) approached experts in the field of genetics with concrete questions. Can a grandmother’s blood be used to identify her grandchildren abducted during the military dictatorship (1976–1983)? Is it possible to ascertain, based on DNA analysis, whether or not a body has been in a coffin? Is it true that babies’ bones disintegrate? Can it be ascertained, based on an analysis of bones, whether a woman has been pregnant? (Di Lonardo et al. 1984; Stover and Joyce 1991; King 1992). These women, who were mostly housewives and had no personal connections to the world of science, made use of the local networks woven and accumulated over previous years during which they had searched for their disappeared relatives. Help from Isabel Mignone, who at that time was living in USA, was to be key. Isabel was one of the daughters of Emilio Mignone, a renowned militant from the world of Catholicism dedicated to the struggle for human rights as a result of the search for another of his daughters, Mónica, who had disappeared along with a group of catechists, youths belonging to Catholic Action (*Acción Católica*) and two priests, during two operations conducted on 14 and 23 May 1976. Isabel put the Grandmothers in touch with Eric Stover, journalist and Director of the Science and Human Rights Program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) (Celesia 2019, p. 20). Stover contacted Cristián Orrego Benavente, a Chilean geneticist living in USA, who in turn, by recommendation of Luca Cavalli-Sforza, contacted US geneticist Marie Claire King of University of California in Berkeley. Also via Stover, grandmothers Isabel “Chicha” Mariani, Estela de Carlotto, and Nélide Navajas contacted Víctor Penchaszadeh, an Argentine geneticist exiled in New York. Penchaszadeh put them in touch with hematologist Fred Allen of the Blood Bank Center. Shortly thereafter, Argentina’s defeat in the Malvinas (Falklands) War hastened the downfall of the dictatorship, and on 10 December 1983, the democratic government of Raúl Alfonsín took over. In this new scenario, Stover received a letter from Ernesto Sabato, who at that time was president of the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (*Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP)) requesting technical assistance with exhumations from N.N. tombs, that is, of unidentified bodies (Cholakian and Guglielmo 2017, p. 45). This initiative was also by request of the Grandmothers, who by then knew that it was possible to determine from bone remains whether a woman who had been pregnant when abducted had given birth (Cohen Salama 1992, p. 120). This was when Clyde Snow appeared on the scene. Snow was a US forensic anthropologist specializing in the identification of victims of aviation accidents based on their skeletal remains, and also known for his forensic work in notorious cases (Stover and Joyce 1991; Bales Foote 2014).

This group of experts shared a common feeling: to the Americans, in addition to the anti-Vietnam sentiment shared by many at that time, there was the fact that their own careers were marked by contact with Latin American reality under the military dictatorships of the 1970s. Eric Stover had traveled in Latin America and experienced state repression himself, Marie Claire King had lived through the dramatic coup in Chile that put an end to the “socialism via democracy” experiment of the Popular Unity (*Unidad Popular*). On the other hand, the Argentinean Víctor Penchaszadeh had been exiled from his country to escape situations of repressive threat from paramilitary groups such as the Triple A before the dictatorship (Cholakian and Guglielmo 2017, pp. 33–47). Although Cristian Orrego Benavente had not lived through state repression himself, he had been born and raised in Chile, where he had begun his university training before moving to the USA following the job opportunities of his father, a prestigious musician, in the early sixties. In the USA he studied biochemistry at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, which he defined as a center of resistance against the Vietnam War and where his political outlook was shaped (Riordon 2018). Clyde Snow may have been the exception: he

was an American who did not know about Latin American reality, but who called himself a Texan and as such, claimed to share the “anti-Yankee” feeling (Celesia 2019, p. 82).

Two institutions arose from this network of transnational activism. Their stories are inextricable, though different. One is the National Genetic Data Bank (*Banco Nacional de Datos Genéticos*, (BNDG)) created by law 23,511 in 1987 within the framework of the State (Catoggio and Irrazábal 2020), and the other is the EAAF, which for years maintained a difficult, conflictive relationship with the State. Established as a non-profit scientific association, also in 1987, the EAAF’s long, difficult road to the creation of its own genetic laboratory made use of the permanent deployment of transnational activism networks connected to associations of victims’ family members, agencies from the world of religion, international bodies, and other States, which at last, in 2005, were joined by the Argentine State (Fonderbrider 2019). During this process, as we shall see, the State itself was one more link in a preexisting chain of solidarity—not the primary partner. In such regard, while the BNDG arose as a State policy, the EAAF had to navigate obstacles and conflicts with the very same State (Cohen Salama 1992).

4. Anti-State Policy: EAAF Forensic Activism

The origins of the EAAF date back to the visit by the first AAAS delegation, requested by the CONADEP, which took place in May 1984. Its members were the aforementioned Eric Stover, Clyde Snow, Marie Claire King, Cristián Orrego Benavente, and it also included forensic odontologist Lowell Levine and forensic pathologists Luke Tedeschi and Leslie Lukash. However, the delegation was not welcomed by many of the family members and organizations of affected parties, who shared a deep mistrust of US help, as a result of US foreign policy being accessory to the dictatorships in the region (Cohen Salama 1992, p. 120). To this “anti-Yankee” sentiment was added a feeling of rejection against the CONADEP, shared by most of the human rights organizations, which had campaigned for the creation of a bicameral commission to elucidate the issue of the disappeared (Crenzel 2008, pp. 61–62). Finally, the search for the remains of the disappeared was in conflict with the political slogan “Return Alive” (“*Aparición con vida*”) and the resistance of victims’ family members against echoing military and political discourses that considered them to be dead (Catoggio 2019). In this context, the delegation made a series of recommendations to the State. In particular, it recommended the creation of a national interdisciplinary center to conduct pre mortem investigations with family members, exhumations, and the preservation, transport, and custody of exhumed materials. For such purpose, it recommended the creation of a bank in which to store the remains from N.N. tombs. However, this recommendation was ignored. Other disagreements followed. CONADEP initially requested the intervention of Snow as expert in exhumations. In response to that request, Snow called upon the Anthropology Graduate Association (*Colegio de Graduados de Antropología*), seeking to establish a team of professionals. This endeavor was unsuccessful, and the EAAF arose from a group of curious, active students (Cohen Salama 1992, pp. 146–47). For a long time, the EAAF would be viewed by the academia more as a cause of human rights activists than of scientists (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020).¹

The government decided that the work begun by the CONADEP should be continued by the Secretariat of Human Rights, directed by Eduardo Rabossi, who had been a member of the Commission. The new Undersecretariat not only refused the EAAF permission to consult the CONADEP files, which were essential for the pre mortem investigation, but also archived Snow’s ambitious Project to create a databank in which to store N.N. remains and refused to finance or provide a minimum structure to enable the team to operate and develop (Stover and Joyce 1991, pp. 254–55; Cohen Salama 1992, pp. 154–55).

¹ During those early years, the exception was academic Francisco Carnese, head of an anthropology department at Buenos Aires University, who was to call upon the EAAF in 1989 to make their work known in the academic sphere (Celesia 2019, p. 122).

The reason for these tensions between the EAAF and the newly-democratic State are explained by Migdal (2001), considering the complexity of the multiple centers of power in tension that make up the image of the State, which should be unequivocal. Indeed, Argentina's return to democracy in 1983 did not bring about a magical transformation of the State, but rather a complex web of wills, mainly democratic, but neither univocal nor free from authoritarian tensions. It consisted of structures populated by actors and bureaucracies, of which many carried over the practices of the preceding military government and/or whose democratic will was not necessarily accompanied by consistent practices. To understand these dynamic tensions, Migdal proposes to focus on the set of interactions, charged with conflict, of multiple informal guidelines on how to behave, which were promoted by social groups within the State, all of which employed sanctions, rewards, and even violence to get their own way. To sum up, Migdal shows how the univocal, coherent image from which the State projects itself and is perceived contrasts sharply with the image of a contradictory entity whose actions often turn against itself (Migdal 2001, p. 22).

Some of the historical team members recounted that they had several clashes with Snow to convince him that "they could not expect anything from Rabossi" (Interview with EAAF founding member, 2020). They concluded that to the State, "it was not the same to look for the living as to look for the dead" (Interview with EAAF founding member, 2 September 2020). Even so, the good relationships established with second-line officials of the Undersecretariat of Human Rights, such as María Julia Bihurriet, were key to liaising with municipalities in order to enable N.N. tomb locations to be mapped and to prove the importance of the undertaking in the social and political spheres (Snow and Bihurriet 1992). Moreover, thanks to these dynamics of multiple interactions, they received first a small amount of financial support from Elba Roulet, vice-governor of Buenos Aires Province and aunt to one of the EAAF members (Celesia 2019, p. 106), and later, help from Luis Brunatti, governor of Buenos Aires Province, during the exhumation work at Avellaneda cemetery in 1988 (Celesia 2019, p. 116).

These exceptions coexisted with a scenario marked by tensions. The EAAF was constituted as an independent agency in absence of state policy favorable to its endeavor, with no recognition from the local academic and scientific system, and forced to negotiate publicly expressed rejection from at least one part of victims' family members: the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (Madres de Plaza de Mayo). However, this independence was co-managed with the support of other victims' family members and their activism networks, among which the world of religion was a key player. Thus, the EAAF largely maintained the logic of political action against the State which was typical of these transnational activism networks created under the dictatorship, but redefining that logic based on their own expertise: forensic work. This enabled them to gain autonomy from human rights activism and to develop their own action mode: forensic activism. Throughout these events, confluence with the world of religion did not occur merely by chance. At that time, not only did the world of religion have hegemony over mortuary rituals, but also, it had transnational networks and institutions which already had their own history of handling the political suffering of many of the victims of dictatorships in the region and the country, even despite the complicity of domestic ecclesiastical hierarchies (Catoggio 2014, 2016a). Following Levine (2012), as from the 1970s, religious actors participated actively in the international field of human rights. From their standpoint, the adoption of a practical vocabulary of rights by part of Latin American Catholicism was central to driving both denunciation of dictatorships and promotion of local and global efforts of collective organization. This confluence of the EAAF and the world of religion took on at least three different modes, which I shall analyze below.

4.1. Sponsors: Infrastructure and Material Resources

The EAAF's first venue, located at Solís 936 in Buenos Aires City, was provided by the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights (Movimiento Ecueménico de Derechos Humanos (MEDH)). The MEDH was formally established in February 1976, one month before the coup. It arose as a joint initiative by representatives of Protestant (Evangelical) churches and members of the Catholic church—both priests

and laypersons. A few months later, Jorge Novak was named bishop of the recently created Quilmes diocese, which formally joined the MEDH.² From the beginning, the MEDH was sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC)—the global organization gathering of Protestant churches since post-World War II, with headquarters in Geneva (Switzerland) (Piñero 2012). The WCC had created a human rights department to respond to the requests for solidarity for victims of state repression and their families in Latin America (Interview with MEDH member, 10 July 2020). Apparently, the EAAF's need for a venue arose during discussions with the CONADEP³:

Some MEDH members worked in the CONADEP: Hugo García, administrative coordinator of the MEDH; Daniel Llanos, member of the MEDH Communications team and one of the authors of the report known as “Nunca Más”. And, in particular, Hugo knew members of the EAAF. We were very interested in their work and learned about their need for infrastructure. That's why the possibility of cooperation from the MEDH arose (Personal conversation with a MEDH director, 17 September 2020).

Thus, paradoxically, both obstacles and help for the constitution of the EAAF arose in the CONADEP. According to the MEDH, cooperation was mediated by consultation with family members. Since identification was a controversial issue for part of the affected agencies, they decided to consult with Families of Persons Detained for Political Reasons (Familiares de Detenidos por Razones Políticas (Familiares)) to whom they were especially close and with whom they shared a program to help enable relatives of political prisoners to visit them in prison.⁴ Familiares was also open to the work of the EAAF. They had requested EAAF intervention in the massacre of Fátima, a case which, because of its scale and features would be emblematic in terms of challenges and lessons learned for the team.⁵ The EAAF had also been requested to intervene in Córdoba, which gave rise to an overt refusal from the Undersecretariat of Human Rights for fear of sparking a new episode of the military issue at the hands of Luciano Benjamín Menéndez.⁶ As a result of these cases taken on by the EAAF, the short-circuit between the EAAF and the Undersecretariat of Human Rights became an overt chasm. Firstly, the increasing closeness between EAAF and Familiares as a result of the Fátima case was viewed with mistrust by the Undersecretariat (Celesia 2019, p. 90). To this was added the fear of political (military) repercussions which might be caused by the exhumations in Córdoba. These breaks lent increasing urgency to the EAAF's need for its own more stable resources and infrastructure. Up to that time, the

² In addition to Quilmes diocese, the MEDH included the Río de la Plata Evangelical Church, the Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, the Disciples of Christ, the Waldensian Church, the United Lutheran Church and the Church of God (Pentecostal). Bishop Novak, Methodist Bishop Federico Pagura and Pastor Juan Van der Velde of the Reformed Church were elected as co-presidents. Individual persons could join as associate members.

³ The CONADEP was conceived as a “committee of personalities” to investigate the past. It was presided by Ernesto Sábato and its members were Eduardo Rabossi, Gregorio Klimovsky, Hilario Fernández Long, Rabbi Marshall Meyer, Ricardo Colombres, Bishop Jaime De Nevares, Magdalena Ruiz Giñazú, René Favaloro, and Pastor Carlos Gattinotti, one of the co-founders of the MEDH.

⁴ The MEDH, along with other organizations such as Familiares and the Argentine League for the Rights of Man (Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre (La Liga)), provided support to enable family visits to distant prisons. The MEDH subsidized the journeys, Familiares supported lodging and La Liga provided funds to deliver to prisoners (Interview with MEDH leader, 9 July 2020).

⁵ The Fátima massacre is the name applied to the murder of 30 persons between 19 and 20 1976, in Fátima, an area located in the district of Pilar. These persons were illegally held at the Superintendency of Security of the Federal Police and transferred to Fátima to be massacred. See <https://www.masacredefatima.com.ar/masacre-de-fatima/memoria.html> (accessed on 28 September 2020). The EAAF was asked to intervene by Raúl Schnabel, lawyer and collaborator of Familiares (Cohen Salama 1992, p. 180).

⁶ The requests for intervention in Córdoba came first from María Elba Martínez, lawyer of Familiares, who requested investigation of some remains found near Lake San Roque, and then from Susana Miguez, also of Familiares, whose husband had disappeared in Córdoba (Cohen Salama 1992, p. 182). The military issue refers to the wave of rumors and threats ongoing since the reform of the Code of Military Justice in 1984, which established three levels of responsibility regarding state repression, and which later led to a series of military uprisings threatening the democratic transition process. The first military uprising occurred in April 1987, and was followed by another two in January 1988 and December 1988, with a final episode in 1990. Luciano Benjamín Menéndez was considered to be one of the hardliners of repression and had already led a military uprising during the dictatorship in 1979 (Canelo 2004, p. 227).

EAAF had been nomadic: meetings alternated between the private homes of team members and an office loaned by Julio César Strassera, who had been the prosecutor at the Trial of the Military Juntas (Celesia 2019, p. 89). Moreover, they had practically no subsidies, but only individual grants funded by the AAAS (Cohen Salama 1992, p. 181), and some equipment funded by the Ford Foundation (Celesia 2019, p. 82).

According to other sources and even according to the recollections of various EAAF members, the EAAF reached the MEDH via Familiares, among whose members, Tilsa Albani played a key role (Cohen Salama 1992, p. 185, Interview with EAAF member, 2 September 2020). Be that as it may, the fact is that Tilsa's trajectory was also marked by her strong links to the world of religion. She describes her family background as having been marked by the confluence of Catholic and Protestant beliefs, and recalls there being "a lot of discussion" but also "much respect for the other" (Interview with Tilsa Albani by Claudia Bacci, 5 May 2010, Memoria Abierta Archive). The tragic story of the disappearance of her son Daniel Crosta is also marked by strong religious commitment. At the time he was abducted, Daniel was living in the Parish of Wilde, of the group of worker priests identified with the Movement of Priests for the Third World (Movimiento de Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo) such as Eliseo Morales and Luis Sánchez. As a lawyer, Tilsa herself had begun to provide legal assistance to the "villeros" (shanty town dwellers) in response to a request from the priest Eliseo Morales (Interview with Tilsa Albani by Claudia Bacci, 5 May 2010, Memoria Abierta Archive). Although MEDH members do not believe that the link to the EAAF was formed through Tilsa Albani, they have good memories of her, as a key figure of reference and lawyer in Familiares, and adjunct professor to Rodolfo Mattarollo's Department of Human Rights at the Lomas de Zamora University, where the MEDH director at that time would later study law (Interview with MEDH director, 10 July 2020).

As we can see, whether via CONADEP—which included several members of the MEDH—or via Familiares—through Tilsa Albani—the EAAF set itself up at the venue of a religious body. Far from being unusual or anecdotal, this type of situation was, on the contrary, quite frequent in the world of human rights. These connections to the world of religion also gave rise to funding sources that were very helpful for establishing the team:

During those years, and now, too, Lutheran churches in particular provided much support to human rights movements around the world, especially (. . .) the World Council of Churches under which the MEDH acted. They provided our first funding. Years later, Swedish churches and [Catholic] German churches also supported us. Diakonia is another of them. (Interview with EAAF founding member, 2 September 2020).

This economic contribution from the world of religion involved no symbolic counterpart: there were no photographs, no joint public ceremonies providing any additional religious legitimacy to the forensic enterprise. From the beginning, the EAAF made use of multiple sources of income which enabled it to maintain its autonomy from the state apparatus and the judicial system. The decision to constitute itself as a non-profit organization independent of the Undersecretariat of Human Rights was accompanied by the decision not to charge for the expert appraisals before the courts. According to Cohen Salama, the decision was based on the fact that they did not consider themselves to be professionals available for work on just any case, but rather as persons who, through the exercise of their profession, served the cause of human rights (Cohen Salama 1992, p. 178).

At that time, the main sources of income were through connections with the USA via the Ford Foundation, links to the world of religion via the World Council of Churches, German Catholic foundations such as Adveniat-Misereor and Swedish Protestant churches such as Diakonia. These multiple sources of income enabled the EAAF to operate with political and scientific autonomy, but did not shield them from tensions. At that time, they were disapproved of by some human rights agencies because they accepted help from the Ford Foundation, which was associated with complicity

with the military dictatorship.⁷ Moreover, the help from the world of religion created tensions in the EAAF's memorial narrative, as reflected by the way in which, while some members were grateful for the support received from those churches, they still felt the need to emphasize the separation between the forensic scientific work and religious terrain:

Our exchanges were never religious. They would provide some information on persons we were looking for or support one of our projects, but they never considered us as a religious entity, which we are not (Interview with EAAF founding member, 2 September 2020).

The matter of identity in these tensions related to funding provided by the world of religion is resolved by a memorial narrative which, on the one hand, frames the relationship within ties of friendship, thereby conferring on the funding the status of "donation" with no need for any compensation, and on the other hand, limits it to the material plane, thereby preventing any religious content from slipping in with the money and infrastructure provided.⁸

However, among EAAF founders, this narrative coexists with another, which affords a glimpse of "a bonus", going beyond monetary support and even beyond friendship based on those donations from the world of religion:

The Swedish and German churches helped us immensely and I remember that with the World Council of Churches, they came here because they would kind of pay you 'a visit', but it was a visit where you felt it was not just a matter of numbers, but that they accompanied us to the cemetery, they wanted to see our work. In other words, there was very active participation of Swedish and German churches. You felt understood, I mean, it was not just a matter of them saying we spent a certain amount of money on this or that, but there was genuine interest in sharing our work. (Interview with EAAF founding member 9 September 2020).

This desire of the WCC to "understand and share" the work of the EAAF may be interpreted as a form of institutional recognition of forensic activism in a context in which the State—or State agencies linked to human rights—and academic institutions had turned their backs on the team. This recognition was no trifling matter to a small, newly formed group, which was still developing and intended to set out on a task which was to be—perhaps at that time unbeknownst to themselves—titanic.

Within this context, the EAAF opted for activism conducted outside the State rather than becoming professional technicians working for the State. This very same activist logic under which the EAAF grew and developed as a team led them to establish new links with the world of religion. As we shall see in the next section, exchanges with the world of religion went beyond the loan of infrastructure and the donation of resources, to become a driver for the development of the team beyond Argentina's national frontiers.

4.2. *Insiders: Partners and Helpers*

In the early 1990s, the EAAF was called upon by María Julia Hernández, of Tutela Legal of the Archbishopric of El Salvador. According to Hernández,

⁷ See paid announcement published by Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, "Luchemos por la vida, no los traicionemos" ("Let's fight for life, let's not betray them"), *Página 12*, 21 December 1989 cited in (Cohen Salama 1992, p. 246).

⁸ The tie with the world of religion is also characteristic of other forensic anthropology groups created in the region following the EAAF model. The Chilean case is emblematic: the Forensic Anthropology Group, created in 1989, also had no economic support from the State and secured funding thanks to help from the Christian Churches Foundation for Social Help (Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas [FASIC]), the aforementioned WCC and several Swedish NGOs (Padilla and Reveco 2004, p. 1102; Bustamante et al. 2009, pp. 74–75). A counterexample is the case of Uruguay, where the Forensic Anthropology Investigation Group arose in a university context in the framework of Universidad de la República and with state funding in 2005. However, after undergoing a strong crisis regarding legitimacy, in 2015 it incorporated representatives of four lines of the world of religion and one representative of Familiares: Ademar Olivera for the Methodist Church; Pedro Sclofsky for the Jewish community; Mario Cayota for the Roman Catholic Church; Susana Andrade for the Afro-Uruguayan community and Emilia Carlevaro for Familiares (Marín Suárez 2016, p. 49). This reinforces the argument I am developing herein.

