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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

INFORMATION

January 3, 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR WILLIAM P. CLARK

FROM: ALFONSO SAPIA-BOSCH

SUBJECT: Liberation Theology

Ambassador Peter Dailey (Dublin) has written you of his concerns on liberation theology; the criticism by Irish church leaders of our policy in Central America; and, about the militancy of the church in America. He suggests that it might be useful to put together a small working group to explore this issue further.

When I was in Dublin in December 1981, at the request of Secretary Haig to discuss Central America with the Foreign Office, I was greeted by the same criticism Ambassador Dailey mentions. Labor members in Parliament at that time were keeping up a steady drumbeat on Central America and our "mistaken policy".

Ambassador Dailey encloses an article on the spreading evangelism in Central America and a research report on "The Challenge to the US of Liberation Theology in Latin America". These are subjects that bear further watching. I will send you periodic reports when appropriate.

Attachments

Tab I Letter to you from Amb. Dailey with related enclosures dated December 15, 1982

SUSPENSE

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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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Attachments

Tab I Letter to you from Amb. Dailey with related enclosures dated December 15, 1982

NSC # 8208927

*Need response
before 3:30 p.m.
handcar: j*

Al Sapia-Bosch

Subject: Liberation Theology

The Judge spent considerable time on this and was impressed with the quality of the paper. He believes we could use it to engender a dialogue with the Pope through discrete private correspondence through Pia Laghi on this subject.

He would appreciate your preparing a letter for him to send to Pia Laghi which, in a low-key way refers the document to him for his consideration. Before doing that you should go through it again to insure that there are no pejorative references to the hierarchy of the Church in it. If you then agree, he would also like to send it to our rep to the Vatican, Bill Wilson for his consideration of ways in which he might engender a dialogue with the Vatican officials on it. (Wilson will be in to see the Judge today *3:30 p.m.* I think. That is too quick but if you agree it can safely be passed to him for at least his info, please give me a call.)

Many thanks

BUS
Bud

8927



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dublin, Ireland

61-0030 AID: 23

December 15, 1982

The Honorable
Judge William P. Clark
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Bill:

Enclosed is the document on Liberation Theology by Richard Brown in the State Department. I had been tremendously impressed with it, even more so now that I find how much our policy in El Salvador and throughout Central America is criticized here by Church leaders and, by their influence, the press.

This militant new wing of the Church is something that, as Mr. Brown says, we must face up to.

That militancy, Bill, is increasingly evident in the Church in America and particularly in southern California among the younger priests both in the Spanish community and in the Anglo community.

In the process of writing this letter I received a copy of a WALL STREET JOURNAL of several weeks ago which comments on the same subject. Perhaps it would pay to put a small working group together to explore this further (perhaps including Brown who has done the early spade work). The implications of the document itself are frightening but if you wish to have your straight Irish hair curled up nice and tight you should read some of the original material cited in the bibliography...right out of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Since I know you have lots of spare time to deal with incidental matters like this,

Cheers and Merry Christmas,

Peter H. Dailey

c.c. Ambassador Gavin

(Dictated but not seen by Ambassador Dailey)

Latin Revival

Central American Gains By Evangelicals Reflect Rising Political Unrest

Helped by Churches in U.S.,
They Win Over Converts
Alienated by Catholicism

Is Religious Conflict Certain?

By LYNDA SCHUSTER

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

In Nueva Suyapa, Honduras, Roberto Pineda attends the Buen Samaritano Evangelical Church because the dusty, downtrodden slum hasn't seen a Catholic priest in years.

Hundreds of miles away in Soyapango, El Salvador, Julia Esteves has become an evangelical because she says the Catholic Church is full of Communists. And across the mountains in Guatemala City, Guatemala, Roberto Velasquez holds evangelical prayer sessions for fellow businessmen because he believes a new national morality is needed.

Protestant evangelism is sweeping the solidly Catholic isthmus of Central America as never before. Tiny, storefront evangelical churches are popping up all over countries that used to be about 98% Catholic. Moreover, whole evangelical communities are taking shape, with hospitals, clinics, shops and schools.

Catholic officials in Guatemala figure that about 30% of the population now belongs to some sort of Protestant church. Some believe that the born-again president, Gen. Efraim Rios Montt, has in effect made evangelism the state religion. "Guatemalans are the chosen people of the New Testament," he says in an interview. "We are the new Israelites of Central America."

First Real Headway

Although evangelicals, who emphasize a personal relationship with God and a strict adherence to the Scriptures, have been in these parts for over a century, only in the past few years have they made any real headway. The climate for a strong religious revival was created by the insecurities resulting from governmental upheavals, failing economies and political violence. And the Catholic Church hasn't seemed able to take advantage of the situation.

Catholic officials say the church is hamstrung by too few workers, too little money, too rigid traditions, and in some cases too much mixing in politics. Msgr. Ricardo Uriaste, the vicar general of the San Salvador Archdiocese in El Salvador, says "We have had too many Catholics and not enough priests."

The evangelicals, however, appear to have plenty of cash, preachers and enthusiasm. To the poor, they offer aid and relentless attention. To the wealthy, many of whom feel threatened by a liberal and crusading Catholic Church, they offer a conservative haven.

The evangelicals' successful proselytizing thus dilutes the power of the Catholic Church, which has been at the fore of the leftist revolutionary movement in several countries. Many see the religious struggle intensifying, with rising political overtones.

'War We Don't Need'

"This is bound to end up as an open religious conflict," says Mario Antonio Sandoval, assistant editor of Guatemala's moderate daily Prensa Libre. "And that's just one more war we don't need."

Others resent the rising influence of the evangelicals because of their philosophical and financial links to U.S. fundamentalist organizations. Although the charge is often heard that American evangelicals working in Central America are actually Central Intelligence Agency operatives, the Americans wearily reject such accusations.

The recent announcement by church officials in El Salvador that Pope John Paul II will visit that country early next year is seen partly as an attempt to counter the evangelical stampede. The pope is expected to stop in other neighboring nations, too.

In the long run, however, many Central Americans doubt that the Protestant wave provides much of a challenge to Catholic dominance in the region. They see the evangelical movement forcing the Catholic Church to become more effective and responsive.

The Catholic Church's role as political opponent to the government is a relatively new one in Central America, and one that over the last two years has cost the lives of 10 priests in El Salvador and 12 in Guatemala. The church's historic coexistence with the repressive rulers in the region was shaken after the Vatican II sessions of the mid-1960s and the Latin bishops' subsequent redefining of the church's role in fighting social injustice.

"Suddenly, the Latin bishops were saying there are social as well as personal sins, and that oppression is sinful," says Ignacio Martin Baro, a Jesuit priest and psychologist who teaches at the University of Central America in San Salvador. "As Catholics, we must work to liberate people from this sin."

