
by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

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This thesis investigates the Costa Rican Catholic Church and the various forms its pastoral obrera (workers' pastorate) took in the period from 1979 to 1996. Church officials' words and actions are assessed in relation to the rights of workers narrowly defined (e.g., the right to strike and the right to form labour organizations) and in relation to social justice issues more broadly conceptualized (e.g., inequity in the social structure, models of social change, etc.). Specifically, the positions of four Church entities are examined: the Costa Rican Episcopal Conference (CECOR) as it is led by Archbishop Arrieta; the Centro Coordinador de Evangelización y Realidad Social (CECODERS); the Escuela Social Juan XXIII (ESJ23); and the official Church in Limón.

The complex interactions between several variables are analyzed throughout the thesis. Significant in the historical context is the early 1980s socio-economic crisis in Costa Rica, along with the neo-liberal government reactions to the crisis and subsequent eruptions of popular discontent in the country. The relationship between two competing forms of labour organization, the union movement (sindicalismo) and the solidarity movement (solidarismo), is also considered. The needs of the Church as an institution in a politically and culturally competitive environment are critically evaluated, as are the various "conservative" and "liberationist" expressions of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) emanating from the Vatican, Latin America, and Costa Rica. This latter analysis is crucial
since many scholars treat the CST tradition as either invulnerable to challenge or as inherently facilitative of justice for workers.

Overall, the thesis contends that Mons. Arrieta (and CECOR) and the ESJ23 are exemplars of conservative Catholicism on workers' and social justice issues, because they share a functionalist perspective on society, an emphasis on harmony and on social change through peaceful reform, and a bias for solidarismo. In contrast, CECODERS and the official Limón Church are liberationist in orientation, as indicated by their conflictual analyses of reality, their support for grassroots and even confrontational movements for social change, and their bias for sindicalismo. Institutional variables help to explain the relative extremism of the ESJ23 and of the Limón Church on the conservative-liberationist continuum.
Acknowledgements

Many people in many places generously lent me their time, assistance, and support while I was writing this thesis. At the outset, I must thank the residents of Finca 11 and Finca 6 in Río Frío, Sarapiquí, Costa Rica. It was they who, long before I had the idea to write a dissertation on the Costa Rican Catholic Church, introduced me to their beautiful country with warmth and hospitality.

The success of my eventual research in Costa Rica was guaranteed by the collegial support and friendship of several Costa Rican scholars, and especially Profesora Rosa María Pochet, Profesor J. Amando Robles, and Erick Solera. They encouraged me with their genuine enthusiasm and they enlightened me with their insightful comments on my project. For their continued friendship and hospitality during all my trips to Costa Rica, I must also thank Rosmery Durán Cosio, mi segunda mamá Anneth Quiros, and the Quesada Arias family. Many of my best memories of Costa Rica are associated with these dear friends.

The friendly and knowledgeable staff members at several Costa Rican institutions, libraries, and archives were also always willing to help la machita from Canada with any number of tasks (and especially photocopying!). I am particularly grateful to those people associated with the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales at the Universidad de Costa Rica, the Archivo Curia Metropolitana, Eco Católico, CECOR, the Biblioteca Nacional Miguel Obregón, and the libraries at the Universidad de Costa Rica and the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica.

Of course, there would be no thesis at all if it were not for the cooperation of the Catholic Church agents I interviewed. Without exception, they were all forthright with their comments and generous with their time. In particular, though, many of them went out of their way to help me attain the information, contacts, and even lodging I sought. Deserving of special mention in this regard are Hernán Hermosilla and Gustavo Blanco of ASEPROLA, Padre Eduardo Ramírez in Limón, Padre Claudio Solano of the ESJ23, Padre Jesús Doncel in Río Frío, and Mario Solis of CECODERS.
In Canada, I was privileged to receive financial assistance from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and from the University of Toronto in the form of various travel grants and fellowships. It was also at the University of Toronto where I was privileged to meet many individuals whose friendship has so enriched my life and my academic odyssey: Michele Murray, Annette Nierobisz, Jane Moulaison, Kristen Sweder, Phil Harland, Catherine Caufield, and Arthur McCalla. They are good friends and inspiring scholars all. At the Centre for the Study of Religion, I am particularly grateful to former administrative staff members Lesley Lewis and Cynthia Gauthier, and to present members Irene Kao, Shuk Bing Wong, and Marilyn Colaço. Not only were they unfailingly efficient in their jobs, but their friendliness and enthusiasm made my many administrative dealings at University painless, if not pleasant. Special mention also goes to Professor Thomas McIntire, Associate Director of the Centre, for his genuine concern and wise words of guidance over my years at the University.

Each of my thesis committee members also deserves special acknowledgement. Professor David Raby showed me that one can be both a full-time scholar and a committed social activist. Professor Roger O'Toole was always a pleasant and enthusiastic discussant of thesis-related matters. He also took an interest in my academic career as it was developing beyond the thesis. My advisor, Professor Marsha Hewitt, consistently displayed an energy, a sharp mind, and a sharp wit that never detracted from her concern about my personal well-being and academic achievement. I particularly appreciate her confidence in me and her support at every crucial point in the doctoral and dissertation path.

I have also been fortunate to have the love and support of many members of both my immediate and extended families over the past years. In particular, I need to thank my parents, Kate and Don. They have provided me with the type of emotional (and often financial) sustenance that every child deserves. They have been consistently kind and patient, and they have had an unfailing faith in me. I will never be able to thank them enough. I also would like to single out my sister (and one-time roommate) Laura. She too was a source of much comfort and fun over the course of my degree.
Finally, my debt to my husband David is immeasurable. It is no coincidence that my last year of writing this thesis was such a happy time. This had less to do with the thesis itself and more to do with the fact that that year was also the first one of our marriage. For much of that time he kept flowers on my desk, food in my belly, and a smile on my face. For such unselfish love, support, and patience I will always be grateful.
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>Asociación de Empresarios Pro-Justicia Social y Paz/Association of Businessmen for Social Justice and Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AID</td>
<td>Agency for International Development (U.S.A.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASBANA</td>
<td>Asociación de Bananeros Nacionales/National Banana Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEPROLA</td>
<td>Asociación Servicios de Promoción Laboral/Association for Labour Promotion Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BANDECO</td>
<td>Banana Development Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CACM</td>
<td>Central American Common Market</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social/Costa Rica Social Security Bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEBs</td>
<td>comunidades eclesiales de base/base ecclesial communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CECODERS</td>
<td>Centro Coordinador de Evangelización y Realidad Social/Coordinating Centre for Evangelization and Social Reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CECOR</td>
<td>Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica/Costa Rican Episcopal Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELAM</td>
<td>Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano/Latin American Episcopal Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIMA</td>
<td>Consejo Intermagisterial Asociado/Associated Inter-Magisterial Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>CODESA</td>
<td>Corporación Costarricense de Desarrollo Sociedad Anónima / Costa Rican Development Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONEL</td>
<td>Comisión Nacional Episcopal de Laicos/National Episcopal Commission of Laity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>Consejo Permanente de los Trabajadores/Permanent Workers' Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUT</td>
<td>Confederación Unitaria de Trabajadores/Unitary Workers' Confederation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CST</td>
<td>Catholic Social Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESIJ23</td>
<td>Escuela Social Juan XXIII/John XXIII Social School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOLSA</td>
<td>Frente de Organizaciones Laborales del Sector Agropecuario/ Front of Labour Organizations of the Agricultural Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOSSS</td>
<td>Frente de Organizaciones Sindicales del Sector Salud/ Front of Health Sector Union Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSLN</td>
<td>Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional/Sandinista National Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HdT</td>
<td>Hermandades de Trabajo/Brotherhood of Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICFTU</td>
<td>International Confederation of Free Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFIM</td>
<td>Instituto de Formación Integral Mixto/Institute for Joint Total Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITAC</td>
<td>Instituto Teológico de América Central/Central American Theological Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITCO</td>
<td>Instituto de Tierras y Colonización/Lands and Colonization Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOC</td>
<td>Juventud Católica Obrera/Young Catholic Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEO</td>
<td>Liga Espiritual Obrera/Workers' Spiritual League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAE</td>
<td>Programa de Ajuste Estructural/Structural Adjustment Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PINDECO</td>
<td>Piñas de Costa Rica/Pineapples of Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLN</td>
<td>Partido Liberación Nacional/National Liberation Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRN</td>
<td>Partido Rescate Nacional/National Recovery Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUN</td>
<td>Partido Unión Nacional/National Union Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUSC</td>
<td>Partido Unidad Social Cristiana/Social Christian Unity Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEDAC</td>
<td>Secretariado Episcopal de América Central y Panamá/Episcopal Secretariat of Central America and Panama</td>
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Chapter One
Introduction

The question is not whether the Church is involved in politics, but how it is involved
— Scott Mainwaring, The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil, 1916-1985

Over the past few decades, scholars have been fascinated by the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and politics in Latin America. The emergence of liberation theology, the conversion of certain national Churches and many individual members of the clergy to the "option for the poor," and the participation of thousands of Church members in the continent's revolutionary struggles have provided the basis for a small mountain of books and articles on the Latin American Church. Not surprisingly, given the unprecedented participation of Catholics in the Nicaraguan revolution and the embroilment of Salvadoran and Guatemalan Catholics in their respective nations' civil wars, focus on the Catholic Church in the particular region of Central America has also been intense.

The Catholic Church in Costa Rica, however, has been largely overlooked by scholars, many of who judge the country to be free of political turmoil and progressive pastoral innovation. Through this thesis I seek both to challenge these widespread perceptions of Costa Rica and to help fill the gap in scholarship that has emerged. More precisely, I analyze the Costa Rican Catholic Church's varying positions on social justice and the rights of workers during the period from 1979 to 1996. Against the background of Costa Rican socio-economic history and the Catholic Church's social teaching tradition, I study the words and actions of key Costa Rican Church figures and institutions as they attempt to minister to workers and their families.

Yet since neither Costa Rica nor its Church can be considered in isolation, placing my own study within the context of the large body of research on Latin American Catholicism appears to be the logical starting point. In this introductory chapter, then, I highlight some of the books, themes, and regions that have received the most attention over the years and discuss how the existing literature on Costa Rica fits into this broader
field of study. I then move to describe the topic and scope of this thesis in more detail and to outline the theoretical considerations guiding my work. Finally, I provide a brief chapter-by-chapter outline of the structure of this thesis.

Studies of the Church and Politics in Latin America

J. Lloyd Mecham's *Church and State in Latin America* stands at the beginning of a long line of studies on religion and politics in the region. An oft-cited "classic" originally published in 1934 and revised in 1966, Mecham's book provided later scholars with a wealth of detail on formal Church-State relations in Latin America. Though in the revised edition Mecham did discuss the colonial period, his main concern was to describe the constitutional issues and party politics affecting the Church's legal status in various nations from independence down to the mid-1960s. Importantly, Mecham also observed that some of the Churches in post-World War II Latin America were beginning to flirt with movements for social reform; his recognition that the Catholic Church could not be identified solely with conservative political interests foreshadowed the research of many scholars soon to follow.

Of the early works that treated the progressive factions in the Latin American Church more thoroughly, Ivan Vallier's *Catholicism, Social Control, and Modernization in Latin America* is the most influential. In this 1970 book (and one related article), Vallier presented an evolutionary scale of ideal types of Church influence on society, and evaluated the extent to which each type of church would impede or facilitate the secular forces toward modernization and "national change." He characterized Church initiatives

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1 Though of course there are several Christian churches in Latin America, for the purposes of this thesis "Church" will refer to the Roman Catholic Church.
such as co-operatives, literacy courses, and agrarian reform projects as indicative of the "social development" (or "Stage 4") strategy for influencing society. Although Vallier acknowledged that the social development ideology and activities could contribute to the process of modernization, he felt that most supportive of modernizing trends would be the "cultural-pastoral" Church type. Vallier saw this "Stage 5" Church as providing a socio-ethical framework from which "autonomous" laity could emerge to foster social change as Christian citizens. Though many contemporary scholars criticize Vallier's assumptions, his work remains important as one of the first attempts to assess the relationship between the Latin American Church and modernization in theoretical terms.

Nonetheless, however, Vallier's concern with modernization meant that his survey of "Catholic progressives" was somewhat restricted. Though Vallier acknowledged the existence of revolutionary figures and movements within the Catholic Church, he was primarily interested in groups seeking the reform and development of the capitalist order, not its overthrow. In contrast, Vallier's contemporary, Frederick Turner, while sharing the former's interest in modernization, also paid close attention to the radical Catholic left in Latin America. Around the same time, Emanuel de Kadt published *Catholic Radicals in Brazil.* In it, de Kadt discussed Church-related initiatives of the "social development" type, as well as more confrontational actions against the existing socio-economic order. Both Turner and de Kadt thus showed the ways in which the action and ideology of the Catholic progressives in Latin America could span the range from reformist to revolutionary.

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Yet de Kadt's work was noteworthy for another reason. *Catholic Radicals in Brazil* was one of the earliest examples of a book-length treatment of the Catholic Church in a specific country. In fact, from the time it was published in 1970 down to this day, much of the important historical data collection and theoretical innovation in the field has been done by scholars who examine the Church in one or two countries in particular. Importantly, and with some notable exceptions (e.g., Daniel Levine on Venezuela and Colombia and Brian Smith on Chile), much of this work has also focused on Brazil. Some analysts of the Brazilian Church, such as Thomas Bruneau, concentrate mainly on the institutional dynamics of progressive Catholicism. Others, including Madeleine Adriance and Scott Mainwaring, favour an approach that considers institutional constraints and strategies on the one hand, but also the viewpoints and activism of believers at the grassroots on the other. Adriance's more recent work, W. E. Hewitt's empirical study, and Manuel Vasquez's micro/macro (case study/world systems paradigm) analysis focus specifically on the composition and religious and political orientations of Brazilian *comunidades eclesiales de base* (CEBs).

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9 This is not very surprising, given the leading role sectors of the Brazilian Church played in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in the development of *comunidades eclesiales de base* (CEBs) and of progressive Catholic social teaching more generally.


This concentration on CEBs in Brazil is part of a larger trend, evident among Latin Americanists in the last fifteen years, toward the study of the popular church. In general, scholars are focusing less on Church elites and official pronouncements and more on the interaction of religion and politics in the lives of ordinary men and women. Levine, for one, has played a key role in the theoretical elaboration of the concept of "the popular" and has produced one of the most detailed explorations of "popular voices" in Latin American Catholicism to date.¹³

Some of the most valuable material on the popular church, however, comes from scholars concentrating on the region of Central America. Phillip Berryman, for instance, has provided a rich historical overview of the popular churches' political involvement in countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala;¹⁴ there also exists a large collection of more interpretative single-country studies on the popular church in Central American conflicts.¹⁵ The widespread participation of Catholics in the region's revolutionary struggles, and their definition of this participation as a specifically Christian duty, has made the link between religion and politics in these countries indisputable -- and studying it irresistible.

Studies of the Pre-1979 Church in Costa Rica

As I have noted, however, the contemporary Costa Rican Catholic Church has not been studied nearly as much as the Church in Costa Rica's neighbours to the north.

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Instead, many of the existing studies on the Costa Rican Church deal with the pre-Vatican II era. Interestingly, several of these are detailed accounts of the important figures and events in sixteenth to nineteenth-century Church history, written by a man who himself was to become the most important figure in the Costa Rican Church in the first half of the twentieth century, Víctor Sanabria Martínez. Sanabria was named Archbishop of San José in 1940 and used his position to support reformist social legislation in Costa Rica: the Social Security Law (1941), the "Social Guarantees" (1943), and the Labour Code (1943). With President Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia (who, like Sanabria, had been heavily influenced by European social Christian philosophy and papal social teachings) and Communist Party leader Manuel Mora, Sanabria was part of the famous 1943 "unlikely alliance" that legitimated the legislation at the base of Costa Rica's Welfare State. In line with his commitment to the Social Reforms (as these legislative changes are collectively called), Sanabria also created a series of Catholic workers' organizations and unions.

Much has been written on Monseñor Sanabria, from largely biographical accounts to more scholarly treatments of his thought and work. Some authors concentrate on outlining the outstanding contributions Sanabria made to the Costa Rican Church and to the patria, while others provide a more nuanced interpretation of Sanabria's actions in the 1940s. Miguel Picado, for example, argues that though he was a visionary genuinely inspired by Christian principles to act on behalf of the poor, practical considerations also factored into Sanabria's actions as he tried to protect and increase the institutional power

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15 Many of these can be found in Edward T. Brett, "The Impact of Religion in Central America: A Bibliographical Essay," The Americas 49, no. 3 (January 1993): 297-341.


of the Church in a society undergoing rapid political and economic changes. In the end, Picado sees Sanabria as a skilled institutional leader whose prophetic voice has not been echoed in the Costa Rican archbishopric since his death in 1952.

Certainly, Sanabria’s immediate successors in the archbishop’s role have been widely criticized for their conservatism and silence in the face of Costa Rica’s social problems. Javier Solís, for example, argues that Mons. Rubén Odio Herrera (1952-1959) and particularly Mons. Carlos Humberto Rodríguez Quirós (1960-1978) were traitors to Sanabria’s legacy. In fact, some scholars refer to the time from Sanabria’s death in 1952 to Rodríguez’s stroke in 1978 as "the long period of silence." They frequently refer here to the influential study by José Miguel Rodríguez that found that of 325 official Church documents issued between 1953 and 1970, only 18.76% commented on social and political matters, with the majority of these focusing on the threat of communism (Williams also notes that between 1970 and 1978 careful socio-economic analysis was equally absent from official pronouncements). While many of their counterparts outside of Costa Rica were striving to put the conclusions of Vatican II and of the 1968 Medellín conference of Latin American bishops into action, the Costa Rican bishops were by and large unaffected by the currents of transformation in the Catholic Church.

Nonetheless -- and scholars have not neglected this fact -- during this period of official silence there were several attempts at ecclesial renovation and social change involving individuals and groups at lower levels of the Church. As a priest Javier Solís,

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20 Williams, *Catholic Church and Politics*, 121-34.
22 See Williams, *Catholic Church and Politics*, 147-57; Rodolfo Cardenal, "The Rise and Fall of Social Catholicism in Costa Rica," in *Church and Politics in Latin America*, ed. Dermot Keogh (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: Macmillan, 1990), 176-86; the work with the most detailed material regarding these
for example, tried in the late 1960s to re-orient the Catholic weekly *Eco Católico* to a more critical and leftist stance on socio-economic issues and Church structure. He was also a leader, in the early to mid-1970s, of the Grupo Ecuménico Exodo, an ecumenical social justice group that participated in the Christians for Socialism movement and that was heavily influenced by the teachings of liberation theology and the Medellín conference. However, faced with repeated resistance from the hierarchy, these initiatives all suffered. Solís' actions at one point even earned him a disciplinary transfer out of his parish; he later left the priesthood. Other priests who broke with the official Church's conservatism (by participating in a controversial May Day demonstration, for example) were also subjected to the authoritarian actions of the hierarchy. Finally, after the religious congregations in charge of the Instituto Teológico de América Central (ITAC) began to educate both religious and secular seminarians in the social sciences and in the progressive spirit of Vatican II and Medellín, the bishops withdrew the secular seminarians and sent them to the more conservative Seminario Central for their training. Overall, during the 1960s and until the end of Rodriguez' archbishopric in 1978, the few progressive sectors that did exist in the Costa Rican Church were harassed and largely overshadowed by the conservative and authoritarian hierarchy.

**The Scope and Theme of this Thesis**

Both the Costa Rican Church and its context, however, began to change rather significantly in 1979. Mons. Román Arrieta Villalobos, one of the very few bishops who had spoken on social issues during Rodriguez' tenure (he was a vocal supporter of an agrarian reform project in his diocese), was appointed Archbishop of San José. Also during this year the Costa Rican hierarchy collectively and definitively broke its lengthy silence by issuing a pastoral letter on social and economic problems entitled "Evangelización y realidad social de Costa Rica." This was a timely document, given the

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themes, including primary source documents from the various players involved, is Solís, *La herencia de Sanabria*.

23 Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica, "Carta Pastoral Colectiva: Evangelización y realidad social de Costa Rica: Carta pastoral colectiva," in *La palabra social de los*
shocking situation in which the country was beginning to find itself. Costa Rica, long seen as one of Latin America's most stable and prosperous nations, had begun to feel the effects of a worsening economic and political crisis. Costa Ricans were also shocked and affected by the events next door in Nicaragua, where the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) overthrew the dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle -- with the help of the Catholic Church. Slightly further afield, the Latin American bishops held a general conference in Puebla, Mexico, and once again plunged the continent's Church leaders into a debate over the role of the Church and its members in social change. In light of all these factors and given the importance that they held for the Costa Rican Church and its constituents, 1979 appears a logical point at which to begin an analysis.

To date, there exist few published studies that contain detailed information on the post-1979 Church in Costa Rica. Of these, the most outstanding are Miguel Picado's *La Iglesia costarricense entre el pueblo y el estado*, Andrés Opazo Bernales' *Costa Rica: La Iglesia católica y el orden social*, and Phillip Williams' *The Catholic Church and Politics in Nicaragua and Costa Rica*. All three books contain valuable information on the Costa Rican Church, and all three fit within the general parameters of the literature on the contemporary Latin American Church I discuss above. Phillip Williams, for example, provides an analysis of the Church as institution, showing how the Church's alliance with the established elites and the concern to preserve the Church's social influence in Costa Rica condition Church leaders' responses to social change. Miguel Picado provides a class analysis and analyzes how the conditions created by Costa Rica's Welfare State are interconnected with the Church's political options and pastoral practices, and how in turn this affects the Church's relationship with the country's popular movements. Andrés Opazo takes the most complex approach by paying careful attention to institution, class,
and ideology. Opazo studies the Church's institutional structure and needs; he also looks at the mutually reinforcing relationship of Church and State in Costa Rica and discusses how this relationship frustrates a genuine Church option for the popular sectors. But Opazo also looks closely at the Church's religious discourse and discusses how this symbolic production is related to social and political actions. As I will show below, this approach most closely resembles the one I will adopt in this thesis. In fact, all three works provide important data and theoretical insights for the present study.

Nonetheless, the works by Williams, Opazo and Picado do have limitations. For one, they are fast becoming dated. Picado's book, which includes the most recent material, only covers up to 1988. Moreover, they are all fairly general studies, dealing with a wide range of time periods, individuals, groups, programs, and issues. While this makes them extremely valuable as introductory and background sources, no one topic is covered in great depth.

In contrast, in this thesis I intend to analyze the period from 1979 to 1996, and to focus in detail on a relatively limited topic: the Costa Rican Catholic Church's "pastoral obrera" ("workers' pastorate") and the social justice issues closely related to it.

Costa Rican Church leaders have long seen the importance of addressing the condition of the labouring classes as part of their pastoral social. As early as 1893, Mons. Bernardo Augusto Thiel issued the carta pastoral "Sobre el justo salario" ("On the Just Salary"), in which he argued that workers should receive a wage that enables them to sustain their lives and their families in a decent manner.27 I have already noted Sanabria's concern in the 1940s for legislation protecting the rights of the working classes, and his role in the development of Costa Rican workers' organizations and the Catholic trade union movement. In fact, since Sanabria's appointment as Archbishop in 1940, numerous official Church organizations have been created to minister to the spiritual and educational needs of workers. Among these are: the Liga Espiritual Obrera (LEO, the Workers'  

27 Mons. Bernardo Augusto Thiel, "Trigésima carta pastoral sobre el justo salario," in Picado, La palabra social, 27-36. In this letter, Thiel was following the teachings of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum, which was issued two years prior. For a
Spiritual League), the Juventud Católica Obrera (JOC, the Young Catholic Workers), the Hermandades de Trabajo (HdT, the Brotherhood of Workers), the Escuela Social Juan XXIII (ESJ23, the John XXIII Social School), and the Centro Coordinador de Evangelización y Realidad Social (CECODERS, the Coordinating Centre for Evangelization and Social Reality). Clearly, the Church's *pastoral obrera* has long been one of the most important components of the religion and politics nexus in Costa Rica; as such, it warrants an in-depth investigation.

Nonetheless, very little published material exists on the Church-labour relationship in Costa Rica. Eugene Miller's recent book contains information on the Church and the labour movement in Costa Rica from 1932-1948;\(^\text{28}\) Lawrence Kent's short 1985 article provides some insight into the workings of the ESJ23 in the 1970s and early 1980s.\(^\text{29}\) By far the best and most lengthy study of this type, though, is James Backer's *La Iglesia y el sindicalismo en Costa Rica*,\(^\text{30}\) which discusses Church leaders' attitudes toward and relationships with the labour movement during the period 1871-1972. Still, as was the case with the studies by Picado, Williams, and Opazo mentioned above, Kent's and Backer's works are now quite dated; the time spans and topics covered by all three studies mean that such crucial Church actors as CECODERS (founded in 1985) are neglected. The Church-labour relationship in late twentieth-century Costa Rica simply cannot be understood on the basis of these works alone.

This thesis, then, will provide a much-needed update to these earlier studies. In particular, I will focus on four distinct Church bodies. In terms of organizations within the Church's social pastorate, I analyze the ESJ23 and CECODERS. These two are the only well-established and viable organizations within this pastorate that deal specifically with workers' issues. Most importantly for this thesis, they both have the official mandate

\footnotesize
discussion of this encyclical and subsequent papal teaching on labour issues, see pages 21-22 below and Chapter Four of this thesis.


from the Church hierarchy to spread and apply the message of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in Costa Rica. In terms of the hierarchy itself, it is also essential to investigate the words and actions of Mons. Arrieta and the Costa Rican Conference of Bishops (CECOR). Together these bishops constitute the official face of the Costa Rican Church and, as we shall see, they have developed a definable position on social justice and the rights of workers within the Costa Rican context. Finally, I will examine the local Church in the Limón region of the country. This examination is crucial to this thesis because Limón province has been the arena for many of Costa Rica's labour struggles and because the Limón Church is the only local Church in Costa Rica that has made a sustained effort over the years to develop a *pastoral obrera*. The specific manner in which these cases will be approached, however, is best discussed in light of the theoretical considerations guiding this thesis, the topic to which I now turn.

**Theoretical Considerations**

Generally speaking, this thesis is informed by the work of Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci. As will become evident in later chapters, the Gramscian notion of hegemony is a particularly apt tool to analyze Costa Rica, a country in which the dominant class long ruled not through force, but through the consent of the subordinate classes (a consent largely cultivated through the promotion of the ideology of Costa Rican exceptionalism and pacifism). As we shall also see, the events in Costa Rica during and following the economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s can be more broadly

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31 Gramsci (1891-1937) was a founding leader of the Italian Communist Party who was jailed by Mussolini in 1928. In 1929, he began writing his famous *Quaderni del carcere*, better known in English as the *Prison Notebooks*. The notebooks, numbering 33 in total, consist of fragmentary notes and organized essays on topics such as Italian history, Marxism, philosophy, politics, and religion. They are known for their sophisticated, non-reductionistic analysis of superstructural phenomena. One of the best translations of the *Quaderni* remains *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

categorized in Gramscian terms as a crisis of hegemony. Equally relevant to this work are Gramsci's insights on the role of religion in the power structure of society, since Gramsci recognized that religious discourse and representatives could function in a hegemonic or a counterhegemonic fashion.

Gramsci's thoughts on this matter have been most usefully systematized and expanded upon by the Venezuelan sociologist Otto Maduro. Gramsci and Maduro together provide us with a non-reductionist, neo-Marxist sociology of religion that acknowledges the importance of three types of variables for the study of religion and social change: the socio-economic context, the nature of the Church as an institution, and the content and qualities of religious discourse (in this case, CST) itself. Though many of the scholars discussed above appreciate the importance of one or more of these factors for the analysis of the Catholic Church in Latin America, the Gramscian framework, with its emphasis on the inextricable relation among all three variables, provides the most appropriate categories with which to apprehend the complexity of the relationship between religion and politics in Costa Rica.

Religion and Socio-Economic Context

Basic to the work of Gramsci, Maduro, and this thesis is the assumption that religion is socially embedded, that there are inextricable links between religion and the socio-economic context within which it is located. To put it simply, the socio-economic system of a given society will influence and condition the religious forms expressed in that society.

In classical Marxist terms, one can say that religion, as an element of the superstructure, is a to a certain extent a reflection of the structure, the social relations of production. Marx himself views religion as a reflection in consciousness of the social and

economic contradictions of the real world. Religion can be seen as an indication of human alienation and false consciousness, and it can be used by the ruling classes to serve their own interests and maintain the status quo. Yet this is not to say that religion functions only as weapon in the hands of the dominant class; the often misinterpreted "opium quotation" in fact reveals that Marx did at least entertain the idea that religion could express the protests of the oppressed.\textsuperscript{35} Hence, adopting this framework of analysis reveals that not only patterns of domination and subordination, but also of conflict and protest, are reproduced in the religious field and will affect religious actors' political options and symbolic production.\textsuperscript{36}

This materialist perspective implies that religion cannot be studied in isolation from its social context. It means that in order to understand the Costa Rican Church's \textit{pastoral obrera}, we must look at the economic realities faced by the Church and by the workers to whom it is attempting to minister. Thus, for example, I will discuss the causes, nature, and effects of the severe economic crisis that engulfed Costa Rica beginning in the late 1970s. To do so is not merely to provide background material for my analysis, but to seek out possible motivations for and constraints on Church statements and activism during the crisis. A careful treatment of the socio-historical context of the Costa Rican Church is the logical extension of the presupposition that economic patterns condition religious forms.

By itself, however, the contention that structure determines superstructure is a reductionistic formulation, now dismissed by most sociologists of religion. Crucially, even Engels clarified that he and Marx never said that the economic element was the only

\textsuperscript{35} The quotation reads: "Religious distress is at the same time the \textit{expression} of real distress and the \textit{protest} against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the \textit{opium} of the people." Italics in original. Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, \textit{On Religion}, Second Impression (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1964), 42. Further evidence that Marx and particularly Engels recognized the revolutionary potential of religion, under certain circumstances, is amassed by Roger O'Toole in \textit{Religion: Classic Sociological Approaches} (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1984), 68, fn. 83.
determining factor in history; they admitted that various superstructural variables could also affect historical struggles.\textsuperscript{37} Gramsci also saw the errors of treating ideology as merely epiphenomenal, labelling as "primitive infantilism" the claim "that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure."\textsuperscript{38} As Maduro affirms, structures, conflicts, and changes occurring on the level of an entire society do not directly or mechanically influence religious actions. Instead, he argues, the internal characteristics of the religious realm also play a role in determining religious expressions. This recognition that religion is not unilaterally dependent on the structure, that is, of the \textit{relative autonomy} of the religious realm, represents a crucial advance over reductionistic Marxist theories of religion.\textsuperscript{39}

Accepting the relative autonomy of religion means that, to a certain extent, religion must be appreciated on its own terms, within its own, specifically religious system of meaning. Without dismissing or discounting a critical sociological analysis of religious expressions, these expressions also need to be understood in light of categories and structures that religious agents themselves define as relevant. Hence we must always keep in sight the fact that Román Arrieta is not merely an influential public figure who chooses concrete political options at specific historical conjunctures, he is at one and the same time \textit{Archbishop} Arrieta, who is seen by many as a successor of the apostles, a vicar of Christ


\textsuperscript{38} Gramsci, \textit{Prison Notebooks}, 407.

\textsuperscript{39} Maduro, \textit{Religion and Social Conflicts}, 87. The militant writings of Lenin on religion are the best example of the reductionist position. See, for example, the essays entitled "Socialism and Religion," and "The Attitude of the Workers' Party Towards Religion," in V.I. Lenin, \textit{On Socialist Ideology and Culture}, 2d ed. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962). At the other end of the spectrum, as O'Toole points out, the decisive rejection of economic determinism by some scholars has led to their espousing a so-called "Marxist-Weberian" theory of religion. O'Toole, \textit{Religion}, 190-92.
entrusted with the care and instruction of the Catholic faithful. The Church's teaching on the right to strike, to take another example, is not only a response to the condition of labour in a capitalist system, for many it is also a teaching made in conformity with divine wisdom and made in pursuit of the goal of eternal salvation. To put it another way, we can say that while religion is always political, it is never purely so. In this sense religion can never be explained away as simply a tool in the hands of one or another social class. Religion must also be respected as a system of beliefs, practices, and structures that have transcendental significance for those committed to it.

These theoretical considerations influence the way in which I analyze the Costa Rican Church and its *pastoral obrera*. Specifically, this "non-reductive materialism" — a recognition both of socio-economic influences on the expression of faith and of the relative autonomy of religion — has implications for studying the Church as an institution and for studying the ideas this institution transmits.

*The Church as an Institution*

Andrés Opazo once wrote that "historically speaking, religion is never an incorporeal reality which floats in the consciousness of humans, it is always incarnated in institutions." This contention is confirmed *par excellence* in the case of the Roman Catholicism, which has evolved in the bosom of one of the most highly developed institutions known to humankind. As I indicated above, the recognition of the importance of the Catholic Church's institutional character has been a guiding force in many of the existing studies on religion and politics in Latin America. This insight will also play a role in my analysis of the Costa Rican Church.

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40 One Latin Americanist who has clearly grasped the significance of this point is Daniel Levine. He points out that "the Church is not *primarily* an agent of social, economic, or political action. As an intermediary between people and God, its central mission remains the diffusion of the message of salvation and service" (emphasis in original). Levine, *Religion and Politics in Latin America*, 13.

41 See Vásquez's comments on non-reductive materialism in *Brazilian Popular Church*, 12.

In such an analysis, it is essential to avoid treating the Church in Costa Rica as a monolithic whole and instead to respect the complexity of the Church as institution. I believe that this complexity is in part captured by conceptualizing the Church as an "interclass social space," in which members from a variety of social classes converge and interact. This interclass quality is derived from the nature of the Church as a socially embedded institution, one that reflects the social and economic patterns and conflicts of the larger society. At the same time, this mixed class composition is secured by the universal nature of the Church's mission -- the Catholic Church preaches that salvation in Christ is offered to all, regardless of social status or class (among other things). Moreover, when competing social classes meet within the Church, they do not acquiesce to the pleas for unity among the faithful (a topic to which I will return in later chapters), but rather seek religious legitimation for their respective political projects.

On the one hand, this process of seeking religious meaning that in some way corresponds to one's social situation occurs spontaneously within all social groups as individuals continually work to struggle through and make sense of the categories, conflicts, and aspirations that colour their everyday lives. In large part, this is the phenomenon that scholars who study "the popular" seek to understand. On the other hand, at a more formal and explicit (and methodologically speaking, more accessible) level, such activity is directed and developed most fully by certain specialists within the religious field. With reference to the Catholic Church in particular, this work generally falls to the bishops, priests, and theologians. In line with the Gramscian tradition, we can see these

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44 As Fleet and Smith note, "Catholics . . . come in all shapes and sizes." See Fleet and Smith, The Catholic Church and Democracy in Chile and Peru, 15-16. Gramsci too writes not of Catholicism but of Catholicisms: "there is one Catholicism for the peasants, one for the petits-bourgeois and town workers, one for women, one for intellectuals . . . ." Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, 420. The continuing relevance of Gramsci's observation is also confirmed in Roger O'Toole, "Introduction," in Roger O'Toole, ed., Sociological Studies in Roman Catholicism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, Studies in Religion and Society, Vol. 24 (Lewiston, Lampeter, Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), xv.
45 Villela, "The Church," 267; Opazo, Costa Rica, 196.
figures as "organic intellectuals" (superstructural functionaries whose role it is to give the class to which they are aligned homogeneity and an awareness of its social, economic, and political function).\textsuperscript{46}

In this thesis, I am interested in exploring the words and actions of some of the Costa Rican Church’s organic intellectuals. Hence I will focus largely on official documents and statements issued by ecclesial representatives and related in some way to workers' issues. Of prime importance will be the \textit{cartas pastorales} released by Mons. Arrieta and CECOR from 1979-1996, and by Mons. Coto during his time in Limón. Also deserving of special analysis will be the publications produced by ESJ23 and CECODERS under the supervision of Father Claudio Solano and Father Orlando Navarro, the pivotal figures in these respective organizations. Personal interviews with these four main figures and with other individuals close to them and their organizations will provide supplementary material for analysis, as will newspaper and journal accounts treating relevant topics. Throughout my discussion, I will emphasize how the manifestations of the Church’s \textit{pastoral obrera} can be seen as expressions of particular class and political options (integrated by organic intellectuals).

Still, we must recall that within a Gramscian framework, the religious field is seen as relatively autonomous — competing class alliances cannot be simplistically equated with competing forms of religious expression. The characteristics of the religious field — in this case, those of the religious institution — should also be taken into consideration. As Gramsci himself wrote:

\begin{quote}
If, for every ideological struggle within the Church one wanted to find an immediate primary explanation in the structure one would really be caught napping: all sorts of politico-economic romances have been written for this reason. It is evident on the contrary that the majority of these discussions are connected with sectarian and organisational necessities.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

More precisely, many actions of the clergy can be linked to the institutional need for self-preservation.

\textsuperscript{46} Gramsci, \textit{Prison Notebooks}, 5-6; Maduro, \textit{Religion and Social Conflicts}, 72-74 and 122-35.
\textsuperscript{47} Gramsci, \textit{Prison Notebooks}, 408.
In the specific case of Costa Rica, I believe that this institutional imperative can be investigated with reference to three interrelated factors. First, one must consider the possible implications of the Church's constitutional privilege in Costa Rica. In terms of the Costa Rican Constitution, the Catholic Church has always been the official State Church; even at the height of Church-State tensions in the late 1800s this constitutional privilege was never abrogated.48 The current Constitution affirms the Church's status in Article 75, which reads as follows:

The Apostolic, Roman, Catholic Religion is that of the State, which contributes to its maintenance, without impeding the free exercise in the Republic of other religions [cultos] that are not opposed to universal morality nor good customs.49

Consistent with this clause, religious education is mandatory in all public schools and Catholic parishes, projects, and buildings are eligible for tax breaks and other financial assistance from the government.50 The Costa Rican Church, as an institution, will necessarily strive to maintain this favourable status vis-à-vis the State.

Second, we must look at the Catholic Church's membership status among the general population. As in other Latin American countries, Catholicism (professed if not actually practised) has long been the religion of the majority in Costa Rica.51 From the point of view of the Church as an institution, however, this position is never secure. In Limón province, for example, there has always been an uneasy co-existence between the Catholic Church and the numerous "historical" Protestant churches (Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, and Lutheran). In recent years, Catholic Church membership has also been threatened by the dramatic increase in the number of Pentecostal churches (often referred

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48 For a history of changes in the Costa Rican Catholic Church's legal status, see Mecham, Church and State in Latin America, 332-35.
50 See a description and discussion of these benefits in Picado, La Iglesia costarricense entre el pueblo y el estado, 46-7 & 67-75; and Williams, Catholic Church and Politics, 126-7.
51 Costa Rican pollsters have recently estimated that 78.8% of the population considers themselves to be Catholic. This is a substantial majority, to be sure, but it is also significantly lower than the popularly-cited figure of 95%. Larissa Minsky Acosta, "¿Somos lo que creemos?" La Nación (Revista Dominical), 17 March 1997, 9.
to as "sectas") throughout Costa Rica.\(^{52}\) Of course, the traditional enemy of the Church throughout Latin America -- communism -- can also be seen as threatening the structures and souls belonging to the Church. The days of the unlikely alliance between the Church and the Communist Party in Costa Rica are long past and, though there are not exactly cells of armed leftist guerrillas practising manoeuvres in the country's rainforests, there is a communist movement in Costa Rica and the unpleasant experiences of the Catholic Church in Cuba and Nicaragua under leftist governments are certainly known among the Costa Rican clergy. It is an institutional imperative, then, for the Church to try to maintain (if not increase) its membership in the face to such threats to its dominance.

A third aspect of institutional preservation relates to the Church's internal organization. The Catholic Church is a hierarchically structured institution in which power is not equitably distributed. Those holding positions of authority will generally seek to ensure that the Church's internal structure of religious power is reproduced and that they maintain control over the processes of symbolic production and the distribution of religious goods.\(^{53}\) This type of centralized, hierarchical authority structure is especially entrenched in the Costa Rican Church, which for the most part has remained immune to the democratizing impulses of the Central American CEB movement. The bishops and priests in Costa Rica will thus be motivated to maintain their positions of privilege and status within a Church that, as I have shown above, has been accorded privilege and status within the general Costa Rican society.

Lastly, I would like to point out that the specific nature of the Catholic Church as an institution means that, in fact, we can never perform an analysis of just its Costa Rican expression. The Roman Catholic Church is a worldwide institution, centred in the Vatican; the national Churches, far from being autonomous or self-contained units, function in inextricable relation and subordination to this governing structure and its leader, the pope. This international or universal Church as a whole, moreover, has institutional needs for


self-preservation and reproduction similar to those I have discussed above. The Costa Rican Church, therefore, must always be viewed in light of the larger organizational structure and agenda emanating from Rome.

Given this, an important task in this thesis will thus be to investigate to what extent these various institutional characteristics and necessities impact upon the Costa Rican Church's *pastoral obrera*. Here again, however, it is not possible to plot linear relationships between institutional necessities and pastoral actions. Just as the economic structure is not narrowly determinative of religious expression, neither are institutional exigencies. One remaining variable must also be factored into any analysis of the Church's *pastoral obrera*, that of relevant CST.

**Catholic Social Teaching**

The CST tradition is generally said to have been inaugurated with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.⁵⁴ Known in English as "On the Condition of Labour," this document warned of the dangers of socialism and critiqued the exploitation of workers under the extremes of industrial capitalism. In it, Leo also advocated for such basic workers' rights as the right to a just wage and the right to form "associations." The next major document in this tradition, Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), also focused on issues concerning workers in industrialized nations and generally expanded upon Pope Leo's teachings of forty years earlier. With the papacies of John XXIII and Paul VI, with Vatican II, and with various revolutionary and internationalist currents emerging within and outside of the Church in the 1960s, CST moved beyond a narrow European perspective and began to deal with social justice in more general and global terms. Development and underdevelopment, conflict and peace, and human rights were issues addressed at length for the first time during this period. These concerns were also treated - - with specific reference to Latin America -- at the general meetings of the Latin American

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Episcopal Council (CELAM) in Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), and Santo Domingo (1992). With the papacy of Pope John Paul II, workers' issues were addressed more directly once again in Laborem Exercens ("On Human Work"), issued in 1981. Since that time, John Paul II's documents have reverted to a consideration of broader social justice issues that nonetheless have implications for the condition of labour in modern societies.

This tradition and its themes help to shape the social justice agenda of local and national Churches the world over, and the case is no different in Costa Rica. There, frequent and explicit references are made to CST documents by the hierarchy and by those involved in the pastoral obrera; in fact, both CECODERS and the ESJ23 are considered to be charged with the mission of putting CST into practice. Given this, an examination of CST will be a necessary part of this thesis.

Surprisingly, most of the existing works treating the Costa Rican Church's pastoral obrera do not provide an in-depth discussion of CST. Those that do touch upon the subject, moreover, often take an uncritical perspective on CST. James Backer, for example, bypasses a nuanced look at the concepts and categories of CST and instead takes Catholic doctrine as "axiomatic." The assumption here is that CST in itself does not need to be critically examined, that on the whole it is pro-union and pro-worker. In this view, any anti-union or anti-worker statements or practices of Church leaders are construed as betrayals of the spirit and letter of the CST tradition. Other scholars present a variation on this theme by portraying conservative or questionable positions vis-à-vis the labour movement as a contradiction specifically of post-Vatican II CST. The premise is that though the concerns and positions of early CST are now outmoded and unacceptable, since the papacy of John XXIII CST documents have presented a far more "progressive" agenda in relation to workers' issues. Hence the conclusion of all these scholars is that if only Church leaders and representatives would put CST faithfully into practice, workers' rights would be respected and justice served.

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55 Backer, La Iglesia, 39-40.
56 The most overt statement of this position is found in Kent, "The Social Pastoral Work," 21-22.
In contrast, I think it is necessary to take a more critical look at CST itself, to ask whether certain characteristics of or contradictions within the CST tradition are related to positions that have a decidedly anti-worker bias. The impetus for this critical analysis is the Costa Rican reality and some of the questions it raises. For example, as I shall describe, there is a distinct movement within the Costa Rican pastoral obrera — a movement best exemplified in the actions and publications of Claudio Solano and the ESJ23 — that works to deter workers from unionizing and from exercising their right to strike. On the surface, this appears to be a contradiction of the CST position on the rights of labour. Yet ESJ23 documents are littered with references to and quotations from CST. Does this suggest that CST as a whole is not as supportive of workers and their rights as is commonly believed? One of my aims in this thesis will be to explore this possibility. In other words, instead of assuming the principles of CST to be doctrine invulnerable to challenge, I will examine them critically and point out their potential political implications, both facilitative of justice for workers or not.

This process will be especially important because in fact there are pastoral agents and organizations within the Costa Rican Church that do support the rights of workers to unionize and strike, and that more generally support a progressive social justice agenda. Interestingly, these actors, such as Mons. Coto in Limón and CECODERS based in San José, also look to CST as an inspiration and cite it for legitimation. The question then becomes why and how CST can be used to justify such seemingly contradictory positions on workers' issues. Though this question will provide a basis for discussion throughout this thesis, at present certain relevant points can be noted.

First, we need to avoid treating CST as if it were an internally uniform or consistent body of thought. The notion that there would be significant variation within CST is rendered plausible by the mere fact that in the Vatican II and post-conciliar eras alone CST has been generated by the Vatican under three different popes over four decades, and by various constellations of bishops at the CELAM general conferences over the same period. In addition, no one can dispute that in the past forty years the world's geo-political contours and economic patterns have shifted significantly (the crumbling of the Communist bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s is simply the most dramatic of these
changes). Thus it is hardly surprising that CST, which purports to respond to the "signs of the times," contains a variety of positions. Once we also factor in any number of the institutional constraints and influences on religious production discussed above, and the effects of their variable interactions with changing political and economic contexts, a certain measure of plurality within CST appears guaranteed.

In fact, and as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Four, there are distinguishable "conservative" and "liberationist" tendencies within the post-conciliar CST tradition as a whole, with the Medellín documents representing the extreme at the liberationist pole and the teachings issued by the Vatican under Pope John Paul II reflecting the most conservative stance. In contrast to most analysts of the Costa Rican Church, who do not recognize any distinctions whatsoever within the post-Vatican II tradition,\(^57\) in this thesis I shall take care to examine what expressions of the pastoral obrera are related to which strands of CST. In other words, I will posit that the differing attitudes and actions toward workers on the part of Costa Rican Church leaders and pastoral agents are linked to the differing strands of CST to which they adhere.

By itself, however, this explanation can only be partially correct. As the discussion above has established, no one factor -- be it economic context, institutional interest or, in this case, Church doctrine -- is unilaterally or automatically determinative of pastoral action. Just as those who generate CST in the Vatican and Latin American magisterium are influenced in this production by material and organizational variables, so are the Costa Rican Church agents in their reception, interpretation, and application of this teaching. The words and actions of the Costa Rican pastoral obrera are related to the principles and directives of CST, but they are not reducible to them.

Overall, then, the task of this thesis will not only be to tell the story of the Costa Rican pastoral obrera from 1979-1996, but also to do so in such a way that does justice to the complexity of all these variables and the relationships between them. The theoretical

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\(^{57}\) One of the most frequent and, as I will show in Chapter Four, serious errors in this regard is the conflation of the teachings of the Medellín and Puebla conferences. See, for example, Kent, "The Social Pastoral Work," 30; Opazo, Costa Rica, 183; and Picado, La Iglesia costarricense entre el pueblo, 200.
framework I employ provides space for an analysis of political-economic and religious-institutional conditions motivating Church agents' words and actions, but also allows for the examination of the implications of such documents and programs for those at lower levels of the Church and for those within the society at large. Hence I recognize, with Gramsci, the "necessary reciprocity," or the dialectical relationship, between structure and superstructure.\(^58\) In more general terms I illustrate, with Maduro, that society acts on religion, religion (as relatively autonomous) acts on itself, and religion acts on society and social conflicts.\(^59\)

The Structure of the Thesis

Through the order and contents of the chapters in this thesis, I attempt to reflect these complex relationships as well as to render them comprehensible. I will begin in Chapter Two with a discussion of the political-economic conditions that prevailed in Costa Rica during the period under investigation. The economic crisis that started to affect Costa Ricans in the late 1970s will be a focal point of this analysis, as will the more recent embracing of neo-liberal economic policies by the country's leaders. Exploring the characteristics and implications of these and related phenomena will help to illustrate the deteriorating living conditions of Costa Rican workers throughout the past two decades; it will also suggest some of the constraints and influences on the pastoral agents seeking to minister to these workers.

Chapter Three contains an examination of how Costa Rica's union movement has fared in the face of the economic crisis. While in many respects the strength of sindicalismo in Costa Rica has waned over the past few decades, on the other hand, new forms of union co-operation and protest have arisen in response to the demands posed by the country's worsening economic straits. This chapter will explore the complexities of this situation, and discuss how the fate of the Costa Rican union movement is tied to a competing form of labour organization known as solidarismo.


This is followed in Chapter Four by an examination of the CST tradition and its treatment(s) of the rights of workers. Issues narrowly related to workers' concerns, such as the right to a fair wage, the right to strike, and the right to form unions will be discussed. Moreover, I will analyze more general teachings on social justice that can be shown to have implications for the condition of workers in Costa Rican society. Finally, in this chapter I will also delineate conservative and liberationist categories within post-Vatican II Catholic Social Teaching, and suggest how these can be used to illuminate corresponding tendencies within the Costa Rican pastoral obrera.

In the next two chapters I show in detail how specific Church representatives are situated within Costa Rican political-economic and religious-institutional contexts, and I analyze the nature and effects of these actors' participation in the pastoral obrera. In Chapter Five, I discuss the words and actions of the most powerful religious figure in the Costa Rican Church, Archbishop Román Arrieta, and examine the position of the Costa Rican hierarchy as a collective. In Chapter Six, I treat CECODERS, an organization that, while it operates in San José and under the jurisdiction of Arrieta, nonetheless promotes a workers' pastorate that is in many ways in conflict with the conservative position of the Archdiocese.

The remaining three chapters in the body of the thesis discuss the particular situation of workers and the Church in the province of Limón. Chapter Seven outlines the social, political, religious, and economic peculiarities of Costa Rica's "province on the periphery." In Chapter Eight, I examine the case of the ESJ23, an archdiocesan organization that carries out the bulk of its activities in Limón. I will show how the ESJ23, much like Arrieta and despite appearances and protestations to the contrary, functions to support an essentially conservative agenda that is far more favourable to the interests of capital than to the interests of labour. The final case study, presented in Chapter Nine, looks at the official Limón Church and its liberationist counterparts to Arrieta in the hierarchy, Mons. Coto and his successor Mons. Ulloa. Throughout all these case study chapters I will take care to use theoretical constructs and categories not as rigid pigeon holes into which all the data need to be forced without exception, but rather as heuristic tools guiding the investigation.
The concluding chapter contains a brief summary of the most important points of the thesis, and will suggest the implications of my research for the future study of the Catholic Church in Costa Rica and in Latin America more generally.
Chapter Two

Crisis in Costa Rica

At first sight, Costa Rica appears almost too good to be true
-- Christopher P. Baker, Costa Rica Handbook

During the 1970s, Costa Rica was often considered to be exceptional among
developing nations in the hemisphere. Costa Rica was the "suiza centroamericana"
without an army. It was a "showcase for democracy" without dictators. It was an
economic development success story, with a standard of living and social development
indicators the envy of much of the rest of Latin America. And though many would argue
that these accolades remain well deserved today, the experience of many Costa Ricans
over the past two decades suggests that their country is not as pacific, democratic, or
prosperous as is often believed.

The downturn in Costa Rica's fortunes began in 1978, when the country started to
slide into a severe socio-economic crisis. Though in certain respects the nation
experienced a slight reprieve from its troubles after 1983, to date Costa Rica has still not
fully recovered. In this chapter I discuss this crisis, along with its causes and
consequences, and show how the problems left in its wake have been compounded by the
structural adjustment programs and neo-liberal policies imposed by governments from the
early 1980s on. I also illustrate how some of the popular sectors outside of the Church
have reacted to the socio-economic conditions of this same period. In so doing I establish
the historical context, influences, and constraints experienced by Church agents as they
sought to develop the pastoral obrera to be discussed in later chapters of this thesis.

Post-War Economic Development: State Intervention and Import Substitution

The social legislation promoted by Archbishop Sanabria and other political leaders
during the early 1940s formed the foundation of Costa Rica's Welfare State and
contributed to the comparatively high standard of living enjoyed by Costa Ricans prior to
the economic crisis.\textsuperscript{1} However, Costa Rica's relative socio-economic successes — as well as its eventual and devastating socio-economic crisis — cannot be fully understood without also considering the programs of economic development implemented by Costa Rican leaders in the decades following the 1948 civil war.\textsuperscript{2}

José Figueres, a key figure in this war, won the presidency in the elections of 1953 and embarked upon an explicitly Keynesian development policy. Figueres' drive toward modernization was impelled by State intervention in the economy and financed by a combination of the nationalization of the banking system, the imposition of indirect taxes, and the incurring of internal and external debt.\textsuperscript{3} The resources generated by this program allowed for both a substantial expansion of the central civil service and the creation of numerous "autonomous institutions" (decentralized public agencies). By the end of the decade, the large State bureaucracy was a major employer of Costa Ricans, and via the State and the autonomous institutions significant advances were recorded in areas such as housing, communications, education, and road construction.

The 1960s were marked by Costa Rica's entry into the Central American Common Market (CACM) and its adoption of an import substitution industrialization strategy (aimed at reducing dependence on imported goods). Initially, Costa Rican industry flourished under the protectionist policies and tax exemptions offered by the government. Eventually, however, competition among CACM members forced Costa Rica to attract

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{1}] See Chapter One, p. 6 of this thesis.
  \item[\textsuperscript{2}] The war erupted after the government overturned the results of the 1948 presidential elections in Costa Rica -- elections that had been won by the opposition candidate Otilio Ulate Blanco. Ulate's supporters launched an armed rebellion that defeated the government's army and established a \textit{junta} that ruled Costa Rica for 18 months, after which Ulate stepped in as president. For detailed accounts of the war that include analyses of the broader political and economic factors contributing to the conflict, see: Oscar Aguilar Bulgarelli, \textit{Costa Rica y sus hechos políticos de 1948: Problemática de una década}, 2d ed. (San José, C.R.: EDUCA, 1974); John Patrick Bell, \textit{Crisis in Costa Rica: The 1948 Revolution} (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1971); and Manuel Rojas Bolaños, \textit{Luchas sociales y guerra civil en Costa Rica, 1940-1948}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (San José, C.R.: Editorial Porvenir, 1989).
\end{itemize}
increased foreign investment by extending tax breaks, and U.S. capital came to dominate manufacturing.\(^4\) Further, and despite its efforts toward urban industrial development, Costa Rica continued to promote its agro-export sector. Traditional exports, such as coffee and bananas, remained as a chief source of foreign exchange, while an agricultural diversification program led to ventures into sugar, cotton, pineapple, and livestock production for export.\(^5\) By the end of the decade, then, Costa Rica's dependence on foreign capital and markets was substantial.

Social services were expanded considerably in the 1970s, initially during the term of Figueres' second presidency (1970-74) and then under the administration of Daniel Oduber (1974-78). Relying heavily on internal and external credit, between them Figueres and Oduber universalized social security, implemented family allowances, extended health, transportation, communication, and electrical services, and further developed the country's post-secondary education system. The 1970s also witnessed the birth of the "entrepreneurial State" in Costa Rica; a key role here was played by the Costa Rican Development Corporation (CODESA), an autonomous institution devoted to creating State enterprises with the same legal status as private corporations.\(^6\) The administrative needs of the enlarged social safety net and of the new form of government intervention in the economy made for an even bigger State bureaucracy; by 1978 there were almost 130,000 State employees -- nearly 19 percent of the economically active population.\(^7\)

At a certain level, the results of these economic and social development programs were truly impressive. For example, between 1960 and 1978 the GDP grew approximately 3% per year and inflation was controlled, while in the 1970s the rate of unemployment averaged only 3% a year (in large part due to the high State demand for


\(^5\) Cerdas Cruz, "Costa Rica," 311.


\(^7\) Dunkerley, "Stability at a Price," 605-06.
labour). The education system had reduced the rate of illiteracy to one of the lowest in the Americas. Moreover, by 1978 basic health services had grown to cover 86 percent of the population, average life expectancy had risen past 70 years, and infant mortality had fallen to 21 per thousand. Add to all this the relative tranquillity of Costa Rica in a region otherwise marred by civil strife, repression, and insurrection, and the country certainly appeared as the Central American success story of its time.

The Crisis Hits

Exceptional though they were, however, such indicators could only compensate for the structural vulnerability of Costa Rica's development model for so long. The fact was that the Costa Rican economy was excessively foreign-oriented. On the one hand, Costa Rica continued to rely heavily on the exporting of primary agricultural products, such as bananas and coffee. On the other hand, the industrialization strategy, while successful in reducing the need to import finished goods, nonetheless called for the importing of large amounts of raw materials, intermediate technological products, and capital goods. Crucially, the value of these imports greatly exceeded that of the country's exports and this trade deficit grew throughout the 1970s. At the same time, the dependence on external borrowing to compensate for the trade imbalance and to maintain and expand social programs led to a rapidly increasing debt. Costa Rica thus found itself in an extremely precarious position in the late 1970s and a series of events on the international front were enough to trigger the economic crisis.

The blows to the Costa Rican economy came fast and furious. First coffee prices plummeted in 1978. Then the price of oil -- the importing of which Costa Rica had long been dependent -- jumped in 1979. Also in 1979 the Nicaraguan Revolution and

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9 Cerdas Cruz, "Costa Rica," 318.
increasing conflict in El Salvador seriously disrupted commerce in the CACM and reduced regional demand for Costa Rican exports. Further, the world economic recession at the end of the 1970s led to a decreased demand for Costa Rican products in other markets. With these events the Costa Rican economy was severely strained and the flaws of an externally dependent development program were exposed.

Unfortunately, the Costa Rican government's reaction to the onset of the crisis made matters worse. In an effort to keep the economy afloat, President Rodrigo Carazo (1978-82) continued to borrow money on international markets. By this time, however, loan conditions were becoming more stringent, with shorter payment terms, higher interest rates, and increased debt service demands, all of which added to the stress on the Costa Rican economy. The government also attempted to print money to pay its debts, but since the Central Bank had no backing to support such a move, inflationary pressure increased. Moreover, the weak and inefficient government proved unable to collect taxes in some cases; in other cases, officials capitulated to elite demands and neglected to do so, causing a further shortage of revenue. Finally, in the fall of 1981, Carazo resorted to halting payments on the debt. In response, international lending institutions suspended further aid to Costa Rica. By the end of Carazo's term, the country's economy was in dire straits and Costa Ricans were suffering accordingly.

The severity of the situation in Costa Rica was evident in a variety of measures. The external debt rose from [U.S.] $880,000 in 1978 to $3.4 billion in 1982, while inflation skyrocketed from 9 to 90 percent between 1979 and 1982. In addition, unemployment tripled from 1980 to 1982, underemployment ballooned, and real incomes dropped 45 percent between 1979 and 1982. Throughout this period income distribution became increasingly skewed as the gap between rich and poor in Costa Rica widened. Telling indicators of the crisis were also seen in Costa Rica's once impressive health

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statistics: in the late 1970s and early 1980s the rates of malnutrition, infectious diseases, and infant mortality all increased and medical services and supplies were cut or in short supply.\textsuperscript{15} By 1982, then, these economic conditions and the dramatic drop in Costa Rican living standards were enough to challenge any notions of Costa Rican prosperity or development success. By all accounts, Costa Rica was experiencing a serious crisis.

\textbf{Government Attempts to Combat the Crisis: Monge and Neo-Liberalism}

President Carazo had proven unable to quell the crisis and stabilize the economy. His successor, Luis Alberto Monge, chose to approach the nation's problems in a different and more systematic manner after he took office in May 1982. As early as his inauguration, Monge was calling on all Costa Ricans to work together and to tighten their belts in an 100-day emergency period, assuring the population that the sacrifices they made were for the good of the nation. Monge also strove to foment unity among the various social and political actors in the country, and this included his negotiation with the opposition and his support for the merger of four opposition parties into one larger party (Partido Unidad Social Cristiana, or PUSC).\textsuperscript{16} In the end, Monge's manoeuvres helped pave the way for the acceptance of his anti-crisis strategy -- the so-called "bitter pill" of structural adjustment. With this strategy, Monge was to inaugurate a shift from the Welfare State to the neo-liberal era in Costa Rican economic policy, an era which lasted throughout the 1980s and persists to the present day.