Tutela Legal is basically an office that investigates human rights violations and provides legal defense for the victims. Nevertheless, specialization in the legal area has led to a profound relationship with the family members most involved in the process, with whom strong bonds have developed (Hernández 2007, p. 43).

This time, the request for intervention by the EAAF arose explicitly from the world of religion.⁹ The request for help from the EAAF by Tutela Legal was to elucidate the massacre in Mozote, in the Department of Morazán. It was later proved that on 10 December 1981, units of the infantry battalion “Atlacatl” massacred all men, women, and children in the place, who had offered no resistance. The massacre was part of a military strategy called “tierra arrasada” (“devastated land”), which consisted of perpetrating killings regardless of victims’ civilian status, sex, age, or health status (Hernández 2007, pp. 37–38). Almost immediately, in January 1982, the massacre was denounced internationally by US newspapers such as *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. However, both the government of El Salvador and its political allies in USA denied it, and the judicial investigation of facts made no progress. Moreover, survivors and relatives of the victims were forced into exile in a refugee camp on the frontier with Honduras, wherefore their testimonies could not be taken until they were repatriated in early 1990, during and after the peace talks.¹⁰ It was then that the Archbishopric became a protagonist, not only in gathering testimonies, but also in supporting the family members who were asking the Department of Justice for forensic experts to be designated “in the name of God”. According to Hernández, in April 1992, relatives of the victims delivered a letter to the judge expressing their belief that “God has placed into your hands an irreplaceable and ineludible responsibility, and you do not fulfill it, God Himself and the innocent children who were massacred shall be their own judges and shall cause the permanent unease of your conscience”.¹¹ The Archbishopric publicly supported the claim and had the EAAF designated as party-appointed expert witness in the case (Hernández 2007, p. 39).

In this case, in addition, the exhumations performed by the EAAF began in the area known as “el Convento”, a small room which the priest in charge of El Mozote Church used as a bedroom. There they found the remains of children and babies along with remnants of their clothes, toys, and other childhood paraphernalia. Even though this evidence did not enable any identification, it was crucial to disprove the government version sustaining that they had been “victims of crossfire” and to hold accountable the concrete perpetrators of the massacre when the court case was reopened in the 2000s (Celesia 2019, p. 164. Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020).

⁹ The same occurred in other cases, e.g., in Chile, where the EAAF responded to the request from the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, and in Guatemala, to the request from the Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric of Guatemala, (Interviews with members of the EAAF, 2 September 2020 and 9 September 2020).

¹⁰ During those years, the EAAF made different trips to El Salvador, which served to approach the terrain and family members as part of the preliminary investigations prior to exhumations. The first trip was in 1991 during the covenant negotiation and consisted of the approach to the terrain. In order to perform the exhumations, they had to negotiate a range of legal, procedural and political obstacles. The second trip was in 1992, after the peace covenants had been signed, and with the EAAF designated as expert witness (Celesia 2019, pp. 161–63). Even though they were able to conduct the exhumations and the Committee for Truth and Reconciliation (Comisión de Verdad y Reconciliación) took the Mozote case as paradigmatic, just five days after submitting their report, on 20 March 1993, a “Law of General Amnesty for the consolidation of peace” was enacted, which in practice revoked the victims’ rights to truth, justice and redress as well as the perpetrators’ liability, and the court case for the Mozote massacre was archived in September 1994. This case remains under active investigation in late 2020 (see Rauda 2020).

¹¹ Causa penal 238/90 pieza 1, folio 160, Juzgado Segundo de Primera Instancia de San Francisco Gotera, departamento de Morazán, cited in (Hernández 2007, p. 39).

Support from the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), an ecumenical NGO, was key to conducting the forensic work.¹² These links to the world of religion gave them *savoir faire*, which proved essential to acting at political-institutional level in the midst of an extremely hostile political scenario:

WOLA did not provide money; what WOLA did was to play a very active role when we began to work in El Salvador, which had made things very difficult for us, and (...) WOLA had been working in El Salvador for some time. In fact, we resorted to them (...) because we were desperate. It was not easy to endure newspapers publishing ‘Argentine anthropologists paid 1000 dollars per skeleton exhumed’. I mean, it was highly aggressive. So WOLA helped us to understand and move about in a country that was not ours, [advised us] who to contact and who not to contact, what was worth fighting for, and what was better left alone. So, I recall WOLA as a shoulder to cry on, but they didn’t give us money. (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020).

As we can see, WOLA became a key ally to refute the fake news published by the Salvadorean government as part of a smear campaign against the EAAF, during which the accusation of “profiting from forensic work” came as a shock to a team taking its first steps outside its own country. As we have seen in previous cases, money condenses a set of moral meanings perceived as being at odds with the humanitarian cause of forensic activism. During this process, WOLA being “a shoulder to cry on” affords insight into the importance of this type of organization in the world of religion as partners and situated helpers for the development of forensic anthropology.¹³

I take WOLA as a very important hinge, because not only is it important to have money, but also good contacts. Contacts are what ultimately enable you to find money. But sometimes what you need is safety, is knowing what you’ve got into. Over the years I’ve realized that we run into highly generous people at high levels. (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020).

This political capital secured through transnational actors of the world of religion complemented the exchanges with local religious agents, whose territorial and community management was crucial to performing the preliminary investigations required prior to exhumations.

In many countries around the world [the church] is the place where people go, not only for religious matters but also because the priest retrieves the names of the disappeared or helps them. It happened in Haiti, it happened in South Africa, and, very often, [the church] is the refuge for people in these situations of violence, a place where they can find some support, and there are many priests in those places with whom we have interacted, but always regarding investigation, from the information we needed, to the information we

¹² WOLA was founded in 1974 by leaders of different churches in USA who were concerned about repression in Latin America. Their main mission was to connect policy-makers in Washington with people who had first-hand knowledge of the thousands of deaths, disappearances, torture cases, and unfair imprisonments that occurred under the dictatorships of that time. It included many members or former members of religious institutions, especially Catholic, Protestant and Jewish, e.g., Joe Eldridge (director), a former Methodist pastor; Jo Marie Griesgraber, former Catholic nun; William Wipfler of the National Council of Churches, Tom Quigley of the Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Peggy Healy, who was still a Maryknoll nun, among others.

¹³ In 2003, WOLA called upon the EAAF to participate in action against the femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico (Celesia 2019, p. 239). Moreover, during those years, the association with WOLA was key to persuading US senators to endorse the request for funding for a network of forensic anthropology teams, made up of the EAAF, the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team (Equipo Peruano de Antropología Forense (EPAF)) and the Guatemala Forensic Anthropology Foundation (Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG)). This funding enabled the EAAF to see its dream come true in 2006, when its own genetic laboratory was founded. (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020). See also: <https://eaaf.org/laboratorio-de-genetica-forense/> (accessed on 28 September 2020). Finally, as from 2009, the EAAF has participated together with other religious organizations in Proyecto Frontera, created to form a regional system for the search for disappeared migrants. This is currently the EAAF’s largest Project (Clasco-Quilmes 2019, p. 113; Interview with EAAF founding member, 14 September 2020).

exchanged. This has happened throughout most of Latin America. (Interview with EAAF founding member, 2 September 2020).

In particular, in the case of El Salvador, the rural priests who knew the territory and communities and had ties of confidence with the families took on the role of gatekeepers. “The priests in rural areas, in little villages, were crucial for contacting people and enabling us to interview the families” (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020). Thus, from their special position as insiders in the field, the priests were at the same time partners and helpers, regarding both family members and the EAAF itself.

The mediation links with victims’ family members were not only useful for conducting forensic work on the ground, but they also often served as liaisons to navigate the difficult process of restituting remains that were found—sometimes identified and sometimes not—without breaking any of the community’s cultural and/or religious traditions that link the living to the dead and to help victims’ families cope with grief.

4.3. *Spiritual Brokers: Mortuary Rituals and Coping with Grief*

The mediation of religious agents in mortuary rituals by request of victims’ families as closure for the process of identification and restitution of the remains of their loved ones was present from the beginning of the team’s work¹⁴:

At first, a religious ceremony was always held, led by priest Luis Farinello, both in Avellaneda and in Lomas. I recall that he assisted us at four or five ceremonies. Remember that there were not many identifications during the early years. I couldn’t tell you exactly when the first one was, it must have been 1987 or 1988 (. . .) [Where he came from] I’m not sure, we may have met him in the MEDH. I couldn’t tell you, all I can say is that after him, for emotional reasons, he helped us a lot whenever a family member asked us for a priest (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020).

At least one of the identifications made while the team was working at the MEDH venue arose from these connections (Cohen Salama 1992, pp. 273–74). This was the case of Dora Badilla de Jaramillo, who was at that time cook at the MEDH, and whose husband, Luis, had disappeared. As recalled by one of the team members, even though they used to share lunch with Dora, “she took a long time before telling them about her husband” (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020). This delay speaks of the initial difficulty—and perhaps mistrust—that many of the victims’ family members felt regarding the work of the EAAF. When remains were identified, it meant ceasing to search for the disappeared alive, accepting their death and coping with grief. Apparently, according to other testimonies, Farinello’s ceremonies began with the restitution process of the remains of Dora’s husband:

The ceremony I recall is the one at Ezpeleta cemetery to bury the remains of Luis Jaramillo. Dora and her family arranged for Luis Farinello’s participation. It was a very moving ceremony. Farinello may have participated in other ceremonies inspired in this one, which was surely the first. Luis Farinello was closely associated to the MEDH. (. . .) He also belonged to the APDH [Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos)]. (Interview with MEDH leader, 9 July 2010).

As we can see, Farinello was a priest with his own history of links with families of the disappeared and the world of human rights. He was one of the rebellious, third-world clergy that was surveilled and repressed during the last military dictatorship (Catoggio 2016b).¹⁵ Those shared feelings explain

¹⁴ For other instances of emergence of religion and beliefs in the work of the EAAF, see (Clacso-Quilmes 2019, pp. 39–40). These topics have been discussed at length with EAAF members (14 September 2020) and will be taken up again in future writings.

¹⁵ According to a fellow priest, “Farinello ordinarily received many threats, especially over the phone. Bombs were planted at the parish twice and once the front was machine-gunned. His house was broken into several times. He was often intercepted

why his ceremonies were requested by a group of relatives of victims to help them through that experience of suffering and coming to terms with grief. According to Cohen Salama, Farinello also performed the religious ceremony requested for the restitution of the remains of Luis María Roberto and Norberto Morresi. On that occasion, in his sermon, Farinello compared these disappeared/dead to Jesus Christ: “He, too, was abducted and murdered, although in those days there were no electric prods or injections—only nails”.¹⁶

The same occurred in the El Salvador case discussed above. The priest who officiated the religious ceremonies after the exhumations was a local priest who was close to the relatives. One of the team members describes him as

... one of those very informal priests, who don't wear priest's clothes, who are totally dedicated to the people (...) Rogelio, they called him 'the tomato priest' because since he is Belgian, he would go as red as the sun. He conducted all the ceremonies when we were unable to identify these children that we exhumed, so he held a very large ceremony. He conducted the religious ceremony with all the coffins of the exhumed persons, mostly children, and, by decision of the locals, they were all buried at the same place. They are there, with a great monument and on the wall, on small wooden boards, are written the names of all the people who lived in that subdivision. (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020).

Another of the emblematic scenes at that time, which helps to understand the role of these agents in the mortuary rituals and process of coming to terms with grief, took place at the MEDH during the restitution of the remains of María del Carmen Pérez, recalled by the EAAF founders as “one of the most difficult”:

In this case, she was murdered eight and a half months pregnant (...) it was the first case where we found a fetus positioned for birth, i.e., the fetus was in María del Carmen's womb (...) but my recollection of this case (...) is that it was the first time that we had to notify someone that both her daughter and her grandchild had died (...) The MEDH gave us what they called ... it was the room they called the multipurpose room and there was a whole ... like a setting prepared by everyone who worked at the MEDH, knowing what was going to happen (...) 'Pola'—that was the name of María del Carmen Pérez's mother—(...) spent almost six hours clutching the urn, sitting on the floor and rocking it as if it were a baby (...) we couldn't get Pola to let go of the urn and the people from MEDH were very kind. (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020).

This scene shows that the MEDH not only lent their infrastructure but also provided the “setting” for the process of restitution of the remains of the disappeared. This setting was the place where some relatives were able to begin to come to terms with their losses and also—at least in this case—the means by which the EAAF cushioned the initial impact of reporting the atrocious death not only of the disappeared, but also of the grandchildren being sought alive:

the thing was that the mother of María del Carmen Pérez (...) had received a letter (...) saying that her daughter had given birth to twins. So, for a long time this lady thought she was the grandmother of twins and bought, for instance, two of the same [type of] toys for the time when she could meet up with them (...) We had to tell her, 'Your daughter was murdered and they murdered your grandchild in her womb'. The restitution was very

and insulted while driving his car. He got beaten up. He had to organize a group of people to accompany and protect him.” (Yorio 1996, p. 367). See Yorio, Orlando. 1996. “El obispo Jorge Novak frente al problema de los desaparecidos”. *CIAS* 455, pp. 355–62.

¹⁶ *Página 12*, 8 July 1989, cited in (Cohen Salama 1992, p. 232).

painful . . . it was the first time that we called a psychiatrist and asked them to please be present while we notified her (. . .). You can be very good at notifying, but the news was so harsh that we didn't know how she would respond. So, this doctor was present there and we did it at the MEDH. (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020).

Thus, both the psychiatrist and the MEDH served as mediators-catalyzers of the dreaded "response" of victims' relatives when faced by evidence of the atrocious deaths of their loved ones that the team was in charge of imparting. An analogous form of mediation can be observed in the case of El Salvador:

when we worked in Central America, both in El Salvador and in Guatemala, the contact through the church was via local priests who were very close to the people (. . .) in El Mozote they hold one or two masses or religious ceremonies (. . .) where, much to our distress, we had to leave because (. . .) you know, that business of 'we are scientists' and shouldn't get 'very close' to the victims' relatives, all the more so because that might be used to attack us. So we took all care [to appear neutral]. (Interview with EAAF founding member, 9 September 2020).

This case illustrates how spiritual brokerage closes the required distance that must sometimes be imposed from the victims' relatives "so as not to get very close" because "we are scientists". The expression "much to our distress, we had to leave" shows that mortuary rituals—whether or not religious—were also a means to make sense of and at the same time, provide closure for the work specific to forensic activism, whose foundational action maxim was Snow's statement that broke the taboo: "You can work by day and cry by night" (Clacso-Quilmes 2019, p. 19). According to the EAAF memorial narrative, Snow convinced them with this idea to follow him in his scientific proposal to find the disappeared.

5. Discussion

The search for and identification of human remains in scenarios of post-dictatorship, mass violence, and genocides has become a globalized phenomenon that includes exhumation practices within the framework of management policies for the traumatic past. This new context, which began in the last decade of the Twentieth Century and became consolidated in the new millennium, has been characterized by the emergence of a "forensic turn" considered by some to have brought with it the shift from testimonial paradigm to material evidence. According to this standpoint, in order to explain and understand the extreme violence undergone, focus on the accounts of survivors was shifted to the "material evidence" of human rights violations (Garibian et al. 2017, pp. 12–13). In turn, restitution and reburial of exhumed human remains emerged as a tool for redress for the victims and commemoration for post-traumatic societies. The EAAF, formed by Clyde Snow, is the main driver of this global turn. Due to the team's importance, as we have seen, there is plentiful literature on the team and the process of its formation, development, and internationalization. There are also many papers on its contribution to the world, both in terms of redress to victims and of the elucidation of human rights violations that occurred in different contexts and places. Within this framework, my paper addresses a dimension which so far has received little or no attention: the links between the EAAF and the world of religion, especially churches, ecumenical agencies, foundations, religious leaders, and so on.

This approach enables several contributions to be made. It shows that these connections were not mere monetary and material donations based on ties of friendship. Even when they coexisted with other philanthropic funding sources, they operated as *sponsors* who provided infrastructure and financial resources to the team, often accompanied by a guarantee and institutional recognition from churches and their foundations regarding the work conducted. This recognition was no minor issue for a team initially defined by autonomy from the state, without academic or local scientific recognition and with certain disagreements with the human rights movement. This vocation for autonomy was in turn combined with the rejection of straightforward professionalization as a party-appointed expert, as resolved by the establishment of a non-profit association. This modality of combining expertise with

human sensitivity, which I call “forensic activism”, had many connections to the religious world. The privileged position of religious actors, as territorial insiders and key actors within the social fabric, made them strategic partners for the EAAF and, at the same time, true “helpers” in contexts that were hostile to this forensic work. They played a key role in guaranteeing security on the ground, preserving the image of professional prestige in the face of defamatory campaigns by the perpetrators and/or local governments, and advancing with the work itself. Knowledge of the terrain and the established trust achieved with the victims’ families was a valuable asset that many actors from the religious world provided to the EAAF, functioning in practice as gatekeepers for the preliminary investigation of forensic work.

This article also discusses the restricted role often attributed to religion as an exotic feature of a foreign culture or a merely contextual factor. This position misses much of great importance. Rituals, prohibitions, and religious beliefs about life and death are an inescapable part of the work of alleviating the pain of the living and restoring the identity to the dead. I have shown that during the mortuary rituals requested by victims’ families, religious agents provided *spiritual brokerage* between the living and the dead, and ways of managing suffering that also helped to preserve the team’s scientific and humanitarian character. In other words, religious mediation preserves the necessary scientific distance from the suffering of the victims and their families but, at the same time, it reinforces the humanitarian sensitivity of the team that calls the priests or obtains the physical space so that the families can have the rituals they desire. These rituals also offer a valuable space for scientists that allows them to weep over the human suffering they witness in day after day of physically and emotionally exhausting work.

6. Materials and Methods

This article is part of a broader project called “Genetics and Human Rights: policies and management of health and identity in recent Argentina (1980–2017)”, financed by the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas), whose aim is to describe and understand, from a socio-historical standpoint, the relationships between genetics and human rights recently Argentina, focusing on policies and management of health, justice and identity from the 1980s to the present.

In this particular paper, I combined document analysis, observation, and participation in scientific disclosure events and talks, and in-depth interviews. For document analysis, I worked with a large corpus of sources that included journalistic articles, journalistic books and testimonials, scientific articles by EAAF members published in various academic journals, and periodic EAAF reports. Regarding scientific disclosure events and talks, I observed five EAAF public events, conducted during the past two years. Finally, I conducted five in-depth interviews with key respondents about various stages of the EAAF and three respondents from other human rights organizations, in addition to studying 10 interviews available from different sources. Within this framework, this paper was based on a qualitative research design using flexible patterns, which were redefined during the research process through constant comparison between theory and data (Mendizábal 2006). Flexibility refers to the possibility of noticing new situations during the research process itself, emerging from the interactive situation between the researcher and the object of study, and based on them, reformulating both the questions and the appropriate approaches to them. At the same time, this design admits a multi-method strategy enabling deployment of collection and interpretation methods adequate to the different levels of analysis (Patton 2002, p. 272). The strategy followed to define the final sample size was inductive, following criteria of theoretical relevance, which guide the fieldwork until saturation is reached (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Thus, the categories employed in the analysis emerged from the data and were not adopted beforehand a priori.

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Article

Hidden in Plain Sight: Dominion Theology, Spiritual Warfare, and Violence in Latin America

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Abstract: Historically, Protestant churches in Latin America regarded the ‘world’ as a realm of sin and impurity. The proper focus of the church, they believed, was on salvation, and building a community of the saved. In recent years, this has begun to change, as evangelicals have entered the political arena in force. Many are motivated by ‘Dominion theology’, a long hidden movement that works to bring a network of conservative Christians to political power in order to affect ‘dominion’ over the earth to hasten the Kingdom of God. Although its origins are in the United States, this is a global movement, hidden in plain sight. The movement has shown strength and drawn notable political allies all across Latin America, with notable cases in Central America and Brazil. This remains a minority and a much-contested movement in Latin American Protestantism, but its advocates are working hard to gain positions of influence.

Keywords: evangelical; Pentecostal; Dominion theology; Rushdoony; Latin America; Guatemala

1. Introduction

Since the ‘evangelical boom’ that began in the 1970s, social scientists have long anticipated the emergence of Protestants, and Pentecostals in particular, as a powerful political and social force for change in Latin America. With a few exceptions, this has not been the case: Latin American Pentecostals have largely tended to frame their moral constructs in terms of ‘the church’ and the ‘world’. They have historically regarded the world outside the church as a demonic and dangerous space, with which evangélicos¹ should avoid all contact, except through evangelization and prayer.

However, this is rapidly changing. As evangelical religion becomes more established in Latin America, an increasing number of evangelical, mainly Pentecostal/neopentecostal, churches have adopted the hermeneutics of political engagement derived from a movement known as ‘Christian Restoration’, the international derivation of which is known as ‘Dominion theology’. Dominion theology is a type of political evangelism that works to bring a network of conservative Christians to political power in order to affect ‘dominion’ over the earth to hasten the Kingdom of God. Although there are antecedents dating back to the 1980s, it is only since the first decades of this century that the movement has become widespread across Latin America. The object of this chapter is to shed light on Dominionism and its impact in vernacular settings, given that it is one of the most influential, unrecognized, political movements in Latin America today.