This "liberation theology" plunged the Catholic Church into the thick of revolutionary struggle springing up against repressive regimes all over Central America. Not all of the church hierarchy condoned the new activism. But enough priests got involved in it, especially those who worked among the poorer peasants, that the Catholic Church often found itself labeled as being as subversive as the Marxist guerrillas.

Whatever label applies, the church's already serious shortage of priests has worsened. In Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, there is one priest for every 25,000 Catholics, and only seven men are studying for the priesthood in Honduras's two seminaries. In Guatemala, where the 10 priests lost their lives, 150 of the 600 other priests have fled the country under death threats after

Please Turn to Page 22, Column 2

WALL ST. JOURNAL
THURS. DEC. 7,
1982

Latin Revival: Evangelicals' Gains in Central America Reflect Rising Economic and Political Unrest There

Continued From First Page

many priests spoke out against the earlier military government.

As the Catholic Church has suffered its setbacks, the evangelicals have been able to build on the good will they built up in the wake of natural disasters that struck in the late 1970s, including the 1976 earthquake that killed some 22,000 people in Guatemala. The evangelicals, many of them funded by their mother churches in the U.S., provided much-needed supplies and help. And they picked up lots of converts along the way. "They traded roofs for souls," a Guatemalan priest says cynically.

Help for the Peasants

But the peasants who received the help are far from cynical. Rafaela Cruz, for example, lives in the Colonia Fourth of February, a ramshackle neighborhood near Guatemala City that was named for the day the earthquake struck. TV antennas atop wooden huts are scarcely more numerous than the crude wooden crosses that mark the evangelical churches that opened to help rebuild the neighborhood.

Mrs. Cruz converted to Protestantism through the efforts of Californians Glenn and Sharlette Lindgren, who built a church and clinic to serve the earthquake victims. "Sharlette gave my children lunch and clothes," Mrs. Cruz says, looking down at her toe poking through a hole in her black, dusty shoe. "And then she converted us. She gave me Bible lessons and a job at the clinic, so why shouldn't I be a believer? Where was my priest during all this?"

Having thus gained a foothold by helping the poor through natural disasters, the evangelicals were in a good position to help the not-so-poor in a period of political upheaval—especially in El Salvador, where the lives of the wealthy have been particularly upset by political murders and kidnappings, bank nationalizations and a land-redistribution program.

This has created a "tremendous breakthrough" for the evangelical movement, says Luis Bush, pastor of the Nazareth Church in an upper-middle-class section of San Salvador. His church membership started surging in 1980 after years of very slow growth, he says.

Insecurity of the Wealthy

"The situation here has created a huge amount of insecurity," he says. "People are looking for some sort of comfort. But they can't go to the Catholic Church because they see it as one of the institutions that caused the changes in their lives."

On Sunday morning the streets around

the Cristiana Josue Church in the posh Escalon section of the city are jammed with *blindados*, the armor-plated station wagons the rich drive for protection. Inside the church, seats are packed with men in nicely tailored suits and women in designer jeans who wobble slightly on their stilleto heels when they rise to sing.

Standing near the door is Raul Unquilla Gonzalez, who owns gas stations and supermarkets. He has been robbed 19 times and shot at twice by assailants in fatigues wielding submachine guns. Once they missed. The other time the bullet entered his neck, ripped open his throat and bounced off his collar bone. He required two operations and once was pronounced dead. "I think God was trying to give me a message," Mr. Unquilla says. "It's a message I couldn't get as a Catholic. I needed to come here to communicate with him in a more personal way."

Evangelicals say that "personal touch" fills a spiritual vacuum left by the Catholic priests, who failed to tread some of the ground where the evangelicals walk freely. Priests don't make it around too often, for instance, to the barracks of the Salvadoran National Guard, considered among the most brutal of the nation's armed forces. But the Rev. William Rogers comes all the way from the Church of God in Fulton, Mo., to preach there. He stands before about 150 soldiers in the mess hall, wearing a "Jesus Saves" belt buckle and shouts at the top of his lungs with arms outstretched. A line of 120-millimeter guns sitting on the floor forms a backdrop behind him.

A Soldier's Reaction

Hernan Napoleon Torres, 18, listens intently as Mr. Rogers gets the soldiers to sing and clap their hands. ("Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!" Mr. Rogers roars.) "It makes me feel better to know I can talk to God anytime, even out on patrol," Mr. Torres says softly, fingering the safety catch on his G-3 rifle. "Maybe this will make us all better soldiers."

In Guatemala, President Rios Montt says he has a personal relationship with God. And he feels he must urge the same version of Christian morality on Guatemala's seven million people. To that end, he is trying to clean up corruption in the government and excesses in the military. He preaches to the populace on Sunday night television about marital fidelity and a happy home life, and he warns businessmen that seeking more safety for their funds by depositing them in Miami banks is immoral.

"I have the boldness to say that I am a

believer," he says in his office in the faded green presidential residence in downtown Guatemala City. "That means there can't be a separation between Christianity and government, because I can't separate my way of being."

Guatemalans have mixed opinions about the president's unusual approach. Carlos Arias Maselli, an investment banker who calls himself a devout Catholic, thinks it is just what the country needs. "People have to be spanked, and the Catholics lost their guts a long time ago," he says.

But Vinicio Cerezo, head of the moderate Christian Democratic Party, thinks Gen. Rios Montt is pushing morality issues to avoid democratic elections. The president took over last March after a fraudulent presidential election and subsequent military coup, presumably to move the country quickly back to the democratic process. He now says, however, that it will take about 30 months before the country is sufficiently cleansed to hold elections.

Mr. Cerezo and others also worry about the growing political influence by evangelical churches and their U.S. affiliates. Gen. Rios Montt's top aide, Francisco Bianchi, is an elder of the general's church which receives part of its budget from Gospel Outreach, an evangelical group headquartered in Eureka, Calif. James Degolyer, pastor of the Guatemalan church, who hails from upstate New York, says that although the church doesn't intrude in government affairs, it wouldn't hesitate to make the general account for something that goes against Christian principles.

Although evangelicals' political influence isn't so defined in other Central American countries, many wonder about the sudden proliferation of churches backed with lots of dollars from U.S. conservative organizations. A Honduran businessman sees it as an attempt by U.S. evangelicals to "reconservatize" the region. "They're so interested in singing Hallelujah and praising the Lord they can't see all the social problems around them. And all that's going to do is strengthen the hand of the old guard and the military in our countries," he says.

But what really makes everyone jumpy is rising religious tension. Zacatecoluca is a town of about 20,000 people in southern El Salvador that has one cathedral, two Catholic and about 20 evangelical churches. A priest from the cathedral says he was followed home some weeks ago by a group of evangelicals who crowded in around him shouting, "Idol worshipper, you are the Devil."