Carazo had alienated financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by suspending debt payments. Monge and his successors, however, saw better relations with, and further assistance from, such organizations as the key to combating Costa Rica's economic problems. To this end Monge signed two Letters of Intent with the IMF (in 1982 and 1985) and the first Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) agreement with the World Bank (also in 1985).

The government of Oscar Arias (1986-90) continued in this vein by signing two further IMF Letters of Intent (in 1987 and 1989) and by supporting a second World Bank SAP (in 1988). The Calderón administration (1990-94) also signed IMF Letters of Intent (1991 and 1992) and a third SAP (in 1993). The terms of this latter agreement were eventually accepted by the administration of José Figueres, Jr. (1994-98); Figueres himself signed another agreement with the IMF in 1995. In addition, it was not only the IMF and the World Bank to whom Costa Rica turned for help. Beginning in 1982, the United States' Agency for International Development (AID) also became a key player in countering the crisis, tying assistance to Costa Rica's compliance with some of the above agreements.

All these agreements made economic aid for stabilizing the economy and for debt payments contingent upon the fulfilment of certain demands. Though each letter or program was slightly different, in general they included calls for decreasing the size of the State (through layoffs and through the privatization of certain State agencies) and cutting public spending (on education, social programs, and price subsidies for basic necessities). These agreements also included demands to place salary caps on public sector jobs and to increase consumption taxes and tariffs on public services (such as water and electricity). While requiring downsizing in the public sector, however, the structural adjustment programs focused on strengthening the private sector. Further, the economic structure was to be reoriented so as to decrease production for domestic consumption and to increase production (particularly of non-traditional goods such as ornamental plants and textiles) for export. Reducing or eliminating trade barriers also went along with such restructuring, as a chief aim of these programs was to push the country to become more open to and integrated in world markets. These policies, which essentially allow the market to become the dominant force in the structuring of society with as little State interference as possible, are known by the term "neo-liberal."

By some accounts -- most notably those of the international financial institutions themselves -- this neo-liberal medicine did cure Costa Rica's economic ills. And

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certainly, the infusion of such large amounts of money did help to stabilize the economy and lift it out of the crisis lows of 1981 and 1982. Shortly after this point, for example, inflation and unemployment dropped and economic growth was restored. Nonetheless, and as is especially evident when viewed from the longer-term perspective of the late 1990s, in many respects the neo-liberal economic adjustment strategies have done more far harm than good in Costa Rica.

**Side Effects of the "Bitter Pill"**

Often, the disconcerting implications of loans and SAPs come to light once one probes just a little deeper into the various politics and policies involved. Take the substantial assistance provided by the United States through AID, for example: by 1985 AID was contributing loans and outright grants to Costa Rica at the rate of $1.2 million per day. Important though this financial help may have been, it also had a clear geopolitical motivation for the United States government, which saw the strategic value of a stable Costa Rica in the land of the Panama Canal, the contra war in Nicaragua, and the civil war in El Salvador. It is also revealing that during the 1982-89 period, Costa Rica — "the country without an army" — received over $27 million in military assistance and training from the United States. Moreover, it is no coincidence that during this period various right-wing paramilitary groups (several with links to the U.S.) flourished in Costa Rica, aiding the contras to the north and persecuting leftists at home. Throughout the

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20 Rojas Bolaños, *Los años ochenta*, 16.
1980s Costa Rican dependence on the United States grew dramatically and the seamy side of U.S. charity was becoming increasingly exposed.

United States intervention and the militarization of Costa Rican society are not the only signs that Costa Rica is not the debt relief success story that the international financial institutions make it out to be. Consider, in addition, the shifts in the Costa Rican economy from the mid-1980s onward. The government has increased its support for agro-export production, largely through the reduction of export taxes and through the provision of subsidies to export industries. These benefits to the export sector have come partially at the expense of small-scale basic grain producers, many of who have been forced off their lands as a result of the government’s reduction of price subsidies for their products. This process, because it has led to a drop in production of food staples (such as corn, beans, and rice), jeopardizes the ability of Costa Ricans to feed themselves. Nonetheless, the displacement of independent farmers frees up land and labour needed for large-scale agro-export enterprises.\(^\text{22}\)

The country’s increased bias toward agro-export production, however, has not meant that the other risks associated with this type of economic activity have been eliminated. Costa Rican exports, for example, are just as vulnerable to international fluctuations in prices and demand as they have always been (the 1993 cuts in European banana quotas and their devastating effects on the Costa Rican banana industry are a case in point). Further, Costa Rican reliance on non-traditional exports is particularly unstable, largely because such production is often subsidized by foreign aid and dependent upon preferential access to U.S. markets.\(^\text{23}\) Yet, even with the drawbacks inherent in this type of export-oriented economy, Costa Rica’s pattern of dependent development is continuing apace.

Despite -- and in part because of -- this export-based pattern of agricultural production, Costa Rica still has not been able to eliminate its large trade deficit nor substantially pay down its foreign debt. For one thing, the drop in the domestic production of basic grains has meant that Costa Rica has had to import staple food

\(^{22}\) Korten, *Ajuste estructural*, 65-76.
products, such as wheat from the United States. As well, the country still must import the technology and pesticides essential to its agro-export enterprises. Moreover, in recent years the Costa Rican market has been flooded with foreign-produced luxury items for the upper classes, such as cosmetics and cars, further contributing to a skewed import-export ratio. Thus, even though the adjustment strategy of expanding exports was designed to reduce the trade deficit and to generate the foreign exchange needed to service the external debt, the commercial deficit has not been reduced and Costa Rica is actually forced to borrow more from international institutions in order to maintain imports and pay its foreign creditors. This vicious circle meant that in 1995, Costa Rica still carried over U.S. $3 billion in external debt.

Nonetheless, analysts argue that Costa Rica’s largest problem in recent years has not been its trade imbalance, nor its external debt, but rather its internal debt, the amount by which the government’s internal expenses exceed revenues. In Costa Rica, this debt is expressed as the amount of money the central government and government banks owe (mainly in the form of bonds) to internal creditors (generally public institutions). The internal debt grew steadily throughout the early 1990s (in part due to the tax breaks, subsidies, and other costs associated with the government’s promotion of the export sector) and reached an alarming 38.5% of the country’s GNP by 1995. An internal debt of this size is problematic because it leads to increasing interest rates. Not only do high interest rates drive up the cost of housing for the general population, they also discourage private investment and reduce the level of production, which in turn cause unemployment to rise. Moreover, since the government has attempted to cope with this deficit by again cutting spending in areas such as health, education, and social programs, the population once

\[23\] Korten, Ajuste estructural, 78-80.
\[24\] Korten, Ajuste estructural, 70-71 & 93-102.
\[26\] Proyecto Estado de la Nación, Estado de la nación, 95.
more suffers the consequences.\textsuperscript{27} In effect, the excessive internal debt has come to exercise a near stranglehold over Costa Rica's economy and its people. Overall, the various debt relief, structural adjustment, and deficit fighting schemes of the 1980s and 1990s have not solved Costa Rica's economic and social problems. More than 10 years after the "end" to the Costa Rican crisis, the country is now more indebted and dependent than ever before, and landlessness and poverty have increased markedly in rural areas. In addition, not only has the population witnessed the dismantling of its Welfare State in recent years, but inflation has risen significantly once again.\textsuperscript{28} In light of all this, and given that by some estimates up to 38\% of the total population now lives in a condition of poverty,\textsuperscript{29} Costa Rica can hardly be considered the democratic and prosperous paradise that some make it out to be.

\textbf{Popular Reactions to the Crisis: Disturbing the "Peace"}

While the foregoing may suggest that ordinary citizens were helpless victims of the crisis and the government's neo-liberal policies, the level and nature of popular protests during the 1980s and 1990s indicate that the matter is more complex. Costa Rica's economic problems and the various attempts to remedy them provoked strong reactions from the popular classes during this period, as some of the sectors most affected by the changing socio-economic structure began to organize and mobilize. Beginning in the 1980s, in fact, there was a dramatic surge in political activism among the urban poor, as well as among poor campesinos. Instead of simply acquiescing to the demands of the government and international financial institutions, these popular sectors played important roles in contesting the biases of the changing Costa Rican economic order. As we shall also see, the following two examples of popular reactions to the crisis further helped to reveal a deepening crisis of hegemony in Costa Rican society.

\textsuperscript{27} Proyecto Estado de la Nación, \textit{Estado de la nación}, 47-8, 86 & 106.
\textsuperscript{28} Proyecto Estado de la Nación, \textit{Estado de la nación}, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{29} Administración Figueres Olsen, \textit{Plan nacional de combate a la pobreza: Hacia una Costa Rica integrada de oportunidades} (San José, C.R.: Consejo Social, Segunda
The Electricity Rate Protests

The earliest and most noteworthy instances of popular mobilization originating in the cities were the 1983 protests against rising electricity rates. In November 1982, as a condition of a government agreement with the IMF, the public utility companies began to implement a plan to increase the cost of electricity by 92%. This was a vicious hike (especially harsh since rates had already been raised by over 70% a few months earlier) that made a basic public service unaffordable for many people. As the increase was phased in over the following months (in increments of 10% and 13%), and as more and more Costa Rica individuals and organizations were affected, people began to voice their discontent. When complaints among neighbours and individual petitions to the electric companies proved fruitless, organization at the community level began to take place. Among the first to hold meetings were residents in Hatillo 5 and Hatillo 6, two poor neighbourhoods on the outskirts of San José. Out of these meetings arose the first comités de lucha (struggle committees), local groups that would play an important role as the protest movement spread. These Hatillo committees were already in place when the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back came with the April 1983 jump of 24.25%. When the electricity bills reflecting this latest increase were distributed at the beginning of May, popular discontent erupted.

The organized protests began with a May 2 march from Hatillo to the offices of one of the electrical companies in San José. Demonstrators burned their light bills and demanded a meeting between community representatives and company officials. When the meeting resulted in no concessions from the company, the Hatillo committees set about organizing a National Coordinating Committee to facilitate the establishment of struggle committees in other regions of the country and to coordinate the efforts of the various community organizations expressing interest in the cause. In the days that followed,

Vicepresidencia de la República, 1996), 9, as cited in Proyecto Estado de la Nación, Estado de la nación, 100.
members of the existing and newly formed struggle committees began to go door to door, urging people to default on their electricity payments and collecting light bills to return to the electric companies. All over signs in windows and on placards declared, "I DON'T PAY MY ELECTRIC BILL" ("YO NO PAGO EL RECIBO DE LA LUZ"). Many people remained resolute in their protest even after the electric companies began to cut the power to the strikers' homes and workplaces.

At the same time, the government, witnessing the escalating tensions and hoping to forestall further protests and conflict, announced it was forming a commission to study the problem. The commission, however, refused to negotiate with the National Coordinating Committee, discrediting it by labelling it Communist (in fact, though there were members of the Popular Vanguard Party involved in the Committee, it was truly a cosmopolitan group, composed of representatives from many different grassroots organizations). Instead, the government began to deal with a separate committee (made up of certain union leaders and Partido Liberación Nacional [PLN] allies) that had little popular support. When the government and negotiating committee announced an agreement to lower rates to the February 1983 level and to stop cutting electrical service to the homes and business of strikers, the popular protests were temporarily dampened.

The protests were not completely extinguished, however, and by early June the companies were once again cutting the electrical service of the strikers. This move served only to reinvigorate the protests. Struggle committees began to organize teams to reconnect the power lines and "defence committees" (largely made up of housewives) to stand guard against the disconnection of power in other areas. More visibly, traffic barricades were erected in more than 40 communities and San José itself was almost completely cut off from the rest of the country by blockade. By this point the protest movement had become so intense and so widespread that the government had no choice but to negotiate with the National Coordinating Committee. In the end, the National Committee attained an impressive series of concessions from the government and utility

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companies (including the lowering of rates to their December 1982 levels, further rate concessions to schools and nutrition centres, preferential rates to small businesses, and the restoration of power to those behind in their bill payments). The struggle and sacrifices made by the members of the movement had not been in vain.

The Rural Squatter Movement

In the countryside, popular protest has been most clearly expressed in the illegal land invasions of the squatter movement (el movimiento precarista).\(^\text{31}\) This type of activism began to expand most noticeably after mid-1983, though it is still a visible facet of rural life in Costa Rica. Generally, the precarista movement has consisted of families, sometimes in groups of up to 600 people, who invade and erect makeshift shelters on uninhabited tracts of land (often the unused portions of the large fincas [farms] owned by the multinational agro-export companies). Sometimes, these people have been displaced from their own small plots of land due to agribusiness expansion; often they are the families of migrant workers who move from region to region in search of temporary employment on the banana plantations. In general, the precaristas are not allowed to stay on the land for any length of time; usually, within days or weeks the Rural Guard expels them and destroys their tents and any rudimentary infrastructure they may have set up. When thrown off they land they often return and squat again, only for the Guard to come and begin the expulsion anew.

While such land invasions are typically spontaneous actions taken out of desperation by poor families, other protests related to the precarista movement are coordinated by larger campesino organizations.\(^\text{32}\) The Federaciones Campesinas (Campesino Federations), many of which have ties to the Costa Rican union movement, have launched various publicity campaigns, legal appeals, and negotiations with the State and with farm owners in attempts to secure land ownership for the poor precaristas. When

\(^{31}\) For a detailed chronicling and analysis of the precarista movement, from which the following comments are adapted, see Sandra Cartín and Isabel Román, *Echando Raices: la lucha por la tierra en Costa Rica* (San José, C.R.: Centro de Estudios para la Acción Social, 1991; and Opazo, *Costa Rica*, 69-71.
such measures fail, however, members of these organizations have resorted to occupations of government and Church buildings, hunger strikes, protest marches, and road blockades in order to have their demands heard.

Unlike in the case of the electricity rate protests, which for the most part were peaceful and which did not incur repressive measures from the government, violence and persecution have often plagued the precarista movement. Although precarista families often try to live and tend to their gardens peacefully on the patches of land they inhabit, in other cases the squatters have been combative and have destroyed property and bridges during the land invasions. More often, however, it has been the Rural Guard's members who have exercised excessive force, using bullets and bulldozers to drive the precaristas away. Various participants in other protests of the movement have also been fired upon, forcibly evacuated, and jailed by Costa Rican security forces. Overall, and also in contrast to the eventual success achieved by the electricity rate protests, the precaristas remain on the losing end of the battle for land in Costa Rica and continue to be persecuted by State authorities.

The Crisis of Hegemony in Costa Rican Society

In theoretical terms, the economic crisis and the popular protests it engendered can be seen as indicators of a "crisis of hegemony" in Costa Rican society. For Gramsci, in most societies (other than dictatorships) the dominant class rules more by consent than force. More precisely, the dominant class is able to cultivate the active consent of the subordinate classes to its rule. By its links to ideological apparatus (schools, political parties, mass media, and churches), the ruling class inculcates in the masses the worldviews, customs, morality, and ways of thinking and acting that correspond to the needs of the productive forces in society (and hence to the interests of this dominant class). When a group attains such ideological predominance, it is said to have established hegemony.

Maintaining hegemony, though, is always a delicate balancing act. The ruling class must take into account the interests and tendencies of the subordinate groups, and make certain economic compromises on their behalf (too many compromises, however, would jeopardize the economic basis of their rule.)\textsuperscript{34} By at least appearing to represent the interests of the dominated groups, the ruling class maintains a hegemonic equilibrium. A crisis of hegemony, then, occurs when this equilibrium is destroyed.\textsuperscript{35}

This is precisely what began to happen in Costa Rica in the 1980s. Prior to this time, Costa Ricans, living in a peaceful and prosperous oasis relative to the rest of Central America, had come to accept the ideology of Costa Rican exceptionalism. The prevailing interpretation attributed the country's idiosyncrasy to its "curious colonial history" as a poor, relatively isolated, colony with few precious metals or indigenous people to exploit and, as a result, no warring social classes or despotic rulers.\textsuperscript{36} It is argued that from this situation, in the eighteenth century, the noble yeoman farmer emerged: a hardworking man of the land, struggling to subsist, yet free from domination and obligation to large landowners. From him, the traditional historians claim, arose Costa Rica's long-standing rural democracy, persistent pacifism, and characteristic respect for law and liberty. While this reading of history has been shown by more critical analysts to be wanting,\textsuperscript{37} and while changes in modern agriculture have made the yeoman a nearly extinct species, the portrayal of a democratic, pacifist, and egalitarian nation has nonetheless been proudly and widely adopted in Costa Rica.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{34} Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 161.
\textsuperscript{35} Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 184-85, 210 & 275-76.
An important buttress to the legend of the idyllic campesino lifestyle arose in connection with the development of the Benefactor State in Costa Rica from the 1940s onward. As the State grew and grew, providing more jobs, benefits, and social plans to its citizens, further proof of Costa Rica's exceptional egalitarianism and democracy was amassed. Crucially, though, this political model also played an important role in maintaining social stability. The paternalistic State, the "gran padre providente" (great provident father), as Opazo has called it, successfully minimized social conflict for a long time by preventing an extreme polarization of wealth from developing.\(^{39}\) The State responded to the material needs of the popular classes not by repression, but by creating numerous government and autonomous institutions, which succeeded in institutionalizing conflict and relieving tensions before they could build to a point threatening to the status quo.\(^{40}\) Costa Rica's agrarian reform program of the 1960s, coordinated by the Instituto de Tierras y Colonización (ITCO, the Lands and Colonization Institute) and influenced by the strategy of the U.S.'s Alliance for Progress (implementing reform from above in order to forestall revolution from below), is a prime example of this stability-creating mechanism.\(^{41}\) With many of the Costa Rica's socio-economic problems dealt with in this fashion, popular passivity predominated. Those who did attempt to protest conditions were mainly drawn into bureaucratic channels for redress, not forced to demand changes in the streets.\(^{42}\) Overall, this "social pact," orchestrated by the country's elite and gratefully accepted by the majority of citizens, persisted for many years, paying handsome dividends in the form of social order for Costa Rica.

The crisis of hegemony, then, occurred as this pact was broken by the economic crisis and the substitution of neo-liberalism for social reformism. While the economic crisis generally made life more difficult for Costa Ricans, moves such as the hike in

\(^{39}\) Opazo, *Costa Rica*, 14 & 176-78.


\(^{42}\) Opazo, *Costa Rica*, 175-78.
electricity rates were threatening to make conditions intolerable for the popular classes. Worse, the source of the hikes and other structural adjustment measures was the State — the very State that Costa Ricans had been conditioned to believe would take care of them. Not only was *el gran padre* no longer doing a good job taking care of his children, but he now appeared to be turning against them. And in contrast to what Costa Ricans had long been taught about the superiority of dialogue and negotiation as means to resolve difficulties, these tools proved ineffective when tested at the beginning of the electricity rate protests and throughout the *precarista* crisis. The worsening conditions in the countryside had the additional effect of dispelling any residual myths about *campesino* families contentedly working their own land, while the violent treatment of the squatters helped to disprove the claim that no army exists in Costa Rica.\(^{43}\) Prosperity, pacifism, and democracy had long been touted as the hallmarks of the Costa Rican character, and were supposedly expressed writ large in the Benefactor State, but the economic hardships, neoliberal policies, and conflicts involving the popular classes during the 1980s proved the predominant assessment to be false. Costa Rica’s image was, unfortunately, too good to be true.

**Conclusion**

During the crisis of the 1980s, the dominant order in Costa Rica was threatened by the government’s own economic vulnerabilities, a serious decrease in its credibility, and the corresponding increase in popular discontent and protest. Having lost hegemonic consensus, Costa Rican leaders were at a crossroads: they could move toward rule by coercive force alone (in Gramscian terms, the sign of a full-blown crisis of hegemony),\(^{44}\) or they could shore up the ideological bases of their dominance. Although there was an increase in State violence at the time, Costa Rica clearly did not evolve into a dictatorship. Instead, leaders were to turn anew to the ideological institutions of civil society, including

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\(^{43}\) In fact, as has been recently publicized, Costa Rica’s armed "guardia de seguridad" [security guard] totals more than 40,000 troops. "Honduras critica 'militarismo' costarricense," *La Nación*, 7 October 1996, 24A.

\(^{44}\) Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 275-76.
the Roman Catholic Church, for support. As we shall see in Chapter Five, the discourse provided by the official Costa Rican Church during this time of crisis was to prove valuable in the ruling class's attempt to maintain its dominance. Examining the Costa Rican bishops' general analysis of reality and their specific pastoral obrera will reveal the extent to which the official Church's symbolic production coincided with the needs of a government under duress.

In many respects, the official Church's support for the threatened State is not surprising. As we shall also see, since the Church and its privileges are so closely linked to the established order, when the latter is threatened so is the former. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the entire Church rallied behind the government in crisis. In fact, it was only during this time of crisis that an alternate, counterhegemonic form of religious production could fully develop in Costa Rica. The economic hardships and overt conflicts in society opened up spaces for certain religious actors to challenge the status quo. As we shall see in Chapter Six, the increasing poverty and popular struggles in Costa Rica gave groups such as CECODERS a reason to operate; at the same time, these conditions also inspired and legitimated CECODERS' alternate interpretations of reality and its distinctly liberationist pastoral obrera. The case studies of the Costa Rican bishops and CECODERS will demonstrate that the manner in which Church leaders experience and evaluate the Costa Rican crisis is one of the keys to understanding the pastoral obrera that they promote.

Of course, given the focus of this thesis, another salient feature of the Costa Rican historical reality is the state of the labour movement in the country during the period under investigation; hence, it is to a discussion of this topic that I turn next.
Chapter Three
The State of the Unions in the Face of the Crisis

A strike is a strike from a political perspective, but not from a juridical-legal perspective — Costa Rican Labour Minister Farid Ayales, in a 1995 interview with La República

But the spirit of the laws is one thing and reality is another — Elisa Donato M. and Manuel Rojas B., Sindicatos, política y economía, 1972-1986

The economic crisis did not come at the best of times for the Costa Rican union movement. Having peaked in influence, organization, and activity during the first half of this century, the movement entered into a period of decline in the 1950s and 1960s, experienced a slight resurgence (mainly in the banana sectors) in the 1970s, and had begun to lose ground again by the onset of the crisis in the late 1970s.¹ In addition, according to almost all accounts the union movement could be best characterized as "weak" or "passive" as it faced the crisis and its aftermath throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. Analysts point out that during this period not only did the overall level of unionization among workers remain relatively low and stagnant,² but that the union movement as a


² Union involvement has generally remained below 18% of the workforce, with levels as low as 15% as recently as 1993. Aguilar and Ramírez, "Crisis económica," 57; and Rodrigo Aguilar Arce, Actualidad del movimiento sindical en Costa Rica (San José, C.R.: Fundación Friedrich Ebert, 1993), 15.
whole was unable to respond effectively enough to derail the privatization process and the other programs of the government's neo-liberal agenda.³

However, and despite the very real and serious problems experienced by the Costa Rican labour movement in recent decades, union activism has not completely disappeared from the political landscape. In the 1980s and particularly the 1990s, new forms of union protest and collaboration have also arisen in Costa Rica. In fact, there is ample evidence to suggest that workers' organizations have not taken the economic crisis and the government's neo-liberal remedies for it lying down. In this chapter, I discuss both the problems and the promise of the Costa Rican labour movement after 1979, and thus provide more of the historical context needed in order for us to understand Costa Rican Church leaders' varied approaches to workers and the issues affecting them.

**The Costa Rican Labour Movement: Problems**

*Internal Weaknesses*

One of the most commonly cited causes of the relative impotence of the unions during the past two decades has been the "atomization" (excessive fragmentation) within the labour movement itself. This phenomenon is most noticeable in the public sector, where the workers of even a single institution may find themselves split among a dozen or more unions (the CCSS, the Costa Rican Social Security Bureau, for example, contained 36 different unions in 1997).⁴ New unions continually appear, often as groups within existing unions attempt to break away and form their own organizations. Sometimes these new unions fail and vanish, but more often they remain as small units unto themselves (in 1993, 45% of unions recorded less than 50 registered members, while 24% had between 50 and 99 members).⁵ As well, because a substantial proportion of unions in Costa Rica have elected not to affiliate themselves with one of the existing union federations or

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confederations (the latter are also known as "union centrals"), the isolation and lack of coordination among many of these small, independent unions is even more pronounced.6

The fragmentation of the labour movement can be attributed to a number of factors. These include: ideological dogmatism or sectarianism; elitism (in evidence when groups of engineers, for example, refuse to affiliate with groups of bus drivers or other manual labourers); and gremialismo (or a "guild mentality," in which workers associate only with other workers in the same, very narrowly defined, trade).7 Regardless of the exact cause(s) responsible for atomization, however, this division in the movement has had harmful effects on Costa Rican workers. On the one hand, many of the unions are too small and have too few resources to be able to muster up significant bargaining power vis-à-vis employers. This is particularly serious during a period when social and economic conditions indicate that workers can least afford to be losing ground as far as wages, job stability, and the like are concerned. More generally, atomization has reduced the level of influence of the union movement as a whole, with dispersion and infighting among unions hindering them from forming a united front able to contest the government's neo-liberal policies and the changes in working conditions such policies imply.

*External Factors*

While atomization is a problem internal to the labour movement, there have also been a variety of influences from outside the movement that have eroded the power of Costa Rican unions over the past two decades. Some have observed, for example, that the 1982 division within the Partido Vanguardia Popular (i.e. the Costa Rican communist party), the crisis and/or disappearance of other leftist forces in Costa Rica, and the disintegration of the world socialist system have all taken their toll on the militancy of the Costa Rican union movement.8 Others note that the dramatic downsizing of the public sector in Costa Rica has also affected labour's power. Since the public sector has been the

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7 Aguilar, interview by author.
8 de la Cruz, "Características y rasgos históricos," 32.
most heavily unionized in Costa Rica, the government’s various structural adjustment and privatization schemes — which have resulted in the loss of thousands of public sector jobs in the 1990s alone — have struck at the heart of union influence. Simply put, as more workers are drained from the State and its institutions, more power is drained from the unions.

Aside from the general political climate and the decreasing size of the State in Costa Rica, other factors related to the weakness of the labour movement can be pinpointed. In the last 25 years, for example, a form of labour organization known as solidarismo has grown dramatically in the country — largely at the expense of sindicalismo (unionism). Founded in Costa Rica in 1947 by Alberto Martén, the solidarity movement emphasizes the common interests and cooperation of labour and capital. Under solidarismo, owners and workers of a given company contribute equal amounts (usually 5% of a worker’s salary) to a savings fund. This fund, administered by the company’s "solidarity association" (composed of both management and workers), is used to finance health care, housing, and education for workers, as well as to provide recreational opportunities and commercial services (such as a store or cafetería) for them. Consistent with the ideology of collaboration, workers of solidarity associations also renounce their right to strike. Further, under solidarismo collective agreements negotiated by unions are replaced with arreglos directos (direct agreements) arrived at by workers’ committees (of no more than three people in size) in consultation with company owners or their representatives. Since solidarismo has proven to be a cost-effective way to cope with workers’ demands and to reduce labour strife, it is hardly surprising that owners have

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10 Martén was an influential Costa Rican lawyer and politician who served for a brief period as Minister of Finance in the Figueres junta following the 1948 civil war. For a more detailed analysis of Martén’s thought and of the creation of the solidarity movement, see Gustavo Blanco and Orlando Navarro, El solidarismo: Pensamiento y dinámica social de un movimiento obrero patronal (San José, C.R.: Editorial Costa Rica, 1984), 25-58.
been among the strongest supporters of the solidarity movement and have basically bankrolled its spread.

While a more detailed analysis of the solidarity movement and its ideology (and their close links to Costa Rica's business class and the Church's Escuela Social Juan XXIII) will be provided in Chapter Eight, at this point we can briefly examine the relationship between solidarismo and the weakness of the union movement in Costa Rica. In the first place, we can note that while over the past two decades the level of unionization has remained relatively stagnant in Costa Rica, the number of solidarity associations in Costa Rica has been rising steadily. Before 1972, there were only 30 solidarity associations in Costa Rica; in 1996, over 1,800 existed.\textsuperscript{11} Much of the growth of solidarismo has occurred on the transnational banana company plantations, particularly those in the Limón region on the Atlantic Coast. There, solidarity associations have largely supplanted the once powerful unions. Today, solidarismo is reported to be the most common form of labour organization in the country, with more than 15\% of private sector workers and 7\% of public sector employees affiliated with the solidarity movement.\textsuperscript{12} Insofar as there is competition between the solidarity movement and the union movement for the allegiance of Costa Rican workers, the solidaristas appear to be winning the battle.

The question, however, is whether there is some sort of causal relationship between the growth of solidarismo and the decline of sindicalismo in Costa Rica. On the one hand, as we have seen, several variables aside from solidarismo have contributed to the weakness of the union movement in Costa Rica. On the other hand, certain solidaristas are doing far more than merely taking advantage of the fallout from a weak and divided labour movement. In fact, ample evidence indicates that solidaristas have used propaganda, pressure, and outright persecution against unionists in order to increase membership in the solidarity movement. In this way, as a coalition of Costa Rican union confederations has argued, "solidarismo and the violation of union freedom in Costa Rica

turn out to be two intimately linked phenomena. Like Siamese twins, the violation of the right to free unionization is the *sine qua non* of the rise and development of *solidarismo* in Costa Rica.  

Dubious and coercive *solidarista* recruiting tactics and the blatant infringement of union liberties are particularly well documented in relation to the banana plantations of Limón. In scaremongering speeches, pamphlets, and posters, unions are vehemently condemned as corrupt, violent, and communist -- qualities said to be at odds with the peace-loving and democratic Costa Rican character. In addition, workers are pressured to join solidarity associations either as a condition of employment on plantations or in order to ensure continued employment or benefits. Those workers refusing to renounce their union affiliation or those who otherwise criticize or doubt the solidarity movement risk ending up on the infamous "listas negras" (blacklists) maintained by the banana companies and *solidarista* promoters. People whose names are included on such lists are harassed and frequently fired, only to find themselves discriminated against when they apply for other jobs in the region. Such sordid tactics have obvious and negative repercussions for the strength of the labour movement in the country.

It is important to note, moreover, that the Costa Rican government has been unable and, it appears, unwilling to protect unionists from this type of persecution. Granted, Article 60 of the Costa Rican Constitution and Articles 363-370 of the Labour Code clearly imply that in Costa Rica union liberties are protected by law: workers in Costa Rica have the right to free unionization and the freedom to form and join trade unions without discrimination. However, the government has been unable or unwilling to enforce these provisions. The Costa Rican government has been complicit in the violation of union liberties and has failed to protect unionists from this type of persecution.

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Rica have the right to organize and join unions. In fact, even the Ley de Asociaciones Solidaristas (the 1984 legislation that gave juridical sanction to solidarismo) states that any form of activity by solidarity associations or their representatives that hinders the formation or function of union organizations is "absolutely prohibited." Nonetheless, the government has done little, if anything, to censure representatives of the solidarity movement for their obvious disregard of such legislation, even when the State has been pressured to act on this matter by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) itself. Without the appropriate enforcement, the laws intended to safeguard union liberties in Costa Rica exist on paper only.

There are also other instances, quite apart from those related to the solidarity movement and its actions, in which Costa Rican legislation and its application appear to have an anti-union bias. Most relevant here are the provisions regarding workers' right to strike. On the one hand, the right to strike — for all except those employed in public services — is guaranteed by Article 61 of the Costa Rican Constitution. On the other hand, between 1969 and 1996 all but three strikes in Costa Rica were declared illegal. What is going on here? The mere fact that almost all strikes are illegal suggests that the right to strike is more an illusion than a reality in Costa Rica; examining some of the specific requirements for a legal strike reveals the extent to which Costa Rican law hinders the ability of unions to mobilize their workers.

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15 For more details on the companies' tracking of problematic employees, see Philippe Bourgois, Banano, etnia y lucha social en Centro América (San José, C.R.: DEI, 1994), 40.
19 Constitución Política de la República de Costa Rica, 15.
20 de la Cruz, "Características y rasgos históricos," 33.
First, we must examine the definition of "public services" in the constitutional clause cited above. As might be expected, strikes in certain essential public service settings, such as health care clinics or hospitals, are disallowed. But, as Article 376 of the Labour Code reveals, public service workers also include employees of the State and its institutions, and workers in agriculture (including, of course, banana workers), transportation, and the stevedore industry.21 When this broad definition of "public services" is taken into account, relatively few Costa Rican workers actually have the right to strike.

In effect, only the workers in certain private enterprises can strike legally. Even in these cases, however, the chances of a strike being declared legal are extremely slim. For one thing, at least 60% of the workers must support the strike in order for it to be declared legal. This does not seem an overly stringent requirement in itself -- until one considers that in Costa Rica the workers in favour of such labour action must sign their names on a list to be registered with the labour tribunals. Because this type of public declaration of support for union actions will often lead to a worker being fired by his or her employer, it is not surprising that it is almost impossible to collect the necessary number of signatures from workers.22 Additionally, a strike will only be classified as legal once all other avenues (i.e. conciliation) for settling the differences between employer and employees have been exhausted. Again, this does not appear too unreasonable, except for the fact that under Costa Rican law the conciliation process can last up to 45 days. During this phase the employer often stalls (conciliation in Costa Rica very rarely ends in a resolution of labour disputes), intimidates workers, and otherwise interferes with the momentum of the pro-strike agitators -- so much so that unions can rarely afford to wait the legally prescribed amount of time to declare a work stoppage.23 Overall, then, because such requisites are built into Costa Rican labour law, it is easy to see why so few strikes in Costa Rica are legal. In the end, moreover, this anti-union character of the Costa Rican

21 República de Costa Rica, Código de trabajo, 151-52.
22 Laura Martínez, "Solo 22 huelgas legales en los últimos 50 años," La Nación 15 October 1993, 4A.
23 Martínez, "Solo 22 huelgas legales," 4A.
legal system constitutes yet another blow to the strength of individual unions and to the overall labour movement in Costa Rica.

**The Costa Rican Labour Movement: Promise**

In light of all this, one may question whether there have been any signs of hope for Costa Rican unions over the years since the crisis began; one may also wonder whether the labour movement is doomed to still further difficulties as neo-liberal policies become even more entrenched in Costa Rica late in the century. In fact, and despite the serious problems and persecutions discussed above, there have been some encouraging developments for the country’s unionists over the 1980s and 1990s.

Despite the considerable legal bias against unions and strikes, for example, workers in Costa Rica have continued to use strikes as a means to place pressure on their employers and the State. Interestingly, some of the most pronounced strike activity occurred during the thick of the economic crisis in 1980. In that year alone, workers waged 63 strikes in Costa Rica (while from 1972 to 1979 there were only 110 strikes in total).\(^{24}\) Most of the 1980 strikes were in the agriculture sector and the most significant of these was the banana strike in Golfito of the Zona Sur (many of the other strikes of this year were waged in solidarity with the workers of this region). Other important banana strikes occurred in 1982 (in Limón) and 1984 (again in the Zona Sur), but by the mid-1980s the agricultural sector had ceased to be the focal point of union activity.

In the late 1980s, strikes among government employees, teachers, and among non-agricultural labourers in the Limón region became more frequent. Noteworthy among these were the August 1989 general strike in Limón, the July and August 1993 strikes among government workers, educators, and Limonense labourers (with a total participation of approximately 97,000 workers),\(^{25}\) and the strikes that sprung up around the massive July 1995 teachers’ strike. Though these and some of the other strikes during this period often included specific demands for better wages and benefits (teachers, for


example, have struck for salary increases and against proposed changes to their pension plan), they were more generally aimed at protesting the government's programs of privatization and structural adjustment, and at contesting the layoffs, decimated social programs, and rising cost of living to which such programs led. In spite of the various woes of the union movement during this time, workers still attempted to register their dissatisfaction by stopping work and taking to the streets.

Aside from the fact that labour activism has persisted throughout the 1980s and 1990s despite the obstacles provided by the law and solidarismo, it is also crucial to comment on the changed nature of this activism in the past fifteen years. The shift in the locus of union activity from the private to the public sector and, to a certain extent, from manual labourers (such as bananeros) to professionals (such as teachers and government bureaucrats), indicates the beginnings of a deeper ideological and political realignment in Costa Rican society. In earlier times and in the context of a burgeoning Benefactor State, professionals in the public sector could count on a relatively stable and comfortable existence in Costa Rica. The government, for its part, could count on these professionals to reinforce its rule through their compliance, silence, and, especially in the case of teachers, through their transmittal of the predominant ideological biases in Costa Rican society. In fact, although strikes in the public sector (among doctors, for example) were not unknown, overall they were infrequent and of short duration. During this period, then, such public sector professionals acted in the manner of Gramsci's organic intellectuals as they helped to legitimate the hegemonic rule of the dominant class.26

Even when the economic crisis hit Costa Rica in the early 1980s, these professionals remained relatively complacent. It was only when the socio-economic repercussions of the neo-liberal solutions to the crisis were revealed in the late 1980s that discontent in the professional classes began to show. At that point, even though the government declared the crisis to be over and economic indicators had rebounded, these professionals did not witness any attendant increase in their standards of living. Instead, opposite to what they may have expected, but similar to many other Costa Ricans at that

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26 See Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, 3-14.
time, they began to feel the pinch of structural adjustment. With government downsizing and privatization schemes further threatening their very jobs, these professionals had little motivation to continue legitimating the government's rule with their passivity. Disaffected with neo-liberal policies and detached from their traditional functions in the State, these public sector professionals began to protest against the government in unprecedented numbers. While with these protests the government was losing an essential source of ideological support at a time when its controversial policies most needed confirmation, the union movement began to gain some much needed and high profile momentum in the public sector.

Importantly, moreover, while such public service strikes were still classified as illegal, after 1993 the individual instigators of and participants in such actions could no longer be punished with jail terms. Once the Legislative Assembly voted to repeal Articles 333 and 334 of the Penal Code in June of 1993 (albeit after a seven year delay), participation in strikes was effectively "de-penalized." Though this may appear small consolation in light of the otherwise anti-union bias of the Costa Rican legal system, such de-penalization does provide some measure of protection for union leaders and members and constitutes an encouraging advance for the labour movement.

Unionists can also be heartened by the cases of collaboration and coalition building within the labour movement, phenomena that have helped to offset the process of atomization discussed above. In 1986, for example, six major union centrals in the country joined together under the name Consejo Permanente de los Trabajadores (CPT, or the Permanent Workers' Council). Though the individual confederations within the CPT still remain, the CPT as an umbrella organization has proved an important protagonist in the strikes and protests against privatization and structural adjustment.28

While the CPT is an instance of coordination across various labour sectors, other smaller coalitions of note have been formed within individual sectors, such as the Consejo Intermagisterial Asociado (CIMA, or the Associated Inter-Magisterial Council, an

27 William Mendez, "Despenalizan participación en huelgas," La Nación, 16 June 1993, 6A.
28 de la Cruz, "Características y rasgos históricos," 32-33.
organization for the country's teachers) and the Frente de Organizaciones Laborales del Sector Agropecuario (FOLSA, or the Front of Labour Organizations of the Agricultural Sector). Interestingly (and as will be discussed further in Chapter Six), one of these sectoral organizations, the Frente de Organizaciones Sindicales del Sector Salud (FOSSS, or the Front of Health Sector Union Organizations) has worked extensively with the Church organization CECODERS in protesting the proposed reform and privatization of the health care system in Costa Rica. Such collaboration among unions compensates for some of the effects of fragmentation in the labour movement and helps to provide workers with a stronger voice in the face of the government's neo-liberal agenda.

On a different level, some union leaders have recently begun to participate in the development of a new political party in Costa Rica, the Partido Rescate Nacional (PRN, or the National Recovery Party). These sindicalistas recognize that strikes and other labour actions can only go so far in challenging the government's anti-union bias, and argue that the best way to protect and promote the interests of workers is to seek direct representation in the country's Legislative Assembly. Strictly speaking, the proposed PRN will not be a party of unionists but rather an alternative coalition drawn from various sectors of civil society. However, by developing a formal political presence in Costa Rica, union leaders hope to shape government policy from the outset, as opposed to merely protesting its implications after the fact. Though to date the PRN has not yet received official recognition from the Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones, the very efforts of sindicalistas to employ broad political means to confront the problems facing workers is another indication that the Costa Rican union movement is by no means in complete decline.

**Limón en Lucha: A Sign of Things to Come?**

The 1996 "Limón en Lucha" ("Limón in Struggle") protest movement deserves special mention at this juncture for a number of reasons. This movement is noteworthy because it illustrates some of the recent developments in the Costa Rican labour movement discussed above; in addition, it further confirms some of the points I made in the last

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29 Aguilar, interview by author.
chapter regarding Costa Rica as being a more conflict-ridden nation than is commonly assumed. The Limón en Lucha movement is also significant because, and as I shall elaborate upon in Chapter Nine, it involved the considerable participation of several pastoral agents of the Catholic Church in Limón. Finally, Limón en Lucha is important quite simply because it was the most impressive, widely-based and, in certain respects, effective union-led protest movement to occur in Costa Rica in recent decades.

Limón en Lucha was a coalition built in May 1996 and based largely in Puerto Limón (the capital city of Limón province, the poorest region in Costa Rica). Unions and their leaders formed the heart of the coalition and its coordinating committee. Key roles in the alliance were played by union representatives from (among others) the stevedore industry, the main hospital in Limón (Hospital Tony Facio) and the medical sciences profession more generally, the municipality of Limón, and the University of Costa Rica. The 57-member coalition also incorporated various community associations, women's organizations, and campesino organizations, as well as certain representatives from the Catholic Church and several Protestant churches in Limón (most notably the Baptist and Adventist churches, and the Salvation Army).\(^\text{30}\) Importantly, then, not only was Limón en Lucha an example of coalition building within the union movement, it was also was an instance of labour's collaboration with various popular sectors under a common banner.

Once formed, the leaders of Limón en Lucha began pressuring the Costa Rican government on a number of fronts.\(^\text{31}\) They demanded, for instance, that dockworkers be guaranteed a fixed minimum wage and workday length, and that measures be taken to ease the hardships faced by unemployed workers in the stevedore industry. Further, the Limón en Lucha committee called for a halt to government plans to amend the Constitution in order to allow for the privatization of the country's ports, airports, and railway system. In


addition, the movement's members sought a variety of improvements in housing, education, public health care, sanitation, and infrastructure, all aimed at redressing the long-standing conditions of poverty in the country's most disadvantaged region. Overall, therefore, and despite the heavy labour representation in the movement, Limón en Lucha was not just a struggle for better wages or working conditions. It was, instead, "de todo y para todos" (from all and for all): a broadly based movement protesting injustice and government policy in the region and seeking a better quality of life for all Limonenses.

The leaders of Limón en Lucha began by petitioning the central government to fulfil the above demands and, when they received unsatisfactory responses, turned to other pressure tactics in mid-August. The coordinating committee first called for the paralyzing of the Moin and Alemán docks (two of Costa Rica's key commercial ports on the Atlantic); soon strike activity spread to other sectors as commercial establishments closed their doors and workers at Hospital Tony Facio scaled back services. Road blocks and protest marches were also employed and these further disrupted traffic and commerce in the region. From the outset there was a considerable police presence in the area and gunfire and tear gas were used to quash the rioting that broke out on several occasions (at least one death and hundreds of injuries were reported). For a two-week period the Limón en Lucha protests captured the attention of the nation and the headlines of the media -- Costa Ricans were reminded yet again that theirs was not a country immune to violence.

Finally, in early September, after discussions had been repeatedly launched and broken off, government representatives and the Limón en Lucha negotiating committee settled on over 200 points of agreement. The members of Limón en Lucha had succeeded in voicing their demands and in bringing the government to the table. And while the

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33 José David Guevara, "Brote de violencia en Limón," La Nación, 16 August 1996, 4A; and Angela Orozco, "Limón es un infierno," La República, 28 August 1996, 4A.
longer term efficacy of the protests and negotiations remains unclear,\(^3^4\) the union movement in Limón, in an alliance with the popular sectors of the region, had shown a vitality and unity of purpose not expected by observers preoccupied with tales of labour's fragmentation and decline.

**Conclusion**

It is difficult to describe the status of the Costa Rican labour movement from 1979 onward in a straightforward manner. Certainly, serious problems have plagued the unions and have hampered their ability and freedom to act in the interests of workers. Yet, for every charge of atomization, there is a countervailing example of collaboration, for every lament about union passivity, a protest proves the contrary. The past two decades have been ones of mixed fortunes for the union movement in Costa Rica; there is no reason to be surprised that the overall condition of the labour movement defies clear categorization.

Still, some general observations can be made about recent changes in the tenor of union activity and their significance. If the popular protests described in the last chapter represented the first signs of a crisis of hegemony in Costa Rica, the phenomena treated in this chapter reveal that this crisis is deepening. Specifically, the ignition of union activism among the professional classes indicates that a larger segment of Costa Rican society is opting to contest the rule of the dominant classes. These recently mobilized professionals, who are not only articulating workplace- or industry-specific concerns, but who are also protesting the broader economic and political policies upon which the neo-liberal government rests, now challenge the very order they once helped to legitimate. Importantly, since these intellectuals have become unmoored from their traditional ideological function in favour of the State, there is the potential for

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\(^3^4\) By February 1997 the government was claiming that it had fulfilled approximately 77% of the commitments it had made, while Limón en Lucha leaders were accusing the government of misrepresentation and charging that much had remained unchanged in the region. Marco Leandro, "Gobierno asegura que ya cumplió con Limón," *El Diario Extra*, 15 February 1997, 2; and Angela Orozco, "Tambores de guerra en Limón," *La República*, 15 February 1997, 5A.
them to be converted into organic intellectuals of the subordinate classes. Such intellectuals, as they recognize the true bases of power and inequality in society, come to speak not only for themselves, but also for others who traditionally have been denied a voice in the institutional framework of civil society. In the Gramscian framework, they are an essential component in the counterhegemonic struggle.

To a certain extent this conversion is already happening, as witnessed, for example, in the participation of public sector unionists alongside popular organization members in the Limón en Lucha struggles. Many of the Costa Rican teachers on strike -- insofar as they move beyond demands for better wages and pensions to defend all those affected by the biases of neo-liberalism -- can also be seen as nascent organic intellectuals of the dominated classes. Such struggles represent important steps in the building of an alternate hegemony, and can function as the crucibles within which additional uncommitted or "unattached" intellectuals can join the cause of the oppressed.

Perhaps just as significantly, these more heterogeneous protests hold promise for the Costa Rican labour movement as a whole. Whereas earlier, more narrowly-based and sector-specific strikes (such as those on banana plantations) were justified, their long-term efficacy was severely limited in a context of anti-union legislation and the rise of solidarismo. A more broadly-based movement, such as Limón en Lucha, is less vulnerable to persecution and, if successful, will manage to address both detestable working conditions and the political/economic models that ultimately give rise to and sustain them. Moreover, though to date unionists in Costa Rica have been unable to derail the solidarismo phenomenon directly, their continued support for and participation in anti-government protests will indirectly challenge the ideological underpinnings of the solidarity movement. Since solidarismo (like the government) depends on people's willingness to value consensus and collaboration in society regardless of existing injustice and inequity, any visible and repeated contradiction of these values -- such as occurs with widespread and high profile protests I have mentioned in this chapter -- will eventually help to erode the solidarity movement's credibility. As many unionists have come to acknowledge themselves with their attempt to create an alternate political party in Costa
Rica, the struggle for workers' rights must take place on various ideological, political, and economic levels.

In the end, it is obvious that opinions differ in Costa Rican society about whether and how and when workers should be allowed to unionize and to express their grievances in protests and strikes. Crucially, and as I will describe in the latter half of this thesis, some of these same differences of opinion are reflected within the Costa Rican Catholic Church. Church leaders and pastoral agents struggle, for example, over whether *sindicalismo* or *solidarismo* best represents the interests of workers. Or they work to define through their words -- and confirm by their actions -- whether the use of strikes is legitimate. In such efforts, however, Church agents not only observe and are influenced by the socio-historical context around them, they also look to the Church magisterium for inspiration and guidance on the matter. Hence the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) tradition, which contains ample material related to the condition and the rights of workers, is yet another phenomenon that needs to be examined before we can understand the types of *pastoral obrera* that have been developed in Costa Rica. As such, I move to discuss relevant aspects of CST in the following chapter.
Chapter Four

Official Catholic Teaching on Workers' Issues

Human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question
— Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*

Since Leo XIII issued his famous encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("On the Condition of Labour")\(^1\) over one hundred years ago, the theme of work has figured prominently in the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) tradition.\(^2\) While CST documents have routinely condemned the overly harsh or unjust conditions to which workers are often subjected, work in itself has always been ascribed a positive value by the magisterium. At a most basic level, work is said to be a duty and a right,\(^3\) the means by which an individual sustains life and contributes to his or her family, community, and nation.\(^4\) According to CST, there is dignity and honour in work,\(^5\) labour being the means through which one realizes, maintains, and develops one's humanity.\(^6\) Yet work also has theological

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2 In this thesis, I have elected to use the term "Catholic Social Teaching," as opposed to "Catholic Social Doctrine" or "Catholic Social Thought." Catholic Social Teaching refers, literally, to the documents issued by the bearers of the Church's ecclesial magisterium (i.e. the Church's teaching authority) -- the pope and bishops. Catholic Social Doctrine is often considered to be an outdated phrase with dogmatic overtones; Catholic Social Thought is a relatively loose term that refers to texts issued by the Church hierarchy and by other Catholic theologians.


6 Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," nos. 6 and 16.
significance: it is through work that humans can participate in the activity of the Creator;\textsuperscript{7} it is through toil that the worker can share, in some small way, in the cross of Christ.\textsuperscript{8} In fact, as Pope John Paul II reminds his readers in Laborem Exercens, Jesus Christ himself was a workingman, and Christ looks upon human work with love, appreciation, and respect.\textsuperscript{9}

In light of the discussion in this thesis, however, more relevant in CST is the treatment of workers' rights, not the issue or definition of work per se. As I outlined in the previous chapter, the rights of workers to strike and to form unions have been contested in Costa Rica over the years, regardless of the juridical protection such liberties appear to be given. For their part, Church leaders in Costa Rica have turned to the CST tradition for inspiration and legitimation as they minister to workers and attempt to clarify their rights. Interestingly, though, and as we shall see, often the very same Church documents are used to justify opposing pastoral positions on labour in Costa Rica. A first step in discovering why this is the case is to uncover precisely what the magisterium does teach in regard to workers' rights. Thus, in this chapter I will begin with a critical discussion of the official Church's positions on unions and strikes over the years.

However, a simple chronology of Church teaching on workers' rights is not enough. The "condition of labour" in society is dependent upon far more than simply the right to association or to strike. The characteristics of the overall social structure, the available mechanisms for remedying social injustice, the role of the lower classes in social change -- these are just some of the factors that will also have implications for workers and their well-being in any given society. Since the CST tradition has in fact concerned itself with such issues in the past century, I will also consider the Church's broader social justice perspectives as part of my analysis. As we shall see, two patterns in Church history, the liberationist and conservative, can be delineated.

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\textsuperscript{7} Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium et Spes," nos. 34 and 67; Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," no. 25.
\textsuperscript{8} Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," no. 27.
Crucially, moreover, and in contrast to commonly held assumptions, the conservative and liberationist models do not correspond neatly to the pre- and post-conciliar periods respectively. Hence, I will conclude this chapter with an inventory of select themes in CST documents from the conciliar era and beyond, with the intent of showing that conservative concepts and perspectives are not found exclusively in the pre-conciliar social teachings. This revised understanding of CST will then become an important point of reference as I turn to examine the Costa Rican Church and its organizations in the following chapters.

**Strikes and Unions in Catholic Social Teaching**

In this section, I discuss CST as it appears in two sets of documents: 1) statements from the Vatican (documents issued by individual popes and by the conciliar fathers at the Vatican II), and 2) conference documents issued by the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM, the Latin American Episcopal Council).

**Vatican Statements**

In 1891, Leo XIII issued the first encyclical that dealt extensively with workers' issues in modern society. A startling Church pronouncement for its time, *Rerum Novarum* was a strong and unprecedented papal critique of the miserable condition of workers under industrial capitalism. While also warning against the dangers of socialism (to which he feared the Church was losing the lower classes), the Pope in this encyclical eloquently promotes workers' rights, such as the right to a just wage and to regulated hours of labour. In addition, Pope Leo touches on the issue of strikes and on the workers' right to form "associations." Significantly, however, his message on these latter two themes is rather ambiguous and would probably prove disappointing to the present-day unionist.

On the matter of strikes, as Donal Dorr notes, Leo emphasizes what makes a strike wrong, as opposed to what would justify one. The Pope states, for example, that a strike is a "grave inconvenience" that hurts trade and the public interest, and that
frequently leads to violence. Though the Pope acknowledges that the grievances leading to a strike (such as overwork or insufficient wages) may be legitimate, he places the onus on the State to enact the appropriate laws ahead of time so that such labour conflicts do not arise. Workers, for their part, are "never to injure capital, nor to outrage the person of an employer; never to employ violence in representing [their] own cause, nor to engage in riot or disorder . . . ." While strikes are not mentioned by name at this point, this passage certainly implies that strikes with such characteristics should be disallowed. In fact, since Leo's overriding concern in Rerum Novarum is with the maintenance of harmony and order in society (a theme I will treat at length below), strikes -- insofar as they disrupt social stability -- appear to be frowned upon. In the end, nonetheless, since strikes in themselves are never explicitly condemned in the document, Leo's exact position on the issue (what of more tranquil work stoppages, for instance?) remains unclear.

The Pope's stance on the right of workers to unionize is also ambiguous. On the one hand, he lauds "workmen's associations" as the most important of all social assistance organizations and states that it is a natural right of citizens to form associations. Leo further points to the potential importance of such organizations in helping members resolve disputes with their "masters," in arranging for a continuous supply of work, and in creating a contingency fund to help sick, injured, or elderly members. Still, nowhere in the encyclical is it entirely clear that it is in fact trade unions (understood as organizations restricted to wage workers only) to which Leo is referring. As several scholars have pointed out, the terminology used in this section of the encyclical is vague and inconsistent, with the use of various terms (in the original Latin, associationes, collegia, sodalitia, sodalitates, societates, and communitates are all used) leaving it uncertain as to whether the Pope is discussing mixed groups of workers and employers, or groups of

12 Pope Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," no. 16.
14 Pope Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," no. 43.
labourers alone. Moreover, Leo warns against associations based on un-Christian principles, and, true to his emphasis on harmony and order in society, does not in the slightest encourage such "workmen's associations" to undertake resolute or militant action to further the workers' cause. Thus, those who look to Rerum Novarum for the unconditional support of unions and their activities will likely be disappointed.

After Rerum Novarum, the next major document in the CST tradition was Pius XI's Quadragesimo Anno ("After Forty Years" or, as it is sometimes referred to, "On the Social Order"). Issued in 1931 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Leo's influential encyclical, Quadragesimo Anno sought to reaffirm and update the principles laid out in Rerum Novarum, and to encourage a Christian reconstruction of society beginning with the renovation of morals. Clarifying Leo's teaching on workers' associations, in this document Pope Pius comes out strongly in favour of trade unions. He leaves no question that the Church supports the formation of associations restricted to workers only, and he stresses the importance of such unions in protecting the rights and interests of the working classes. Nonetheless, Pope Pius also promotes a corporatist model of social organization based upon occupational/vocational "groups." He saw such groups, composed of both employers and employees, as essential in promoting harmony among the various "ranks" in society. Finally, Pius is brief and indirect on the matter of strikes. He does, however, appear to uphold the prohibition of strikes made by his immediate predecessors.

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16 Pope Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," nos. 40 and 44.
17 Pope Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," nos. 30-36.
19 Pope Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," nos. 91-95.
predecessors (Pius X and Benedict XV), a position which would certainly be in line with *Quadragesimo Anno*’s emphasis on social harmony and the mutual collaboration between capital and labour.

Pope John XXIII was next to broach the subject of workers’ rights in his 1961 encyclical, *Mater et Magistra* ("Christianity and Social Progress"). Though the novelty of *Mater et Magistra* lay in its relatively detailed treatment of international social and economic development issues, Pope John’s discussion of unions in this document was also noteworthy. Cognisant of the reasons earlier Church leaders were wary of union organizing, the Pope notes that "these bodies no longer recruit workers for the purposes of strife, but rather for pursuing a common aim." He praises those who strive "to vindicate the rights of workingmen and to improve their lot and conduct" and even applauds the "effective and valuable" work of the International Labour Organization. Although in this encyclical the Pope did not directly address the issue of the right to strike, a discussion of this matter was soon to follow in one of the core documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

The monumental *Gaudium et Spes* ("Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World"), was released near the close of Vatican II and can be considered a cornerstone of the Council’s process of aggiornamento (updating or renewal) of the Roman Catholic Church. A wide ranging document that covers all manner of themes from international peace and poverty, to politics, marriage, culture, and the economy, *Gaudium et Spes* also manages to address the issues of unions and strikes. On the matter of unions, the conciliar fathers are succinct:

Among the basic rights of the human person must be counted the right of freely founding labour unions. These unions should be truly able to represent the workers and to contribute to the proper arrangement of economic life. Another such right is that of taking part freely in the activity of these unions without risk of reprisal.

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24 Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium et Spes," no. 68.
This final sentence can be taken to imply that strikes too are permissible, and indeed the document affirms that the strike can be a legitimate means to defend workers' rights and to fulfil their just demands. Overall, however, the strike is cautioned to be a mechanism of last resort only, with sincere discussion and negotiation the preferred means of resolving disputes.25 Hence with Gaudium et Spes the Council reaffirmed the Church's approval of trade unions and attempted to set certain guidelines for their activities.

Pope Paul VI, who presided over the sessions of Vatican II after John XXIII died in 1963, further developed the Church's position on workers' organizations in his own writings. Though there are some positive allusions to unions in Populorum Progressio ("On the Development of Peoples),26 a more explicit teaching can be found in the Pope's apostolic letter of 1971, Octogesima Adveniens ("A Call to Action").27 In this latter document, the Pope notes the important contribution that unions can make to society and affirms the conciliar position on strikes (i.e., that a strike is recognized as legitimate when used "as a final means of defence").28 Yet, in a manner reminiscent of Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum, Paul appears to be more concerned with pointing out the potential dangers of union activism and strikes, as opposed to promoting their legitimacy. He states that the activity of unions "is not without its difficulties," including the temptation to impose conditions that would burden the economy or the "social body," and the desire to obtain demands of a "directly political" nature.29 The implication here is that unions are to restrict their activities to those involving specifically economic issues, and that even then they are not to ask for too much.

One problem with this position, however, is that it is often difficult to delineate a specifically "economic" as opposed to a "political" realm in modern society. The privatization of the Costa Rican public sector that I discussed in Chapter Two, for

25 Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium et Spes," no. 68.
example, has both political and economic aspects. On the one hand, privatization is a government-initiated process involving a reorganization of the State and its services; in this sense it is certainly a political issue. Yet privatization also involves economics, for not only is the matter of ownership involved, the privatization process often impacts upon the condition of workers by affecting the availability of employment and the level of wages offered. Though this example simplifies the mechanics of Costa Rican privatization, it is sufficient to indicate how problematic it can be to speak solely of economics or politics. Restricting the activity of unions to the economic sphere, therefore, implies that unionists are only to involve themselves with the narrowest of bread and butter concerns, regardless of the broader political policies or laws that contributed to such concerns in the first place. In a society in which economics and politics are combined, disallowing the participation of unions in politics robs them of much potential efficacy and force. Nonetheless, serious as the implications of this teaching may be, the fact remains that workers' issues were not a central theme of neither Paul VI's papacy nor his writings.

The same could certainly not be said of Pope John Paul II, who in 1981 issued the first papal encyclical to deal primarily with the question of work since Rerum Novarum. *Laborem Exercens* ("On Human Work") is an aptly named and complex treatise that explores the process of work and the dignity of the worker from a historical, philosophical, and theological viewpoint. The Pope does treat workers' issues in his other two major social encyclicals, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* ("On Social Concern") and especially *Centesimus Annus* ("On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum"), but *Laborem Exercens* remains as the most explicit and detailed statement of his views on the topic.

