

ROBERT A. PORTADA III

**Graduate Student
Department of Political Science
University of Notre Dame**

**THE DISSIDENT CROSS:
CATHOLICISM AND POLITICAL CONFRONTATION IN CUBA**

“Doing direct opposition is dangerous. Catholicism is not an adversary ideology. But it is true that the great majority of people that attend mass do not sympathize with the Revolution. The church is like an intermediate zone.”

-Padre Fernando De la Vega, Párroco de la Iglesia Montserrat, La Habana

“No pulpit should be used for conspiracy. They must recognize, for example, that if you believe in Christ, I believe in Castro. They must respect that.”

-Dorita Pérez, Director of the Office of Religious Subjects of the Cuban Communist Party, Provincial Committee, Ciudad de la Habana

Every church and diocese in Havana is strewn with photos, posters, and other references to Pope John Paul II's 1998 visit to Cuba. Often these posters include short printed quotes from the sermons he delivered during his 5-day stay in Cuba, like one that adorns a wall in the Office of the *Canciller* (Chancellor) of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Havana: “*No tengas miedo!*” (“Don't be afraid!”). These messages, inspirationally recalling a glorious week in the history of the Cuban Catholic Church when if only for a brief moment Catholicism and Cuban national identity seemed indistinguishable, serve to validate the political mission currently undertaken by Cuban Church officials – the one that originally persuaded the Vatican to arrange a papal visit to Cuba, the one that now makes the Catholic Church the institutional foundation and primary symbol of contentious collective action on the island. The lasting sentiment is one of defiance, of a church that has come out from the shadows to assert itself in a society that once outcasted its believers and to confront a government that once persecuted its clergy – of a church no longer afraid.

Around the globe, religious institutions and religiously based social movements often mobilize opponents of authoritarian regimes. A great deal of scholarly attention has focused on the role of the Catholic Church in leading the fight against authoritarianism and communism in many Latin American and Eastern European countries, a direction that in Latin America at least prompted these churches to leave their traditional, conservative roles behind and move in a more politically progressive direction. In Latin America today, while most national churches find themselves dealing primarily with the challenges of religious pluralism, democracy, and the secularization of culture, some still face the challenge of confronting authoritarian regimes. Though scholars have

debated the factors that led some national churches to move into opposition while others remained loyal to authoritarian states, there has been relatively less attention paid to how churches have responded to different kinds of authoritarian regimes and how confrontational church strategies have changed over time. Focusing on the contemporary case of the Cuban Catholic Church, I use evidence gathered from extensive fieldwork in Cuba to create a new set of definitions that distinguishes between strategies of *direct confrontation* and *indirect confrontation*, and in so doing offer a new theoretical framework for comparative theory about religion and contentious politics.

In this paper, I deal explicitly with the factors that led national churches that opposed authoritarian regimes to choose directly or indirectly confrontational strategies. I argue that the Cuban Church has formulated a strategy of indirect confrontation that has allowed church leaders to play a role in contentious politics while protecting the church's institutional interests and continuing its mission of evangelization. To establish a broader comparative perspective I place the Cuban Church in comparative analysis with the national churches of Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua, Poland, and Venezuela during periods of authoritarian rule. I use this modest set of comparable cases to argue that a combination of regime type, institutional church reforms, and the world-historical time period during which the church began its contentious activities have a direct influence on a national church's choice of confrontational strategy. Churches that became confrontational under right-wing authoritarian regimes during the 1960s and 1970s were likely to pursue strategies of direct confrontation while churches facing leftist authoritarian regimes from the 1980s to the present were likely to pursue strategies of indirect confrontation. The influence of the Second Vatican Council and progressive Catholic thinking that gave rise to liberation theology (a progressive theology that served as a counter-ideology to the ideal of the national security state promoted by right-wing authoritarian regimes) led many national churches into directly confrontational relationships with right-wing regimes during the 1960s and 1970s. The Vatican's turn toward more conservative politics under the papacy of John Paul II did not eliminate contentious relationships between church and state, but it did lead churches to pursue strategies closer to indirect confrontation, especially against leftist authoritarian regimes where liberation theology could not serve as a viable confrontational ideology and autonomous grassroots political mobilization declined as a pastoral activity. In addition, the repression suffered by progressives who were among the first Catholic Church members to directly confront authoritarian regimes was sufficiently harsh to cause church leaders to reconsider the losses they suffered when entering politics and make it less likely for churches to pursue this kind of confrontational strategy in later years.

I chose the national churches of Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua, Poland, and Venezuela to include a wide range of experiences between churches and authoritarian states and to highlight the general,

comparative importance of the problem of the Cuban Church's contentious stance against the Castro regime. Two of the cases – Brazil and Chile – are churches that formulated political strategies in the post-Vatican II/pre-Puebla era. Significant sectors of both the Brazilian and Chilean churches pursued strategies of direct confrontation against right-wing regimes. Three of the cases under study – Nicaragua, Poland, and Cuba – crafted their political strategies against left-wing regimes during the John Paul II papacy. The case of Poland (the only case included here that is not part of Latin America) is important because it constitutes the first national church that systematically formulated a strategy of indirect confrontation. The Nicaraguan Church remained sharply divided throughout the Sandinista years, reflecting the difficulty of finding a unifying confrontational strategy when the hierarchy would not accommodate the regime and the grassroots worked closely with the left-wing government. Cuba best exemplifies a strategy of indirect confrontation in Latin America, formed approximately one decade after the Polish Church fully formulated its indirectly confrontational strategy against the communist regime. Venezuela serves as a case of a national church that is currently facing the prospect of a polity transition from democratic rule to left-wing authoritarianism, making it a case of a church that, according to the arguments presented here, should adopt an indirectly confrontational strategy (a la Poland and Cuba) or end up divided if it cannot formulate a unifying strategy (a la Nicaragua).