The story is the opposite, however, in Suyapa, Honduras, a few miles from Nueva Suyapa, the town that hasn't had a priest for years. In Suyapa, the largest cathedral in Latin America is being built on the site of a "visitation" by the Virgin Mary. The town is very holy to Catholics, but Gabriela Godoya de Valladares, 71, is an evangelical. She says some townspeople "stoned and beat up" two evangelicals when they came to preach in the plaza some months back. And when she tried to help them, she was knocked down, she says.

None of this makes much sense to Magr. Jacobo Caceres Avila at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church down the road from Mrs. Godoya's house. Why are people finding something new to fight about? he asks, watching the afternoon sun play upon the little statue of the Virgin on the altar. The Catholic Church in Honduras, as it is all over Central America, is training new lay workers to make up for the lack of priests. And they will try to get out to the people, he says.

"I have been a priest for 50 years, and I don't think the Catholic Church is about to disappear," he says. "The difference now is that some people will be evangelical and some will be Catholic. We have to change, along with everyone else here."

THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE
NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

STRATEGIC STUDY

THE CHALLENGE TO THE U.S. OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY
IN LATIN AMERICA

by

Richard C. Brown, 525-68-6223
Department of State

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH
REQUIREMENT

Research Supervisor: Mr. Ray Warren

THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

April 1982

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The National War College
Strategic Studies Report Abstract

Title: The Challenge to the U.S. of Liberation Theology
in Latin America

Author: Richard C. Brown, FSO-1, Department of State

Date: April, 1982

The study traces the history and theological bases of liberation theology in Latin America, commenting on its chief causes, growth, and strength. The thinking of the principal Roman Catholic proponents of the movement is examined and quotations from their most noteworthy works are included. The alliance between the Catholic liberationists and radical Marxist revolutionaries is noted. The paper revealed that moderate churchmen are beginning to emerge to counterbalance the liberationists. Though their views are being supported by Pope John Paul II and the conclusions of the 1979 Puebla Conference in Mexico were less radical than the 1968 Medellin Conference, the liberation movement is still vibrant and has led a significant element of the Church into the political arena favoring violent revolution.

An examination of the complications created for the U.S. in Latin America follows and a final section discusses several policy options which the U.S. could pursue.

Biographical Sketch

Richard C. Brown is a career Foreign Service Officer (FSO-1) with the Department of State. He has served abroad in Spain, Vietnam, Brazil, and Mauritius. In Washington he has worked in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs as Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary (1969-72) and as Deputy Director of the Office of Central American Affairs (1979-81). In 1978-79 Mr. Brown was a staff member of the National Security Council working on Latin American Affairs. He became interested in following changes in the Catholic Church's public programs while in Spain (1967-69) where he developed several close contacts inside the Church's religious orders and hierarchy. Later while in Brazil (Rio: 1972-74; Recife: 1974-76), he continued monitoring Church activities and maintained a steady dialogue with Church leaders there, among whom were Archbishop Dom Helder Camara in Recife and Cardinal Eugenio Sales in Rio. During his tour in the Office of Central American Affairs, Mr. Brown had additional first hand exposure to Church representatives and those who supported liberation theology.

Mr. Brown is a graduate of the George Washington University (BA - 1960; MA - 1961) and did post-graduate study at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 1962. He was awarded the State Department's Superior Honor Award on two occasions: 1975 and 1981; he received its Meritorious Honor Award in 1966. He speaks Spanish, Portuguese and Vietnamese.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- During the past two decades a new movement based on a philosophical persuasion called the "theology of liberation" has evolved inside the Latin American Catholic Church and has had a profound effect on the Church's message, programs, and political behavior.
- Liberation theology maintains that the widespread poverty and oppression in the Western Hemisphere result from exploitive political and economic structures imposed principally from the outside either by foreign governments or multinational corporations. To "liberate" the common man from these abject conditions, a total restructuring must take place. Radical revolutionary steps, including the use of violence, are morally justifiable means to achieve the thoroughgoing restructuring.
- Marxian analysis has become the primary tool used by the liberationists to explain the past and the present, and to prescribe solutions for the future.
- Liberation theology grew out of changes in the Church's outlook on the world following the death of Pope Pius XII, the conclusions of the Vatican II Councils and various papal encyclicals in the 1960's.

- The preoccupation of the Church with how to engage social problems to achieve social justice and peace was particularly appealing to the Latin American Church leadership.
- The persistence of poverty and political rigidity in Latin America created deep resentment and frustration especially on the part of the younger Catholic clergy, the large majority of whom were North American or European in nationality or had been trained in U.S. or European institutions.
- Another important factor influencing the clergy in Latin America was concern over the Church's survival and the belief that if the Church did not radically adjust its programs, the youth in particular and the public in general would find refuge in secularism, Marxism, spiritism, or Protestantism.
- The strong conviction by many clerics in Latin America that the U.S. was largely responsible for the deep problems facing the Hemisphere was reflected at the Medellin Bishops' Conference (1968) and in subsequent key writings by the liberationists.
- Advocates of liberation theology have attempted to "demonize" the U.S., probably partly from deep emotional conviction due to their belief the U.S.

is responsible for the dire conditions in Latin America and partly in order to take advantage of the longstanding anti-American sentiment in the Hemisphere: (a) to attract the public (especially the youth and the intellectuals) back into the fold and (b) to serve as an added justification for totally restructuring the political and economic systems, and countering the tyranny as they saw it of the "national security state doctrine."

-- The Hemisphere's radical leftist leaders, particularly Fidel Castro, were quick to recognize the mutually beneficial elements of liberationism and sought successfully to form common cause with liberationists to boost efforts to bring about change through revolution.

--- Supporters of liberation theology in some form may account for as many as 50 percent of the clergy and 30 percent of the hierarchy. The Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEB's) provide an effective organizational method to promote liberationism among the laity at the parish level. The CEB's are especially numerous in Brazil.

-- The liberationist view has been accepted by a number of U.S. Catholic churchmen and institutions which

have sought to influence U.S. policy toward Latin America. Some liberationists believe that change must come about through a revolution inside the U.S., starting from within the Hispanic community.

- Countering the more extreme liberationists in Latin America are: (a) elements on the far right, such as the Tradition, Family and Property societies, which are relatively small in number, though at times disproportionately influential, and (b) the more numerous moderates (possibly over 60 percent of the hierarchy) who insist that social activism must be divorced from political radicalism and partisanship.
- Pope John Paul II has acted to bolster the moderate position and to restrain the radical liberationists. It is still too early to determine, however, whether his recent moves to curb the Jesuits' and other priests' political activism will effectively diminish the forces propelling liberation theology.
- The ambiguous and at times contradictory conclusions of the Puebla Conference (1979) reflected the differences between the moderate and extreme liberationist viewpoints. On balance, the results of Puebla are probably more moderate than those of Medellin,

but the language provides sufficient leeway for the liberationists to continue following radical courses of action.