Costa Rica

On Easter Day 2018, Costa Ricans elected a new president, Carlos Alvarado, a member of the ruling party, the PCN. Unlike most Costa Rican elections, which are usually democratic, fair, predictable,

¹ I use the word ‘*evangélico*’ in this work as it is used in Spanish and Portuguese, to indicate any Protestant, regardless of denomination

and a little dull, the nation held its collective breath that year, due to predictions that another candidate, a Pentecostal journalist named Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz (no relation to Carlos), would win the election. Fabricio was neither a seasoned politician nor a particularly well-known figure in Costa Rica prior to around 2017. However, he and his National Restoration Party (PNR) suddenly rose to the fore in the early stages of that nation's presidential campaign, thanks to the candidate's pledge to 'restore' Costa Rica to its pro-life, anti-LGBT, anti-gay-marriage, bolstered by traditional family and Costa Rican values.

Despite the fact that Costa Rica is, in many respects, a progressive and forward-looking country, certainly by Central American standards, it is also, in the words of one pundit, 'conservative from the waist down' (Wyss 2018). A recent ruling that legalized gay marriage pushed many *ticos* into the Fabricio Alvarado camp during the first round of presidential elections in February 2018. Fabricio Alvarado ultimately lost the election, but only by a slim margin. Since then, however, Fabricio's notoriety has only increased, and his political future in Costa Rica seems assured.

The political rise and fall of Fabricio Alvarado, however, in fact, is indicative of something more than Costa Rican domestic politics. His Restoration party is part of a much larger movement across Latin America and, indeed, the world, that is hidden in plain sight to most observers, though it is clearly legible to the knowing, even boldly advertised in the party's name. This is a so-called 'Christian' movement known as Christian Restoration, along with its international derivative, Dominion theology.

In actual terms, Dominion theology is not so much a 'theology' per se so much as it is an ideology and practice for a specific type of conservative Christian political engagement derived from Christian Restorationism. Its goal is to adopt a mentality of cultural engagement to bring about political action resulting in nodes of their specific variety of Christian political leadership across all nations; in the lexicon of the movement, advocates seek to 'transform', 'redeem', and 'restore' culture, thus bringing 'dominion' to the earth and restoring Christ's Kingdom to precipitate His Second Coming. The movement is widespread, and its advocates are often politically influential, although it remains a minority current within the stream of evangelical Christianity writ large. Many outsiders, including Christian fundamentalists, and non-Dominionist Pentecostals, mainline Protestants, and Mormons, view it with deep suspicion; these groups find its ideas unbiblical, threatening, and even abhorrent. Some even refer to it as 'dark Christianity'.

Even so, Dominionist thinking is widespread in Latin America; it has been a factor in an incipient form at least since the early 1980s, when, in Guatemala, 'church growth' specialists declared the genocidal Rios Montt administration to be a 'prophetic moment' when Christians would begin to take dominion over failed secular governments (Garrard-Burnett 2010). However, it is in the past 10 years, not only in Latin America but in much of the world at large, that it has stepped out more boldly from the shadows across the region.

2. The Roots of Christian Restorationism and Dominion Theology

The roots of Dominion theology draw from Calvinism and an earlier fundamentalist mode known as 'Christian Restoration'. Dominion theology demanded the politization of the faith to reconstruct a Godly society from the rubble of secular liberalism. (Its early form, Christian Reconstructionism, called for an end to liberal democracy and for a new society to be built based on Old Testament law, including Mosaic-era penalties such as execution by stoning for adultery and homosexuality, and the imposition of theonomy, a government based on divine law) (North 1982; Hedges 2006). Its contemporary roots date back to 1973—not coincidentally, the same year that the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion. That year, a theologian and historian, trained at Berkeley, the University of California, by the name of Rousas John (RJ) Rushdoony published a treatise called *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. Rushdoony was a strict Calvinist and also sympathetic to the John Birch Society, a fiercely conservative political movement that coalesced in the US itself as a champion of tradition values against what it defined as the worst excesses of secular, libertine liberalism, including racial integration, secular education, women's rights, and multiculturalism (a term anachronistic to that time).

It was Rushdoony who most successfully fused this political tendency onto an evangelical framework. His *Institutes of Biblical Law*, a highly parenetic work, readily revealed its deep Calvinist roots in its commitment to the ideas of ‘election’ and ‘predestination’, and would become the foundational book of Dominionism (Rushdoony 1973). (Note: Rushdoony considered himself a Restorationist, not a Dominionist per se, but he is nonetheless the genesis figure in the latter movement). Rushdoony’s fundamental premise builds on four key principles. (1) Jesus as calling on Christians to create a society that is founded and predicated on God’s laws according to the Bible. (2) The United States is God’s chosen and elect providential agent. (3) The US cannot yet fulfill this destiny because of its sinful and fallen state, as evinced by key bellwether issues, particularly legal abortion, the prohibition of public prayer in school, the teaching of evolution, approbation of same-sex marriage and other similar rights, compounded by the multiplicity of non-Christian voices and values corrupting American society. (4) The selection of ‘true’ Christian leadership is essential to expunging and repenting for these sins. Biblical law must replace secular legal codes and Christian values should form the basis of the educational system. This leadership must restore a nostalgic ‘Christian’ *imaginarie* where (white) men, acting with Biblically sanctioned, benevolent and godly *noblesse oblige*, dictate the lives of women, people of color, and all those outside the mainstream (Hedges 2006).

Rushdoony’s work directly or derivatively inspired three interrelated religious–political movements. The umbrella term, *Christian Restoration*, refers to the notion that the Founding Fathers of the US never intended to create a truly secular nation, and it demands that today’s task is to restore the United States to a Christian nation defined by its adherence to precise Biblical standards in all central aspects of public life: law, governance, gender and race interactions, reproductive health, and education. The second is the closely related idea of *Christian nationalism*, which extrapolates these ideas into a direct-action political ideology which, in the United States, has attached itself to the Republican Party. In the worlds of analyst Michelle Goldberg, ‘It is a conflation of scripture and politics that sees America’s triumphs as part of a cosmic context between God and the Devil.’ (Goldberg 2006). This manifestation has become so politically emphatic that recent observers have referred to Republican-oriented Christian nationalism as a ‘political bloc with a religious past’ (Bruenig 2020).

The third current is *Dominion theology*, the specific topic of this chapter and the aspect most germane to Latin America. This an international, perhaps more optimistic, derivation of Christian Restorationism that is less specific to the United States, but still fiercely driven by a strident opposition to secular liberalism and demanding society’s ‘restoration’ to godly rule as proscribed by Rushdoony a generation ago. Because all of these propositions are so closely interwoven and because each bleeds onto the others, it is not always possible or even desirable to separate one from another. As Goldberg suggests, ‘It is a hydra-headed thing, sometimes contradictory but unified enough to be called by a single name.’ (Goldberg 2006). As this article is specifically concerned with Latin America, I will use term ‘Dominionism’ because of its more international, less US-oriented implications, even as I acknowledge the imprecision of the nomenclature.

Rushdoony provides a series of propositions that translate readily into a methodology. The first and most important of these is the notion that because ‘Christian’ leadership in the Dominionist mold is completely of God, all other political and societal figures are not merely in opposition, but literally Satanic and against God and His holy law. Because there can be no compromise with Satan, Dominionism eschews the traditional, liberal (in the 18th century sense) Western values that stem from the nation’s Enlightenment-era founding documents: justice, equality, tolerance, reason, compassion, respect for dissent, and the immutability of science. In this way of thinking, there is no room for dissent or difference in opinion. In this theocratic thinking, Others are demonized, literally, to the point of dehumanization. This outlook offers fertile ground for the growth of conspiracy theories and absurd, even obscene accusations against ‘enemies’, because Satan, always a trickster, can and does readily colonize the human mind and soul.

One of the markers of Dominion theology in particular is a reimagining of Jesus as a muscular, aggressive, hypermasculine figure—nothing like the meek and mild Prince of Peace—often portrayed

carrying a large sword or even an automatic weapon to lead the faithful into battle with the ungodly. (As Jerry Falwell, Sr. confidently declared in an interview with the *New Yorker* back in 1981, ‘Christ was a man with muscles’.) (Fitzgerald 1981). The imagery—which appears widely on various popular culture platforms from t-shirts to social media—is a potently martial and aggressive one, and it calls for nothing short of the destruction of the liberal, Enlightened secular state. It demands ‘spiritual warfare’, and the restoration of ‘Christian values’ by any means necessary, including through violence. Although these references ostensibly stem from the Apocalypse of the Book of Revelation, it is only a short rhetorical leap from that world to the temporal one.

Second, the movement intentionally engages with what Hedges terms ‘*logocide*’, meaning that it appropriates and re-signifies well-known words with new meanings, which become code words, shifting meaning even as outsiders and sometimes even insiders fail to note the difference. Chief among these are key words of the United States’ political idiom that have long been linked to secular, liberal democracy, such as ‘freedom’, ‘liberty’, ‘wisdom’, ‘life’, ‘love’ (Hedges 2006). ‘Wisdom’, for example, in the new religious lexicon means unquestioned commitment to the hegemony of the movement; ‘freedom’ is life in Christ in a highly proscribed definition of what this means; ‘love’ is unquestioned obedience to those to claim to speak ‘for God’s law-order’, which is itself, in Rushdoony’s words, the ‘only true liberty’ (Rushdoony 1973).

Because all these charged words are deeply familiar and resonant to most Christians of all stripes and central to the patriotic sentiments of most citizens of democratic countries, it is all too easy for compliant preachers and secular politicians to lead earnest believers down this path, especially when that trail is marked along the way by familiar pet objections to modern society, such as abortion and gun-control. (In Latin America, it bears noting, neither of these two specific concerns are hot-button political issues, but rather, moral ones. For example, only two countries in the region, Cuba and Uruguay, allow abortion without restriction, and gun control laws—usually unenforced—are stringent in most Latin American countries) (Córdova Villazón 2014; Fernandez Anderson 2013; Gacs et al. 2019). However, many Latin Americans *do* share with other conservative Christians a great discomfort with progressive social imperatives such as gay rights, feminism, and sex education in public schools, which they believe undermine the primary of the traditional family, which is, generally speaking, the most trusted and valued social unit among people who live in the region. This is precisely the milieu in which secular political ambition and religious principles can readily meld with one another to create a single ideology supported by a powerful moral panic that feeds off code words, unquestioning obedience, and a faith-vindicated fear of the Other. This is hegemony by consent in the most Gramscian sense: in return for submitting to a closed-circuit of authority and self-referential verities, followers believe they are following God’s will and will thus receive God’s favor and eternal life.

It is important to underscore that not all, or even most evangelicals are Dominionists, and many traditional conservative evangelical leaders, have publicly expressed their strong discomfort with it (Stewart 2020). Moreover, not all Dominionists are evangelicals—conservative, fiercely anti-abortion Catholics also make up their numbers. Most importantly for this chapter, although Dominion theology has deep North American roots, preachers and politicians in Latin America have adopted it with enthusiasm, seeing in it a new opportunity to lay claim to another imported ideology (as they did in the late Cold War with anti-communism) to adapt to advance their own political and religious interests in their home countries.

2.1. *The New Apostolic Reformation*

As we have seen, Dominion theology claims that evangelical Christians are charged by God to ‘claim dominion’ over their home nations, if not the entire world. In much of Latin America, the methodology for building dominion is three-fold: followers engage first in vigorous prayer and then move on to direct political and social action. Specifically, they envision that a new Christian society will be built upon ‘seven mountains’ formed on biblical principles (Weaver 2016; Wallnau 2013). These ‘seven mountains’ are comprehensive spheres of influence: church, education, government/military,

family, business/commerce, arts/entertainment, and media. The principal goal of dominion theology and the seven-mountain mandate is the political and religious domination of the world, country by country, through the implementation of the moral laws and sanctions of the Bible, particularly of the Old Testament (Wallnau and Maiden 2011). Latin American Dominionists promise that fervent and directed intercession, coupled with careful political slating, will bring about total ‘transformation’—a term of art—that will usher in a new age of peace, prosperity, and Christian benevolence to their troubled societies, the nations, and the global community at large. If these efforts fail, however, they do not rule out other options.

Many of the agents of Dominionism are part of an evangelical, mainly Pentecostal current known as the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). The NAR is not a denomination or even a formal network per se, but its ‘apostles’ are usually connected with one another either theologically or relationally. In the last years of the 20th century, a cohort of autonomous ‘rising stars’ in the movement have emerged in Latin America; these enjoy a large popular following, either through their stature as the prominent pastors of megachurches, or as televangelists (Osborn 2015).

At the heart of its theology is the notion that the source of a society’s, or a people’s ills, come from demonic forces that are present today either because of some sort of ancient Satanic pact, such as, in this case, devotion to indigenous religious practices and images, or because of an individual or an identarian group’s ‘flawed spiritual DNA’; this is especially an issue in Latin America and Africa, where indigenous religions and hybrid varieties of Christianity remain vigorous (Weaver 2016). To overcome these barriers, Christian fighters must undertake ‘spiritual warfare’, a method of prayer and action that rises above the allegorical to project the live fire of faith against evil.

Here, prayer warriors, usually a pastor and his congregation, work to expel these dark forces (‘fallen angels, principalities, dominions, and demons’) out of a locality through prayers, fasting, exorcism, and, less commonly, direct physical destruction. Once exorcised, the locality is, in the term of art, ‘transformed’ and redeemed for Christ. This approach privileges the knowledge and authority of local pastors and ‘apostles’, who are most familiar with the contours of the local spiritual landscape (Wagner 1979). The NAR did not invent spiritual warfare, and it is not unique to them, but they did help to bring it from the sidelines into standard Pentecostal repertoire.

The throughline from Dominion theology to spiritual warfare—the former being a political theology, the latter more a methodology—is that spiritual warfare *within this context* is not simply the deliverance or exorcism of an individual, but of a location and the collectivity of people who inhabit a given physical and metaphysical space. This can be a productive process which helps communities engage with a paradigm that can help them build better and more productive lives. However, it is also a hermeneutics that lends itself to a rapid slide down the slippery slope from celestial warfare against malign spirits to outright physical violence against other human beings in the here-and-now.

2.2. Building Dominion

It was during the 1980s, in the aftermath of the rise of the ‘Moral Majority’ and the coalition of conservative Christians that helped elect Ronald Reagan to the US presidency, when the advocacy and mobilization of conservative Christians gained unprecedented momentum. During the 1980s, the Central American crisis provided an ideal foreign testing ground for this activist theology, pinpointing Guatemala, a country that at the time was undergoing a significant boom in evangelical growth and which then laid claim to the largest Protestant population, percentage wise, in all of Latin America: Guatemala would serve as a prototype for what would eventually be known as Dominion theology (Garrard-Burnett 1998). There, a recently born-again Pentecostal general, Efraín Ríos Montt was leading his scorched-earth campaign against leftist insurgents and the dominant Maya population. At the time, proto-NRA church growth specialists predicted that Guatemala was poised on the threshold of it ‘*hora de Dios*’,—its *kairos*, its prophetic moment, and the tipping point, when prayer and large-scale conversions to Protestantism—would allow the troubled country to undergo wholesale transformation (Garrard-Burnett 2010).

Ríos Montt's overthrow in a military coup in 1983 and his eventual conviction for genocide and crimes against humanity committed by him during his tenure in office took the starch out of his reputation as a 'Christian soldier' for dominion, and compelled his conservative Christian supporters in the United States to eventually distance themselves from him. Despite this, however, in the hands of its local advocates, Dominion theology continued to take shape both as a religious praxis and as a political vision. At the helm of this new direction was Guatemala's Harold Caballeros, the founder and now the former pastor of the wealthy mega-church El Shaddai, and, not coincidentally, an early proponent and international celebrity of the NAR (O'Neill 2012).

Caballeros was an early advocate of spiritual warfare. When the excavation of the Parque Central to build a subterranean parking lot in front of the National Palace in Zone 1 of Guatemala City revealed a pre-Columbian statue of the Mesoamerican winged deity Quetzalcoatl, Caballeros identified the image as the demonic source of Guatemala's many historical woes and traumas, and He and his prayer warriors launched an all-out spiritual war of prayers for national deliverance.² Caballeros' ministry speaks directly to a precise definition of 'Christian citizenship' calls for direct engagement by neopentecostals in prayer and politics for the 'redemption' of their nations (O'Neill 2010). If one can 'name and claim' blessings for one's self, Caballeros argues, then should not the same be true for one's family, one's community, and, indeed, for the entire country, and the world beyond?

As Kevin Lewis O'Neill has demonstrated in *City of God: Christian Citizenship in Guatemala*, while Caballeros' tipping point for national, even international transformation has remained elusive, the principles of 'Christian citizenship', largely by way of small prayer and study groups affiliated with El Shaddai have become active nodes for capacity-building among Guatemalan Pentecostals. This is true not least for Pastor Harold himself, who ran for President of Guatemala in two elections. Though unsuccessful both time, his campaign for the presidency in 2011 resulted in his being named Foreign Minister in the administration of President Otto Pérez Molina, a post he later resigned from, as did the president himself a few years later.

Not all Pentecostal efforts at claiming dominion have been as peaceful as Caballeros'. Spiritual Warfare has become a common tactic and trope in much of Guatemalan Pentecostalism, and its manifestations are sometimes physical or even lethal. On the other hand, we can observe one of its salubrious manifestations in the town of Almolonga, a prosperous K'iche' Maya highland village where the vast majority of the citizens are Pentecostal. The town's citizens, whose prosperity patently challenges the stereotype that "to be 'Indian' is to be poor," credit its economic success and low crime rate to the town's near-collective conversion to Protestant Christianity in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Almolonga's 'transformation', in Dominionist parlance, was an explosive one. After Jesus Himself, in material presence, commanded a local pastor told hold a series of healing services, villagers readily took part. There, they experienced the expulsion of demons (some so violent that the exiting demons flung their victims across the room) and collectively repudiated a local Maya deity, San Simón. In return, villagers—more than 80% of whom are *evangélicos*—fervently believe that God has materially rewarded this tiny 'city of miracles' with great abundance. Dominionists have held up Almolonga as a poster child for 'transformation' to conservative evangelical churches around the world; the village even appears in a Sunday School video from the 1990s appropriately titled *Transformations*. NAR prophet and spiritual warrior Harold Caballeros, a Dominionist, features heavily in this film, much to the chagrin of local indigenous protagonists (Garrard 2020).

It is measurably true that Almolonga enjoys remarkable success, especially in relation to other indigenous towns in the region, and credit for that belongs somewhere, which Almolongueños believe

² A different version of this story recounts that the Quetzalcoatl image was discovered by workmen while breaking ground for Caballeros' new megachurch, El Shaddai, in Zone 13 of Guatemala City. The account here is the one that Caballeros recalled to me.

is the *don*—the gift—of God.³ Almolonga’s social statistics are indeed singularly impressive. Since its deliverance event in the mid-1970s, Almolonga’s agricultural productivity (augmented not just by prayer, but also by fertilizer and new farming techniques), dramatically increased; the town is now known as ‘the vegetable garden of Central America’ (Falla 1972; Goldin 1987). The average local income is more than twice that of the neighboring village of Zunil, and as a result men from Almolonga can earn a living in their home town, thus saving the community from the familiar and social rupture of emigration that plagues so much of rural Guatemala. Crime rates are so low that local leaders turned the jail into a community center, which they rechristened the ‘Hall of Honor’ (Winger 2012). According to government data for the municipality, alcoholism, intoxication, and ‘senility’ (often-alcohol related), the three leading causes of death in neighboring villages, are so uncommon in Almolonga that the local government-run health center no longer even lists them as diagnostic categories (Almolonga 2005; Zunil 2005).

Despite this blessing and abundance—which is indeed extraordinary by even secular measures—this providential sense of being has from time to time taken a lethal turn over the past few years, as Almolonga’s evangélicos have become enforcers of the miracle by purging the town of interlopers and purported criminals who threaten their peace and prosperity. In 1998, villagers took the law into their own hands and cruelly lynched two teenage *ladinos* (non-indigenous) brothers from the nearby city of Quetzaltenango in the mistaken belief that they had been the perpetrators in a recent series of bus robberies (Prensa Libre 1998). In 2018, an angry mob of local evangélico businessmen severely beat two suspected kidnappers and burned their vehicles; the National Civil Police (PNC) were called to prevent the suspects from being beaten to death, but the mob repelled them, claiming that the presumed criminals still had accomplices in the town. More recently, in at least one documented case (although many more are rumored to have occurred), *evangélico* vigilantes formed a *turba* (lynch mob) to attack and lynch a young man who they determined, without benefit of judicial process, to be a thief and criminal (Rivera and Toc 2018). As recently as 2020, Almolongueños have violently opposed restrictions to prevent COVID-19, protesting that faith alone was enough to protect them and that restrictions would damage local commerce (El Periódico 2020). In May 2020, a group attacked four journalists who were covering this story, right in the midst of the vast vegetable market that lies at the steps of El Calvario church, the site of Almolonga’s original blessing. The journalists were roughed up, their cameras and recorders taken, and their vehicles damaged, but they escaped the town in one piece, thanks to the timely intervention of the PNC (Sandoval 2020).