This paper is organized as follows: I begin by defining and contrasting strategies of direct and indirect confrontation. I then analyze the Cuban Catholic Church in reference to six defining features that constitute a confrontational church strategy:

- (1) The church's position toward the regime
- (2) The church's position toward the regime's ideology
- (3) The church's relationship with the regime
- (4) The association of the church with the opposition in the public sphere
- (5) Church assistance to the opposition
- (6) Church participation with the opposition

Next, I examine the Cuban government's perspective on the role of, and its relationship with, the Cuban Catholic Church to go deeper into the confrontational nature of church-state relations on the island. Finally, I compare the confrontational strategy of the Cuban Church with cases from Latin America and Eastern Europe in reference to such variables as the world-historical time period the church is acting in, the influence of bishops' conferences and liberation theology, and the type of regime it is confronting.

Church Strategy: Indirect Confrontation in Cuba

The social and political environment in Cuba is uniformly organized and highly controlled, making deviations from official positions and norms of behavior, even by officials of the Cuban Catholic Church, decidedly conspicuous. There is only one political party, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), and it is illegal to form any other political parties or social movements that are not

state-controlled. All television, radio programming, and newspapers in Cuba are run by the state. Organizing public events and processions require state permission. This is not to say that no forms of public protest or criticism take place, or that there is a lack of dialogue amongst representatives from church and state. But church leaders are aware that their activities and statements are monitored and scrutinized by state officials. Consequently, their private conversations often differ in tone and message from that which is delivered in public statements. In fact, it is the Catholic Church's ideological foundation in spirituality and sacred transcendence that makes it on the surface less threatening to the Cuban government than an alternative political party or social movement would be. However, the danger for church leaders is treading too fervently in the political arena and flaunting its opposition to the regime and/or exposing its ties to dissident political actors.

Indirect confrontation is the defining aspect of the Cuban Church's contentious strategy. I define strategies of direct and indirect confrontation as follows: *Direct confrontation* is a politically contentious strategy in which the church makes explicit its view of the illegitimacy and/or malevolence of the ruling regime. In public statements the church identifies specific targets as illegitimate and/or malevolent, including specific officials, policies, institutions, organizations, or the official ideology. The church has no relationship or strained relations with the ruling regime but has public relationships with oppositional actors. *Indirect confrontation* is a politically contentious strategy in which the church does not make explicit its view of the illegitimacy or malevolence of the ruling regime. In public statements the church does not identify specific targets as illegitimate or malevolent, but remains confrontational in the context of the national discourse by identifying certain negative political, economic, or social effects resulting from the regime's governance, policies, and/or ideology, and/or proposing alternative modes of governance, policies, and/or ideological or cultural meaning-systems. The church maintains formal relations with the regime but only symbolic and/or ambiguous relations with oppositional actors.

A strategy of indirect confrontation can be identified by contrasting the characteristics of directly and indirectly confrontational actions and positions. The following table outlines the differences between indirect and direct strategies of contention along six definable positions the leaders of a religious organization takes toward (a) the regime and (b) the primary social opposition:

Political strategy:	<i>Indirect Confrontation</i>	<i>Direct Confrontation</i>
Church position toward:	A. The Regime	
1. The Regime/Political institutions	Endorse increased political pluralism, open dialogue, public debate, entry of new	Endorse political reform, development of oppositional political parties or specific

	political ideas, growth of autonomous civil society	democratic institutions, and/or a political transition
2. The Official ideology	Critique official ideology, make distinctions between church doctrine and official ideology	Condemn the official ideology and perhaps identify its primary governmental proponents
3. Relations with the regime	Remain neutral or promote reconciliation with the regime	Seek condemnation of the regime
Church position toward:	B. The Opposition	
1. Association with opposition in the public sphere	Symbolic association with opposition	Open association with opposition
2. Assistance of the opposition	Endorse growth of civil society, offer no assistance or clandestinely assist opposition	Endorse specific oppositional movements, openly assist opposition
3. Participation with the opposition in political activities	Encourage only laypersons to participate in political activities	Open participation in political debates and oppositional processions/events

These strategic categories are treated as ideal types that are not, of course, consistently followed at all times by all members of a specific national church. I characterize the confrontational strategies of national churches through historical analysis of the rhetoric and behavior of prominent church leaders and their followings over time. The following sections examine church positions in Cuba on each of the above six aspects of confrontational strategy. Cuban church leaders have sought to maintain a strategy of indirect confrontation in the context of a repressive socialist regime that has marginalized a Church unsympathetic to their social and political goals while dealing with a burgeoning dissident movement replete with Catholic lay activists.

A. The Regime

1. Regime Type

This section considers church positions toward the regime as a whole – focusing on its legitimacy (or lack thereof) as a governing body. The primary difference between direct and indirect confrontation lies in the target of church criticisms and the extent to which the church is willing to challenge the regime either by attacking its modes of governance and/or calling for a regime change. A distinction between direct and indirect confrontation can also be found in where the church finds entry to promote its political interests and how it makes confrontational statements – whether it expressly propounds a political agenda and/or desire for political change, or if its political critiques are vague and routinely couched in religious rhetoric. In a strategy of direct confrontation, the church endorses profound political reforms and/or a change of regime. It may publicly name the kind of regime, democratic or otherwise, it would like to see replace the current regime, and may endorse the development of oppositional political parties or the efforts of

oppositional political actors. In a strategy of indirect confrontation, the church advocates increased political pluralism without necessarily questioning the legitimacy of the current regime. Dialogue and the entry of new ideas into the public debate are advocated without explicitly naming what new political ideas or institutions should be adopted. The church may lament the lack of broad political freedoms and endorse the growth of civil society but does not publicly call for transition or regime change.