- Liberation theology poses a series of problems for the U.S. in Latin America and complicates our ability to conduct a full range of constructive relationships.
- We cannot ignore its dynamism nor the real social and economic disparities which it tries to address; but neither can or should we conform our policies to meet all of its demands.
- While the major burden of dealing with liberationism should be left to the Church, the U.S. should engage liberationists in an active dialogue, recognize liberationism's valid contentions, expose its fallacies and false prospects, and encourage moderate Church leaders in their efforts to keep the Church on the path toward promoting social justice through evolutionary change free of ideological content, anti-U.S. demagoguery, and violence.

INTRODUCTION

In 1965 the Colombian priest, Camilo Torres, issued a celebrated message to the Colombian people calling upon them to rise up and revolt against the government. He took up arms, went to the hills, and was later killed in a clash with government troops. More recently Catholic priests in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador have taken up arms against the constituted governments of those countries, joining insurgencies which they and an important portion of their colleagues have openly advocated from the pulpit. These priests and a significant number of Catholic laymen were provided the license and possibly the inspiration to act by a philosophical persuasion which has evolved in the Latin American Catholic Church during the past two decades and has shaken the very foundations of the Church and its relationship to established authority. The new force has been called by its proponents the theology of liberation.

Liberation theology has had a profound effect on the Church's message, programs and political behavior. The new theology has become a source of motivation for radical action and a philosophical framework for dissent from authoritarian rule.¹ Its content and insistence

upon socioeconomic structural changes through radical revolutionary actions have implications for U.S. policies toward Latin America. This paper will attempt to shed light on the origins and major tenets of the new theology, assess its strength and popularity, determine what implications it holds for U.S. interests in Latin America, and finally will examine some policy alternatives the U.S. might consider in facing up to the dynamics the theology has set in motion in the Hemisphere.

Chapter I

DEFINITION AND THEOLOGICAL BASES

Definition

In essence liberation theology maintains that widespread poverty and oppression in Latin America (and elsewhere in the Third World) result from the exploitive political and economic structures imposed primarily from the outside by either foreign governments or multinational corporations which have found willing local elites to administer the system often under authoritarian regimes. The aid and trade the developed countries have devised for the underdeveloped world, according to the liberationists, have created an adverse relationship that perpetuates economic and political dependency and servitude.

The heart of the Christian message is the liberation of man. The Church, the liberationists believe, must take up the cause of the oppressed against the oppressor, sensitize the common man of the underdeveloped nations to the injustice of his lot, and seek to bring about a total restructuring of the economic and political systems to permit individuals to develop fully their spiritual and secular potentials. Liberationists believe in the

validity of Marxian analysis (class struggle, economic and historic determination, etc.) and use it to interpret history and to arrive at prescriptions to society's problems. Poverty and oppression are forms of violence with which the poor must contend everyday. Liberationists with a few exceptions justify the use of counterviolence when other measures to restructure the system fail. ²

Theological Bases

The theological bases of liberation theology can be found in various papal encyclicals of the 1960's, the documents which emerged from the Vatican II Councils, and in the conclusions reached during the Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968. While certain scriptural references to liberation (Luke 4; parts of Exodus; Paul's epistles) are often quoted by proponents of the theology, the biblical bases are clearly secondary to the more elaborate philosophical principles propounded in the papal and Church council documents of the 1960's.

With the death of Pope Pius XII in 1958 and the accession of Pope John XXIII, the Church's extreme conservatism and rather introspective orientation began to give way to a more liberal disposition -- one concerned with how the Church might better minister to the needs

of all men in the modern world. Two landmark encyclicals were issued by John XXIII in the early 1960's which were to have a profound effect on Church policy and direction: Mater e Magistra (1961) and Pacem in Terris (1963).

They emphasized the importance of fulfilling man's social needs as well as his spiritual needs. At the same time they questioned the absolute right of private property and the virtues of individualism over collective action. Wealthier nations, according to the encyclicals, had a responsibility to provide aid to underdeveloped nations in such a way as to avoid creating a new form of colonialism.

Later John XXIII convoked the Vatican II Council and charged the Church's leadership with examining the gamut of policy issues and theology. Besides permitting the use of the vernacular for the Mass and bestowing more local autonomy upon the bishops, the Vatican II Councils concluded that the Church should be more concerned with man's welfare -- both spiritual and physical. The Church must take a more vocal stand on social, political and economic issues. The rigid anti-communism of Pius XII was deemed no longer adequate. Capitalism, imperialism, and underdevelopment were all subject to review and criticism.

Upon John XXIII's death, Pope Paul VI continued the Vatican II Councils and began to move the Church in the direction of the Council's conclusions. In 1967 he issued Populorum Progressio in which he appealed again to the wealthy countries to promote human development and to remedy imbalances between richer and poorer nations. The encyclical put the world on notice that the Church would be an advocate for human rights and for humanizing social, political, and economic policies.

These basic shifts in Church thinking had a profound impact on Catholic leaders in Latin America. The extent of the impact became apparent during the second General Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM II) which met in Medellin in 1968. Of the sixteen documents resulting from the meeting one entitled, "Peace," contained language and conclusions which placed the Church squarely on the side of social activism. The Bishops declared that the Church would not stand idly by in the face of the "extreme inequities" that existed. They charged that Latin American nations were living in "dependency" on foreign powers and suffering from external "economic colonialism." "Institutional violence" generated "oppression by the power groups who may give the impression of maintaining peace and order, but in truth (bring about) the continuous and inevitable seed of rebellion and war." ³

The Church was to be the "promoter and agent of change for the social justice that will liberate the peoples of Latin America from situations of sin and oppression, internal and external, that impede their integral development." According to CELAM II, the Church was to reach out to the poor and take steps to make the necessary political, economic, and social structural changes that would free the disadvantaged from the chains of poverty and oppression. Should the transformations encounter intransigent resistance, violence could be used to bring about change. Poverty was not the result of the poor's failures and shortcomings, but came about because of a defect in the structure of the prevailing economic and political systems. Pope Paul travelled to Colombia and later endorsed the results of the Conference which were to serve as guidelines and source material for liberationists as they pressed to involve the Church more directly in social revolution.