Is it fair to suggest all these assaults were religiously motivated? The answer is a qualified yes, in the sense that Almolonga’s local epistemology is based in the belief that its success and prosperity is grounded in its specific experience of divine blessing; these episodes are not spiritual warfare, but social cleansing, understood by local people as intervention on God’s behalf to preserve His miracle. Thus, we see the slippage on the moral battlefield between spiritual struggle and plain vigilantism: the line between the two is all too porous.

Almolonga is not the only place in Guatemala where evangélicos have banded together for the social cleansing of persons they consider to be bad social actors. In 1997, the same year as the first Almolonga incident, another such *turba* gathered in San Antonio Palopó, a Kakchiquel Maya village near the lovely Lago de Atitlán, to lynch three young thieves. Two escaped, but one did not: after severely beating him, the mob doused the young man with gasoline and burned him alive. The *turba* was mostly *evangélico*, and as a group, it was the church people’s level of cohesion and leadership that helped to incite the mob (Piazza 2012). A few years later, a similar incident took place in the nearby town of San Lucas Tolimán, where a largely religious *turba* also apprehended, beat, and burned a young thief alive. Elsewhere, in the Mam Mayan town of Todos Santos Cuchumatán, angry locals

³ I elucidate this case much more fully in chapter 2, ‘Chapter 2: Tricksters, Gods and Global Pentecostalism in Almolonga, Guatemala’, *Faces of God in Latin America: Emerging Forms of Vernacular Christianity*, (Oxford University Press, 2020).

killed a local man who had recently returned from living in the US, where he had grown his hair long and pierced his ears, on the unproven premise that he was not only a *marero*, (gang member) but also ‘filled with the devil’ (Weston 2019).

Most recently, in June 2020, in the community of Chimay, San Lucas, El Petén, vigilante ‘justice’ took an especially gruesome turn. In this case, a lynch mob made up predominately of evangélicos poured gasoline on and set fire to Domingo Choc Che, a Q’eqchi’ native healer, accusing him of practicing witchcraft. They and many other bystanders next recorded Choc on their phones as he screamed and ran about wildly, the highly oxygenated flames quickly consuming him in death (Menchú 2020; Sandoval 2020). In the background of the 28-second video that his killers made—all of them his Q’eqchi’ neighbors, most of them purportedly devout Christians—not a single person moved to help Choc (TN23 2020). Some days later, a son of the man who Choc had supposedly killed by magic admitted freely to having purchased the gasoline and matches that ignited Choc, so it is not yet clear, given the exigencies of long-distant research, if the turba was motivated more by religious fervor or family vengeance. Even so, the ghastly video posted on YouTube of the murder bore these final words: ‘*Lo quemaron por brujo*’ (They burned him for being a witch (Ollantay 2020)).

It is important to underscore that by no means all, or even most, vigilantism in Guatemala stems from religious zealotry, since Guatemala has one of the highest rates of extrajudicial killings in the world. According to the national Procuraduría de Derechos Humanos, between 2005 and 2019, some 431 people were lynched, while 2366 were beaten and badly injured (U.S. Department of State 2009). Scholars and criminologists attribute this grim statistic to a very weak rule of law in much of the country, a lack of confidence in an effective and impartial judiciary, and even the tendency for indigenous people to resort to ‘customary law’ within their communities rather than take their grievances to the racist and corrupt system associated with the state (Mendoza and Torres-Rivas 2003). Others blame a long-standing tendency for Guatemalans to do things ‘*en su propia manera*’—to take matters into their own hands. (Girón Sandoval 2007). However, there can be little doubt that in communities where Pentecostal rhetoric specifically demands spiritual combat—that is, direct, confrontation as collective active agents of God against the power of evil, and summons believers to act as soldiers on a clearly Manichean battlefield where Good and Evil meet—it also, however unintentionally, helps fuel violent and lethal interactions.

Guatemala is hardly unique; while this chapter briefly undertakes three short case studies, it could just as easily highlight others: Colombia, Mexico, Haiti, and Bolivia stand out, and they are by no means the only other examples. Brazil, above all, stands out from the rest. There, NAR Pentecostals were closely involved in the constitutional *coup d’état* that removed Brazil’s popularly elected leftist president, Dilma Rousseff, in 2016. The powerful *bancada evangélica* (evangelical bloc), which makes up 13% of congressional members, both then and now is one of the most influential sectors in the Brazilian national assembly (Ribeira and Lago 2019). Alongside the well-known Pentecostal leader and speaker of the House of Deputies, Eduardo Cunha, these were active agents in the constitutional coup against Dilma Rouseff (Encarnación 2017).

Conservative evangélico support contributed to the rapid political rise and election of far-right former military-officer-turned-born-again ‘Christian’ named Jair Messias Bolsonaro to the presidency of Brazil (Polimédio 2018; Nogueira 2018). Bolsonaro won the Brazilian presidential elections on 28 October 2018, with a hefty margin and very wide support from Brazil’s evangelicals, who now make up nearly a quarter of Brazil’s overall population. Bolsonaro, who many aptly refer to as the ‘Brazilian Trump’, is outspoken, bombastic, and authoritarian (The Economist 2017). His ferociously anti-immigrant views, his gloves-off law-and-order mentality, outrageously misogynistic and homophobic statements, his disdain for Brazil’s enormous non-White population, enthusiasm for combating his political enemies through violence and even assassination, and his flagrant disregard for democracy, do not, on their face, suggest much in the way of a Christian outlook (Billler and Douglas 2017).

Bolsonaro is outspoken and vulgar. He openly pushes ferociously anti-immigrant and racist views. His law-and-order mentality is notorious; he famously opined back in 1999, that Brazil’s military

government of the 1960s and 1970s 'should have killed 30,000 people, starting with Congress as well as [former president and economist] Fernando Enrique Cardozo', and he attempted to create a new holiday to commemorate the great successes of that murderous regime (Finchelstein 2018). Under Bolsonaro's inattentive leadership, the COVID-19 epidemic, as in the United States, has run rampant; at the same time, Bolsonaro, a climate change denier, allowed massive wildfires in the Amazon, many caused by new settlers and exploiters that the government had encouraged to 'develop' the region to burn freely, even as he did his best to deny their reality (Spring and Marcello 2020). He has placed the autonomy and the authority of the Brazilian Congress under direct attack (Phillips 2020). His government has increased repression of 'terrorists' such as social justice and dissident groups, particularly Black activists (Soares 2020). He has also issued regular denunciations and attempted to reduce the rights and property of *quilombolas*, the descendants of runaway slaves who live in remote, communities (*quilombos*) that were granted legal recognition and collective land ownership by the 1988 Brazilian constitution, and which have fought hard to maintain their land rights and cultural autonomy (Braga de Souza 2019).

Despite Bolsonaro's enthusiastic misanthropy and racism, his strong anti-corruption stance, coupled with his profoundly conservative views on gender and sexuality, make him a popular populist figure among conservative Brazilians, even those well outside the Dominionist Pentecostal community (Venaglia 2018). Conservative evangelicals appreciate his opposition to abortion, the legalization of drugs, his opposition to LGBT causes, his distaste for affirmative action quotas for Blacks, and his eagerness to stand up for nationalistic and white identarian politics (Alves Leal 2018). Despite his provocative pronouncements that run directly contrary to Christ's teachings on fundamental issues, Bolsonaro has won the favor of Brazil's most prominent and influential evangelical leaders, although mainline Christians remain repelled by his incendiary and tendentious speech and policies (Pereira 2018). As Brazilian commentator Gilberto Alves Leal notes, for many evangelicals, who are accustomed to submitting themselves fully to the mandates of an 'anointed' spiritual leader, "the authoritarian posture of Bolsonaro does not provoke fear, but rather a 'familiar sense of security'." (Alves Leal 2018).

During the presidential campaign, Bolsonaro won endorsements from key evangelical leaders and NAR apostles, including Silas Malafaia, and Jose Wellington Berreza, the head superintendent and president, respectively, of Brazil's single largest Pentecostal denomination, the Assembleia de Deus (Frazão 2018). No less a figure than the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus' founder and influential 'Bishop', Edir Macedo, offered his powerful endorsement of Bolsonaro during the campaign. Today, Macedo is one of the president's most powerful and influential supporters (Veja 2018).

On 1 September 2019, Macedo formally presented Bolsonaro to God and to his vast congregation at the IURD's showcase Templo de Salomão in São Paulo. The pastor of one of the world's largest megachurches offered his blessing on the president, declaring him to be '*consegurado*', (consecrated) '*profético*' (prophetic), and a leader 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. On this occasion, the diminutive Macedo placed his hands on the kneeling Bolsonaro so as to anoint his head with holy oil, ordering him to 'lead the beloved country in the name of Jesus' (Chapola et al. 2018). Macedo, who is a leading NAR 'prophet' and an ardent Dominionist, marked Bolsonaro as one divinely chosen to shepherd the Americas' largest nation to 'apostolic governance', which will, in turn, lead to the transformation of Brazil and far beyond (Macedo 2019).

With such an 'anointed' leader in power and within an environment that increasingly condones division and intolerance, it is perhaps not surprising that some of Brazil's Pentecostals have also translated their warfare from the spiritual realm to the streets (CartaCapital 2018). In fact, there had been a noticeable upswing in violence related to religious intolerance prior to Bolsonaro's rise, since around 2016, but in 2019, the Rio-based Comissão de Combate à Intolerância Religiosa recorded a 56% increase in religious violence in that single year (Duarte de Souza 2020). The majority—although not all, since some charismatic Catholic groups have also been accused of such actions—of these events consist of assaults by Pentecostals, often specifically the members of Macedo's denomination,

the IURD, against practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions, particularly Candomblé, Umbanda and the ‘*matriz africana*’—the breadth of African-based faiths—more generally. These attacks are not rogue, but entirely intentional. In his widely-read book *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias, deuses ou demônios?*, the IURD’s Edir Macedo admonished his followers that African religious expressions ‘seek to keep us from God. They are enemies of Him and the human race’. He added: ‘This struggle with Satan is necessary . . . to eternal salvation.’⁴ (Macedo 1980).

The Brazilian federal court banned the book in 2005, on the grounds that it was ‘degrading, insulting, prejudiced and discriminatory’ (*degradante, injuriosa, preconceituosa e discriminatória*) to Afro-Brazilian religions, and as such a danger to society, but Macedo continues to make the work available to members of his church (Tinoco 2019). In recent years, attacks on Umbanda and Candomblé templos and terreiros have increased dramatically, spiking sharply since Bolsonaro’s assumption of the presidency. By way of example, in 2019, several hundred such attacks—more than one third of those that occurred in the entire country—took place in the Baixada Fluminense, one Rio’s poorest and therefore most crime-ridden neighborhoods, an area that is home to more than 250 terreiros (these conflated fluidly with Bolsonaro’s war on urban crime by any means, including violence). Violent attacks by Pentecostals and neopentecostals (not only from the IURD, but also from the Assembleias de Deus and other Pentecostals with deep roots in Brazil) against the *matriz africana* have become so common that the assailants have earned the sobriquet of ‘*gospeltraficantes*’, an obvious play on the Portuguese word for ‘narcotraffickers’ (Marton 2019). They attack with impunity, working under the imprimatur and tacit approval of Bolsonaro to purge Brazil of Africa’s ‘demonic stain’ and to ‘restore’ it as a Christian nation operating under Biblical strictures and Godly law.

Although the level of violence in Brazil rarely reaches that of the Guatemalan lynchings—thus far—the attacks are acts of physical aggression packaged in religious rhetoric and imagery. They tend to consist of violent attacks on temples and *terreiros*, the destruction of religious images, physical and verbal assaults (particularly against the *matriz africana*’s religious leaders), arson, and manslaughter, since some victims have died of heart attacks after violent confrontations (Muggah 2019). The language that the Pentecostal warriors use is in the violent idiom of spiritual warfare: as one Candomblé practitioner who described the attack at her *terreiro* Ilê Omo Aiyê in São Paulo states, the assailants shouted, ‘*Senhor, protegei-nos do demônio*’ and ‘*Queima ela, queima ela, Senhor*’ (Lord, protect us from the devil! and ‘Burn her, burn her!’). These sort of confrontations have become commonplace (and unpunished) in areas of Brazil where Afro-Brazilian religions are most widely practiced, such as Natal, São Paulo, Salvador Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro (Mann 2019). They have also, increasingly, become an accepted part of the Pentecostal spiritual warfare repertoire and a hallmark of Dominionist success.

3. Conclusions

For several decades now, pundits and serious observers have posited ‘the politics of evangelical growth’ as Latin America becomes more and more Pentecostal, and many knowledgeable scholars have questioned how long it would take for Latin America’s Protestant boom to take an overtly political turn⁵ (Parker and Olavarría 2016). With the politics of Dominionism it appears that the buried giant of Pentecostal political activism has, at last, finally roused itself. Or has it?

It is important to stress once again that many Christians—even most evangelicals and non-NAR Pentecostals—emphatically do not subscribe to the NAR, Dominion theology, or Christian nationalism, at least not in so many words. Even as they may agree on certain key issues, such as the efficacy of prayer

⁴ Edir Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias, deuses ou demônios?*, (São Paulo: Unipro, 1980). This book was reissued in a new edition 1997 to a much larger readership and sold more than 3 million copies.

⁵ I borrow this phrase from David Stoll’s 1990 book, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, Stoll 1990), which, along with David Martin’s *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, Martin 1990), published the same year, was among the first full-length scholarly monographs to examine this question.

to affect human agency and outcomes, and the importance of following clear moral guidelines in public and private life, Christians outside the NAR are deeply critical of what they consider to be its faulty theology, the overweening and unquestioned ‘authority’ of dubious ‘prophets and apostles’, and what they take as its severe deviations from Biblical teachings. The revulsion that many Christians and others feel toward the NAR is not due to the conservative moral values that it champions (with these, they are actually likely to agree), but rather with the NAR’s claim to a secret proprietary and exclusive power relationship with God that subverts the democratic process and values. Some believe the movement heretical; many consider its political implications dangerous.⁶ The gist of this work is not that Latin American evangelicals have become politically influential—that is only to be expected, given their numbers— but it is also unlikely that, as a disparate group, they would back a single slate of candidates anywhere, given their many divisions and differences. The point is, rather, that a significant minority movement within Pentecostal Christianity with a clear agenda and methodology, hidden in plain sight, has become a highly influential player within Latin America’s political arena. Christian Restorationism and its offspring, Dominionism, as its proponents and detractors both agree, have profound implications for the future.

The Dominionists have proven themselves to be extremely adept at tapping into deep veins of social discontent and moral anxieties, especially in the hot zones of culture, race, and, above all, sexuality. The fact that the prophets and apostles are governed by a specific vision that is largely opaque to those outside the movement provides them with a cover that allows them to steadily expand their influence in the quest for dominion without transparency. Above all, they move forward with the utmost confidence in the righteousness of their grand plan to restore and redeem not only their own countries, but the world itself.

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⁶ There is a no shortage of anti-Dominion screed readily available on websites, blogs, and social media. See for example, Sandy Simpson, ‘Dominionism Exposed’, Apologetics Coordination Team, 2 February 2006 (Simpson 2006); ‘La Iglesia offshore de Harold Caballeros’, *Plaza Publica*, 9 May 2016, <https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/la-iglesia-offshore-de-harold-caballeros>, ‘Harold Caballeros—Abandona Guatemala’, *The Guatemala Chronicle*, 25 September 2015, <https://guatemalachronicle.wordpress.com/2015/09/22/harold-caballeros-abandona-guatemala/>; Falso Profeta y Apóstol Rony Chavez Denunciado, 2020, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTjFmWpleVc>; Falso apóstol y profeta Rony Chaves-El papa de Costa Rica, 2020, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvSeTIE-g-0>.

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Article

“Spiritual Warfare” or “Crimes against Humanity”? Evangelized Drug Traffickers and Violence against Afro-Brazilian Religions in Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract: Since at least 2005, drug traffickers in the cities and favelas of the state of Rio de Janeiro have been carrying out systematic and violent assaults on Afro-Brazilian religious communities. Motivated by their conversion to sects of Evangelical Christianity that regard Afro-Brazilian religions as devil worship, the traffickers have forcibly expelled devotees of these faiths from their homes and temples, destroyed shrines and places of worship, and threatened to kill priests if they continue to practice their religion. Scholars have often described this religious landscape as a “conflict” and a “spiritual war.” However, I argue that Evangelized drug traffickers and Afro-Brazilian religions are not engaged in a two-sided struggle; rather, the former is unilaterally committing gross violations of the latter’s human rights, which contravene international norms prohibiting crimes against humanity and genocide.

Keywords: Afro-Brazilian religions; Candomblé; Umbanda; evangelicals; Brazil; spiritual warfare; violence; crimes against humanity; genocide

1. Introduction

In mid-August 2019, police in the state of Rio de Janeiro announced that they had arrested eight drug traffickers who had been attacking devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions (i.e., Candomblé and Umbanda) and their places of worship (terreiros) (“[Polícia prende ‘Bonde de Jesus’](#)” 2019). The traffickers were part of a group known as “Bonde de Jesus,” or “Jesus Tram,” which they founded to organize and coordinate their efforts to use threats and property destruction to push Afro-Brazilian religions out of the communities that they control. One of the founders of Bonde de Jesus is Álvaro Malaquias Santa Rosa, also known as “o Peixão” (“the big fish”), a commander of one of Rio de Janeiro’s most notorious gangs, the Terceiro Comando Puro (TCP). The police received reports that Santa Rosa’s branch of the TCP had established its own church and that Santa Rosa had been ordained as a pastor.

Under the leadership of people like Santa Rosa, the members of Bonde de Jesus and other Evangelized drug traffickers¹ had threatened at least 200 Afro-Brazilian terreiros in the first eight months of 2019 (“[Polícia prende ‘Bonde de Jesus’](#)” 2019). In some cases, they set restrictions for the operation of these places of worship such as limiting the hours in which ceremonies could occur, prohibiting devotees from wearing white (a ceremonial color), and banning public displays of “santos” (images of saints or deities known as orixás). In others, they evicted devotees from their own places of worship—by threat or by force—or simply destroyed these terreiros altogether.

¹ It appears that the majority of these drug traffickers belong to Neo-Pentecostal churches; however, reports of these attacks often use general language about Evangelical drug traffickers, making it difficult to exclude the possibility that other forms of Evangelical Christianity are also participating in violence against Afro-Brazilian religions.

Bonde de Jesus and the acts of religious intolerance that they carried out against Afro-Brazilian terreiros in 2019 are part of a larger wave of Evangelical extremism among drug trafficking gangs in the state of Rio de Janeiro that can be traced back to at least 2005. Commencing in Morro do Dendê on Ilha do Governador and Senador Camará favela in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro, militarized strands of Evangelical Christianity have infiltrated the favelas and cities across the state. Although these brutal assaults on devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions have continued for more than a decade and appear to be increasing in frequency and severity, the government of Brazil has been reticent to acknowledge the gravity of the problem or to implement meaningful efforts to prevent further violence.

In *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and For All*, Gareth Evans (2008) provides a dishearteningly lengthy list of serious human rights violations that occurred in the late 20th and 21st centuries despite the existence of an extensive network of international human rights treaties and organizations that was implemented precisely to prevent such atrocities. In this article, I argue that the attacks against Afro-Brazilian religious communities in Rio de Janeiro provide another example of systematic egregious human rights violations in the 21st century that have received little acknowledgment, denunciation, or intervention. This argument breaks with the traditional ways that scholars have described the religious landscape in Brazil. Although researchers have often written about recent Evangelical aggressions against Afro-Brazilian religions, they have typically employed the perpetrators' own language and worldview about spiritual "warfare" or "conflict" to describe these attacks. I contend that this terminology is misleading because it downplays the severity of the violence and inaccurately suggests reciprocal aggressions between Afro-Brazilian and Evangelical religious communities. I argue that Evangelical assaults on Afro-Brazilian religions are one-sided aggressions that contravene international laws and norms prohibiting "crimes against humanity" and that they may also constitute genocide.

I structure this article using a common law/legal studies format. I begin with a delimitation of the problem, describing the earliest reports of Evangelized traffickers committing acts of intolerance against Afro-Brazilian religious communities in the mid-2000s and then outlining the most recent series of attacks, which took place in four cities in the state of Rio de Janeiro from 2017 to 2019. After providing this background information, I explore how scholars have increasingly attributed acts of intolerance against Afro-Brazilian religions to Brazilian Neo-Pentecostals' ideology about "spiritual warfare." Then, I use the most widely accepted definitions of crimes against humanity and genocide to argue that Evangelical attacks against Afro-Brazilian religious communities, particularly those carried out by Evangelized drug traffickers, constitute grievous human rights abuses. I conclude by exploring some of the benefits of employing language that focuses on the impact on the victims rather than the worldview of the perpetrators.

2. The Origins of Evangelized Traffickers and Violence against Afro-Brazilian Religions

The history of Evangelized drug traffickers and their campaigns of violence against Afro-Brazilian religious communities has never been properly studied. I am unaware of any publication, in English or Portuguese, that describes the history of the traffickers' conversion and their attacks against devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions in meaningful detail. Therefore, before assessing whether these acts of violence constitute crimes against humanity or genocide, it is necessary to construct an outline of the history and nature of these attacks.