The Cuban Catholic Church views the revolutionary government as an oppressive, totalitarian regime, albeit one that has made an indelible mark on Cuban society and Cuban identity. However, these views are not explicitly divulged in public settings or in church documents. Only in private conversations do these views become apparent. In official statements, the Cuban Revolution is treated by church leaders as an undeniable part of Cuba's social, political, and cultural reality, rather than a personal dictatorship or tyrannical authoritarian regime.

In many ways the difference between direct and indirect confrontation reflects a change of tone in the language used by church officials. Rather than use words like condemn, combat, defeat, or overcome, the Church speaks of reconciliation, dialogue, pluralism, and reform – even in its most pointed critiques.

El amor todo lo espera is a pastoral letter written in 1993 by the 11 Cuban bishops that made up the *Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Cuba* (Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba - COCC) at the time. The letter contains the sharpest critique of Cuban society and government written by the Cuban bishops since the contentious anti-revolutionary statements of the 1960s (which led to the marginalization of the church in Cuban society and a period of silence on the part of church leaders). Written three years after the Cuban government lost its primary economic benefactor, the Soviet Union, the bishops wrote for the first time from the perspective that Fidel Castro's socialist regime would soon fall, as had the regimes of Russia's network of Eastern European communist satellites.

Reflecting the dire economic situation spurred by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bishops essentially blamed the crisis on poor economic and political governance by the revolutionary regime. They make a litany of suggestions for political reform, opening doors for opposition groups to seek support in the church. *El amor todo lo espera* in many ways could be viewed as a political manifesto, signaling to existing and prospective dissident activists where the Cuban Church's political sympathies lied.

El amor todo lo espera contains the few examples of directly confrontational statements the bishops have made since forming their confrontational strategy. The tone taken by the bishops in

this letter was unique and did *not* become constitutive of their political strategy; rather the bishops used the letter to signal their contentious stance to the rest of society and have since remained exclusively indirectly confrontational (the exceptions including a few iconic moments during the 1998 papal visit). The two strategies are brought together in this letter, containing some instances of the bishops explicitly naming the parties or institutions they deem responsible for Cuba's social and economic crises.

The bishops begin the political portion of their letter by describing one of many politically self-reflective subjects that were discussed at the PCC's IV Party Congress a year earlier in 1992:

“The calling to order of the IV Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba made a clear call to eradicate what it called double morality, false unanimity, and the feigning and/or silencing of opinions. Surely, a country which rewards those attitudes is neither a healthy nor totally free country; little by little, it changes into an aseptic country, untrustworthy, wherein wishing for the resurgence of a new man one finds instead a false man.”¹

The example is used to find entry into a political critique by referencing an intra-regime recognition of the hazards of suppressing critical or oppositional voices. The bishops go as far as attacking Che Guevara's conception of the “New Man” that was needed to build socialism (though Guevara is not named) by arguing that it has been replaced by a “false man.”

Under the heading, “Political Aspects”, the bishops identify five political “irritants” that must be eradicated along with the necessary economic changes, the accomplishment of which would produce a “bridge of hope in the national soul”²:

(1). The bishops begin by attacking the “omnipresent and exclusionary” character of the national ideology. They identify five paired terms used by the government to equate the Revolution with the nation, but that in the bishops' view should not and cannot be considered synonymous: *fatherland* and *socialism*, *state* and *government*, *authority* and *power*, *legality* and *morality*, *Cuban* and *revolutionary*. According to the bishops, the latter subjective terms have been superimposed by the regime on the former neutral terms. *La Patria*, the fatherland, has been construed by the regime as somehow indelibly socialist. The state, made up of official positions that are endowed with a certain degree of authority, is equated by the regime with this particular government, possessing unchecked political power. What can be codified into law by the regime – legality – is not necessarily moral, an indicator that the bishops see the existence of unjust laws within the legal system. And the issue of identity – what it means to be Cuban – has been closed by the regime to include only those Cubans who are also revolutionaries. The bishops go on to argue that the constricting nature of the state ideology produces a sensation of exhaustion with all the repeated orations and slogans.

¹ Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Cuba, “El amor todo lo espera,” reprinted *La Voz de la Iglesia en Cuba: 100 Documentos Episcopales*, D.F., México: Obra Nacional de la Buen Prensa, A.C., 1995, 410.

² *ibid.*

(2). The bishops denounce the limitations imposed not on the exercise of certain freedoms, but on freedom itself. This statement is indicative of an indirectly confrontational strategy, however, the bishops argue that any substantive change in this attitude must be accompanied with the administration of an independent justice system – which would result in the consolidation of a state governed by the rule of law. Identifying a specific institution as necessary for the exercise of complete freedom reflects a directly confrontational strategy.

(3). The bishops call attention to the excessive control of the Organs of State Security, that at times intrudes on the strictly private lives of citizens and produces a social fear that is hard to define but palpable to feel. Again, identifying State Security as a culprit for social ills in a public letter is a directly confrontational statement.

(4). The bishops underscore the high number of prisoners in Cuba, condemned for actions which could reasonably be depenalized or in some cases at least reconsidered. The bishops reason that under a conciliatory political climate men could be freed who have been imprisoned for crimes motivated by politics or economics.

(5). The bishops argue that the effective elimination of all discrimination for philosophical ideas, political ideas, or religious creed, would open the way for participation of all Cubans in the life of the country.

El amor todo lo espera represents one of the few cases in which direct and indirect strategies of confrontation are blended by the Cuban Church. The bishops point specifically to the Organs of State Security as a social menace and recommend the creation of an independent justice system to consolidate the rule of law. Still, while virulently denouncing some of Cuba's social and political institutions, the bishops do not name the Cuban president or any other government leaders as culprits in the lack of social justice, they do not list specific freedoms that are denied by the Cuban regime, and do not call for a new system of government to replace the regime.