Chapter II

CHIEF CAUSES AND PROPONENTS

The philosophical and theological underpinnings of the liberation movement, formulated both in Europe and in Latin America, were tailored to meet several underlying realities confronting the Church in Latin America. Extreme disparities in income distribution as well as the existence of rigid unresponsive social and political systems were the rule in a large majority of the Latin American nation states. Poverty and political repression were all too prevalent in the Hemisphere. As one of the most pervasive and historic institutions in Latin America, the Church had come hand-in-hand with the Spanish/Portuguese conquistadores and had converted indigenous peoples to Catholicism by persuasion, force, and through compromise with pagan customs and traditions. It ruled hand-in-glove with first the colonial authorities and later at the side of the power elites in the independent republics that were born in the nineteenth century.⁴ It gained and generally maintained wealth and power as a result.

By the mid-twentieth century the Church leadership, influenced by the breezes of social justice which were blowing inside the Church as well as in the world at

large, felt a great sense of guilt ⁵ for its power and wealth in the midst of considerable poverty and authoritarian rule. Also, even though 90 percent of the population of Latin America was nominally Catholic, the Church was not keeping the people within its pastoral fold and, more significantly, entrants into the priesthood fell to negligible levels. Inroads were being made by fundamentalist protestant sects and the spiritism and animism which had prevailed originally among the indigenous and Black slave populations seemed to be on the upswing. Moreover secularism and sheer indifference were apparent on every side. ⁶ More seriously, however, the youth were turning away from the Church, and Marxism, especially among the university population, was becoming attractive.

Thus, the basic motivational forces driving an important segment of the Church's leadership in Latin America at mid-century were not only a deep sense of concern and frustration over the seemingly intractable ills of the societies they saw around them, but also a conviction that if the Church did not radically change its policies, it would simply not survive as a relevant institution. ⁷ It was in this context that the Church's doctrinal review occurred and, indeed, out of which the CELAM II conclusions were formulated. In 1965 Panama's Bishop McGrath summed

up the Church's dilemma by stating that a new mission had to be found for its survival: "Christianity is on trial in our Hemisphere. The challenge is to find the sense of our time in brotherhood. This is the fundamental of social revolution." ⁸

In facing this challenge the Church leadership responded in different ways. Some preferred a more conservative approach of ministry through the traditional charitable, educational and social arms of the Church. Others were much more enamored of the Christian Democratic approach to seek reform by making existing political and economic structures more responsive to society's needs and concerns. A third group of Catholic activists believed that the problems could only be resolved by drastic changes in the economic and political structures. ⁹ From this element emerged the concepts that eventually formed liberation theology. The views of a number of the theology's proponents are noteworthy. An examination of the writings of the most important figures of the movement provides valuable insight into the theology's content and evolution.

Camilo Torres, the Colombian priest who became a guerrilla fighter, is looked upon as one of the first martyrs of the movement. His example of sacrifice is emphasized more by liberationists than the intellectual

force he lent to the cause. The few writings he did leave behind are instructive, however, and have been extensively distributed in Latin America.

In 1965 he wrote that a minority controlled the resources and decisionmaking power in Latin America and that the majorities were poor.

The power must be taken for the majorities' part so that structural, economic, social, and political reforms benefitting (them) may be realized. This is called revolution, and if it is necessary in order to fulfill love for one's neighbor, then it is necessary for a Christian to be a revolutionary. ...When Christians live basically for love and to make others love..., we will be able to say the Church is strong, without economic or political power, but with charity. If temporal involvement of a priest in political struggle contributed to this, it seems that his sacrifice can be justified. ¹⁰

In his "Call to the Colombian People," Torres said:

For many years the poor of our country have awaited the battle cry to throw themselves into the final struggle against the oligarchy.... No means remains but to arm, to risk their lives so that they will not be enslaved, so that they can be free of North American jurisdiction. I have joined the armed struggle because it seeks to liberate the people from exploitation and imperialism.... All patriotic Colombians must place themselves on a war footing. ¹¹

The chief theologian and intellectual author of liberation theology, however, is Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest whose extensive works on the subject have been circulated widely in Latin America and elsewhere.

In his writings, he relies heavily on Marxian analysis and terminology:

Liberation expresses the aspiration of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspects of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes. ¹²

Christ is presented (in the Bible) as the one who brings us liberation. Christ the Savior liberates man from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression. ¹³

The class struggle is a fact and neutrality in this question is not possible. ¹⁴

Today we must identify with the oppressed classes of this Continent...which is marked by injustice and spoliation on the one hand and hope-filled yearning for liberation on the other. ¹⁵

...efforts to project a new society in Latin America are moving more toward socialism. ¹⁶

...private ownership ¹⁷ of the means of production will be eliminated.

On the existence of violence and its use as a means to achieve a goal, Gutierrez has said:

The realm of politics today entails confrontation between different human groups, between social classes with opposing interests; and these confrontations are marked by varying levels of violence. The desire to be an 'artisan of peace' not only does not excuse one from taking part in these conflicts, it actually compels one to take part in them if one wants to tackle them at their roots and get beyond them. ¹⁸

The (liberation) theology's position on violence is the same as the Church's traditional teaching on 'just wars' that dates to Thomas Aquinas

that violence is possible as a lesser evil and last resort against a great violence, such as tyranny, but that no Christian willingly accepts such a choice. One of the crucial decisions in that choice is whether counterviolence is effective. If it is not, it should not be chosen. ¹⁹

Those who are familiar with the doctrine of "just war" as developed initially by St. Augustine and later by St. Thomas Aquinas will note that Gutierrez strays outside the theory's confines. Gutierrez moves the question of whether to commit violence beyond the moral justification regarding its "justness" and instead contends that its use depends upon the application of the amoral criterion of "effectiveness." This new standard admits to a high degree of pragmatism and neatly coincides with Marxist-Leninist dogma.

Another liberationist writer who has contributed to the theology's body of thought as well as to its promulgation is Jose Comblin, a Belgian priest who has lived and worked in various parts of Latin America for over two decades. Comblin's views of development-dependency, exploitation of the poor, political activism, and the use of violence are very similar to those of Gustavo Gutierrez. Comblin, however, introduced to liberationist thought the concept that the "national security doctrine" is largely responsible for the political repression being

practiced in Latin America today by military regimes. His analysis has been widely accepted on this point by not only the liberationists but by more moderate elements of the Church as well. Comblin insists that the "national security ideology system" was invented by the U.S. and came into being with the creation of the NSC and CIA under the National Security Act of 1947.²⁰ In fact he identifies the National War College as the major propagator of the "new ideology of national security" which the U.S. convinced, through various exchanges and training programs, the Latin American military establishments to adopt. The doctrine has been used, he says, by Latin regimes as a justification for destroying by whatever means (torture, imprisonment, assassination, open warfare) all internal enemies who threaten a nation's national security. This doctrine has been added to the list of evils from which people must be liberated. Illustrative excerpts from Comblin's writings are revealing:

There is no longer any doubt for the Church: any solidarity with a system like national security is impossible, definitely incompatible with the task of evangelization.²¹