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30 For a more detailed examination of this point, see Dorr, *Option for the Poor*, 220-23.
John Paul's specific teachings on unions and strikes are gathered under one lengthy subsection of his encyclical.\textsuperscript{33} Consistent with most of his predecessors, John Paul comes out clearly in favour of the right of workers to form unions. Labelling them "an indispensable element of social life," the Pope argues that unions function "to defend the existential interests of workers in all sectors in which their rights are concerned." He clarifies that all types of workers -- not just industrial labourers -- can form unions, and that employers may also set up their own associations. On the issue of politics, the Pope claims that while union activity does enter the field of politics (as long as this is "understood as prudent concern for the common good"), unions themselves should not "play politics," should not act like political parties struggling for power, and should not have too close ties to existing parties. In addition, strikes are seen as legitimate "in the proper conditions and within just limits." Once again they are viewed as an "extreme" means that must not be abused -- especially, John Paul emphasizes, for "political" purposes. The Pope also argues that strikes should not endanger essential community services. Finally, he warns that misuse of the strike weapon can paralyze the whole of socio-economic life, a situation at odds with the common good of society. Like Leo XIII and Paul VI before him, Pope John Paul II seems more concerned to spell out what would make a strike wrong than to promote the idea of the strike as a right.

The treatment of unions and politics in this section of \textit{Laborem Exercens} presents certain difficulties. To begin with, the Pope's use of the term "politics" is imprecise. He jumps from a general definition of politics as concern for the common good to a reference to party politics to the vague notion of "political purposes," the participation of unions in each type of activity being evaluated differently. Similarly, what exactly does "playing politics" mean? On the one hand, the admonition against playing politics can be taken to mean that the Pope is warning union leaders to focus on protecting the rights of workers instead of being preoccupied with their own personal quests for power and social influence. On the other hand, the whole notion of prohibiting union activism in the political sphere brings up the same issue I noted above regarding the impossibility of

\textsuperscript{33} Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," no. 20.
strictly separating the economic and the political in modern society. By prohibiting unions from playing politics, is the Pope thereby saying that government policies and legislation are illegitimate targets for union concern? As several scholars have affirmed, in many countries union political activity is precisely the means by which workers' rights are secured.\textsuperscript{34} Moreover, in some cases (the British Labour Party, for example), unions are constitutionally linked with political parties.\textsuperscript{35} When considered in this light, the Pope's prescription regarding politics seems unrealistic at best, detrimental to workers' rights at worst.

Nonetheless, the full implications of Pope John Paul's teachings on workers' rights can only be understood in light of his more general positions on matters such as the relationship of labour and capital or the mechanisms for social change. Before turning to discuss these issues, however, it is first necessary to examine one other major body of CST relevant to the Costa Rican situation, that produced by CELAM.

\textit{Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM)}

The creation of CELAM in 1955 was one of the most important events in the history of the Latin American Roman Catholic Church. Until that time, no formal continental expression of the Latin American Church existed. A meeting of Latin American bishops had been held once before, in Rome, in 1899. But not until the First General Latin American Episcopal Conference met in Rio de Janeiro and formed CELAM was there an actual episcopal organization devoted to studying the affairs and coordinating the activities of the Church in the region as a whole. As such, over the years CELAM came to be an extremely powerful force in the operation of the Latin American Church.\textsuperscript{36}


\textsuperscript{36} Histories of CELAM include: Juan Botero Restrepo, \textit{El CELAM: Elementos para su historia} (Medellín, Colombia: CELAM 1982); François Houtart, "L'histoire du CELAM ou l'oubli des origines," \textit{Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions}, 62, no. 1.
CELAM's Second General Conference in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, was a watershed event for the Latin American Church that provided legitimation and inspiration for the emerging liberation theology movement on the continent. At Medellín, the bishops documented and denounced the injustice they saw around them, they promoted the Church's "option for the poor," and they committed themselves to working for both spiritual change and the radical transformation of societal structures. 37

Significantly, the bishops saw workers and workers' unions as principle agents in this process of social change. 38 Not only do workers have the right to unionize, according to the Medellín documents, but their unions should also acquire "sufficient strength and presence" and should participate in all levels of production and in the areas of national, continental, and international trade. In addition, the bishops write that union members should exercise their right to be represented "on the political, social and economic levels, where decisions are made that are related to the common good." 39 In contrast to the papal teachings on unions and their activities, then, the Medellín documents appear to give unionists the right -- and the responsibility -- to become involved in social movements and political debates that extend beyond narrowly "economic" issues.

The final document from the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, 40 held in Puebla, Mexico in 1979, is markedly different in tone from the Medellín texts. The Puebla conference came at a time when many Church officials had grown wary of the revolutionary political implications of liberation theology. In large

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38 CELAM, "Justicia," in Medellín, no. 7; and CELAM, "Pastoral de élites," in Medellín, nos. 1-2 and 19.

39 CELAM, "Justicia," in Medellín, no. 12.

40 III Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano, Puebla: La evangelización en el presente y en el futuro de América Latina (Bogotá, Colombia:
part, the Puebla document exhibits the reserve of these more conservative factions on issues of social change, as well as their reluctance to endorse an unequivocal option for the poor. Such restraint can also be detected in the Puebla treatment of workers' issues. While the final document affirms the right to unionize and comments on the frequent disregard for labour legislation in Latin America, bold calls for workers' participation in the transformation of society are absent. In contrast to Medellin's view of workers as agents of social change, Puebla sees working people as victims of poverty and repression or as objects of the Church's evangelization. Granted, the Puebla document calls for the workers to "contribute responsibly to the common good" and to the construction of "the Latin America of tomorrow," but even these phrases seem rather weak and vague. In the context of these other comments and when we also consider that the bishops warn against the "exasperated politicization" of the top union levels, the implication becomes clearer. It appears that, much as Pope John Paul II was to do in *Laborem Exercens* two years later, the bishops in the Puebla document are attempting to de-politicize the role of workers and unions in Latin America.

The last text to be examined in this history of CST was issued by the Fourth General CELAM Conference. CELAM IV (which began in 1992 exactly 500 years after the day on which Columbus first sighted land in the Americas) was intended as a celebration of Jesus Christ and of the Church's evangelization on the continent. Although in the conclusions from the conference the realm of work is delineated as an area of great pastoral concern, the treatment of workers' issues is one of the weakest in the entire CST

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41 CELAM, *Puebla,* nos. 44, 1162-63, and 1244.
42 CELAM, *Puebla,* nos. 36, 44, and 442.
43 CELAM, *Puebla,* no. 1244. In the former quotation, the bishops are adopting the words of Pope John Paul II in his January 31, 1979 address to workers in Monterrey.
44 CELAM, *Puebla,* no. 45.
45 IV Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano, *Santo Domingo conclusiones: Nueva evangelización, promoción humana, cultura cristiana* (Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia: CELAM, 1992). Future references to this document will be cited as: CELAM, *Santo Domingo.*
46 CELAM, *Santo Domingo,* no. 182.
tradition. The Santo Domingo document, for example, does not repeat the by-then standard CST confirmation of the right to unionization or even refer to unions by name; it alludes instead to "organizations of workers." The conclusions do, however, note the lack of respect for workers' rights and the setbacks in terms of labour legislation. Yet the emphasis here is on the rights of individual workers very narrowly defined (the right to sufficient pay and to protection for old age, illness, and unemployment) and there is the assumption that adequate (and adequately enforced) legislation is the key to securing justice for workers. While all this is undoubtedly important, there is still no recognition of the role of workers or unions themselves in the broader political environment. Lawmakers and enforcers appear to be the key agents in "change," while the potential roles and activism of workers at the grassroots level are omitted.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that part of the reason that workers and their families are poor is due to the overall socio-economic conditions in which they attempt to subsist. The authors of the conclusions appear to recognize this but their suggestion, that increased economic growth will increase the welfare of the poor (through just distribution), is also problematic. By concentrating on improving productivity within the present economic framework instead of questioning whether the framework itself is a hindrance to fairer distribution, the conclusions appear to misplace the emphasis again. An essential part of securing workers' rights is transforming exclusionary and inequitable social structures as a whole, not merely remedying employers' lack of compliance with labour laws or stimulating economic growth. The Santo Domingo bishops do not make these connections strongly enough in their treatment of work and as a result the portrayal of workers' issues suffers.

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47 CELAM, Santo Domingo, nos. 183 and 185.
48 CELAM, Santo Domingo, no. 183.
49 CELAM, Santo Domingo, no. 185.
50 CELAM, Santo Domingo, no. 183.
51 This thinking is similar to that found in the failed "trickle-down" developmentalist schemes of the 1960s and in the current neo-liberal programs in Latin America.
As a matter of fact, any treatment of workers' issues will be incomplete if such issues remain narrowly defined as "the right to strike" or "the right to unionize." A thorough understanding of CST's positions on workers can only be sought in the context of the Church's overall discussion of social justice themes, the topic to which I turn next.

Contrasting Approaches to Social Justice in Catholic Social Teaching

As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, CST cannot be considered an internally uniform or consistent body of thought. In fact, the perspectives on social justice issues represented in CST documents run the range from conservative to liberationist in nature. In this section I define what I actually mean by the terms "conservative" and "liberationist," and provide the clearest examples from the CST corpus of each type. As we shall see, the conservatives and liberationists can be distinguished by their opposing positions on three key measures: general view of society, diagnosis of social problems, and proposed strategy for overcoming such problems.

Conservative Catholic Social Teaching: Leo XIII and Pius XI

The classic conservative position in CST can be characterized by a functionalist or organic view of society, a diagnosis of social problems that emphasizes attitudes and behaviours and that is reluctant to criticize the structures or assumptions of capitalism itself, and a model of social change that is top-down, non-violent, and based on consensus and collaboration as opposed to conflict. These characteristics are best illustrated with reference to the main CST encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI.

To begin, it is clear that both Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo Anno are based on a functionalist view of the social order. Here, society is seen as an organic whole, much like the human body in which all the parts function in unison to contribute to the operation of one another and to the overall life of the organism. From this perspective, inequalities and social stratification are a given; each social group has its own particular role to play in order to keep society functioning smoothly. As Leo explains: "Such inequality is far from being disadvantageous either to individuals or to the community;
social and public life can only go on by the help of various kinds of capacity and the playing of many parts, and each man, as a rule, chooses the part which peculiarly suits his case."52 From this perspective, abolishing differences among humans or classes would be impossible, to try and do so a vain effort against natural law. By extension, for Leo and Pius harmony and collaboration among the various social groups are the proper foundations of social life, with stability and order in society prized above all.

Nonetheless, despite this ideal of "blessed social peace"53 for which they longed, both Leo and Pius recognized the tensions and strife in the societies of their day. Leo commented on the "conflict" and "evil" around him, in which "a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself."54 Pius, for his part, lamented the "grave disorder" of class "combat" in his own time, so greatly at odds with the well-ordered social body he and his predecessor sought.55 Importantly, however, though Leo and Pius decried the condition of workers under industrial capitalism, they did not lay the blame for social problems on capitalism per se. As Pius noted, "it is clear then that the system as such is not to be condemned. Surely it is not vicious of its very nature . . . ."56 Instead, Leo and Pius criticized only the extremes of modern capitalism as it was seen, for instance, in the enormous gulf between rich and poor,57 in the "despotic economic domination . . . concentrated in the hands of a few,"58 or in the "economic dictatorship [that] has replaced a free market."59

Ultimately, both Leo and Pius argued that at the root of society's ills were un-Christian principles and mistaken ideas. To Leo, employers were greedy, grasping, and callous, oblivious in their pride to the plight of the worker. The workers themselves were often envious and impatient, unwilling to accept their lot in life and all too susceptible to

54 Pope Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," no. 2.
55 Pope Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," no. 83.
57 Pope Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," nos. 1 and 35.
58 Pope Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," no. 105.
misguided calls for social equality and to the revolutionary rhetoric of "crafty agitators." Similarly, Pius condemns those who are "swept away by selfishness, by unbridled and sordid greed," and pinpoints original sin as the root of this lack of morals in economic life. Hence for Leo and Pius it was not the structure of capitalist society itself, but the sinful attitudes of and the abuses by its members that led to the shameful poverty among workers and the condemnable social conflict.

The Popes' prescriptions for social change follow logically from these points about the nature of society and the causes of its problems. The solution, as was implied above, is not to abolish the fundamental structures of capitalism. In addition, socialism and communism are also not viable paths to follow, among other reasons because they foment the very type of class conflict and social disorder the Popes seek to remedy. Rather, the changes the Popes call for do not take place so much in the structures of society as they do in human hearts and consciences. Leo and Pius seek an end to social strife and the reestablishment of order and harmony in society through a "renewal of the Christian spirit." The Church obviously plays a key role in this moral renovation, serving to teach the Gospel precepts and trying "to bind class to class in friendship and good understanding." This Christian-inspired unity extends to all social relations, including those in the workplace where the classes should collaborate in their recognition that "capital cannot do without labor nor labor without capital." Granted, there are workers' groups or the corporative structures that the Popes also believe will contribute to the betterment of society, but these too must first and foremost be imbued with Christian virtue. As both Pius and Leo repeatedly emphasize, above all it is charity that should

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61 Pope Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," no. 131.
63 Pope Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," nos. 112-17.
64 Pope Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," no. 127.
66 Pope Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," no. 15; and Pope Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," nos. 53 and 100.
undergird social relationships. In the end, nonetheless, if charity and co-operation should fall short in some way, if the poor continue to be mistreated or if the workers' agitation for rights threatens to disrupt peace and order, the encyclicals state that the State should step in to protect the weak and to safeguard social stability. Overall, then, Leo and Pius call for a spiritual transformation in society, reinforced by the institutional authorities of the Church and, when necessary, the State.

The implications of this conservative perspective are problematic in several respects. First, the structural components of injustice in capitalist society are largely overlooked as the Popes concentrate instead on the interior qualities and attitudes of individuals. There is no questioning of the fundamental dynamics of the capital-labour relationship, no deep analysis of the economic or political mechanisms by which the "sinful" extremes of wealth and poverty arise and are maintained. In this overly spiritualistic rendering of the roots of social conflict and of the impetus for social change, the conversion of hearts and minds is rather naively assumed to be sufficient to overcome what are in fact complex and ingrained patterns of inequality in industrial society. Not only does this shallow inspection of capitalism and unwarranted optimism in the encyclicals of Leo and Pius detract from the strength of their critique on the condition of workers, they also help to sabotage calls for more thoroughgoing structural transformations in society.

Also questionable in this perspective is the exaltation of social stability as a value or condition to be preserved at all costs. As Dorr correctly notes,

Stability is a very good thing in a society which is reasonably just. On the other hand stability may not be a good thing in a country that is highly stratified socially and economically, a society built on flagrant social injustice. In this situation radical change maybe a higher priority than stability. 

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69 Dorr, Option for the Poor, 222.
In *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, the Popes appear to place the need for order in society above the need for justice. Despite the condemnations of the suffering of the poor under the extremes of industrial capitalism, their emphasis on order and harmony implies that if a change in society cannot come about peacefully and without disturbing social stability, then it should not occur at all. Put another way, according to the logic of the encyclicals, stability may mean that the poor will just have to tolerate injustice.⁷⁰

These two encyclicals encourage a passive or fatalistic attitude for the poor in other manners as well. As we have seen, inequality is legitimated by being characterized as "natural," as beneficial to the operation of society, and as impossible to abolish completely. Also in line with this perspective, the poor are counselled that "in God's sight poverty is no disgrace,"⁷¹ and reminded that "to suffer and endure . . . is the lot of humanity."⁷² Granted, both Leo and Pius support the formation of workers' organizations. Yet the restrictions on these groups' activities, the insistence on social stability, and the notion that "tranquil resignation"⁷³ is the appropriate attitude for the poor to assume are all ways in which the Popes discourage social activism by those at the base of society. Suffer though they may, the poor are not given the right or acknowledged to have the ability to mobilize for significant change.

Instead, the Popes promote a distinctly "top-down" vision of social change in which the wealthy and powerful members of society hold the responsibility to care for the poor and to effect reforms. This can be seen in the repeated references to charity in the encyclicals. In addition, the top-down model is evident in the frequent and direct appeals to rich men, "masters," and public leaders that remind them of their duties to watch over the poor. These pleas lend the encyclicals a rather paternalistic tone. Certainly, I do not mean to suggest that the State and the more influential members of society should bear no responsibilities toward the poorer classes; in fact, social justice demands that they should have great obligations in this regard. I am arguing, however, that without genuine moves

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⁷⁰ Dorr, *Option for the Poor*, 23 and 27.
to empower the poor themselves and to respect them as agents of social change, another form of inequality is being perpetuated. Further, and from a more pragmatic view, reforms sponsored only by the upper strata themselves — changes that disregard the opinions and participation of the poor — will likely do little to modify the system that led to impoverishment in the first place. Those in positions of privilege have a vested interest in maintaining the structures that have made them society's "winners." As such (and whether consciously or not), many will not propose remedies for poverty that will threaten their own status and wealth. Since it lacks the authentic inclusion of the poor, the top-down bias of the conservative model functions to undermine attempts to achieve social justice.

_Liberationist Catholic Social Teaching: CELAM and the Medellín Documents_

In clear contrast to the conservative approach to CST stands what I shall label the "liberationist" approach. Whereas conservatives see the basis of society in harmonious and organic terms, the liberationists view the social order as being torn by conflict and violence. When the conservatives focus more on attitudes and individuals in their examination of the root of society's problems, the liberationists expose the structural components and international dynamics of injustice in modern capitalism. Finally, while conservatives promote a top-down program of reform based on consensus, the liberationists adhere to a bottom-up model of societal transformation that encourages the activism of the poor and that admits the possibility that confrontation may be a necessary part of the process.

The Medellín conference documents represent the best example of the liberationist perspective as it exists in official CST. To begin, we can see that the Medellín bishops perform a structural analysis of Latin America's problems and thereby reveal the fundamentally conflictual nature of the society as a whole. They discuss the extreme inequality between the classes within Latin American countries, attributing the widespread poverty to the unjust nature of certain political, economic, and cultural structures and to the insensitivity and willful oppression displayed toward those who have been
marginalized. What the bishops label "international tensions and external neo-colonialism" compounds the problems generated by this internal injustice. Here the bishops concentrate on the relative poverty of Latin American countries in the global market, arguing that this impoverishment is largely due to Latin America's dependence on a centre of economic power outside itself. Distorted terms of exchange, the tax evasion of multinational companies, and growing external debts are all aspects of the inequitable international relations which have had grave consequences for poor Latin Americans.

It is through this analysis that the bishops reveal the conflictual nature of Latin American society. In fact, the Medellín bishops go so far as to view the above injustice as a negation of peace, as violence. According to the documents, when structural deficiencies of agriculture, of industry, of national and international economies, and of cultural and political life deprive people of their independence, initiative, and basic life necessities, institutionalized violence exists. In this understanding, the inhuman and destructive structures themselves are diagnosed as violent. Repressive violence is closely related to institutionalized violence, as the groups who benefit from the violent structures of the established order use force in order to prevent the alteration of these structures. These elites repress attempts at opposition and, although such measures are often masked as being "anti-communist" or as necessary to maintain "peace and order," repressive force is nonetheless violent. Like institutionalized violence, repressive violence has as its victims the impoverished masses. This being the case, the bishops are not surprised that among the people there is the "temptation to violence." Revolutionary violence, therefore, is directly provoked by the institutionalized and repressive violence to which people are subject, and is fuelled by their increasing awareness of their situation. Referring to the "explosive consequences" of socio-economic problems and the "climate of collective anguish" amongst the poor, the bishops powerfully indicate the potential for revolutionary

74 CELAM, "Justicia," in Medellín, nos. 1-2; and CELAM, "Paz," in Medellín, nos. 2-7.
75 CELAM, "Paz," in Medellín, nos. 8-10.
76 CELAM, "Paz," in Medellín, nos. 1 and 14.
77 CELAM, "Paz," in Medellín, no. 16.
78 CELAM, "Paz," in Medellín, nos. 6, 14 and 17.
violence in Latin America. Overall, when these descriptions of violence are taken together with the discussions of injustice, tensions, inequality, and colonialism in the Medellín documents, one conclusion is inescapable. The participants at Medellín, in attempting to outline the nature of reality in Latin America, assessed it to be pervaded with conflict.

The bishops at Medellín, however, do more than simply discuss the injustice and violence in Latin America. They are also prepared to promote changes in this situation. Adopting some of the language and concepts of the liberation theologians, they announce a message of liberation for Latin America that involves both an attitudinal conversion among individuals and the transformation of societal structures. Importantly, liberation in this context is at once spiritual and social; at Medellín the bishops at refuse to separate the spiritual and temporal realms. According to the documents, it is artificial to make a separation between temporal tasks and religious commitments, because, after all, God's salvific work in Christ is performed in the course of human history. For the Latin American episcopate, therefore, there is no excuse for the Church to remain aloof and separate from the world; it is a Christian responsibility to work for justice in society.

Consistent with this conviction, the bishops in their pastoral recommendations outline the various types of social transformations they support. These changes are to take place in the economic, industrial, agricultural, judicial, and political realms, and include such things as agrarian reform, ensuring just prices for exported raw materials, and incorporating peasant and other marginalized populations into political and economic

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79 CELAM, "Justicia," in Medellín, no. 1; CELAM, "Paz," in Medellín, nos. 7, 16-17 and 19; and CELAM, "Juventud," in Medellín, no. 3.
80 CELAM, "Justicia," in Medellín, nos. 3, 10, 14 and 16; CELAM, "Paz," in Medellín, no. 16; and CELAM, "Educación," in Medellín, nos. 7-8.
81 CELAM, "Justicia," in Medellín, nos. 3-5; CELAM, "Juventud," in Medellín, no. 16; CELAM, "Pastoral de élites," in Medellín, no. 13; CELAM, "Catequesis," in Medellín, no. 4; CELAM, "Movimientos de laicos," nos. 9-11; and CELAM, "Religiosos," in Medellín, no. 8.
decision-making. Such recommendations do appear to be far-reaching and, in fact, the bishops fit into the "revolutionary" (as opposed to the "traditionalist/conservative" or the "developmentalist") category of their own classification system because they "question the socio-economic structure . . . [and] desire its radical change, in both its goals and means." In this view, the elites with formal political power, or those with more education or economic resources, are not excused from their responsibility to assume the struggles of the poor and to foment structural change in society. Nonetheless, it is the poor themselves who are the central architects of their own liberation. By supporting the formation of **comunidades eclesiales de base** (CEBs) and other grassroots organizations and by promoting a form of "liberating education" (or, in effect, "conscientization") for the lower classes, the bishops

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82 Details of the bishops' recommendations for change are found in: CELAM, "Justicia," in Medellín, nos. 6-23; CELAM, "Paz," in Medellín, nos. 20-33; and CELAM, "Educación," in Medellín, nos. 10-31.

83 CELAM, "Pastoral de élites," in Medellín, no. 8; the bishops' three-fold classification system is spelled out in CELAM, "Pastoral de élites," in Medellín, nos. 5-8.

84 CELAM, "Justicia," in Medellín, no. 7. My emphasis.

85 The bishops refer to these small, lay-led, neighbourhood Church groups in more than one document. According to them, the CEBs are a focal point for evangelization and are essential factors in development, the consolidation of rights, and the search for justice.

86 The bishops here are clearly influenced by the work of the Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire, who defines conscientization as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality." Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970), 19. Freire originally used the Portuguese form of the word, *conscientização*; in Spanish, the term is *conscientización*. 

further reinforce the notion of the poor as social activists. These components of the "bottom-up" model of social change are an essential part of Medellín's "option for the poor" and comprise some of Medellín's most vaunted and controversial contributions to the CST tradition.

One of the most polemical implications of the Medellín message is related to the power structure of the Church. If Medellín's option for the poor is taken seriously, the poor become active not only in the transformation of the larger society, but also within the Church itself. In fact this option, particularly as it is presented in the bishops' support for the CEBs, reveals the potential for what Leonardo Boff has called a "reinvention of the Church." Such a reinvention implies a shift away from the authoritarian and monarchical model of the Church, and a move towards a model of the Church as the People of God, a Church that is from, of, and with, the poor. Historically in the Church, as Boff points out, the bishops and the priests received all the religious "capital" and produced all the religious "goods," with the faithful relegated to consumer status only. In a reinvented Church, this religious production is no longer the monopoly of the hierarchy, but can and also should originate "from below." With this reinvention, sacred power is redistributed in the Church, and new energy would be directed towards the essential task of spiritual and political liberation. By affirming the need for CEBs, the Medellín documents are suggesting a reform and renewal of the long-standing Church structure -- changes which could certainly be viewed as threatening by many of those whose power and status are linked to the traditional institutional form.

87 CELAM, "Justicia," in Medellín, nos. 17 and 20; CELAM, "Paz," in Medellín, nos. 18 and 27; CELAM, "Educación," in Medellín, nos. 3-8 and 16; CELAM, "Formación del clero," in Medellín, no. 21; CELAM, "Pastoral de conjunto," in Medellín, no. 10; and CELAM, "Medios de comunicación social," in Medellín, nos. 2, 5-6 and 15.

88 These ideas can be found in Leonardo Boff, Church: Charism and Power. Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1985), chapters 1, 9 and 10; and Leonardo Boff, Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986, chapters 1 and 3.
In addition, if one is to take Medellín's bottom-up program for societal transformation seriously, it must be admitted that confrontation may be an inescapable part of the process of social change. If, as the option for the poor implies, the popular classes are to play such a key role in determining a course of action, if their needs and expectations are truly addressed, conflicts with other segments of society will arise. This is because fulfilling the demands of the poor will often entail a redistribution of resources to such an extent that it will be unlikely that those at the top of society will be able to maintain the positions of privilege to which they have become accustomed.

Given this scenario, the conservative model of change through consensus appears quite unrealistic. The resistance to change that many in power will provide means that for the poor, a degree of militancy, protest, organization, and action — in other words, a degree of conflict and confrontation — will be necessary in order to carry out a genuine transformation of the social order.

The bishops themselves understand this and, although they generally assume that the process of change should be non-violent, they also admit that in certain circumstances even violent confrontation may be justified. The oft-cited Medellín "loophole" for revolutionary violence is found in the document on Peace. It reads:

> If it is true that revolutionary insurrection can be legitimate in the case of "evident and prolonged tyranny that seriously works against the fundamental rights of the person and dangerously damages the common good of the country", whether it proceeds from one person or from evidently unjust structures, it is also certain that violence or "armed revolution" generally "generates new injustices, introduces new imbalances and causes new disasters; one cannot combat a real evil at the price of a greater evil."\(^{89}\)

Although here the Medellín bishops are borrowing words from Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, the sense imparted is much different.\(^{90}\) Unlike Paul, the Medellín bishops


\(^{90}\) The original passage reads: "We know, however, that a revolutionary uprising -- save where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country -- produces new injustices, throws more elements out of balance and brings on new disasters. A real evil should not be fought against at the cost of greater misery." Pope Paul VI, "Populorum Progressio," no. 31. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Dorr, *Option for the Poor*, 210-11.
actually come out and make the explicit and audacious statement that revolutionary violence can be legitimate. In the context of Latin America (which by the late 1960s had witnessed more than its share of revolutionary movements and uprisings), and when contrasted with the dominant pacifist stream of the broader CST tradition (which I will discuss below), it is not difficult to see why the Medellín position on violence remains controversial.

The Conciliar Era and Beyond: Persistent Conservatism in Catholic Social Teaching

That the social teachings of Leo XIII and Pius XI occupy the conservative end of the CST spectrum is hardly disputable, as is the fact that the Medellín conference documents represent the most liberationist texts in the same tradition. Beyond this, however, many scholars assume that the Medellín conference (or, as some would argue, Vatican II a few years earlier) ushered in a new era of progressivism in CST. They frequently refer, for example, to the tradition of "Medellín and Puebla," based on their perception that the latter conference represented a reaffirmation -- and even a deepening -- of the liberationist tenets of the former.\(^9\) As I noted in Chapter One, analysts of the Costa Rican Church have also portrayed post-Vatican II CST in homogeneous terms as pro-union and pro-worker. This type of analysis sets up a simplistic dichotomy in CST, one that is based on the assumption of a rather arbitrary 1960s dividing point between the old-fashioned conservative and the progressive contemporary eras.

In this thesis I wish to challenge such assumptions and argue that the matter is not so simple. CST over the past three decades cannot be so easily categorized, containing as it does elements that resonate with both the liberationist and the conservative perspectives on social justice. If anything, I would argue that in this mix the conservative perspective is

by far the predominant one, with several parallels existing between the pre-conciliar social teachings and those issued during and since the 1960s. The basis for such assertions will become evident through a critical examination of conciliar and post-conciliar positions on four issues suggested by my discussion of the liberationist and conservative CST models: unity and conflict; social change and solidarity; liberation; and the option for the poor. In my analysis, I will pay special attention to the documents issued during Pope John Paul II's tenure, as this period most closely corresponds to the period of Costa Rican Church history covered by this thesis.

Unity and Conflict

In many documents issued during and since the conciliar era, one can detect a stress on social harmony and collaboration. The focus, reminiscent of the conservative encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI, is on the fundamental unity of the human race with a frequent failure to admit -- or to acknowledge the importance of -- the existence of serious conflicts in society. Emphasis is placed on the mutual rights, respect, obligations, and love that members of society should have for one another, and great value is ascribed to the ideal of co-operation within and among nations. Consistent with this perspective, the image of the human family is commonly employed in these documents, with repeated references to "brotherly love," "universal brotherhood," and the "fraternal unity of one human family" reinforcing an organic view of society. The Santo Domingo bishops illustrate this view nicely when they write that "in Latin America many people live in poverty, which frequently reaches shocking levels. However, even in limit-situations, we

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are able to love one another, to live in unity despite our differences, and to show the whole world our radiant experience of brotherhood."\textsuperscript{94} Hence, in spite of the grave problems and inequities in the modern world, we still find a concentration on unity in place of an understanding of confrontation or conflict. In the end, the sanction for this concept of unity often comes through direct appeals to theology, evident in such statements as "the Son of God has saved mankind and at the same time has united all people,"\textsuperscript{95} and "the Lord unites us with himself through the Eucharist . . . and he unites us with himself and with one another by a bond stronger than any natural union."\textsuperscript{96} Once it is cast in this way as "God's will," the value of the unity in the CST tradition cannot be underestimated.

This conservative emphasis on unity, however, proves troublesome from the perspective of social justice. This is certainly true in the case of Latin America, where the poverty and oppression suffered by the majority of people belie any idealistic notion of humankind's unity. Far from existing as a radiant and unified family, at present Latin American society is deeply divided, and "the basic difference is between being close to life or close to death."\textsuperscript{97} In such a context, quite simply, the above-cited CST texts falsify reality. Further, and as the work of Otto Maduro suggests, downplaying or denying class conflict in society and trying to unify the dominant and dominated religiously within the Church contribute to the symbolic concealment and transcendence of the socio-political conflicts present in Latin American society. The failure to adequately acknowledge such conflicts hinders and contradicts the recognition by the oppressed classes of the injustice of their condition.\textsuperscript{98} An overemphasis on unity thus provides support for those who benefit from the maintenance of the existing order, as opposed to those whose hopes lie in its transformation.

\textsuperscript{94} CELAM, \textit{Santo Domingo}, no. 122.  
\textsuperscript{95} Pope John Paul II, "Centesimus Annus," no. 51.  
\textsuperscript{96} Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," no. 48. Emphasis in original. Other examples include: Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium et Spes," nos. 24, 32 and 42; and Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi," no. 77.  
\textsuperscript{98} Otto Maduro, \textit{Religion and Social Conflicts}, 133-34.
Before moving on to the next theme, it is necessary to discuss the notions of unity and conflict presented in Pope John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*. Though this encyclical is frequently applauded for its progressive social analysis and political positions, it nonetheless contains material that resonates more with a conservative, as opposed to liberationist, point of view. For instance, John Paul does present a concept of class unity consistent with the conservative position already described. This is evident in his discussion of world of work. Work, he argues, "first and foremost unites people" — workers, managers, and owners. In his view of society, since work is considered a universal calling, virtually all people can be considered workers and, as such, they are bound together. On a related note, John Paul also argues that the link between workers and owners is an inseparable one, that there is no inherent opposition between labour and capital. According to him, there is no fundamental distinction between capital and labour because, simply stated, capital is merely the accumulated result of labour. Since it is the human being and his or her labour that stand at the source of the entire economic process, it is erroneous to posit a necessary division or opposition within the economic arena.

This "personalist" perspective, although it is important in supporting John Paul II's contentions about the dignity of the worker, also serves to reveal the conservatism in *Laborem Exercens*. With his portrayal of labour and definition of capital, and his argument about the unity between the two, the Pope neglects fundamental truths about the structure and nature of capitalist society. True, capital is labour upon labour (accumulated labour), but it is not merely so, as the encyclical suggests. Specifically, capital is amassed through a process whereby the owners of the means of production appropriate the value produced by the workers in their employ. The relation between capital and labour is thus not merely quantitative, it is also exploitative, since the owners are reaping profits from the labour

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100 Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," no. 20.

101 Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," no. 9. For further comments on the notion of all people as workers, see Dorr, *Option for the Poor*, 309.

power taken from others. Given this exploitation, to posit an underlying unity of labour and capital does not make sense. By insisting on the unity of labour and capital, the Pope glosses over the structural contradiction that is at the core of the capitalist system.

Despite his emphasis on an ideal or theoretical unity in the world of work, however, the Pope does not deny that social conflict has existed since the early stages of industrial development. In fact, John Paul devotes a considerable amount of space in his encyclical to the "Conflict between Labor and Capital in the Present Phase of History." Yet if, as the Pope argues, "opposition between labor and capital does not spring from the structure of the production process or from the structure of the economic process," how does this conflict arise? The Pope’s answer reveals a further conservative bias in Laborem Exercens.

John Paul II argues that the conflict first arose during the birth and rapid development of industrialization, when small groups of greedy entrepreneurs exploited their employees in an attempt to maximize profits -- and so provoked a "justified" reaction from these workers. He goes on to state that this strife soon became cast as a socio-economic class conflict which was expressed in the ideological and political struggle between liberalism and Marxism. This interpretation, however, was based on false theoretical systems (economism and, eventually, materialism) which reduced labour and capital to two impersonal forces that could be separated and set in opposition to one another. Thus, the "practical error" of conflict, a reality since early industrial society, is misrepresented and exacerbated by the "philosophical error" of Marxism which, because it ignores the primacy of the personal element in the economic process, interprets class struggle as inevitable. For the Pope, then, class conflict is not a necessary or unavoidable aspect of the capitalist system. Instead, it is the unfortunate by-product of human greed, immorality, and distorted thinking.

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103 A visit to a maquiladora or banana plantation and a view of the working conditions suffered there will provide graphic evidence of some of the other outcomes of this exploitative relationship.
Several points must be made about the treatment of class conflict in *Laborem Exercens*. The first is that John Paul II rests his argument upon an inaccurate characterization of Marxism. He implies that in their theories of class conflict, all Marxists would subscribe to materialism as *he* defines it, a "non-humanistic way of stating the issue [of work]" in which "man is not first and foremost the subject of work and the efficient cause of the production process, but continues to be understood and treated, in dependence on what is material, as a kind of 'resultant' of the economic or production relations." The Pope here is associating Marxism with a narrow economic determinism, a doctrine that denies human agency and instead posits that human consciousness and behaviour are dictated solely by the socio-economic structure of a society. While this view may bear some relation to the *interpretation* of Marxism as it has been imposed under certain communist regimes (e.g., in the Soviet Union), it certainly does not correspond to the work of many Marxist thinkers (whether they be labelled "critical," "revisionist" or "neo-" Marxists) who do place emphasis on the role of humans as subjects and shapers of the world around them.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps more importantly, even Marx himself, when his work is taken as a whole, cannot be accused of expounding a determinist view. As analysts such as Miranda have so persuasively drawn out, Marx (and particularly in works such as *Theories of Surplus Value, Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and the *Grundisse*) rejects any mechanistic determinism, instead insisting that humans are free subjects who are not only products of history, but who are also *producers* of history.¹⁰⁹ Further, and in contrast to what the Pope implies in *Laborem Exercens*, Marx also applies this principle of human agency to the production process itself. As he wrote in *Theories of Surplus Value*,

¹⁰⁸ Though in this thesis I have made particular mention of Antonio Gramsci and Otto Maduro in this regard (see Chapter One, pp. 12-15), one could also discuss the work of individuals such as George Lukács or Mihailo Markovic, or the work of "critical theorists" such as Herbert Marcuse or Max Horkheimer, here. See also the discussion of the development of various Marxisms after Marx in Arthur F. McGovern, *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 49-89.
Man himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production that he carries on. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the subject of production, more or less modify all his functions and activities, and therefore too his functions and activities as the creator of material wealth, of commodities. In this respect it can in fact be shown that all human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a more or less decisive influence on it.\textsuperscript{110}

Thus for Marx too it is the human being who produces, who is the true subject of production.

John Paul II, however, does not recognize this subtlety in Marx's thought, much as he does not acknowledge the variety among those who belong to the broader Marxist tradition. The Pope, who indiscriminately refers to "Marxism," the "Marxist program," and "Marxist ideology" without qualification, is thus only attacking a caricature, an exaggerated and grotesque representation of what actually exists. And while painting this picture of an unsophisticated, monolithic Marxism may correspond with certain historic institutional necessities for the Church,\textsuperscript{111} such inaccuracies also serve to undermine the Pope's overall claims about Marxism in this encyclical.

Finally, and aside from the issue of accuracy, we can note that once the Pope does set up this version of Marxism as deterministic and anti-humanistic, it becomes that much easier for him to contrast it with his own personalistic interpretation of economics and labour. Yet, with all the attention paid to personal characteristics of owners (greedy and exploitative) or workers (conscious of their position in society and free to choose their [re]actions), \textit{Laborem Exercens} again fails to analyze the structural basis of poverty and injustice in society. We have already seen how John Paul emphasizes the unity between labour and capital to the neglect of the deeper conflict of interest between the two groups.


\textsuperscript{111} The Church's hostility toward communism (and hence, "Marxism") has historically been tied to its need to condemn anything that threatens its ability to survive and freely proclaim its message of salvation. Given the persecution the Church has suffered under certain communist regimes in the past, it is not surprising that the Pope does not present a nuanced view of the Marxist tradition.
Now, we have seen how, as Hobgood perceptively notes, *Laborem Exercens* "make[s] individual ethical choice the primary factor in determining the justice of an economic system." Thus, not only in its unyielding attack on Marxism, but also in its emphasis on the moral and personal at the expense of the structural and objective, John Paul II's supposedly "progressive" encyclical in fact echoes the conservatism of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*.

**Social Change and Solidarity**

Regardless of their often idyllic view of human society and their inadequate analyses of conflict, official CST statements since the 1960s have emphasized the need for social change. Often, nonetheless, the authors of these documents indicate that consensus and co-operation are sufficient to bring about greater justice in society, much as in the pre-conciliar period. In John XXIII's encyclicals, for example, the position taken is most optimistic, exhibiting the Pope's hopeful belief that love and charity can conquer all. Even Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, despite its urgent calls for bold social transformations and subtle reference to rebellion, ultimately reverts to the position that change can be effected by a process of dialogue and negotiation in which the generous efforts of the rich and elite play the central role. In these documents, John XXIII and Paul VI appear to share Leo XIII and Pius XI's impression that good will can be an effective antidote for society's ills.

With this renewed emphasis on consensus and collaboration in CST, it is not surprising that the authors of such documents envision a strictly non-violent process of social change. In fact, the Medellín document on Peace cited above is one of the only texts in the CST tradition that suggests that revolutionary violence may be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the Church. Pope Paul VI, whose passage in *Populorum Progressio*

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113 See, for example, Pope John XXIII, "Mater et Magistra," nos. 6, 92 and 257; and Pope John XXIII, "Pacem in Terris," nos. 31, 107 and 129.
Progressio provided some justification for Medellín's "loophole" for revolutionary violence, soon after recanted his original position. In his addresses in Colombia preceding and inaugurating the Medellín conference, the Pope repeatedly stressed that revolution and violence were un-Christian,115 a position he continued to support in his later teachings.116 In 1979, the CELAM bishops at Puebla reversed the Medellín position on revolution by unequivocally condemning all forms of violence, "subversive" violence included.117 Pope John Paul II has also continued in this vein by consistently refusing to endorse any violent means for social change.118 Overall, these judgements on revolution provide a further link between pre- and post-conciliar thought. The Church's recent prohibitions on revolutionary violence are consistent with Leo and Pius' non-violent approach to social change, and with their fear of revolution and the social disorder that accompanied it.

The essentially conservative viewpoint of the post-1960s Church on social change is further bolstered by John Paul II's teachings on solidarity. In Laborem Exercens, John Paul presents solidarity in a historical context as the justified reaction of workers against exploitation during the early period of industrialization. But he also argues that "movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers" are the means to achieve justice in the world today, both in terms of working conditions and society in general.119 Interestingly, scholars such as Donal Dorr contend that in using this notion of solidarity, the Pope admits that a certain degree of struggle or confrontation may be necessary in order for justice to be served.120 This interpretation has contributed to the perception that,

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117 CELAM, Puebla, nos. 486, 531-34 and 1259.
120 Dorr, Option for the Poor, 303-08.
with **Laborem Exercens**, the Pope moves to "the left," in effect adopting a position that resembles that of the liberationists. I would argue, however, that this perception is an inaccurate one. Once we examine John Paul II's notion of solidarity more closely, both within the context of **Laborem Exercens** and as it is elaborated upon in the Pope's two later social encyclicals, the continuity between John Paul's teachings and the conservative pre-conciliar encyclicals becomes evident.

In **Laborem Exercens**, for example, the actual link between solidarity and struggle or confrontation is tenuous at best. As Dorr himself points out, in the passage where John Paul discusses solidarity most thoroughly, the Pope does not once refer to "struggle."\(^{121}\) Nor does the Pope mention solidarity when he does bring up struggle in his comments on trade unions, and he is quick to point out that this struggle is "for" the just good and not a struggle "against" others.\(^{122}\) In fact, it appears that the linking of solidarity and confrontation in the Pope's thought comes not from **Laborem Exercens** itself, but only from a study Karol Wojtyla published in 1969 while he was still Archbishop of Cracow.\(^{123}\)

Granted, in this work Wojtyla does argue that opposition may be compatible with solidarity and, of course, Karol Wojtyla and Pope John Paul II are the same individual. Nonetheless, the fact remains that over a decade elapsed between the two documents in question and that during that time the Church and this individual's role and responsibilities within the Church changed dramatically. That a philosophically-minded archbishop in Poland once wrote an essay that incorporated the notion of conflict into a discussion of solidarity is perhaps a point of interest for the Pope's biographers; it is not a hermeneutic key to an encyclical written twelve years later by the leader of the world's Catholics. The assumption that the term solidarity retained its confrontational connotation when it was used in **Laborem Exercens** is thus quite unwarranted, especially in light of the absence of a direct tie between solidarity and struggle in this latter document.

\(^{121}\) Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," no. 8; and Dorr, *Option for the Poor*, 305.

\(^{122}\) Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," no. 20.

The manner in which the Pope uses solidarity in his other social encyclicals, and particularly in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, further reveals his conservatism. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the Pope presents solidarity as the appropriate response to the recognition of interdependence among individuals and nations in the world today. More precisely, for John Paul II, solidarity is the means through which justice in the world can be achieved. It is, according to him, "the path to peace and at the same time to development." Since for the Pope obstacles to development are rooted in sinful attitudes such as the "all-consuming desire for profit" and "the thirst for power," solidarity responds on the same moral level as it aims for a spiritual conversion among society's members. In place of selfishness, solidarity calls for the rich to be responsible for and to share with the poor, and for the poor to be neither passive nor destructive in their work for the common good. According to both *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus*, the acts proper to solidarity are therefore peaceful collaboration and dialogue. In the end, solidarity, as a "Christian virtue," is inspired by a model of human unity (which is a reflection of one God in three persons) and takes on the elements of charity and of "total gratuity, forgiveness, and reconciliation."

Even beyond the discussion of solidarity, the conservatism of John Paul II's thought is evident in several respects. First, the problems and poverty in society are portrayed in individualistic and spiritualistic terms. The Pope makes it clear that underdevelopment is above all a moral problem, one that can be traced to the attitudes and shortcomings of individual actors. In this view, a structural analysis of social injustice and the corresponding need for socio-economic transformation are by-passed -- even the so-called "structures of sin" that the Pope critiques are "rooted in personal sin." Though

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129 Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," nos. 8-9, 35, 37 and 41.
130 Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," no. 36
selfishness is mentioned most often in this regard, the Pope argues that development may also be blocked "through fear, indecision and basically, through cowardice," or even by the "laziness" of responsible persons. For John Paul II, then, there is "the urgent need to change the spiritual attitudes" of individuals.

With personal as opposed to structural transformation being John Paul II's focus, it is not surprising that the social changes he does propose are reformist as opposed to revolutionary. For him, capitalism itself is not the problem, though the excesses and consumerist attitudes that accompany the free market system may need to be corrected. Other changes that are suggested are of a top-down variety, since "a greater responsibility rests on those who have more and can do more." In the place of receiving unequivocal empowerment in the Pope's scheme, the poor are counselled to avoid violence and destruction. Instead of emphasizing the potentially liberating value of basic education programs or grassroots political mobilization, the Pope falls back on the principle that "the more individuals are defenceless within a given society, the more they require the care and concern of others, and in particular the intervention of governmental authority." In this model, collaboration and consensus are expected to suffice to foment social and economic development, and charity once again takes a key role in place of encouragement to the poor to struggle for their own advancement. Given all of this, the

131 Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," nos. 14, 26 and 36.
132 Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," no. 47.
133 Pope John Paul II, "Reconciliatio et Paenitentia," no. 16, as cited in Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," no. 36, fn. 65.
136 Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," no. 47.
138 The Pope does, however, remark on the Polish workers' protests against "Marxism." Still, he notes the efficacy of these protests, based as they were not on violence, but "on trying every avenue of negotiation, dialogue and witness to the truth, appealing to the conscience of the adversary . . . ." Pope John Paul II, "Centesimus Annus," no. 23.
139 Pope John Paul II, "Centesimus Annus," no. 10.
similarities between John Paul's social teachings and the earlier documents of Leo XIII and Pius XI are obvious.

_Liberation_

In the discussion of key themes up until this point, one can note a certain consistency between the terminology used in many of the CST documents and the conservative bias of these same documents. To some extent, one could perhaps predict a pre-conciliar style emphasis on harmony and repudiation of conflict by observing the repeated use of term "unity" or "solidarity" in the documents of the conciliar era and beyond. The use of the term "liberation" in a document, in contrast, provides the opposite impression. In fact, surveying the frequent use of the term in major Church documents since Medellín one could conclude, contrary to what I have been arguing so far, that the liberationist model has been adopted in important ways in recent CST. The matter is not so simple, however. For once we see exactly how the term "liberation" is employed in these various documents, other aspects of conservatism emerge.

As I explained above, the bishops at Medellín were among the first to use the term "liberation" in their prescriptions for social change. For them, liberation involved both a spiritual and a social aspect -- individual conversions and profound structural transformations in society were to take place at the same time, with the Church and its members fully involved in these tasks. Put another way, the Medellín bishops were proclaiming the unity of the religious and temporal realms (or of the Church and the world), a concept they developed in conscious relation to Vatican II ecclesiology.\(^\text{140}\) Citing _Gaudium et Spes_, they arrive at the same essential conclusion as Pope Paul VI did at the end of the Council when he spoke of "the intimate union, constantly affirmed and upheld by the Council, that exists between human and temporal values and properly spiritual, religious, and eternal values. The Church is inclined toward man and the earth, but in so doing, raises it toward the kingdom of God."\(^\text{141}\) Following this principle means that

\(^{140}\) CELAM, "Justicia," in _Medellin_, nos. 3-5.

\(^{141}\) As cited in Juan Luis Segundo, _Theology and the Church: A Response to Cardinal Ratzinger and a Warning to the Whole Church_, revised edition, trans. John W.
liberation cannot possibly be reduced to solely its political dimension, nor solely its spiritual one.

Nonetheless, when the Vatican began to use the language of liberation as its own in the early 1970s, a definite emphasis on the spiritual aspects of liberation could be detected. Insofar as the term "liberation" is used in Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens*, it is primarily connected with the internal conversion of humans. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, moreover, Pope Paul defines liberation according to its links with the Gospel obligation of evangelization — the bringing of the Good News (the centre of which is the proclamation of God's great gift of salvation). Though evangelization is a message of liberation, Paul stresses that it is not limited to the economic, social, or cultural spheres, but that it concerns the whole person in every dimension, including his or her relation to God. Therefore, the Pope states, while the Church has the duty of proclaiming liberation and of working for its completion, this liberation is not purely human: the Church reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual role. As Donal Dorr once suggested, through its location within a network of established theological concepts (evangelization, salvation, etc.), the term liberation is accorded a certain amount of "theological respectability" in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. In this way, liberation cannot be narrowly defined as revolution (in a purely politico-economic sense), but is primarily seen as a spiritual concept.

This emphasis is reinforced by the Pope's treatment of those who adhere to a liberationist perspective, who of course also maintain that political and spiritual liberation are inseparable. In *Octogesima Adveniens*, for example, Paul distinctly warns against the political liberation promised by revolutionary ideologies, which he argues enslaves humans, curtails freedoms, and establishes new injustices. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, moreover, he clearly distinguishes his liberation from that of "all temporal liberation, all

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142 Pope Paul VI, "Octogesima Adveniens," no. 45.
143 Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi," nos. 29-34.
political liberation," stressing the latter's inadequacy "even if it endeavours to find its justification in such or such a page of the Old or New Testament, even if it claims for its ideological postulates and its norms of action theological data and conclusions, even if it pretends to be today's theology." The Vatican's post-conciliar move toward distinguishing between the two aspects of liberation was thus first seen not only in its emphasis on the spiritual, but also in its critique of those who themselves explicitly combined the spiritual and the political.

This dualism resurfaced in the 1979 Puebla document, although it did so in a subtle manner missed (or ignored) by those positing Puebla's "confirmation" of Medellín. Granted, in the Puebla document liberation is said to include spiritual, interpersonal, and social dimensions. Further, the Puebla document also picks up the Medellín assumption that temporal tasks are related to the spiritual realm: the bishops argue that since justice in the world is related to the Kingdom of God, the Church must necessarily be involved in worldly affairs. However, the bishops at Puebla emphatically and repeatedly mention one additional component of the Church's mission that was barely visible at Medellín: evangelization. In fact, the descriptions of liberation and its links to evangelization in the Puebla document are taken almost completely from Evangelii Nuntiandi. Hence, while at Puebla the need for the Church's involvement in worldly affairs is noted, the emphasis is once again on the spiritual component of liberation.

In this definition the political facet of liberation -- though minimized -- still appears to be preserved in line with the conciliar conception of the Church and the spiritual realm as wholly bound up with the temporal. However, for the bishops, evangelization means that the Church's involvement in the socio-political arena should be exclusively religious and "not driven by any intention of a political, economic or social nature." At Puebla we note that the bishops, priests, and religious are forbidden to exercise or to support

145 Pope Paul VI, "Octogesima Adveniens," nos. 28 and 45.
146 Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi," no. 35.
147 CELAM, Puebla, nos. 327-39.
148 CELAM, Puebla, nos. 187-97 and 475.
149 CELAM, Puebla, nos. 348-55.
150 CELAM, Puebla, no. 519.
partisan political options within the Church. In addition, though the CEBs are labelled "motors of liberation and development," attention is focused more on the experience of the Word of God and of the Eucharist than on world-transforming action. In fact, the bishops express their regret that sometimes political interests manipulate the CEBs. At Puebla, the distinction between the spiritual and the political in the struggle for liberation is widened through the critique of the political nature of the CEBs and by the attempted removal of all actual political activity from the sphere of the Church.

Interestingly, Pope John Paul II tends to shy away from treating the theme of liberation at length in his encyclicals. In Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, for example, the Pope is more concerned with expanding upon his predecessor Paul's teaching on "development" (through his own concept of solidarity). This is not to imply, however, that Pope John Paul did not feel the issue of liberation to be worthy of comment. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, one could say that one of the Pope's chief concerns throughout his papacy has been to "set the record straight" on the concept of liberation and its use by the liberationists. But in place of detailed expositions on the topic in his own encyclicals, the Pope, when he does refer to what he calls "authentic" liberation, instead directs his readers to the position spelled out in the Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation. The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued this document in 1986 as a companion piece to the 1984 text, Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation." Though Cardinal Ratzinger, the prefect of the Congregation, wrote these two Instructions, the Pope approved them, ordered their publication, and repeatedly cited them as the Church's official statements on the matter.

Both Instructions exhibit the Vatican distinction between the spiritual and political planes of reality. In both documents, for instance, sin is treated primarily as an interior

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151 CELAM, Puebla, nos. 96-98 and 640-43.
moral condition of individuals and thus a purely religious phenomenon, in contrast to the view of the liberationists in which sin is viewed as both collective (i.e., social and structural) as well as personal.\textsuperscript{154} The dualism implicit in the Vatican's conception of sin further manifests itself in the fundamental distinction made between "liberation [as] first and foremost liberation from the radical slavery of sin," and "liberation from servitude of an earthly and temporal kind."\textsuperscript{155} Though the Vatican II conception of the intimate union between the two realms suggests that such a distinction is impossible to make, this separation is nonetheless reinforced at various points throughout the Instructions. Pope John Paul, through his citations of some of these same passages and through his own direct use of a very individualistic and spiritualistic notion of sin (as I discussed above), also helps reinforce a conception of liberation considerably at odds with that originally proposed by the Medellín bishops.

Ironically, the biggest change in the use of the term liberation came from the Latin American bishops themselves when they broached the subject again at CELAM IV in Santo Domingo. The references to liberation in the Santo Domingo conclusions are few and far between, but when an attempt is made to elaborate on the meaning of the term, the connotation given to it is overwhelmingly spiritual. At one point, for example, the bishops "testify with joy that in Jesus Christ we have integral liberation for each one of us and for our peoples; liberation from sin, from death and from slavery, which consists of forgiveness and reconciliation."\textsuperscript{156} In their most thorough treatment of the topic, the bishops quote extensively from Pope John Paul II's \textit{Redemptoris Missio} ("On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate"), a 1990 encyclical not


\textsuperscript{155} Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, \textit{Instruction (1984)}, 3; and Segundo, \textit{Theology and the Church}, 27-29 and 34.

\textsuperscript{156} CELAM, \textit{Santo Domingo}, no. 123.
considered to be part of the CST corpus. They note that, "the Church offers a force for liberation and promotes development precisely because it leads to conversion of heart and of mentality; aids the recognition of each person's dignity; [and] encourages solidarity, commitment, [and] service of one's neighbour." Immediately after, they again quote John Paul II that the Church "always safeguards the priority of transcendent and spiritual realities, which are premises of eschatological salvation." At these points, no direct mention is made of socio-economic change or structural transformation; liberation essentially appears as a spiritual process of conversion.

Strictly speaking, there is nothing conservative or anti-liberationist about emphasizing the spiritual component of liberation. As I have noted, the Medellín definition of liberation assumed that the spiritual and political were different aspects of the same struggle. However, increased spiritualization does become problematic if it is related to a corresponding shift away from the concern with political activities -- something we have witnessed in recent CST documents with their tendency to separate the spiritual and temporal realms and to critique the political activism of members of the popular church. Hence, even though we see that the term "liberation" becomes relatively commonplace in the official Church literature after the 1960s, we can also see that the sense imparted to it is different than the authors of the Medellín texts would have intended. Contrary to first appearances, then, this use of the concept of liberation reveals yet another manner in which a pre-conciliar conservatism surfaces in CST documents that are much more recent.

The Option for the Poor

The phrase "option for the poor" arose in connection with the Medellín documents and the early writings of the liberation theologians. Originally, the option meant that the


\[158\] Pope John Paul II, "Redemptoris Missio," no. 20, as cited in CELAM, Santo Domingo, no. 157.

\[159\] See especially Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY:
movement for liberation was to begin and end with the poor and the oppressed. The Church was also to side with the poor in the struggle for social change and to respect the fact that the poor themselves were to be the central architects of this change. As I noted above, this option for the poor further involved support for the CEBs and their reinvention of ecclesial structures.

Since its earliest formulation in the late 1960s, however, the concept has lost much of its force and specificity. This is especially evident in the significant linguistic dilution of the concept over the years. Nowhere now do we see mention of a straightforward "option for the poor" in CST. Instead, the notion emerges in the Puebla and Santo Domingo conference documents as the "preferential option for the poor," the "preferential love and concern for the poor and needy," and the "preferential option for the poor and young." Pope John Paul II, for his part, refers to "the option or love of preference for the poor" which is "an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity." Clearly, a certain softening in phraseology has occurred.

Liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo points to some of the implications of such changes. As he notes,

To opt (or to choose sides) in a conflict means to enter into it and to accept the inherent partisanship of one of the two sides -- in this case, that of the poor. Every option limits. And that limitation is even greater, the deeper and more crucial the conflict. But at the same time the strength and efficacy of the option comes precisely from its partiality. Thus, even appending the word "preferential" to the option phrase already implies a compromise position because it excludes the possibility of unequivocal solidarity with the poor (by implying that one opts for both the poor and the rich and just gives preference to

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Orbis Books, 1973), 287-306. Significantly, Gutiérrez was one of the theological advisors at the Medellín conference.

160 CELAM, Puebla, nos. 382, 733 and 1134-45; and CELAM, Santo Domingo, no. 180.

161 Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," no. 42. Emphasis in original. See also Pope John Paul II, "Centesimus Annus," no. 11.

162 Segundo, Theology and the Church, 41.
the former). The further the option devolves into "a special concern" or a "love of preference," the further the conflictive meaning of the phrase recedes.\footnote{Segundo, Theology and the Church, 41-43.}

Granted, Segundo's reading here is based on a limited examination of word choices and phrasing. Nonetheless, his suggestion — that these reformulations indicate a withdrawal from the crucial elements (i.e., conflict and partiality) of an efficacious option for the poor — can be corroborated by other means. Once we see that the changed option corresponds to and is reinforced by an emphasis on a particular ecclesiological model — that of the Church as unified and universal -- we can see that the shifts in the option for the poor do go deeper than diction.

Of the traditional defining marks of the Catholic Church, Vatican and Latin American Church leaders have emphasized unity and universality the most in recent decades. Church unity, for example, was a key theme at Vatican II and since has played an important role in the teachings of Pope John Paul II.\footnote{Second Vatican Council, "Lumen Gentium," in Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1987), no. 1-4; and Pope John Paul II, "Unity of the Church," The Pope Speaks 28, no. 3 (1983): 206-10.} It is based on the belief that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all." (Eph. 4:5-6) Universality is, of course, a hallmark of the Catholic Church, which is believed to direct its message of salvation to all people in all nations. Also treated in the texts of the Second Vatican Council, the value of universality is more noticeably emphasized in later documents such as Paul VI's \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi}.\footnote{Second Vatican Council, "Lumen Gentium," nos. 12-13; and Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi," nos. 61-65.}

The concentration on a unified and universal Church contradicts the original liberationist option for the poor in several ways. A focus on unity, for example, can obscure the extent to which the Church, as fully present in society, is traversed by the same conflicts and class struggles as is the larger social order.\footnote{Segundo, Theology and the Church, 41-43.} The idea of a unified Church is not only inaccurate, but unduly emphasizing this value also detracts from the
call to struggle against injustice and those responsible for it. As Segundo implies above and as Gutiérrez once affirmed, the decision to be with the poor and to opt for them inevitably involves an element of conflict: "to be with the oppressed is to be against the oppressor."167 An artificially unified institution in which conflict is suppressed is an institution in which the injustice of inequality is denied and is thereby perpetuated. Church leaders' appeals to unity are based on a denial of the nature of the Church as it exists in a class society, and on a denial of the fact that within such a society, when the Church professes to be free of conflict, it is actually taking the side of the elite against the oppressed majority.