Finding themselves in a situation of challenging the regime and making political demands, the bishops also use *El amor todo lo espera* to call for a “direct and frank dialogue with the authorities of the nation,” as a way of maintaining a “double and exigent faithfulness: to the Church and to the Homeland.”³ In certain instances, the bishops make explicit references to the nuances of their political strategy, recognizing how cautious they must be in challenging the regime: “The bishops of Cuba, conscious of living in a historic stage of singular transcendence, have exercised their sacred magisterium with the tact and delicacy that the situation requires.”⁴

The premium placed on tact and delicacy has continued. Since the writing of *El amor todo lo espera*, the Cuban Church has not directly confronted the ruling regime in its actions or rhetoric. It has instead chosen to focus on the challenges and difficulties of fulfilling their religious mission,

³ *ibid*, 411.

⁴ *ibid*.

thus highlighting in an indirect way the repressive social environment in Cuba. In a 2002 conference on the subject of the Catholic Church and the media in Cuba that took place in the *San Juan de Letrán* Convent in Havana, Orlando Márquez, a Catholic layman and editor of *Palabra Nueva* (the official newsletter of the Archdiocese of Havana) referred to the singularity of *El amor todo lo espera* as a political statement stating, “In the document...the Church said what it could say...Everything is clear, everything is said, and the Church is using its actual means of communication to try to proceed according to the mission of the Church.”⁵ The Cuban Church publicly treats the pastoral letter as a unique event rather than a representative statement of their ongoing strategy. However, many church leaders privately express great pride for composing the letter and have deemed it unnecessary to write another similar pastoral letter because Cuba’s social, political, and economic conditions have not profoundly changed. The singularity of *El amor todo lo espera* has given it iconic status in the history of the Cuban Church and has allowed church leaders to proceed with an indirectly confrontational strategy without resorting to making direct political denunciations. What church leaders continue to call into question is the lack of political pluralism in Cuba, though without characterizing the regime as totalitarian and in only scattered instances criticizing the domination of the PCC.

To signal their disapproval of the regime without overstepping into direct confrontation, church leaders have issued calls for increased political pluralism and the open debate of political ideas. They do not explicitly condemn the regime or call for a democratic transition. To avoid giving the regime the tools to portray the Catholic Church as a conspiratorial political organization, church leaders affirm Catholic doctrine that the church does not and will not instruct its faithful to join any specific political organization or choose a specific political option. Yet, church leaders always follow these caveats by stating that their faithful are free to choose any and all political options – as long as their decisions are made in recognition of God’s love and based on religious morality. This freedom to choose amongst a plurality of political options is something not offered by the Cuban regime, which has legalized only one political party and in a strict sense only one political option – that for socialism and the Cuban Revolution – though they may believe the Revolution altruistic and skillful enough to serve the needs of all of Cuba’s people. This is a fundamental difference in the political philosophy between church and state in Cuba: for the Cuban Church, the Revolution forms Cuba’s social and political reality, though it is a closed political system and only one political option among many. For the regime, the Revolution is the embodiment of identity and nation, not just a set of political institutions. Any options contrary to the Revolution are contrary to Cuba, to the nation itself. Part of the Cuban Church’s strategy of indirect confrontation is to make the simple observation that there should exist a variety of political options.

⁵ Orlando Márquez, “Debate: Diálogo Posterior, Sostenido entre El Conferencista y Los Presentes en el Aula ‘Fray Bartolomé de las Casas,’ Compilado por Fray Jesús Espeja O.P.”, *Palabra Nueva*, April 2002.

Mons. Ramon Suárez Polcari is the chancellor of the Cuban Catholic Church, an office that makes him the pointman for all communications between the Cuban Church and the Cuban government. In an interview with the author, Mons. Polcari made clear the Cuban Church's political preferences: "It is the desire of the church that a civil society and a political plurality develops in Cuba; I'm not talking about a specific party or organization – but we want it to be a representative democracy; however the State always responds that it is already representative of the people."⁶ This statement highlights one of the difficulties of engaging in political discourse with a regime that considers itself the political embodiment of a unified populace.

It should be made clear that the phrase "representative democracy," is a loaded political term in Cuba's national discourse, as this is the term normally used to pejoratively characterize American democracy. Cuba's state media outlets frequently make note of the ways in which American political representatives often come from privileged backgrounds, making them less 'representative' of the populace. Mons. Polcari's use of the word "representative democracy" at once signals the church's desire for democratic change in Cuba and serves as an endorsement of adopting political institutions resembling those of the United States. In addition, this statement calling for a "representative democracy" is striking in that it explicitly calls for a new type of regime in Cuba. Such statements cannot often be found in public Cuban Church documents. What church leaders do not hesitate calling for are greater plurality and the development of civil society, broad political concepts that could seemingly be achieved without necessarily threatening the survival of socialism. Although presented in the spirit of progressive political reform, government officials certainly interpret them as counter-revolutionary acts of defiance and conspiracy.

Not Mons. Polcari or any other church official would deny that the mission of the church is a religious one, though the church does acknowledge that its political obligations flow from that religious mission. A 2003 theological-pastoral instructoral of the COCC, entitled "The Social Presence of the Church", explicitly addressed the Cuban Church's perspective on political involvement:

"The mission of the Church is not political; its mission is not to intervene directly in the exercise of civil power, nor in the oppositional structures of power, nor support one or another party, nor recommend a candidate party up for vote in an election. In the political debate amongst parties that confront one another or join in ideological or strategic alliances the Church must be neutral, although it is a part of its ethic that the rights of everyone be respected in this debate."⁷

⁶ Mons. Ramon Suárez Polcari, *Canciller* of the Cuban Catholic Church, interview with author, Havana, 9 May 2006.