The reader should use this and the following section solely as an introduction to this little-known issue. In these sections, my purpose is not to analyze the relatively minimal sources that are available to study these traffickers, to explore the political and social stakes behind the traffickers' conversion or their practice of targeting Afro-Brazilian religions, nor to place these events in the broader context of the extensive literature on religion and violence. Instead, this background information will merely assist the reader in understanding why labeling these attacks as "spiritual warfare" is problematic and why the traffickers' actions likely contravene international human rights law. I rely on news stories, human rights reports, and other sources to create this summary/overview.

The favelas of Brazil developed as workers who could not afford to live in the cities where they were employed set up informal settlements on the outskirts of the cities. The government offered these informal settlements, known as favelas or comunidades, little in the way of basic infrastructure such as water, power, police, and legal recognition of land rights. In the later part of the 20th century, as the drug trade increased in Brazil, trafficking gangs were easily able to take over these spaces that were traditionally without state support and control (Sandoval 2017). Over time, most Brazilian cities developed with two separate parts—those that are governed by the state and those that are governed by militias or gangs.

As of 2013, drug traffickers controlled 53% of the favelas in the state of Rio de Janeiro (Sandoval 2017, p. 238). There are at least three major drug trafficking gangs that dominate the landscape of the state. The oldest of the gangs is the Comando Vermelho (Red Command), which was founded in the late 1970s. The second oldest is the Terceiro Comando Puro (Third Pure Command), which was founded in the mid-1980s, when it split off from Comando Vermelho. The third trafficking gang is Amigos dos Amigos (Friends of Friends), which was formed in the late-1990s, also through a rift with Comando Vermelho. Initially, these gangs were tolerant of Afro-Brazilian religions and some scholars argue that many traffickers were once devotees of these faiths. However, all of this began to change by the late 2000s, as Evangelical Christianity took root among the traffickers.

One of the earliest accounts of these drug trafficking communities committing acts of intolerance against Afro-Brazilian religions was published in February 2006, when journalist Mario Hugo Monken wrote an article in *Folha de Sao Paulo* titled “Trafficker is accused of vetoing Umbanda in Rio” (“Tráfico é acusado de vetar umbanda no Rio”). Monken recounted several incidents wherein drug traffickers had issued threats against devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro. In 2005, traffickers in Piedade ordered the closure of an Umbanda center “because there was a war between rival gangs, who feared police infiltration” (Monken 2006).² That same year, according to Monken, the traffickers closed two terreiros in nearby Morro da Fazendinha because they feared that the sound of the ritual drums played during ceremonies could prevent them from detecting a police invasion. Around this same time, factions of the Comando Vermelho prohibited Afro-Brazilian terreiros from operating in four other favelas in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro (Jacarezinho, Mangueira, Manguinhos, and Vigário Geral) as well as “threatened to assault a woman in Manguinhos” because she was a devotee of an Afro-Brazilian religion (Monken 2006).³ While Monken reports that the restrictions on terreiros in Piedade and Fazendinha Hill were driven by concerns that Afro-Brazilian terreiros made them vulnerable to police invasions, he does not offer any rationale for the Comando Vermelho’s prohibitions in the other four regions.

In this article, Monken also provided one of the earliest reports of Evangelized traffickers placing limitations on the practice of Afro-Brazilian religions. In Senador Camará favela in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro, local drug traffickers banned “macumba dispatches and rallies.”⁴ Monken explained that the traffickers there had been attending an Evangelical Church-Igreja Assembléia de Deus dos Últimos Dias. Their leader, Robinho Pinga, had recently been arrested and surrendered to the police with a bible in hand, “claiming to be evangelical” (Monken 2006).⁵ In addition to Robinho Pinga’s restrictions on “macumba” in Senador Camará, Monken also averred that Fernando Gomes de Freitas (also known as Fernandinho Guarabu), a self-proclaimed Evangelical, had recently closed three terreiros in Morro do Dendê on Ilha do Governador and prohibited inhabitants of the favela from wearing bracelets or necklaces associated with Afro-Brazilian religions. Fernandinho would eventually become the

² Quote: “porque estava havendo uma guerra entre quadrilhas rivais, que temiam a infiltração policial.”

³ Quote: “ameaçou agredir uma mulher em Manguinhos.”

⁴ Quote: “despachos de macumba e reuniões.” Macumba is a (often derogatory) term used to refer to Afro-Brazilian religions. It is similar to the popular use of the term “voodoo” in English.

⁵ Quote: “afirmando-se evangélico.”

trafficker who most sources cite as the beginning of Evangelized religious intolerance in Rio's favelas ("Polícia prende 'Bonde de Jesus'" 2019),⁶

By time Monken published his report on intolerance in Rio's favelas, Fernandinho had spent approximately two years as the TCP's commander of 17 of the 18 favelas on Ilha do Governador in Rio de Janeiro, including the largest favela, Morro do Dendê (Anderson 2009). A few years later, estimates indicated that around 100,000 people lived in the 18 favelas on Ilha do Governador (20% of the island's 500,000 inhabitants). Around this same time, sources estimated that Guarabu made \$300,000 per month from drug trafficking and had significant income from other sources such as "protection money" from local businesses (Anderson 2009).

In the early years of his command, Fernandinho was known for throwing street parties (bailes funk) that were sites of drinking and heavy drug use. At these parties, Fernandinho occasionally took the mic to rap about taking out his enemies without mercy (Anderson 2009). However, in 2006, Fernandinho became close with a local pastor who had been ministering to the traffickers, Sidney Espino dos Santos. Pastor Sidney was the leader of an Evangelical Church—Igreja Assembleia de Deus Ministerio Monte Sinai (Mount Sinai Assembly of God Church)—in Parque Royal. After a time and due to Sidney's influence, Fernandinho converted to Evangelical Christianity.

Following his conversion, Fernandinho engaged in a series of actions that would eventually become typical of Evangelized drug traffickers. First, he "invited" all non-evangelicals to leave the area that he controlled. Specifically, in Morro do Dendê, traffickers closed down all 10 Afro-Brazilian terreiros that operated in that community. The traffickers also wrote bible verses on the walls of the favela and placed a sign over a community pool that Fernandinho built that said "This belongs to Jesus Christ" (Monken 2006; Anderson 2009; "Crime e preconceito" 2015).

Throughout all these attempts to proclaim Ilha do Governador as Christian territory, Fernandinho never ceased to carry out the violence that has often been rampant in Rio's favelas. In 2007, he threw a party to celebrate the defeat of one of his enemies, and when the police raided the party in an attempt to kill Fernandinho, they "found a four-and-a-half-foot cake decorated with the twenty-third Psalm, spelled out in icing" (Anderson 2009). Later that year, when the news of Fernandinho's conversion hit local newspapers and tabloids, it was featured under a headline about his penchant for beheading people who opposed him.

By 2009, Fernandinho's persistent murders put a strain on his relationship with Pastor Sidney. Yet, when Pastor Sidney took journalist Jon Lee Anderson to meet Fernandinho, there was still significant evidence of the relationship between Evangelical Christianity and Ilha do Governador traffickers (Anderson 2009). As they passed through various gang checkpoints, Anderson witnessed Sidney praying for the traffickers—laying hands on their head and yelling "leave" in a manner that sounds like he was trying to cast out demons. When Anderson met Fernandinho himself, the TCP commander at least paid lip service to his purported religious beliefs, proudly telling Anderson that he was trying to read the bible the whole way through, sporting a tattoo on his forearm that said "Jesus Cristo," and decorating his bedroom with pictures of various verses from Psalms.

Over the next few years, reports surfaced in other parts of Rio de Janeiro, suggesting that the Evangelization of drug traffickers had spread from Ilha do Governador back to mainland areas of the state. For instance, in the latter half of the 2000s, Evangelized traffickers banned white clothes (a symbol of Afro-Brazilian religions, worn every Friday as well as to religious ceremonies) in the community of Morro do Amor, in Lins de Vasconcelos. One mãe-de-santo (female priest) who did not wish to be identified told reporters that she suffered harassment when she was going to and from ceremonies and that the traffickers warned that they wouldn't tolerate any "macumba" in the community. One of the traffickers even came to her house to warn her that she would be evicted if she was seen again in those "devil's clothes" (white clothes). She secretly packed her religious attire in a bag when she went

⁶ This 2019 article erroneously reported that Guarabu had converted only four years prior.

to ceremonies to try to avoid any problems. However, one day in 2010, she accidentally left her white clothes on the clothesline. The traffickers noticed and threatened her again so the mãe-de-santo moved to a new community (“Crime e preconceito” 2015).

Around this same time, in 2009, a different mãe-de-santo bought a plot of land in Parque Columbia in the city of Pavuna and sought to establish an Afro-Brazilian terreiro there. After she had done a few spiritual consultations and divination sessions, several traffickers showed up with the president of the residents’ association. The group informed the mãe-de-santo that an “Army of Jesus” was in charge of the neighborhood and they did not permit any “macumba” there. A few days later, the mãe-de-santo returned to find that the traffickers had put the property up for sale without her knowledge (Soares 2013; “Crime e preconceito” 2015).

By 2013, the US Department of State had picked up on the severity of this issue in its International Religious Freedom Report on Brazil. The State Department indicated that it had heard reports “that drug traffickers were persecuting adherents of Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian religions in impoverished Rio communities. The media reported that drug traffickers had forced Candomblé areas to close, expelled at least 40 Candomblé leaders from the communities, and forbid residents to wear white clothing or display other outward signs of being a Candomblé practitioner” (United States Department of State 2013). Stories in Brazilian media from the same time period suggest that these problems were concentrated in the North Zone of Rio, in communities such as Lins and Serrinha in Madueira, which were under the command of the TCP (Soares 2013).

3. Recent Evangelized Trafficker Violence against Afro-Brazilian Religions

In recent years, Evangelized trafficker violence has fanned out to other parts of the state outside of the favelas in the Rio de Janeiro greater metropolitan area (Figure 1). Most significantly, in May 2019, the Commission to Combat Religious Intolerance reported that of the 100 terreiros that had been targeted since the beginning of the year, 60% were spread across four cities—15 in Nova Iguaçu, 20 in Duque de Caxias, 15 in Campos dos Goytacazes, and 10 in São Gonçalo (“Campos está entre as cidades” 2019). It is important to understand the patterns of intolerance in these areas because they are some of the most heavily populated cities in the state. São Gonçalo is the second largest city in the state after Rio de Janeiro. In 2018, it had over 1.077 million people. Duque de Caxias is the third most populated city with 914,383 people, and Nova Iguaçu is fourth with 818,875 people. Campos dos Goytacazes is the seventh largest city in the state of Rio de Janeiro with just over half a million people. Therefore, the systematic assaults on these four cities alone threatens the religious freedom of over 3.3 million people.

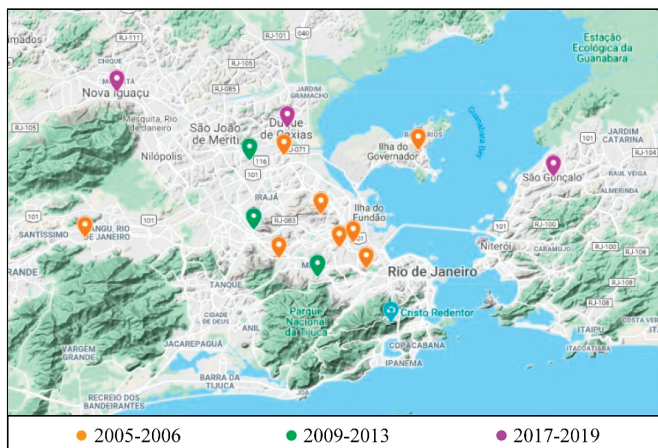


Figure 1. Locations of Trafficker Attacks.

a. Nova Iguaçu

Nova Iguaçu was the first of these four cities to experience systematic attacks from Evangelized traffickers. The bulk of the first wave of attacks took place between July and early September of 2017. During this time, at least seven Afro-Brazilian terreiros were destroyed in Nova Iguaçu (Sétimo terreiro é depredado 2017; United States Department of State 2017).

Evangelized traffickers recorded two of these attacks and someone (possibly the traffickers themselves) disseminated the videos on the popular messaging platform WhatsApp. The first occurred in August of 2017, and the identity of the victim has not been disclosed.⁷ The video shows a pai-de-santo (male priest) standing in the ruins of an Afro-Brazilian terreiro. He is holding dozens of sacred necklaces—ilekes—in his hands, breaking them one by one. A person behind the camera yells at the pai-de-santo, claiming “É só um diálogo que eu tô tendo com você. Da próxima vez eu mato” (“It’s just a dialogue that I am having with you. The next time, I kill”). A baseball bat appears in the corner of the screen with the word “dialogue” written on it. The traffickers tell the pai-de-santo that this area is under the control of the TCP and that they had made it clear that they did not want any “macumba” in their territory. They admonish the pai-de-santo, averring that he knew he should not be praying in this “dog house.” They order him to keep destroying the ilekes and to break the “Satanic” bottles (presumably ritual containers) sitting outside the terreiro. Before the video closes, the traffickers remind the pai-de-santo that if he rebuilds the terreiro, they will kill him.

In September 2017, the traffickers carried out a second attack in Nova Iguaçu that they also documented on film. In this assault, seven individuals who were armed with guns, iron bars, and baseball bats surrounded Mãe Carmen de Oxum and her companions as they were returning from the market (Filho 2017). Two traffickers held Mãe Carmen’s companions at gunpoint and forced them to lay on the ground while the other five followed her inside her place of worship. The video of her attack begins when the traffickers are calling her the “devil’s chief” and telling her to “break everything” in her terreiro. They order her to overturn the shrines of her deities one by one, telling her that only “the blood of Jesus has power.”⁸ After the last of the shrines had been knocked to the ground, the traffickers stopped filming. However, Mãe Carmen later reported that the attackers told her that they were representatives of the drug cartel and acting on behalf of “the man who did not want macumba” (“do homem que não queria macumba”). As the traffickers were departing, some of Mãe Carmen’s Evangelical neighbors reportedly applauded their actions and shook hands with them (Bustamante 2017; Nunes 2017).

Around the same time as the attack on Mãe Carmen, traffickers invaded another terreiro in Nova Iguaçu, Ilê Asé Togun Jobi (Barbosa 2019). This terreiro sits on approximately 1200 square meters of land and has more than 20 rooms devoted to different orixás (spirits or deities). The vandals caused massive damage throughout the space—breaking furniture, musical instruments, and shrines used to honor the orixás. The members of the religious community appealed to the commander of the local traffickers, asking for permission to return to the terreiro and retrieve important items. After three months, the leader of the traffickers allowed the religious community to return and reopen the terreiro. However, this permission came with the stipulation that they could not hold public services.

These three attacks on Afro-Brazilian places of worship in Nova Iguaçu were part of a larger pattern of religious intolerance taking place at that time. Before the end of September 2017, a state hotline that received reports of religious intolerance disclosed that 30 Afro-Brazilian terreiros in Rio de Janeiro had been destroyed in less than a three-week period during that month (Muggah 2017). It is unclear from these reports how many of these attacks were carried out by Evangelized traffickers; however, the two recorded assaults and the invasion of Ilê Asé Togun Jobi demonstrate that these traffickers were at least a central component of this large scale assault. After the wave of violence

⁷ This video is in the author’s personal files. A copy is available at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=FbmQUv5iN7k>.

⁸ This video is in the author’s personal files. A copy is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwzGGEZfh9s>.

between July and September 2017, trafficker assaults on Nova Iguaçu appear to have slowed down for approximately one year—possibly due to the substantial public scrutiny caused by these attacks. However, in 2019, Evangelized traffickers escalated their violence against Afro-Brazilian places of worship in Nova Iguaçu once more.

In the first five months of 2019, 15 Afro-Brazilian religious communities were expelled from Nova Iguaçu. One of these was Ilê Asé Togun Jobi. On 25 March 2019, a little over 18 months after the first attack, Evangelized traffickers invaded this terreiro for a second time. They removed the security cameras and began breaking the sacred objects inside. The traffickers wrote “Jesus is the owner of the place” (“Jesus é o dono do lugar”) on the external wall of the terreiro and used it as their headquarters for several months, forbidding the religious community and the lawful owners of the property from returning (Barbosa 2019; Seara 2019; United States Department of State 2019).

b. Duque de Caixas

In 2018 and 2019, Evangelized traffickers also targeted the city of Duque de Caxias and the neighborhood of Cordovil. Although Cordovil is technically considered part of the North Zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro, it is located about ten minutes south of Duque de Caixas. Both of these areas (Cordovil and Duque de Caixas) were under the control of TCP commander Álvaro Malaquias Santa Rosa, who was revealed in August 2019 as one of the co-founders of Bonde de Jesus (Travae 2019). Before widespread reports of his leadership in this extremist organization, Santa Rosa repeatedly made headlines because of his involvement in a brutal war with the Comando Vermelho over control of Cordovil. For instance, in April 2019, reporter Antonio Augusto Puga published an article about the TCP’s restrictions on the lives of persons residing in the favela, titled “Criminals Terrorize Residents of Cordovil” (“Criminosos aterrorizam moradores de Cordovil”). Puga asserted that Santa Rosa and his traffickers used cameras and drones to monitor movement in the community as well as controlled access to gas and public transportation (Puga 2019). The following month, in May 2019, traffickers under Santa Rosa’s command murdered seven young people from the Comando Vermelho and threw their bodies for pigs to eat (Traficantes que mataram 2019).

Throughout this gang war between Santa Rosa’s TCP forces and the Comando Vermelho, the TCP imposed significant restrictions on the practice of Afro-Brazilian religions in Cordovil. In May 2018, reports surfaced that they had barred devotees from wearing white and that their movements throughout the community had been restricted (Zuazo 2018). Furthermore, most Afro-Brazilian places of worship had been closed down in the area. On 30 May 2018, the traffickers also carried out an attack on a specific place of worship—they invaded and destroyed the terreiro of Mãe Didi D Yemanjá (Zuazo 2018; United States Department of State 2018). After wrecking her place of worship, the traffickers forcibly transported Mãe Didi and her children to a bus stop. They told her that the reason for the attack was that she had not heeded their prior warnings against practicing Afro-Brazilian religions.

In 2019, Santa Rosa’s traffickers turned their sights on eradicating Afro-Brazilian religions from another city in their territory, Duque de Caixas. In May 2019, Julio José Araujo, a representative from the federal public prosecutor’s office, reported that they had received a complaint that a pastor had led a group of drug traffickers to surround 15 terreiros in Duque de Caxias and prevent any religious activities from taking place in the area (“Governo do Rio intimado” 2019; United States Department of State 2019). Similar to the attack on Mãe Didi in Cordovil, over the following months, the traffickers carried out specific assaults on the terreiros that failed to abide by their warnings.

On 11 July 2019, the traffickers invaded a terreiro in Parque Paulista (a neighborhood in the northern part of Duque de Caixas) that had been in existence for more than 50 years. They held the religious leader, an 84-year-old mãe-de-santo, at gunpoint, and forced her to destroy all of her orixá shrines before they demolished the rest of the terreiro (Santos 2019; United States Department of State 2019). The following month, in August 2019, the traffickers invaded Ilê Axé de Bate Folha terreiro. They ordered everyone to leave and then broke all of the sacred objects and offerings. The traffickers also

threatened to kill the mãe-de-santo and set fire to the terreiro; terrified, she closed the terreiro and fled the state.⁹

c. Campos dos Goytacazes

Campos dos Goytacazes is the third city in Rio de Janeiro that has been the victim of recent Evangelized trafficker attacks. One will recall that, in May 2019, the Commission to Combat Religious Intolerance estimated that 15 of the 100 Afro-Brazilian terreiros under threat were located in Campos. In September 2019, the Commission more than doubled the number of those terreiros under threat in Campos from 15 to 40 (Amorim 2019). A 2015 report estimated that there were only approximately 100 terreiros in the city; therefore, perhaps 40% of the terreiros in Campos had been threatened by traffickers in 2019 alone (Núcleo de Estudos da Exclusão e da Violência 2015).

In June 2019, Gilberto Totinho, president of the Fórum Municipal de Religiões Afro-brasileiras (“Municipal Forum of Afro-Brazilian Religions”) reported more specifics about the nature of the threat against these communities (Abreu 2019). In the neighborhood of Guarus, Totinho averred, six terreiros had been closed in the preceding week. In the neighborhoods of Santa Rosa, Penha, Vila Manhães and Pecuaría, traffickers gave all Afro-Brazilian places of worship until the end of 2019 to close. In the central part of Campos, traffickers had invaded nine terreiros and threatened their leaders. Across the city, they had restricted the operation of an additional 20 terreiros to daytime hours. Totinho reported that these threats, invasions, and expulsions were particularly concerning in Campos because 90% of religious leaders lived inside their terreiros. Therefore, closing their place of worship equated to an eviction of the families as well.

d. São Gonçalo

Unlike the other three cities, there is little information about the recent Evangelized trafficker attacks in São Gonçalo. However, *Rio On Watch* reporter Samuel Lima’s May 2011 article titled “Religion in Rio’s Favelas,” may have given a foreshadowing of the relationships that would lay the foundations for this extremism (Lima 2011). At that time, Lima explained that São Gonçalo was known as “the city with the most churches per square kilometer in Latin America.” Among these was at least one pastor, Luiz Cláudio of the Ministério Resgatando Almas, who focused on converting local drug traffickers and other persons who had been involved in violent crime. Cláudio himself was a former trafficker before converting to Christianity.