Emphasizing the Church's universal nature has related implications for the option for the poor. A conservative focus on the Church as universal implies that all groups must be included in any social or political program undertaken. Insofar as an option for the poor involves an option against the oppressors, then, it can become equated with exclusivity or even sectarianism -- an affront to the universal character and mission of the Church.168 As a result, Church documents will often only go so far as to promote a preferential option for the poor that "does not suppose the exclusion of anyone."169 Ironically, however, through the very careful promotion of this preferential-but-not-exclusive option for the poor, Church leaders ultimately contribute to a system that conspires against -- and even excludes -- the oppressed. As Segundo notes, the force of an option is derived precisely from its partiality. When an unequivocal stand for the poor is not taken, the threat to existing structures of sin and injustice diminishes correspondingly. In a highly stratified class society such as Latin America, the attempt of the Church to be non-partisan cannot succeed -- not opting for the poor is the same as opting for the oppressors.

166 See Chapter One, pp. 17-18 of this thesis.
167 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, 301.
An ecclesiological model that posits the Church as united and universal can contradict a genuine and effective option for the poor in additional ways. This becomes obvious when we consider that although the unity of the Church may be based on the belief in one faith and one God, it is above all maintained, as Pope John Paul II stresses, by "obedience to the bishops and to the pope." This hierarchical structure is reinforced by the emphasis on the universal Church as a church with only one acceptable organization, magisterium, and doctrine -- the one centred in Rome.

As Pope John Paul II confirms,

Dissent... is opposed to ecclesial communion and to a correct understanding of the hierarchical constitution of the people of God. Opposition to the teaching of the Church's pastors cannot be seen as a legitimate expression either of Christian freedom or of the diversity of the Spirit's gifts.

Given this, certain questions logically arise. For example, does this emphasis on obedience to the magisterium conflict with the need of the poor to be central to the reflection on, and to the struggle for, liberation? Further, does this emphasis also conflict with the need for a redistribution of power within a Church that opts for the poor?

One way to broach the first question is to investigate the extent to which the historical experiences, perspectives, and needs of the poor are considered in the generation of theological reflection on liberation. In the 1960s, for example, Pope John XXIII introduced the "signs of the times" approach in CST. According to him, the signs of the times are distinctive characteristics of the current historical situation. Political, economic, or social in nature, these signs can be positive or negative, representing justice or injustice. With the Vatican II document Gaudium et Spes, the signs of the times became the starting point in the process of moral discernment on social matters. Thus the concrete

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170 Pope John Paul II, "Unity of the Church," 207.
171 Richard, "The Latin American Church," 41-43.
historical situation and its crises were chronicled and analyzed first, were then followed by an interpretation in the light of the Gospel, and were finally followed by suggestions for pastoral action. The same inductive methodology of "see, judge, act" was also adopted in Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* and in the documents of the Medellín conference. The CELAM bishops in particular exemplified this manner of approaching social issues. By beginning each of their documents with detailed descriptions and denunciations of the injustices and inadequacies in Latin American societies, the Medellín bishops grounded their social teachings on the demands of the historical context. This inductive formulation is one way to give priority to the poor and their struggles in the creation of theology and the quest for liberation.

In more recent times, however, the emphasis has shifted. In several CST documents since Medellín, conformity to orthodoxy appears to take precedence over the life experiences of the poor. For example, Pope Paul's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*, and the Santo Domingo document of the Latin American bishops all adopt a "theology, world, action" formula. Such texts begin with lengthy theological expositions that are only then followed by discussions of current social problems and finally by suggestions for appropriate remedying actions. More than just organizational formalities, however, the teaching itself is also significant. Thus, for example, we can note that in John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* the aim is to apply the century-old teaching of *Rerum Novarum* to the conditions of the world in 1991. Though the Pope indicates he is performing a "re-reading" of the text and is giving "careful consideration to current events," his point is not to bring Leo's encyclical up to date, but is rather to "discover anew the richness of the fundamental principles which it formulated . . . [and] confirm the permanent value of such teaching."¹⁷⁴ Modern historical circumstances apparently have no determinative influence on social teaching; instead, it is "the church's tradition, which contains what is old . . . which enables us to interpret the 'new things.'"¹⁷⁵ Here the procedure is not a historically relevant reinterpretation of traditional social teaching, but rather a reapplication of dogma to modern historical circumstances.

¹⁷⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 3.
These documents represent a reversion to a distinctly pre-conciliar methodology. Prior to the 1960s, the institutional Church, viewed as the privileged and exclusive guardian of the truth of revelation, was accorded prime responsibility for moral teaching. In the pre-Vatican II vertical authority structure of the Church, the hierarchical magisterium, headed by the Pope, was seen as the infallible interpreter of the revelation of Jesus Christ and therefore as the unquestionable authority on all social and economic matters. Regardless of new demands and changed historical conditions, the teaching of the magisterium was not to be altered, but only adapted carefully or applied precisely to the needs of time and circumstance. With this dogmatic methodology, the magisterium's authoritative expression of the immutable and eternal truth was the starting point for all social teaching pronouncements that could then be surely applied to any number of historical situations.

While the documents cited above certainly employ this type of deductive reasoning, the two Vatican Instructions on liberation theology issued in the mid-1980s emulate the pre-conciliar approach most closely. In these texts, social teaching is not said to be based on the historical context. Instead, the truth of divine revelation, as interpreted by the Church's hierarchical magisterium, is pronounced as the starting point for all theological reflection on human liberation:

Through the mystery of the Incarnate Word and Redeemer of the world, she [the Church] possesses the truth regarding the Father and his love for us, and also the truth concerning man and his freedom . . . . It is from Christ the Redeemer that her thought and action originate when, as she contemplates the tragedies affecting the world, she reflects on the meaning of liberation and true freedom and on the paths leading to them.

175 Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, no. 3.
177 Pope Pius XI, "Quadragesimo Anno," no. 18.
178 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction (1986), 5; see also Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction (1984), 14 and 30.
As in the pre-conciliar era, historical conditions and actions are evaluated against an unquestionable orthodoxy instead of forming the dynamic theological locus themselves. With these deductive processes, the poor and their experiences in history are devalued in relation to the need for obedience to the hierarchical magisterium and to its infallible interpretation of revelation.\textsuperscript{179} Such a methodology thus conflicts with the option for the poor's demand that the poor and their needs are placed front and centre in the process of liberation.

Turning to our final questions, what of the poor as the "architects of change" themselves? Has there been a reinvention of the Church along the lines indicated by the option for the poor? The answers to these questions may be predictable in light of the above comments on methodology, but the evidence merits reviewing nonetheless.

Consider, once more, the Church's prohibition on revolutionary violence as I described it above. Forbidding the use of force by the oppressed is a matter of restricting the role of the poor as agents of change. By not granting any legitimacy to the violent means the poor have sometimes felt impelled to use in the struggle for liberation, Church leaders are withdrawing from an option from the poor. It is a question of the distribution of authority within the Church. In a truly reinvented Church, one in which authority can originate from the base, the decision of those at the base (who also form the majority in the Church) -- even if it is a decision to use violence -- cannot be unequivocally denied. A predetermined and absolute prohibition of revolutionary violence in effect rescinds the right of the poor to determine for themselves the path to their own liberation (while simultaneously protecting the power and privileges of the ruling classes).

We can also examine the reaction of the Church hierarchy to the CEBs over the years. As early as Pope Paul VI, CEBs were admonished to remain "firmly attached to the local Church" and "never sectarian." According to Pope Paul in Evangelii Nuntiandi, those "communities which by their spirit of opposition cut themselves off from the

Church, and whose unity they wound, can well be called *communautés de base*, but in this case it is strictly a sociological name. They could not, without a misuse of terms, be called ecclesial *communautés de base*. . . .”180 It is worth noting that in this same passage Paul also appeals to the value of Church universality in his support of his position on CEBs. In the Puebla document, too, as I noted above, the Church’s position on CEBs is restrictive as the bishops attempt to indicate what types of activity are not acceptable in these groups. Significantly, the Puebla delegates also appeal to unity and universality in their treatment of the "popular church" (i.e., the CEBs). They argue that the popular church is problematic because it "implicates a division within the bosom of the Church and an unacceptable denial of the hierarchy’s function."181 Moreover, they cast the popular church in terms of the issue of "parallel magisteria,"182 another way of implying that CEBs are a divisive phenomenon. In these cases, the hierarchy demonstrates their lack of willingness to relinquish authority to the laity in the CEBs.

This conservative theoretical position on CEBs has been reinforced by Rome’s actions vis-à-vis the popular church’s supporters in Latin America. During John Paul II’s tenure, the Vatican has censured the pro-CEB Latin American Conference of Religious (CLAR) and has further "questioned, controlled, or quashed" many other progressive Church experiments.183 Pope John Paul II himself has replaced several progressive Latin American bishops with conservative ones (including members of the ultra-rightist Opus Dei movement), often over the protests of the local Churches.184 Rome has also blocked the appointments of progressive professors to Latin American theology schools. And finally, of course, Rome has persecuted, censored, and silenced certain liberationist

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180 Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi," no. 58.
181 CELAM, *Puebla*, no. 263.
182 CELAM, *Puebla*, no. 262.
theologians, including Leonardo Boff (who, significantly, has written extensively on the reinvention of the Church). ¹⁸⁵

Authoritarian actions of this nature do not signify a transformation of traditional Church structures. If anything, they represent a regression to a pre-conciliar authority structure that represents the opposite of a democratized Church of the poor. When we add to these facts the other implications of an overemphasis on the unity and universality of the Church, a pre-conciliar style conservatism is evident again. Hence, over the years and through to its expression as a "preferential love and concern for the poor and needy," the bold and precise commitment of the original "option for the poor" has devolved into a vague and subdued platitude.

Conclusion

Pope John Paul II, in his introductory comments to Laborem Exercens, noted that his reflections on work were intended to be "in organic connection" with the Church's whole social teaching tradition. ¹⁸⁶ The above analysis shows that the Pope did follow through with his intention, not only in Laborem Exercens, but also in his later social encyclicals. In fact, on the crucial issues related to social justice discussed above, the other documents surveyed would also fit in with the fundamentally conservative heritage passed on from Pope Leo XIII in the last century.

Perhaps this is not surprising, given that Tradition is considered to be one of the anchors of the Catholic faith. The conservative tradition that influences much of the official Church's position on social justice does, however, provide cause for a re-evaluation of the Medellín conference and of its significance to the larger body of CST. Seen from this perspective, the Medellín conference does not quite fit in. Medellín did not

¹⁸⁶ Pope John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," no. 2.
inaugurate a new era in Church progressivism; rather, it remains as an exception in the otherwise conservative trajectory of Church teachings. Still, Medellín did make a mark. Medellín introduced Latin American liberation theology to the worldwide Church and official CST. Medellín also inspired and supported militants in the Latin American Church who struggled for social change. Most importantly, the words and actions associated with Medellín caused a backlash.

Once the CELAM bishops introduced their liberationist model at Medellín, it could not be ignored. The impression the Medellín bishops helped to make can be seen in the various popes' admonishments about the "liberation movement" and their critiques of the popular church. It can be seen in the silencing of Leonardo Boff, in the careful adoptions and adaptations of the terms "liberation" and "option for the poor," and in the very fact that the two Instructions on liberation were deemed necessary. With Medellín, the liberationist-conservative conflict in the Church hierarchy was revealed. With these subsequent events and activities, the struggle was proved present at other levels of the institution as well.

Costa Rican Church agents are both witnesses to these liberationist-conservative struggles and participants in them. They seek to understand and implement CST as they develop their own versions of a Catholic *pastoral obrera*, which in turn can be liberationist or conservative in orientation. Church actors do not simply translate CST into theoretical positions and practical programming, however. Rather, CST is appropriated and employed in ways that are related to these actors' needs, experiences, and alliances within the Costa Rican Church and society. The complex manner in which this occurs will be the subject of the remaining chapters of this thesis.
Chapter Five

Archbishop Arrieta and the Costa Rican Episcopal Conference:
The Church Speaks Out on Social Justice Issues

Only the union of all Costa Ricans, without social, political or religious distinctions, can move us forward and free us from a social cataclysm -- Archbishop Arrieta in "United to Save Costa Rica," a 1982 editorial

Where there is work there is bread, and where there is bread there is peace -- Frequent expression of Mons. Arrieta

After the 1952 death of Archbishop Sanabria, the outspoken Church leader and vigorous proponent of social reform, the Costa Rican hierarchy fell into a so-called period of "long silence" regarding social and political issues. This era, which spanned the tenures of both Archbishop Odio (1952–59) and Archbishop Rodríguez (1960–78), can be best characterized as one of extreme Church complacency with regard to social problems. Though the imagined threat of communism did occasionally rouse the bishops to heated commentary, in general the Costa Rican episcopate displayed little public concern for social justice issues during this period. Not even the 1960s and the currents of change in the worldwide Church had much effect on the hierarchy. As some have remarked, all Vatican II meant in Costa Rica was that priests could now turn around and speak Spanish when saying Mass.¹ Medellín made even less of an impact, perhaps predictable with the arch-conservative Mons. Rodríguez leaving the conference in Colombia before the closing ceremony and refusing to sign the liberationist final document.

All this appeared to change, however, with the 1979 appointment of Archbishop Román Arrieta Villalobos. Since that time, Mons. Arrieta and the Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica (CECOR, the Costa Rican Episcopal Conference) have issued numerous noteworthy cartas pastorales (pastoral letters) on social justice issues. In this chapter, after

discussing the context for Arrieta’s appointment, I explore the recurring themes in these and other lesser-known social pronouncements of the hierarchy. I also provide a critical analysis of the CECOR bishops’ words and actions in relation to workers’ associations and activism in Costa Rica. By examining the political, economic, ideological, and institutional variables affecting the bishops’ positions, we can see why the bishops chose to speak out when and how they did, and what functions their pronouncements performed in the context of Costa Rican society and of the Church itself.

**The Appointment of Mons. Arrieta: The Man They Call "Manzanita"**

It came as no surprise that the Costa Rican Church found its voice again after Mons. Arrieta’s appointment as Archbishop. As Bishop of Tilarán (1961-79), Arrieta had been known as an exception, as one of the few Church leaders who would publicly involve himself in social justice issues during the long period of silence. Perhaps most notably, Arrieta achieved national fame in 1975 for his statements in support of the Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) government’s controversial irrigation and agrarian reform proposal for the Guanacaste region of the country. Because of the bishop’s tenacity in promoting the project’s benefits for poor campesinos -- even in the face of harsh criticism from the cattle-owning latifundistas of the area -- it appeared that the Costa Rican Church had finally found a second Sanabria.

Still, in spite of (or, more likely, because of) the leadership he had shown on the Guanacaste issue, Arrieta was not automatically appointed archbishop when the time came. Although Mons. Rodríguez’s failing health meant that the Church was effectively leaderless in 1978 and early 1979, and although Arrieta appeared to be well respected in Church circles as president of both CECOR and SEDAC (Secretariado Episcopal de América Central y Panamá), Arrieta’s widely expected ascension to the archbishop’s position was delayed. The resistance to Arrieta came primarily from the newly elected

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3 For a more detailed description of this controversy, see Williams, *Catholic Church and Politics*, 133-34.
Partido Unión Nacional (PUN) government of Rodrigo Carazo. Aware of Arrieta’s close ties to the PLN and witness to the effects of such ties in the irrigation and land reform debate, President Carazo succeeded in convincing the Vatican to postpone naming a new archbishop until he could visit Rome to discuss the issue in person. When Carazo could not find another suitable candidate for archbishop and when he became otherwise occupied trying to cope with the worsening economic crisis in Costa Rica, Arrieta was finally named Archbishop of San José in July of 1979.

In the years after his appointment, Arrieta took on even more responsibilities in the international Catholic Church. Once a long-serving President of CELAM’s Department of Vocations and Ministries, he was elevated to the role of Second Vice-President of CELAM from 1980-83. In terms of the Vatican, Arrieta served as a consultant on the Pontifical Commission for Latin America and, in the early 1980s, was named as a member of both the Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law and the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. At the same time, Arrieta grew to become a respected public figure at home, receiving high approval ratings in Costa Rican public opinion polls. Before long, the Archbishop came to be known colloquially and affectionately as "Manzanita" (little apple), a reference to his rather round and red face and definitely not (as we shall soon see) to any communist convictions. Yet, after his biography it is Arrieta’s actual socio-political positions, and those of the CECOR bishops collectively, that form the next relevant topic for investigation in this thesis.

**Political Pronouncements and Preferences of the Hierarchy**

During the time period covered by this thesis, the CECOR bishops as a collective and Mons. Arrieta as an individual released a total of nine major pastoral letters, and a much greater number of shorter pronouncements, on topics related to politics and social justice. Though, as I will demonstrate, positions resonating with the conservative tradition

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4 Richard and Meléndez, "La Iglesia de los pobres," 292-94.
within CST can be detected throughout the hierarchy's statements over the years, the more subtle differences in the tone and targets of the bishops' analyses can be best discussed in terms of three specific time periods: 1979-1981, 1982-1989, and 1990-1996.


In the period immediately following Arrieta's appointment, the bishops issued three major collective pastoral letters addressing the country's severe economic crisis. The first and, arguably, most important of these was "Evangelization and Social Reality in Costa Rica," the document that definitively broke the bishops' silence in December 1979. This missive was followed by "The Church and the Current Moment," in August 1981, and by the aptly-named "United in Hope," a Christmas message for the same year. Throughout this period, moreover, Mons. Arrieta also released certain individual statements in which sought to clarify the meaning of the socio-religious themes of "liberation" and the "preferential option for the poor."

"Evangelization and Social Reality in Costa Rica" represents the bishops' conscious effort to apply the categories and teachings of that year's CELAM conference in Puebla to the Costa Rican crisis. In the letter, the fact that one third of the population lives in state of "misery" is pronounced to be "a grave negation of the Kingdom of God." The Costa Rican hierarchy also condemns the "social breach between the rich and poor," in which the privileged minorities live in "the offensive ostentation of superabundance." Directly

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6 See, for example, "Popularidad que es aceptación," *El Mensajero del Claro* 23 (November 1987): 16.
7 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," 159-81.
10 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 2.4.
citing the Puebla document, the bishops classify this situation as one of "social sin," and as "a scandal and contradiction of the essence of Christianity."11

When it comes to laying blame for the "asphyxiating economic situation and distressing social reality"12 in the country, the bishops point both to sinful attitudes and structural flaws in the socio-economic system. Singled out on the one hand are the "materialistic selfishness and an unbridled urge for luxury,"13 along with the "uncontrolled ambition" of a consumerist society.14 On the other hand, the bishops refer to the "structures and mechanisms" of a socio-economic development process that has benefited the middle and upper classes more than the popular classes.15 In general, though, the bishops are rather vague about how these structures and mechanisms function, they do accuse the "privileged groups" and powerful political "plotters" of orienting the structure of commerce and production in their favour, and of controlling public opinion through their influence over the mass media.16

This denunciation of the Costa Rican social reality is strong, as is the language used to delineate what must change. Once again citing phrases from the Puebla conference final document, the bishops call for both a "personal conversion and profound changes of structures."17 With the CELAM bishops, the Costa Rican hierarchy thus aims to support the "integral liberation of the human person,"18 as well as Puebla's "unambiguous preferential option for the poor."19

Yet, in spite of the impression given by the use of such liberationist language, the remedies actually proposed by the bishops are quite weak. As other analysts have also

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11 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 2.4.
12 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 2.5.
13 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 2.5.
14 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 5.12.
15 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," nos. 5.4 and 5.6.
16 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 5.8.
17 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 2.6.
18 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 3.5; see also nos. 2.1 and 8.1.
19 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 6.2; see also 3.2.
recognized, the bishops do not point to any specific alternatives to the current structures, nor to any concrete strategies for overcoming societal inequalities. In fact, they stress that their role is not to promote specific forms of social organization or economic models, and they qualify their support for liberation by saying that "it is not technical, but moral and from faith." Moreover, the bishops appeal almost exclusively to the upper classes in society in their letter, calling upon the privileged to act as "Good Samaritans" and to "exercise love and practice justice towards [their] needy brothers." Quoting Puebla yet again, the bishops call for the rich to be "converted and liberated" from their slavery to riches and from their selfishness. The poor, instead of being empowered to change the world around them, must be "freed" from individualism and from being "attracted and seduced by the false ideals of a consumer society." This emphasis on attitudinal as opposed to structural change, and on the rich as opposed to the poor as the prime agents of change, contrasts with the almost strident phrasing the bishops use in their document. Despite some of the liberationist overtones implied by the language of the letter, the underlying message of the document falls closer to the conservative end of the CST spectrum — much as we saw, in the previous chapter, to be the case with the Puebla document itself.

Many of the same biases are evident in the other two pastoral letters released by the bishops. Though in both "The Church and the Current Moment" and "United in Hope" we find a condemnation of the crisis and its characteristics (unemployment, inflation, corruption, the growing gap between rich and poor, etc.), the solutions proposed do not seriously challenge the current socio-economic structure or the privileges and power of those in charge of it. Avenues for the structural renovation of society are ignored in favour

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20 Richard and Meléndez, La Iglesia de los pobres, 296-97; and Williams, Catholic Church and Politics, 138-39.
21 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 3.4.
22 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 3.5.
23 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 3.2; see also nos. 2.3, 5.11, and 6.4.
24 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 3.2.
of calls for a "radical change of attitude" and appeals to "Christian sentiments" and "conscience." Once again, the remedies for the crisis involve mainly the powerful in society, as the bishops express hope that Jesus will "with celestial brilliance illumine the mind and heart of our government leaders, politicians, businessmen, and all those who can do as much to improve our current situation." Hence the privileged are asked to contribute generously to Church programs for the poor, to live austerely, to be content with what they have and to not press for more, and to pay higher taxes so that the government can redirect resources and fund programs for those most in need. In all of this, the poor themselves are not accorded much agency, but are treated more as the needy victims of help from above.

Beyond this, two other important themes in these letters merit comment. The first is the bishops' preoccupation with preserving social peace in Costa Rica. They repeatedly warn that the characteristics of the crisis present "a grave threat" to social harmony. Here, the hierarchy views the crisis as potentially initiating some sort of dangerous chain reaction, as they pray to "let us maintain a Costa Rica free of the violence that hunger can provoke." At another point, they plead so that God will "not permit that, due to the selfishness, indifference, or short-sightedness of some, the situation will deteriorate even more, violence will arise, chaos will reign and the country will perish." In this view, we note that the injustice and poverty characteristic of the crisis are not defined as violent in themselves, the argument instead being that only if such inequality and suffering are not ameliorated will violence erupt. This categorization stands in contrast to that of the Medellín conference and its definition of "institutionalized violence," in which the very
structures of society are condemned as a negation of peace. The CECOR bishops, by refusing to acknowledge the inequality of the crisis as a form of violence in itself, are minimizing the severity of the conflict in Costa Rica. Moreover, with their insistence that social peace must be preserved at all costs, they are communicating to their constituents that violence is an unacceptable reaction to social problems.

This last point is certainly consistent with a final theme that comes to the fore in these pastoral letters, that of social unity. The unified efforts of Costa Ricans are, for the bishops, the key to overcoming the economic crisis. All Costa Ricans, regardless of social, political, or economic differences, must work together in solidarity and fraternity to resolve the nation's problems. They must overcome any political and ideological barriers to confront their challenges together, "forging [their] common destiny as one big family." As a corollary to this position, the bishops condemn struggle and polarization as anti-Christian, and warn against the "exacerbated hatred that is leading peoples dear and near to us to genocide and self-immolation." Though there is a tacit reference to the Nicaraguan situation here, the bishops' message is clear: it is Christian collaboration, not conflict and confrontation, that will resolve Costa Rica's crisis. Overall, the bishops' emphasis on unity and collaboration, in the face of an economic crisis characterized by the fact of class struggle, also places the Costa Rican hierarchy within the conservative CST tradition.

This interpretation is borne out by a closer examination of the way in which the bishops use the concept of the preferential option for the poor. The careful observer, for example, will note that the 1979 carta pastoral refers to an "unambiguous" preferential option for the poor. Yet, as I also outlined in the previous chapter, by merely appending the qualification "preferential" onto the phrase "option for the poor," ambiguity, or at least a degree of equivocation, is introduced (since the implication is that one opts for both the rich and the poor, and just gives preference to the poor). In fact, the bishops themselves

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33 CECOR, "Iglesia y momento actual," nos. 1.3, 2, 2.1.8, and 2.2.2.
34 CECOR, "Iglesia y momento actual," no. 2.2.3.
35 CECOR, "Iglesia y momento actual," no. 2.2.3.
36 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 6.2.
confirm that they do not intend to promote exclusivity or side-taking as they state that "this option for the poor does not mean, in return, the undervaluing, or even less the rejection of the rich." Mons. Arrieta, in an individual statement on the topic, also takes care to stress that above all the option for the poor should be an authentic "option for Christ." For the Archbishop, this means that Marxism and its method of analysis, with its acceptance of class struggle and violence, must be rejected. Otherwise, he warns, the unity of the Church and the communion of all its members are threatened.

In fact, Arrieta cites similar principles to clarify what the term liberation should mean for Christians. Much as the Pope and Cardinal Ratzinger were soon to do with their infamous Instructions on liberation theology, Arrieta obviously felt the need to stipulate what liberation was and what it was not. According to him, "authentic" or "Christian" liberation (the term is almost never left to stand on its own) has four key characteristics. Liberation should be based in faith (not ideologies); liberation should begin with the conversion of individual hearts (one should begin with oneself before attempting the liberation of the world); liberation should employ only "evangelical" means (and never violence); and liberation should be "rectilinear" (involving only an option for Christ, since anything else -- such as opting for an idolatrous socio-economic system -- would destroy Christian unity).

Much as was the case with the collective pastoral letters, then, Arrieta's definitions of liberation and the preferential option for the poor emphasize the political and socio-religious convictions that are the hallmarks of conservative CST.

Continuing Conservatism and a Preference for the PLN (1982-1989)

In the second period under investigation, the CECOR bishops collectively issued four further pastoral letters. The most relevant to the present discussion are: "Blessed is

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37 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 3.2.
He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord," released shortly before the Pope's 1983 visit to Costa Rica; "The Church in the Face of the Electoral Process," circulated in late 1985 in anticipation of the elections slated for the following February; and "A Call from the Bishops of Costa Rica to the Conscience of the Country," published in March of 1988. Though of these only the 1988 call from the bishops focused centrally on overcoming the country's economic woes, all three pastorals contained material of relevance regarding the Church's position on social justice. By and large, moreover, the bishops in these documents fall into their earlier patterns when it comes to offering opinions about how best to solve the Costa Rican crisis.

Once again, no real changes of a structural nature are recommended. Instead, for example, the hierarchy asks public sector workers to work more conscientiously and efficiently, and to treat their office machines more "delicately" and maintain them regularly, so that the money saved can be directed to the needs of the poor. In other cases, the bishops concentrate on factors such as the "reform of customs" or the "reconstitution of man" as the means to societal improvement. Indeed, in this period we also find the resurrection of the myth of the noble Costa Rican campesino, as the bishops appeal to individuals to "project the authentic campesino soul, so full of values, that has forged the history of our people." Here the focus is on the moral renovation of citizens and not, as the bishops emphasize, on any ideology or socio-economic "system."

The bishops also remain biased toward a top-down model of social change. The letters either ask those with economic and political power to help the needy or, as in the case of the carta released during the mid-1980s election campaign, ask the faithful to elect

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40 Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica, Bendito el que viene en el nombre del Señor: Exhortación de los obispos de Costa Rica ante la próxima venida de S.S. Juan Pablo II (San José, C.R.: Ediciones CECOR, 1983).
43 CECOR, Una llamada de los obispos, no. 1.
44 CECOR, Bendito el que viene, III: nos. 4.1-4.3.
representatives who will "opt preferentially for the poor and fully dedicate themselves to their integral promotion."\textsuperscript{46} Mons. Arrieta, in his individual statements, reinforces this rather paternalistic "obligation" (\textit{compromiso con los pobres}) by "calling for the rich to not forget the poor, and for selfishness to die so that they can open themselves to their brothers with generosity."\textsuperscript{47} For all their rhetoric about committing and opting for the poor, none of the bishops' statements during this time incorporate the necessary actions of encouragement or empowerment for the poor, actions that would make such commitments and options truly effective.

A final set of similarities between the bishops' documents during the first and second periods under investigation relates to the themes of social peace and unity. Again, ensuring peace, love, and order (as opposed to "war, hatred, and chaos") is portrayed as a prime motivation for caring for the poor and for overcoming the gap between the rich and poor.\textsuperscript{48} Especially evident, however, is a stress on Christian unity -- and specifically \textit{Church} unity -- above all in "Blessed is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord." In this 1983 document, the bishops, who define themselves as "pastors at the service of unity and truth,"\textsuperscript{49} affirm that it is the Pope who is the guarantor of unity in the Church, the "visible and lasting source and foundation of the unity of faith and of communion."\textsuperscript{50} Here the bishops are explicitly promoting a hierarchical ecclesiological model, and they emphasize that it should not be confused with civil society and its democratic characteristics.\textsuperscript{51} Likewise, they discredit the notion of the "wrongly named" popular church, arguing that it is "neither Church nor popular."\textsuperscript{52} In the CECOR bishops' institutional model, there is

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\item \textsuperscript{45} CECOR, \textit{Bendito el que viene}, III: no. 4.3.
\item \textsuperscript{46} CECOR, "La Iglesia ante el proceso electoral," no. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{48} CECOR, "La Iglesia ante el proceso electoral," nos. 21-22.
\item \textsuperscript{49} CECOR, \textit{Bendito el que viene}, I: no. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{50} CECOR, \textit{Bendito el que viene}, II: no. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{51} CECOR, \textit{Bendito el que viene}, I: no. 2.1.
\item \textsuperscript{52} CECOR, \textit{Bendito el que viene}, I: no. 2.2; see the similar repudiation of the popular church in "Solemnidad de nuestra Señora de los Ángeles (1987)," 2; and Armando
only one path to follow — that laid out by the Pope: "to separate oneself from him is to separate oneself from Christ."53

As I will discuss later on, these comments can be related to the situation of the Church in neighbouring Nicaragua. Nonetheless, they are also consistent with the statements Mons. Arrieta made on the importance of Christian unity earlier in the 1980s. Given such concerns for unity, moreover, and given Arrieta's position on liberation as outlined above, it is not surprising that the Archbishop displayed strong support for the 1984 Instruction on liberation theology issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In his formal declaration on the topic, Arrieta echoes the Vatican document in all its key points: the definition of liberation as a "liberation from the radical slavery of sin," the rejection of a principally political form of liberation, and the warning of the dangers of using Marxist analysis. This statement of solidarity with the Instruction provides one more link between the Costa Rican Church and the conservative project of the Vatican.

For all the consistencies in the bishops' statements throughout these two periods, however, one important new element can be detected in the public position of the Church. Beginning with the 1982 election of Luis Alberto Monge, the Church — and particularly Mons. Arrieta — made a clear option for the PLN-led State. From this point on, through to the election and presidential term of Monge's successor Oscar Arias (1986-90), the official Costa Rican Church played a crucial role in supporting the PLN government in both its anti-crisis strategy and its foreign policy commitments.

Clues about the forthcoming collaboration came as early as the morning following Monge's election victory, when Arrieta hosted the ceremony proclaiming the new president in the atrium of the Metropolitan Cathedral (the Archbishop was later to continue with his new tradition after Arias was elected four years later). During his remarks to the

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53 CECOR, Bendito el que viene, II: no. 1.3.
nation, the Archbishop invoked the nation's "sacred heritage" and "exemplary" traditions of peace and democracy, while also warning that these were threatened by the effects of the crisis and by those associated with "terrorism, social instability, and intimidation." Significantly, he called upon Costa Ricans to "close ranks" (cerrar filas) around the new government and to work together with the newly elected leaders to overcome the economic crisis. Like Arrieta, at the ceremony Monge also emphasized that all Costa Ricans needed to pull together in a spirit of solidarity in order to confront the crisis. The president elect closed his speech by stating his desire to serve the people of Costa Rica as well as God, and by referring to the "heavy cross" that he had been given and that he would carry on his shoulders with discipline and humility. With this event a significant alliance, which featured the nation's religious leader speaking in clearly political terms and its future political leader openly adopting religious symbolism, came to light.

The Church's cartas pastorales during the eight years of PLN rule in the 1980s display further evidence of this Church-State relationship. Whereas during President Carazo's tenure the Church's critique of the economic crisis was pointed and unforgiving, the pastoral letters during the time of Monge and Arias took on a more conciliatory tone. The 1983 and 1985 letters contain a relatively weak critique of social conditions and, as noted, were not primarily concerned with the country's economic conditions anyway. Moreover, even the hierarchy's 1988 letter on the crisis was worded to avoid offending those in political power. In the preamble to the document, the bishops stressed that by pointing out problems they did not mean "to humiliate anyone, whether that be the government, its institutions, or private initiative." They further prefaced their comments on reducing public spending by acknowledging the government's efforts in this area to

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57 Andrés Opazo Bernales, Costa Rica, 74-79.
58 CECOR, Una llamada de los obispos, preambulo.
date, even though they recognized that more needed to be done.\footnote{CECOR, \textit{Una llamada de los obispos}, no. 1.} By muting their critique of the economic crisis and by softening their direct comments toward the government in this way, the bishops helped the government disassociate itself from the causes of the crisis. Perhaps more importantly, they helped reinforce the notion that the government was effectively working to overcome the nation's problems.

This latter point is especially important since both Monge and Arias sought to portray themselves as leaders capable of competently combating the crisis. The structural adjustment agreements these presidents signed with the IMF and the World Bank were part of their overall strategy to restabilize the Costa Rican economy through neo-liberal policies. And while the government attempted to impose the structural framework for neo-liberalism, the Church provided important ideological and practical backing for the project. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in Mons. Arrieta's "Ten Commandments of Austerity" (\textit{decálogo de la austeridad}). Widely publicized in the Costa Rican media during 1984, these commandments represented another merging of religious symbolism with a frankly political agenda in the Church's discourse. Explicitly referring to the government's calls for austerity as a means to overcome the crisis, the Archbishop reinforces this strategy by asking Costa Ricans to avoid spending money on vices and luxuries, to save as much as possible, to use public services sparingly, and to conserve petrol by walking instead of driving, etc.\footnote{Mons. Román Arrieta, "Decálogo de la austeridad," \textit{Eco Católico}, 15 January 1984, 3.} Such a program, beyond helping to inculcate among the population a mindset of making sacrifices for one's country, was also a means to soften the side effects of the bitter pill of structural adjustment. By promoting these austerity measures, then, the Archbishop helped the government to maintain social stability during a period of widespread economic hardship.

A related joint venture of the Church and State during this period functioned in a similar manner. In 1982, the Monge administration proposed that the Church assist in the implementation of a new "National Food Distribution Plan," intended to alleviate the poverty of approximately 25,000 of Costa Rica's poorest families. The Church agreed,
and through Cáritas (its social assistance agency) and local parishes it began to assess the needs of families and distribute staple food items. While undoubtedly this program helped to satisfy the basic needs of many poor families, this type of assistencialismo also fit in with the Costa Rican Church's standard "top-down" model of coping with social problems. Moreover, the Cáritas program was another means through which the Church acted as an accomplice in the government's program of "social containment" during a time of crisis.  

A final form of Church support for the State came in relation to the Costa Rican government's various approaches to the increasingly complex Nicaraguan situation. By the time Monge was elected in 1982, the Nicaraguan counterrevolution was already in full swing. Though at the beginning of his term Monge proclaimed Costa Rica's neutrality on the Nicaraguan issue, because of the importance of his alliance with the United States (which provided much-needed economic aid for Costa Rica during the crisis) he also allowed the anti-Sandinista contra rebels to operate from Costa Rican territory with little or no interference. After 1984, the Monge administration's support for Ronald Reagan's campaign against the Sandinistas became more overt and, as military aid (and a group of U.S. Green Berets) poured into Costa Rica, the "neutral country without an army" was fully embroiled in what was threatening to become an all-out war in the region. Only with the 1986 election of Oscar Arias and the 1987 acceptance of his Esquipulas II peace plan did tensions (and the Reagan-Costa Rican alliance) subside.

Throughout this period, the stance of the official Costa Rican Church either directly or indirectly bolstered the government's position vis-à-vis Nicaragua. Thus during the Monge administration the Church proclaimed its support for the government's proclamation of neutrality. But it simultaneously worked against the Sandinistas on several levels. The hierarchy, for example, persisted in "satanizing" the Sandinista State as

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61 Opazo, Costa Rica, 77; and Williams, Catholic Church and Politics, 142.
a "Marxist regime," and Mons. Arrieta was particularly incensed over the fact that priests occupied several key positions in the revolutionary government. The Archbishop also harshly chastized the paper *Eco Católico* for running an editorial criticizing Reagan's policies toward Nicaragua and lauding the early accomplishments of the revolutionary government. In addition, the Costa Rican bishops clearly sided with the Sandinista's archenemy, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo. The Costa Rican hierarchy's attack on the "popular church," which in Nicaragua had publicly split with Obando shortly after the revolution, was one form of support for the embattled Cardinal. The bishops also openly pledged their solidarity with the leader of the "persecuted" Nicaraguan Church and invited him to join Mons. Arrieta to celebrate the annual public Mass in honour of Costa Rica's patron saint. Significantly, the Costa Rican hierarchy was notoriously silent regarding the channelling of U.S. military aid to the *contras*, in contrast to many other Latin American religious leaders at the time. Finally, when the time came, the Church also threw its weight behind Arias' peace plan, asking the faithful to pray for its acceptance and celebrating its success with a thanksgiving mass.

In the end, and as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, the bishops' stance on Nicaragua was not merely an opinion on Costa Rican foreign policy; the anti-Sandinista position can also be linked to the Church's institutional need for self-preservation. For now, however, suffice it to say that the hierarchy's public statements on Nicaragua were, like so many actions of the Costa Rican Church during this time, another

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form of support for the Costa Rican government struggling with an economic crisis at home and a political crisis next door.

A Change in the Church's Direction (1990-1996)?

The final period under investigation was marked by two major pastoral letters, "New Evangelization and Human Promotion" (released by the Archbishop in 1993) and "Mother Earth" (a CECOR document published in 1994), and, once again, by numerous other official Church statements of import from a social justice perspective. Though in many respects the bishops simply presented more of the same socio-political convictions during this period, there appeared to be some significant shifts to the left in their positions around the time of "Mother Earth." These new liberationist notes in the hierarchy's message in particular will deserve a closer analysis.

To begin, however, we see that Mons. Arrieta and the hierarchy did not waver on their definitions of core socio-religious concepts. In fact, Arrieta's 1980 four-point discussion of Christian liberation was re-published, almost verbatim, in 1990 and 1996. The option for the poor was once again carefully cast, this time as a "commitment to the poor" or, in the words of the Santo Domingo conference, as an "authentic preferential option for the poor" and an "effective preoccupation for the poorest," alongside a "preferential option for youth." The wording of each of these phrases clearly represents a weakening of the originally bold and unequivocal liberationist option for the poor. As in

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71 Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica (CECOR), Madre Tierra: Mensaje de los obispos de Costa Rica sobre la situación de los campesinos y los indígenas (San José, C.R.: [Ediciones CECOR?], 1994).
73 Mons. Román Arrieta, "La Iglesia tiene un compromiso con los más pobres," Eco Católico, 8 April 1990, 3.
74 Mons. Arrieta, Nueva Evangelización, IV: no. 6.
75 Mons. Arrieta, Nueva Evangelización, IV: no. 37.
previous years, we can also note an emphasis on maintaining social peace, and on the unity of all Costa Ricans as a means to overcome social problems.\textsuperscript{77}

Mons. Arrieta’s political partisanship, so evident in the period from 1982-1989, also resurfaced in the early 1990s. It can be detected, for instance, in his cool and critical attitude toward the newly elected Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC) government. Hence, in marked contrast to his behaviour following the elections of PLN presidents Monge and Arias, Arrieta with broke his custom and did not offer the thanksgiving service following the electoral victory of Rafael Angel Calderón Fournier (much, reportedly, to the resentment of the incoming president).\textsuperscript{78} Even more obvious were Arrieta’s harsh comments directed against the government’s policies during his public homily to celebrate the feast of the Virgin of Los Angeles (Costa Rica’s patron saint) later that same year.\textsuperscript{79} Tellingly, Arrieta’s position provoked heated complaints and rebuttals from PUSC party members in the press, while PLN representatives reacted with support for the Archbishop’s sermon.\textsuperscript{80}

Arrieta’s 1993 pastoral letter continued in the same vein, with several pointed references to the incapacity of the State to fulfil its duties and the failure of government policies to alleviate socio-economic problems in the country.\textsuperscript{81} Not surprisingly, Arrieta’s position once again triggered displays of public outrage from PUSC officials.\textsuperscript{82} In fact, the


\textsuperscript{78} Alvaro Fernández González, "Iglesia católica y ajuste estructural: Dilemas y conflictos," \textit{Ciencias Sociales} 61 (September 1993): 94.


\textsuperscript{80} Alfredo Chacon V., "Socialcristianos critican a Monseñor," \textit{La Prensa Libre}, 3 August 1990, 6; and Dino Starcevic, "Arzobispo condena a Ministro," \textit{La República}, 6 August 1990, 2A.

\textsuperscript{81} Mons. Arrieta, \textit{Nueva Evangelización}, II: nos. 18, 19, 41 and 61.

\textsuperscript{82} José Alberto Briceño, "Calderón rechaza críticas de Arzobispo," \textit{La República}, 19 November 1993, 5A; Marielos Campos and Fernando Lopez G., "Ministros alegan
charges of political bias were in many respects justified, especially given that the
document was released less than three months before the 1994 presidential elections and
that parallels could be drawn between Arrieta's critique of neo-liberal policies and the
campaign platform of PLN candidate José Figueres.83

Despite these obvious similarities in the Church's position during the 1980s and the
first half of the 1990s, however, it also appears that the Costa Rican hierarchy began to
shift its position significantly toward the end of this period. In this respect we can note the
strong denunciation, in 1994's "Mother Earth," of the conditions suffered by Costa Rica's
campesinos and indigenous peoples, and of the government's role in creating and
sustaining these conditions. The bishops critique, among other things, the inequitable
distribution of land in Costa Rica, the negative effects of transnational corporations' influence in the social, cultural, economic, and ecological realms, and the flaws in an economic model excessively oriented toward export.84 The fact that one of the harshest condemnations of Costa Rica's socio-economic crisis in Church history came during the administration of a PLN president, José Figueres, makes this pastoral letter all the more remarkable.

Also noteworthy is the fact that in this pastoral letter the bishops appear to move away from a strictly top-down model of responsibility for social change. They do emphasize that the State, its institutions, and Church bodies should be reforming their policies and programs for the benefit of the poor. But they also chastize such organizations for the often insensitive and paternalistic manner in which they treat the poor and disrespect their cultures,85 and stress that it is the campesino and indigenous peoples themselves who are the "subjects of their own development."86 As such, those at the base

84 CECOR, Madre Tierra, primera parte, I: nos. 1-31, and II: nos. 32-54.
85 CECOR, Madre Tierra, primera parte, II: nos. 50-53.
86 CECOR, Madre Tierra, tercera parte, III: no. 73.
of society are also urged to undertake actions to organize themselves to defend their rights and find solutions for their needs.  

This move toward empowerment for the poor is reinforced by the increasing efforts of the Church to incorporate CEBs into its pastoral strategy. Though sporadic allusions had been made to promoting CEBs ever since the Archdiocesan Synod of 1984, 88 it was not until 1995 that the hierarchy made a concerted attempt to develop a coherent and official position on the topic. In that year, the bishops asked the Comisión Nacional Episcopal de Laicos (CONEL, or the National Episcopal Commission of Laity) to develop definitions and criteria to guide parishes as they incorporated CEBs into their pastoral planning. The resulting document, which CECOR fully endorsed and recommended to all priests and laity in the country, was entitled "Base Ecclesial Communities in the Costa Rican Church." 89 Therefore, with the statements made in "Mother Earth" and this initiative regarding CEBs, it appeared that the Costa Rican bishops were taking some important steps in democratizing the exceedingly hierarchical Costa Rican Church structure.

Nonetheless, a closer investigation of the type of CEBs promoted, along with the contents and context for the 1994 pastoral letter, reveals that the hierarchy's conservative bias remained largely intact. To begin, we note that the role envisioned for CEBs in the Costa Rican Church is far more pastoral than political. Hence, for example, in the CONEL document there is an marked emphasis on the spiritual aspects of CEBs, which are portrayed primarily as a new Church structure that can respond to peoples' "hunger for the Word of God" and can function as a way to motivate people "to sample the joy of Christian coexistence." 90 CEBs are seen as having their origin and sustenance in the Holy Spirit, as being centred on the Bible, as working to overcome religious ignorance, and as

87 CECOR, Madre Tierra, tercera parte, III: nos. 73.1-73.11.
88 A brief treatment of early references to the CEB phenomenon in Costa Rican Church documents can be found in Carlos Castro Calzada, "Las comunidades eclesiales de base: ¿Una opción pastoral de la Arquidiócesis de San José?" Senderos 52 (January-April 1996): 113-17.
89 Comisión Nacional Episcopal de Laicos (CONEL), Las comunidades eclesiales de base en la Iglesia costarricense (San José, C.R.: [Ediciones CECOR?], 1995).
fostering fraternal love.\textsuperscript{91} Granted, there are references to the CEBs making a "preferential option for the poor" and to the social pastoral work of these communities.\textsuperscript{92} Nonetheless, the option for the poor is once again cautioned to be "neither excluding nor exclusive"\textsuperscript{93} and, instead of a clear call for political activism, we find vague references to the CEB operating as a "community of service and charity" in which "assistential, promotional, and liberative" efforts are expressed.\textsuperscript{94} Echoes of Pope Paul VI's \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi} warnings that CEBs should not be identified with political ideologies or positions underscore the fact that the communities in Costa Rica are not intended to transform society.\textsuperscript{95}

Nor are they intended to transform the Church. Both Arrieta's earlier comments on CEBs and the CONEL document stress (also in line with Pope Paul VI's admonitions in \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi}) that CEBs are to develop firmly within the local and the universal Church, and in communion with her legitimate pastors.\textsuperscript{96} In fact, although lay animators are said to fulfil an important ministry within CEBs, much emphasis is placed on the appropriate role of bishops and priests in accompanying the work of the communities.\textsuperscript{97} With this focus on CEBs as an extension of the Church's hierarchical structure and as subsumed beneath it, it is clear that neither pastoral independence nor pastoral creativity is desired by the bishops. Far from Leonardo Boff's suggestion that CEBs could be the means to reinvent and democratize the Church, then, for the Costa Rican hierarchy these new ecclesial units are simply a further elaboration of the already entrenched authoritarian institutional pattern.

\textsuperscript{90} CONEL, \textit{Las comunidades eclesiales de base}, 9.
\textsuperscript{91} CONEL, \textit{Las comunidades eclesiales de base}, 20-23.
\textsuperscript{92} CONEL, \textit{Las comunidades eclesiales de base}, 25.
\textsuperscript{93} CONEL, \textit{Las comunidades eclesiales de base}, 36.
\textsuperscript{94} CONEL, \textit{Las comunidades eclesiales de base}, 24-25.
\textsuperscript{95} CONEL, \textit{Las comunidades eclesiales de base}, 19 and 22.
\textsuperscript{96} Mons. Arrieta, \textit{Nueva evangelización}, IV: no. 12; and CONEL, \textit{Las comunidades eclesiales de base}, 17 and 19.
\textsuperscript{97} Mons. Arrieta, \textit{Nueva evangelización}, IV: no. 12; and CONEL, \textit{Las comunidades eclesiales de base}, 28-33.
In addition, and despite appearances to the contrary, the bishops do not entirely embrace liberationist CST perspectives on social change in "Mother Earth." Hence, although mention is made of the right of the poor to be agents of their own development, it is clearly a State-led developmentalism that is advocated, not the liberation of those who have been largely excluded from the benefits of the present socio-economic structure. The particular responsibilities accorded to campesinos and indigenous peoples in the document are vague and largely overshadowed by those assigned to the government (and, to a lesser extent, the Church). And, while dictating a number of specific actions for campesinos and indigenous peoples to follow would be inconsistent with a true respect for their agency and independence, advice such as "coordinate plans and actions among different organizations," "know CST more deeply," or "safeguard the environment while undertaking productive activities" glosses over the issues of who holds power and how they use it to maintain an unjust distribution of privileges, necessary elements to consider if grassroots-inspired social transformation is to be successful. In fact, the recommendations to the poor in the letter almost all guide them to transform relations among themselves (to overcome individualism and rivalries), or to retrieve what they have lost (cultural traditions). While this (admittedly paternalistic) advice may be valuable, actions for social change must also be directed beyond the individuals and groups that make up the impoverished communities themselves, to challenge some of the larger societal structures that generate inequality. The statist bias of the letter, in contrast, parallels the top-down model of social responsibility embodied in generations of conservative CST.

Moreover, although there is one recommendation to "maintain a dialogue" with the relevant organizations to ensure that just prices are paid for agricultural products,\textsuperscript{98} there are no calls to "work for liberation" or "struggle for justice" in the letter. Beyond merely being a matter of semantics, there is absolutely no allowance for conflict or confrontation made by the bishops (the only struggle alluded to is the one needed to overcome tensions within and among campesino and indigenous groups). This becomes problematic because,

\textsuperscript{98} CECOR, \textit{Madre Tierra}, tercera parte, III: nos. 73.4, 73.6, and 73.10.
as I outlined in the previous chapter, hopes for significant social changes through consensus are frequently naïve; confrontation is often an inescapable companion to the significant redistribution of societal privileges. Yet in the end, no matter how harsh the bishops' critique of the present system in "Mother Earth" may be, it is clear that reform, not revolution, is their goal. After all, the bishops' position that "the market is the opportunity to live in solidarity with all" reveals their implicit faith in the capitalist system -- albeit once the necessary adjustments are made and fairer prices are paid. The bishops' reluctance to look beyond the present socio-economic structure for solutions to the inequalities within that structure is one further way in which they place themselves closer to the conservative, as opposed to the liberationist, end of the CST spectrum.

Finally, we can see that "Mother Earth" also does not reveal a true split between the Church and its favourite political party -- its publication during Figueres' term notwithstanding. Coming as it did only a few months into the term of the new president, this pastoral letter is not a condemnation of the present PLN government, but rather an indictment of the programs of PUSC ex-president Calderón (who, as we have seen, was also subjected to direct criticism from the Church when he was in power). In fact, the bishops explicitly point to the "State policies of the past years" when they lay blame for the current predicament of Costa Rica's poor. Further, while it attacks the neo-liberal programming that defined Calderón's presidency, the letter can also be read as an reaffirmation of State-led reformism that Figueres, appealing to his father's legacy (Figueres Sr. led the country from 1953-58 and from 1970-74), had himself tried to promote during his election campaign. The bishops' emphasis on State responsibilities toward the poor, and on reforming and expanding government programming in areas such as the environment, thus coincides with certain classic PLN social democratic principles. That the recently elected PLN deputies were not upset with the letter, but instead publicly

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99 CECOR, Madre Tierra, tercera parte, III: no. 73.7.
100 CECOR, Madre Tierra, segunda parte, I: no. 64.
101 CECOR, Madre Tierra, primera parte, I: no. 30; see also primera parte, I: no. 16.
praised its contents as "on the mark," "laudable" and "timely" is further proof of the perseverance of the PLN-Church alliance during this period.\textsuperscript{102} 

Crucially, moreover, after President Figueres reneged on his election promises and began to embrace a neo-liberal program himself after 1994 (he signed another stabilization agreement with the IMF in 1995 and, among other things, cut thousands of public sector jobs and benefits while pushing for privatization in banking and the State electrical utility),\textsuperscript{103} the Church did not mention the government's hypocrisy or repeat its attack on neo-liberalism. Instead, Church leaders reverted to calls for unity among Costa Ricans as a means to overcome the economic crisis. Importantly, a repeated variation on this theme was that of political unity, the idea that no group or political party acting alone could save Costa Rica, and that reconciliation had to take place among elected representatives in the country's Legislative Assembly.\textsuperscript{104}

This plea for unity takes on its full meaning when we consider the position into which Figueres had been forced: having failed to achieve a parliamentary majority in 1994, the PLN leader was dependent on the co-operation of PUSC Assembly members in order to pass the legislation necessary to appease the IMF. When the recalcitrance of PUSC members began to cause costly stalemates almost immediately, Figueres sought an agreement with PUSC ex-president Calderón. The "Figueres-Calderón Pact\textsuperscript{105}" was signed in 1995 and, though Figueres was then able to pass several pieces of critical legislation expediently, the agreement remained controversial and Figueres' popularity began to

\textsuperscript{102} Carlos Arguedas, "Gobierno acepta críticas de obispos," \textit{Al Día}, 19 August 1994, 4.


\textsuperscript{105} The text announcing the accord, interestingly, uses language similar to that used by Arrieta in his appeals to place the good of the patria above factional political
plummet (the widely held perception that he was a liar who went back on his election promises soon made him the most unpopular president in the history of Costa Rican polling).\(^{106}\) Within this context, then, the Church's calls for unity provided an important means of support for Costa Rica's struggling president and his new bipartisanship. Though this type of political intervention was certainly more indirect than it had been, for example, during Monge's rule, Arrieta's comments once again can be equated to calling on Costa Ricans to close ranks around a PLN government.

Despite some of the superficial changes in the Church's position during the 1990s, then, the socio-political standpoints of the Costa Rican hierarchy remained remarkably stable after Mons. Arrieta's 1979 appointment as Archbishop. In many ways, the bishops adopted several of the standard conservative principles found in post-Vatican II CST. They did so, moreover, in a manner uniquely responsive to the Costa Rican historical context and the particular political options presented there. Though of course it will be necessary to investigate the bishops' religious expressions and political alliances from a more theoretical perspective, the teachings of the bishops that focus more particularly on the rights of workers first deserve a closer consideration.

**The Costa Rican Hierarchy and Workers' Rights**

Overall, Costa Rican Church officials have paid a considerable amount of attention to what can be specifically labelled workers' issues. The hierarchy in general, but especially Mons. Arrieta in his annual May 1st addresses to workers,\(^{107}\) has consistently promoted the rights of workers as they are often defined in Western democracies and in the CST tradition. Thus, for example, we see repeated references in CECOR documents and in Arrieta's homilies to the right of individuals to employment, to free association, to strike, to fair remuneration, to work in a healthy environment, to weekly periods of rest, interests. See Gerardo Hernández Naranjo, "El discurso del pacto Figueres-Calderón," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 72 (June 1996): 32-33.

\(^{106}\) Wilson, "Leftist parties," 763.

\(^{107}\) Since 1961, the Archbishop of San José has celebrated a public mass every year in honour of the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker.
to vacation time, and to social security and unemployment benefits. And, though an affirmation of these standard rights may be predictable, three particular emphases come to the fore in the discussion of these issues by Costa Rican Church officials.

First, we can note the Costa Rican bishops' concern for social harmony, much as was the case in their more general treatments of socio-economic problems as discussed above. Here, the corollary to the bishops' call to respect workers' rights is often the warning that if such rights are disregarded, social peace will be endangered. The motto "where there is work there is bread, and where there is bread there is peace" is but the most subtle of these warnings; frequently the direct message is that workers' rights are essential to maintaining social peace.

Second, though the bishops are clearly using the major papal encyclicals on workers' issues (most notably Rerum Novarum, Quadragesimo Anno, and Laborem Exercens) as a frame of reference when it comes to defining workers' rights, a distinctly nationalistic flavour is imparted to the discussion. This can be seen in the priority given to the concept of a just salary or, more accurately, a "just family salary," the notion that a salary should be sufficient to satisfy the basic needs of the worker and those of his or her dependants. The bishops do acknowledge that the concept of a just salary was elaborated in Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo Anno. But they also strive to ensure that the faithful are aware that two early and illustrious Costa Rican Church leaders issued cartas pastorales on this very same theme. They do so by frequently invoking the 1893 letter of Mons. Thiel and the 1941 letter of Mons. Sanabria, both entitled, "On the Just Salary." Moreover, the bishops are demonstrably proud of Mons. Sanabria's role in the institution of the Social Guarantees and the Labour Code in 1940s Costa Rica, the story of which

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108 See, for example, Mons. Román Arrieta, "Decálogo de los derechos de los trabajadores," Eco Católico, 26 September 1993, 4; Mons. Román Arrieta, "Los trabajadores, con el auxilio divino, son los artífices de la justicia, la paz y el amor en el mundo," Eco Católico, 10 May 1992, 4; and CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," nos. 6.3 and 6.9-6.10.

109 For example, see Mons. Arrieta, "Los trabajadores," 4.


111 For example, see Mons. Arrieta, Nueva Evangelización, I: nos. 1-4 and 11.
they cite often.\footnote{For example, see Mons. Román Arrieta, "Las conquistas del Código del Trabajo son derechos del trabajador, no dádivas," Eco Católico, 3 October 1993, 4; and Mons. Román Arrieta, "En los cuarenta años de la promulgación del Código de Trabajo," El Mensajero del Clero 14 (June 1984): 18-19.} With their repeated references to the accomplishments of Thiel and Sanabria, the bishops demonstrate that they consider the lobby for workers' rights to be a cornerstone of Costa Rican Church history.

Third, and perhaps most interestingly, the CECOR bishops have worked to resurrect the legacy of Sanabria themselves through their involvement in efforts to reform long standing Costa Rican social legislation. Church leaders were first invited by the PLN Minister of Labour and Social Security in 1988 to submit their advice on proposed revisions to the decades-old Labour Code. In response, the hierarchy issued a lengthy collective pastoral letter, "Comments on the New Labour Code Project,"\footnote{Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica (CECOR), "Comentarios sobre el Proyecto de Nuevo Código de Trabajo," in Iglesia Católica, crisis y democratización en Centro América (Documentos seleccionados de las conferencias episcopales y del SEDAC, 1979-1990) (Guatemala City: INCEP, 1990).} that reviewed past Church teachings (from the Vatican, as well as from Thiel and Sanabria) on the rights of workers. In addition, both before and since that time Mons. Arrieta has lobbied (unsuccessfully) for a thorough revision of both the Labour Code and the Social Guarantees, arguing that this legislation is inadequate to respond to the conditions faced by present-day workers.\footnote{Mons. Román Arrieta, "Fiesta de San José Obrero: Homilía (1996)" (CECOR archives, photocopy).} Though the actual social teaching perspectives outlined in the carta and subsequent statements on the issue will be discussed below, what is important to note here is that this is an attempt by the hierarchy to foster social justice through the endorsement of legislative reforms. The bishops' support for revisions to the Labour Code and the Social Guarantees underscores their belief that one of the best ways to ensure that workers' rights are respected is through State-sponsored change.

\textit{The Right to Strike}

Of all the rights to which workers are entitled, it is the right to strike and the right to form unions that have the most relevance in the Costa Rican context. Importantly, the
Costa Rican hierarchy has developed clear and detailed positions on both of these issues. We can, for example, see that the CECOR attitude toward strikes closely follows the perspective historically espoused by the Vatican, a stance that finds its most recent expression in John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*. That is, the Costa Rican bishops view the strike as a last resort, an extreme means to be employed only once all other avenues of negotiation have been exhausted.¹¹⁵ Like Pope John Paul (and several of his predecessors), the bishops also focus on the negative effects of strikes (particularly losses in production and the loss of social peace),¹¹⁶ and warn that strikes are not to be abused in the pursuit of "political" ends.¹¹⁷

The overall attitude of the bishops on the topic is perhaps best revealed through comments found in their pastoral letter on the Labour Code:

> The exercise of [the strike] cannot be unconditional, which would cause serious damages to the general interests of the community. The strike should be seen as an instrument of conciliation, of an ultimate and temporal character, but one that should improve the condition of the workers and one that must be accepted as socially just whenever the demands made are reasonable, economically possible, and would not cause serious public harm.¹¹⁸

This passage reinforces the notion of the strike as a sometimes necessary evil, one that is subject to a number of restrictions. Yet some of these restrictions raise important questions. Who, for instance, determines what demands are "reasonable"? What criteria are used to decide whether workers' demands are "economically possible"? Would strikes for employment stability be deemed less reasonable in the eyes of a government beholden to neo-liberal policies that dictate the downsizing of the State and the elimination of public sector jobs? Would calls for higher wages be labelled economically impossible in light of campaigns for austerity in times of economic crisis? Recall too that Costa Rican law already severely restricts the conditions under which a strike can be legally declared. The

¹¹⁷ CECOR, "Comentarios sobre el Proyecto de Nuevo Código," no. 8.
¹¹⁸ CECOR, "Comentarios sobre el Proyecto de Nuevo Código," no. 8.
bishops, by focusing on the negatives of most strikes and the limits of legitimate ones, thus contribute to what is already a fairly unfavourable attitude toward labour activism in Costa Rica.