Underdevelopment is not belated development at all; on the contrary, it is nothing less than a secondary effect of the development of the developed nations.... The best way to explain the world condition is as a set of relationships between 'dominating' nations and 'dominated' nations. A true development

process would really be a process of liberation.... No development is possible if a radical change in structure and processes does not take place in the underdeveloped countries themselves. ²²

A task of the strategy of liberation is to support all true movements for the liberation of people by undertaking their struggles and sufferings, their slavery and hope, their rebellion and martyrdom.... It recognizes Christ's salvation in the popular movements. ²³

The world is in a revolutionary period. The Spirit has to tell human beings what Jesus' words mean for those who have to act in this revolutionary world. ²⁴

Another leading liberationist, an Argentine cleric, Jose Miguez-Bonino, has attempted to show the usefulness of the Marxist dialectic for determining the courses of action for the Church. Besides believing that Christians can indeed be Marxists, Miguez-Bonino has promoted the idea that Marxism as an insight into the social processes and the revolutionary ethos is indispensable for revolutionary change. He also stresses that revolutionary action is necessary to change the basic economic, political, social and cultural structure of Latin American nations. Although Christians will be concerned that the use of violence be kept to a minimum, violence, he says, is still a fact of revolutionary change that must be accepted. ²⁵

The list of noteworthy liberationists is long and includes Juan Luis Segundo, Pedro Casaldaliga, Sergio

Arce Martinez, Enrique Dussel, Mendez Arceo and others. But one in particular has become a figure of some international importance, Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, Brazil. While Dom Helder's influence on his fellow Latin American bishops has been considerable, he has been an even more effective missionary for the liberationist cause among American and Vatican Catholic leaders. In contrast with many of his fellow liberationists, Dom Helder opposes violence as the means to gain structural revolution. He admires Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi and urges his followers to emulate their political approach, resorting only to civil disobedience when circumstances warrant. Another significant and consistent part of his message is addressed to the youth of the developed nations. He asks them to stay home and "help develop the consciousness of the affluent countries which need a cultural revolution that will lead to new values." 26

Dom Helder is a charismatic but genial revolutionary who, like almost all of his liberationist colleagues, has no understanding of economics. He is highly critical of the rich, accusing them of bringing about the causes of violence, and takes the side of the poor, rallying them around a banner of liberation. But he and the other liberationists have no clear prescription of what formal

system should replace the structures they wish destroyed. A vague kind of socialism seems to be their preference, but the formulation of it is left undefined.

Liberationism has received significant impetus from non-Latin American sources. As noted earlier the first seeds of liberation theology appeared in Europe. It is interesting to note that both Camilo Torres and Gustavo Gutierrez studied at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. Many, if not most Latin American priests receive some advanced education in Europe or in the U.S. Moreover, the extreme scarcity of priests and nuns in Latin America led the Church to call upon foreigners to fill the gap. Currently, foreign priests outnumber Latin priests in almost every country. The influx of foreign clerics dramatically increased since World War II, a period during which liberationism was formulated and fostered. In Guatemala, for example, there were only 119 priests in 1940. Almost all were native Guatemalans. By 1979, however, there were 556 priests of whom 496 were foreign. A similar trend occurred in the female Catholic orders.²⁷ In 1979 of the 989 Catholic nuns in Guatemala, 718 were foreign. In all Latin America there were 54,967 priests and 120,834 nuns in 1975 ministering to a Catholic population of 285 million. Over one-half of the priests are foreigners.²⁸

Faced with the stark conditions of poverty and political authoritarianism, most foreign religious personnel (who are in large part either American or European) often react with shock and disgust, and tend to favor efforts to replace the systems which they believe cause or at least perpetuate the social and political problems. They may be predisposed to this course not only because of their generally more liberal educational and cultural backgrounds, but also because they come prepared to view their surroundings through liberationist lenses. They also feel less constrained by the secular power structure of their host countries and certainly possess loyalties to convictions that extend beyond national borders. Not surprisingly, such a substantial number of foreign priests has created a real problem for several Latin American governments that feel both challenged by and resentful of their presence.

Chapter III

STRENGTH, ALLIES AND OPPONENTS

Starting with a few adherents in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the growth of liberationism in Latin America has been steady and impressive. Although no statistics are available to determine the precise size of the movement, an estimated 20 to 30 percent of the bishops (including archbishops and Cardinals) are probably dedicated proponents of liberationism.²⁹ A larger percentage of the hierarchy (possibly over 60) is sympathetic to much of the philosophy behind liberation theology but is not disposed to activate their parishioners toward the revolutionary rearrangement, favoring violence if necessary, of economic and political structures that the more radical proponents require. These moderates would favor a more evolutionary change and eschew violence from any quarter. The remaining 10 to 20 percent of the hierarchy fall into the conservative, traditional category, favoring a secondary role for the Church in the social activism arena but emphasizing ministry to society's spiritual needs.

A different picture exists among the rank and file clergy. Possibly as many as 40 to 50 percent could be

classified as enthusiastic advocates of liberationism, with some 30 to 40 percent in the moderate category, and a relatively small percentage siding with the conservative position. In Guatemala, about 80 percent of the 500 priests working in rural areas are considered to be supporters of the liberationist cause, although only 2 to 5 priests are actually fighting along side the insurgents.³⁰ (One of the guerrilla priests is Irishman Don McKenna who is convinced that violence and Marxism are necessary elements to achieve true revolutionary change.)

In El Salvador, Archbishop Rivera y Damas has estimated that 12 to 15 priests have joined the ranks of the armed guerrillas in the countryside. A larger number lend support to the left by providing safe houses, monies and contacts with the international press.

In neighboring Honduras, Spanish Jesuits and Passionists as well as several French and a few American priests are actively aiding Salvadoran insurgents with food, funds and propaganda support through various solidarity and refugee relief committees. There are reports of collaboration between certain priests and the Honduran Communist Party to jointly assist the Salvadoran guerrillas.³¹

And of course in the case of Nicaragua a number of priests fought by the side of the Sandinistas against Somoza and at least 20 now occupy key positions in the government. Maryknoller Miguel D'Escoto is Foreign Minister and Jesuit Ernesto Cardenal heads the Ministry of Culture. Both are avid liberationists and travel widely internationally promoting their cause. A significant number of parish priests (most of whom are foreign) in Nicaragua also actively support the Sandinista government. Some 60 priests and nuns reaffirmed the depth of their liberationist convictions by signing a document circulated in Managua in March 1981.

Not to support the Sandinistas in Nicaragua today is equivalent to supporting a political model that does not radically change the society of exploitation and domination we have inherited. We do not just want a change of names in power or simply an end to traditional corruption. We want firm and solid moves on a non-capitalist basis, toward a new society.³² This is our choice, justifiable as Christians.