⁷ Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Cuba, "La Presencia Social de la Iglesia," Instrucción Teológico-Pastoral, 8 September 2003, 9.

Recognition of the idea that such a debate should occur, even without identifying the specifics of what political issues or ideas should be included in Cuba's public discourse, is in itself perceived by the regime as an act of confrontation. Church leaders do not endorse particular parties but they decry the fact that political options are not offered by the Cuban political system. Catholic laypeople need only be loyal to the Catholic Church, and must necessarily base their political choices on Christian ethics. In an article for the Cuban Catholic magazine *Espacio Laical*, Padre Antonio Rodríguez Díaz discusses the difference between moral pluralism and political pluralism: "A moral pluralism cannot exist. There is one morality for everyone, because it is founded in the nature of the human person, in his dignity...Morality on the other hand, does not exclude political pluralism, which is necessary for normal and happy social living arrangement; rather, it is founded on it. The different political options must be confronted with morality."⁸ The church, then, would be against any system that did not provide for political choices among which Christians could choose. In "The Social Presence of the Church" the Cuban bishops are more specific about what kind of choices faithful Christians should make:

"Being this way for an ecclesial entity, Christian laypeople that are integrated in it as individuals have the freedom to choose any political option in one sense or another, as long as they make their choice with the objective of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. This objective includes the respect for human rights, the fundamental values that must be protected, to the honesty in the management of public funds, etc."⁹

This is the indirect way in which democratization is advocated – avoiding mention of specific leaders, parties, institutions, and political options that should be ousted, formed, erected, or exercised (respectively), but acknowledging that a plurality of potential leaders, parties, institutions, options do exist and should be respected. While the Cuban Church does not denounce the revolutionary system per se, it does affirm the existence of a plurality of political options that would benefit Cuba should some social force work toward the realization of those options.

2. Regime Ideology

This section considers church positions toward the regime's official ideology. A strategy of direct confrontation would condemn the regime's ideology as oppressive or incompatible with Catholic doctrine, and would decry the political capacity of its staunchest proponents. A strategy of indirect confrontation would critique the official ideology and highlight differences between the official ideology and Catholic doctrine, perhaps by creating and promoting its own cultural meaning-system rather than condemning the official ideology.

⁸ Padre Antonio Rodríguez Díaz, "Fe cristiana, Ética y el Mundo del Trabajo," *Espacio Laical*, No. 3, 2005, 6.

⁹ COCC, "La Presencia Social de la Iglesia," 9.

In *El amor todo lo espera*, the Cuban bishops signaled their disapproval of Marxism, referring in their list of five political “irritants” to the “omnipresent and exclusionary” character of the national ideology. The bishops reserved the national ideology for the first position on their list, arguing that the regime has forcibly attempted to equate the Revolution with the nation – and by characterizing the efforts of the ruling regime in this way, the bishops hoped to rescue the concept of Cuban nationhood from the Revolution.

However, the bishops do not – in *El amor todo lo espera* or in any successive writings – condemn Marxism per se. What they focus on criticizing is the “omnipresent” and “all-inclusive” nature of the official ideology, rather than the actual content of revolutionary Marxism as it is interpreted by the Cuban regime. This kind of critique has been consistent since the writing of *El amor todo lo espera*.

In “The Social Presence of the Church”, the bishops reiterate their criticism of the official ideology and hint at a political solution to the “difficult situation” created by totalitarian ideology:

“When one identifies the ideology of the government with all the juridical order and the ethical reality of the country, he is equating society with the State and in this way the State converts itself equally in the conscience of all the citizens. The difficult situation created by this undue identification can only be overcome by the development of a civil ethic and by the growth of an open culture in which the highest possible number of realities and hopes of the citizens can converse. It is imperative to keep in mind that, actually, all thought and action does not coincide with the official ideology...”¹⁰

The virtues of Marxism are not attacked; rather, the State ideology is criticized only to the extent that it does represent all the realities to be found neither in Cuba nor in the conscience of every citizen. The bishops hope to position the Catholic Church as the one *institution* that recognizes the plurality of Cuban culture, even as they follow their mission to evangelize the population and advocate a single morality, based on Christian ethics.

In a lecture commemorating the 20th anniversary of the 1986 *Encuentro Nacional Eclesial Cubano* (ENEC), a national Cuban Church conference that signified a reemergence of the church and a break from its period of silence, Cardinal Jaime Ortega began a discussion of why the Cuban Church rejected the formation of a theology of reconciliation in favor of a theology of communion following the ENEC. The Cardinal argued that such a theology unnecessarily implied that reconciliation ought take place between Catholics and Marxists, rather than amongst all Cubans:

“The conflicts have taken place between Cubans, not between Catholics and Marxists. It was not appropriate to transcribe to these conflicts the contentious history between Marxism and Christianity with all its philosophical implications that would convert this

¹⁰ *ibid*, 3.

treatment into a dialogue of experts, to our reality, more simple, with less philosophical importance and, perhaps, more of an emotional charge.”¹¹

Here, Cardinal Ortega aims to draw attention away from the ideological conflicts that have taken place in Cuban society and simplify such conflicts as derivative of an “emotional charge.” A theology of reconciliation would imply a mediation between two camps of Cubans, something the Church wants to avoid, at least in its rhetoric. Yet, in an ironic twist, Cardinal Ortega goes on to identify Marxism as the source of the social transformations that have made it difficult for the Church to deepen its roots in Cuban society and proceed with evangelization: “The social transformations that have taken place in Cuba, inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology during a long stage of the revolutionary process, with its consequent prejudices and ignorance of what the Church is, moves us to expound, newly, on what is the nature of the Church that determines its life and what is its mission in the world.”¹² Though the Cardinal initially aimed to dilute the ideological battle between Marxism and Christianity in Cuba society, he finds himself accusing the regime, with the official ideology at its core, of alienating the Catholic Church from the populace.