After all, in the eyes of the bishops, the ideal is that strikes would not need to occur at all. They maintain that workers and employers should attempt to resolve their differences through dialogue and negotiation, goodwill and mutual co-operation -- not strikes and lockouts. The hierarchy even labels it a "patriotic" duty for business owners and union leaders to foment harmonious relations between the groups they represent. The bishops' general emphasis on social harmony in Costa Rica thus resurfaces in their particular position on workers' right to strike.

Also consistent with this disfavour toward strikes and emphasis on harmony has been Mons. Arrieta's role as a mediator in more than ten strikes since his appointment as Archbishop. Basically, Arrieta facilitates communication between both sides in the dispute with the aim of bringing an end to the strike as quickly as possible. He will also act as a guarantor to ensure that the promises made during negotiations are kept. According to the Archbishop, impartiality is a key element of this mediation: he will only act in this capacity if both parties in the dispute request his services, and he will focus solely on what is asked for and the merits of the demands, not on who is doing the asking. The result, Arrieta declares, is a limit to the material losses incurred, an overcoming of the climate of confrontation, and the fulfilment of the workers' just demands.

There is no doubt that the intervention of the Archbishop can mean a faster resolution to a strike. Every strike in which Arrieta has mediated has ended relatively soon after his involvement began. Yet, while a speedy end to a strike may limit the amount of labour time lost, it does not necessarily mean that workers' "just demands" are met. In

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120 CECOR, "Unidos en la esperanza," no. 2.5.
121 The most noteworthy of these included a 1984 strike of government social service workers and teachers' strikes in 1988 and 1993.
122 Mons. Arrieta, interview by author.
1995, for example, Arrieta helped to bring an end to the teachers' strike by getting the government to agree to discuss its proposed changes to the educators' pension program with the teachers' representatives themselves. \footnote{Mons. Arrieta, interview by author.} Though teachers went back to their classes and negotiations resumed between union leaders and the government, in the end the strike was deemed a failure, with the teachers unable to win most of their demands. \footnote{Mon. Román Arrieta, "Iglesia sí intervino por solución a huelga," \textit{Eco Católico}, 10 September 1995, 4.} Arrieta did help to end the strike, and he did help to put the teachers' concerns on the negotiating agenda. But, he did not function as an advocate for the teachers' actual demands; as an "impartial" mediator he could only clarify issues, not come out in favour of one side or another.

The problem with such disinterested mediation is that in cases of a power differential between the two parties involved, not making a clear option for one side is the same as supporting those who hold the most power in the first place. In the case of strikes by public sector workers whose unions, as we have seen, have suffered from a decline in membership, fragmentation, and discriminatory legislation in Costa Rica, a professed neutrality on the part of Mons. Arrieta is akin to an option for the government, the obvious power holder in this situation. This neutrality is also a form of abandonment of the workers, those who need Arrieta's clear advocacy most of all in the context of the government's neo-liberal agenda. We will see, in Chapter Nine, how Mons. Ulloa in Limón refused to mediate in the 1996 Limón en Lucha strikes, and instead chose to support the protestors and pressure the government on their behalf. One can only imagine how much greater influence the Archbishop of San José could have on behalf of strikers, if he were to make known his unequivocal support for the workers and their demands. Instead, Arrieta's mediation appears to function primarily to end strikes expeditiously and thus contain their disruptive social consequences. And while this may do much to bolster the position of those in power, it does not automatically mean that justice has been served.
The Right to Association: Sindicalismo and/or Solidarismo?

As on the issue of strikes, we see the Costa Rican hierarchy clearly affirming the standard Vatican position on the workers' right to freedom of association. According to the bishops, workers have the inalienable right, which should be protected by law, to organize in unions to defend their legitimate interests. This right to unionization signifies for workers the duty to represent their fellow workers, to collaborate in the economic progress of society, and to share in the responsibility for the realization of the common good.

Beyond this theoretical support for the workers' right to unionization, the bishops' statements have, on occasion, explicitly coincided with the practical demands of the union movement. For example, when the government revealed its proposed changes to the Labour Code in 1988, union leaders were particularly concerned about the clauses that would give employers more power to terminate employment contracts at will and that would strengthen the juridical scope of direct agreements (i.e., as promoted by solidarismo) at the expense of collective conventions. The bishops, in their pastoral letter on this Labour Code project, explicitly addressed these two issues. They argued for limits on the cases in which employers could unilaterally terminate an employment contract and affirmed the need to protect the collective bargaining process as the primary tool for workers to lobby for their rights. Significantly, the position taken by the bishops in the letter was publicly and enthusiastically applauded by the Confederación Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), one of the most important union confederations in the country.

The bishops' promotion of freedom of association, however, is not limited to the

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126 CECOR, "Comentarios sobre el Proyecto de Nuevo Código," no. 7; CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," nos. 6.8-6.10; and Mons. Arrieta, "En los cuarenta años," 19.
127 CECOR, "Evangelización y realidad social," no. 6.10.
129 CECOR, "Comentarios sobre el Proyecto de Nuevo Código," nos. 6-7.
130 Fernández, "Iglesia católica y conflicto social," 77.
workers in unions. The Costa Rica hierarchy has also consistently supported the right of workers to join solidarity associations. In fact, almost every reference to sindicalismo in Costa Rican Church documents is accompanied by an affirmation that solidarismo is also a legitimate option for workers to pursue. According to Mons. Arrieta, the Church looks with "great affection" upon the development of solidarismo in Costa Rica, since it seeks "the integral and permanent improvement of workers" through the "most harmonious relations possible" between workers and owners. Not surprisingly, then, the bishops stress that solidarity associations are entitled to the same protection under the law as are unions.

All this brings about the question, of course, of whether the bishops display any preferences for one form of labour organization over another. The Archbishop, who has addressed this question most frequently, insists that "it is the right of workers to seek association in the form of organization that they are most attracted to or are sympathetic to," whether that be sindicalismo, solidarismo, or another form of labour organization (such as cooperativism). Mons. Arrieta further asserts that the Church defends, promotes, and supports both sindicalismo and solidarismo equally. Perhaps the strongest proof for the impartiality of the Church in this regard is the fact that organizations allied with both of these major labour movements are represented within the Archdiocese's Vicaría de Pastoral Social (Vicariate for the Social Pastorate, founded in 1985). Here, CECODERS caters to unionized workers, while the ESJ23 is clearly supportive of the solidarity movement. And, since both of these Church organizations fit into the institutional structure of the Archdiocese at exactly the same level, in theory there is no difference in ecclesial support between the two.

132 CECOR, "Comentarios sobre el Proyecto de Nuevo Código," no. 7.  
133 Mons. Arrieta, interview by author.  
135 The practical relationship between the Archbishop and CECODERS, and between the Archbishop and the ESJ23, will be discussed in Chapters Six and Eight respectively.
Still, it is possible to detect a certain bias toward *solidarismo*, above all in the Archbishop's statements. This is perhaps not very surprising since the solidarity movement's emphasis on harmony and dialogue is consistent with the hierarchy's concentration on the same themes. Thus, we can note that *solidarismo*’s fostering of harmonious relations between capital and labour is praised and ultimately legitimated as "congruent with Christ's supreme commandment of fraternal love." At another point, the Archbishop suggests that *solidarismo*’s means of solving labour conflicts can perhaps have "greater advantages" than what workers can obtain through a "costly and painful" strike. Overall, *sindicalismo* is treated with a far more critical tone than is *solidarismo*, with union leaders at times being chastized for allowing class struggle and confrontation to be their instruments for the vindication of workers' rights. The bishops also repeat the predominant papal proviso that unions should not "play politics." Or, they warn against union leaders falling into a "exaggerated politicization," or "ideologicalization," arguing that workers instead expect their leaders to be inspired by Christian and democratic values. Though the bishops are careful not to offer any blatant endorsement of one form of labour organization over the other, their preference for *solidarismo* appears evident.

This pro-*solidarismo* bias is reinforced by the hierarchy’s failure to forthrightly condemn the violation of union liberties by *solidarista* promoters. As I discussed in Chapter Three, the development of *solidarismo* in Costa Rica is closely related to various coercive tactics used by *solidarista* promoters on newly hired workers and against union members. Though the bishops do allude to this issue in their commentary on the Labour Code (they stipulate that "workers' committees" should be constituted by the free decision

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138 Mons. Román Arrieta, "Fiesta de San José Obrero: Homilía (1996)."
140 While the hierarchy as a collective sidesteps this issue, as I will discuss in Chapter Nine, Mons. Coto and the official Church in Limón have publicly denounced the unscrupulous practices of *solidarista* representatives on banana plantations.
of workers and caution that such committees should not be used as an instrument to weaken unions),¹⁴¹ the overall treatment of the subject is vague and solidarismo is not mentioned by name. In light of the very public and very grave accusations against the solidarity movement in this regard, the fact that there are no other CECOR pronouncements on the issue, from a hierarchy that claims to protect and promote the rights of workers, is astonishing.

The bishops’ reluctance to adopt a critical perspective regarding solidarismo (much as they have done with sindicalismo) amounts to more than a case of pro-solidarismo bias; it can also run the risk of contributing to an anti-worker climate in Costa Rica. When we add to this the restrictive attitude the bishops hold in regard to strikes, the hierarchy’s supposedly pro-worker stance is further called into question. And though the needs of the State (in crisis or not) may be best met by discouraging strikes and protests while promoting collaboration and conciliation, the needs of the workers may very well fall by the wayside.

Conclusion

The words and actions of the Archbishop and the rest of the Costa Rican hierarchy after 1979 clearly constitute a form of conservative CST. Not only in relation to workers’ issues most narrowly defined, but also in matters of social structure and social change, the Costa Rican bishops’ positions coincide in several respects with the conservative Vatican tradition outlined in Chapter Four. Hence, beyond their maintenance of a relatively restrictive attitude toward unions and strikes, we also find the bishops consistently avoiding any overtly political interpretation of "liberation" or any unequivocal "option for the poor." Though the bishops do recognize the serious social problems and inequalities that plague Costa Rica, their concerns for maintaining social peace and for fostering class collaboration take priority over calls for significant structural change. The bishops never actually question the dynamics of capitalism itself as remedies to present-day problems are sought in State-led reformism, not grassroots struggle. Thus while the hierarchy under

¹⁴¹ CECOR, "Comentarios sobre el Proyecto de Nuevo Código," no. 7.
Arrieta may have broken the "long silence," they did not break away from the conservative tradition of CST that has long predominated in the worldwide Church.

In many respects, the bishops' positions during this time period could be interpreted as a reaction to the economic crisis. More precisely, however, they were also a reaction of a Church *in crisis*. That is, because of the close relationship that has developed over the decades between the State and the Church in Costa Rica, when the stability of the former is threatened, so are the privileges of the latter.\(^{142}\) On this theme, consider the favourable position the Catholic Church has occupied in Costa Rica. The enshrinement of Roman Catholicism as the State religion in Article 75 of the Constitution, aside from providing the symbolic legitimation of the faith by the political power structure, has also been used to justify a host of tangible benefits for the Church as an institution. Among the most significant of these are tax exemptions on Church properties, financial grants for Church projects and buildings, and State support for a variety of Church educational endeavours, such as Catholic private schools and mandatory religion classes in public schools (these are important as a tool for the propagation of the faith and, since classes are typically taught by priests, as a source of income for the clergy). Given this high degree of Church association and even dependence on the State, a crisis that affects the State would also constitute a crisis for the Church. On this level, then, it is not surprising that the Church's words and actions during the crisis were aimed at preserving the social order on which both the Church institution and the threatened governments depended.

Certainly, the bishops' positions (and particularly those related to protecting and promoting social peace and class collaboration) would have functioned to support the established order regardless of its rulers' particular political persuasion. Nonetheless, however, we have seen that many of the bishops' actions during the period under investigation revealed a clear preference for the PLN. The Church's political partisanship makes sense in the light of Costa Rican history, since the traditionally reformist policies of the PLN party represent the recuperation of the Sanabria era's "social Christian"

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\(^{142}\) Several analysts of the Costa Rican Church have advanced similar arguments. See, for example, Opazo, *Costa Rica*, 208; and Picado, *La Iglesia costarricense entre el pueblo y el estado*, 46-47 and 67-75.
principles in the political realm. More generally, the classic PLN emphasis on State-led developmentalism is consistent with the bishops' conservative CST in which top-down and gradual social change is promoted. Beyond this, we must remember that the PLN program brought prestigious positions to several members of the clergy in the autonomous institutions that comprised the expanding Welfare State in the 1960s and 1970s. The PLN was also the party that launched the Church's important role in administering the social assistance programs necessary to help those left behind by the government's development schemes. When one adds to this the personal friendships that have developed between officials from the party and the Church (the close relationship between Arrieta and Monge has been frequently commented upon), the Church's traditional support for the PLN government appears fairly predictable.

Still, such alliances and the need to maintain privileges linked to the established political order can provide just part of the explanation for the Church's positions during the period in question. The remainder of the equation is only revealed once we realize that the Church's crisis cannot be reduced to the crisis as experienced by the Costa Rican State. In many ways, after 1979 the Church was facing its own crisis of hegemony in Costa Rica. That is, the Church began to see its long-held dominance in the religious realm slip as it faced the triple threat of Protestantism, secularism, and communism.

Costa Rican Catholic Church leaders have been keenly aware of the growth in the number of evangelical Protestant churches in the country since the 1970s. As such, the bishops have released numerous public statements warning Catholics about the "fanaticism, proselytization, and aggression against the Catholic Church" characteristic of what they pejoratively refer to as "sectas." Mons. Arrieta has been particularly vocal in this regard, and has campaigned vigorously to prevent as many people as possible from

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143 Opazo, Costa Rica, 24-25.
144 Williams, Catholic Church and Politics, 126.
145 Picado, La Iglesia costarricense entre el pueblo y el estado, 125.
making the "grave error" of leaving the Catholic faith. On this theme it is also important to note that the Costa Rican Church has more to lose than just the souls of the faithful to the Protestants. As the Catholic Church's hold on the majority of Costa Ricans begins to slip, so does the validity of one of its leaders' favourite justifications for the Church's constitutional privileges and right to assert its moral authority on questions of national importance. The Archbishop has repeatedly countered accusations of meddling in politics or preferential treatment for the Church with the argument that such behaviour is legitimate because the Church represents almost all citizens anyway. If this is no longer the case, exclusive exemptions and special treatment for the Church may become less defensible.

The threat of secularism also weighs heavily on the Church, with Mons. Arrieta once labelling the trend "the most pernicious heresy of the contemporary world." Certainly, factors such as the urbanization of the past few decades have taken their toll on the traditional religiosity of Costa Ricans; in the mid-1990s, for example, far less than half (41.9%) of all Costa Ricans were attending Mass on a weekly basis. Most often, Church leaders cast the problem of secularism as one of "religious indifference" or "religious ignorance," the latter being declared doubly dangerous as such ignorance has been identified by the bishops as a main cause for Catholic defection to the sectas. In the end, combating religious ignorance among the faithful remains one of biggest challenges the present-day Church in Costa Rica has set for itself.

No less serious is the threat that communism poses to the Costa Rican Church. The decline of the Catholic Church in Castro's Cuba, and the communists' presumed

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148 Arrieta usually cites the inflated figure of 90%. For example, see Mons. Román Arrieta, "Dios nos llama a la vigencia y la práctica de la justicia," *Gente*, 20 April 1987, 6. In contrast, polls have shown that the number of Catholics is under 80%. Minsky, "¿Somos lo que creemos?" 9.


150 Minsky, "¿Somos lo que creemos?" 12.

atheism and endorsement of class struggle, have long fuelled fear and condemnation in Costa Rican Church circles. And even though the formal left in Costa Rica has been relatively weak (the communist party is only supported by a very small proportion of the population and, since the 1980s, has also been plagued by infighting and schism), the triumph and persistence of the Sandinista revolution next door in Nicaragua could not be ignored.

Even more threatening than the political model enacted by the Sandinistas, however, was the particular ecclesiologicaI model associated with the revolution, that of the "popular church." In the ideal Church of the hierarchy (in Nicaragua as in Costa Rica), unity is assured by obedience to the bishops and pope, and by submission to the one authentic teaching they express. The popular church, in contrast, was an exercise in the democratization of sacred power and the decentralization of theological production. In effect, it was no less than a rejection of the hierarchy's traditional authoritarianism and orthodoxy. The popular church in Nicaragua, organized into CEBs and inspired by liberation theology, thus threatened the reproduction of the Church's internal power structure from which the hierarchy had traditionally benefited. Therefore, even if the CECOR bishops could be assured that the Sandinistas were not going to export their political revolution across the border, they were understandably frightened of the spread of the popular church and its accompanying ecclesiologicaI reinvention.

The institutional vulnerability created by these threats to the Costa Rican Church places the bishops' positions as discussed in this chapter in a new context. Take the case of the CEBs as promoted by the hierarchy, for example. The incorporation of these small religious education groups into the pastoral strategy of the Archdiocese provides the clergy with the ideal tools for combating religious ignorance and, by extension (in the logic of the hierarchy at least), the sectas. Mons. Arrieta himself has openly declared as much. The prescribed episcopal accompaniment for the communities now takes on additional

relevance as a preventative measure against the development of "parallel magisteria" (as was deemed to have happened in Nicaragua), the ultimate affront to Church unity. Mons. Arrieta's reluctance to even call these groups CEBs (he often labels them "small Christian communities," "family assemblies" or "authentic CEBs,"), along with his directly disparaging remarks against the popular church, are other indicators of his desire to distance his Church from the Nicaraguan phenomenon. Overall, the CEBs in the Costa Rican Church are an excellent example of what are known, in Gramscian terms, as "conjunctural organizations." When existing Church forms prove unable to deal with rival social forces, the Church often creates such structures to help counterbalance the danger.156

The hierarchy's tightly controlled definitions of important socio-religious concepts are also consistent with some of the above considerations. Thus, liberation is explained in a such a way (faith-based, individual, non-violent, etc.) that it would be impossible to link it to the left-wing political movements often associated with liberation theology in Central America. The option for the poor is also diluted and defined (as neither excluding nor exclusive) with an eye to preserving the integrity of an ecclesiological model based on the traditional Catholic marks of unity and universality. Certainly, one can detect in these definitions clear echoes of the most recent CELAM and Vatican positions on the same topics. But the bishops' behaviour here is not just a function of their obedience to orthodoxy. It is also conditioned by a further institutional imperative, one that helps to account for the fact that such potentially dangerous concepts have not been anathematized in the Church altogether.

Much like the Pope within the context of the worldwide Church, the leaders of a national Church must make an effort to appear responsive and relevant to the majority of their constituents, regardless of personal agreement or disagreement with their positions. In fact, beyond being one of the implications of the magisterium's emphasis on unity and universality, this can be seen as one of the standard requisites for any ruler or ruling class.

155 Mons. Arrieta, "Homilía en la fiesta de María Reina de Los Angeles (1990)," 2.
attempting to maintain its hegemony. Leaders must take into account the various tendencies and interests of the subordinate groups in society, and must on occasion make compromises to these groups in order for their leadership to be accepted as legitimate. The key for leaders, of course, is to make only compromises that will not jeopardize established relations of power. Within the Church, for example, this means that while the most revolutionary or blatantly heretical concepts of the liberationists will be rejected by leaders outright, the concept of liberation (or the option of the poor) itself will be recovered, reworked, and resubmitted to the laity in a form that projects the priorities and protects the interests of the hierarchy itself. Ultimately, as Maduro once summarized this process, the aim is "to preserve the unity of the Church by gaining possession of factors threatening that unity."^157

It is on a similar plane that Mons. Arrieta's insistence on unbiased mediation, or the bishops' claim to equal treatment for both *solidarismo* and *sindicalismo*, is best interpreted. The Church as an institution, especially as it is rendered vulnerable by the crises and threats outlined above, simply cannot afford to rebuff any large sector of its constituency directly. In light of the circumstances, the neutral position is thus the most prudent to assume, even while true biases and alliances remain intact. Thus, while a close examination of the Archbishop's homilies or the bishops' pastorals can reveal their theological principles and political preferences, the overall message remains universal enough for both those on the left and the right, or for both unionists and solidarity association members, to find some legitimation in the words. The attempt of the hierarchy to reflect some of the inner pluralism of the Church is one of the keys to maintaining their hegemonic rule within the institution.

Crucially, though, insofar as this hegemony is to be maintained by consent and not dictatorial force, Church leaders must relinquish some of their control at lower levels of the institution. The Archdiocese can provide space (under the auspices of its Vicaría de Pastoral Social) for the representatives of both *sindicalismo* and *solidarismo* to operate


within the Church, and it can define the mandates of CECODERS and the ESJ23 as these groups minister to workers on behalf of the Church. Yet Church leaders must, at some point, cede some authority to the priests and laypeople involved in these organizations. This, in turn, opens up the possibility for representatives of these organizations to develop pastoral and political positions that go beyond those that would be predictable in terms of the Archbishop or CECOR bishops themselves. Even a bishop acting with the clergy in his own diocese, and apart from his responsibilities to represent the national Church as a member of CECOR, may develop a perspective on workers' issues at odds with those of the Costa Rican hierarchy in general. The remaining three case studies in this thesis, focusing as they do on CECODERS, the ESJ23, and the official Church in Limón, will examine just such possibilities.
Chapter Six

The Centro Coordinador de Evangelización y Realidad Social: A Liberationist Challenge from within the Archdiocese?

CECODERS, hand-in-hand with the worker
— Slogan on a banner carried by CECODERS representatives in May 1st parade, 1996

— The poor peoples make a dramatic accusation against the rich peoples

Quotation from Pope Paul VI's Populorum Progressio and the caption on a poster in the
CECODERS office

The Centro Coordinador de Evangelización y Realidad Social (the Coordinating Centre for Evangelization and Social Reality), better known in Costa Rica by its acronym, CECODERS, was created in 1984 by a decree of the Fifth Archdiocesan Synod. A part of the Archdiocese’s Vicaría de Pastoral Social (itself formed by Synodal decree to coordinate the efforts of all of the Church’s social pastoral agencies based in the Archdiocese of San José), CECODERS officially began its work in October 1985. From the very start of its existence, Father Orlando Navarro Rojas has acted as Director of the Centre and has been instrumental in shaping its mandate to include a number of programs aimed specifically at workers in Costa Rica. This chapter begins with a description of the Centre, its structure, and the wide array of activities it has organized over the years as part of the Church’s pastoral social. Then, turning to focus particularly on the Centre’s words and actions in relation to its "Education, Training, and Accompaniment" programming, I will show how CECODERS in many — but not all — ways expresses a liberationist pastoral option that conflicts with the conservative positions of the Archdiocese as a whole.

1 See V Sínodo Arquidiocesano, Decretos sinodales (Curridabat, C.R.: Ludovico, 1985), no. 203.
The Centre's Structure and Programming Areas

In comparison to the other agencies that have been brought under the coordination of the Vicaría de Pastoral Social (Cáritas, the ESJ23, and Hermandades de Trabajo), CECODERS is not only the youngest organization but, with the exception of the nearly defunct Hermandades de Trabajo, also the smallest. As of 1996, CECODERS maintained only eight people on its permanent staff. The ESJ23, the closest counterpart to the Centre within the Vicaría, employed over one hundred. Moreover, and in contrast to the impressive facilities housing the ESJ23 in several locations throughout the country, CECODERS operates out of a cramped complex of offices and meeting rooms located on the grounds of the Church of Santa Marta Y Griega in San José.

Despite such modest appearances, however, CECODERS is a stable Church organization that has long provided an impressive range of programs and services to its constituents. Part of this is due to the fact that while staff size is kept low, members are able to draw upon the support of others in the Church and the community at large. Thus, while Padre Navarro is the only member of the clergy formally employed at CECODERS, he can count on a long-standing network of approximately ten other priests who voluntarily help him with fundraising and organizing activities. In addition, while the core staff consists of sociologists (including Navarro himself), administrators, a statistician, and a theologian, they frequently collaborate with members of a broader pool of social scientists and journalists. These individuals will either donate their services to CECODERS, or will work for the Centre on a contract basis as the need for their expertise arises. Taken together, this interdisciplinary network of professionals provides CECODERS with resources and labour power far beyond what the organization's low operating budget would suggest.

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2 The ESJ23 will be dealt with in Chapter Eight; for more information on Cáritas see V Sinodo Arquidiocesano, *Decretos sinodales*, no. 204; for Hermandades de Trabajo, see J. Amando Robles Robles, "Movimientos eclesiales de la Iglesia católica en Costa Rica," *Mensajero del Claro*, extraordinary issue (September 1983): 38-40.

3 Mario Solis, CECODERS theologian, interview by author, in San José, Costa Rica, 24 July 1996.
Over the years, CECODERS' staff has come to concentrate their energies in three main areas: social scientific research; support for small scale productive projects among disadvantaged sectors of the population; and education, training, and accompaniment programs. Examining each of these areas in turn can reveal the depth and breadth of activities encompassed in the pastoral social of the Centre.

Social Scientific Research

Even before CECODERS was an official Church entity, Father Navarro recognized that the first step in effective social pastoral planning must be an accurate understanding of the socio-economic reality experienced by Church members. He believed that providing Church leaders with sociological "diagnoses" (diagnosticos) of their realities would be the key to organizing pastoral strategies that truly responded to the needs of their target populations.\(^4\) The delegates to the Archdiocesan Synod agreed that the Church's social assistance and human promotion programming should be informed by socio-religious research, and they translated this conviction into the mission assigned to CECODERS at the Synod.\(^5\) With this, CECODERS was on its way to becoming the main social scientific research centre in the Costa Rican Catholic Church.

In the beginning, the diagnosticos were carried out only within the Archdiocese, with Navarro and his assistants collecting and analyzing all the data themselves. Before long, however, the need for CECODERS' services became obvious in other dioceses in the country. Thus, staff members began to visit parishes to train individuals to gather information themselves by means of a "parish family census."\(^6\) The data from the detailed census, which asked questions on topics such as family composition, health, assets, employment, and religious practices, would then be processed and analyzed at CECODERS in San José. Once the statistics were compiled and basic interpretations

\(^4\) Yadira Bonilla, Assistant Director of CECODERS, interview by author, in San José, Costa Rica, 26 July 1997.

\(^5\) Bonilla, interview by author; and Padre Orlando Navarro Rojas, Director of CECODERS, interview by author, in San José, Costa Rica, 18 July 1996.

\(^6\) V Sinodo Arquidiocesano, Decretos sinodales, no. 203c.

\(^7\) CECODERS, Censo parroquial familiar (San José, C.R.: CECODERS, n.d.).
performed, they would be returned to the original parishes where the priest, interviewers, and other pastoral agents would meet to discuss the results. The idea was that together these individuals could compare the census results with their own interpretations and experiences, and could analyze the trends uncovered in terms of Catholic Social Teaching. From this process of interaction and consultation, future priorities for the parish’s pastoral programming could, ideally, take shape.

Moreover, though early on research was carried out primarily at the parish level in Costa Rica, CECODERS soon began to provide services to entire dioceses and, eventually, to international Church and development organizations. Within Costa Rica, most noteworthy has been the collaboration between CECODERS and the bishop and social pastoral commission of the Church in the Limón region. In particular, and as I will discuss further in Chapter Nine, the socio-economic diagnosticos coordinated by CECODERS in Limón in 1987-88 and 1993 formed the basis of what were to become the Limón Church’s ground-breaking and liberationist "Overall Pastoral Plans." Beyond this, CECODERS has provided research for various Costa Rican dioceses when they have considered building new parishes, and has prepared reports for the Vatican as it has investigated the creation of new dioceses in the country. Internationally, the bishops of CELAM and SEDAC (Secretariado Episcopal de América Central y Panamá) have also requested studies from the staff of CECODERS, as have various Central American university organizations and UNICEF in the United States and Latin America. These international contracts not only indicate the impressive and far-reaching reputation CECODERS has built up over time; they also represent a significant source of income for the small Church organization.

In addition, it is important to recognize that CECODERS carries out both what it terms "socio-religious" research (intended primarily for use in parish and diocesan pastoral planning) and more traditional sociological studies. In this latter area, CECODERS maintains a data bank of economic, social, and political information and generates thematic studies on topics such as neo-liberalism, structural adjustment, AIDS, and the

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8 Bonilla, interview by author.
informal economy in Costa Rica. These data and studies are always at the disposal of bishops, other Church agents, academics, and activists who wish to consult them; they are also often translated into popular education materials that are more widely distributed among the population. Further, CECODERS members themselves use the insights gained from this social scientific research to decide on priorities for their two remaining programming areas.

**Productive Projects**

Over the years, CECODERS has evolved into an agency that provides counselling and credit to individuals, families, and other small groups seeking to set up "productive projects" (sometimes also called "microempresas") in city slums. Research performed by CECODERS in various Costa Rican communities had indicated that small-scale enterprises, based on skills that individuals already possessed or could easily learn, would be effective tools for social and economic development. The simple products and services sold in the microempresas are the means to generate desperately needed income for the urban poor.9

Though originally CECODERS was not intended to develop these types of activities itself (within the Vicaria, the responsibility for so-called "human promotion" projects was delegated more directly to Cáritas), productive projects have come to constitute a significant part of the Centre's programming. By the mid-1990s, CECODERS was shepherding approximately 150 different productive projects in marginalized urban areas such as Aserrí, Desamparado, and Tíbas. Centre staff members solicit funding for this programming area from various national and international development agencies, usually on a project by project basis.10

In terms of the projects themselves, CECODERS focuses primarily (though not exclusively) on developing microempresas with women. This is due to the large number of female-headed households in Costa Rican cities, and the difficulty that single mothers often have in finding childcare when they work outside the home. In response to this

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9 Bonilla, interview by author.
situation, CECODERS has generated projects revolving around dressmaking and *artesania* that allow women to earn an income while they stay at home with their children. The Centre provides training in the practical skill involved as well as in basic accounting and administration and, once such training is completed, access to a rotating microcredit fund to help with start up or expansion costs. Though CECODERS offers on-going technical and administrative advice for everyone involved in the productive projects, the long term goal is for the small businesses to detach from the Centre and learn to manage on their own.

*Education, Training, and Accompaniment*

CECODERS' education, training, and accompaniment efforts represent its largest and, at least in terms of this thesis, most important programming area. Here, in the context of its more general mission "to spread (divulgar) the Social Doctrine of the Church, applying it to the Costa Rican reality through adequate programs," CECODERS offers specialized services to three particular groups. As an expression of what Centre leaders label their "option for the poor," CECODERS works most closely with members of San José's burgeoning informal economy, with individuals diagnosed as HIV positive and their families, and with unionized workers. While I will comment briefly on the Centre's work in the informal economy and on its AIDS ministry here, the remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an analysis of CECODERS' approach to CST and its relationship with the Costa Rican union movement.

Largely as a result of the higher levels of unemployment and poverty generated by Costa Rica's crisis of the past years, the informal sector of the economy has grown considerably. By far the most visible workers in this sector are the "*vendedores ambulantes*" (ambulatory vendors) on the streets of San José. These men, women, and children shine shoes or may sell anything from fruit, vegetables, and prepared foods to crafts, clothing, cosmetics, and toys. They may sell their wares from sacks slung over

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10 Bonilla, interview by author.
12 Bonilla, interview by author; and Navarro, interview by author.
their shoulders, or display their inventories on small wooden tables or sheets of plastic spread on the sidewalk. In addition, these vendors are often immigrants from other Central American countries and their merchandise is sometimes imported illegally. As such, they frequently do not have the licence (*permiso*) required by the local government and are subject to harassment and persecution by the police.

CECODERS has conducted detailed studies on this phenomenon for the municipal government, comparing the situation of the San José vendors with that of vendors in other Latin American cities and illustrating how the difficulties surrounding the sector cannot be dealt with in isolation from larger social and economic problems. The Centre also works directly with the merchants by helping them to attain their licences whenever possible. Even more importantly, CECODERS has set up workshops and projects that encourage street vendors to organize amongst themselves, both as a means of protection against harassment and as a way to take advantage of economies of scale. Perhaps the most successful CECODERS project in this area to date has involved the setting up of an artisan's alley in the Plaza de la Democracia (a main tourist site in San José's central core). There, the vendors can count on a permanent, safe, and legally sanctioned market for their goods with a steady flow of customers and continual access to small business advice from CECODERS. Altogether, CECODERS works with over 1,500 street merchants in San José and has begun to branch out and consult with vendors employed by larger private corporations (e.g., selling newspapers or ice cream), educating them about their rights and the benefits of labour organization.13

CECODERS' accompaniment of HIV-positive individuals and their families takes place on a much smaller scale than its work with ambulatory vendors. The Centre's "Pastoral de la Esperanza" (Pastorate of Hope) was created in 1992 as a response to the alarming growth in the rate of HIV infection in Costa Rica and the prejudice, fear, and isolation those sick with AIDS often face. This arm of CECODERS, which operates in conjunction with the parish of Santa Marta Y Griega, distributes popular

13 Bonilla, interview by author; and Solis, interview by author.
education materials aimed at teaching the public about the disease. It also helps to provide spiritual support to AIDS sufferers, along with material assistance in terms of doctors' fees, prescriptions, food, and clothing for the sick. Weekly meetings are held for both those diagnosed as HIV-positive and for those interested in volunteering with the Pastorate of Hope. Activities are financed through raffles, food sales, teas, bingo nights, and voluntary contributions. With this pastorate, CECODERS has come to play a vital role in the Costa Rican Church's growing ministry to people with AIDS.

Though all of this programming is undoubtedly significant in terms of CECODERS' overall contribution to the Church and the rest of Costa Rican society, we must now turn to consider the Centre's use of Catholic Social Teaching and the specific forms that its workers' pastorate takes. Here, borrowing the conceptual categories of "see," "judge," and "act" from progressive CST itself can serve to highlight the most important elements to investigate in CECODERS' mission.

**Seeing Social Reality: The Controversial 1986 Folleto**

In general, CECODERS carries out its mandate to divulge CST in Costa Rican society by means of workshops and publications. The Centre's occasional workshops are typically built around a particular papal encyclical or theme suggested by the encyclicals and are held at the CECODERS installations in San José. Popular education materials, small working groups, and participatory methodologies are the norm at these sessions, with discussion and interaction among seminar participants being stressed. A much wider audience, however, has been reached by means of CECODERS' publications themselves. From 1986 to 1991 (the year of Pope John Paul II's last major social encyclical), CECODERS released a number of popular education folletos (pamphlets) and articles in

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14 In this regard it is interesting to note that the Church-sponsored pamphlets openly promote the use of condoms as a way to prevent the transmission of the virus.


16 The Archdiocese itself has recently constructed a small palliative care home for those dying of AIDS.
Eco Católico that served to raise awareness about Costa Rican social history and about the Catholic Church's social teaching.¹⁷

One of the earliest, and undoubtedly most notorious, examples of CECODERS' work in this regard is a popular education folleto the Centre published in conjunction with Cáritas in January 1986. "The History of Costa Rica? And of Our Community!"¹⁸ illustrates the hypothetical discussion of a handful of men and women meeting at a local school. Expressing the belief that helping one's neighbour is the best form of evangelization, but acknowledging that this is only possible once the historical causes of the community's problems are understood,¹⁹ the members of this Church group have gathered to teach one another about their country's history. Group members have divided the material into three time periods (1940-1948, 1948-1973, and 1973-1985) and a relatively detailed picture of Costa Rican political history emerges through the presentations, questions, and reflections that follow.

The class-based analysis of the folleto is apparent almost immediately. The period leading up to the 1940s is portrayed in terms of a conflict between the powerful privileged classes (the coffee oligarchs and bankers in control of the government) and the suffering and hungry majority of the population.²⁰ The shifting alliances and confrontations immediately preceding the 1948 civil war are also illustrated in terms of class location. Hence we read about conflicting interests of three main groups: the privileged or "rich" classes; the reformist bourgeoisie and working classes allied behind Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia; and the disaffected cafetaleros, the middle classes, and the popular sectors supporting the eventual victor of the civil war, José Figueres, Sr.²¹ The Church's

¹⁷ Many of the Eco Católico articles are simply excerpts taken from the longer booklets used in CECODERS seminars.
¹⁹ CECODERS and Cáritas, ¿La historia de Costa Rica?, 2-3.
²⁰ CECODERS and Cáritas, ¿La historia de Costa Rica?, 3-5.
²¹ CECODERS and Cáritas, ¿La historia de Costa Rica?, 5-8.
involvement in the union movement, along with Mons. Sanabria’s alliance with Calderón and the communists to promote the Social Guarantees, is also highlighted here.\footnote{CECODERS and Cáritas, 《La historia de Costa Rica？, 6.}

The bulk of the folleto is devoted to a critical analysis of the development model proposed by Figueres and his successors in the Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN). Here, the booklet outlines the characteristics of the interventionist and Benefactor State that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, and also explains the government’s import substitution industrialization strategy and growing external debt load. The folleto’s evaluation of government policies during this period is harsh. Though some benefits of this development model are noted, the cartoon characters in the pamphlet emphasize that targeted social problems were not solved and that phenomena such as poverty, landlessness, and unemployment grew overall.\footnote{CECODERS and Cáritas, 《La historia de Costa Rica？, 15.} Popular organizations and government associations operating during this time are caricatured as puppets of the State that acted on behalf of communities in name only.\footnote{CECODERS and Cáritas, 《La historia de Costa Rica？, 16} Transnational corporations from rich and powerful countries are blamed for their economic, political, and cultural oppression, and for creating a dependent and consumerist Costa Rican society.\footnote{CECODERS and Cáritas, 《La historia de Costa Rica？, 18-19.} As one of the characters summarizes, quoting the bishops at Puebla, under this model of industrialization the "rich get richer and the poor, poorer."\footnote{CECODERS and Cáritas, 《La historia de Costa Rica？, 21.}

Significantly, even the Church itself does not escape criticism in the folleto’s analysis, as it is accused of attaching itself to the PLN project and, though some exceptions are noted, of failing to provide an effective response to the most poor.\footnote{CECODERS and Cáritas, 《La historia de Costa Rica？, 14, 20 and 24.}

The final section of the folleto discusses the economic crisis in Costa Rica and the rise in power of the neo-liberals, defined as "those who want the freedom to produce in order to sell, and of course to earn more, and to exploit the workers more."\footnote{CECODERS and Cáritas, 《La historia de Costa Rica？, 27.} The structural adjustment programs of the IMF and the World Bank, and the self-interest of the
United States' involvement in these institutions, are explained and attacked. Once again, the folleto notes that it is the poor who must carry the burden (*pagar los platos rotos*). Though no mention is made of the Costa Rican Church here, the Puebla bishops are cited once more, this time in their condemnation of the "idols" of wealth and capitalist liberalism.\(^{29}\) Significantly, moreover, even the widespread image of Costa Rica as the Central American Switzerland is discredited with statistics and directly dismissed as a myth propagated by politicians.\(^{30}\) A priest concludes the hypothetical meeting with a list of discussion questions for readers about Costa Rican history and the responsibilities of Christians and the Church in the face of the crisis.\(^{31}\)

This folleto is noteworthy in several respects. To begin, it provides a clearly liberationist analysis of Costa Rica's history and present-day crisis. Through the folleto, CECODERS demonstrates the reality and effects of class conflict in Costa Rican society. In so doing, the Centre revises the predominant version of history taught to generations of children and their parents by teachers and politicians. The folleto unmaskst the myth of Costa Rica as the *suiza centroamericana*, just as it challenges the equally pervasive, but equally false, belief that there is no class conflict in the nation. The problems in society are not seen as stemming from sinful attitudes or faulty morals, but rather are diagnosed as linked to an inequitable development model. In contrast to the style of analysis (common, as we have seen, in the CST tradition) in which poverty is blamed on vague "excesses" of capitalism, the CECODERS booklet explains the processes involved, and names the parties, politicians, and policies responsible. The critique of reality found in this folleto thus fits squarely into the standard liberationist line of thought, but does so in a manner dependent on and directly responsive to the Costa Rican historical context.

This position naturally places CECODERS in an antagonistic relationship vis-à-vis the ruling classes in Costa Rica. After all, the pamphlet not only critiques the economic and political bases of their dominance, but it also, through its work of demythologization, undermines the ideological support for their rule. Given this, it is not surprising that

\(^{29}\) CECODERS and Cáritas, *¿La historia de Costa Rica?*, 28  
\(^{30}\) CECODERS and Cáritas, *¿La historia de Costa Rica?*, 30-31.  
\(^{31}\) CECODERS and Cáritas, *¿La historia de Costa Rica?*, 33.
heated debate over the publication eventually broke out. In March 1987, news of the folleto's "Marxist-Leninist" vision surfaced in the right-wing daily La Nación. Over the following weeks, more than 70 articles on the folleto appeared as the debate raged in the national press.

In one corner were La Nación and its editorialists, including Julio Rodríguez (the paper's resident "theologian," rumoured Opus Dei associate, and one-time ESJ223 advisor). Throughout the debate, editorials portrayed the paper as a defender of Costa Rican democracy that was serving the patria by alerting its readers to the dangers of communist infiltration in the Church. As proof of such infiltration, the paper cited the comments of two CECOR bishops, Mons. Trejos and Mons. Morera, who had expressed concern over the support for the popular church and liberation theology within official Church organizations. The paper highlighted the "pugna" (clash) among the clergy that had emerged over such issues, and also blamed Mons. Arrieta for not doing enough to stop the spread of Marxism within the Church himself.

In the other corner were Archbishop Arrieta and the hierarchy. Mons. Arrieta's responses to the newspaper revealed his indignation over the attack and the fact that the first articles were published while he was out of the country and thus could not immediately respond to the accusations. The Archbishop acknowledged that there were some problems with the folleto, but denied that as a whole the publication was communist. In fact, he attempted to minimize the presence of Marxism in the Church overall and

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32 Aixa Saborío, "Folleto ocasiona pugna en Iglesia," La Nación, 13 March 1987, 6A.

33 Miguel Picado, La Iglesia costarricense entre el pueblo, 172. Many of the most important of these articles have been gathered and reprinted in Pablo Richard, ed., La pastoral social en Costa Rica: Documentos y comentarios acerca de la polémica entre la Iglesia católica y el periódico La Nación (San José, C.R.: DEI, 1987).

34 Julio Rodríguez, "Los mercaderes," La Nación, 17 March 1987, 15A; and "La cuestión de fondo," La Nación, 20 March 1987, 14A.

35 "Obispos y sacerdotes preocupa influencia marxista en Iglesia," La Nación, 14 March 1987, 6A; and "La cuestión," 14A.

36 Saborío, "Folleto," 6A; and "La infiltración en la Iglesia," La Nación, 15 March 1987, 14A.
argued that none of the clergy or hierarchy should be accused of Marxism when they were simply collaborating, in obedience to the Pope and Church magisterium, in social pastoral work. The Archbishop likewise took exception to the portrayal that there was disunity among the bishops within the Church, claiming that La Nación's interpretation of Mons. Trejos' and Mons. Morera's remarks was "absolutely false." Writing as a collective, the CECOR bishops supported the Archbishop's position and railed against the paper's "insidious campaign" and "malevolent attempts" to portray the episcopate as divided. The reality, the bishops wrote, was that they acted "with only one soul and only one spirit, in the name of Christ." In terms of concrete actions taken, Arrieta also reported, in his own defence, that when complaints about the CECODERS publication began to surface, he did convene meetings and take actions to correct the errors in the folleto. Perhaps most importantly, the Archbishop announced that he personally, along with a recently formed Archdiocesan commission, would review all future writings of CECODERS (and of the ESJ23) prior to publication.

Throughout all of this, CECODERS itself kept a relatively low profile. Though La Nación reported that Centre director Padre Navarro originally disagreed with Mons. Arrieta's assessment of the folleto as problematic, the paper also noted that Navarro was willing to amend its contents if necessary. Eventually, Padre Navarro issued a public response to Mons. Arrieta explaining the Centre's position on the issue. In this letter, Navarro, emphasizing that CECODERS was "united with our Bishop in dialogue, obedience, and love," repeated that the Centre would rectify any errors the leader of the

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39 Arrieta, "Que la Santa Sede," 16A.
42 Saborío, "Folleto," 6A.
Church indicated. Moreover, Navarro repudiated *La Nación*’s charges of Marxist-Leninist infiltration in the Church. To underscore his point, Navarro demonstrated, by citing passages from the Puebla document and the CECOR bishops’ 1979 *carta pastoral*, that the Church’s preferential option for the poor and its responsibility to collaborate in social transformation were fully justifiable in terms of the Church’s social teachings.

Some of CECODERS’ supporters also took pains to illustrate, this time with numerous and lengthy quotations from Pope John Paul II’s encyclicals, that the Centre’s positions were acceptable in light of CST. Much was also made of *La Nación*’s unprofessional behaviour in the whole affair. Highlighted here was the accusation that the newspaper’s journalists "fabricated" news about the *folleto* over a year after it was published solely so that they could editorialize about it, and the claim that the paper distorted the words of the two bishops concerned about liberation theology and the popular church (by implying that they were commenting on the CECODERS *folleto* when they were actually making remarks about other Church organizations). Most of these commentators further emphasized the conservative political agenda driving *La Nación* throughout the controversy. Essentially, they argued that the paper’s charges of communism in the Church served the interests of those wishing to maintain the unjust status quo in Costa Rica and block the Church’s work on behalf of the poor.

Certainly, much of this commentary about *La Nación*’s perspective and tactics is accurate. As I also noted above, the liberationist analysis of the *folleto* would quite understandably prove threatening to the elite segment of society represented by *La Nación*.

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46 See "¿Pugna en la Iglesia o pugna de 'La Nación' contra la Iglesia?" in Richard, ed., *La pastoral social de Costa Rica*, 73-80; and Jorge Arturo Chavez, "Los 'pseudoteologos de La Nación,' y el peligro de un 'magisterio paralelo,'" *Eco Católico*, 5 April 1987, 8.
Capitalizing on Costa Ricans' fear of communism would thus be one way to undermine support for progressive Church positions. Further, the newspaper's manipulation of fact is an inexcusable abuse of journalistic licence. However, in their efforts to discredit *La Nación* and defend CECODERS, these commentators are missing something significant. That is, as reprehensible or distasteful as *La Nación*’s right-wing rhetoric and red baiting may be, the paper’s editorialists have nonetheless highlighted a truth about the Church as institution in Costa Rica. They have detected the split that exists within the Church -- the fact that the Church, like Costa Rican society itself, is traversed by class conflict.

The *folleto* itself, though it cannot indicate all the characteristics of the conflict, highlights certain important facets of this intra-Church split. To begin, the *folleto* demonstrates that CECODERS and the Costa Rican hierarchy have dramatically different perceptions of reality, with the Centre’s revelation of class conflict in Costa Rica presenting a challenge to the bishops' persistent belief in social peace and Christian unity. Beyond this, the CECODERS *folleto* openly contradicts the claim of Church leaders to be politically neutral ("neither Liberationist [PLN] nor Social Christian [PUSC]" has been Arrieta’s longstanding refrain) by pointing to the Church’s political alliances, first with Calderón in the 1940s and then more recently with the PLN. CECODERS’ attack on the traditional reformist project of the PLN is thus also an attack on Church leaders whose words and actions, as we have seen, have long helped to bolster this party’s particular political option. In addition, the Centre’s harsh critique of the neo-liberal policies that had more recently been embraced by PLN leaders contrasts with the symbolic support for structural adjustment programs the hierarchy had also begun to display (Arrieta’s first Decalogue of Austerity, for example, was released the year prior to the *folleto*’s publication). And, questions of political partisanship aside, we must not forget that the pamphlet directly charges the Church with failing to respond effectively to the poor. The *folleto*, then, reveals a conservative-liberationist clash in the Church: whereas the hierarchy speaks and acts for the ruling classes and their political agenda, the Centre formulates an unmasking of and opposition to these positions on behalf of the poor.

The proclamations of unity made by the various Church parties during the debate -- proclamations made in spite of the polemics crystallized by the *folleto* -- are likewise
significant. Clearly, the hierarchy's affirmation of Church unity on social pastoral matters is consonant with its promotion of harmony and collaboration (i.e., unity) within society. But it is also consistent with the CECOR bishops' more general conservative ecclesiological perspective, one that emphasizes overall Church unity and obedience to the bishops who are said to guarantee it. Thus, even though some of the bishops themselves originally, if unwittingly, pointed to a split within the Church (by voicing their fears about the influence of liberation theology and the popular church over some of the clergy), their eventual reassertion of Church unity is not surprising. Further, Mons. Arrieta's move to place CECODERS under more direct supervision is at once an admission that there is an unacceptable level of diversity (disunity) within the Church, and a safeguard to ensure that such diversity would not be replicated in the future. In the end, the institutional imperative to preserve Church unity is strong: just as it was necessary for the Costa Rican hierarchy to react against the threat of the popular church in Nicaragua, it was also necessary for them to deny any sort of polarization or left-wing penetration into their own Church.

Interestingly, and perhaps contrary to what one would expect given CECODERS' overtly liberationist reading of reality, Father Navarro appeared to cede relatively quickly to the hierarchy's pressure for unity. He did so not only by agreeing to change the folleto and submit future writings to the Archbishop, but also by directly reiterating the Centre's obedience and unity to the Archbishop. These statements do not seem so unlikely, however, if we regard them simply as an expression of CECODERS' novice and subordinate status within the Archdiocese. In other words, insofar as the Centre had been recently created by, and was still officially subsumed under, the very Church body now pressuring it to modify its course, Padre Navarro and the staff would have had little choice but to fall into line. To remain defiant could have meant the end of their sociological research centre (or at least their employment therein) and their valuable social pastoral work in parishes and with the poor of San José. In any case, whatever the motivations for CECODERS' pledge of solidarity with the Archbishop, one thing remains certain. After

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47 See Chapter Five, pp.153-54.
the controversy over the *folleto* died down, no differences of opinion in the Church regarding CECODERS' positions or publications surfaced for public scrutiny again.

**Making Judgements: CECODERS and the CST Tradition of the Church**

Reflecting on the debate over the 1986 *folleto*, we must not forget that it was to Catholic Social Teaching that CECODERS and its supporters appealed as proof of the validity of the Centre’s positions. Pointing to CECODERS’ use of the standard teachings of the Church magisterium, in other words, was another attempt to demonstrate Church unity. Even after the *folleto* controversy, CECODERS continued to publish documents and articles related to CST. Given all this, the forms of CST used and the roles that these play in CECODERS' materials deserve a closer investigation.

First of all, however, it should be stressed that CECODERS does not actually create CST in its writings. Instead, the organization concentrates on disseminating fragments of an already existing tradition. Strictly speaking, this is in line with the mission assigned to CECODERS by Archdiocesan Synod, as well as with the traditional ecclesiastical division of labour in which the members of the hierarchy are seen as the only progenitors of the Church’s teachings. Still, one could reasonably expect (as in the case of the liberation theologians, for example) that other Church bodies would generate their own forms of (unofficial) CST by means of their interpretation of, dialogue with, or reaction to, the larger tradition. Nonetheless, this is not the case with CECODERS. There is little original theological reflection in the Centre’s materials that is not directly derivative from the major encyclicals or the CELAM documents.

Instead, what we frequently find in the CECODERS materials are lengthy quotations taken straight from CST sources themselves. Sometimes, various paragraphs (or paraphrases of paragraphs) are selected from the original documents and strung together to provide a representative sampling of papal thought on the State,\(^{48}\) for example,

\(^{48}\) CECODERS, "La Rerum Novarum y el estado," *Eco Católico*, 4 February 1990, 12.
or on spirituality, or on the common good and solidarity. Or, an article will show the evolution of an idea over time. It may demonstrate, for instance, how the notion of human dignity first surfaced in Rerum Novarum, but then was clarified and expanded upon in Laborem Exercens. In some cases, we can read a section by section summary of the contents of an encyclical. In other cases, we find a chronology of the major CST documents from the Vatican and Latin America, a detailing of the names and themes of encyclicals and conferences from the time of Leo XIII onward. As simple lessons about CST these are competently compiled and well written. But at no point is the reader convinced that CECODERS has made a contribution to CST on its own.

This is not to imply, however, that there is absolutely no analysis or evaluation being recorded in this material. On the contrary, several of the CECODERS pieces contain opinions regarding issues commonly debated in relation to CST. Still, in these cases the judgements are often predictable and are consistently laudatory. Thus, for example, CECODERS asserts that even though the earliest encyclicals remain relevant in the present day, there is a clear split between pre- and post-conciliar CST. The Centre also echoes the commonplace belief that the CELAM Puebla conference was an

49 CECODERS, "La espiritualidad en la Populorum Progressio," Eco Católico, 6 March 1988, 3.
51 For example, see, CECODERS, "Algunos aspectos fundamentales de la encíclica Rerum Novarum," Eco Católico, 21 January 1990, 12.
52 For example, see the summary of John Paul II's Sollicitudo Rei Socialis in CECODERS, "La preocupación social de la Iglesia," Eco Católico, 28 February 1988, 10.
affirmation of the Medellín conference.\textsuperscript{56} Further, when assessing the writings of the present pope, the Centre posits that John Paul II's thought is original and innovative,\textsuperscript{57} and that he also supports liberation theology and has adopted its methods and objectives.\textsuperscript{58} These positions are contained in both CECODERS' columns for \textit{Eco Católico} as well as in the more lengthy and scholarly articles written by CECODERS' directors for journals and books.

Significantly, and especially in the commentaries related to liberation theology, certain key points are ignored in the Centre's writings. For example, on what basis can these judgements about the Pope be made? Whose definition of liberation and what form of this theology has he adopted? The CECODERS portrayal is that with the 1986 Vatican \textit{Instruction} on liberation theology, the controversy over this theology has been straightened out. Yet not only is this interpretation based on a superficial reading of the texts themselves, it is also does not take into consideration the Vatican's persecution and censorship of liberationists and their allies in Latin America.\textsuperscript{59} The treatment of the option for the poor by Navarro also leaves certain questions unanswered. While he notes that Pope John Paul II has "redefined" this option as a "preferential option for the poor,"\textsuperscript{60} he does not examine the reasons behind, or the implications of, this redefinition. Such investigations are especially warranted because, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Four, using the language of the liberationists does not always imply a corresponding abandonment of fundamentally conservative categories. In fact, the Centre's uncritical presentation of the key elements of the CST tradition actually coincides with the needs of the conservatives in the Church. By not delving into the controversies and conflicts, by not

\textsuperscript{56} CECODERS, "De la encíclica 'Populorum Progressio' a la encíclica 'Sollicitudo Rei Socialis': Década de los setenta," \textit{Eco Católico}, 20 March 1988, 13.

\textsuperscript{57} CECODERS, "Derechos de los trabajadores a la luz de la Doctrina Social," \textit{Eco Católico}, 20 August 1989, 11; and Navarro and Borrialla, "La Iglesia e el avance de la Doctrina Social," 128 and 130.


\textsuperscript{59} See Chapter Four, p. 125.

\textsuperscript{60} Navarro, "El pensamiento actual en la doctrina social," 77.
asking difficult questions or even acknowledging the existence of some of the debates involved here, CECODERS is allowing the predominant (and predominantly conservative) visions of CST in the Church to be transmitted unchallenged. Nonetheless, even if the Centre's writings do not constitute original responses to CST or facilitate deep reflection on the tradition, they do fulfil certain functions crucial to the liberationist project. These are primarily related to the readings of the "signs of the times" found in many CECODERS articles on CST. Significantly, alongside the standard and uncritical presentations of CST in the Centre's publications, we find alternative and critical readings of Costa Rican and Latin American history. A short description of Pope John Paul II's subject matter in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, for instance, is followed by the comment that "the preceding invites us to reflect on the Costa Rican economic sphere, especially when we find ourselves on the verge of the approval of the Second Structural Adjustment Loan (PAE II)." The succeeding reflection, in turn, is a lengthy and unflinchingly negative portrayal of structural adjustment and its effects. Also inserted among the paragraphs and paraphrases taken directly from CST are explanations of the indicators of the socio-economic crisis throughout Latin America, revelations of Latin American militarism and human rights violations in the 1970s, and analyses of the causes and consequences of Costa Rica's huge external debt. Particularly noteworthy is the Centre's discussion of poverty in which the poor are defined primarily as members of classes: classes in conflict with and made poor by the dominant classes, and classes who demand justice by means of an alternative social project involving structural changes in

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62 CECODERS, "Los efectos económicos y sociales de la crisis Latinoamericana (una iluminación desde la Populorum Progressio y la Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)," *Eco Católico*, 6 August 1989, 16.
63 CECODERS, "De la encíclica 'Populorum Progressio' a la encíclica 'Sollicitudo Rei Socialis': Década de los setenta," 13.
64 CECODERS, "La deuda externa a la luz de la 'Populorum Progressio' y la 'Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,'" *Eco Católico*, 23 July 1989, 7.
society. Taken together, these articles provide an incisive look at socio-economic conditions in Costa Rica and reveal elements that are frequently ignored or strategically obfuscated by the mainstream press and political leaders. Catholic Social Teaching presented relatively objectively thus serves as the segue to, and legitimation for, CECODERS' subjectively presented version of history. In this consciousness-raising process, the concepts, vocabulary, and tools of counterhegemonic critique are disseminated to a wider audience in the Church.

In the end, and as I will discuss below, CECODERS' reluctance to critically engage the categories of CST may interfere with the long-term efficacy of its liberationist project. Still, the fact remains that this method of citing social teaching leaves very little room for accusations of CECODERS' disloyalty to, or conflict with, the message of Church leaders. Overall, then, CECODERS allows the division of labour implied by the Archdiocesan Synod and consistent with the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church to prevail. The Centre concentrates on seeing the sociological data, while leaving the production of theological judgements to the Church magisterium itself.

**Acting in Solidarity with Workers: CECODERS and the Union Movement**

Father Orlando Navarro and his staff have devoted themselves to promoting the well being of unionized workers since the very inception of CECODERS. In this section, therefore, I finally turn to examine the alliances and activities that constitute the Centre's accompaniment of the Costa Rican union movement.

**CECODERS and ASEPROLA**

CECODERS' present-day work with the union movement can best be understood from the starting point of Padre Navarro's long standing interests in the *solidarismo* phenomenon. In the early 1980s, he and Gustavo Blanco, a fellow student of sociology and committed lay Catholic, began to perceive certain practical and philosophical contradictions between the union movement and the solidarity movement in Costa Rica. In

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65 CECODERS, "Pobres, solidaridad, y liberación," *Eco Católico*, 23 December
fact, Navarro and Blanco collaborated on a joint thesis on the history, development, and doctrine of solidarismo. In 1984, the thesis was published as a book that constituted one of the first large-scale critiques of solidarismo in Costa Rican history.\textsuperscript{66} Shortly after, when Navarro as a priest was organizing the newly founded CECODERS, he and Blanco created a lay organization to operate alongside the Archdiocesan Centre. Soon to be known as the Asociación Servicios de Promoción Laboral (ASEPROLA, the Association for Labour Promotion Services), this latter organization focused primarily on educating workers and union leaders about the dangers posed by the rapidly expanding solidarity movement.\textsuperscript{67}

In the early days, there was much collaboration and overlap in the work of CECODERS and ASEPROLA. Though ASEPROLA was never officially designated as part of the Archdiocese's Vicaría de Pastoral Social, the two groups shared office space and resources, and Father Navarro spent much time working directly on the programs for workers that Blanco was developing. Activities carried out jointly by the two former schoolmates were sometimes attributed to CECODERS and sometimes to ASEPROLA, depending on which organization's mandate the work most closely matched. Also at this time, under the auspices of ASEPROLA, Blanco and Navarro began to question Church leaders' apparent favouritism toward solidarismo and their distant relationship with the country's union movement.\textsuperscript{68}

Before long, Navarro and Blanco's critique caught the attention of Archbishop Arrieta. Their anti-solidarismo campaign also angered Father Claudio Solano, the director of the ESJ23 and one of the country's leading proponents of the solidarismo. In 1987, as a result of Solano's lobbying and the Archbishop's own discomfort with the direction that ASEPROLA's activities were taking, Mons. Arrieta pressured Father Navarro to

\textsuperscript{66} Blanco and Navarro, \textit{El solidarismo}.