The strength of liberation theology among the laity is a subject of considerable speculation. Much depends on whether the parish priest and/or his bishop are liberationists and, if so, how effective they are in reaching their congregations with their views. One of the most important organizational means which the Church has used

to promote a greater social awareness among the lay parishioners is the Ecclesiastical Base Community (CEB - Comunidade Eclesiastica de Base). Fostered initially by the Brazilian bishops, the CEB's are small (12 to 25 or 50 persons) groups of lay persons who organize at the parish level into fellowship groups to study the Bible or to discuss problems of the local community or neighborhood. They may decide to act on certain problems or they may just study and think upon them. The large degree of flexibility permitted the CEB's has been one of the reasons for their popular success as well as their controversial nature.

The CEB's are given the use of Church buildings and other facilities for their meetings and social activities. Both the CELAM II conference in Medellin and the subsequent CELAM III in Puebla (1979) endorsed the CEB's and their use as a vehicle for Church members to work together for a more just society.

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian Catholic educator and intellectual, introduced the concept of concientizacion (consciousness-raising) as an essential to popular education. The CEB's became the principal vehicles for applying Freire's concept. His belief as adopted by most of the Brazilian bishops insisted that a downtrodden, often

illiterate peasant or worker had to first become aware of himself as a person and be able to relate himself to society before he could truly become educated and function as a responsible member of that society. In effect, the awareness of the reasons for his downtrodden state is what Freire wanted a person to understand: i.e., that he was a member of the working or peasant class and that others, e.g., the oligarchy, were getting rich from the benefits of his labors by keeping laborers' salaries low and prices of goods and services high. The need to raise the social awareness of the common people through concientizacion serves as the chief dynamic of the CEB's. Through this mechanism it is believed that social change can be achieved.³³ Today there are approximately 50,000 CEB's in Brazil, 1,000 in Chile and an undetermined number in most of the other Latin American countries.³⁴

The adoption of Marxian analysis by the liberationists and their use of CEB's to organize and reach the people have naturally not been lost on this Hemisphere's leftist revolutionaries. As is apparent from the Nicaraguan revolution and the insurgencies going on in El Salvador and Guatemala today, the Marxist-oriented revolutionary and the activist Catholic liberationist have joined

forces. Fidel Castro recognized the convergence of goals between the revolution he wants to see in Latin America and that of the liberationists. In 1971 during his visit to Allende's Chile, Castro called on the Church leadership to join ranks: "We must make an alliance, but not simply a tactical alliance. I would say a strategic alliance between religion and socialism, between religion and revolution." Again in 1977 while he was visiting Jamaica Castro said: "No contradictions exist between the aims of religion and the aims of socialism."³⁵ Modern day liberationists also quote Che Guevara as sort of a latter day prophet-revolutionary. Before his death in 1967, Che Guevara observed: "When Christians are bold enough to bear integral revolutionary witness, the Latin American revolution will be invincible; for up to now Christians have allowed their doctrine to be used as a tool by the reactionaries."³⁶ Building on Castro and Guevara, Juan Hernandez Pico, a Sandinista revolutionary, spoke before an ecumenical conference held in Sao Paulo in 1980:

There is no place in Christian strategy for saying that religion and revolutionary politics are incompatible. From the revolutionary practice of the Sandinista movement there arises a duty to purify those religious elements that impede a loving commitment to the exploited multitude. Sandinista revolutionary practice offers better conditions for a more authentic religion.³⁷

There is little doubt that liberation theology has provided the radical left with a valuable asset. The liberationists in the Church provide financial resources, safe houses and above all a veritable pulpit -- both at the parish and international levels -- from which to promote their cause.³⁸ Whether the radical left is cynically using the liberationists as one of its tools to gain power is moot. The positions of both groups are so nearly identical that their cooperation is assured, and the question of whether one may be using the other as a tool becomes irrelevant.

If the liberationist movement has been recognized by the radical left as a valuable asset, the Latin American right sees it as a threat. On the far right groups like the societies for the defense of Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP) have emerged to counter liberationism. Composed of lay persons primarily of the wealthier, more conservative elements of society, the TFP has important organizational efforts in Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Its strength in other Latin American countries, however, is slight. It combines a traditional religious stance with reactionary social and political positions closely tied to the national security doctrine that is espoused by certain military regimes.³⁹ The well-funded TFP

spreads its anti-communist, anti-liberationist message in a variety of ways, though it concentrates on the media using radio, television and full-page ads in newspapers. Some members of the Church's hierarchy and a small percentage of the clergy promote the TFP point of view.

A much more significant challenge to liberationism has developed inside the Church among the moderates. This group is composed of a growing number of bishops, priests and key Catholic institutions working to maintain the unity of the Church against heavy pressures from the right and the left while still striving to respond to the demands of contemporary social and political life.⁴⁰ Bishop Alfonso Lopez Trujillo probably best epitomizes this group. As head of the permanent CELAM secretariat located in Bogota, Bishop Lopez Trujillo has been attacked by extreme liberationists as being "too traditional and reactionary." His works and public statements, however, reveal that he is a deep believer in social activism for the Church, but outside the framework of political ideology.⁴¹ Of similar persuasion is Archbishop Obando y Bravo of Managua who was on the forefront of those who criticized Somoza's repressive regime. In the face of the steadily repressive acts of the Sandinista government, Obando y Bravo has likewise spoken out and

has attempted, unsuccessfully, to remove the more radical priests from participating in the government. In July 1981 Obando y Bravo and his fellow Nicaraguan bishops issued a statement aimed at Foreign Minister D'Escoto and the other priests in the Sandinista government: "Priests cannot allow the message of Salvation that they carry to be identified with any particular political cause." ⁴² He took the issue to Rome but the Vatican compromised and is permitting the liberationist priests to remain in the government, though they cannot practice priestly functions or sacraments as long as they occupy an official position. The bishop is coming under increasing criticism from the Sandinistas as well as from the more extreme liberationists. But his clear condemnation of both the right and the left, and his dedication to genuine social and economic reforms devoid of political partisanship have placed him squarely in the middle where a growing number of his colleagues are beginning to regroup.

Acting Archbishop Rivera y Damas in El Salvador is also desperately trying to keep to the moderate middle. Beleaguered by an episcopate deeply divided between conservatives and radicals, he pleads for an end to the bloody civil war, condemning the atrocities committed

by both the right and the left. He along with his colleague in Managua understands more clearly than most the heavy toll in human suffering imposed on society when clashes between extremists -- whether they are of the far right or zealots of the left. He is working hard to regain control of the Salvadoran Church and restore discipline over a sizeable number of foreign priests and nuns many of whom are aiding the leftist cause.