The Cuban Catholic Church has created an alternative cultural-meaning system to combat the omnipresence of the Marxist-inspired official ideology of the Cuban regime. Church officials often accompany their critiques of the official ideology with vague statements about the exercise of personal liberties and the lack thereof in Cuba. Their primary strategy has been to affirm what is distinct about their culture – centered on the individual and inspired by transcendent spiritual foundations – rather than denounce the tenets of revolutionary socialism in Cuba. But it is apparent to all of Cuban society that the Catholic Church cannot be counted amongst the supporters of the revolutionary regime’s social project.

3. Relationship with the Regime

This section considers the church’s formal relationship with the regime. In a strategy of direct confrontation the church seeks to condemn the ruling regime, leading to or following a rapid deterioration of relations between the church and the regime. In this scenario, church leaders and members are very often the subject of political persecution. In a strategy of indirect confrontation, the church remains neutral or formally seeks reconciliation with the regime and the advancement of mutual interests, though still remaining indirectly confrontational in regard to the regime’s leaders, institutions, political, economic, and social policies, and the official ideology.

¹¹ Lecture by Cardenal Jaime Ortega Alamino, “XX años del ENEC y Nuevo Plan Pastoral,” 6 April 2006.

¹² COCC, “La Presencia Social de la Iglesia,” 4.

Formally and publicly, the Cuban Catholic Church strives to maintain a cordial relationship with the Castro regime. Even when critiquing the official ideology, the Church does not make the regime itself a subject of attack. Describing the nature of church-state relations, Mons. Jose Felix Pérez Riera, former Adjunct Secretary of the COCC, uses very dry, stark terms, never flowering over the coldness that exists between the two entities:

“Relations are formal, in order, and they are functioning. They cover administrative aspects, that may have to do with the restoration of churches or priests that want to do a religious procession. In another dimension, we try to include political aspects. Between the government and the COCC, we cover basic principles: there is a dialogue about human and social issues. The government is worried about the divorce rate and the disintegration of the family. But our focus is different – we’re always thinking about the loss of values.”¹³

Mons. Pérez Riera sought to acknowledge certain issues around which the church and the regime have found common ground, in this case highlighting a shared concern for the family. Yet, he found it necessary to distinguish the church’s emphasis on the loss of *values* in Cuban society. Mons. Suárez Polcari, who as *Canciller* must deal with government officials on a regular basis, also looks for positive signs when characterizing church-state relations: “In these moments we are in a stage of certain flexibility, looking for understanding. There are favorable signs for the church’s sphere of influence; there has been an opening in the mentality of those who govern; there are more permissions for religious processions; they are allowing us to have our own space.”¹⁴

Even the most genial descriptions of church-state relations made by church leaders emphasize the differences in thinking between the two entities. The Office of *Asuntos Religiosos* (Religious Subjects) of the PCC is the official channel through which all communications between church and state take place. The existence of such an office is a source of consternation for the Catholic Church. For decades the Catholic Church enjoyed a special position vis-à-vis the state as the “official” church of Cuba, a position the church occupied informally at the close of the Spanish colonial period and was inscribed into formally (by the United States) under the period of the Republic. This history is not forgotten by today’s church leaders, who not only find it distasteful communicating through a special office, but abhor the fact that they are treated as one amongst many religions, including Protestant churches and religions of African origin, all with the same status and communicating through the same office. Mons. Pérez Riera notes that when the Office of Religious Subjects contacts the Church, it is usually to protest church actions that overstep boundaries instituted by the government: “It doesn’t occur with much frequency. It could be that a priest in a town organized a procession without permission, as they say, disturbing the social order; it could be about certain articles published in church magazines, or that someone visited

¹³ Mons. José Félix Pérez Riera, interview with author, Havana, 4 May 2006.

¹⁴ Mons. Ramon Suarez Polcari, interview with author, Havana, 9 May 2006.

without official documentation.”¹⁵ In discussing the process of dealing with the Office of Religious Subjects, Mons. Suarez Polcari expressed dismay at the Catholic Church’s loss of status:

“All of us communicate with the State through the official office; there are signs of improvement but there is always tension; they have their own style of working; the Catholic Church maintains a unique posture; there is a historical tradition – the period of the Republic opened in 1902 by placing the church in a special position – the church never had to incorporate itself into any special Council, like the *Concilio Evangélico* today; after the Revolution, we ceased being the official church; but, we maintained our status as the church with the highest percentage of faithful...”¹⁶

The *Concilio Evangélico* is a Christian church council that encompasses all the Protestant denominations in Cuba. All the churches that belong to the *Concilio* cooperate with and are supportive of the Revolution. The Catholic Church remains the only Christian church that has not been incorporated into the *Concilio Evangélico*. Mons. Polcari detailed how being part of the *Concilio* has resulted in benefits for the Protestant churches, even with fewer percentages of faithful in Cuba than the Catholic Church:

“Amongst Protestants and Evangelicals there is no considerable percentage of faithful in Cuba; they haven’t even grown much, but they have more facilities, they have permission to construct new temples; so they have their own posture – the Catholic Church has more independence than the *Concilio Evangélico*, which is identified with the State; although it has been difficult, we haven’t cut the dialogue – this is the policy of the Bishops, to maintain dialogue, it was also the attitude of John Paul II.”¹⁷

The important thing for church officials is to stress that they function independent of the government, something that would be compromised by joining a council that, in the eyes of the Cuban Catholic Church, forces other churches to tow the government line.