4. “Spiritual Warfare” or “Crimes against Humanity”

Since the 1970s, Neo-Pentecostalism has been growing in popularity in Brazil. Scholars have explained that this form of Evangelical Christianity centers on the principle that Jesus or God is engaged in spiritual warfare with the devil and that it is necessary to perform exorcisms and expel the devil (Rocha and Vásquez 2013; Da Silva 2016). Anaxsuell Fernando Da Silva (2019) contends that this religious concept of “spiritual warfare” has found popularity in Brazilian favelas because it fits with the “ethos of war and violence present in the favelas” because it “constructs their world as a place of war, battle, and conquest; a martial idiom becomes unavoidable” (p. 170). This worldview leads to attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions because many Neo-Pentecostals regard them as devil worshippers

⁹ In these cases, the traffickers left no video calling cards and reports of these two attacks do not include any statements that explain their motives. However, the reports of the arrests of the members of Bonde de Jesus contain specific details that strongly suggest that they were the culprits. One of the first members of Bonde de Jesus to be arrested, Jefferson Anísio da Silva, also known as Jefinho, was directly implicated in the 11 July attack on the 84-year-old mãe-de-santo in Parque Paulista. Furthermore, at least five of the eight traffickers arrested in the roundup approximately two weeks later were also from Parque Paulista. Therefore, it seems reasonably certain that these members of Bonde de Jesus were the ones behind both attacks. Jaline Santos, “Traficante que destruiu terreiro de macumba no Rio vai preso,” *Buxixo Gospel*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.obuxixogospel.com.br/2019/08/foi-presos-um-dos-autores-por-destruir-terreiro-na-baixada-fluminense/>.

and view the invasion of Afro-Brazilian temples and the destruction of their sacred vessels as a kind of “exorcism” or “demon-cleansing” (Da Silva 2016, p. 491).

Scholars who have written about Neo-Pentecostal intolerance against Afro-Brazilian religions have typically embraced this language about “spiritual warfare” to describe the religious landscape, despite the one-sided nature of these hostilities. For instance, in 1997, Ari Pedro Oro, a professor of Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, published an article about the already budding Neo-Pentecostal attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions titled, “Neo-Pentecostals and Afro-Brazilians: Who Will Win This War?”¹⁰ However, despite describing the interactions between these religious communities as a “war,” Oro observed “the constancy and insistence of the attacks unleashed by the Neo-Pentecostal churches against Afro-Brazilian religions and silence, or pale responses, almost no reaction on the part of the latter”¹¹ (Oro 1997, p. 21).

Similarly, in 2012, Milene Cristina Santos wrote a thesis for a Masters of Law degree at the University of Brasília titled “Religious Proselytism between the Freedom of Expression and Hate Speech: the Neo-Pentecostal ‘Holy War’ against Afro-Brazilian Religions.”¹² Although the title references a “‘Holy War’ *against* Afro-Brazilian Religions,” throughout the text, Santos, refers to “the conflict *between* Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions”¹³ (Santos 2012, p. 8, emphasis added). Furthermore, in a subsection titled the same as Oro’s 1997 article, Santos argues that “Afro-Brazilian reactions [to Neo-Pentecostal attacks] intensified in the last decade”¹⁴ (Santos 2012, p. 216) However, the only “intensified reactions” that Santos discusses are Afro-Brazilian religious leaders filing complaints with the police, initiating court cases, creating websites to denounce religious intolerance, organizing walks in support of religious freedom, and forming campaigns to promote tolerance and respect for religious diversity.

More recently, Vagner Goncalves da Silva published a chapter titled “Crossroads: Conflicts between Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions” in the edited book *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*. Like Santos, although Da Silva uses the phrase “conflicts between” in the title and discusses “spiritual warfare” in the text of the chapter, he only provides evidence of Neo-Pentecostals carrying out violent attacks against Afro-Brazilian religions—destroying their monuments, invading their temples, and committing acts of physical aggression against devotees. When he addresses Afro-Brazilian devotees’ response to Neo-Pentecostals, Da Silva merely describes their political and legal efforts to try to bring the perpetrators to justice. Da Silva does not allege that Afro-Brazilian religious communities engaged in retaliatory violence or even armed self-defense.

Although scholars have tended to adopt Neo-Pentecostals’ own language about “spiritual warfare” to describe their rhetoric and actions against Afro-Brazilian religions, the term “warfare” is an inappropriate descriptor of what is occurring in Rio de Janeiro. The most commonly accepted definitions of “warfare” describe it as armed conflict, struggle, or military operations between at least two enemies or nations.¹⁵ As Neo-Pentecostals are the only ones engaging in campaigns of intolerance and physical violence, and Afro-Brazilian religious communities have merely responded by asking for respect and seeking accountability for the crimes against them, “warfare” cannot properly characterize the one-sided conflict.

¹⁰ Title: Neopentecostais e afro-brasileiros: quem vencerá esta guerra?

¹¹ Quote: “É absolutamente desmesurada a constância e a insistência dos ataques desfechados diuturnamente pelas igrejas neopentecostais contra as religiões afro-brasileiras e o silêncio, ou respostas pálidas, quase ausência de reações por parte destas últimas.”

¹² Title: O Proselitismo religioso entre a Liberdade de expressão e o Discurso de ódio: a “Guerra santa” do Neopentecostalismo contra as Religiões afro-brasileiras.

¹³ Quote: “do conflito entre o Neopentecostalismo e as Religiões afro-brasileiras.”

¹⁴ Quote: “As reações afro-brasileiras intensificaram-se na última década.”

¹⁵ Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “warfare” as “military operations between enemies” or “struggle between competing entities.” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/warfare> Similarly, dictionary.com defines “warfare” as “the process of military struggle between two nations or groups of nations” and “armed conflict between two massed enemies, armies, or the like.” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/warfare>

Rather than describing Neo-Pentecostal attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions, especially those carried out by Evangelized drug traffickers, as “spiritual warfare,” a more appropriate label would be “crimes against humanity.” The concept of crimes against humanity has been developing since the late 18th century and has been applied “particularly in the context of slavery and the slave trade, and to describe atrocities associated with European colonialism in Africa and elsewhere such as, for example, the atrocities committed by Leopold II of Belgium in the Congo Free State” (United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect n.d.). The most widely accepted definition is that found in Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which defines crimes against humanity as certain delineated acts such as murder, extermination, torture, and forced pregnancy, “when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.” Two of the delineated acts apply to the attacks carried out by Evangelized drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro: “(d) Deportation or forcible transfer of population” and “(g) Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender as defined in paragraph 3, or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law” (Rome Statute 1998, art. 7(1)).

The Rome Statute clarifies that “‘Deportation or forcible transfer of population’ means forced displacement of the persons concerned by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law” (art. 7(2)(d)). It seems without question that the drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro have violated this section of the Rome Statute. As discussed above, the traffickers have closed down, damaged, and destroyed hundreds of Afro-Brazilian temples, and evicted priests and practitioners. These displacements are easily described as “forced” or “coercive,” as they have been achieved by invading and depredating their places of worship, threatening priests at gunpoint, and even seizing one temple, Ilé Asé Togun Jobi, for their own headquarters. These attacks have been ongoing since 2005; therefore, they would satisfy the element of the statute requiring the actions to be widespread or systematic.

In the context of “crimes against humanity,” the Rome Statute explains that “‘persecution’ means the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity” (art. 7(2)(g)). The Evangelized drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro have deprived devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions of their fundamental rights to freedom of religion or belief (by destroying their temples and threatening them with serious bodily harm or death if they continue to practice their faith), to freedom of expression (prohibiting them from wearing religious attire and adornments), to peaceful assembly and association (by prohibiting devotees from gathering for worship), and to life, liberty, and security of person (by threatening and physically harming devotees). Again, the continuation of these attacks for at least 15 years and the systematic nature of these assaults satisfy the criteria for this section.

In addition to crimes against humanity, activists from Afro-Brazilian religious communities have been calling upon Brazil and international human rights experts to recognize the violence against them as a form of genocide. For instance, immediately following the outbreak of attacks on Nova Iguaçu in 2017, one of the terreiros in the city, Ilé Àse Omiojúàró, released a report delineating some of the most recent assaults titled, “The rise of cases of racism and religious intolerance against religions of Afro-Brazilian matrix.”¹⁶ In the introduction to the report, the religious community characterized these attacks using words like “genocide,” “extermination,” and “annihilation” to describe the perpetrators’ intent (Ilé Àse Omiojúàró 2017, p. 7). They denounced the government’s inaction in response to this “systematic” violence. The following year, Dennis De Oliveira (2018) expressed similar concerns in an article titled “Religious Racism: One More Form of Genocide of the Black Population in Brazil and of Brazilian Nazi-Facism.”¹⁷ De Oliveira explained that attacks on religions of African descent

¹⁶ Title: “Levantamento de casos de racismo e intolerância religiosa contra religiões de matriz afrobrasileira, Rio de Janeiro.”

¹⁷ Title: “Racismo religioso: mais uma forma do genocídio da população negra no Brasil e do nazifacismo brasileiro.” Activists and devotees frequently use this phrase “racismo religioso” (“religious racism”) to describe intolerance against Afro-Brazilian

are another mechanism to both physically and symbolically erase Black presence in Brazil. Most recently, in October 2019, Ana Paula Mendes de Miranda, professor of anthropology at the Federal University of Fluminense, explained that she and her colleagues preferred to use the terms “religious racism, genocide or terrorism” to refer to intolerance against Afro-Brazilian faiths because “these cases involved organized groups—militias, traffickers, groups of other religions—who deliberately attack Afro-religions”¹⁸ (Pessano 2019).

The term “genocide” came into popular usage following the atrocities of World War II. The most widely accepted definition of genocide is that found in the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide \(1948\)](#), which was approved and opened for signature on 9 December 1948 and which entered into force on 12 January 1951. Article 2 of the Convention defines genocide as having two components. First, the perpetrator(s) must have the intent “to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Second, the perpetrator(s) must commit one or more of the following acts with that intent: “(a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” Article Six of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court mirrors this definition.

One could argue that the actions taken by Evangelical drug traffickers satisfy all the required elements of the Convention’s definition of genocide. First, they satisfy the *mens rea* (mental requirement) of the definition because they have openly proclaimed their “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” As discussed above, the perpetrators have banned the practice of these faiths and threatened to kill those who defied their orders. These acts of intolerance stem from a worldview that regards Afro-Brazilian religions as demons and messengers of Satan who they must eradicate.

The attacks that the drug traffickers have carried out against Afro-Brazilian religious communities could satisfy the *actus reus* (physical element) of the definition in Article 2b on “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.” Although the Genocide Convention itself does not define “serious mental harm,” research tracking human rights court decisions about genocide reveal that it includes “threats of death and knowledge of impending death; acts causing intense fear or terror; surviving killing operations; forcible displacement; and ‘mental torture’” (Milaninia 2018, p. 1394). As discussed above, the Evangelized drug traffickers have held devotees at gunpoint, forcing them to destroy their own places of worship and threatening them with death if they rebuild their temples. They have caused intense fear or terror with their systematic invasion and destruction of places of worship. Furthermore, they have forcibly displaced hundreds of Afro-Brazilian religious communities. Some courts have specified that the mental or physical harm, in addition to being serious, must be connected to or contribute to the destruction of a group (Milaninia 2018). This is without question, as the invasion of temples, the violence against priests, and the threats of death are precisely intended to intimidate devotees into abandoning their faith, their homes, their temples, or all of the above.

Although there is substantial proof that Evangelized drug traffickers have harassed, intimidated, threatened, forcibly displaced, and physically assaulted devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions, and destroyed their religious shrines and temples, there is a potential complication with classifying these

religions. This is a complex term that typically references the historical origins of these religions in African-descended populations and the fact that intolerance against these religions began during slavery and was rooted in anti-Black racism. However, 21st century devotees are racially diverse and this terminology does not necessarily indicate that Black devotees suffer intolerance more frequently or severely than their white counterparts. It also does not indicate that the perpetrators of intolerance are typically white Brazilians. Unfortunately, official records frequently omit the race of the victim and perpetrator in cases of religious intolerance. Therefore, there is insufficient data to determine what role, if any, race places in these attacks.

¹⁸ Quote: “Esses casos envolvem grupos organizados - milícias, traficantes, grupos de outras religiões—que deliberadamente atacam os afro-religiosos.”

attacks as genocide. One could argue that the traffickers' intent was to eradicate any symbols of Afro-Brazilian religions and to prevent the practice of these faiths, rather than to destroy the devotees themselves. In some of the previously described examples, the traffickers permitted devotees to continue living in the favelas or cities that they controlled so long as they did not wear symbols of Afro-Brazilian religions or conduct ceremonies of these faiths. In other cases, they forcibly evicted devotees from their homes or temples but did not otherwise physically harm them. If the traffickers' intent was merely to destroy the religion and not the adherents themselves, courts could find these attacks to be "cultural genocide," which is not classified as genocide under the Genocide Convention or the Rome Statute.¹⁹ Additionally, if the courts believed that the traffickers' sole goal was forcible displacement—evicting devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions from their territory—this would also fall short of international legal definitions of genocide.²⁰

However, several aspects of these attacks underscore the necessity for further investigation before they are dismissed as cultural genocide or forced displacement. First, there have been numerous violent attacks against Afro-Brazilian religious communities over the past several years that have occurred in areas where trafficking attacks are rampant, but the perpetrators were never identified.²¹ For instance, shortly before the filmed assaults on Candomblé priests in 2017, unknown persons stoned, set fire to, and then bombed the terreiro run by Mãe Elaine de Oxalá in Nova Iguaçu (Roza 2017). When the bomb exploded, the devotees were inside the terreiro, holding a ceremony. Luckily, no one was seriously injured. Similarly, in 2014, unknown persons attacked members of Kwe Cejá Gbé, a Candomblé terreiro in Duque de Caxias (Constancio 2014; United States Department of State 2014). First, arsonists set a devotee's car on fire. Then, they shot at the terreiro and the neighboring house where some of the devotees live. The following month, they set fire to the upper floor of the terreiro and caused the roof to collapse. In 2017 and 2018, several pais-de-santo (male priests) were mysteriously murdered in Rio de Janeiro. Most notably, at least two of these unsolved murders occurred in Campos dos Goytacazes, where the largest number of trafficker attacks on Afro-Brazilians occurred in 2019 (Amorim 2019). If these violent attacks involving arson, bombings, and murder are connected to the traffickers, then their actions would be more likely to meet the standards of genocide because they suggest an intent to physically destroy devotees themselves rather than just to eradicate their religion or evict them.

Additionally, there is evidence suggesting that the trafficker invasions of Afro-Brazilian places of worship are not just meant to evict devotees. They are calculated to cause the kind of shock and fear that leads to devastating, including fatal, health crises. In particular, the traffickers seem to be targeting elderly priestesses, separating them from other devotees and holding them hostage while they force them to destroy their own shrines. One will recall the videotaped attack on Mãe Carmen de Oxum in Nova Iguaçu in September 2017. At the time of the attack, Mãe Carmen was 66 years old. Similarly, the previously mentioned trafficker attack in Cordovil in July 2019 targeted an 84-year-old mãe-de-santo.

This tactic is significant because some of the most widely publicized cases of religious intolerance in Brazil have been those in which elderly priests died following severe harassment. For instance,

¹⁹ In 2007, the International Court of Justice held that "the destruction of historical, cultural and religious heritage cannot be considered to constitute the deliberate infliction of conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of the group. Although such destruction may be highly significant inasmuch as it is directed to the elimination of all traces of the cultural or religious presence of a group, and contrary to other legal norms, it does not fall within the categories of acts of genocide set out in Article II of the Convention." In reaching this decision, they noted that the U.N. General Assembly had "decided not to include cultural genocide in the list of punishable acts" when drafting the Genocide Convention. Rather, "the definition of acts of genocide is limited to those seeking the physical or biological destruction of a group" (*Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro* 2007, ¶344).

²⁰ International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia has found that "forcible transfer does not constitute in and of itself a genocidal act" although it may be "evidence of the intentions" of the perpetrators (*Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić* 2004, ¶33).

²¹ The International Commission to Combat Religious Racism has published a report, a database, and interactive maps tracking hundreds of cases of intolerance against Afro-Brazilian religions in the 21st century at www.religiousracism.org/brazil (accessed on 26 November 2020).

Brazil's National Day to Combat Religious Intolerance is held on January 21, the anniversary of the death of Mãe Gilda de Ogum. Mãe Gilda died in 2000, after the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God published an image of her in its magazine, which had 1.37 million subscribers, associated with an article about "quack sorcerers" deceiving their clients. Her daughter sued the Universal Church for moral damages and misuse of her image, and attributed Mãe Gilda's death to the stress of defamation (Rego 2008; Silva 2014).

More recently, in 2015, an Evangelical Church held an overnight vigil outside the temple run by 90-year-old Mãe Dede de Iansã in Camaçari, Bahia (Melo 2015). They shouted that Mãe Dede was a devil worshipper and prayed for god to burn down her temple. During the vigil, Mãe Dede suffered a heart attack and died. This case, like that of Mãe Gilda, made national headlines in Brazil. Therefore, if the traffickers in Rio de Janeiro have been intentionally targeting temples run by elderly priestesses, one could assume that they intend to cause the same types of health complications as those suffered by Mãe Gilda and Mãe Dede by shocking and terrorizing these religious leaders.

Despite the clear evidence that these drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro are engaged in attacks that almost certainly constitute crimes against humanity and may meet the definition of genocide, the Brazilian government's response has not been commensurate with the severity of these human rights violations. Aside from the apprehension of several members of Bonde de Jesus that was mentioned in the introduction, few, if any, traffickers have been arrested for their crimes against Afro-Brazilian religions. Although the government's own human rights offices and hotlines have collected much of the previously cited data documenting these systematic efforts to eradicate Afro-Brazilian religions in Rio de Janeiro,²² they have not developed any meaningful efforts to ensure the safety and survival of these communities.

As noted above, since 2013, the U.S. Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report has recorded the ongoing problem of Evangelized drug traffickers harassing and attacking Afro-Brazilian religious communities. In 2015, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues expressed concern after receiving reports from devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions of "widespread impunity surrounding attacks on their person, places of worship, or instances of discrimination" (Izsák 2016, p. 18) The Special Rapporteur noted that "Lack of responsiveness to complaints filed, or failure to investigate allegations, further contributes to a sense of marginalization and discrimination on the part of the communities" (Izsák 2016, p. 18). Although international human rights reports have repeatedly noted the grave threat to Afro-Brazilian religious communities, Brazil has downplayed the issue in its own responses. For instance, in Brazil's periodic report on its compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, submitted in June 2020, the state revealed nothing about its ongoing struggle with these traffickers. Regarding its compliance with Article 18 of the Covenant, which guarantees freedom of thought, consciousness, and religion, Brazil briefly noted that "religious prejudice is especially directed at African-based religions," but minimized the problem by merely stating that devotees "are often disrespected for their opinions" (Governo Federal do Brasil 2020, p. 34) Furthermore, Brazil implied that they had implemented an effective solution to this prejudice, reporting that "this situation has required the adoption of specific measures toward this religious group" (p. 34).

Brazil's weak response to these severe human rights abuses is not particularly surprising, given the government's own extensive history of persecuting Afro-Brazilian religions. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, federal law criminalized Afro-Brazilian religions as a threat to public health and morality (Johnson 2001). During this time, police officers raided ceremonies, arrested devotees, and confiscated ritual objects.

²² For instance, even prior to the systematic assaults on Afro-Brazilian places of worship in 2017 and 2019, the Palmares Cultural Foundation (an office of the federal government) documented 218 violent attacks against Afro-Brazilian religious communities between 2010 and 2015 (United States Department of State 2015).

Even though Afro-Brazilian religions are no longer prohibited by law, state discrimination against them frequently continues in the present day alongside these trafficker attacks. For instance, in 2014, the year after the U.S. Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report drew international attention to the trafficker attacks on Afro-Brazilian religious communities in Rio de Janeiro, one of the branches of the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office (Ministerio Publico Federal) filed a lawsuit demanding that Google Brasil remove an Evangelical church's videos demonizing Afro-Brazilian religions from YouTube. Denying this request, a federal court judge in Rio de Janeiro, Eugenio Rosa de Araujo, ruled that these faiths could not be classified as "religions" and were not protected by laws barring religious discrimination (Ministério Público Federal v. Google Brasil Internet Ltda 2014). Additionally, less than a year after the videos of Evangelized traffickers attacking Candomblé priests made national and international headlines, the government of Nova Iguaçu installed a sign on one of the main entrances to the city that said "Welcome to Nova Iguaçu. This city belongs to Jesus"²³ (Cruz 2018). Such persistent biases among Brazilian officials likely play a role in the government's slow and ineffective efforts to curb the growing violence against Afro-Brazilian religions.