The more radical advocates of liberation theology received an additional rebuke in December, 1980, when Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, sent a letter to his provincials of Latin America addressing the question: "Can a Christian, a Jesuit, adopt a Marxist analysis as long as he distinguishes it from Marxist philosophy or ideology, and also from Marxist praxis, at least considered in its totality?" In his letter Arrupe declares that Marxist principles do not flow from the Gospels and furthermore that Marxist contentions that politics, culture, and religion all depend on economics is erroneous. Marxism tries to relegate the Church and Christ to a "fragile, gratuitous position." It has nowhere been proved, he says, that all human history can be reduced to a struggle between classes; history is much more complex and is influenced by many diverse

factors. Marxist analysis often does not remain mere analysis but leads to action programs and strategies, and sometimes to violence and struggle. Jesuits should promote other methods of social transformation, calling for persuasion, witness, reconciliation -- never losing hope of conversion, Arrupe instructs. The Marxist position rejecting private property as it relates to production is likewise questionable. Bad distribution of property leads to and facilitates the exploitation Marx pointed out. "But is not the institution of property itself confused with its bad distribution?" Arrupe concludes that it is important to continue investigating what forms of distribution of property rights (e.g. with regard to a trade union system) will bring about greater justice and more development for all people in different types of society. 43

The effect of this letter on the Jesuit order in Latin America is still being assessed. Jesuits have been especially active in liberationism and in El Salvador were closely associated with the radical leftist insurgents. Many departed San Salvador in early 1981 when threats against their lives were issued by right-wing death squads.

Pope John Paul II has been especially concerned with the Jesuits' political activism and failure to conform to priestly discipline as he defines it. The Pope called the powerful order's leaders to Rome in February and told them that "a priest's job is not that of a doctor, a social worker, a politician or a union leader.... The priest's service...is above all, and essentially, a spiritual service. The necessary concern for justice must be exercised in conformity with your vocation as priests and brothers."⁴⁴ He repeated his earlier injunction that priests are not to become involved in political activities. John Paul openly reminded them of their vow of obedience to the Pope's authority and has moved to make the Society's leadership more amenable to his moderate point of view. Many Jesuits have reportedly protested the Pope's intervention into their affairs,⁴⁵ and it is still too early to determine what effect the pontiff's actions will have on Jesuit programs in Latin America.

Prior to the Pope's actions regarding the Jesuits, the Church's moderates in Latin America had received support for their middle of the road position in March 1981 at the eighteenth regular assembly of the CELAM meeting in Santiago. At the conference six Cardinals

and 55 bishops from every country in Latin America castigated those in the Church who favored Marxism:

It is unacceptable for individuals or groups to characterize themselves as 'Marxist-Christians.' Marxism is not a new theological concept, nor has it served to liberate people. The liberation to which the Church refers is evangelical. CELAM will attempt to resolve theological differences through dialogue.

The conference attacked liberation theology and concluded that: "The Church loves the poor, but apart from ideologies and political partisanship and without promoting class struggle".⁴⁶

This new moderate position is to be distinguished from an older moderate stance favoring Christian Democracy. The latter grew to political prominence in the 1950's and 60's in Latin America but became largely discredited by its inability to successfully deal with the nagging social and economic problems of the Hemisphere. Chile's Christian Democratic party as well as others in the region were also tainted with widespread allegations of CIA affiliation and financial backing. Only in Venezuela have the Christian Democrats managed to prosper and continue to operate as a and successful political party. Christian Democracy's goal is to reform the world, making it more just through an application of modern Catholic social thought.⁴⁷

This is to be contrasted with the current moderate Catholic position in Latin America. Levine calls the latest middle-of-the-road option the "evangelical-pastoral position"⁴⁸ because of its emphasis on revitalizing the content and delivery of the gospel message, its stress on building community, fraternity and a sense of belonging to the Church (especially through the CEB's), and its call for disengagement from partisan politics while denouncing the injustices being experienced by the poor.

Chapter IV

THE PUEBLA CONFERENCE

The evangelical-pastoral position is the position which Pope John Paul II endorsed in 1979 following the CELAM III Conference held in Puebla, Mexico. The conclusions of the Puebla Conference were arrived at through an intense round of debate and drafting sessions in which prelates representing all the national bishop conferences of the Hemisphere participated. The language of the conclusions is at times ambiguous and some parts of the documents seem to contradict others in doctrinal approach, leading many to conjecture that the results of the Conference were inconclusive. In general, however, the CELAM III meetings can probably be said to have strengthened the more moderate position, although the conference in its analysis of the Church's role in society did provide sufficient leeway for the more radical liberationists to justify their activities. A working paper circulated in advance by Bishop Lopez Trujillo of Bogota in his capacity as CELAM Secretary General, was heavily criticized by both radical and conservative prelates.⁴⁹ The radicals charged that the paper was an attempt to reverse the

results of CELAM II while the conservatives believed it sacrificed religious goals to socioeconomic analysis.⁵⁰ The Trujillo document did couch the issues in somewhat less radical terms than the Medellin CELAM conclusions, but it apparently was intended to be a draft document only, and served as a framework against which the participants in the Conference were to have (and did) depart for their discussions.

The radical pro-liberationist churchmen also criticized the makeup of the delegates to the conference. They claimed, though they could provide no evidence, that a number of their proponents were excluded from the ranks of the 350 official delegates of whom only 184 were entitled to vote.⁵¹ Placido Erdozain, an avid liberationist, described the view of a fellow liberationist who attended the Puebla Conference: "The game was a tie, the score was nothing to nothing, but it was a moral victory for the people's church because we played on an unfamiliar field and the crowd (of bishops) was against us."⁵² Outside observers with long experience agree, however, that all elements of Church thought were represented at Puebla and had ample opportunity to voice their views.

Pope John Paul II probably influenced more than any other one factor the outcome of the Conference toward a more moderate course. The Pope made it clear in his address opening the Conference that while social activism was still a legitimate role for the Church, the main objective should be "mankind's salvation through transforming, peacemaking, pardoning, and reconciling love." ⁵³ He openly attacked those who cast Christ in the role of a revolutionary. Rejecting the dialectics of class struggle and violence as tactics for change, John Paul II emphasized the non-political nature of the Church and the need to protect the concept of Christian liberation from being "captured and manipulated by ideological systems and political parties." ⁵⁴ He insisted, however, that the Church should remain strongly committed to the poor as well as critical of human rights abuses and the structural inequities that permit the abuses. The Pope also stressed that doctrinal precision was essential.

The CELAM III resolutions specified three ideologies as unacceptable approaches to politics and liberation: Marxism, liberal capitalism, and the national security doctrine. The bishops also cautioned those Catholics who have been attracted by and have adopted the Marxist method of analysis. This analysis, they concluded, cannot be separated from the ideology.