\textsuperscript{67} Gustavo Blanco B., ASEPROLA co-founder and sociologist, interview by author, in San José, Costa Rica, 19 June 1997.

\textsuperscript{68} Blanco, interview by author.
disassociate CECODERS and ASEPROLA. At this, ASEPROLA moved out of the CECODERS office space and the day-to-day collaboration between the two groups ceased.

After that point, Blanco and ASEPROLA concentrated on providing training and consulting services to unions in the battle against *solidarismo*. Navarro and CECODERS, meanwhile, moved their attention away from the solidarity movement and focused more exclusively on accompanying the union movement as representatives of the official Church. According to Blanco, this arrangement was useful because it allowed ASEPROLA to operate with a great deal of autonomy as it went about the "dirty work" of denouncing *solidarismo* in Costa Rica. Since it was no longer closely associated with the Church, the organization could not be censored as it carried out its political critique and its questioning of the Church's relationship to workers' organizations. Navarro and CECODERS, in contrast, were subject to more restrictions; as Blanco readily concedes, they had to be more cautious and compromise more with the hierarchy in order to maintain their status within the official institution.

This division of labour persists until this day. Though occasionally CECODERS will refer to the growth of solidarity movement in Costa Rica or the fact that *solidarismo* serves the interests of owners as opposed to workers, the Centre generally does not broach this controversial subject in its materials. As we shall see below, CECODERS has developed its work with unions in several other directions. ASEPROLA, on the other hand, has maintained its strong anti-*solidarismo* position, studying the phenomenon, holding workshops for union members on the dangers of *solidarismo*, and publishing

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69. Hernán Hermosilla Barrientos, coordinator of the Christian Program, ASEPROLA, interview by author, in San José, Costa Rica, 3 June 1997; and Navarro, interview by author.

70. Blanco, interview by author.


72. Navarro himself, when asked directly about *solidarismo*, is critical but diplomatic. He maintains that while there may be some important elements in *solidarismo*, the solidarity movement has goals that serve the neo-liberal agenda and that therefore are fundamentally different than the goals of the union movement. Navarro, interview by author.
extensively (written and audio-visual popular education materials, union training manuals, scholarly works, etc.) on the solidarity movement as a whole. In recent years, moreover, ASEPROLA has grown considerably in size and in the scope of its activities. The organization now includes several Protestants and non-Christians among its staff, with its "Christian Program" representing the remains of the group's lay Catholic origins. In particular, it is the staff of this program that liase most closely with representatives from the Pastoral Social in the Limón Church (the specific nature of ASEPROLA's involvement in Limón will be dealt with in Chapter Nine). In its direct work with unions, ASEPROLA has developed programming in the areas of occupational health (particularly in relation to banana plantations throughout Central America) and women's rights and roles within the union movement. Through its "Woman Worker Program," ASEPROLA has also undertaken a popular education campaign aimed at increasing awareness of labour rights for maquila workers. In all of this, relations with CECODERS remain friendly. While the two groups occasionally collaborate on specific projects, they still regard their work as separate though complementary. 73

CECODERS and Labour Struggles

Since its split with ASEPROLA, CECODERS has concentrated more closely on fostering a rapprochement between the union movement and the Church. Thus, on the one hand, the Centre offers workshops on CST for union leaders. On the other hand, Father Navarro and his staff work to educate bishops about the theory of unionism and the actual state of sindicalismo in Costa Rica. Perhaps most importantly, CECODERS also sponsors monthly meetings between interested Church members and union representatives. Further, though it does carry out some projects with campesino organizations and continues to provide research support to the Limón Church, most of CECODERS' present-day activities are centred in San José.

As might be expected, the CST used to define the Centre's position on work is drawn from standard magisterial sources. For example, Navarro and the CECODERS

73 Hermosilla, interview by author.
documents cite Leo XIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II in support of the right of workers to unionize to defend their interests. Moreover, referring to the tradition of Mons. Sanabria and to John Paul II's writings in *Laborem Exercens*, Father Navarro has called for "substantial changes" in the Costa Rican system in order to make the just salary a reality for all workers. A particular focus in CECODERS' writings and statements also comes from the present Pope's encyclical on work — the notion that the human being is the subject of work and that it is through work that one realizes one's humanity. Importantly, on this point CECODERS emphasizes the Pope's notion of the priority of labour over capital. Still, in place of an acknowledgement that within the capitalist system the interests of labour and capital are by definition opposed (an assertion more in line with liberationist thought), we find an adoption of the patently conservative position from John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* that work naturally unites people. At one point in a discussion of strikes, CECODERS even quotes a passage from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* that highlights the damages to workers, commerce, and society that strikes can cause. Given such reference points, it would be easy to consider the Centre's position a mere echo of the dominant and conservative CST tradition, a tradition we have seen to be propagated by the Pope in the Vatican and the hierarchy in the Costa Rican Church.

Nonetheless, a closer look at the work of the Centre begins to reveal certain marked differences in the positions of CECODERS and the Church magisterium. Many of these can be seen in CECODERS' attitude toward actual strikes, both past and present, in Costa Rica. Publications meant to educate workers about the history of the labour movement, for example, tell the story of several path-breaking strikes from the early

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74 CECODERS, "Las relaciones entre las naciones y su influencia en el trabajo," *Eco Católico*, 27 August 1989, 12; and Navarro, "El pensamiento actual en la Doctrina Social," 69.


76 Navarro and Bonilla, "La Iglesia e el avance de la Doctrina Social," 129; and Navarro, interview by author.

77 Navarro and Bonilla, "La Iglesia e el avance de la Doctrina Social," 129.

1900s to the late 1930s (involving banana workers, shoemakers, bakers, tailors, etc.).
The articles explain the conditions suffered by the workers at the time and describe how
they organized to demand improvements in their workplaces and salaries. Importantly, the
message conveyed in these pieces is two-fold: that there is strength in a unified workers'
movement and that workers' persistence in striking is ultimately rewarded with
concessions from employers.\textsuperscript{80} Considering this context, and upon further examination, we
see that the quotation about strike damages from \textit{Rerum Novarum} cited above is used
neither to stigmatize labour militancy nor to dissuade workers from striking. Rather,
CECODERS here is illustrating that the disruption caused by strikes is enough to pressure
the State to respond to the workers' demands.\textsuperscript{81} With this, it appears that the Centre is not
so much focused on the drawbacks to strike activity as it is concerned with providing
examples of the success of strikes. CECODERS is therefore adopting an position at odds
with that of the Costa Rican hierarchy which, as we have seen in the previous chapter,
tends to dwell on the extremity, dangers, and limits of strikes.

The actions of CECODERS during the 1995 teachers' strike reinforce this
interpretation. In comparison to the efforts of Mons. Arrieta to function as an "impartial"
mediator between the teachers and the government, Padre Navarro and CECODERS
assumed a more partisan position. They did so primarily by organizing a fax campaign on
behalf of the striking teachers. The Centre composed a document and circulated it to
parishes throughout the country, eventually gaining the support of 67 priests in their public
declaration and petition to the government.\textsuperscript{82} In the strongly worded document, the
workers' right to strike is affirmed and the government's use of propaganda to sway public
opinion is denounced.\textsuperscript{83} CECODERS points out that the teachers' protests are not only a

\textsuperscript{79} Leo XIII, "Rerum Novarum," no. 31, as cited in CECODERS, "Las huelgas de
\textsuperscript{80} CECODERS, "Las huelgas de 1934," 18; CECODERS, "Las huelgas en Costa
Rica en el movimiento artesanal obrero," \textit{Eco Católica}, 12 August 1990, 13; and
\textsuperscript{81} CECODERS, "Las huelgas de 1934," 18.
\textsuperscript{82} Solis, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{83} CECODERS and sacerdotes de diversa diócesis de Costa Rica, "Fax sobre la
huelga del Magisterio [1995]," (CECODERS archives, photocopy).
reaction to the proposed reforms of the pension law, but are also a manifestation of the broader popular discontent with the effects of the latest structural adjustment program. The document here also singles out the undemocratic means through which the reform of the State has been carried out in the country and the detrimental effects that this reform has had on the majority of the population. Significantly, the CECODERS fax asks the government to initiate negotiations with the teachers and to do so without demanding that the teachers end their strike first. A quotation from Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, regarding the legitimacy of the strike as a necessary means to defend workers' rights, is used to reinforce this request. Again, CECODERS' attitude directly contrasts with that of the Archbishop in the same situation. Mons. Arrieta attempted to minimize the disruption caused by the strike and tried to return teachers to their classrooms as a precedent for beginning negotiations. But CECODERS recognizes the value of the persistent strike as a weapon in the struggle against both an unjust pension law and the neo-liberal State.

In fact, it is this broader opposition to neo-liberalism that informs most of CECODERS' work with unions in Costa Rica. Recognizing that the pressure to privatize is one of the most pernicious elements of structural adjustment policy, one of the Centre's priorities has been to accompany unions in the very sectors targeted for privatization. In this regard, CECODERS' most notable work has been with various unions in the healthcare sector. While the State has gradually been reducing its funding to healthcare since near the beginning of the neo-liberal era in the 1980s, the structural adjustment program signed by the government in 1993 contained a particularly ambitious "Healthcare Sector Reform Project." With this project the government began to transfer responsibility for a wide array of medical services from the Costa Rican Social Security Bureau to private hands.

In response to this situation, CECODERS has tried to raise awareness about how budget cuts have created a crisis in healthcare and about why privatization, based as it is

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84 Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium et Spes," no. 68, as cited in CECODERS and sacerdotes de diversa diócesis de Costa Rica, "Fax."
85 Navarro, interview by author.
on the logic of profitability, will only make matters worse. The Centre also works to forge unity among the exceedingly fragmented unions in the healthcare sector. In 1995, for example, CECODERS was instrumental in the coordination of fourteen unions to form the Frente de Organizaciones Sindicales del Sector Salud (FOSSS, or the Front of Health Sector Union Organizations). FOSSS seeks to organize and mobilize its constituents to defend the interests of both workers and patients affected by the changes in the Costa Rican healthcare system. According to the Frente's working plan, which was elaborated by CECODERS itself, FOSSS will become the operations base for future pressure on and negotiations with the government regarding healthcare reform. The ongoing support CECODERS provides to healthcare workers via FOSSS thus makes the Centre an important accomplice in the campaign to reverse the trend toward privatization in Costa Rica.

The regular meetings CECODERS sponsors between priests and union representatives also take place within the larger context of Costa Rican neo-liberalism. These meetings, then, are not only designed to foster closer ties between two groups that were often estranged in the past. They are also meant to pool resources, develop strategies, and unite these agents together in protest against the profound social changes and increasing poverty that have accompanied the restructuring of the Costa Rican State. As the working plans for the meetings confirm, CECODERS sees itself as provoking conscientization about the present-day situation in Costa Rica. The Centre also seeks to provide a space for dialogue and coordination among unions, and between unions and the Church, so that they can come to be "strong interlocutors in the face of the government." 

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86 Orlando Navarro, "La Iglesia católica frente al Proyecto de la Reforma de Salud," (CECODERS archives, photocopy); and CECODERS, "Situación en que se encuentra el sector salud en Costa Rica," (CECODERS archives, photocopy).

87 The workers of the CCSS alone, for example, belong to 43 separate unions. Solis, interview by author. For a discussion of the implications of this fragmentation for the Costa Rican union movement, see Chapter Three.


89 CECODERS, "Encuentro sacerdotes y organizaciones sindicales," (CECODERS archives, photocopy), 1.
Ultimately, CECODERS' goal with this project is to unite the popular sectors of the country, to arrive at alternative economic policies and at development options that respond to the needs of the poorest, and to create a Costa Rica where everyone has access to the wealth.\(^{90}\)

The proceedings of one of these meetings, held in mid-1996, reveal the combination of strategic and theoretical concerns involved with such tasks.\(^{91}\) The meeting begins with a survey of the latest restructuring and layoffs in the Costa Rican civil service and the continued inability of the fragmented labour movement to mobilize workers effectively against the government's policies. Some of the discussion revolves around choosing one issue (rising gasoline prices, inadequate salary increases, layoffs etc.) around which to rally the population and garner support for the protest movement. Further, there is the recognition that the struggle against the government should not be merely conjunctural, but that it should also be based upon a defined ideological and political base in order to sustain the unity of the movement. Perhaps most significantly, the delegates justify the need for class struggle and confrontation, as opposed to simply dialogue and negotiation, as the instruments needed to reclaim workers' rights:

The union movement has always made room for dialogue, negotiation, and solidarity, but we believe, contrary to Mons. Arrieta, that these elements have given way to class struggle and confrontation, owing to the great abuse of power of the present government and all its allies, such as the businessmen and the Catholic Church itself, who have forgotten their commitment to the Costa Rican people and have thrown them into poverty, unemployment, and indignity, and who have taken advantage of the present situation to make the rich richer and the poor poorer . . . .\(^{92}\)

Significantly, the priests and union leaders here point to both the reality of class conflict in society and the real need for struggle in order to transform the current state of social relations. Thus, they acknowledge a pre-existing social conflict between

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\(^{90}\) CECODERS, "Encuentro sacerdotes y organizaciones sindicales," 2.

\(^{91}\) CECODERS, "Tercer encuentro de sacerdotes y organizaciones sindicales [1996]," (CECODERS archives, photocopy).

\(^{92}\) CECODERS, "Tercer encuentro," 4.
the government and its allies on one hand, and the poor on the other. But, they also indicate that, in light of government's intransigence, social change will necessarily involve an element of conflict. In addition, the meeting delegates provide further evidence, by means of their overt disagreement with the Archbishop and their accusations regarding the Church's alliance with an unjust government, of the internal conflict within the Costa Rican Church. As was also the case with the 1986 folleto, therefore, these meetings are a tangible illustration of the theoretical assertion that the Church functions as an interclass social space— the conflicts and confrontations present in the larger society are reproduced within the Church institution itself.

Conclusion

CECODERS falls near the liberationist end of the ideological spectrum within the Church as it has been outlined in this thesis. This can be seen particularly in relation to the Centre's perspectives on social reality and its programming for workers and the poor in the Archdiocese of San José. CECODERS' controversial folleto, its history of Costa Rican strikes, and its analyses of neo-liberalism all work to discredit the myth of the "Central American Switzerland" and expose the structural bases of the inequality and injustice in Costa Rican society. The Centre points to conflict within society without reserve, and likewise acknowledges that the movement for social change may involve the element of confrontation. In the cases of CECODERS' support for striking workers or its accompaniment of unions struggling against structural adjustment, this theoretical acknowledgement is transformed into a concrete commitment on behalf of the oppressed and against the State. In many of these practical alliances, moreover, CECODERS adopts positions that are in direct conflict with those held by Archbishop Arrieta and the Costa Rican hierarchy. In so doing, CECODERS challenges the established orders both within and outside of the Church.

This liberationist stance of CECODERS can only be fully understood in the context of the socio-economic crisis and the corresponding crisis of hegemony in Costa Rican society. CECODERS was founded during the mid-1980s, a time when the increases in popular protests were evidence not only of growing economic hardship for Costa Ricans,
but also of Costa Ricans' growing discontent with the government's neo-liberal solutions to their problems. At one level, CECODERS simply ministered to those most affected by the changes in the country: workers and women, and the poor and the sick. Yet beyond this, while the words and actions of the Church hierarchy helped to legitimate the government's policies and to generally fortify the basis of its rule, CECODERS came to adopt a distinctly counterhegemonic role. CECODERS staff members, through their studies of and programming for the oppressed in Costa Rica, were converted into actual spokespersons for the cause of the popular classes. In other words, Father Navarro and his staff functioned as what Gramsci would have labelled "organic intellectuals." Sometimes these Centre intellectuals, with their various retellings of history or their analyses of the economic crisis, themselves articulated the concepts and categories critical to the counterhegemonic struggle. At other points, through their actions of accompaniment and coordination, they provided crucial logistical support to the unions and union coalitions in their battles with the government. Importantly, through their appeals to the relevance of CST in these situations, and as members of the official Church themselves, these intellectuals also conferred a degree of religious legitimacy on the efforts of those working against neo-liberalism. Overall, then, through CECODERS these Church agents played a significant role in helping to express and direct the complaints and aspirations of Costa Rican workers as they moved toward the construction of an alternate socio-economic order.

Despite all of this, however, the words and actions of CECODERS do not constitute a completely liberationist or consistently counterhegemonic project. Such a project would necessarily involve a critical questioning and re-reading of all the ideological elements buttressing the current order. Granted, we have seen the various manners in which CECODERS effectively unmask the secular supports of hegemonic rule (such as the myth of Costa Rica as a Switzerland, or the myth of structural adjustment as a cure for the crisis). But, because it does not go on to question the validity of the CST tradition as it has been transmitted via the Church hierarchy, the Centre will ultimately fail in its liberationist task. CECODERS' reluctance to investigate the links between the dominant ideas of Church leaders and the dominant ideas of government leaders threatens
its ability to contribute to a truly thorough social transformation. By automatically assuming the relevance of CST for its liberationist efforts, then, CECODERS may unwittingly be sabotaging the success of such efforts itself.

The concept of the hermeneutic circle, taken from the work of liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo, can be profitably employed here. Segundo uses this concept as a means to explain how a truly liberative theology can be generated. In this dialectical circle, the reality of historical contradiction and injustice is first experienced and exposed. This then leads to a re-reading and reinterpretation of scripture and a further movement to alter reality, which again is followed by a fresh reinterpretation of scripture. In this never-ending cycle, reality is not judged in the light of the precepts of theology, but rather theology itself arises from the changing conditions of reality. Only as part of this radically inductive process can theology be an effective tool in the transformation of the social order. Otherwise, once cast as an unquestionable orthodoxy, theology's own role in processes of domination and subordination will remain unchallenged, if not completely undetected.

Although Segundo here is referring to the creation of a liberative theology through the critical and continual rereading of scripture, we can apply the same principles to the creation of a liberative pastoral social or pastoral obrera, this time through the critical and continual rereading of Catholic Social Teaching. When viewed from this perspective, the work of CECODERS clearly falls short. Despite its members' obvious commitment to workers and their struggles, the organization's pastoral approach cannot be truly liberative because it is based upon an uncritical adoption of CST. While CECODERS' mission may intersect with the hermeneutic circle at various points, it is never drawn completely into the spiralling dialectic of critique and re-creation. Thus, even though CECODERS appears in many respects to be drastically different from its sponsors in the Costa Rican Church

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94 This application is legitimate not only because Scripture and Tradition are accorded equivalent status in the eyes of the Catholic Church but because, as Segundo also points out, a hermeneutic of suspicion is necessary vis-à-vis any type of tradition. Segundo, The Liberation of Theology, 35-36, fn. 22.
and in the Vatican, because it treats CST as orthodox, the Centre never fully escapes from this conservative lineage.

Disappointing as it may be from a liberationist perspective, this reluctance to question orthodoxy makes sense once we recall CECODERS' patently subordinate position within the Church's organizational structure. As the incidents involving the 1986 folleto and ASEPROLA demonstrate, the Archdiocese maintains a close watch on CECODERS and the Archbishop will not hesitate to step in and dictate changes if the Centre's positions prove threatening to the interests of the Church as a whole. Given such precedents, it is unlikely that CECODERS will undertake any serious critique of the doctrinal positions held by the hierarchy. In fact, CECODERS' uncritical acceptance and citation of the standard CST sources, and the unity in the Church that this acceptance implies, may even afford the Centre a measure of symbolic protection as it develops political alliances that otherwise may prove problematic in the eyes of Church leaders. Thus, regardless of whether these appeals to CST are deliberate or even sincere, they are one means by which CECODERS can survive as a relatively liberationist entity within a larger, more powerful, and more conservative Church institution.

The cases of the Archdiocese of San José and CECODERS have revealed certain elements of the conservative-liberationist dynamic in the Costa Rican Church. The two remaining case studies in this thesis, that of the ESJ23 and the official Church in Limón, display some of the more extreme characteristics of this conservative-liberationist split. Before we can discuss what this means and how this is possible, however, we must first turn to investigate the unique historical, cultural, and economic context with which Church organizations in Limón must contend.
Chapter Seven

Limón: A Province on the Periphery

Although geographically and politically Costa Rica is one, in the people's mind Limón is still considered as another Costa Rica

-- Miguel Picado, La Iglesia costarricense entre el pueblo y el estado

If one word were used to describe both the Costa Rican province of Limón and the Catholic Church in Limón, that word would be "marginalized." Limón province, located on Costa Rica's Atlantic Coast, is not only the country's poorest region, it stands apart from San José and the Central Valley politically and culturally as well. The Church in Limón, for its part, was long classified as an immature ecclesiastical unit and was only upgraded from its status as an apostolic vicariate to a diocese in its own right at the end of 1994. Today it is still considered by many to be somewhat like a younger sibling of the more powerful Archdiocese of San José.

It calls one's attention, then, that Limón is precisely where "una nueva forma de ser iglesia" ("a new church character") is developing in Costa Rica. It is Limón where the CEB phenomenon is the strongest, Limón where the Church agents are most active on behalf of the poor, and Limón where the most emphasis has been placed on the development of a pastoral social in line with a liberationist socio-religious perspective. Moreover, in all of Costa Rica, it is the Limón Church that has acted and spoken out most strongly in favour in workers' rights, and that has made the greatest progress in developing a formal pastoral obrera with its members.

On the other hand, it is also in Limón province where one finds the most outstanding example of a conservative pastoral social in Costa Rica -- that espoused by the Escuela Social Juan XXIII (ESJ23, the John XXIII Social School). Although formally the Social School falls under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of San José, in recent decades it has carried out most of its work in the Limón region. There, School agents have campaigned against the "violent" and "communist" unions and have laboured tirelessly to promote solidarismo on the banana plantations. As we shall see, the School's dubious
practices and particular interpretation of CST place it in direct conflict with the liberationist agenda of the official Church in the area.

In order to understand fully the unique liberationist and conservative expressions of the Church in Limón, however, one must first grasp the unique character of the region and of the Limón Church itself. In this chapter, therefore, I begin with an examination of the social and economic conditions that have been specific to Limón over the past century. This is followed by a discussion of the particular religious and political factors contributing to the institutional insecurity of the Church in the region. Taken together, this material illustrates the socio-economic and religious-institutional context for the final two case studies to be examined in this thesis.

Socio-Economic Conditions in Limón

In any contemporary survey of Costa Rica, the characteristics of Limón province stand out. The region is the most ethnically diverse in the country, with Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, and indigenous peoples comprising a substantial proportion of the population. The Limonense dialect is heavily infused with English. In addition, Limón plays a crucial role in generating revenue for Costa Rica. It produces 95% of the country’s number one export, bananas, and as such it is a key contributor to Costa Rica’s economy.¹ The location of two large ports in Limón, through which it has been estimated that up to 80% of Costa Rica’s imports and exports pass,² further underscores the province’s importance to the nation.

Limón's cultural richness and income generating activities, however, contrast with its endemic poverty. Despite the wealth the region generates, many Limonenses do not have access to adequate education, health care, housing, and employment. On top of this, Limón has been the site of some of Costa Rica's most violent strikes and popular protests, up to and including the recent Limón en Lucha protests against deteriorating living standards and the proposed privatization of the stevedore industry. Today, tourist guidebooks warn of the crime and drug use in the capital city of Puerto Limón (one author notes that it is becoming known as "Piedropolis," or "crack city"), and many Costa Ricans themselves are wary of travel to this city on the coast.

Much of Limón's present-day uniqueness, along with its many of its problems, can be traced to its history as an economic enclave built upon the banana and railroad industries from the late nineteenth century onward. Tens of thousands of immigrants from all over the world, the largest bulk of them from the Caribbean (and particularly Jamaica), were solicited to work on building the railroads and on the banana plantations. From the beginning working conditions in the region were inhumane, with the problems inherent in performing backbreaking labour in the tropical lowlands exacerbated by the blatant racism and exploitation visited upon workers by company officials. The Costa Rican government, moreover, did little to improve this situation. Not only was there not adequate labour legislation in effect at that time, but the government had racist policies of its own and had granted many operating privileges to the international companies setting

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5 For a brief history of the development of these industries in Costa Rica from the 1880s to the 1980s, see Goluboay and Vega, "La actividad bananera," 131-61.
up in Costa Rica. For most of this century, Limón remained as a wet and mosquito-ridden "foreign" territory, out of sight and accessible only by a long and slow rail ride.\(^7\)

The booms and busts in the banana industry continued to drive Limón's economy through the mid-1900s. An increase in world demand for bananas and expansion in production would attract more workers and generate spin-off employment; a decrease in market demand, agricultural diseases or, increasingly, labour strife would lead to the transnational companies abandoning the area and the consequent unemployment and further displacement of workers. The unstable nature of employment on plantations contributed to a poor and precarious existence for many Limonenses. For its part, the government continued to neglect its citizens in Limón and was slow to provide them with the Welfare State benefits and infrastructural development from which the rest of the country was benefiting.\(^8\) Regardless of the growth and development that Costa Rica as a whole was said to be experiencing at this time, Limón was still being left behind.

This situation largely persisted into the time period covered by this thesis, though with a few important changes. In the mid-1980s, for example, the construction of the Braulio-Carillo Highway provided the first direct access to and from Limón by road. Once connected to the capital city and beyond, Limón began to attract even more agricultural job seekers from the rest of Costa Rica. The highway thus helped to boost population growth and, in addition, contributed even more to the infrastructural and industrial development that the latest banana boom had brought to Limón. Nonetheless, however, during the 1980s Limón continued to lag behind most of the rest of Costa Rica in terms of social and economic indicators.

Matters were not helped, to say the least, by the natural disasters that beset Limón in the 1990s. Though the lowlands on the coast had always been susceptible to damage caused by storms and flooding, little could compare to the earthquake that struck the

\(^7\) For an account of the popular perception of "los negros" and life in Limón during the early and mid-1900s, see Chaves, *Magisterio social*, 11-12.

\(^8\) Chaves reports that as late as 20 years ago, government functionaries still thought of a posting in the Atlantic zone as a punishment or a demotion, *Magisterio social*, 12.
region on April 22, 1991. Measuring 7.4 on the Richter scale, the quake left dozens dead, hundreds injured, and 13,000 homeless. It also destroyed over 3,000 buildings in the province. Costa Rica's only oil refinery and a crucial port sustained severe damages, with the port's shutdown responsible for a temporary but expensive halt to the export of bananas. On top of this, earthquake-induced landslides stripped the Talamanca Mountains of vegetation, which in turn contributed to severe flooding when heavy rains fell a few months later. All told, the region's basic infrastructure suffered greatly. Years later, not all the bridges, roads, and sources of potable water in Limón have been repaired. The destructive flooding of February 1996 was the second major disaster to hit the province in the 1990s. According to some estimates, the people affected by the floods numbered at least 27,000, with the damages to housing and roads correspondingly severe. With events such as these dragging them down, it is hardly surprising that the people of Limón have not yet been able to attain acceptable living conditions.

The problem with such disasters, of course, is that they are not entirely "natural." While it is true that no one can control seismic activity or the clouds, it is also true that what constitutes a problem (however serious) in a northern "developed" nation can take on truly catastrophic proportions in an area that is already disadvantaged. In this sense, such disasters are often just as much a product of humankind as they are of nature.

In the case of Limón in the 1980s and 1990s, the human hand behind much of the suffering has been related to the neo-liberal economic policies enforced under the nation's various structural adjustment programs. As I explained in Chapter Two, government leaders, in conjunction with international financial institutions, attempted to combat Costa Rica's economic crisis in part by promoting the agro-export sector and by instituting regulations that would make it as easy as possible for Costa Rica to become integrated into world markets. Of particular relevance for Limón here was the Plan de Fomento Bananero (Banana Promotion Plan), established in 1985. Basically, this plan aimed to increase the

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9 This account of the quake and its effects is adapted from Baker, Costa Rica Handbook, 7.
overall amount of bananas exported, extend the area devoted to banana cultivation, generate new jobs in the industry, and re-establish the participation in the world banana market that the country had lost in recent years. These goals were to be accomplished through legislative changes and through various financial incentives granted to international banana companies. As with many structural adjustment programs, however, while the effects of this plan have been impressive from the point of view of the market, in human and ecological terms they have been dismal and destructive.

Since 1985, for example, the area devoted to the cultivation of bananas has increased from 35,000 to 51,000 hectares. However, this expansion in land comes largely from the transnational companies' displacement of small and medium-sized farmers. Though this has often been a coercive process, it is also aided by certain government actions, such as the withholding of credit to smaller-scale producers. Extra land for banana production has also come from the clearing of thousands of hectares of primary rainforest, a process with serious consequences for Costa Rican ecosystems. In addition, the excessive use of pesticides and the huge amount of garbage that is dumped during banana production have caused extensive damage to the rivers and soil in the Limón region.

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11 Goluboay and Vega, "La actividad bananera," 144-45.
13 Hermosilla and Palencia, Creación de una instancia coordinadora, 12.
15 Hermosilla and Palencia, Creación de una instancia coordinadora, 9 and 12.
16 Costa Rica has the highest rate of agro-chemical use per hectare in the world. In addition, it has been estimated that 2.5 kilograms of waste is left behind for every kilogram of bananas exported. Gilberth Bermúdez, member of the Coordinadora de Sindicatos Bananeros and of the coordinating committee of Foro Emaús, interview by author, in San José, Costa Rica, 2 July 1997; and Hermosilla and Palencia, Creación de una instancia coordinadora, 13.
The Banana Promotion Plan has also appeared impressive in terms of increased employment, with close to 52,000 people now working on banana plantations.\textsuperscript{17} Still, only a small proportion of such workers are permanently employed, with the remainder left to wander from plantation to plantation, competing with one another for short-term work (usually less than 3 months in duration). Salaries and benefits for banana workers have also decreased since the institution of the Plan and migrant workers (generally illegal immigrants from Nicaragua who comprise up to 60\% of the bananero labour force) are often denied even the most basic labour benefits.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, and as I discussed in Chapter Three, the infiltration of solidarismo and the decline of the union movement on banana plantations in Limón has done much to counteract the workers' legal rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining.

In addition to all of this, one must also take into account the actual living and working conditions on the plantations. Aside from the fact that by its very nature plantation work is extremely arduous and is performed in the sweltering heat, those who work on plantations (or those who live on or near them) are exposed to dangerously high levels of pesticides.\textsuperscript{19} Some estimate that approximately 13,000 Costa Rican workers have been rendered sterile as a result of their contact with agro-chemicals;\textsuperscript{20} thousands more citizens have been affected by skin and central nervous system diseases, digestive problems, and congenital birth defects.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, though overall foreign workers and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Bermúdez, interview by author.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Bermúdez, interview by author; Foro Emaús, ed., \textit{Bananos para el mundo}, 13; and Hermosilla and Palencia, \textit{Creación de una instancia coordinadora}, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{19} To put things into perspective, consider that in Costa Rica transnational companies annually use an average of 40 kilograms of agro-chemicals per worker; the Central American average is 16 kilograms and in the industrialized countries that import Costa Rican bananas, pesticide use in agricultural production is limited to 4 kilograms per person annually. Hermosilla and Palencia, \textit{Creación de una instancia coordinadora}, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Bermúdez, interview by author.
\item \textsuperscript{21} A detailed and well-documented account of the health hazards of chemical use on banana plantations is Jorge Norman Jiménez Céspedes, \textit{Plaguicidas y salud en las bananeras de Costa Rica} (San José, C.R.: ASEPROLA, 1995).
\end{itemize}
women appear to be the ones most adversely affected by the poor working conditions, everyone suffers from the high levels of poverty, crime, prostitution, alcoholism and drug abuse that are frequently reported on the plantations. All in all, it appears that Costa Rica's increased participation in the world market has come at the expense of the health and well-being of its citizens and natural resources.

This social and economic context is the arena in which the ESJ23 operates and in which the official Church in Limón has developed its *pastoral social*. As we shall see, the Social School and its representatives are frequently complicit in the problematic situations detailed above, while the pastoral agents of the Limón Church devote much energy to combating the socio-economic oppression in the area. Social and economic factors alone are not the only variables important to understanding the ESJ23's and the Limón Church's positions on the condition of labour, however. As we have already seen in the case of the Archbishop Arrieta, the Costa Rican Episcopal Conference, and CECODERS, the institutional characteristics and necessities of a Church body can also have an effect on the type of workers' pastorate that is developed.

**The Institutional Insecurity of the Limón Church**

Limón's social and economic marginalization within the Costa Rican context has been paralleled by the institutional weakness of its local Church. Historically, three types of threats have contributed to the institutional insecurity of the Church in the region. Such threats can be categorized as: those arising from the organizational character of the Limón Church itself (internal factors); those related to the political context of the region (external factors); and those arising from the religious diversity in Limón (other factors external to the Church itself).

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22 Foreign workers are typically assigned the most physically demanding jobs on plantations (e.g., cutting the bamboo stalks that are used to hold the leaves of the banana plants upright). Women are particularly affected in terms of discrimination in hiring, sexual harassment and assaults, lower wages, and lack of adequate provisions for pregnant workers and for women who need maternity leave. In the case of pesticides, women are not only exposed to them during their paid labour, but also because they are the ones
Organizational Weaknesses

In 1921, the Costa Rican Diocese of San José was divided into three and the Vicariato Apostólico de Limón was born. The very fact that Limón was designated an "apostolic vicariate" instead of a diocese is noteworthy. In the Catholic Church, an apostolic vicariate is an ecclesiastical unit that is not yet mature enough to "stand on its own two feet." Due to its limited human, economic, and pastoral resources, it receives special attention and assistance (including financial aid) from the Roman Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In fact, a vicariate falls under the direct responsibility of this Congregation and its prefect, who is appointed by the Pope. The bishop of an apostolic vicariate, therefore, carries out his functions in the name of the Holy See.23

In its early days, the Apostolic Vicariate of Limón suffered from a material poverty consistent with that in the region as a whole. It also experienced a shortage of pastoral agents, which meant that instead of Costa Rican clergy, priests from Germany performed the bulk of the Church's labours in the area. Further, the Limón Church was greatly affected by its character as a "missionary" Church. This was a different case than in the rest of Costa Rica, where by the twentieth century the Catholic Church had long been installed as the Church of the majority. In contrast, Limón, with its large numbers of Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, and indigenous peoples -- almost none of whom were Catholic to begin with -- remained "a land of missions."24 As such, the status the Church has enjoyed in the rest of the country was never definitively achieved in Limón. As I will elaborate upon below, the continual pressure to preserve and increase the influence of the Catholic Church in face of so many other faiths constituted an added measure of insecurity for an institution that already had a limited number of official representatives. Moreover, because of the relatively small size of their constituency, the pastoral agents in Limón

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24 Picado, La Iglesia costarricense entre el pueblo, 256.
concentrated more on going out to the corners of the land and seeking converts than on developing the administrative apparatus and organizational infrastructure common elsewhere in Costa Rica.²⁵ All of this contributed to the Catholic Church's relatively weak institutional presence in the province in the first half of the 1900s.

The situation did not improve much in the following decades. By the late 1960s many of the German priests were leaving for home to help compensate for the lack of vocations there.²⁶ After this, some of the older priests began to defect because they did not approve of the pastoral changes certain of the younger Costa Rican clergy were trying to implement in the wake of Vatican II and the Medellín conference.²⁷ By the time Mons. Alfonso Coto Monge was appointed bishop in 1980, there were only 15 priests and two seminarians in the area, a clearly insufficient number to minister adequately to the needs of the Vicariate.²⁸ When one also considers the material poverty of the institution in the area throughout this time, it is not surprising that the Limón Church was known as an "underage minor" or as the "younger sibling" of the actual dioceses in the country.²⁹

The Limón Church did not lose these monikers even after it became a diocese itself in 1994. Today, the Limón Church exists in a particularly subordinate relationship vis-à-vis the Archdiocese of San José. We have already seen how the Archdiocese's strength and status is bolstered by its leaders' long-standing ties to the secular centres of Costa Rican power. Yet it is also worth noting that the immense power of the sede metropolitana is perceived, by those both outside and inside the Church, to extend beyond the Archdiocese's limits. Although within the Catholic Church each local diocese has the right to determine for itself its own identity and characteristics without interference from another diocese or bishop (even Archbishop), this has not prevented a two-tiered system of Church power from developing in Costa Rica. There, a pattern has developed in which

²⁶ Coto, interview by author.
²⁷ Ramírez, interview by Solera.
the Archdiocese has tended to dominate the affairs of the Church in the country as a whole, with the other dioceses and their leaders viewed as existing on a secondary level. In this whole schema, the Limón Church is commonly considered to place quite low, if not lowest, on the scale of the peripheral Churches. However unsanctioned in terms of canon law Limón's subordination to San José may be, in actuality this relationship has threatened the Limón Church's rightful autonomy. This situation thus represents a further way in which the institutional strength of the Limón Church has been compromised.

*The Political Context: Unions in Limón*

While the above challenges to the institutional security of the Limón Church are related to factors internal to the Church itself, we can also look to the external political context in Limón for other potential threats to the Church institution. Of particular importance here is the challenge that the union movement in Limón poses (or is perceived to pose) to the Church.

In the past, the union movement in Limón was the strongest in the country, with labour activism on banana plantations being particularly militant. Even today the memory of the infamous Atlantic Banana Plantation Strike of 1934 remains alive in the popular imagination. Since that time, however, the fortunes of the labour movement in Limón have waned somewhat. Still, although it is true that in recent years solidarismo has largely replaced sindicalismo on the banana plantations, unions have not completely disappeared from either the coastal region as a whole or even from the plantations themselves. The participation of labour in 1996's Limón en Lucha movement could even be taken to suggest that union activism is on the upswing in the area once again.

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30 Padre Eduardo Ramírez, priest in the parish of Puerto Limón, interview by author and Erick Solera, in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica, 10 July 1997; and Ramírez, interview by Solera.

31 The two-week strike, which involved 10,000 workers in a conflict against the United Fruit Company in Limón, was one of the largest Latin American strikes against a North American company in history. See Carlos Luis Fallas, "The Great Atlantic Banana Plantation Strike of 1934," in Edelman and Kene, ed., *The Costa Rica Reader*, 76-82.
A particularly important period of labour activism in Limón took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time, Limón was described as being "the belligerent vanguard of social organization and mobilization in the country." Apart from the campesino and more general community struggles that were also taking place during those years, union-led strikes were a particularly noticeable facet of life in Limón. Of these, the most outstanding were the prolonged strikes that took place on the banana plantations in the area. From December 1979 to January 1980, for example, a massive strike against the Standard Fruit Company (which at that time was the company responsible for half of all banana production in the region) lasted for 28 days and involved the participation of four major unions. Another major strike against Standard, this time from December 1981 to January 1982, lasted well over a month. Though there were other large-scale strike actions in the Limón region during this time, the banana strikes were particularly noteworthy because of the central importance of the industry to the region and because of the huge losses typically incurred during work stoppages on the plantations. In any case, at the very beginning of the period under investigation in this thesis, the level of organization and the combativeness of the unions in Limón could not be missed.

This very visible and very volatile union activity in Limón was seen as a threat by the Church in the region. Church leaders viewed union leaders and communists as drawing dangerously close together and commonly diagnosed the unions as being infected with a

33 Smith and Rivera, "Organización, movilización popular y desarrollo regional," 50 and 52.
35 As Burbach and Flynn point out, "bananas are a highly perishable commodity, and time is critical in the marketing process. A plantation or port work stoppage of even a day can mean the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in overripe bananas. . . . The whole process must be regulated like clockwork, and delays avoided at any cost." Roger Burbach and Patricia Flynn, "A New 'Banana Republic': Del Monte in Guatemala," in Revolution in Central America, ed. Stanford Central American Action Network (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 181-82.
"tinta comunista." Further, the opinion was that people, especially in the context of the inequality and injustice in the area, were attracted to the unions and their communist ranks out of sheer necessity (as opposed to ideological discernment). In the early 1980s -- when Catholic leaders in Latin America had witnessed the experience of the Church in revolutionary Cuba, and when the Sandinista government in neighbouring Nicaragua had already begun to clash with the Catholic hierarchy there -- the prospect of a communist resurgence in Costa Rica would not have been appealing to Church representatives. At the very least, the communists would have been seen as competing with the Limón Church for constituents, thus threatening the institution and its need to preserve its presence within a competitive ideological atmosphere.

Religious Diversity

The greatest overall threat to the Limón Church and to its need for institutional self-preservation comes not from its internal organizational weaknesses nor from external political competition, but rather from specifically religious competition. In fact, because of the religious diversity in the area, Limón is probably the only region in Costa Rica where the word "church" is not automatically assumed to signify "Catholic Church." Although the Catholic Church remains the church of the majority in the region, Limón is the province in Costa Rica with the highest density of Protestant churches among the population. The Afro-Caribbean peoples in Limón, who comprise up to 40% of the area's total population, are predominantly Protestant. In terms of the mainline Protestant churches (also known as "historical" Protestant churches in Costa Rica and considered to be the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Moravian, and Salvation Army churches), this is not surprising, given that the original Jamaican and other Caribbean immigrants to the area brought their colonizers' religions with them when they arrived at the turn of the century.

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36 Mons. Francisco Ulloa Rojas, Bishop of Limón, interview by author and Erick Solera, in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica, 10 July 1997; and Coto, interview by author.
37 As Mons. Coto stated, "people were not 'convinced' communists; they were not communist for the ideology, but out of necessity." Coto, interview by author.
In general, relations between the Catholic and mainline Protestant churches are quite positive. An attitude of mutual respect has developed among them and practical collaboration has become fairly frequent. For example, some of the Catholic and Protestant leaders have formed a pastors' association that meets monthly to discuss issues of relevance to the churches and to the region as a whole. Joint activities for youth and ecumenical conferences for laypeople have also taken place. In addition, Catholic and Protestant representatives have worked together to secure financial support for corn farmers in the area, to respond to the effects of natural disasters, and to demand improvements in the living and working conditions in Limón both during and apart from the Limón en Lucha protests of 1996.38

In contrast to the good working relationship between the Catholic and mainline Protestant churches in Limón, fear, distrust, and even hostility characterize the relationship between the official Catholic Church and the Pentecostal churches. As in other areas of Central America, these small evangelical Protestant churches have been spreading quickly in Costa Rica. Limón province, in fact, has one of the highest rates of Pentecostal growth and the highest density of Pentecostal churches in Costa Rica.39 Catholic Church agents take great care to distinguish the historical Protestant churches in Limón from what they disparagingly refer to as "sectas." They negatively characterize the latter groups as "fanatical," "hostile," and "fundamentalist," and view them as a threat to the Church.40 The attitude of some of the Pentecostal leaders is no more open. As one

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38 Coto, interview by author; "Iglesias piden investigar caos en Limón," La Prensa Libre, 19 February 1996, 7; José Enrique Sibaja, "Iglesias limonenses: Defienden derechos de muilleros," Eco Católico, 3 March 1996, 6; and Ulloa, interview by author and Solera.

39 Javier Robles Monge and Héctor Fallas, "Las sectas: Esas grandes desconocidas (I parte)," Eco Católico, 8 May 1988, 8; and Jaime Valverde, Las sectas en Costa Rica: Pentecostalismo y conflicto social (San José, C.R.: DEI, 1990), 89-90.

40 Coto, interview by author; Ramírez, interview by Solera; and Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Plan pastoral del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón (San José, C.R.: Varitec, 1990), 23. While many Church officials attribute the presence and growth of the sectas in Limón to "religious ignorance" and to the precarious socio-economic situation that leads people to view the sectas as a means to evade reality, some also acknowledge that pastoral shortcomings (e.g., in the area of Catholic spirituality) may also be
Assemblies of God pastor has explained it, the Catholic Church and his church could not mix, since they are "like water and oil." As perhaps can be expected from such descriptions and comments, formal relations or ecumenical efforts between the leaders of these groups do not exist.

Importantly, however, some Catholics and Pentecostals do appear to be drawn together through their support for *solidarismo*. Jaime Valverde has observed that in the banana zones of Limón region, Pentecostals generally do not participate in popular political organizations, union activities, or strikes. As such they are seen as trustworthy employees ("empleados de confianza") valued by the management of the banana companies in the area. Further, when they do become involved in organized activities, Valverde notes, Pentecostals become involved in the solidarity movement and often occupy executive posts in solidarity associations.

In fact, there is a significant convergence between the Pentecostal worldview and the *solidarismo* doctrine. As Valverde affirms, Pentecostals emphasize social peace as a Christian value and characterize movements of political rebellion as sinful. These attitudes fit well with the emphasis on collaboration and harmony which, as I shall explain in the following chapter, is characteristic of the solidarity movement and the doctrine of the ESJ23. As the Assemblies of God pastor quoted above also mentioned during a discussion of recent labour and political conflicts in Limón, "*sindicalismo* and strike movements, what they are doing is seeking conflict with the authorities. The Bible says that we should subject ourselves to the authorities." He also noted that "the Christian is a

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41 Pastor Ronaldo Vargas, Minister in the Assemblies of God, interview by author, in San José, Costa Rica, 29 July 1997.


pacificist, not a fighter," and that "solidarismo is good... it seeks agreement between the manager and the employee."  

Banana company officials have apparently recognized the implications of Pentecostalism for labour relations. Valverde reports, for example, that companies have preferentially hired Pentecostal workers. Companies have also attempted to facilitate the growth of Pentecostal churches in the area by providing them with financial and material aid when they are getting established on the plantations. The advantage that this assistance confers upon the Pentecostal churches is that much greater in light of the loss of access to Vatican funds that the Limón Church experienced when it became a diocese in 1994.

Overall, the threat that the Protestant denominations pose to the Catholic Church in Limón is complex. On the one hand, though the Church seems to co-exist peacefully and even collaborate with the historical Protestant churches in the region, the traditional influence of mainline Protestantism in Limón means that the Catholic Church still cannot take its slight majority status in the area for granted. On the other hand, Catholic leaders are quite open about their distress over the growing numbers of Catholics leaving the Church for the sectas in Limón. The advantages that the support of transnational capital confers upon the Pentecostal churches, and these churches' links to the powerful solidarismo movement on the plantations, makes the growing Pentecostal phenomenon in Limón all the more threatening. In the end, whether Church leaders view the Protestant churches positively or not, the fact remains that the Catholic representatives do have to work harder to maintain and increase their constituency in such a religiously diverse area.

**Conclusion**

The typical plantation or dock worker in contemporary Limón does not have an easy life. The labour is hard and often hazardous, the wages are low, workers' rights are frequently ignored. Workers must subsist in a region polluted by chemicals, ravaged by nature, and dominated by transnational companies with priorities far from their own. High

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44 R. Vargas, interview by author.
rates of crime, poverty, and substance abuse complete the picture of this province on the periphery, a land where the ideal image of Costa Rican development and stability is even more of a fable than elsewhere.

Church pastoral programming for workers in the region has developed sometimes in response to, and always in the context of, such conditions. The next two chapters detail how this has occurred in the official Church in Limón and in the ESJ23. In the final case of this thesis, we shall see the means by which the official Church (which is precisely the institution threatened by the various religious and political factors cited above) has developed a distinctly liberationist pastorate for workers. The contrast between the positions of this local Church and those of the Archdiocese of San José and the national body of Costa Rican bishops is striking. As will become obvious, the pastoral obrera of the Church in Limón is more similar to that espoused by CECODERS (with whom, as we shall also see, the Limón Church's Pastoral Social has collaborated extensively).

First, however, I will examine the programming and documents for workers produced by the Limón Church's ideological opponent, the ESJ23. The fact that the Social School is an archdiocesan organization, not affected by the same institutional constraints as the Limón Church, is one factor in its conservatism. The Social School's ties to the solidarity movement and, by extension, to the interests of the banana companies in the region, will also be important to consider as we investigate the decidedly conservative interpretation of CST evident in its pastoral work.

Chapter Eight

The Escuela Social Juan XXIII: Catholic Conservatism on the Coast

The solution of worker-employer conflicts by means of conciliation, harmony and dialogue is the most important fruit of the Escuela Social Juan XXIII -- Archbishop Román Arrieta, in a statement frequently quoted in ESJ23 literature

The harmony of solidarismo is that of the dictator: everyone shuts up, nothing more. The harmony is that nobody complains
-- Padre Jesús Doncel, priest in the banana plantation town of Río Frío

Archbishop Carlos Humberto Rodríguez Quiros (1960-79) established the Escuela Social Juan XXIII (ESJ23) in 1963 as an official Church agency and charged it with the responsibility to "teach, defend and diffuse Catholic social doctrine (la doctrina social de la Iglesia) and to coordinate all the works of Catholic Social Action in the Archdiocese [of San José]."¹ The School floundered under its early directors and was plagued by funding shortages and internal ideological division until 1971 and the appointment of Father Claudio Solano as director.² Solano, who today remains as the School's leader, revitalized the organization and transformed it into an affluent and influential wing of the Costa Rican Church.

In this chapter I analyze the pastoral obrera of the ESJ23 under Solano, and demonstrate why it can be characterized as a prime example of conservative Catholic Social Teaching. I begin with a description of the expansion of the Social School since the early 1970s and document how the promotion of solidarismo came to be the raison d'être of the School itself. Next, I describe and critique the deep conservatism found in Solano's statements and School materials, and show how this particular expression of CST is

¹ Mons. Carlos Humberto Rodríguez Quiros, "[Decreto]," El Mensajero del Clero (March 1963), 57-61, as quoted in Backer, La Iglesia, 191.

² Details of the early years of the ESJ23 can be found in Backer, La Iglesia, 191-94; and "La Escuela Social Juan XXIII ayer y hoy," Eco Católico (Suplemento Campesino), 12 October 1980, 4.
related to the web of economic, political, and Church alliances to which the ESJ23 belongs. The resulting portrait of the ESJ23 reveals an institution that, while it claims to protect and promote the well-being of Limonense workers, in fact constitutes the real threat to the rights of workers itself.

**Claudio Solano and the Expansion of the ESJ23**

Padre Claudio Maria Solano Cerdas began his work at the ESJ23 as a relatively well-educated, but relatively inexperienced, young priest. Solano received his theological training in Costa Rica and France, earned a degree in philosophy from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, and completed postgraduate studies at the International Sociological Institute, also in Rome. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1969. Prior to arriving at the Social School in August of 1971, Padre Solano served briefly as an assistant priest in parishes in San Ignacio de Acosta and Heredia, Costa Rica, and also worked as advisor to the National Scout Movement. Today, however, this one-time Boy Scout leader is a powerful and controversial public figure whose name has become synonymous with the ESJ23 in Costa Rican society.

Under Solano, the School's mission and objectives have expanded considerably. No longer content with the 1963 mandate to "teach, defend, and diffuse" CST, the School's mission is now to "promote, impel, coordinate, teach, diffuse, defend and apply the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine in the social, community, family and institutional realms and especially to develop action in the fields of labour and education." Chief among the School's objectives, and most relevant to the theme of this thesis, is the fostering of social peace, harmony, and good relations between workers and employers.

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For more than a quarter of a century, Solano has sought to achieve these goals through the energetic promotion of solidarismo. As I described in Chapter Three, solidarismo is a form of labour organization that renounces collective agreements and the right to strike in favour of an emphasis on the common interests and collaboration of workers and owners. According to School lore, Solano began his term as the ESJ23's director by attempting to find an appropriate channel through which to translate the theory of CST into practice. After considering and rejecting both cooperativismo (cooperativism) and sindicalismo (unionism), he discovered solidarismo. Although the solidarity movement was strictly a secular phenomenon, Solano judged it to be fundamentally compatible with Christian principles of social justice. He felt that, once "enriched" by these same principles, the solidarity movement would be the ideal means to spread CST among Costa Rican workers. Thus, in the words of one Social School administrator, Solano began to use the solidarity movement as a "Trojan horse" to bring CST to the people.

Since 1971, then, Solano and his staff have devoted most of their attention and resources to furthering the solidarista cause. For the first several years, the School concentrated its efforts in urban commercial and industrial sectors. However, after 1978, members began to focus more intensively on the country's Atlantic banana plantations where, as we have seen, union influences and horrible working conditions had combined to make the workers particularly combative. In all these regions, School outreach workers, called promotores solidaristas, travel to factories, public offices, and plantations to hold workshops and give speeches on CST and the benefits of solidarismo. Workers are also bussed in to attend multi-day seminars on the same topics at the School's Solidarista Training Centre in Tres Ríos, Cartago. Padre Solano himself does sometimes speak to groups of workers, but more frequently promotes the benefits of solidarismo to company owners and managers. If and when a group decides to form a solidarity association at their company, the School is there to supply the necessary guidance and registration materials.

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and will provide both association members and their employers with ongoing training and administrative support in the legal aspects of *solidarismo*, as well as in the areas of accounting, human resources, and labour relations. At each step of the way, the ESJ23 distributes copious amounts of printed material in the form of pamphlets, training manuals, and study guides, all produced in-house by the ESJ23's Education Department and approved by Solano.

Beyond the activities directly related to the promotion of *solidarismo*, the ESJ23 has developed a number of other training, spiritual assistance, and education programs over the years. In 1975, for example, Solano established the Instituto de Formación Integral Mixto (IFIM) as an artesanal and technical training centre. The IFIM (which runs out of the School's headquarters in Curridabat, but which also has offices in marginal urban communities and the Atlantic region) offers courses in areas such as sewing, nutrition, flower arranging, toy making, confectionery, hairdressing, and esthetics. Many of these classes are directed specifically at women, as are the seminars in self-esteem, household budgeting, and leadership offered to "*damas solidaristas*" (the wives and daughters of male *solidarista* workers) at the School's Tres Ríos installation. Finally, the School runs Voz Amiga (Friendly Voice), a service that offers free psychological counselling and spiritual guidance over the telephone.

Over time, and as can be expected, the ESJ23 has developed a considerable infrastructure in order to support all this programming. The School headquarters, located across from the church in the centre of the San José suburb of Curridabat, is an airy complex of classrooms and offices equipped with the latest in modern technology. Padre Solano has always maintained his office there. Apart from the director, the ESJ23's *sedecentral* employs approximately 35 staff members who function as the administrative core of the organization. In contrast to the urban setting of the Curridabat installation, the ESJ23 training centre in Tres Ríos is an isolated (15 minutes outside the city of Cartago),

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7 Trejos, interview by author.
sprawling property filled with green and open spaces. Located at the centre, which opened in 1987, are offices, classrooms, conference facilities, cabins, sports and recreation facilities, a dining hall, and a print shop. Approximately 40 people (split between the departments of education and administration) work at this site, and between four and five thousand workers receive courses there every year. Finally, close to 40 people also work in the ESJ23's _solidarista_ promotion offices. One of these offices is located in San José; the other six are scattered throughout the banana-producing zones of the country (in Guapiles, Siquirres, Buenos Aires, Valle de la Estrella, Río Frío, and Sixaola). All of this is certainly a far cry from the small, cash-strapped, and struggling ESJ23 that existed during the 1960s.

Perhaps the most striking indication of the School's accomplishments under Solano, however, can be seen in the phenomenal growth of the _solidarismo_ movement. The number of solidarity associations in Costa Rica has increased by more than 60-fold since Padre Solano took up the cause. While prior to 1972 there were only 30 associations in the entire country, today there are between 1,800 and 2,000 associations in Costa Rica, with up to 250,000 registered affiliates. On the banana plantations of Limón province, where _solidarismo_ has become the dominant form of labour organization, the effects of the movement's growth are particularly noteworthy. According to School officials, because of _solidarismo_ "labour peace" has reined on many plantations for well over a decade. The resulting absence of strikes and the favourable working environment, ESJ23 supporters claim, has translated into increases in banana production and savings of millions of dollars

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9 Villalta, interview by author.

10 Escuela Social Juan XXIII, ed., _Ley de asociaciones solidaristas_, 13; Mairena, "Gigante," 15 and 17; Escuela Social Juan XXIII, _Solidarismo, solidarismo_ (Curridabat, C.R.: Escuela Social Juan XXIII, n.d.); Solano, interview by author; Villalta, interview by author.


School representatives, not surprisingly, have ready explanations to account for such accomplishments, and particularly for the remarkable spread of \textit{solidarismo} in recent years. They claim that, aside from the tireless efforts of Father Solano, the "basic reason" for the expansion of \textit{solidarismo} in Costa Rica "rests in the close links between \textit{solidarismo} and the fundamental principles of Christianity: fraternity, respect, harmony, liberty, [and] justice in the relations between the workers and the company, characteristics of the economic and social development of Costa Rica."\footnote{Escuela Social Juan XXIII, ed., \textit{Ley de asociaciones solidaristas}, 13.} According to this interpretation, once workers themselves are given the right to choose, most "naturally" opt for \textit{solidarismo} and its attendant benefits.\footnote{Vargas Solano, interview by author.}

**The Escuela Social Juan XXIII and Catholic Social Teaching**

Given claims of such congruency between the message of the Church and the nature of \textit{solidarismo}, the formulation of CST propagated by the Social School deserves closer scrutiny. Through this examination, we can see precisely how the "fundamental" principles of Christianity are expressed in School teachings, and where the doctrine of the Social School falls on the liberationist-conservative continuum.

**Pre-Conciliar CST and the ESJ23**

The first thing to note about the ESJ23's teaching of CST is the School's heavy reliance on pre-Vatican II papal statements and encyclicals. School representatives and instructional materials repeatedly cite the words of Leo XIII (in \textit{Rerum Novarum}) and Pius
XI (in *Quadragesimo Anno*) on social issues. Even the teachings of Pope Pius XII (1939-58), whose statements are overlooked in many analyses of papal CST, receive heavy emphasis in School literature. From justifications for the Church's social magisterium to evaluations of principles of social organization, to pronouncements about right relations between employers and their workers, or between the State and its citizens, the pre-conciliar papal social statements are clearly a touchstone for the School's teachings.

On labour issues as they are most narrowly defined, for example, School materials explicitly draw upon pre-Vatican II social teaching documents. Thus, despite the School’s links to and promotion of the solidarity movement, its CST *Manual* still cites Leo XIII, Pius XI, and Pius XII in its affirmation that workers do have the right to form unions. Moreover, while the ESJ23 does on occasion refer to Vatican II’s position on the right to strike (the *Gaudium et Spes* classification of a strike as an extreme, though sometimes necessary, means), by far the greater emphasis is on strikes as an "evil," and on the costs and losses, and hatred and violence, that officials claim strikes almost inevitably involve. In this way the ESJ23, with its emphasis on what makes strikes wrong as opposed what may justify them, clearly echoes the earliest CST and the opposition of Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI to any form of labour militancy.

An overt anti-communism also played a role in Leo XIII and Pius XI’s distrust of union pressure tactics. Products of their time and cognizant that left-wing movements might well draw the working class out of the pews and into the streets, they were fearful of the threat communists and other "crafty agitators" posed to social order and to the souls

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16 For example, see Escuela Social Juan XXIII, "Concepto cristiano de la empresa," *Eco Católico*, 9 June 1974, 14; and Escuela Social Juan XXIII, *Manual*.
of the faithful. Although many decades have passed since these popes gave voice to their fears in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, the anti-communism of early CST resurfaces in a particularly virulent, and often surprisingly facile, form in the teachings of the ESJ23.

One of the School’s main CST textbooks, *The Social Doctrine of the Church (Introduction to its Study)*, is particularly revealing in this regard. This study guide, complete with fill-in-the-blank and matching-column exercises, was originally published in 1985 and is still a staple in School seminars for workers. The workbook emphasizes the many dangers associated with communism, most often referred to as the "Communist Dictatorship," and represented in drawings as a hammer and sickle or a silhouette of the Soviet Union with the city of Moscow marked. In the lessons preceding the one devoted exclusively to communism, students learn to equate communism with, among other things: atheism, the treatment of humans as soulless animals, divorce, ignorance (because communists do not let parents properly educate their children), poverty, and enslavement. In the introductory remarks for Lesson 15, on communism itself, students are "alerted" to the "trick" of the communists and are told that the following pages will "unmask" communism for what it truly is. This is important, according to the workbook, because communists triumphed in Cuba (among the "good" Cubans) precisely because they disguised themselves and their intentions until after they had grasped power. The workbook then warns, "In Costa Rica it [communism] can triumph, if we let ourselves be fooled by this group of masked men."