Maintaining dialogue is the official policy of the Cuban Catholic Church, but church leaders recognize that the Castro regime has erected barriers that inhibit maintaining *effective* dialogue, that is, dialogue that would produce compromises between the church and government on areas of mutual interest and lead to collaboration on social issues and projects between the two institutions. Rolando Suárez, a Catholic layman and the lawyer of the COCC, points to certain social issues that have been on the table in discussions between church and government officials: “The government made abortion legal, and employs the death penalty. On these issues we are not in agreement. But, for example, the government has said that euthanasia will be illegal. On this issue we have agreement.”¹⁸ However, the regime does not in practice consult the church on how to approach social issues. Areas of agreement are arrived at more or less by chance rather than consultation. Rather, the Office of Religious Subjects dictates to and admonishes the church for its offenses.

¹⁵ Mons. José Félix Pérez Riera, interview with author, Havana, 4 May 2006.

¹⁶ Mons. Ramon Suarez Polcari, Canciller of the Catholic Church, Havana, 9 May 2006.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Rolando Suarez, interview with author, 4 May 2006.

In “The Social Presence of the Church”, the Cuban Church cautions against what it perceives as attempts of the Office of Religious Subjects to limit its capabilities to evangelize:

“We have the impression that there is a subtle and ongoing campaign in our country against the Church, treating it as a private entity or a marginal institution capable of drawing energy away from the Revolution. The existence of an Office for Attention to Religious Subjects, appointed by the Communist Party, is often perceived as a form of control that limits the evangelization efforts of the Church and not as a constructive institution that makes possible, through dialogue, the revision and solution to issues of common interest.”¹⁹

Here, the church mildly disguises its loathing of the Office by stating what it is perceived as – again, *indirectly* accusing by implication. The church makes apparent its desire to find solutions to issues of common interest, but it criticizes the official channels set up by the regime to purportedly achieve a constructive dialogue. The COCC conveys its awareness that the regime has tried to marginalize the Catholic Church; but the highly critical tone of the passage keeps its reference point in the church’s apparent desire to work *with* the regime, not against it.

The desire to maintain normal relations between the Cuban Catholic Church and the Cuban government is shared by the Vatican. The Vatican’s representative in Cuba, *Nuncio Apostólico* Luigi Bonazzi, has delineated specific challenges that face Cuban society, the Catholic Church, and the State:

“Cuba is a Latin American country that shares many of the same challenges that are found throughout the rest of Latin America, among them creating better life conditions for their citizens. The Cuban government has realized significant accomplishments in the field of education, but there remain problems in the areas of living conditions, communications, etc. Cuba has a specific identity; the challenge of the Church in Cuba (which is also the challenge of the State) is demonstrating how social justice, equality, fraternity – what are claimed as the ideals of the Cuban Revolution – are alive and shared and put in practice in the life of the ecclesial community; for the State the challenge is respecting the religious duty of its citizens and acknowledging that Cuban society has fundamental Christian roots. This reality should be seen as an important base for the whole social project.”²⁰

This statement puts church and state on equal standing in Cuban society as equally important institutions for the development of Cuban society, a sentiment expected from the Vatican but that continues to inhibit a productive relationship between the Catholic Church and the Cuban regime. The Cuban regime refuses to offer special status to the Catholic Church, a religious institution that not only considers itself exceptionally relevant amongst the other Cuban religions but recalls its own history of heightened status and elitism. The Church’s indirectly confrontational posture allows it to maintain formalized relations with the regime, though they remain contentious. Political themes remain a taboo subject and are not broached in official meetings between the PCC and the COCC. This is perhaps the primary reason why a formal relationship can be maintained between the two institutions.

¹⁹ COCC, “La Presencia Social de la Iglesia,” 10.

²⁰ Papal Nuncio Mons. Luigi Bonazzi, interview with author, Havana, 11 May 2006.

B. The Opposition

1. Association with the Opposition

This section considers the degree of the church's association with the primary social opposition in the public sphere. A strategy of direct confrontation would find the church in open association with oppositional leaders and groups, appearing with them in protests or rallies and defending their political ideas and actions. A strategy of indirect confrontation finds the church in symbolic association with the primary social opposition – church leaders themselves do not participate in or endorse the activities of dissident actors, but it is generally known that the church supports the work of the primary social opposition. These dissidents tie their politics to Catholic symbols and generally seek the protection of the church and religious spaces to organize their activities.

A 2002 article in *Palabra Nueva* (the Catholic magazine that serves as the official “voice of the Cuban Church”) clearly outlined the Church's relationship to Cuba's dissident community, as much by what was said in the article by what wasn't said. Entitled *El Proyecto de la Iglesia* (“The Project of the Church”), *Palabra Nueva's* editor Orlando Márquez responded to a letter from Iván Chávez Viera (presumably a Catholic dissident) criticizing the Catholic Church for not endorsing Oswaldo Payá's Varela Project, a petition presented to the Cuban National Assembly proposing laws that would entail comprehensive political reforms, including the establishment of freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, free elections, freedom to start private businesses, and amnesty for political prisoners. Oswaldo Paya's dissident organization, the Christian Liberation Movement (CLM), organized the Varela Project. CLM activists collected 11,020 signatures of registered voters, more than the 10,000 required by the Cuban constitution for any petition proposing new laws to be reviewed by the Cuban National Assembly.

To establish the church's credibility as a defender of oppositional actors, Márquez invokes passages from *El amor todo le espera* as a record of what the institutional church, through the voice of the COCC, thinks about those Cubans that are called “dissidents,” “opponents,” and “counter-revolutionaries.” The passages convey the bishops' opinion that “dissension” can be “enlightening,” and argue that if Cuba can open international relationships with nations who do not agree with the Cuban system, why at the national level should Cuban citizens be forcibly uniform in their political orientation? Márquez continued: “The prophetic mission of the church is to affirm and denounce from its own position, centered in the human person, without attaching itself to any political posture, but in recognition of the political vocation of citizens.”²¹ Here, Márquez claims the church's neutrality in questions of political disputes: the church does not and will not endorse or adhere to any partisan political programmes.