5. Conclusions: The Benefits of the "Crimes against Humanity" and "Genocide" Labels

The question of how one should describe the Evangelized trafficker violence against Afro-Brazilian religions is more than a mere issue of semantics. By adopting Evangelicals' own language about "spiritual warfare" to describe mass violence against devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions, scholars are privileging and promoting the worldview of the perpetrators in which these assaults are justified efforts to expel the devil from their communities. Furthermore, using terminology such as "warfare" and "conflict" suggests that Afro-Brazilian religious communities are also the perpetrators of violence and are complicit in the creation of this climate of religious intolerance. By contrast, categorizing these attacks using language about serious human rights abuses would center the discussion on the harms that the traffickers and other Evangelical extremists are enacting on Afro-Brazilian religious communities rather than on Neo-Pentecostal theology or worldview. It would also draw international attention to this largely unrecognized and grossly understudied problem.

In fact, international criminal law and human rights norms provide several possibilities for outside intervention to prevent crimes against humanity and genocide, should Brazil continue to mount a lackluster defense to the problem. Brazil has been a party to the Rome Statute since 2002 (Decree No. 4.388 2002). As such, the traffickers could be charged before the International Criminal Court (ICC) for all the crimes committed against devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions since Brazil became a party. Brazil could refer the case to the ICC or, pursuant to article 15 of the Rome Statute, the ICC Prosecutor could initiate their own investigation into these attacks. In such circumstances, the Rome Statute dictates that Brazil would be given the opportunity to open its own investigation; if they did not do so or if the Court determined that Brazil was unwilling or unable to prosecute the traffickers, the ICC could proceed with its own case against them.

Along these same lines, both crimes against humanity and genocide are considered to be *jus cogens* or peremptory norms. These norms "reflect and protect fundamental values of the international community, are hierarchically superior to other rules of international law and are universally applicable" (United Nations 2019, p. 142). Peremptory norms create universal obligations, known as obligations *erga omnes*, that States owe "to the international community as a whole" (United Nations 2019, p. 145). In essence, such crimes are considered so heinous that the entire international community is entitled to (and indeed has an obligation to) intervene to prevent them from occurring.

For these reasons, a lot is at stake in how Evangelized trafficker violence against Afro-Brazilian religions is characterized or labeled. Evangelized drug traffickers are forcibly displacing Afro-Brazilian religious communities and depriving them of their fundamental rights through attacks that constitute

²³ Quote: "Bem-vindo a Nova Iguaçu. Essa cidade pertence ao Senhor Jesus."

the most heinous crimes under international law. As the violence has increased, and has remained one-sided, the continued utilization of terms like “warfare” and “conflict” that imply reciprocal attacks is not only misleading but it also prevents the situation from being properly assessed and addressed.

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Article

People Love Their Religion: Political Conflict on Religion in Early Independent Mexico

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Abstract: Global histories commonly attribute the secularization of the state exclusively to Europe. However, the church state conflict over these issues has been an important thread in much of Latin America. In Mexico, questions about the role of religion and the church in society became a major political conflict after independence. Best known for the Mexican case are the disputes over the constitution of 1857, which laid down the freedom of religion, and the Cristero Revolt in the 1920s. However, the history of struggles over secularization goes back further. In 1835, the First Republic ultimately failed, because of the massive protests against the anticlerical laws of the government. In the paper, this failure is understood as a genuine religious conflict over the question of the proper social and political order, in which large sections of the population were involved. Beginning with the anticlerical laws of 1833, political and religious reaction in Mexico often began with a *pronunciamiento* (a mixture of rebellion and petitioning the authorities) and evolved into conflicts over federalism vs. centralism.

Keywords: Mexico; political conflict; religion; social order; violence; 19th century



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“... amando los Pueblos su Religion sobre todos los bienes, atacandola los esponian a perder... su preciosa libertad.”¹

1. Introduction

The nineteenth century, in many respects, was a century of fundamental changes (Hobsbawm 1996), whereas in some world regions, the importance of colonialism rose, for example in Africa and parts of Asia, in the Americas it ended at least in its formal terms. Independence from British, French, Spanish and Portuguese imperial powers in the Americas was intertwined with another important development the nineteenth century witnessed: the rise of nation states. Christopher A. Bayly called the nineteenth century the birth of a modern world, which began with political revolutions, was characterized by industrialization and the rise of states as well as by the growing importance of new theories as for example liberalism, rationalism and practices informed by these ideas (Bayly 2004). Liberalism and its characteristic emphasis on rational thinking influenced the view on religion and its importance in many countries and strengthened the goal of governments to secularize state and society. This was not only true in Europe, as Jürgen Osterhammel would have it, but also in the Americas, as for example, in Mexico (Osterhammel 2014). However, liberalism, and especially the separation of state and church, as understood and discussed in elite circles, was not the same as the secularization of society (Casanova 1994). Following independence, the world once known and what had been a basically uncontested social order came under attack in many aspects. The form of government and the question of who should participate in decision-making was contested as the role of the

¹ “The people love their religion above all other goods, the attacks [against the religion, S.H.] expose them to lose their freedom.” Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca (referred to henceforth as AGE), Gobierno de los Distritos, Huajuapán, 1834, leg. 5, exp. 36: “El ayuntamiento de Huajuapán reproduce la solicitud que en 6 de febr. ultimo hizo, manifestando la opinión religiosa de los poblados que representa.”

Catholic Church and of religion in general in society. The two topics became intertwined in Mexico during the 1830s, when anticlerical laws by a liberal government were contested by a wide array of social actors. After independence, more people had become involved in politics and more topics entered public debate. The legal status, the rights, and the property of the institutional Catholic Church were one focus of conflict. Religion in general as an axis of private and public behavior also took center stage in political conflict, as many ordinary Mexicans saw government politics to be a threat to a way of life in which the Catholic religion played an important part by informing their identities and giving form and meaning to their daily routines.

In what follows, I will analyze how and why the laws on secularization of 1833 and 1834 brought a new element to political conflicts of the time, inciting a genuinely religious conflict, as it is defined by Rogers Brubaker: A “religiously informed political conflict . . . involves claims to substantively regulate public life in accordance with religious principles . . . ” (Brubaker 2015, p. 5). In order to understand the parameter of this conflict, it is necessary to go beyond the national level and take a close look at the regional and local levels. Furthermore, violence as an important aspect of what happened in the 1830s will be taken into account. As will be shown, violence had many aspects beyond the physical harm it inflicted. The threat of violence was present in many rumors and violence also occurred against material goods as symbolic acts against state institutions. Its presence in discourse and practices stirred up emotions and thereby influenced the conflict on the social order even more.

The first decades after Mexican independence are often described as a phase of instability and political chaos. There was indeed a long period of civil strife and violent conflict, but the impression of inconceivable chaos is only valid from a distance insofar, as it suggests that there was no reason for the instability. In fact, independence brought not only the end of colonial domination by Spain, but also triggered a political revolution that disrupted the existing order. As a result, political debates revolved around such fundamental issues as how society should look, who should have the right to participate in decision-making, and which civil and moral virtues were considered important. Beginning with the struggle between royalists and autonomists in 1808, political conflict over the next decades hinged on questions concerning the future of the body politic in its broadest sense. Among the issues at stake was the role the Catholic religion and the Church should play in society. However, the Church as an institution with its clerical members and religion as a set of beliefs and practices were not the same. Religion had an important impact on Mexicans, their political stance notwithstanding, and regulated much of their daily lives by providing meaning and shaping collective identities. Religious elements were also present in politics, especially in the symbolic communication, as for example, in the oath on the constitution, which in itself had a religious connotation (Hensel 2011). Religion and to be more specific Catholicism for many Mexicans were inextricably linked to a just and good social order. Even though the conflict over religion was intertwined with the struggles between liberals and conservatives and federalists versus centralists of the time, it was not the same, in the sense that it touched questions on society far deeper than the form of government or who held positions of power.

As the statement of the *ayuntamiento* (town council) of Huajuapán, a small town in the southern province of Oaxaca, shows, religion constituted an important parameter in people’s lives. According to Ben Smith, this was not the case in all Mexican regions but especially in those communities he calls adherents to “provincial conservatism,” and even though he warns about identifying these positions in any fixed way with contemporary conservatism and liberalism, he links conservatism with the support of Catholicism (Smith 2012). Other scholars reject a clear-cut distinction between conservative and liberal political positions. With respect to the liberal Church reforms in 1833, 1859 and 1864, Galeana De Valadés (2005) emphasizes that it was not religion itself liberals wanted to attack, but rather the influence the Church exercised as an institution on political affairs. In this sense, the reforms were not so much antireligious as anticlerical. In what follows, I argue that

although the distinction made by Galeana might be applied to the conflict arising in 1833 over anticlerical laws issued by the government under acting president Valentín Gómez Farías if seen from above, nonetheless many Mexicans interpreted these laws as a threat to the Catholic religion, their faith, and saw the social order under attack.

In any case, the first decades after Mexican independence were per se conflicting in many ways. In the 1830s, religion would add to the stakes at issue and gained importance even in debates over the form of government, and contributed to the end of the First Federal Republic in 1835. Many Mexicans had lost their faith in a more than metaphorical way in the federation, because it could not create and maintain a social order that guaranteed stability, prosperity and a life in accordance with moral virtues. For these reasons, analysis of the religious factor adds to the discussion on the failure of federalism in 1835, even though the conflict between federalists and centralists is not the focus (Vázquez 2012). The present research also contributes to the growing body of literature on the role of religion in Mexican history. Although religion for a long time did not figure as an important issue to understand Mexico's national past, this has changed during recent decades. The work of Brian Connaughton contributes substantially to this trend. His work sheds light on how politics and religion were inseparably linked even after independence and elaborates on the role of clerics in early national politics. Parish priests continued to interfere in politics and influenced the public discourse (Connaughton 1999, 2010). Members of the group took opposed stances and played different roles in political conflicts of the era. On the one hand, they supported liberal or conservative positions; on the other, they acted as mediators between local populations and politicians and sometimes were the target of public discontent, especially in pueblos (Connaughton 2008). Some historians discuss the influence that clerics had in politics and others focus on bishops in particular (García Ugarte 2010).

Earlier historical studies on religion and politics in Mexico looked at their topic under the perspective of modernization theory, analyzing state efforts of secularization and often focusing in particular on the several laws of the Reforma between 1855 and 1863, with special emphasis on the Constitution of 1857 rather than on the early nineteenth century (Bastian 1998; Blancarte 2013). Or, they made the effort in the first place to clarify the relationship between state and church after independence with its central problems (Staples 1976). The relation of political violence and religion is seldom explicitly treated for the early national period. Herrejón Peredo (1998) analyzes violent rhetoric in religious discourse, but his analysis ends before independence, even though he suggests that the legitimization of violence in defense of faith did have a long-lasting impact. Anne Staples, for her part, looks into the role of clerics in political conflicts and of parish priests in *pronunciamientos*, a mixture of rebellion and petitioning the authorities.² She warns to depict them as a collective actor, because in fact, political positions taken by priests were very diverse (Staples 2012). When it came to the fear that Mexico might lose its religion, however, most priests probably acted quite similarly, stirring up that fear in order to prevent an impact of anticlerical laws (Staples 2009).

To show the importance of religion in politics in the years 1833–1835 and discuss the role violence played in these struggles, I will analyze the *pronunciamientos* of these years that directly addressed religious grievances and refer to a crisis in the social order. Of special interest will be the question of how religion figured as a reason for threatened upheaval and which role violence played in the argument. The importance of physical violence has, in the political conflicts of the First Republic on the one hand, long been taken for granted in most studies of these years, because of the large number of rebellions and *pronunciamientos*. Will Fowler, on the other hand, contends that actual violence was less ubiquitous than usually suggested, at least when it comes to civilian participation in violent acts. According to Fowler, conflicts of national importance which involved civil violence were those in the federalist revolt and the subsequent civil war of 1832 and 1854/55, the

² For further explanation see below.

liberal rebellion against Antonio López de Santa Anna's dictatorship. All others involved only military and militia units and, in many of the conflicts, physical violence was only a threat, but did not take place (Fowler 2000). Except the revolt of 1832, Anna (1998) only saw four other violent rebellions (Zacatecas 1835, Texas 1836, Tamaulipas 1839, Yucatán 1843). Nevertheless, how the population perceived the presence or absence of violence was certainly not as structured as historical writing can make it appear to be. Whether a conflict was of national reach or had only a regional or local impact, in all likelihood was not as meaningful to the people who witnessed violent acts as it may appear in historical analysis. In any event, physical violence among the army and the militia of course affected the civil population as well. Families were affected when men were drawn to the militia or soldiers were wounded or died in fighting. In addition, contemporaries could not know in advance the outcome and scope the struggles would take and hence might have felt anxieties. Rumors of violence often circulated widely in these years. Finally, death or physical harm of the victim was only one possible result of violence, but there were many more, such as, for example, in the expulsion of Spaniards or political enemies. Violence against material goods (property, buildings) also needs to be considered because of its symbolic dimension. Violence has effects on society that go beyond individual physical harm. These acts of violence often were not considered as important on a national level, but on the local level, they conveyed rage against the government and thereby questioned its legitimacy as well as they could stir up fear. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the impact of violence, not only by counting human deaths on the national level, but by analyzing the meaning of these minor violent acts on the local level.

Acts of violence, especially in political conflicts, also have a communicative component that is intended to convey a message to those who are not directly involved in the act of violence (Tilly 2003). The implied message very likely stirred up emotions and thus influenced people's ways of looking at the world in which they lived. The role of emotions in the early national period has not yet been paid much attention in the historiography of the period, but Anne Staples provides insights into the fear of a non-religious society that was propagated by members of the high clergy in the 1830s and 1840s (Staples 2009). When it came to anticlerical politics in 1833, the perception of Mexicans about the future of the social order played an important role on how they acted. These perceptions will be a focus of the present analysis.

2. Political Conflict and Violence in the Era of Independence until the 1830s

Only a decade after the declaration of independence in 1821, which was finally achieved after eleven years of heavy civil war with the Plan de Iguala, the country had already seen two different systems of government (empire and federal republic) and various presidents who had come to office by non-constitutional means. Politics were conflict-ridden and political violence played an important role in the years of the First Republic (1824–1835). From the inception of the war of independence in 1810 through the 1830s, Mexico had few extended periods of public tranquility. Political violence was almost always around the corner. Historian Juan Ortiz Escamilla saw a new political culture emerging from the war of independence, when the use of arms in political conflict became a common feature (Ortiz Escamilla 1997, p. 17). Religion not only played a role in the war of independence, because the priests Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos led the movement, and many other clerics took sides in the conflict, by either supporting independence or fighting against it. Religion was also important because rebels and royalists alike used religious symbols and references to religion in their propaganda to legitimize their cause.³ As Van Young shows, the participants in the struggle did not just defend economic interests as village lands. He writes that “what was at stake was the defense or re-equilibration . . .

³ There is an ongoing discussion on the importance clerics had as leaders in the struggle for independence. See the discussion in (Ibarra and Cisneros 2007). On the use of religious symbols during the war see (Taylor 1986, 1994). Sánchez Silva (1998, p. 136) shows that this use of religious images was continued during rebellions after independence in Oaxaca.

of a moral universe, of a cohesive system of ideas for explaining authority, legitimacy, and ethnic identity, and for mapping meanings onto social relationships.” (Van Young 2001) Van Young’s interpretation of the war of independence is also valid for the first decades of the national period; and Catholic religion, without any doubt, was an integral part of that moral universe to be re-equilibrated after considerable changes in the social order had turned upside down many certainties on the social order (Taylor 1996).

Since 1808, the question of who should decide the fate of New Spain and since 1821 of the independent nation was crucial and national sovereignty was an important topic in political discourse. According to the concepts circulating at the time, the nation was constituted by its citizens but these citizens were understood to be already responsible in the *pueblos*, cities, towns, and villages, led by a political body, the *ayuntamiento constitucional*, the constitutional town council.⁴ This corporate concept of the body politic remained essential after independence and in connection with the ideas on national sovereignty it brought about new forms of political participation: the *pronunciamiento* (Guerra 2000). This hybrid practice, which sometimes was more a petition and sometimes the start of a rebellion or the threat thereof, became “the way of doing politics in nineteenth-century Mexico.” (Fowler 2016) Independence had been achieved by a *pronunciamiento*, and also the establishment of the federal republic, as well as other issues negotiated via *pronunciamientos* in the 1820s. At the beginning of the 1830s, the number of *pronunciamientos* rose, especially with those fighting against the government under Antonio Bustamante and in favor of federalism in 1832. Whereas most of the times, *pronunciamientos* did not result in major violent confrontations on the national level, 1832 was a year of civil war with more than 2000 casualties among the soldiers (Fowler 2000).

The years from independence to the 1830s witnessed political conflict, not only in national politics, but also on the regional and local level, where it was a time of growing discord and strife. Within the regions, conflicts had various sources. In more rural areas, land conflicts led to the outbreak of violence (Meyer 1973; Reina 1984). Many scholars also see local conflicts as peasant revolts or disputes over elections to constitutional town councils in the context of the contested state-building process (Guardino 1996, 2005; Mallon 1995). Thus, in many regions, public security was more or less constantly threatened. In the Mixteca in Oaxaca, for example, many disturbances occurred since 1830 and the governor declared the whole region in rebellion in 1833. That situation was further complicated by a famine (Pastor 1987). Since 1825, war against various indigenous groups has raged in the north (Hu-Dehart 2016). Public safety was further threatened by the growing number of bandits who besieged the roads and made the area between Veracruz and Mexico City unsafe. Around 1830, bandits plundered the rich sugar plantations in the valley of Cuernavaca. Bandits also operated in the north of the country, attacking mining cities or convoys (Lynch 1992). In addition, the population suffered from lootings by the armed forces not paid by the national or provincial governments due to empty state coffers.⁵

In 1833, Mexico was struck by a cholera epidemic that further complicated the situation (Contreras Sánchez and Alcalá Ferrández 2014; Oliver 2018). The disease claimed 10,000 victims in the capital alone, and many more in the rest of the country (Costeloe 1975). The epidemic was used by the clergy to denounce the situation of Mexican society as a whole. Various pamphlets claimed that the government was to blame for the epidemic, and apparently, the clergy took the disease as an opportunity to preach from the pulpit against the anticlerical laws (Costeloe 1975). In a printed pamphlet, the bishop of Puebla, one of the few bishops in the whole country, Pablo Vázquez, considered the general decline in morals and customs as the reason for the epidemic threatening the country. According to Vázquez, even women read heretical texts and too much alcohol was served

⁴ On the corporate conceptualization of the nation see (Guerra 1995). For the importance of the *ayuntamientos constitucionales* as political actors see (Ortiz Escamilla and Serrano Ortega 2007). Ducey analyzes how villages tried to shape national politics after independence (Ducey 2004).

⁵ Archivo General de la Nación (in the following AGN), Gobernación sin sección, caja 417, exp. 22. Tabasco. Acta levantada por los vecinos de Huimanguillo con motivo de los abusos y arbitrariedades de las autoridades de ese cantón.

at festivities. However, above all, the “males públicos,” public evils, were to blame for the situation. These evils, according to Vázquez, were exemplified in newspapers criticizing the fundamental teachings of the Church and the bishop, which made them responsible for the decline of morals (Vázquez 1833). As Vázquez saw it, the decline of customs had brought God’s punishment in the form of cholera to Mexico. Furthermore, Vázquez complained that the victims of the illness lacked spiritual support in the moment of death, due to the lack of priests. Donald F. Stevens contends that Vázquez did not use cholera as a vehicle to act against the anticlerical politics of the government, but rather tried to influence the moral behavior of ordinary people (Stevens 1999, pp. 87–101). It is true that Vázquez did not mention the laws, though his pastoral was quite possibly published before they had even been discussed in Congress. As shown, he did clearly connect politics and epidemic to the situation of religion and of the Church when he cited public debate and especially those newspapers that advocated religious freedom as impious and as one of the reasons for divine punishment.

3. The Anticlerical Laws, *pronunciamientos* and Violence, 1833–1834

Until 1833, religion was of course not absent from politics, but it had not yet taken center stage. A quantitative analysis of *pronunciamientos* makes this clear. The database of *pronunciamientos* organized by Will Fowler at St. Andrews University counts 523 such *pronunciamientos* in the years 1821–1835, with a peak of 260 in 1834.⁶ Although the term “religion” was mentioned in only six of them during the whole decade of the 1820s, in 1834, 134 or 50% of the *pronunciamientos* referred to religion.⁷ Others, not included in the 134, adhered to *pronunciamientos* in defense of religion, but did not include the term itself.⁸ Thus, at the end of the First Republic, religion had become a hotly debated issue on the national level. In 1834, many of the 134 *pronunciamientos* in defense of Catholic religion adhered to the Plan de Cuernavaca from 25 May.⁹ A great majority of these *pronunciamientos* were declared by *ayuntamientos* often in conjunction with the citizens of the respective town or village (87), militia units followed with 16 *pronunciamientos* and the same number holds true for *ayuntamientos* and military or militia units together. The last 15 *pronunciamientos* were declared by groups of citizens, corporations on the regional level or others.¹⁰ That is, even though the armed forces are often seen as a major agent in the cycle of *pronunciamientos* of 1833–1834 because Congress tried to abolish not only the ecclesiastical but also the military *fuero*, a privilege allowing the armed forces to have a special jurisdiction, as had the clergy with the ecclesiastical *fuero*, the great majority of *pronunciamientos* in 1834 were not initiated by the army. Military or militia units were often involved, however. For 1835, the database is not as reliable because it does not include 72 *pronunciamientos* of that year, to be found in just one volume of the fondo “Historia” in the National Mexican Archive.¹¹ This omission is not only numerically important. I argue instead that the *pronunciamientos* in favor of a change of the federal republic to a centralist system have to be seen in the context of the cycle of *pronunciamientos* starting in 1833.