The chapter continues to show students communism as it "really" is: a doctrine of hate and class struggle in which the rich and the poor aim to annihilate one another, a strategy for revolution based on deceit and false promises, and a system of power based on terror and torture. Finally, the lesson concludes with the call to prevent communism from seizing power in the "free world."

Regardless of what has happened since the crumbling of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall, the

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21 Escuela Social Juan XXIII, *La Doctrina Social*, 3-90 passim.
22 Escuela Social Juan XXIII, *La Doctrina Social*, 91.
continued use of this workbook at the School and the persistence of Fidel Castro's government in Cuba means that for the ESJ23, the enemy is alive and well and living in Latin America.

Beyond this, both the ESJ23's promotion of solidarismo and its attack on communism are clearly rooted in a particular conception of what society is and what it should be. Much as was the case in the CST documents issued many decades ago, in the material of the Social School unity, harmony, and (as can be expected) solidarity are core concepts in both an analysis of present day society and in the remedies for any social problems that may arise. Although these concepts are not found exclusively in pre-conciliar CST, the Social School's linking of these principles to their earliest formulations bears some comment here.

According to the analysis of the School, solidarismo as a movement is based upon, and tries to apply, solidaridad (solidarity) as a concept. As a School booklet outlines, "Solidarity presents the idea of close or strong cohesion, of unity, of integration. Therefore, solidarity is not selfishness, nor imposition, nor hatred, nor struggle or conflicts, but the union of various parts, the collaboration of different persons, to achieve a common objective."24 The document goes on to explain that solidarity is a fact, the normal and normative state of affairs, in nature and in society: from the parts of the human body functioning together in unity, to the members of a soccer team whose triumph depends on the collaboration of all the players, to the stars and planets of the universe that move together as the parts of a watch. In this schema, the positing of an unity among humans in society stems from the argument that we all have a common Father in God, that we are all human beings with immortal souls and material bodies occupying the same world, and that we all have the same final end in God. Whether at home, in the workplace, or in society in general, then, humans are called to behave in a manner consistent with such principles; solidarity is both a fact (hecho) of life, and an obligation (deber) in life.25

23 Escuela Social Juan XXIII, La Doctrina Social, 92-94.
24 Escuela Social Juan XXIII, Solidarismo: Aspectos doctrinales, 5.
25 Escuela Social Juan XXIII, Solidarismo: Aspectos doctrinales, 5-8.
According to the teachings of the School, though these lessons can be traced back to Jesus' command to love one another and to the Pauline notion of various Christians forming only one body in Christ, they are also expressed repeatedly in the CST tradition. On the topic of solidarity in the world of work, for example, School materials cite quotations from Leo XIII and Pius XI on the necessary alliance and the mutual agreement between capital and labour. The more general doctrinal analysis of the concept, meanwhile, concentrates more closely on the words of Pius XII, whose *Summi Pontificatus* (1939) appears to have provided a veritable template for the School's explanation of the nature and causes of solidarity. In both the conceptions of the School and the pre-conciliar popes, a largely functionalist conception of society and human relations -- with people of various classes and callings all working together to contribute to the good of the whole -- prevails.

The School's adoption of this doctrine, however, does not imply that School representatives believe there are no social problems at all in Costa Rica. In fact, apart from the threat of the communists, the School does point to poverty and labour strife as threats to the country's social peace. Though School documents contain almost no references to how such problems arose in the first place, they repeatedly and emphatically indicate the appropriate solutions for ills at any level in society: changes in behaviours and attitudes. Overcome must be selfishness, corruption, consumerist habits, a "tribal" conception of human relations, and any classist mentality of confrontation. Instead, all Costa Ricans, including both workers and employers, must develop a "mentality of solidarity," described in one School pamphlet as "a necessary attitude, the only solution in the face of current circumstances." 

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Given the School's focus on this "profound transformation of mentality," the solutions to social problems are necessarily found on the individual and interpersonal levels. So when the CST workbook asks, for example, "How can the poverty among the Costa Rican people be remedied?" the answer does not involve suggestions regarding anything related to economic restructuring or government programming. Rather, the answer lies in the "mutual comprehension" of the parties involved:

That the worker understands the empresario and the empresario understands the worker. . . . When there is mutual comprehension, both owners and workers benefit, because justice will reign; a true community of mutual interests will be created: in large part, the conflicts that hold up or diminish production will disappear.30

This mutual comprehension and collaboration are, of course, fostered by the solidarity association to which workers should belong.

The errors in such a perspective begin with its superficial analysis of social relations. The dire poverty in Limón, the horrendous conditions on the banana plantations, and the denial of basic workplace liberties are all neglected in the face of an emphasis on unity as the organizing principle of human affairs. School materials do not even include detailed descriptions or heated moral condemnations of the suffering in the region. Moreover, the problems in Limón are not traced to the economic logic of international capitalism or the distorted priorities of a neo-liberal government, but are implied to be the products of the greed and selfishness of individual actors. The School's focus on the individual and the interpersonal effectively excludes any broader understanding of the causes and consequences of the structural flaws in the agro-export industry. Only in this schema can divorce be defined as a serious social problem while banana company airplanes spraying workers (not to mention children in nearby schoolyards) with pesticides is not. In this sense even the encyclicals of the pre-conciliar popes revealed more of a sensitivity to the suffering and working conditions of their time than do the materials of ESJ23 representatives (many of who, ironically, spend their days in direct contact with workers and their families).

30 Escuela Social Juan XXIII, La Doctrina Social, 53.
The School's near complete lack of attention to anything but interpersonal dynamics and the need for attitudinal change renders its key educational materials little more than pop psychology manuals from the Church. Far from being primers for conscientization or resources in the struggle for social justice, School workbooks and pamphlets perpetuate the false impression among workers that problems between workers and employers can all be "talked out," provided both sides are willing. According to the School's logic, the dynamics of oppression and the drastic differences in political and economic power between the parties involved do not matter once both parties assume the correct "Christian" demeanour of trust and understanding. Yet this assumption, in the context of Limón, ultimately functions to keeps workers as docile employees instead of empowered agents who demand the wages, job security, and poison-free environment that is rightfully theirs.

The School's vehement anti-communism also works to demonize anyone who dares to struggle against the status quo. Hence even though Solano admits that CST dictates that workers do have the right to form unions, the unions in Limón (and Costa Rica in general) must be stopped because, according to Solano at least, they are controlled by the communists. Even though strikes as a last resort are also accepted in theory in School teachings, in practice they are condemned as the preferred weapon of the communists and as vehicles for the hatred and violence that communism embodies. In this simplistic worldview, any analysis of reality that contradicts the School's assumption of the unity underlying social relations, and any protest that occurs outside the boardroom, can be painted red. In Costa Rica, where, as we have seen, the national mythology also incorporates elements of anti-communism, this sends a particularly powerful message: the good Christian, the good Costa Rican, is one who loves peace and compromise, not conflict and struggle. Unfortunately, this means that the work for social justice, which in the face of entrenched inequalities and oppression must often involve an element of struggle or confrontation, can thereby be precluded.

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31 Solano, "Hemos transformado," 16A.
32 Escuela Social Juan XXIII, "El fruto incierto," 3; Escuela Social Juan XXIII, La Doctrina Social, 81; and Escuela Social Juan XXIII, "La huelga," 3.
The School's teachings as they have been described to this point certainly contain many of the hallmarks of conservative pre-conciliar CST: a blunt anti-communism, a functionalist view of the social order, and a focus on solving social problems through reformed attitudes, dialogue, and collaboration. The references in School documents, moreover, also make it clear that the pre-conciliar popes are the primary sources of doctrinal inspiration for these perspectives.

Yet does this firm grounding in pre-conciliar CST necessarily mean that the teachings of the School stand in opposition to the CST tradition of the post-Vatican II Church? Commentators such as Lawrence Kent and Víctor Vega argue that it does, that the CST espoused by the School is based on outdated principles that have been replaced or superseded by more contemporary CST. As we shall see, however, these assertions reveal a lack of familiarity with the more recent teachings of the Social School. They are also based on certain erroneous assumptions about CST and about the differences between pre- and post-conciliar forms of this teaching.

**Post-Conciliar CST and the ESJ23**

On the most obvious level, it should be pointed out that far from relying solely on the teachings of the pre-conciliar era, School publications and representatives do in fact refer to more recent CST documents of the Church magisterium. The work of John XXIII (*Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*) is cited in School documents, as are documents from Paul VI (*Populorum Progressio* and *Octogesima Adveniens*) and even CELAM (from the Medellín Conference). Perhaps not surprisingly, the most common references in School materials are to Pope John Paul II's comments on the importance of solidarity, including the notions that solidarity is a Christian virtue and that solidarity is a necessary component of social justice. In other cases, the School's statements on collaboration

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34 For example, see, Pope John Paul II, "*Laborem Exercens*," no. 8, as quoted in Escuela Social Juan XXIII, *Solidarismo: Aspectos doctrinales*, 10; Pope John Paul II, "*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*," no. 38, as quoted in Escuela Social Juan XXIII, *La solidaridad*,
between workers and owners and on the need for dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the world of work are supported by further references to John Paul II's encyclicals.\textsuperscript{35} These School teachings may have a pre-conciliar ring to them, but they nonetheless can be easily supported by the teachings of the present Pope.

The relationship between the School's teachings and other themes found in post-conciliar CST is less straightforward. We can note, interestingly, that although concepts such as liberation and the option for the poor (in both their liberationist and conservative interpretations) are found in the CST of the past few decades, the use of these concepts appears to be studiously avoided, and even critiqued, by School representatives.

The word liberation, for example, is almost never used in any of the School's promotional pamphlets or instructional literature. One of the very few references to the term, found in a description of the Medellín documents, only briefly and vaguely refers to Christ's "message of liberation for the poor."\textsuperscript{36} It certainly does not define liberation as involving socio-economic empowerment for the popular classes or structural transformation of society. In other materials, instead of the language of the liberationists, we find references to the "integral development" of human beings and "development in solidarity," phrases that were given prominence in Pope Paul VI's encyclical \textit{Populorum Progressio}.\textsuperscript{37} Here a collaborative and gradual process of development in society is emphasized, not the deep-rooted social change promoted by the liberationists. Thus neither the actual term liberation, nor the potentially radical concept behind it, is given much attention in ESJ23 documents.

Solano has also made it clear that he wants to avoid making any sort of option for the poor. As he has commented:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{2-3; and Pope John Paul II, "Centesimus Annus," no. 10, as quoted in Claudio Solano, "El solidarismo en los albores del siglo XXI" (paper presented at the BANDECO Managerial Seminar, San José, C.R., 1997), 2.}
  \item \textsuperscript{35} See, for example, Pope John Paul II, "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," no. 32, as quoted in Solano, "El solidarismo en los albores," 5; and Pope John Paul II, "Centesimus Annus," no. 60, as quoted in Escuela Social Juan XXIII, \textit{Solidarismo y democracia}, 26.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Escuela Social Juan XXIII, \textit{Manual}, 9-10.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Pope Paul VI, "Populorum Progressio," no. 43, as cited in Solano, "El solidarismo en los albores," 6.
\end{itemize}
It is necessary to demythologize the option for the poor. Each time that we help to form the conscience of the empresarios we realize this option. I do not want to belong to a Church that understands the "poor" as an economic term, at least not exclusively. It would be a hypocritical and outdated Church that would go against God's universal and saving will. Be afraid of this option for the poor.  

For Solano, the role of the Church is not to opt for one group over another; it is never to exclude anyone on the basis of his or her social, political, or economic status. Rather, the Church needs to promote dialogue, collaboration, and mutual responsibilities among all her "children."  

As I noted in Chapter Four, an emphasis on Church unity and universality and a reluctance to commit to the partiality necessary for an efficacious option for the poor are defining features of post-conciliar Catholic conservatism. By attempting to cater to all groups in society at once and refusing to support the poor and their rights unequivocally, the "non-partisan" position in fact becomes an anti-poor position, because it carries no direct critique of or challenge to those who help to perpetuate the structures of injustice in society. The reluctance to characterize "the poor" as an economic category further compounds the issue because it implies that everyone, regardless of their socio-economic circumstances, can be viewed as poor. Refusing to acknowledge and define the poor as the economically disadvantaged group that they are is another way of denying that serious inequalities exist in Costa Rica. And this denial is not only an affront to the thousands of workers toiling under inhumane conditions on Limón plantations; it is also an excuse for those who control those plantations to do nothing about such conditions. Regardless of the inequality legitimated and perpetuated by this refusal to take sides, regardless of the fact that sometimes the only way to act for justice is to act against the interests of a particular

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group, regardless of the consequences that an "option for everyone" allows, Solano and the ESJ23 maintain a fear of an option for the poor.

This fear, along with the School's emphasis on John Paul II's teachings on solidarity, has led some to suggest that the Pope's social teachings are being distorted by School promoters eager to legitimate the solidarismo movement. They argue that the ESJ23 is wrong to over-emphasize John Paul II's comments on labour-capital harmony, and that it is ignoring the Pope's teachings on the preferential option for the poor and liberation (teachings that they presume would contradict the anti-liberationist bias of solidarismo).40

In response, we should recall that despite the appearance that terms like "liberation" and "preferential option for the poor" lend to the Pope's statements, he is still promoting a conservative message of class collaboration. As I outlined in Chapter Four, this can be seen in the Pope's attacks on Marxism and class struggle, and in his teachings on unity in the Church and society, as well as in his spiritualistic as opposed to political interpretation of the term liberation, and in his promotion of a preferential option for the poor that excludes no one. Despite the surface differences in language, then, the messages of the ESJ23 and the Pope's conservative CST are extremely similar. In the end, solidarity and harmony are not only hallmarks of pre-conciliar CST, but also of John Paul II's social teachings — and the campaign of the John XXIII Social School falls squarely within this doctrinal tradition. As the comments of one plantation worker and solidarity association member underscore, "the solidarity movement is the same as the Church. Both teach the way of Jesus: peace, tranquillity, and bearing the burden."41

Another Side to the School's Success

If one were to believe the assertions of the ESJ23's solidarista promoters, the story of the Social School could end after a biography of its leader, a description of its programming and facilities, and an exposition of its CST. According to them, no more

40 This is the position, for example, that was presented to me in Hermosilla, interview by author.
information would be necessary to understand the expansion of the School and the spread of *solidarismo* in Costa Rica. Yet there are further factors that can also help us to analyze the "success" of the School and the content of the *solidarismo* message: the ESJ23’s dirty dealings on the banana plantations on the one hand, and its alliances with the country’s business, political, and religious elites on the other.

*Dirty Dealings on the Plantations*

In stark contrast to the School’s explanation for the popularity of *solidarismo*, numerous reports have indicated that there are other, sometimes shocking, factors behind the predominance of this form of labour organization in Costa Rica’s Limón region. In fact, the ESJ23 and its *solidarista* promoters have been implicated in the outright coercion of workers on banana plantations. These charges not only tarnish the School’s reputation and qualify its definition of the success of *solidarismo*, they also lead us to question once again the actual form of CST to which the School claims to adhere.

I have already made, in Chapter Three, some general references to the unethical tactics that have been used to persuade workers to join solidarity associations. In particular, we can see that the pressure to join the solidarity association can begin as soon as potential workers arrive on a plantation. Often, when workers seek jobs on the *fincas*, they are asked to sign association membership cards before they are shown a contract with the banana company. Those who affiliate with the solidarity movement are granted employment; those who refuse to sign may be told that there are no jobs available. In other efforts to convince existing employees to affiliate with *solidarismo*, company supervisors may promise workers better postings and housing, more overtime hours, or secure jobs for their children. Further, the workers who are members of solidarity associations have few problems passing the three-month probationary period (after which a worker’s job is more secure and benefits begin to accrue), while unaffiliated workers run a greater risk of losing their jobs or being transferred while on probation, hence losing the

coveted three-month "record" of employment. Perhaps most notoriously, workers who complain about the company or the solidarity association, who become union members, or who are otherwise sympathetic to sindicalismo, risk ending up on the company's lista negra (blacklist). Workers who are listed are intimidated, harassed, or fired, and, since the names contained on the list are shared between banana company officials on plantations throughout the region, these workers have difficulty finding jobs even once they have left the finca where their "problematic" behaviour originated. Thus, although in Costa Rica workers are legally guaranteed the right of freedom of association, on the plantations and in practice they are not truly free to choose the type of workers' organization with which they associate.

While a number of banana company officials are certainly involved in such unscrupulous behaviours, there can also be no doubt that these individuals operate with the knowledge, consent, and, in some cases, outright assistance of the ESJ23's leaders and promoters. On one level, the sheer amount of time Solano and his solidarista promoters spend on the plantations and in consultation with company workers and officials makes it inconceivable that School representatives would be unaware of the dirty dealings taking place on solidarismo's behalf. On another level, in fact, eyewitnesses have reported that Solano and other School officials have actively participated in the rooting out and firing of workers whose actions are deemed to be contrary to the solidarity movement's ideals. In some cases, moreover, copies of the photos taken of banana workers for School identification cards are routinely forwarded to banana company managers. These photos, accompanied by reports from School instructors about which workers ask inconvenient

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43 ASEPROLA, "Solidarismo," (Archives of Padre Eduardo Ramírez, photocopy), 3 and 5-6.
44 It should be also noted that while it is extremely difficult to get company or School officials to admit to the existence of the lista negra on the fincas, it is frequently commented that among workers "everybody knows" about the practice of blacklisting. Hence, regardless of factors such as the actual contents of the list or the number of workers themselves named on it, the widespread perception that the list exists has the very real consequence of helping to silence workers' complaints. Padre Jesús Doncel, parish priest in Río Frío, interview by author, in Río Frío, Costa Rica, 17 August 1996; Flores, El solidarismo desde adentro, 65-66; and Kent, "The Social Pastoral Work," 18-19.
questions during training sessions, allow the companies to detect and eliminate troublemakers in the ranks much more efficiently.\textsuperscript{46}

While such actions may have helped to swell the numbers of \textit{solidaristas} and silence the solidarity movement's critics on plantations, they also challenge the veracity of the ESJ23's claims to be based on CST principles. In the first place, and as we have seen, the CST tradition has long accorded workers the freedom to unionize. Even the Social School itself does not deny this and claims to respect such rights. Yet the reality is that ESJ23 representatives go to considerable lengths to prevent workers from affiliating with the union movement. They thereby directly violate the rights workers are supposedly guaranteed by both Costa Rican law and the Church's social teaching tradition. Even if School officials are not direct participants in the persecution of unionists but are merely bystanders to such unethical goings-on, they still have an obligation to speak out on behalf of those targeted by anti-union discrimination and suffering from its effects. The commitment to truth and justice throughout the CST tradition demands no less.

Yet, ironically, one suspects that it is precisely a commitment to the "Truth" that lies behind the hypocritical behaviour of Solano and other School members. In this case, the Truth that justifies persecution of \textit{sindicalistas} involves the definition of the solidarity movement as good on the one hand, and the union movement as evil on the other. While Solano claims that he has no problems with unionism per se and even that unions can play an important role in clarifying and defending the rights of workers, he also reveals his conviction that in Costa Rica in general and Limón in particular, unions have strayed from their true democratic origins and betrayed the support the Church once gave them.\textsuperscript{47} He can then portray \textit{solidarismo} as an "instrument to save the Atlantic Zone" from the "exploitation," "attack on human dignity," and "perversion of democracy" fomented by communist unionism.\textsuperscript{48} Once the School's campaign is thus outlined in terms of good versus evil and right versus wrong, the promotion of \textit{solidarismo} by whatever means

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{45} ASEPROLA, "Solidarismo," 5; and Kent, "The Social Pastoral Work," 19.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Flores, \textit{El solidarismo desde adentro}, 66-67.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Solano, interview by author.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Solano, "Hemos transformado," 16A.
\end{itemize}
necessary is not so much seen as a matter of denying workers the right to unionize as it is denying the communists a foothold in Costa Rica.

All this is reminiscent of the Vatican treatment of certain liberation theologians. While the Pope and his supporters, for example, claim to have no problem with the promotion of liberation or the preferential option for the poor "correctly" defined, they have silenced those liberationists, such as Leonardo Boff, whom they see as guilty of perverting the Church's "authentic" message. Yet here too the silencing of Boff is not so much seen as a matter of repressing dissent in the Church as it is preserving the Vatican's interpretation of doctrine. In both the case of the ESJ23 and the Vatican, then, the rights of those at the base of the Church are sacrificed in the attempt to protect and propagate the Truth. This privileging of the Truth over the need to enact justice in the historical realm is, of course, another characteristic of conservative CST. But in concrete terms, this priority of Solano's also means that Limón's bananeros will continue to suffer from poverty, violence, and disease without much control over how to react to them.

Unscrupulous activities aside, other keys to understanding the influence of the ESJ23 can be found in an analysis of the School's supporters from segments of the broader Costa Rican society. An examination of the ESJ23's sources of corporate funding, its practical and symbolic alliances with the State, and its forms of approval from the Archdiocese can provide the additional context and information needed for a complete analysis of the School's CST.

Sources of Corporate Funding

Since Padre Solano took charge of the ESJ23, the organization has operated without any direct financial assistance from the Archdiocese. As I shall discuss later on, this is not meant to imply that the Costa Rican hierarchy has been indifferent to Solano and the ESJ23. It does mean, however, that Solano has long had to solicit funds from outside of the Church for the School's ever-growing roster of activities.

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49 Masís Vega, interview by author.
After his 1971 appointment, Solano wasted little time in lining up the necessary financiers for the School's mission. In 1972, for example, he initiated the formation of an organization called the Asociación de Empresarios Pro-Justicia Social y Paz (the AE, the Association of Businessmen for Social Justice and Peace). This group of prominent Costa Rican business leaders functioned as a powerful lobby for the solidarity movement among the empresarial class in Costa Rica, but it also clearly provided a financial lifeline for the ESJ23 for many years. According to Gustavo Blanco and Orlando Navarro, the ESJ23 was almost completely economically dependent upon the AE from 1972 to 1980. During this time, the AE donated substantial amounts of money to the ESJ23 in the form of outright grants, but it also covered many of the ESJ23's basic operating costs, including its utility bills and officials' travel expenses. Crucially, for at least part of this time, the AE also directly paid the salaries of Solano and most of the ESJ23's administrative staff.50 In this sense, ESJ23 representatives were effectively treated as the employees of the AE and the School itself could be viewed as a subsidiary of this same organization.

Though the AE was dissolved in 1980, this did not spell the end of corporate financing of ESJ23 activities. Over the years, national and international companies, particularly in the banana industry, have donated large sums of the money to the Social School through the Fundación Juan XXIII, the fundraising organization set up by Solano to support ESJ23 programs. Reports indicate that substantial amounts have been donated by the Asociación de Bananeros Nacionales (ASBANA), the Banana Development Corporation (BANDECO), Standard Fruit Company, United Fruit Company, and Piñas de Costa Rica (PINDECO, a pineapple company).51 Beyond these large-scale donations, it should also be noted that when banana workers attend courses at the School's training centre in Tres Ríos, it is the banana companies themselves who select the workers and pay for their course fees.52 Conversely, when School promoters hold meetings on company plantations, it is generally the company that covers the costs associated with holding the

50 Blanco and Navarro, El solidarismo, 179 and 358-65.
51 Blanco and Navarro, El solidarismo, 181; and "Fijan donación para Escuela Juan XXIII," La Nación, 10 January 1987, 2A.
52 Blanco and Navarro, El solidarismo, 180; Villalta, interview by author.
meetings, printing pamphlets, etc.\textsuperscript{53} Through all these means, large companies in Costa Rica have underwritten many of the ESJ23's expenses.

A final important source of private funding for the School comes from the revenue generated by the ESJ23's sale of services to the business community at large. Apart from hosting its solidarista training activities at the Tres Ríos installation, the School also makes a profit by renting out parts of this facility as a convention centre. Companies can host their own private retreats, meetings, and conferences on the ESJ23 grounds, and pay the School for the use of meeting rooms, auditoriums, lodging, dining facilities, etc.\textsuperscript{54} Though this is a more indirect source of financing for School activities, it nevertheless serves to reinforce the already strong ties between the School and Costa Rica's business elite.

Overall, the relationship that has developed between the ESJ23 and the empresarial class in Costa Rica can best be described as symbiotic. On the one hand, the School does rely heavily on income from private sector funding -- so much so that the very ability of the School to maintain its staff and programming without such funding would be thrown into question. Yet, consider also what the School offers business leaders in return: both the practical promotion and the religious legitimation of a form of labour organization that is ideally suited to their needs. Solidarismo's insistent doctrine of class unity functions to obfuscate the inherent conflict between labourers and owners on Costa Rican plantations, thereby hampering the development of class consciousness among workers and hindering their efforts to transform the structures that oppress them.\textsuperscript{55} The anti-union and anti-communist bias of solidarismo also helps to preempt labour activism on plantations. This is particularly important in a region where historically unions have been combative and strikes have been costly. The investment that business leaders have made in the ESJ23 has thus paid handsome dividends in the form of a docile labour force whose members are encouraged only to cultivate the right attitudes, not left-wing activism.

\textsuperscript{53} ASEPROLA, "Solidarismo," 2 and 5; Blanco, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{54} Másis Vega, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{55} Blanco and Navarro, \textit{El solidarismo}, 291-93.
Alliances with the State

Apart from the symbiotic relationship that the ESJ23 engages in with Costa Rica's business elite, Solano has also long maintained several noteworthy alliances with the country's political powerbrokers. Both in his extra-curricular endeavours and in his role as director of the ESJ23, Solano has become a notable player in Costa Rican political life, thereby securing both privileges and prestige for the School and himself.

Padre Solano has, in the past, served as chaplain for the Costa Rican Public Forces (1978-95); he also spent more than a decade (1984-95) on the board of directors of the Costa Rican Social Security Bureau. He today maintains close ties with government officials and, for example, is reported to have weekly meetings with the Costa Rican President and regular sessions with the Minister of Labour.

Though whatever occurs during such meetings cannot be known, the esteem that government leaders hold for solidarismo and the Social School is no secret. Government officials, for example, often attend and speak at special events at the Social School. Even more telling is a two-page item in the newspaper El Diario Extra, published in January 1990, that heralds solidarismo as a "national pride." This article features pictures of, and lengthy quotations from, key Costa Rican political leaders, including then-president Oscar Arias and nine former presidents and presidential candidates (from both major political parties). The politicians in their statements pay tribute to the wonders of solidarismo and, often, to the importance of the ESJ23's work. With their references to solidarismo as a "brilliant idea," the "best labour formula," and the "essence of democracy," these politicians could easily find employment as substitutes for the most fervent of the ESJ23's solidarista promoters. Interestingly, as well, at least one of these politicos (ex-president Monge) once wrote to President Reagan in the United States, in

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57 Masis Vega, interview by author.
58 See, for example, "Palabras pronunciadas por el Señor Ministro de Trabajo, Licenciado German Serrano Pinto, en la inauguración de las nuevas edificaciones de la Escuela Social Juan XXIII," Eco Católico (Suplemento Campesino), 26 October 1980, 2.
similarly glowing terms about the contributions the solidarity movement has made to peace and democracy in Costa Rica.\textsuperscript{60}

With such friends and admirers in high places, it is not surprising that Solano has been able to secure domestic and international government funding for the School, and that he has received certain national honours himself. In the past, the ESJ23 has received financial assistance from the Costa Rican government and from the embassies of the United States, Guatemala, Chile, and Israel. Organizations including the Pan American Development Foundation, U.S. AID, and the Canadian International Development Association (CIDA) have also contributed funds to the ESJ23.\textsuperscript{61} Within Costa Rica, Solano has been feted on various occasions, having received the Freedom Prize from the National Association for Economic Advancement (1983), and having been named "Costa Rican of the Year" (1981) and "Forger of Democracy" (1988).\textsuperscript{62} With the exception of Archbishop Arrieta, no other Church leader in recent history has attained such close connections with the government and such a high public profile in Costa Rica.

The reason government representatives look upon Solano and his ESJ23 with such favour is no mystery. The doctrine and labour model associated with the School fit well with the needs of a State attempting to respond to socio-economic crises through neoliberalism.\textsuperscript{63} The School's emphasis on co-operation and class collaboration correspond to the government's pleas for everyone to tighten their belts and adhere to the austerity measures demanded by international lending institutions. The ideals of solidarity and social peace emphasized by the ESJ23 are consistent with the State's appeals, in the face of escalating popular protests, to the pacific and democratic character of the Costa Rican people. And solidarismo itself can help the country to offer the lower wages, weak union presence, and generally undemanding workforce so attractive to the foreign investors upon

\textsuperscript{60} Flores, El solidarismo desde adentro, 114-15.

\textsuperscript{61} Gustavo Leonel Blanco B. "Iglesia católica y pastoral social," (Master's Thesis, Ciudad Universitaria "Rodrigo Facio," Costa Rica, 1987), 142; Blanco and Navarro, El solidarismo, 180; and Flores El solidarismo desde adentro, 131

\textsuperscript{62} Solano, "Curriculo," 3.
whose capital Costa Rica is dependent to help service its heavy debt. Along with Archbishop Arrieta and CECOR more generally (as described in Chapter Five), the ESJ23 has thus functioned as an important ideological ally in the government's attempts to impose neo-liberal demands on its citizens without compromising its hegemonic rule.

In return, Solano and the School also benefit immensely. Tangible rewards would of course include the aforementioned government funding. But Solano's good relations and ideological similarities with Costa Rican politicians also undoubtedly played a role in his successful efforts to gain legal recognition for the solidarista phenomenon. In 1979, Solano and the ESJ23 presented the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly with a draft of proposed legislation defining the scope and functions of solidarity associations. This law, which was passed in 1984 as Law No. 6970, accords solidarismo juridical status and legal protection under the State. In 1991, also under the initiative and advice of Solano and the ESJ23, President Calderón promulgated a series of supplementary regulations to the law (through Executive Decree No. 2068-TSS), further entrenching the solidarity movement's position in the structure of Costa Rican society.64

Solano and School materials cite this law often, treating it as if it were a badge of honour. They also make frequent mention of the fact that both the Constitution and the Labour Code contain articles explicitly based upon the "Christian principles of social justice,"65 thereby establishing a further link between the ESJ23 (which, of course, is also emphasized to be based on CST) and Costa Rican political institutions. In fact, on prominent display in the courtyard of the ESJ23's headquarters is a fountain in part constructed with the railings from the site of the country's first Legislative Assembly. The

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64 See Escuela Social Juan XXIII, Solidarismo y democracia, 7. Both the Law and the Executive Decree can be found in Escuela Social Juan XXIII, ed., Ley de asociaciones solidaristas, 17-35 and 43-49 (respectively).

65 I have already discussed the broader significance of the legislative enshrinement of Catholicism in Costa Rica in Chapter One, p. 19, and in Chapter Five, p. 150. In fact, almost every School document and public statement by Solano contains some reference to
accolades heaped upon the work of Solano and the ESJ23 by past and present politicians only work to reinforce this image of the Social School as closely tied to the political infrastructure of the nation.

From the point of view of the ESJ23, all this is highly advantageous in a country where, regardless of public favour or disfavour toward actual political office holders, the citizenry in general looks upon Costa Rica's democratic political heritage and its legislative foundations with a great deal of pride. Hence on top of the legitimacy conferred to the ESJ23 and its message through the use of the social teachings of the Catholic Church, the credibility of the institution is also enhanced by its apparently close relation to the Costa Rican democratic tradition. In Costa Rica, any organization that can thus imply the support of both Church and State is a powerful one indeed.

Archdiocesan Support

Importantly, when it comes to the Archdiocese of San José and the figure of Archbishop Arrieta, Solano and School representatives can do more than just imply the support of the Church. For although the Archdiocese does not provide any direct financing for School activities, the other forms of backing Arrieta does supply have been essential in bolstering the School's position in Costa Rica and within the Costa Rican Church.

In terms of material assistance, the Archdiocese has donated buildings and land to the School. In 1987, for example, Arrieta oversaw the transfer of the Archdiocesan seminary in Tres Ríos to the ESJ23. This gift of the seminary, which now serves as the lynchpin in the School's training and educational activities, was crucial in helping the ESJ23 to increase the reach of its solidarista message. In addition, as we have seen, owning the Tres Ríos property has also allowed the ESJ23 to rent space and sell services to corporate Costa Rica, which itself provides funding for the School and further cements the ties School leaders maintain with the business class. None of these endeavours would

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these juridical facts. For example, see Escuela Social Juan XXIII, Solidarismo, solidarismo; Solano, El solidarismo en los albores, 2-3; and Solano, interview by author.  
66 Villalta, interview by author.
have been possible had the School remained restricted to operating out of the relatively modest Curridabat offices; the donation of the seminary has made a decisive contribution to the growth and financial stability of the ESJ23.

In non-material terms, Arrieta's accolades for *solidarismo* and the labours of the Social School have been public, unequivocal, and, undoubtedly, extremely valuable. On several occasions, Arrieta has praised *solidarismo* as an effective means for resolving social problems between workers and employers harmoniously. Referring to it as a "very Costa Rican instrument," he has also called *solidarismo* the "best option" for workers, and the form of labour organization that "preserves the most faithful relation to the supreme commandment that Jesus left us, that of love."67 Consistent with such an evaluation, he has contested charges that *solidarismo* benefits the bosses only. Moreover, and despite the evidence to the contrary cited above, Arrieta insists that the expansion of the movement has not been reached to the detriment of social justice.68 He thus has praised the School for its "faithful devotion to the irrenunciable principles of justice," and has given thanks for the work of both Solano and the School in spreading CST and putting its principles into practice in Costa Rica.69

Arrieta's support for *solidarismo* is not surprising, given that he shares Solano's conviction that dialogue and collaboration are preferable to confrontation and class conflict when it comes to dealing with social problems. It is also consistent with the Archbishop's own ties to Costa Rica's political and economic leaders. A 1987 picture taken at the Archbishop's Palace, featuring Arrieta receiving a hefty donation for the ESJ23 from BANDECO and PINDECO officials, symbolizes the importance of Arrieta's various allegiances for the Social School.70 That the Archbishop has chosen to ignore and even deny charges of unjust practices on the plantations is a further indication of his approval for the mission of the School and its *solidarista* promoters. Such sanction from the leader

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68 "Solidarismo, orgullo nacional," 14; and Arrieta, interview by author.
70 "Fijan donación," 2A.
of the Costa Rican Church also provides a valuable form of legitimation for a movement that has faced national and international union condemnation for its actions.

Finally, this Archdiocesan support functions to entrench the position of the Social School over and against the official Church in Limón. As we shall see in the following chapter, Limón Church representatives not only enact a pastoral obrera that falls on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum from the ESJ23, they have also publicly criticized the tactics used by School promoters in the region. Perhaps more importantly, several members of the Limón clergy -- including the former bishop himself -- have complained that as an Archdiocesan institution, the ESJ23 has no right to operate in the Diocese of Limón. Solano, for his part, self-righteously proclaims that he "does not need a passport" to enter into any diocese and work in the field of labour relations. Yet even though the Church's established jurisdictional guidelines indicate that Solano is mistaken and that Limón Church officials have every right to determine the parameters for pastoral activity in their own diocese, Arrieta persists in offering Solano and the Social School his blessings. Arrieta's siding with the ESJ23 in this way provides a noteworthy example of the Archdiocese's subordination of the official Church in Limón. And while the Limonense clergy are forced to contend with this significant threat to the institutional strength of their local Church, the ESJ23 continues to operate with impunity on the coast.

Conclusion

The case of the Escuela Social Juan XXIII provides us with a second example of a conservative pastoral obrera in the Costa Rican Catholic Church. As was the case with Archbishop Arrieta and the Costa Rican Episcopal Conference, the ESJ23 promotes a workers' pastorate consistent with the stream of CST that emphasizes unity over conflict, and collaboration over confrontation. From this perspective, problems in society are attributable to faulty attitudes and flawed mentalities. By extension, they can be resolved

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71 Mons. Coto, interview by author; Ramírez, interview by author and Erick Solera; and Padre Gerardo Vargas, priest and coordinator of the Comisión Diocesana de Pastoral Social in Limón, interview by author and Erick Solera, in Siquirres, Costa Rica, 11 July 1997.
through a renovation of the spiritual, not a transformation of the structural. In fact, the whole idea of societal restructuring raises for the ESJ23 the dreaded spectre of communism, with the violence and hatred that threatens to infect workers and other good Costa Ricans through the union movement charged with bearing this godless ideology. That the well-being of workers is ultimately sacrificed in the ESJ23's battle against *sindicalismo*, however, appears of little consequence in light of its overriding mandate to promote *solidarismo*, the form of labour organization legitimated by this same conservative CST of the School.

Yet although the primary components of the ESJ23's socio-religious doctrine are drawn from the social teaching tradition of the Catholic Church, the precise form this doctrine takes is clearly influenced by variables external to the Church. The close alliances School officials have formed with Costa Rica's ruling classes have no doubt impacted upon the shape of the organization's *pastoral obrera*. In sociological terms, we can say that the ESJ23's pastoral discourse necessarily expresses the interests and the agenda of the class upon whom its survival depends. In the words of a popular Costa Rican saying, we can also say that "whoever pays the orchestra, controls the dance" ("quien paga la orquestra, manda el baile"). Much as we saw in the case of the Archbishop, the close relationship the ESJ23 maintains with Costa Rica's political and economic elites affects the organization's ideological production at a deep level.

Still, a further question remains. Because although the School is an Archdiocesan organization fully sanctioned by Arrieta himself, although both the Archbishop and the School share the same basic political-economic perspective, and although the School's interpretation and employment of Church teachings clearly resonate with that emanating from the Archdiocese, there is one crucial difference between these two expressions of CST. Whereas Archbishop Arrieta has made frequent use of the language associated with the liberationists (to advance an agenda that is nonetheless conservative), School representatives are loath to employ the lingo of liberation theology themselves (in pursuit of what are essentially the same goals).

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72 Solano, interview by author.
Why is it, therefore, that the Archbishop clearly finds it advantageous to co-opt the concepts of the liberationists, while Solano, whose position is so similar to that of Archbishop is so many other respects, clearly does not?

The answer lies in the differing institutional characteristics and needs of the two parties. As we saw in Chapter Five, Arrieta, as Archbishop of San Jose, sees himself as head of the Church in Costa Rica and therefore must appear responsive -- whatever his true alliances and agenda may be -- to all factions within his Church. By adopting the terms of liberation theology yet adapting them to serve a conservative message, he can demonstrate his institution's relevance to both the left and right within the Church. Arrieta's official support of both CECODERS and ESJ23 is another way to cover two disparate ideological bases in terms of pastoral programming.\(^74\)

Solano, in contrast, as head of a relatively small and specialized organization, need not appear to be sympathetic to both tendencies. Since the School is technically independent of the Archdiocese in terms of funding, Solano is not bound to the replicate the breadth of the Archbishop's appeal. Further, since workers themselves do not ultimately determine the success or failure of the organization (most attend ESJ23 classes because their managers tell them to, many join solidarity associations because their jobs may depend on it), there is little motivation to affect the liberationist discourse that may be more attuned to their life experiences and needs. In fact, an appeal to liberationist categories could potentially alienate the very groups upon whom the ESJ23 does depend -- the representatives of the large agro-export companies. Given the ESJ23's position within the Church and within Costa Rican society, the gain to be achieved by appearing to adopt elements of the liberationist worldview would be relatively small compared to the risk entailed.

Taken altogether, what I have outlined in this chapter indicates that, contrary to the explanation of School representatives, Solano does not use solidarismo as a "Trojan horse" to spread CST among the people. In fact, though the analogy is an apt one to describe the tactics and effect of the ESJ23's work, the elements are reversed: in Limón, it is Catholic

\(^{73}\) ASEPROLA, "Solidarismo," 2.
Social Teaching and religious representatives that are used as the vehicles to import the solidarity movement into the banana plantations. Legitimated by its association with the Church, _solidarismo_ is implanted amongst the workers. However, in the place of the peace and harmony promised by Solano and the solidarity movement, we find a misrepresentation of reality, a suppression of dissent, and a disrespect for workers' rights that help perpetuate the inequality and oppression that have long plagued the region. Far from bringing socio-economic salvation to Limonense banana workers and their families, the ESJ23 instead contributes to their continued subjugation.

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74 See Philip Williams, _Catholic Church and Politics_, 162.
Chapter Nine

The Official Church in Limón: Liberating Impulses from the Margin

We are in solidarity with those who suffer, not with those who take advantage of this pain—Mons. Coto and Limón priests on behalf of protesters occupying the Limón cathedral.

The case of the official Church in Limón can be considered the opposite of that presented in the previous chapter. Where the pastoral obrera of the Escuela Social Juan XXIII is conservative, that of the Limón Church is liberationist. In this chapter I explore the forms that this official workers' pastorate takes in Limón and seek to uncover the reasons for their progressivism. I begin with a description of the leadership and pastoral innovation of Moñsenor Coto, the beloved bishop of Limón who during his tenure (1980-1995) did much to foster his Church's conversion to the cause of the poor. I discuss the particular institutional characteristics that developed during Coto's time in the Limón Church and show how he (along with other leaders and the laity within this institution) reacted to the poverty and injustice that surrounded him. Of particular importance here will be the discussion of the pastoral letter issued by the Limón Church in 1989. This important document, the effects of which were felt well into the episcopate of Coto's successor, Moñsenor Ulloa, constitutes the Limón Church's own unique contribution to the corpus of Costa Rican Catholic Social Teaching. Yet as we shall see, the carta pastoral is also one of the key texts that can serve to reveal the fascinating manner in which the worldwide body of CST, that emanating chiefly from the Vatican, can be employed to advance particularly Limonense local needs.

The Limón Church under Moñsenor Coto

Mons. Don Alfonso Coto Monge was made a bishop and named Apostolic Vicar of Limón on March 7, 1980. This appointment was unique and noteworthy for several reasons. First, whereas the four bishops in Limón prior to him were all German, Coto...
had the honour of being the first Costa Rican priest elevated to the role. Second, although the standard practice in the Catholic Church is to entrust the leadership of a Apostolic Vicariate to a member of a religious order (in Limón the tradition had been to appoint a Vincentian priest to the role), Mons. Coto was a diocesan priest. Even more important than Coto's nationality or clerical designation, however, was his personality. Tellingly, one of Mons. Coto's first acts as bishop was to donate his episcopal ring to the community of Corales so that they could use the funds generated from its sale to construct a communal chapel. At the time, this was seen as a sign of poverty and of solidarity with the poor; in the following years, it became clear that this gesture was not merely for show but was in fact a sincere symbol of the bishop's commitment to the people of Limón. As we shall see, Mons. Coto was to go on to become one of the foremost liberationists within the Costa Rican Catholic Church, a true "voice for the voiceless" in Limón.

After he was named bishop, Coto spent the first few months of his appointment travelling around and visiting the parishes and Christian communities in the Vicariate, witnessing the problems and concerns members of the Church in Limón were facing. Later in 1980 he issued his first pastoral letter, the bulk of which was devoted to routine administrative matters (such as the appropriate amounts to charge for baptisms and marriages). In this Exhortation, Mons. Coto also commented that on his tour he had become aware of the scarcity of priests in the area and had "encountered communities that are like 'sheep without a pastor' exposed to the danger of losing their faith in the face of the constant, insidious and bold propaganda of certain Protestant sects or social agitators." It is significant to note that in light of such threats Coto proposed the strengthening of the CEBs in the area, and that he treated them much as the bishops at Puebla had done in the previous year: as groups focused primarily on spiritual enrichment and not necessarily on

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1 Ramírez, interview by Erick Solera.
2 Hermosilla, "Transformación de practicas," 36.
4 Coto, "Con inmenso gozo," no. 1.1.
social action. In fact, Mons. Coto made no direct mention of social justice issues in this document.

Nonetheless, the new bishop was given the chance to demonstrate his practical concern for the poor in the same month this statement was released. While the members of Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly were meeting in Limón, a group of campesinos occupied the Limón Cathedral in order to pressure the government to listen to their concerns regarding land distribution. Upon hearing this news, Mons. Coto left his seat of honour in the gymnasium where the Assembly was meeting and went to listen to the campesinos' complaints. The following day the bishop, along with three priests from the area, published a strongly worded communiqué supporting the campesinos and petitioning the government to meet their demands. In this statement the Church agents explicitly announced their "preferential option for the poor" and their solidarity and identification with the poor campesinos. Even before the end of his first year as bishop, then, Coto was already beginning to demonstrate his concern for social justice in Limón.

In 1981, Coto convened an assembly of clergy, religious, and laypeople from the Vicariate. The conclusions of the six-day meeting emphasized a "pastoral option" for CEBs and, this time, mention was made of the commitment of such groups to working for social justice. From this point on, Mons. Coto organized such meetings at least once a year in the Vicariate. Crucially, they became an arena for discussing social problems in Limón province and for involving laypeople in the decision-making process of the Church. Over the years, the meetings became an important means for the clergy and other concerned Catholics to collaborate in evaluating the previous year's pastoral work and in charting the future plans of the Limón Church.

By the late 1980s, the two characteristic features of these assemblies -- pastoral planning based on an awareness of the social reality in the region and significant lay

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5 Coto, "Con inmenso gozo," nos. 3.1 - 3.3.
6 Mons. Alfonso Coto Monge et al., "Somos solidarios con quienes sufren no con los que se aprovechan de ese dolor," Eco Católico, 28 September 1980, 8.
participation — had been incorporated more formally into the overall pastoral work of the Vicariate. This dual emphasis, unique in the Costa Rican Church, was seen in several projects and aspects of the Vicariate's work. First, Church officials made a concerted effort to obtain a more accurate indication of the pastoral problems and the socio-economic features of the Vicariate. To this end a detailed social scientific study, somewhat along the lines of a census, was conducted in 1987-88. This "diagnostic" effort was coordinated by CECODERS, but the real labour power came from hundreds of pastoral agents in the Vicariate. Working in small teams, Church members spread out throughout Limón province, literally going door-to-door to collect data on subjects such as household composition and income, occupations, and health. They also gathered information on people's religious affiliation and solicited opinions about the Church's work.

Eventually, an analysis of the thousands of information forms completed indicated the extremity of the problems in Limón that delegates to the assemblies had been more informally reporting for years. But — and perhaps more importantly — the whole process of conducting the survey had a conscientizing effect on the participants. Pastoral agents went out into the field and saw with their own eyes the poverty and problems experienced by their neighbours; they heard first-hand of the difficulties the poor were facing in their struggles to survive. Some of the Christian communities were able to reinforce this consciousness-raising experience by sponsoring meetings at which the pastoral workers could share their impressions and attempt to discuss the preliminary results in the light of Scripture and CST. Through such activities, members at all levels of the Church became more sensitized to the socio-economic injustices in Limón and more committed to overcoming them.

In addition, around the same time that the diagnostic surveys and discussions were being carried out, more resources and attention were being devoted to developing the formal structure of the Vicariate's pastoral social. In 1988, Father Gerardo Vargas

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8 Eduardo Ramírez, "El Vicariato dio forma a su experiencia pastoral con un plan global de acción, III parte," Eco Católico, 2 April 1989, 11.
9 Hermosilla, "Transformación de practicas," 57-59; and G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.
assumed responsibility for what came to be known as the Comisión Diocesana de Pastoral Social (Diocesan Social Pastoral Commission). According to Vargas, when he took over the role from Padre Esquivel (who had coordinated the pastoral social in the region up to this point) the latter handed him a box of papers and a bank book showing a few hundred dollars in the Church's pastoral social account. From this modest start Vargas, drawing upon the interest and support of Mons. Coto, was able to procure office space and equipment, an archive, a small support staff and, eventually, two vehicles for the Commission's work. In the following years, the Commission grew to coordinate five main areas: 1) production (securing micro-credit for small agricultural or artisanal income-generating projects); 2) popular housing (rebuilding housing after natural disasters); 3) human rights (conscientization and legal advocacy work, mainly involving migrant workers in the Atlantic region); 4) education and training (workshops, seminars, and the production of popular education materials); and 5) the pastoral de la tierra (the land pastorate, dealing with issues of land distribution and organic farming). 11

Decision-making and projects related to each of these five areas are handled at one or another level of a series of democratically appointed and accountable committees. At the most basic level, each parish elects a "Parish Social Pastoral Commission." From this local committee, two people are elected to represent their community in one of the three "Vicarial Social Pastoral Commissions" in the region. Finally, each of these Vicarial Commissions elects two of its members to the coordinating body for the region, known as the "Diocesan Social Pastoral Commission." This latter commission is the one Vargas works most closely with, and it is this same body that ultimately defines the mission and programs for the Church in the region as a whole. Crucially, however, information, suggestions, and concerns flow both ways up and down this three-tiered structure, hence involving members from all levels and locales in the Limón Church. This structure is important because it helps to democratize power in the Church by encouraging lay participation in the workings of the pastoral social and by formalizing channels for this participation. Though Padre Vargas, the Diocesan commission, and Mons. Coto were the

10 Hermosilla, "Transformación de practicas," 58.
chief official figures in the pastoral social of the Limón Church, and though they functioned as its representatives to the world outside the region, internally the power structure of the Church became relatively horizontal.12

Both the diagnostic census and the democratic organizational structure of the Church were essential to the production of the Limón Church's Plan Global de Pastoral (Overall Pastoral Plan).13 The Plan, the first of its kind in Costa Rica, grew out of the discussions of the census that took place in the Vicariate's assemblies of 1988 and 1989, and was formulated with the help of a pastoral advisor from CELAM. In the words of the document’s introduction, the Plan was meant to

stimulate lines of pastoral action that will help us [all members of the Limón Church] discover paths toward a new kind of Church, incarnate in and committed to the realities of the Vicariate, in order to achieve an integral transformation of people and of structures.14

This emphasis on both personal and social transformation, which we have seen to be a key element in the liberationist tradition, is found in other points of the document as well.15

Tellingly, the Plan also reveals some of the worries of the pastoral agents in the area. Concerns are noted, for example, regarding injustices in the world of work (especially in relation to solidarismo),16 about Protestant sects,17 and also regarding the insufficient number of pastoral agents in the Church.18 These passages, it should be stressed, were committed to print in a document that would serve as the guide for all

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11 G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.
12 Coto’s personal attitude toward such democracy within the institution is revealed by his position on criticism from the clergy and laity, which he actively solicited. As he put it, "one is not perfect, they are not going to believe that the episcopate receives a monopoly on the Holy Spirit and on the absolute truth." Mons. Alfonso Coto Monge, "Limón va adelante," 6. Compare this attitude with that of the representatives of the conservative wing in the Church who, as I have discussed, tend to emphasize obedience to the magisterium.
13 Vicario Apostólico de Limón, Plan pastoral.
14 Vicario Apostólico de Limón, Plan pastoral, 11.
15 See, for example, Vicario Apostólico de Limón, Plan pastoral, 91 and 93.
16 Vicario Apostólico de Limón, Plan pastoral, 33-35.
17 Vicario Apostólico de Limón, Plan pastoral, 23.
18 Vicario Apostólico de Limón, Plan pastoral, 22 and 42.
future pastoral work in the Vicariate. As such, they helped to reinforce and reproduce the perception that the Church as institution, and its members as workers, were threatened.

Finally, the document spells out main areas for pastoral action (areas accorded priority in part, the Plan states, because they open up more spaces for lay participation in the Church and because they favour the poor): the family, training of laity, CEBs, pastoral social, and youth. Of the five priorities listed, the area of pastoral social is the most relevant to this thesis. It is said to be a "liberating" pastorate, one that operates from a "preferential option for the poor," "attacks" all forms of poverty, and continually analyzes and reflects upon the reality of the Vicariate. Interestingly, the Church here also states its intent to "develop and promote a pastoral social with the workers of the banana plantations." As I will discuss next, Church agents began this task immediately after the Global Pastoral Plan was formulated, and they continued to work on it throughout the 1990s.

By the end of the 1980s, then, Mons. Coto and other members from all levels of the Limón Church were tackling the problems of the Church and of the world around them. The structure of the Pastoral Social had been formalized and a variety of conscientizing programs were in place. Nonetheless, at this point these activities were all largely contained within the Vicariate itself, and they attracted relatively little attention and commentary from Church and secular representatives outside the region. All this was to change suddenly, however, with the release of . . .

The 1989 Carta Pastoral

On December 25, 1989, a pastoral letter was released in the Apostolic Vicariate of Limón. Interestingly, Bishop Coto and the clergy of Limón issued the document. This is quite unusual because generally in the Catholic Church, pastoral letters are signed by a bishop alone or, in the case of a collective episcopal letter, by a conference of bishops.

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19 Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Plan pastoral, 87-89.
20 Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Plan pastoral, 100-102.
The only other exceptions to this rule in Latin America have been some of the documents issued by certain bishops in Brazil and by the late Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador. That the authorship of the Límón letter is attributed to both the bishop and the priests is significant because it reflects the process of communication and composition that occurred prior to the release of the document.

I have already noted that representatives of the Church in Límón had a tradition of meeting to discuss social concerns and that they had access to the results of the in-depth CECODERS survey of problems in the area. These consultations and the study confirmed the impression that the living and working conditions on the banana plantations in particular needed to be addressed. Hence in October of 1989, a three-day workshop was held in which the bishop, priests, and some lay representatives from the region examined the conditions on banana plantations and the nature of sindicalismo and solidarismo in the region. Although originally the delegates wrote only a brief pronouncement on the proposed government plan to convert 21,000 additional hectares of land to banana cultivation, at the behest of Mons. Coto this document was revised, expanded, and released as a pastoral letter. Though by all accounts the bishop was instrumental in the formulation and publication of the letter, as the signature indicates the final document was a product of genuine collaboration.

If the authorship of this pastoral letter was unusual, then its contents were extraordinary, at least in the context of the contemporary Costa Rican Church. As I discussed in Chapter Five, many recent Costa Rican pastoral letters have been rather moderate documents, full of indirect criticisms and vague suggestions. In the Límón letter, by contrast, the bishop and priests express outright accusation and condemnation. Basically, the letter denounces the uncontrolled expansion of the banana industry in the country and links it to a variety of socio-economic problems. It argues, for example, that


23 Ramírez, interview by author and Solera.

24 Ramírez, interview by author and Solera; and Efrén Romero, "¿Cómo nació la carta pastoral?" in Foro Iglesia-sindicalismo, ed. FES, Proyecto CAAS, ASPEROLA, and CPT (n.p., 1990), 28-29.
the conditions of banana production compromise human dignity and foment alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, and violence. The family structure and children's education are also said to suffer as a result of the continual migration and employment instability in the industry. On the macro level, Coto and the priests attack the dependency on transnational corporations and monocropping, the concentration of land ownership in the hands of a few companies, and the widespread environmental degradation that characterize the Limón region.

Specifically in reference to labour issues, the letter discusses the ESJ23 and broaches the controversial topic of the conflict between the union movement and the solidarity movement in Limón. As I explained in the previous chapter, the ESJ23, which receives a great deal of its funding from the banana companies, largely devotes itself to spreading solidarismo throughout Limón. School representatives have been accused of helping banana company officials root out and fire union sympathizers on plantations, and there is also evidence that workers are pressured to join solidarity associations in order to secure their jobs. Commenting on this situation, the pastoral letter criticizes the imposition of one model of labour organization to the exclusion of others and denounces the resulting violation of workers' rights such as the right of freedom of association and the right to strike. Though solidarismo is not mentioned by name at this point, an anti-solidarismo bias is suggested by further references to unjustified firings and to the denial of employment to workers affiliated with the "opposing" form of labour organization. There is also a plea in the letter for adequate legal protection for the union movement. In the final section of the document, the work of the Social School is declared to have no relation to the Church in Limón or to its pastoral goals, and the danger of identifying CST

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25 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 8.  
26 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 11.  
27 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 14.  
28 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 18.  
29 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 31.  
30 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, nos. 22-24.  
31 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 23.  
32 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 25.
with the *solidarismo* movement is underscored. With these statements the Church in Limón places itself in direct opposition to the banana industry and its influential religious supporters based in the Archdiocese.

Also in the letter's conclusion, the bishop and priests outline the pastoral tasks for the Church in Limón. They include the concentration on the Church's social pastorate in the region and the promotion of CEBs as both a means of deepening the people's faith and their commitment to societal transformation. This focus on CEBs is consistent with Limón Church's decision to produce a popular version of the pastoral letter, rather bluntly entitled "La expansión bananera incontrolada," or, in English, "The Uncontrolled Expansion of the Banana Industry." The significance of this popular pastoral document deserves comment.

For one thing, though in Costa Rica important Church documents are often published in the daily national newspapers or the weekly Catholic periodical (*Eco Católico*), they are generally reproduced verbatim and hence are not entirely comprehensible to significant segments of the population. The popular version of this letter, with its simplified language and humorous graphics, was more widely accessible. In fact, the popular version was produced with the intent that it be used as a basis for reflection in the parishes and CEBs of the region. This ensured that the letter did not remain a wordy text full of references to unfamiliar theological concepts and papal encyclicals, but instead was transformed into a tool for the *concientización* of the popular classes. The production of a popular version of the document, along with the collaboration that went into writing the letter, reflects a certain degree of democratization in the Church.

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33 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, *Carta pastoral*, nos. 37 and 42.
34 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, *Carta pastoral*, nos. 35, 36, 38 and 41.
in Limón: not only the bishop issues the letter, not only the literate elite are privy to its contents.

In addition, the popular version of the *carta* displays the Limón Church's commitment to an inductive liberationist methodology (one already implied by the formal version of the pastoral letter) most clearly. The popular text first divides the original document into eight central themes for study and discussion, among them "Human Dignity," "Current Economic Policies," "The Sphere of Labour," and "Environmental Health and Ecological Imbalance." Each theme is then subdivided into the three categories of "see," "judge," and "act": seeing involves stating (and illustrating with cartoons) the conditions and problems in the region; judging takes the form of brief quotations from CST (both papal and CELAM documents); and the acting section contains themes for further discussion, along with suggestions for demanding legislative changes and for community and pastoral activities. Through this format, the popular version of the letter contributes to the delegitimation of the socio-economic situation in Limón, and does so for the benefit of those most affected by that situation — the poor workers and their families. Importantly, moreover, the popular letter provides those with few economic resources and little concrete power immediate and concrete suggestions for actions that can contribute to the overcoming of their unjust socio-economic position. Taken together, then, the official *carta pastoral* and its popular incarnation represent the liberationist wing of official Costa Rican Catholic Social Teaching.

**Into the 1990s: The Aftermath of the Pastoral Letter**

In the months following its Christmas release, the *carta pastoral* generated widespread media attention and controversy. A flurry of articles and editorials related to the letter were published in early 1990 and they revealed quickly polarizing opinions. Representatives of banana companies, the government, the solidarity movement, and much of the mainstream press attacked the document variously as inflammatory, inaccurate,
counterproductive, and tainted with extremist or "communist" views. On the other hand, the editor of *Eco Católico* and certain contributors to *La Nación* backed Bishop Coto and the Limón clergy. Arnoldo Mora, for example, remarked that the letter was a "great Christmas gift" for Costa Ricans.

Opinions were also divided in the official Costa Rican Church. Bishop Coto and his priests stood firmly behind their document, releasing in January of 1990 their own press declaration that sought to clarify the intent and content of the letter in response to what they labeled the "distortions" of the truth that were "venomously launched" against them by those with "vested interests." A group of priests from the neighboring Diocese of Tilarán took out a half-page, signed advertisement in the Catholic press to declare their support for the Limón Church. However, these priests were rumoured to have done so against the wishes of their own bishop. In fact, the official Costa Rican Church showed no other display of support for the Limón bishop and clergy. Not even a telegram was sent to the bishop from his colleagues in the episcopate. As one priest from Limón remarked (with a certain bitterness), given the wave of criticism and pressures that the Limón Church had to tolerate, some minimal show of solidarity could have been offered. Thus while the Limón Church was united throughout this process, they were also quite isolated from the rest of the Costa Rican Church.

Overall, the effects of this very public debate should not be underestimated. The controversy surrounding the document had the effect of arousing interest outside the

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40 Ramírez, interview by author and Solera.
bounds of Limón and the original audience of the letter. It thus played an important role in raising the consciousness of Costa Ricans who otherwise may have remained fairly isolated from, or indifferent to, the situation on the coast. The letter and the discussion it generated served to break the silence about the conditions in the banana industry. As such, they were crucial steps in dispelling some of the myths Costa Ricans have long been taught about the relative prosperity and stability of their country. Thus, in sharp contrast to Archbishop Arrieta’s role in supporting the neo-liberal program of the government during this period, the bishop and clergy in Limón, with their demythologizing letter, helped to undermine the key ideological propositions of this same program.