Religion rose to a central issue in political disputes because the new national Congress of 1833, which was dominated by radical liberals, enacted several anticlerical laws, thus

⁶ *The Pronunciamiento in Mexico, 1821–1876*, URL: <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/pronunciamientos/> (last access 28 November 2020).

⁷ This calculation does not include those *pronunciamientos* that adhered to another one including religion as an important reason to pronounce, without elaborating by themselves on the grievances and demands. The database does not include all *pronunciamientos* of 1834. For example, the one of Huajuapán cited at the beginning is not included. Nevertheless, the sample is sufficiently large to show the importance of religion as an issue at stake.

⁸ See, for example, the *pronunciamientos* of Tenancingo on 31 May, Tecualoya, 1 June, Teotihuacán, 3 June, or Jiutepec, 5 June. In (Vázquez 1987, pp. 226, 234, 244, 251).

⁹ For a systematic definition of different types of *pronunciamientos* see (Fowler 2016, pp. 1–36).

¹⁰ Vázquez also contends that most *pronunciamientos* adhering to the Plan de Cuernavaca were declared by civil authorities, mainly on the local level. (Vázquez 1989, p. 225).

¹¹ The database lists 91 *pronunciamientos* for 1835. In AGN, Historia 561, 72 can be found with the respective *acta* included, other *pronunciamientos* are listed in the correspondence to be found in this volume, but without the *acta*.

pushing religion to the forefront of the conflicts. Under the auspices of Vice-President Valentín Gómez Farías, congress started to discuss and adopt a series of anticlerical laws in May 1833, several more followed over the year until April 1834. The first one established the national right of patronage, or control over the nomination of bishops and parish priests. This issue had influenced the relations between the Mexican state and the Holy See since independence, and because it was not resolved, Mexico was left without any bishop in 1829 until 1831. The pending question of the patronage notwithstanding, from 1830 onwards, the Mexican government negotiated the appointment of some bishops, but in 1835, five out of ten dioceses were still vacant (Staples 1976). In many parishes, priests were also lacking. Therefore, in December 1833, the government issued a decree to fill this gap. This law was particularly controversial (Vázquez 1989). Other laws concerned the possessions and income of the Church and religious orders. The compulsory tithe was prohibited and religious orders were expropriated. Furthermore, various members of the Cathedral chapter of Mexico City and all Spanish clerics were included in the so-called *ley del caso* and consequently expelled from the country (García Ugarte 2010).

Resistance to the anticlerical laws came from different social groups. In much historiography, it is linked to conservatism and of course the Church, but also the army, because both corporations saw their privileges threatened. Nevertheless, Josefina Vázquez does not consider the Church to have been an important agent in the movement of Cuernavaca. In her view, centralists and particularly the president Santa Anna, who used religion for his political purposes to change the form of government, were responsible for this *pronunciamiento* cycle (Vázquez 1989). In my opinion, the movement in defense of the Catholic religion was supported by a much broader part of the population. For many Mexicans, religion guaranteed security and order in everyday life, which was repeatedly disrupted by political instability and economic strife. Therefore, many Mexicans were convinced that the laws posed a threat to social order. Resistance to the anticlerical measures spanned a wide spectrum of social and regional groups. *Pronunciamientos* against the legislative measures occurred in all states, but they were not the only way in which people tried to engage in politics.¹²

During the conflict, the federal system and the problem of constant disorder became intertwined. After the publication of the first laws in 1833, opposition to these measures was quick to emerge. In Morelia, Michoacán, the head of the garrison, Ignacio Escalada, launched a *pronunciamiento* against the end of military and ecclesiastical privileges.¹³ Two more *pronunciamientos* followed in early June in Tlalpan in the state of Mexico and in Huejotzingo, Puebla, also defending religion. However, whereas the first one was named after its author General Gabriel Durán, concentrated on the withdrawal of the anticlerical laws, the second one declared by General Mariano Arista also called for a dictatorship under Santa Anna.¹⁴ Santa Anna, taken hostage by the *pronunciados*, was able to flee, and during the following months, he led the fight against the rebels.¹⁵

These events caused concern about possible unrest in other regions as well. From Oaxaca, the governor reported political distortions in early June due to the laws and had 200 troops activated in Huajuapán and at the border with Puebla, respectively.¹⁶ In this state, a conflict evolved between political and Church authorities. The governor accused various parish priests of being responsible for the publication and distribution of inflammatory pamphlets. According to the governor, these priests were guilty of calling on

¹² Vázquez gives a total of 275 *pronunciamientos* adhering to the Plan of Cuernavaca, that is from 25 May 1834, onwards. Half of these according to Vázquez were declared in the states of Mexico and Puebla. These states were geographically large and ranged among the most densely populated states. (Vázquez 1989, p. 226). Of course, Vázquez can hardly give the archival location of these 275 *pronunciamientos*, but unfortunately it remains unclear how exactly they were counted and classified. Neither in the *Planes de la nación mexicana* nor in the database can 275 *pronunciamientos de adhesión* be traced for the Plan of Cuernavaca.

¹³ See the Plan de Escalada, 16 May 1833. (Vázquez 1987, vol. 2, p. 178).

¹⁴ See (Vázquez 1987, vol. 2, pp. 182–85).

¹⁵ On the complicated events evolving in 1833 and the unclear part Santa Anna played in these *pronunciamientos* see (Costeloe 1975, pp. 389–91).

¹⁶ “Prevención para que los eclesiásticos de Oajaca no se metan en asuntos políticos”. AGN, Gobernación sin sección caja 360, exp. 8.

the population to fight to death against the laws. The capitular vicar of Oaxaca, Juan José Guerra y Larrea, answered to the accusations, denying first that any priest had organized a junta, reprinted and circulated pamphlets, or incited rebellion from the pulpit. Before formulating his statement, he had asked Luis Castellanos, another member of the high clergy in Oaxaca, to inform him on the matter. In his statement, Castellanos used very harsh language, speaking of hostilities and heresies prevailing in some periodicals and in politics, calling those responsible “*perversos*” (perverted). Even though he admitted to two cases where priests had published pamphlets and interfered in political debate, he denied any wrongdoing by the clergy whom Castellanos saw as the last wall, protecting the religion in a situation of two existing systems, the federal one which was not under attack and the “impious” one, which the Church rightfully resisted.¹⁷ This makes it clear that, at this early point in mid-1833, the political system and religion were tied together in public debate. In defense of the Church, the clergy referred positively to the constitution, which had declared the Catholic faith as the only valid one. Over the year 1833, this reference to the constitution as legitimization of action against the government was echoed in many regions.

In Oaxaca, the reason for the governor to have raised the alarm with troops in Huajuapán may be found in the political situation there. Huajuapán was a district town of the Mixteca Baja, a region that witnessed many local armed conflicts in 1833. In February 1834, the town council of Huajuapán sent a petition to the Congress of Oaxaca asking the national Congress to repress the license of journalists who, without consideration of the fundamental charter, proclaimed religious tolerance in almost all their writings, something Mexicans did not support. This petition was reiterated twice. First in May, when according to the council all their fears had been realized and Congress had passed many laws against the Church and religion, creating a fundamental crisis. Therefore, the *ayuntamiento* adhered to the *pronunciamiento* of Puebla.¹⁸ In June, Huajuapán came back to its petition a second time and lamented that it had not received any attention from the state authorities. Instead, the governor of Oaxaca had called the actions in Huajuapán illegitimate. Now, the *ayuntamiento* allied itself with the Plan de Cuernavaca taking up arms.¹⁹ Thus, the *ayuntamiento* had, on the same matter, first petitioned the state government, then adhered to a *pronunciamiento* and finally to another one, this last time declaring to take up arms. This threat of violence strongly suggests that Huajuapán distrusted the state government, because the capital had also adhered to the *pronunciamiento* of Puebla, and as a result, the defense of religion was supported by both.²⁰

In Puebla, several units of the armed forces launched a *pronunciamiento* on 11 May 1834, with two main objectives: defend the Catholic religion and the federal system of government.²¹ Moreover, it stated the adherence to a *pronunciamiento* of Orizaba. The *acta*²² of the latter *pronunciamiento* to my knowledge has not yet been found, but correspondence on the occurrences in Orizaba in April 1834 tells a story of a spontaneous and violent rebellion.²³ When the law passed by the Congress of Veracruz to dissolve religious orders became known in public, in Orizaba, some men gathered in front of the convent, where the civil militia was stationed with 200 men, to protect the *jefe político* and the two mayors of the city. The men called for support by ringing the bells of a nearby church. A large crowd gathered and demanded action against the “enemies of religion,” including the

¹⁷ “Prevención,” AGN, Gobernación sin sección, caja 360, exp. 8.

¹⁸ AGEO, Gobierno de los Distritos, Huajuapán, 1834, leg. 5, exp. 36.

¹⁹ AGN, Gobernación sin sección, caja 410, exp. 12.

²⁰ See the *pronunciamiento* of the garrison of Oaxaca and the declaration of the Congress of Oaxaca not to decree freedom of religion in the state. AGN, Gobernación sin sección, caja 410, exp. 12.

²¹ (Vázquez 1987, vol. 2, p. 210). The same *pronunciamiento* is listed a second time without a date on p. 449.

²² An *acta* was the written statement on the reasons why the involved actors thought it necessary to publicly declare their stance with respect to a political conflict. The *acta* was used to find support, sometimes printed and often sent out, not only to other cities and towns, but also to political authorities.

²³ The following is based on the correspondence in AGN, Gobernación sin sección, caja 410, exp. 3.

resignation of local authorities. When these complied through the mediation of *teniente coronel* Bringas, and the militias surrendered their weapons, further violence was prevented, leaving eight men dead and several injured. The insurgents, whose numbers had grown to several thousand overnight, then decided to move to Cordoba. What had happened in Orizaba was repeated in Córdoba on 24 April. According to the account of a citizen who preferred not to sign his letter, 300 “miserables, young men and women”²⁴ led by a monk had gathered and shouted “death” to Congress and the Jacobins and “vivas” to Canalizo, Bravo, Santa Anna and the *escoceses*.²⁵ They had trampled on the law passed by the Congress of Veracruz and asked for a change of the authorities. When the *ayuntamiento* came together, word of a *pronunciamiento* spread in the city.

As mentioned above, Fowler (Fowler 2000) contends that most of the *pronunciamientos* with national impact, the Plan de Cuernavaca among them, did not involve civil society in any fighting. While this might be true on the regional and national level and especially when it comes to the involvement of regular troops, the events described suggest that violence was significant on the local level. It did not necessarily cause deaths, but in many towns and cities, “disorder was the order of the day,” as Paul Vanderwood put it for another context (Vanderwood 1992). These minor violent events were by no means always directed against people, but also symbolically against things, such as trampling a legal text underfoot, and most likely increased the credibility of descriptions as those in the preambles of many *pronunciamientos* in 1833, 1834 and 1835. The Plan of Cuernavaca started declaring:

“The Mexican Republic has been submerged in the most frightening chaos of confusion and disorder to which it has been subjected by the violent measures with which the legislative bodies have filled this period with blood and tears, deploying the attacks of an absolute demagoguery on the destruction of the fundamental charter that has cost so many sacrifices.”²⁶

A *pronunciamiento* of adherence launched in Teotitlán explained:

“A torrent of evils and misfortunes that occurred in recent times has reduced the Mexican nation to the most unhappy and miserable state ever seen since the memorable day of the conquest when, fortunately, convinced of reason, it embraced the holy law of the Crucified which the nation today justly and properly wants and seeks to keep without any mixture and which it received from its ancient fathers: Neither the cruel despotism of the kings of ancient Spain who dominated it for three centuries, nor the arbitrariness of the rulers who have preceded it since the year eight hundred and twenty-one, dared to pass that diabolical multitude of offences, damages and harm that the present legislatures have caused to the unhappy fatherland with the violent measures they took beyond the orbit of their powers, disrupting in all its parts the great fundamental charter. . . . All these scandalous attacks in which are inscribed dire consequences against the holy religion and beloved fatherland, have not been able to see without grief the religious people of Teotitlán.”²⁷

The emphasis on their religiosity by the inhabitants of Teotitlán is most interesting. For them, as for many Mexicans in the cities and villages, religion was a main component of their identity. This local identity, furthermore, was closely linked to the national identity

²⁴ The original reads “leperos, muchachos y mugeres.” AGN, Gobernación sin sección, caja 410, exp. 3.

²⁵ General Valentín Canalizo had supported Mariano Arista’s *pronunciamiento* for religion and dictatorship in 1833 with a *pronunciamiento* in Oaxaca and had again launched a *pronunciamiento* against the anticlerical laws in February 1834. Nicolás Bravo had pronounced at the end of 1833 and proposed to pacify the country by establishing a new congress which was to decide on the future. Even though Santa Anna was president at time, he was not held responsible for the anticlerical politics which congress had decided upon when he had left the official duties to the Vice-President Gómez Fariás. Finally, the *escoceses* were the more conservative Masonic lodge at the time. It is surprising that they were included in the viva shouts, as the Masonic lodges were criticized at the time by many for being responsible for much of the discontent.

²⁶ Acta del Pronunciamiento de Cuernavaca, 25 May 1834. In (Vázquez 1987, vol. 2, p. 214). *Pronunciamientos* frequently referred to the constitution trying to legitimize their protest. See (Fowler 2010, p. 97).

²⁷ (Vázquez 1987, vol. 2, p. 235).

when the Catholic character of the nation, as was stipulated in the constitution, was referred to. In the district of Coronaco, the ayuntamientos of the head town and of the surrounding villages came together with those working the land (labradores) and the citizens of the municipality, in order to adhere to the Plan of Cuernavaca. As for the reasons, the *acta* stated that legislators had disregarded the social pact.²⁸ The *pronunciamiento* of Toluca, for example, saw the goal of all the measures by national and state congresses alike in taking away the people's Catholic faith.²⁹ In Salamanca, Guanajuato, the town denounced the extradition of the bishop of Michoacán (Guanajuato belonged to the diocese of Michoacán) and explained:

"If the divergence of opinions was on purely state matters, it [the pueblo of Salamanca] would maintain an inalterable tranquility, because such has been the behavior of this pueblo in the various debates that have followed one another in the vicissitudes produced by the new order of things, which brought about the national independence, not precisely by apathy, but by the inferiority of our knowledge; but this time we are afraid, that if the illustrious bishops, in agreement with the one of Morelia, prefer the expatriation to fulfilling their responsibilities as the sovereign decree demands the Mexican Church we will be left a second time without these first ministers: and supposing that the lower clergy was divided in opinions, not for this reason would the spirits rest, rather we are afraid that in this case the fatal door of discord would open between brothers, who are united by the bonds of society and religion."³⁰

Through 1833 and 1834, the association of religion and good government evolved into a conflict over the federal system that finally led to its abrogation in October 1835 after another cycle of *pronunciamientos*, of which the ones of Orizaba and Toluca were of considerable significance.³¹ Orizaba called for the change of the constitution on 19 May 1835. The *acta* prominently criticized the politics that aimed to destroy religion and public morals. Toluca declared itself in favor of a centralist system ten days later and emphasized that the new constitution should maintain the Roman Catholic religion as the only one in the country.³² The change to a central system has long been interpreted as a conservative turn in Mexico's political history and this is certainly correct when we look only at the top of the body politic (Anna 1998; Costeloe 1975). Nevertheless, behind this change lay the pre-occupation of many Mexicans about their religion and the violence they had suffered since independence. Many *pronunciamientos* following those of Orizaba and Toluca specifically mentioned these grievances. Villa de Mier, Tamaulipas, for example, pronounced on June 20 in favor of a centralist form of government because, "civil wars, taxes of all classes, and crimes committed in the name of liberty" had made life difficult.³³ However, these demands were not unanimous and many also mentioned liberal ideals. Many pueblos pronounced in order to protect the Catholic religion but they also wanted to preserve the separation of powers, especially mentioning that civil and military powers should not be in one hand, and supporting the freedom of the press.³⁴ Others declared in favor of a "popular, representative and central system."³⁵

In Ometepe, Puebla, the *pronunciamiento* in favor of the change to a central government system made use of the explanation given in Teotitlán a year earlier and stated:

"A torrent of evils and misfortunes that occurred in recent times have reduced the Nation to nullity, have made it weak and unconscious of itself, as it was never seen since the memorable day of the conquest," and went on to refer to the conquest and the colonial

²⁸ (Vázquez 1987, vol. 2, p. 247).

²⁹ The original says: "el fin de descatalogar al pueblo". (Vázquez 1987, vol. 2, p. 224).

³⁰ Manifestación del ayuntamiento de la villa de Salamanca, 8 May 1834. In (Vázquez 1987, vol. 3, p. 15).

³¹ Fowler counts more than 400 between May and October 1835. (Fowler 2016, p. 173).

³² (Vázquez 1987, vol. 3, pp. 17–19, 20–21).

³³ AGN, Historia, vol. 561.

³⁴ See several *pronunciamientos* in Tabasco, Nuevo Leon, Puebla. AGN, Historia, vol. 561.

³⁵ (Vázquez 1987, vol. 3, p. 57).

era. Coming to the reforms of 1833, it especially referred to “the decree of 24 October 1833, and the one that was sanctioned on the abolition of payment of tithes. All Mexicans have seen the bold invasion of personal security with that ingenuous law of ostracism, attacking the property of citizens, destroying the social pact, violating the most sacred rights of the country, heretically and shamelessly inculcating the Holy Religion that we profess . . .”³⁶

Interestingly, whereas the payment of tithes had led to frequent petitions, legal disputes, and even rebellion, when pueblos thought that priests asked for too much during the colonial era, in the 1830s, its reduction to a voluntary payment of the faithful was seen as part of an intent to destroy the social pact, and for this reason, denounced in radical rhetoric. Several measures concerning Church property which were discussed and passed by Congress at the end of 1833 evolved around the problem of empty state coffers. Hence, the abolition of a forced contribution given to the Church, which in turn provided religious services to the community, probably was seen as just another attempt to raise the state income—taxes being another topic that had a long history of contestation between the population and authorities.³⁷

The frequent use of violence in politics came under attack in 1835. Some of the *actas* referred to the violence of the past years; not only complaining about it, but also expressing its discontent with its use in political conflict. The *pronunciamiento* of Tepeji, Puebla, for example, stated that “the citizens had the right to representation under all circumstances. But it should not be accepted that they took up arms and rebelled against the authorities and caused disorder thereby.” In another one, the citizens of Cuetzalan, Puebla, did not believe that federalism was responsible for turmoil and violence, but they also doubted that the federal system was strong enough to resolve the problem.³⁸

4. Conclusions

Religion was an important part of people’s lives in Mexico, as it was in other parts of the world in the nineteenth century. For many Mexicans, religion contributed to their collective identities and was present in their daily routines, as well as in politics. In the early national period, it also became a driving force of political struggles. This was true for the first time in the 1830s, when the government passed several anticlerical laws. Even though the intention might have been merely the separation of state and Catholic Church, many Mexicans conceived of these measures as a threat to their religiously informed way of life. As a result, in the early 1830s, a genuinely religious conflict concerning the social order was added to the many other already existing conflicts. It was not only stirred up by the clergy. Many ordinary Mexicans acted in defense of the religion that they considered a basis for their lives. In a time when political struggles often led to violence, this was also true for actions against the anticlerical laws. Many of these violent acts went beyond military fighting or physical harm to individuals. They symbolically conveyed meaning to the resistance against state measures. Furthermore, widespread critiques of the ubiquitous violence since independence were reinforced by concerns over religion. Critiques on the government system merged with religious matters, and many Mexicans became convinced that the federal system was unable to restore and maintain public order.

A dilemma soon became apparent in public discourse: On the one hand, religion was perceived as an essential pillar of the social order, but on the other, many critics of government policy used *pronunciamientos* to voice their dissent. This soon became a vicious circle, protesting disorder by threatening and engaging in violence if demands were not met. The process commonly began with turmoil on the local level. The perception of constant struggles gave many Mexicans the feeling that their world had turned upside down and made them lose faith in the federal system and demand a change in the form of government in 1835. However, the outlines of the new system they demanded were not always the same.

³⁶ AGN, Historia, vol. 561.

³⁷ For parish taxes in the 18th century see (Taylor 1996). For taxes in the early national period see (Serrano Ortega and Jáuregui 1998).

³⁸ AGN, Historia, vol. 561.

For example, there were several *pronunciamientos* in which, in addition to the determination of the Catholic religion as the only one accepted in Mexico, the separation of powers and freedom of the press were also mentioned as important requests. Therefore, it is at least questionable that all voices from rural areas in favor of maintaining the Catholic religion were expressions of a provincial conservatism. In an almost completely Catholic country, as was Mexico after three hundred years of colonial domination, it is perhaps not surprising that Catholicism had penetrated much of popular culture, politics and the perception of social order. Adopting José Casanova's concept of public religion, I would argue that religion had become public in early nineteenth-century Mexico, a country that had just changed from absolutist and for a short term constitutional monarchy to a republican regime (Casanova 1994). To equate the popular call for the preservation of religion with popular conservatism or even anti-modernism to my understanding should be questioned, and therefore, further research is necessary to better understand religion and the role it played in public life.

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