Moreover, the release of the letter and the ensuing debate took place in the weeks leading up to the 1990 presidential elections in Costa Rica. This forced the incumbent leader (Arias) and the eventual election winner (Calderón) to address the problems in Limón when in the past such issues were largely absent from the political agenda. President Calderón’s Minister of Labour, Erick Thompson, took a special interest in the issues raised by the carta pastoral. In fact, Thompson organized meetings between representatives from the Limón Church and the banana companies to discuss the poor conditions on the plantations. Unfortunately, this dialogue ended when Thompson resigned from his post (some believe he was forced to do so because of pressures from some of the banana companies). Nonetheless, as a result of these meetings -- and, no doubt, the damaging allegations about the banana companies made public during and after the letter’s release -- some of the companies began to reform their behaviour. In particular, certain efforts were made to build better housing for workers and their families, housing that was located outside of the plantations themselves and that included potable water and sanitation services. Some companies also tried to limit the amount of environmental contamination resulting from the cultivation and processing of bananas. Though the conditions in the banana industry are still far from acceptable, at least the letter instigated some improvements.

41 Ramírez, interview by author and Solera.
42 Coto, interview by author.
43 Coto, interview by author; and Ramírez, interview by author and Solera.
Also important were the closer relations that the pastoral letter fomented between the Limón Church and certain secular social movements in the region. As I noted in Chapter Seven, there had been a fair amount of activism and popular mobilization in Limón in the decade preceding the release of the letter. However, during this period the unions and popular organizations generally did not have much of a relationship with the Church in the area, in large part because they perceived it to be "dormida, bendita, sometida" ("asleep, blessed, and submissive"). The pastoral letter served to dispel this perception and draw these parties closer together. We can discuss these new relationships and collaboration in terms of two particular phenomena.

The Limón Church and the Labour Movement

The change in the relationship between the Limón Church and the union movement was noticeable almost immediately. For example, approximately one month following the letter's release, when the public controversy over the document was already in full swing, the CPT (or Permanent Workers' Council, a body composed of the largest union centrals in the country) issued a public statement defending Mons. Coto and the priests. The Council's statement applauded the Limón Church and affirmed that its own members shared the letter's perspective, while it linked those who attacked the letter to economic interests and practices incompatible with the social teaching of the Church.

In July of 1990, around the time the popular version of the pastoral letter was released, the CPT, ASEPROLA, and the Apostolic Vicariate of Limón held a workshop for 50 union representatives and 20 members of the Limón Church. This "Church/Unionism Forum," as it was called, was an opportunity to discuss the challenges to unionism in the banana sector, the solidarismo phenomenon, and the Church's position on unionism. Though primarily an arena for reflection and the exchange of information,

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44 G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.
45 Consejo Permanente de los Trabajadores, "A los trabajadores costarricenses, a los trabajadores bananeros, al clero y obispo de Limón, a la Iglesia católica y ciudadanía en general," (Eduardo Ramírez, photocopy).
46 See FES, Proyecto CAAS, ASPEROLA, and CPT, ed. Foro Iglesia-sindicalismo.
practically speaking the workshop served to promote more contact between Church and labour representatives and to reinforce the goodwill between the two groups that had been generated by the *carta*.

In the time since then, the Limón Church has provided a variety of services and resources to the labour movement. Many parishes, for instance, have offered their salons as a safe space for union meetings and organizing, a necessity in a region where the persecution of unions is common.⁴⁷ In addition, members of the Vicariate's Pastoral Social have coordinated educational workshops for union members on CST and have attended union meetings as guest speakers. Together, union and Church members work on community service projects and continue to meet to discuss social problems in Limón. In such activities, the relationship between the Church and the banana unions has been especially strong.⁴⁸ As a result, banana unions in Limón now consider the Church to be "a guiding friend who always has an open door for the banana worker."⁴⁹

Perhaps most significant, however, has been the role the Church has played during labour conflicts in Limón. Formally, the bishop is routinely called upon to be a mediator during strikes. In these instances the bishop's main task is to facilitate communication between the workers and the employer, or the workers and the government, whatever the case may be.⁵⁰ As mediator, the bishop must remain as impartial as possible and work to seek an expedient end to the strike. In other cases, however, the Church will do more to accompany the unions in particular. According to Bishop Coto, the Church will officially support union strike action and demands if the unions have exhausted all channels of dialogue in search of solutions to their problems and if they agree to renounce all violence.

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⁴⁷ Gilberth Bermúdez, interview by author.
⁴⁸ G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.
⁵⁰ Coto, interview by author; and Ulloa, interview by author and Solera.
Only if such conditions are met, stresses Coto, will the Church step in and support the union in its struggle.\(^5\)

On an more informal level, and at lower levels of the Church, assistance to the unions in times of conflict appears to be less conditional. Though such support has not always been publicly declared, Padre Vargas reports, "we have always been in favour of the strike. Because the strikes here have been in defense of the workers, we have supported the struggles."\(^5\) Members of the Pastoral Social, for example, have provided food and information for striking workers, and have lent strikers office support (such as telephones) and vehicles. According to Vargas, "we have a very clear position on this. Here [in Limón], we first of all support the worker."\(^5\)

**Foro Emaús**

Around the same time as the Church/Unionism Forum and the release of the popular *carta pastoral*, Church agents in Limón began to organize and participate in other workshops to discuss the themes of the pastoral document and the controversy surrounding it. These workshops continued on an occasional basis over the next two years and drew a variety of participants, at times including journalists, environmentalists, academics, development activists, representatives from other Christian churches, representatives from indigenous and campesino movements, and once again, unionists.

In June 1992, the various organizations involved in such meetings held a large forum in Casa Emaús (a pastoral centre in Puerto Limón) to discuss "The Uncontrolled Banana Expansion in Limón and Sarapiquí." There they made the official decision to form a coalition to work together to protect human rights and the ecology in the Atlantic banana region. Adopting the name Foro Emaús, the coalition decided to turn from intra-group dialogue to externally directed activism. Their first formal activity was the elaboration of the public declaration, "Stop the Uncontrolled Banana Expansion," which was published in half-page advertisements in Costa Rican national newspapers. A few months later, in

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\(^5\) Coto, interview by author.

\(^5\) G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.

\(^5\) G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.
September of 1992, Foro Emaus coordinated a well-attended "March for Life and Human Rights" in the capital city of San José to protest the destructive nature of the banana industry. The following month another march was coordinated in San José, this time to demonstrate solidarity with the indigenous peoples in Limón whose land and way of life had been invaded by the banana companies. The Foro also began to petition the government with various proposals for revisions to the laws related to the industry. In addition, the coalition constructed an international network of support among European development and environmental organizations; through this network the Foro began to raise awareness and foment activism in the countries that import Costa Rican bananas. As of 1997, Foro Emaus had 35 member organizations, including the Church in Limón and several public and private sector union organizations. It had also built up an impressive national and international profile. Significantly, the Foro's publications still refer back to the 1989 pastoral letter and the group's mission remains "to halt the uncontrolled expansion of the banana industry" in Costa Rica.

With this in mind, we can posit that in many respects, the 1989 Limón letter was to the Costa Rican Church as the 1968 Medellín documents were to the Latin American Church as a whole. These controversial texts all expressed some of the emerging political currents within the Church under their jurisdictions, and they all instigated and sanctioned further activism by religious agents in the political arena. And -- as is still the case with the Medellín documents in Latin America today -- the Limón letter can serve as the liberationist touchstone against which to compare other Church statements and social activism in Costa Rica.

A New Bishop and a New Diocese

Today, more than a decade has passed since the release of the carta pastoral. Much has changed in the Limón Church. Mons. Coto, for example, is no longer acting as

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54 A history of Foro Emaus can be found in Hermosilla and Palencia, Creación de una instancia coordinadora; and Roy H. May, "La tierra no cae del cielo, hay que luchar por ella": La pastoral de la tierra en la Diócesis de Limón (n.p.: ASEPROLA and
Bishop of Limón. In his place, Padre José Francisco Ulloa Rojas was appointed Bishop in January 1995. Further, around the same time, the Vatican declared the Apostolic Vicariate of Limón to be a Diocese in its own right. This shift meant that the Limón Church gained a greater degree of independence from Rome, but it also meant that it was no longer eligible to receive the financial assistance that the Holy See provides for all vicariates. As a diocese, the Limón Church has had to rely on contributions from its faithful to finance its operation. Given these new factors, then, it is legitimate to examine what has happened in recent years to the progressive paths originally pursued by the bishop and pastoral agents of the Limón Church. How have the impulses catalyzed by the 1989 carta pastoral fared over the years?

Overall, Ulloa and other Church members have maintained and broadened the social and pastoral commitments developed during the 1980s and early 1990s in Limón. Immediately after his appointment, when he received a congratulatory phone call from José Maria Figueres, Mons. Ulloa petitioned the Costa Rican president for more government attention and resources to be devoted to remedying social problems in Limón. Further, Ulloa had personal meetings with Limón's representatives in the Legislative Assembly and with key players in the region's public institutions, with a view to achieving their collaboration in the social and economic development of Limón. Around the same time, the new bishop also met with union representatives from the banana industry and the port sector in Limón. These were all clear attempts by Ulloa to indicate that he intended to continue and build upon Mons. Coto's social involvement and advocacy. Importantly,

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55 Mons. Coto was named Secretary of CECOR in May 1995 and has since retired from that post as well.

56 Ronald Matute and Marvin Barquero, "Sacerdotes de Limón prevén un gran reto," La Nación, 1 January 1995, 16A.

Ulloa reported that during the union encounters in particular his overtures were received with "much goodwill" and openness.\textsuperscript{58}

In the period that followed, Ulloa proved himself a strong supporter of workers and social activists in Limón. In early 1996, for example, he came to the defence of the region's distressed dockworkers. Hundreds of labourers in the stevedore industry had been illegally dismissed and were unable to find alternate employment; many others were receiving pay below the legal minimum wage and below the level needed for subsistence. On top of this, irregularities had been reported in the managing of workers' funds by leaders of a key union in the industry, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Portuarios y Ferrocarrileros de Limón. In response, Ulloa and the other members of the ecumenical Ministerial Association of Limón (all of the non-Catholic churches were members of the "historical" Protestant churches), issued a communiqué directed to President Figueres and made public in the media. This letter, to which Bishop Ulloa was the first signatory, denounced the injustice of the situation, asked that the government investigate the accusations against the stevedore companies and the union, and called for the government to create more job opportunities for the unemployed dockworkers.\textsuperscript{59} It is important to note that though in this case Ulloa clearly acted on behalf of the dockworkers, he also did not shy away from criticizing unions when it appeared necessary.

Later that same year, nonetheless, Mons. Ulloa and his pastoral agents did unequivocally support the unions that were involved in the Limón en Lucha movement. In fact, Ulloa refused to play the role of mediator between the government and the protesters, choosing instead to accompany Limón en Lucha's members and act as the chief negotiator with the government on their behalf. As Padre Gerardo Vargas (who himself was central to the negotiation process) explained it, it was impossible for members of the Limón Church to act as mediators in the case of Limón en Lucha because this would have

\textsuperscript{58} Fernández, "Primeros pasos," 14.

\textsuperscript{59} Asociación Ministerial de Limón, "Comunicado pastoral a Señor Ingeniero José María Figueres Olson [19 February 1996]," (Archives of the Department of Social Communications, CECOR, photocopy); Ulloa, interview by author and Solera; and Gilberto Valencia Navarro, "Iglesias censuran trato a muelleros," \textit{El Heraldo}, 20 February 1996, 4.
imposed upon them a neutrality that did not exist; from the beginning of the struggle they had maintained a clear position in support of those who were protesting against the government and its policies. Months after an agreement between the parties was reached and the protests died down, the Church continued to pressure the government to fulfil the promises made during the negotiations. Much as Mons. Coto and the Limón clergy had done with their 1989 pastoral letter, in the case of Limón en Lucha Mons. Ulloa and the Limón Church were making a strong option for the poor.

This option was also evident in the pastoral lines pursued by Ulloa from the beginning of his episcopate. Mons. Ulloa began his appointment with a vow to continue the pastoral programs of his predecessor and, in fact, the coordinator of the diocese's Pastoral Social confirms that in terms of material and moral support, the bishop has fulfilled this promise. Also important in this respect is the Limón Church's second Plan Diocesano de Pastoral, intended to cover the years 1996-2000. Though the first Plan was only meant to be in effect up until 1993, several factors caused a delay in the writing and release of the second Plan. The disruption caused by the Church's transition from vicariate to diocese and by the change in bishops was partly responsible for the late publication of the document. In addition, however, Church agents deemed it necessary to make revisions to the Plan based on the changed historical conditions in Limón, and on the reflections and recommendations that arose out of consultations with the faithful from all levels of the Church. This meant that, once more, a comprehensive socio-religious survey of Limón was undertaken by CECODERS, and that the laity, religious, and clergy had a chance to participate in the revision of the Plan during a general pastoral assembly. The Plan and the Church's pastoral priorities were then updated accordingly.

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60 G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.
61 Ulloa, interview by author and Solera.
62 "Líneas pastorales que aplicará Mons. Ulloa Rojas," Eco Católico, 19 February 1995, 6; and G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.
63 Diócesis de Limón, Plan diocesano.
64 Ulloa, interview by author and Solera; and G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.
The six main areas of pastoral concern in the revised document include a mix of traditional and newer targets of Church activity in Latin America: women, social pastorate, the family, CEBs, youth, and education and culture. Also importantly, the Plan indicates that in the *pastoral social*, as well as in several of the other target areas, promoting a change of both people (or "mentalities") and structures is a key objective of the Church’s work. Finally, it is clear from the specific policies and strategies advocated that it is the laity -- a trained, conscientized, and organized laity -- who are intended to be the central agents in such pastoral efforts.65

This emphasis on a well-prepared and active laity can be seen in numerous programs and activities in the diocese. The CEBs, for example, have come to occupy an even greater role in the Limón Church than their inclusion as only one of six pastoral priorities would suggest. In fact, the coordinator of the Pastoral Social indicates that the Church is working toward grounding all of the work in the diocese in the CEBs;66 the bishop affirms that these small communities constitute the new way of being Church in Limón.67 Along these lines, the Pastoral Social hosts approximately fifty workshops per year for CEB animators and other lay people. These seminars aim to deepen lay knowledge of CST and other Church doctrine and to involve laypeople concretely in the execution of the diocese’s pastoral plan. In addition, the Church organizes annual assemblies at the parish and vicarial (or zonal) levels that, on top of the yearly diocese-wide meeting, are meant to involve lay people in the process of evaluating past work and constructing future pastoral programming.68 These assemblies are an important way to incorporate the laity into the decision-making process in the Limón Church. Hence, not only has Mons. Ulloa vowed to consult with the clergy and committed laypeople before making any changes to the pastoral orientations of the Church,69 but these meetings at all levels of the diocese have helped to turn his rhetoric into reality.

65 Diócesis de Limón, *Plan diocesano*, 140-75.
66 G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera; and Gerardo Vargas Varela, "Limón con segundo plan pastoral," *Eco Católico*, 15 December 1996, 19.
67 Ulloa, interview by author and Solera.
68 G. Vargas, "Limón con segundo plan pastoral," 19.
As a result of all these efforts (which, by and large, are continuations of the programs, priorities, and structures developed during the episcopacy of Mons. Coto), the Limón Church has evolved into a relatively democratic institution with a fairly horizontal structure. By the estimation of the priests who have been involved in the Pastoral Social, the participation of laypeople in pastoral activities and commissions has been "simply incredible" and "phenomenal," with it being considered normal that in certain cases a layperson will even assume the coordination of a pastoral program. While the priests of course remain important religious figures in their respective parishes, in terms of the pastoral social of the Limón Church, the laity are responsible for the bulk of the activities, with the priests playing a lesser supporting role. Overall, this grassroots orientation of the Limón Church corresponds with one of the hallmarks of the liberationist tradition: instead of the clergy monopolizing religious production and decision-making, such responsibilities are shared out among the People of God.

A Developing Pastoral Obrera in Limón

The programs, activities, and attitudes described above clearly reveal the commitment of Limón Church agents to justice in society and to democracy within the Church. Moreover, the role played by Church representatives in the face of the gross exploitation of workers on the plantations and during actual labour conflicts constitutes a pastoral obrera in practical terms. Yet, we still have not broached the subject of an explicit or formal pastoral obrera in Limón, one that is on par, for example, with that espoused in the ESJ23's documents and education materials. In fact, it has only been during the past few years that the Limón Church has made an effort to develop certain systematic guidelines for a pastoral obrera. As we shall see, however, even in its rudimentary stages the Limonense pastoral obrera has exhibited a character that is distinct in Costa Rica and that is consistent with the liberationist tendencies in the Church that I described above.

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70 Ramírez, interview by Solera; and G. Vargas, interview by author and Solera.
As I already noted, as early as the first pastoral plan, Limón Church agents acknowledged the need "to organize a pastoral obrera capable of accompanying workers in their needs and conflicts and able to offer them Christian education."\(^{71}\) Few formal efforts were subsequently devoted to fulfilling this need, however, and the second plan confessed that the Church had not developed a specific pastorate in this area.\(^ {72}\) Once again, the creation of a pastoral obrera was proposed. Specifically, it was outlined to be one that studies the condition of workers in Limón, supports and promotes the organization of workers in defence of their rights, educates people about workers' right to unionize and right to collective bargaining, provides for relevant training for workers in CST, and critically analyzes the theory and practice of the solidarity movement.\(^ {73}\)

This time the Church followed through with its proposal, and concrete steps were taken to develop and promote the new pastorate. The first phase in this process was coordinated by the Pastoral Social in Limón in conjunction with representatives from ASEPROLA. Together they commissioned Dr. Jorge Arturo Chaves, a priest and economist with the National University, to write a document that presented, in a straightforward manner, the fundamental principles of CST as they relate to the world of work. The book-length result, entitled Magisterio social y pastoral de los trabajadores ("The Social Magisterium and the Workers' Pastorate"), was published in 1996.

Chaves' book is meant to be an educational resource for pastoral animators and for leaders of popular organizations (particularly union leaders) in Limón. As such, it is written at an intermediate level of sophistication.\(^ {74}\) Hence, though it aims to popularize the principles of CST, it is not a popular educational material in itself. In this way it is different from, for example, the ESJ23's *The Social Doctrine of the Church* which, as we saw in Chapter Eight, was a very basic workbook. Nonetheless, it can still be classified in the same category as the Social School's textbook because both books claim to treat CST in a fundamentally expository, as opposed to interpretative, manner. However, while the

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71 Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, *Plan pastoral*, 85, see also 101-102.  
72 Diócesis de Limón, *Plan diocesano*, 133.  
ESJ23's presentation of CST displays many of the hallmark characteristics of Catholic conservatism, *Magisterial social y pastoral de los trabajadores* contains several elements consistent with the liberationist model.

Nowhere does this become clearer than in an examination of Chaves' methodology. As was the case with the *carta pastoral*, Chaves' document exemplifies the see-judge-act methodology. Hence Chaves first analyzes the socio-economic situation in Limón and the general condition of labour in contemporary society. He then elaborates upon relevant themes in CST. Finally, he discusses the directions for action that the reading of the historical situation and the papal and episcopal documents suggest. In all of this, Chaves' vision is sophisticated. He understands, for example, that today an analysis of labour struggles must go beyond the local market and employment and salary issues to discuss the broader trends and neo-liberal policies dominating the globalized economy. Chaves' directions for action are transparently left of center. He calls for social and economic transformation and underscores the importance of unions in the process of social change. Still, most revealing are Chaves' comments on the judgement phase of the process, for it is here that he explicitly broaches the topic of how to read CST.

In fact, for Chaves, the point is not to read CST, but to re-read it, again and again. For him, changed historical circumstances -- be they new technologies or relationships in the labour market, new political norms in the national or international community, or the emergence of new social movements in a society -- necessitate a re-reading of the teachings of the magisterium. Chaves argues that the papal and episcopal texts of the past century are not to be repeated literally, but are rather to be re-interpreted according to the demands of the changed economic and social situation.

It is also important to note that Chaves does not view this process as a task of the Church hierarchy or clergy alone. Instead, for him it is the members of the local communities themselves -- the laity -- who have a prime responsibility in this regard. CST must be read from perspective of those at the base of the Church, those who themselves

77 Chaves, *Magisterio social*, 6-7. 25, and 118.
experience oppression and who struggle to overcome it. In the end, the goal of this re-reading of CST is not to become more "cultured" nor to augment one's knowledge, writes Chaves, but rather to equip oneself to transform reality. Thus Chaves sees the Limón Church's pastoral obrera developing as Church agents and the poor work together to analyze their social and economic reality, to re-read CST, and to struggle to alter reality and overcome injustice in society.

Consistent with such convictions, representatives of the Limón Church have developed a CST school for laity. Church agents have started to meet with a group of about 20 laypeople (including some parish and union leaders) in the town of Siquirres on the fourth Sunday of every month. These meetings treat CST in a more systematic and long-term manner than the workshops and seminars on the topic already held at various levels in the diocese. Inspired by the material and methodology outlined in Chaves' book, moreover, this study of CST is not meant to be mere book learning. Instead, participants approach CST in the context of their own experiences and discussions of the social, economic, and ecological problems prevalent in Limón. They also learn about their human and legal rights, with the idea being that through such discussions and collaboration concrete strategies for social change can be developed. Eventually, the plan is to reach more people directly through the monthly Sunday sessions and indirectly through such things popular education kits to be used by CEB animators, radio programs for distance education, and a bulletin that expresses the experiences and opinions of workers in the region. For now, however, although this CST school is still in its infancy, the philosophy behind it is well defined. As one Church agent expressed it, "[Catholic Social] doctrine does not make any sense if it is not meant to transform. And injustice or, better yet, the search for justice, is the guide ["norte"] of this doctrine." The approach to CST employed by this school is hence consistent with the methodology exemplified in Chaves' book and that embedded in the carta pastoral described above.

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80 Hemosiila, interview by author.
To adapt an important insight of Alfredo Fierro, we can say that the pastoral obrera that emerges from these processes in the Limón Church is historically and politically mediated. It can be described so because it "incorporates social and political realities into its discourse as judgmental elements for interpreting [CST] and also as realities that must be evaluated in terms of [CST]."83 Moreover, it is mediated because it also involves "a practical movement that will alter the existing social situation."84 In the end, this pastoral is liberationist since it is intimately linked to the experiences and struggles of the poor in Limón (as opposed to being deduced from a predetermined and inflexible doctrine that is invested with truth and authority apart from the current historical situation). In other words, this emerging pastoral and the process employed to develop it are further ways in which the Limón Church opts for the poor.

Catholic Social Teaching and the Limón Church

Given the Limón Church's practical programs and stances on behalf of workers, and given its leaders' liberationist approach to CST, one might expect the Church's documents themselves to draw heavily or even exclusively from those texts that represent the liberationist stream in CST. In other words, one would expect the references to the CELAM documents from the Medellín conference to be relatively common, while citations and quotations from Pope John Paul II's conservative encyclicals, such as Sollicitudo Rei Socialis or Centesimus Annus, to be minimal or even absent from the Limón texts. This would indicate a certain consistency between the actions urged or taken and the documents used to inspire or justify them.

Yet the matter is not so simple. In fact, Limón Church documents draw passages from the whole of the CST tradition. The infamous carta pastoral (both in its original form and in the popular version derived from it), for example, cites a variety of post-conciliar sources, including the Puebla conference final document, and the Pope's

82 Hermosilla, interview by author.
83 Fierro, The Militant Gospel, 105-106. Though in the original quotation Fierro is referring to interpreting and evaluating in terms of the "gospel," the concept of historical or political mediation can just as well refer to CST.
Laborem Exercens and Sollicitudo Rei Socialis. Chaves' book goes even further, as he employs most of the major CST documents ranging from pre-conciliar texts, such as Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo Anno, through to the papal and conciliar documents of the 1960s and 1970s, and down to the most important of Pope John Paul II's encyclicals (the two texts quoted by the carta pastoral, along with the more recent Centesimus Annus). Thus, if one follows the argument on CST I laid out in Chapter Four, it appears that the Limón Church is employing conservative CST documents to legitimate practical positions that are liberationist in nature.

What is going on here? Some indication can be taken from the particular quotations selected by the authors of the Limón Church documents. The Church members behind the carta pastoral, for instance, have indeed chosen several passages from magisterial documents that bespeak a liberationist stance. Yet they have often done so regardless of the conservative context of the original quotation. Hence we see an insistence on the priority of labour over capital (a liberationist concept) as outlined in Laborem Exercens, but without a mention of the closely related (but conservative) notion from the same encyclical that work unites all people, labour and capital.\(^85\) Or, we can note that when listing the rights of workers, the carta pastoral does cite papal support for the right to free association and the right to strike.\(^86\) However, unlike the source documents for these passages, the Limón document does not emphasize the supposed dangers of union activism and strikes (e.g., that they "stray" into the realm of politics or may burden socio-economic life). While the treatment of such issues by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II tends to dwell on what would make unions and strikes wrong (as opposed to what makes them a workers' right), the carta pastoral goes in the opposite direction and urges legislative changes and the creation of a new Labour Code that more adequately protect the interests of workers.\(^87\) Instead of just employing quotations from the patently liberationist documents of the CST

\(^{84}\) Fierro, The Militant Gospel, 74.
\(^{85}\) Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 15.
\(^{86}\) Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 24; and Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Una versión popular, no. 5.
\(^{87}\) Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, no. 25; and Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Una versión popular, no. 5.
tradition, the authors of the *carta pastoral* have surveyed even the conservative papal encyclicals of the tradition and then have extracted liberationist passages from them. In short, it could be said that Limón Church members are using CST out of context.

To be more precise, I would argue that, in the *carta pastoral*, CST is used out of context only insofar as this context is defined by the Vatican or by the Pope. However, the social teaching employed in the pastoral letter is consistent within the immediate context of the Limón Church. Given the conflictive socio-economic reality of Limón and the alliance of the official Church there with workers, it is not surprising that the presentation of CST in the *carta pastoral* resonates with a liberationist message. As we have seen above, Church members in Limón have witnessed and even participated themselves in the struggles of the poor on the banana plantations. Such experiences are reflected in their selective appropriation of papal teachings. The religious message presented by the *carta pastoral* is thus not a simple translation or objective application of the magisterium's teachings to the situation in Limón, nor can it be expected to be. Rather, it is a both a product of and a weapon in the Limón Church's efforts to opt for the poor.

A further example of the strategic employment of papal teachings in the *carta pastoral* relates not only to political-economic conditions and positions, but also to institutional considerations. Toward the end of the letter, the authors refer to a passage in the Puebla document that affirms that it is the bishop who has the responsibility to watch over his flock, to safeguard the unity of the Church, and to guide all those who teach within the Church in order to prevent the formation of parallel ministries/magisteria. On the surface, this passage does not appear to be liberationist at all, but instead evokes images of traditional Catholic conservatism: a top-down power structure, doctrinal rigidity, and an ecclesiological model in which unity and universality are privileged over theological creativity and committed solidarity with the poor. Certainly, such a reading makes sense in light of the CELAM and Vatican campaign to discredit liberation theology.

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88 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, *Carta pastoral*, no. 39; and Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, *Una versión popular*, no. 8. Note that the *carta pastoral* incorrectly quotes the CELAM text by using the term
and to defuse the counterhegemonic threat presented by the CEB movement. But the reality of the Limón Church, and the way in which these Puebla teachings are used in the *carta pastoral*, suggest a different interpretation.

In the Limón document, the comments on the role of the bishop and Church unity occur in the midst of a broader discussion of the ESJ23, its interference in the training of laypeople, and its false identification of CST with the solidarity movement. Indeed, we have already seen that the ESJ23 propagates a conservative version of CST, and that the School's presence in the Diocese of Limón constitutes a threat to the position of the official Church there. Hence, whereas the original Puebla references to unity and to the danger of parallel magisteria refer to liberation theology and the CEBs, the Limón Church uses the same concepts as a means to bolster its defences in the competition against its own ideological and ecclesiastical rival, the ESJ23. The fact that the *carta* also stresses that the ESJ23's work does not have an ecclesial character, and that it bears no relation to the pastoral plan of the Limón Church, reinforces the notion that opting for the poor in the Limón Church implies a unity that excludes the ESJ23. In this way Limón Church members are not echoing the meaning of the original CELAM texts, but rather are reading these texts in accordance with their own particular social and ecclesiastical needs. Taking the historical and institutional context of the Limón Diocese into consideration thus explains the liberationist use of otherwise conservative Catholic teachings by Limón Church members.

It should be noted at this point that Chaves himself would likely disagree with parts of this argument. In *Magisterio social y pastoral de los trabajadores* it is clear that Chaves does not share my assessment of the CST tradition as a largely conservative one, but instead views it as one that has consistently promoted the interests and the liberation of the poor (hence rendering inapplicable my points about the conflict between a conservative document and its liberationist appropriation). His presentation of CST, for example,
emphasizes the magisterium's central preoccupation with conflict and socio-economic inequality in society, its enduring see-judge-act methodology, its repeated critique of capitalism, its origin in the option for the poor, and its overall orientation toward social and economic transformation. These characteristics, of course, are hallmarks of what I have been labelling the liberationist expression of CST. Yet, as I have detailed, such characteristics only predominate in a minority of CST texts, and certainly do not define the tradition as a whole from Rerum Novarum to Laborem Exercens, as Chaves suggests. However, Chaves' argument does appear plausible because in his book he focuses on the above listed liberationist indicators in papal and episcopal texts, while neglecting the conservative counterparts to such principles that are in fact more dominant in the tradition (e.g. the focus on unity and consensus in society, a deductive methodology that accords privilege to Truth and authority, a critique of the personal sins and attitudinal weaknesses of capitalists, an emphasis on spiritual components of liberation, etc.).

Interestingly, Chaves claims he is not providing an interpretative reading of CST, but rather that he is only presenting the fundamentals of the tradition. In doing so, moreover, he sees himself as "helping to rescue the pontifical and episcopal documents from the hands of the defenders of the status quo, who have taken advantage of generalized ignorance to strengthen, with a fragmentary use of Social Doctrine, their conservative positions." What Chaves fails to acknowledge, however, is that what he purports to be his "correct reading" of magisterial documents is in itself a selective presentation of principles that reflects his own political sympathies and practical alliances. He is using the papal and episcopal documents to bolster his own liberationist positions.

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89 Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Carta pastoral, nos. 37 and 42; and Obispo y presbíteros del Vicariato Apostólico de Limón, Una versión popular, no. 8.
90 Chaves, Magisterio social, 29, and 40-42.
91 Chaves, Magisterio social, 2 and 32.
92 Chaves, Magisterio social, 29-30.
93 Chaves, Magisterio social, 30.
94 Chaves, Magisterio social, 58 and 99.
95 Chaves, Magisterio social, 7-8.
96 Chaves, Magisterio social, 2.
Chaves may be an academic expert on CST, but it cannot be expected that he will perform as a strictly unbiased one. Every exposition is in reality a form of interpretation, and in Chaves' case his interpretation is necessarily related to his position as a priest conscious of and sympathetic to the struggles of the popular classes in Limón. Chaves' interpretation is also related to his collaboration with the Pastoral Social of the official Church in Limón (in fact, Chaves was a staunch supporter of the Limón Church during the whole controversy over the *carta pastoral*\(^{97}\) and with the pro-worker ASEPROLA, the two organizations who sponsored the production of Chaves' manual. The liberationist reading of CST that Chaves provides is hence not strictly a product of the original texts themselves.

**Conclusion**

The characteristics of the official Limón Church and its emerging *pastoral obrera* fit easily into the template provided by the liberationist stream of the CST tradition. The Church's portrayals of society and prescriptions for social change take into account the structural and not only the spiritual. Pastoral planners derive priorities not directly from papal or episcopal decree, but rather from the demands of social reality (as documented by the tools of social science and as experienced by those at the base of the Church themselves). Pastoral agents emphasize and facilitate informed lay participation both within CEBs and in the Limón Church as a whole. Church leaders, in their written statements and in their collaboration with popular movements, do not shy away from conflict or controversy. It is through such words and actions that agents of this Church make their option for the poor clear.

Yet how did this option arise? Certainly, the progressive pastoral stance in Limón is, in part, a response to the socio-economic situation in the region. As I outlined in Chapter Seven, Limón is a poor and conflict-ridden province. Importantly, Church leaders know this. Whether through pastoral visits, first-person reports, Church assemblies, or the

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\(^{97}\) See, for example, his detailed responses to a variety of critiques aimed at the letter in Jorge Arturo Chaves, "Los ataques al pastor," *Eco Católico*, 4 March 1990, 15; and Jorge Arturo Chaves, "Los ataques al pastor, parte 2a: ¿Desconocimiento de la economía?," *Eco Católico*, 11 March 1990, 11.
CECODERS diagnostic census, Church officials have been made aware of the economic hardships suffered by the majority of their constituents. Through their experiences, the Limonense clergy have undergone a process of conscientización and this has had the effect of deepening their commitment to work for justice as part of their pastoral mission. As Mons. Coto has remarked, once Church agents experienced first hand the tremendous injustices faced by workers in the area, they simply could not remain indifferent.  

The experience of poverty in itself, however, is usually not enough to inspire and sustain such solidarity with the poor (after all, Padre Solano and the staff of the ESJ23 are also well aware of the living conditions in the region). Additional factors are often involved. In this case, the insecure institutional position of the Catholic Church in Limón reinforced the impetus to develop a pastoral obrera that assumed forms consistent with the liberationist model. A shortage of vocations to the priesthood in Limón, for example, meant that the survival and development of pastoral programming was dependent upon laypeople assuming positions of responsibility within the Church. Mons. Coto, as I noted above, proposed strengthening the CEBs as a way to counter the difficulties faced by the communities in his vicariate (the scarcity of priests, the Protestant sects, the "social agitators"). Mons. Ulloa, for his part, sees the "intensification" of lay doctrinal formation as a way to prevent "emigration" to non-Catholic creeds. He also views the CEBs as the best form for the Church given the large number of sectas and other churches in the region. Further, one could treat the Church's increased political activism and support for unions as a means to ensure that if Catholics were drawn to participate in certain activities of a leftist bent, they would not feel forced to leave the Church to do so.

None of this is meant to imply that the development of a liberationist pastoral social in the Limón Church was a merely strategic move by its leaders, one absent of personal conviction or genuine conversion to the cause of the poor. The actual mix of true belief and tactical manoeuvring would be impossible to discern in this or any other case. It

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100 Ulloa, interview by author and Solera.
does indicate, however, that institutional necessities can provide additional motivation for Church officials to adopt positions or implement programming that, under other circumstances, might be viewed as too radical for the organization. The perceived existence of serious threats to the Church's survival will, in effect, mitigate the potential threat represented by pastoral innovation. In some situations, moreover, a move that may have been borne primarily of organizational need, and hence is more liberationist in appearance than in motivation, can itself contribute to a true shift in perspective further down the line. Therefore, whatever the original reasoning behind incorporating more laypeople into the decision-making bodies of the Limón Church, once they claimed more of a voice in the running of the organization, the pastoral work of the Church naturally came to reflect their needs, experiences, and demands. Overall, then, it would be accurate to speak of a confluence of class and institutional interests that contributed to the emergence of the option for the poor in Limón.

In all of this, Catholic Social Teaching plays a crucial role. Regardless of its largely conservative character and previous use in the worldwide Church and in Costa Rica, CST provides an essential framework for the Limón Church's liberationist pastorate. Employing CST allows Church agents in Limón to identify themselves with the universal institution, to place themselves in the line of the Tradition to which Catholics look for guidance. Moreover, though the form of the Limonense pastoral obrera suggests that Church agents have often adopted only the letter of CST (to serve their own spirit), even such a liberationist adaptation of the texts can serve to legitimate the Limón Church's position. This ability to cite the texts of the Church magisterium, to declare itself a local Church within the bounds of the universal body, is particularly valuable given the controversial character of the Limón Church's political positions vis-à-vis those of the Archdiocese of San José, of the Escuela Social Juan XXIII and, ultimately, of the Vatican itself.

In this context, what has changed is not CST per se, but its use. The socio-economic situation in Limón and the organizational needs of the Vicariate (and later the Diocese) can go far to explain why Mons. Coto and others adopted CST in the liberationist manner they did. Yet beyond this, we can ask if there are further questions surrounding
the liberationist use of what is fundamentally a conservative doctrine. For example, are there limits to the political actions that Vatican and CELAM social teachings can legitimate? Or, at what point will the needs and characteristics of the worldwide Church as an institution override the relatively autonomous interpretation of CST by liberationist bodies such as the Limón Church? A discussion of these and related matters follows in the concluding chapter.
Chapter Ten

Concluding Reflections

— The same ideas can point to different conclusions for different classes at the same time
Christopher Hill, Change and Continuity in Seventeenth Century England

This thesis has analyzed the Catholic Church in Costa Rica and the variety of positions its agents have produced on social justice and workers' issues between 1979 and 1996. Against the background of contemporary Costa Rican social history, the institutional exigencies of the Church organization, and Vatican and Latin American Catholic Social Teaching, I have examined four Costa Rican Church bodies and have characterized them as either primarily "conservative" or "liberationist" in orientation. In this conclusion, I highlight some of the more important points in the preceding chapters and suggest the implications of my analysis for broader questions in the study of Costa Rican and Latin American Catholicism.

The Conservative-Liberationist Struggle within the Costa Rican Church

The case studies presented in this thesis are a concrete illustration of the theoretical proposition that the Church is an interclass social space.¹ Church agents representing competing social classes and political options in Costa Rica meet within the Church and attempt to use the material and symbolic resources of this institution to further their respective causes. Regardless of the wishes and the assertions of the Church hierarchy, the class conflicts prevalent in the larger society are not negated or superseded by a common denominator of faith. The four Church entities studied here, instead of revealing the Costa Rican Catholic Church to be a completely coherent and unified entity, thus represent four different Costa Rican Catholicisms² -- divided into two basic ideological camps.

¹ Villela, "The Church," 254.
² See Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, 420.
Conservative Catholicisms: CECOR and the ESJ23

In certain respects, the two groups that inhabit the conservative corner in the Costa Rican Church appear to have little in common. The members of CECOR are bishops, high-ranking representatives of the worldwide Church in Costa Rica, while the ESJ23 is led by a priest and is otherwise staffed entirely by laypeople. Mons. Arrieta, Archbishop of San José and CECOR spokesperson, is widely respected in international Church circles and is affectionately revered as "the little apple" (Manzanita) by many at home. ESJ23 director Claudio Solano, on the other hand, is a controversial figure whose work, though admired by many, has drawn scorn and allegations of illegality from labour activists in Costa Rica and beyond. In terms of CST, the CECOR bishops rely almost exclusively on the post-conciliar Vatican and CELAM sources, occasionally even adopting the language of the Latin American liberationists. ESJ23 representatives, in contrast, make heavy use of both pre- and post-conciliar magisterial documents, and carefully distance themselves from the categories most often associated with liberation theology. Finally, while Arrieta and the hierarchy strive to appear neutral in their approach to workers' issues, Solano and the ESJ23 promotores are unabashedly partisan in their praise of the solidarity movement. Considering these measures alone, it seems unlikely that CECOR and the ESJ23 could share a similar political or social pastoral outlook.

Nonetheless, the investigation in this thesis has illustrated that these two parties do coincide in their promotion of a fundamentally conservative message. Key to the discourse of both CECOR and the ESJ23 is a predominantly functionalist perspective on social reality in which peace and harmony are idealized, often while serious inequalities are overlooked and struggles for justice neglected. Social change for these conservatives implies reform instead of revolution, and the renovation of attitudes instead of the transformation of structures. Not only are collaboration and consensus the tools for social reform here, but -- and especially in the case of CECOR -- the architects of the process are the government, the rich, and the powerful, not the grassroots, the marginalized, or the meek. Even the apparent differences in the ESJ23's and CECOR's approaches to workers' issues fade considerably once we examine the purportedly non-partisan positions of the Archbishop and find a bias for solidarismo instead of sindicalismo, along with a
relatively negative evaluation of the strike as a political pressure tactic. Ultimately, the positions of both CECOR and the ESJ23 function to reinforce the power of a State in crisis and to respond to the needs of those who seek solutions in the neo-liberal capitalist model.

Overall, and contrary to the assumptions and assertions of many academic observers of the Catholic Church, these positions do not represent a reversion to a strictly pre-conciliar CST model and a corresponding affront to latter-day Vatican teachings on social justice. Rather, the words and actions of the ESJ23 and CECOR resonate with pre-Vatican II papal encyclicals and many of the documents of the post-conciliar era. There is a remarkable consistency throughout many of the magisterial social teachings over the decades, a consistency that is best expressed in the enduring centrality of the concepts of unity and solidarity as the organizing principles for both the Church and society. Moreover, though this consistent conservatism may sometimes be concealed, it is never truly contradicted by the pseudo-liberationist language of Pope John Paul II or the CELAM bishops at Puebla and Santo Domingo. In Costa Rica, in turn, such conservatism surfaces in the proclamations and the practices of CECOR and the ESJ23.

Admittedly, CECOR and the ESJ23 are not identical entities. Of the two bodies, the ESJ23 is clearly closer to the right-wing extreme. But, since this variation is not based on two different CST traditions, CECOR's and the ESJ23's differing needs, positions, and alliances within and outside of the Church necessarily come into play. Archbishop Arrieta and the CECOR bishops must respond to the variety of demands placed upon them as they function as both institutional and spiritual leaders in a fragile socio-economic order and competitive cultural milieu. For example, the hierarchy's need to protect alliances with the nation's political powerbrokers, and thereby also protect the Church's secular privileges, must be balanced with the bishops' religious mission to serve as pastors who represent and unite all constituents within the Church. In addition, the bishops' moves to retain and impose their authority within the institution must be tempered by the consideration that the Catholic Church no longer monopolizes the expression of religious sentiment in Costa Rica. The complex interplay of these and other factors ensures that any partisan and conservative political or pastoral options are carefully presented in a more neutral and moderate manner.
Padre Solano and the ESJ23, in contrast, are far less affected by such considerations, in part because they have a narrower range of responsibilities within the institution, but also because they are less vulnerable in terms of the overall social order. Since Solano is in charge of an organization meant to represent only one fraction of the Church's constituency, his need to present an inclusive message or to appear to cater to conservatives and liberationists alike is correspondingly diminished. The alliance of School officials with Costa Rica's business elite and the material security ensured by such a relationship also indicate that the ESJ23 would have little to gain, and potentially much to lose, by broadening its currently conservative message to address the concerns and demands of more progressive factions in the Church and beyond. Moreover, even the relatively subordinate status of the ESJ23 within the Church has not meant that the School has been subject to ecclesial sanction or censure for its extreme propaganda and sometimes illegal activities. On the contrary, the underlying doctrinal affinity between the hierarchy and the School, along with the tacit approval the Archbishop provides for Solano's crusade, mean that the ESJ23 has been able to survive and even thrive in spite of controversy it often generates. Ultimately, then, CECOR and the ESJ23 are two highly compatible exemplars of Costa Rican Catholic conservatism.

*Liberationist Catholicisms: The Official Church in Limón and CECODERS*

The official Church in Limón and CECODERS have much in common as two representatives of the liberationist wing of the Costa Rican Catholic Church. In general terms, both can be said to concretize the principles and priorities embodied in the documents from the 1968 CELAM conference at Medellín. This means that both the Limón Church and CECODERS approach the social order with a critical eye, using the tools of the social sciences to uncover and analyze the conflicts and inequalities in society. By doing so, they help to discredit and delegitimize the predominant myths that obfuscate - and thereby perpetuate -- injustice in Costa Rica. For these groups, moreover, the struggle against injustice is not merely a matter of academic analysis; it also incorporates a variety of practical efforts directed at contesting and transforming the socio-economic structure of society. Essentially, the model for social change employed here illustrates
several of the features of the original option for the poor. Hence, these groups foster the conscientization and empowerment of those at the base of society through a variety of popular education efforts and, in the case of the Limón Church, through CEBs. Further, Limón Church and CECODERS agents acknowledge the partisanship such an option implies, even when this partiality leads to a conflict or confrontation with some of the more powerful groups in society or within the Church. Finally, these Church agents accord workers and union organizations a central role in this "bottom-up" movement for change. Through accompanying union coalitions in San José or supporting the Limón en Lucha protests on the coast, CECODERS and the Limón Church help to encourage and direct popular challenges to the neo-liberal State. Overall, then, and in all these ways, the leaders of the Limón Church and of CECODERS function as the organic intellectuals of the counterhegemonic cause.

One significant variation between CECODERS and the Limón Church, however, is related to the CST that the groups use to legitimate their liberationist practical agenda. More precisely, it is not the CST documents cited by these Church agents that are in themselves different, since both CECODERS and the Limón Church draw heavily on what I have cast as the conservative doctrinal tradition in the Church. Rather, it is how they approach this CST that is the crucial factor. CECODERS is reluctant to apprehend the categories of CST in a critical manner and instead accepts the orthodox presentation of CST as the reference point for its pastoral social. The Centre thus jeopardizes the efficacy of its liberationist project because its closes itself off from seeing how elements of this orthodoxy can in themselves contribute to the oppression that CECODERS is struggling to overcome. The Limón Church, on the other hand, re-reads CST from the vantage point of the conflicts it is embroiled in and re-creates the meaning of the tradition accordingly. By prioritizing historical action over authoritative doctrine in this way (a process that is both paralleled and reinforced by the movements toward democratization within the Limón Church structure), Limón Church agents can potentially go further in transforming the quest for social justice from rhetoric into reality.

Some of these differences in approach to CST can be attributed to the differing institutional locations and alliances of CECODERS and the Limón Church within the
larger Costa Rican Church structure. Only the Limón Church, under and because of its bishop, has the ecclesiastical authority and autonomy that would allow it to make a creative re-evaluation of and contribution to the CST corpus. Strictly speaking, and within the traditional, top-down authority structure of Catholic Church, only the members of the hierarchy produce CST. Bodies like CECODERS, as the Centre's assigned mandate reveals, are restricted to reproducing and spreading these received teachings to others. Mons. Arrieta's differing reactions to the controversies involving documents from CECODERS and the Limón Church are one illustration of this principle: the Archbishop brought CECODERS back into the Archdiocesan line soon after it published its folleto on the history of Costa Rica, but the equally provocative 1989 carta pastoral from Limón was essentially ignored (recall that Arrieta has no actual jurisdiction in Limón). Put another way, only the Limón Church has had the hierarchical sponsorship (Mons. Coto or Mons. Ulloa) needed for it in order to be able to develop a liberationist approach to CST. Despite its practical alliances with the Church of Limón, CECODERS operates within the Archdiocese and there, unlike the ESJ23, it has not had a bishop who would support, sponsor, or sanction a re-reading of CST more in line with its class alliances and commitment to social change.

This is not to suggest that intermediate-level Church organizations will simply reproduce the positions of their bishops on all pastoral and doctrinal levels, only that there is a limit to how far progressive positions can be developed without hierarchical support.

The more important questions in terms of the liberationist wing in the Costa Rican Church, then, may be related to how Church leaders within the Diocese of Limón arrived at their progressive positions. Among the salient factors were the Church agents' encounters with the poor of Limón (which provoked a process of conscientization), and the insecurities of the institutional Church in the region (which encouraged a move toward democratization). Perhaps most crucial, however, was the willingness of the bishop and the clergy in Limón to struggle alongside workers and the poor at the base of the Church, and to allow their perspectives and priorities to be reflected in religious production and pastoral planning. Through the interaction of all these variables, the Limón Church agents, much like the CELAM bishops at Medellín decades earlier, have come to
represent a liberationist exception to the conservative CST dominance within the Church hierarchy.

**Final Reflections**

Keeping in mind the content and the comparisons of the case studies presented above, I finally wish to consider some of the broader implications of the material examined in this thesis for other work on the Costa Rican or Latin American Church. Though by now it should be clear that any strict separation among the three levels of analysis first outlined in the introduction is artificial, these categories do provide a convenient structure under which to elaborate some brief and concluding reflections.

*Religion and Socio-Economic Context*

This thesis has illustrated how the Costa Rican socio-economic crisis, and the neo-liberal reactions to this crisis, opened up new opportunities for Church agents to become involved in the political realm. Though the Church hierarchy had long been allied with the State and had played an important role in the articulation and consolidation of the reformist political model in Costa Rica, the onset of the crisis provoked a level of CECOR commentary on social issues that had not been seen for decades. When, after the early 1980s, structural adjustment became State leaders' preferred means of responding to Costa Rica's problems, Archbishop Arrieta and the hierarchy adapted the nature of their traditional alliances accordingly and provided the symbolic support needed by the government as it imposed its highly contested neo-liberal policies. Crucially, at the same time and under the same conditions, entities such as the Limón Church and CECODERS developed and enacted their liberationist option for the poor. In these cases, the structural contradictions in society exposed by the crisis, and the inequities perpetuated and worsened by the supposed "solution" to the crisis, served to inspire and validate the liberationists' perspectives and their practical actions on behalf of workers and the poor.

The emergence of this liberationist Church in Costa Rica provides an interesting contrast to the development of the progressive Church in much of the rest of Latin America. There, and particularly in countries such as Brazil, Peru, Nicaragua, and El
Salvador, the liberationist wing of the Church either surfaced or expanded substantially under conditions of military dictatorship. In Costa Rica, however, the progressive Church developed within a relatively open civilian political system. The Costa Rican case thus suggests that perhaps it is time to re-evaluate the commonly held notion that dictatorship is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition to bring the progressive Church into existence.

Studying the Costa Rican liberationists may also help to qualify the related and more recent hypothesis that the increased democratization in Latin America is linked to the decline and/or fragmentation of the popular Church (because, presumably, the more democratic a society is, the less need there is for Church agents to step in and demand social changes). On the one hand, the increased formal democratization that has persisted since the 1948 civil war in Costa Rica did not preclude the (eventual) emergence of a progressive Church there. On the other hand, if we were to consider the negative effects of various neo-liberal State policies on the Costa Rican popular classes to constitute a diminishment of actual democracy, then the notion that there is a relationship between level of democracy and level of Church activism receives at least some support.

At the heart of the matter here is how one defines democracy, a debate that has surfaced with renewed intensity in the recent literature on Latin America. In a challenge to the traditional assumption that democracy is strictly a political regime in which people have the regular right to elect their government representatives, some have argued that democracy is also a social condition in which the principle and practice of equality prevail.

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3 This is the process illustrated by the essays collected in Scott Mainwaring and Alexander Wilde, eds., *The Progressive Church in Latin America* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

4 See the expression of this hypothesis in Scott Mainwaring and Alexander Wilde, "The Progressive Church in Latin America: An Interpretation," in Mainwaring and Wilde, eds., *The Progressive Church*, 14.

According to scholars such as Atilio Boron, for a society to be truly democratic, there must exist both formal mechanisms that allow for popular participation in government and a citizenry capable (in a physical, social, intellectual, and economic sense) of effective political participation. The neo-liberal capitalist order, because of its exclusionary and inegalitarian nature, thus can be said to function as a detriment to democracy in countries such as Costa Rica.

Significantly, liberationist Church agents have attempted to provoke a similar debate within Costa Rica for some time now. Their implicit and explicit challenges to the various myths about Costa Rican democracy (including the myths related to the country’s exceptionalism, pacifism, and likeness to Switzerland) parallel Boron’s argument as outlined above. And while the liberationists’ priority with these challenges has undoubtedly been a practical one (the conscientization and mobilization of Costa Ricans), the lessons of their demythologizing work should not be lost on scholars of other Latin American countries. Quite simply, the Costa Rican case shows us that an absence of dictatorship should not be equated with the presence of a true democracy.

_The Church as an Institution_

The four case studies presented in this thesis have all focused on bodies that are indisputably part of the official Church institution. We have seen how Church leaders’ reactions to institutional insecurity can be an important factor in provoking pastoral innovation (such as encouraging the formation of CEBs) that in turn can have liberationist (Limón) or conservative (Archdiocese of San José) implications. Beyond this, we can briefly examine other elements related to the overall structure of the Church organization, and reflect upon whether these can suggest if liberationist or conservative tendencies will predominate in the Costa Rican Church in the future.

As I have shown, Church structure in Costa Rica is relatively authoritarian in nature. Though there has been a belated effort by CECOR to incorporate CEBs into pastoral planning for the Church as a whole, only in the Diocese of Limón has the CEB

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6 Atilio A. Boron, _State, Capitalism, and Democracy in Latin America_ (Boulder,
phenomenon truly taken root and indicated a movement toward Church decentralization and democratization. The relatively tight control Archbishop Arrieta and CECOR seek to retain over those at lower levels of the institution, both in the CEBs and in intermediate Church organizations such as CECODERS, indicates the hierarchical and centralized ecclesiological pattern that predominates in the Costa Rican Church.

This top-down authority pattern in itself suggests that the national Church is likely to continue to support the socio-economic status quo in Costa Rica. Even apart from the political predilections or economic alliances of the individuals monopolizing the religious means of production, the very fact that such authoritarian relations prevail within the institution is problematic from the viewpoint of those wishing to transform society. This is because the logic of hierarchical and centralized organization dictated by the Church can contribute to the interiorization by the faithful of a respectful attitude toward hierarchy, authority, and centralized power. In turn, this inculcation of hierarchical logic within the Church facilitates the submission of the faithful to other forms of social hierarchy, including those of capitalist economic dominance. By extension, only once the Church's internal power relations are transformed can the institution be an effective symbol and a force for the transformation of power relations in the broader society. Judging by the relatively traditional and hierarchical structure of the Church as it is led by Mons. Arrieta, this will not happen anytime soon in Costa Rica.

Yet, regardless of the conservatism and authoritarianism that dominates in the Church, the liberationists in Costa Rica, as elsewhere in Latin America, have generally chosen to remain within the institution. Apart from what we can presume to be the liberationists' personal beliefs about the legitimacy of the institution, there are also real benefits that working from inside the Catholic Church can bring. For example, Church membership can provide access to material resources in the form of money or office space. Affiliation with the official Church can also bolster one's credibility and respect, especially given that in Costa Rica bishops are widely admired and the Church as a whole

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7 Maduro, Religion and Social Conflicts, 134.
8 Mainwaring and Wilde, "The Progressive Church in Latin America," 16.
has consistently remained one of the most trusted institutions in society. \(^9\) Finally, because the Catholic Church still provides ordinary Costa Ricans with much of their worldview, values, and even vocabulary, a liberationist movement that seeks to incorporate and influence these people would logically be better situated within, as opposed to outside, the Church's institutional orbit. Ultimately, then, the goal of the liberationists is not to leave or abolish the institution, but to work from inside to transform it.

Moreover, for as long as the institutional nature of the liberationist project persists, the actions and opinions of those individuals who hold key offices in the Church hierarchy will remain extremely important. I have already discussed the positions of various Costa Rican bishops at length and have indicated the importance of episcopal support for the success of both liberationist and conservative endeavours at lower levels of the Church. Indeed, researchers have established that a similar phenomenon routinely occurs in other Latin American countries. \(^10\) Yet, given the structure of the Church, we must move beyond this national level of analysis to recognize that other Latin American bishops (as members of CELAM) and the Bishop of Rome himself (as head of the worldwide Church) will also have an influence on the Costa Rican Church. Since this influence stems largely from the Pope's and CELAM's doctrinal directions, I turn now to a final consideration of the CST tradition.

**Catholic Social Teaching**

Despite the fact that CELAM is active and publishes documents throughout Latin America on a regular basis, Costa Rican Church agents have typically considered the CELAM general conference documents -- Medellín, Puebla, and Santo Domingo -- to be the primary sources for CST inspiration. Whether the conservatism of Puebla and Santo

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\(^10\) Among those who have indicated that a bishop's favour or disfavour can have a significant effect on the nature and persistence of CEB activism or progressive Church innovation are Bruneau, *The Church in Brazil*, 109-111; Warren Edward Hewitt, *Base Christian Communities and Social Change in Brazil* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 53-56; and Mainwaring and Wilde, "The Progressive Church in Latin America," 15-16.
Dorningo will be reaffirmed at the next (as yet unannounced) general conference remains to be seen, but the chances of this continental episcopal body producing a liberationist manifesto at CELAM V are slight. Though the infamous and ultra-conservative Mons. Alfonso López Trujillo no longer runs CELAM (now a cardinal, he serves as head of the Pontifical Council for the Family), there are few indications that CELAM has adopted a drastically new course since his departure. In any case, regardless of the actual president of CELAM, the Pope in the past has had no qualms about sending conservative Curial representatives to "oversee" CELAM meetings on his behalf. Moreover, the restrictions the Pope has placed on progressive Latin American bishops over the years may have depleted any remaining liberationist fervour in the organization. Beyond this, the conservative new bishops John Paul II has been appointing in Latin America since the mid-1980s may also help to keep CELAM on his preferred path.\(^\text{11}\)

As for the Pope's own statements regarding CST, it does appear that he has devoted less energy to attacking liberationists directly in recent years. In fact, in a 1996 statement to Latin American journalists, the Pope even indicated that liberation theology was no longer a great problem on the continent. As he commented, "liberation theology was somewhat a Marxist ideology. Today, following the fall of communism, liberation theology has fallen a little too."\(^\text{12}\) Generally speaking, in this post-communist era, the Pope seems more interested in defining the Church's stance on issues related to gender, sexuality, and ecumenism than in expanding the CST corpus.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that John Paul II has changed his mind about the liberationists. The Pope certainly has not changed -- and has even taken steps to reinforce - - his position on the nature of Church authority (which, as we have seen, is closely related


to his reaction against the liberationist movement). The heavy-handed approaches (excommunications, forced resignations, retirements, and transfers) to bishops and priests who run afoul of Vatican policy continue.\textsuperscript{13} Major statements from national bishops' conferences, if they are not unanimous, are now subject to Vatican approval.\textsuperscript{14} And the oath obliging theologians working at Catholic universities to submit without dissent to magisterial teaching on key doctrinal matters has recently been written into the Code of Canon Law.\textsuperscript{15} To quote Michael Budde, the Pope is still, perhaps now more than ever, a "centralizing, power-collecting prelate."\textsuperscript{16}

Of course, the Pope's advanced age and physical frailty suggest that he will not remain at the helm of the Vatican much longer. This means that the positions and persuasions of his successor will soon provide a new subject for analysis. Yet, regardless of the forms that the next CST statements from both CELAM and the Pope take, only with time and careful scrutiny should they be declared "liberationist" or "conservative." We cannot assume that liberationist words, be they related to the right to strike or the responsibility to change society, always correspond to authentically liberationist practical positions. Similarly, we cannot expect that conservative CST concepts will only function to legitimate actions acceptable from the conservative point of view. CST does not stand isolated from the intentions and institutions of those who produce it or use it, and the continual interplay among all these actors and their ecclesial and social environments indicates that the conservative-liberationist struggle may never be settled once and for all. Past, present, and future CST documents must therefore always be appraised in context and with a critical eye.

\textsuperscript{13} For descriptions of the some of the most recent cases, see Jean François Nothomb, "Does the Papacy Have a Future?" \textit{Cross Currents} 49, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 102.

\textsuperscript{14} Pope John Paul II, "On Bishops and Bishops' Conferences (July 23, 1998)," \textit{The Pope Speaks} 44, no. 2 (1999): 102-14; and


Finally, I would suggest that this critical stance is not only an academic imperative, but that it is also a crucial element for the survival and success of Church agents' efforts to bring about justice in the world. Waiting for another Medellín conference or the next pope to provide the definitive legitimation for the liberationist agenda may well prove fruitless, as would accepting CST and the magisterial interpretations of it at face value. The hope for change in the Church and in society does not so much rest in the Church's doctrinal tradition, but in those who, through their committed rereading and reclaiming of CST, dare to react to it and struggle to enact it for themselves.
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Contrary to popular convention, each separate newspaper article cited in this thesis has also been listed as either a primary or secondary source document below. This is because most of the articles cited are not merely news items, but are often either editorial pieces written by or about key Costa Rican Church figures, or reproductions of official Church documents. A list of all the Costa Rican newspapers consulted in the course of my thesis research also follows under the last subsection of this bibliography.

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