²¹ Orlando Márquez, “El Proyecto de la Iglesia,” *Palabra Nueva*, No. 107, 2002, 5.

Yet, the Varela Project was not in and of itself a partisan political manifesto but a petition proposing liberal democratic political reforms including freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, free elections, and amnesty for political prisoners. These are the very freedoms that church officials have intimated at in its political testimonials and professed to support in private interviews. The Varela Project did not forward the agenda of a partisan political organization, but requested the kind of political opening that church leaders hope will lead to the development of political pluralism and civil society. Nevertheless, Oswaldo Payá, a Catholic layman, was forced (according to church policy) to abandon any pastoral duties done for the church when he established a *political* organization, to relieve the church of direct association with the Varela Project or the CLM.

Later in the article it becomes apparent that Márquez believes the church should avoid endorsing the Varela Project out of concern for the institutional autonomy of the church vis-à-vis government reprisals rather than the interests of partisan neutrality. Church leaders have become so adept at navigating the political waters of Cuban society that it will not capitulate to the demands of any of Cuba's dissident actors, even though it may support the stated goals of such actors. The goal of Cuba's strategy of indirect confrontation has been to symbolically align itself with the social opposition while maintaining its independence – thus, retaining its status as the only private, independent, yet politically contentious institution on the island. This, according to Márquez, means refusing to respond to the pressures of those very social actors the Church has worked to cultivate – at times, in fact, publicly distancing itself from these social actors when they become excessively belligerent. Making clear that he speaks *for* the hierarchy in the pages of *Palabra Nueva*, Márquez goes on to outline the *project* of the Church:

“Should the church define itself – and this magazine *is* an instrument of the church – according to the criteria of political actors, or should it strive to maintain its independence in such subjects, engaging itself even more in a pastoral of reconciliation and preserving its obligation with the people to fulfill the mission received from Jesus Christ? *That is the project of the church.*”²²

Knowing that the Cuban Church, as a result of its indirectly confrontational strategy, often is charged with not going far enough into the arena of contentious politics by more extreme and partisan political dissidents (in Cuba and in exile) Márquez further explains how the Church addresses political issues: “If they existed, it is possible that we would occupy more of these subjects, but not from a partisan position. In other words, prudence is not synonymous with silence and complicity.”²³ Church officials do not often address politically contentious issues in public, not because it is complicit with the government but because it is prudent in its behavior.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

Prudence dominates the Catholic Church's agenda in Cuba. Yet, church officials still are pressured by extreme political opponents in exile and moderate dissident activists on the island to assume a more directly politically confrontational approach. Padre Fernando de la Vega of the Montserrat Church in Havana states what has become an oft repeated phrase by church officials to those who would look to the Church to use its institutional autonomy to organize dissident groups against the Castro regime, that the Church will not serve as an alternative political party: "The church cannot be an alternative political party in Cuba. The church is positioned between two camps – those that live here and don't accept the official ideology and the church in exile, which says that we don't come out strongly enough against the state. But they are there and we are here."²⁴ This sentiment was echoed in my talks with Mons. Perez Riera: "The church cannot assume any political projects; it cannot be an alternative opposition political party. It must maintain its independence before those that want to manipulate it with the official ideology. The church has its own project of evangelization. Our lay can be members of dissident groups or governmental groups."²⁵

Padre Teodoro Becerril of Havana has witnessed many young and old Cubans come through his doors in search of a different political and social perspective as much as salvation: "Yes, some people come to the church looking for an alternative political option, but the church has never been that. Yet, there is always collaboration amongst Catholics. I myself work to make sure the social doctrine of the church reaches the people."²⁶ And so church officials continue preparing their flock not only for the Kingdom of Heaven but for a new political reality in Cuba, one in which individuals will make choices from a variety of political options, trained to use a Christian morality to guide them in their choices. But the Cuban Church has never worked to build any political organizations itself, and though it encourages Catholics to be politically active, it does not endorse the organizations that may be built by its faithful. The association of the church with opposition groups remains symbolic, even though these groups may be predominantly populated with individuals bred from within the church's temples.

2. Assistance to the Opposition

This section examines the extent to which the church assists the opposition. In a strategy of direct confrontation, the church may endorse specific oppositional movements and offers assistance to a variety of dissident actors working for reform of the political system or regime change. Under a strategy of indirect confrontation, the church broadly endorses the growth of civil society and only clandestinely assist oppositional actors or offer no assistance at all.

²⁴ Fr. Fernando de la Vega, interview with author, Havana, 26 April 2006.

²⁵ Mons. José Félix Pérez Riera, interview with author, Havana, 4 May 2006.

²⁶ Padre Teodoro Becerril, interview with author, Havana, 10 May 2006.

The Cuban Catholic Church has since the early 1990s consistently vocalized its desire for the development of an autonomous civil society, independent of the many state-run organizations that promote citizen participation in the socialist system. Rolando Suárez, Catholic layman and lawyer of the COCC, puts the development of civil society at the forefront of the Church's political interests:

“This is a church that is an active participant in society. Freedom implies participation. The big issue on the table is civil society, and participation in civil society. Some Marxists argue that the Communist Party is part of civil society, but for this to be true there must be other civil actors present as well. Non-governmental organizations don't necessarily have to mean anti-governmental, there are many in all parts of the world that are pro-governmental. This is an unresolved theme here. The church defends the values of civil society, not the specific organizations. We are motivated to defend these ideals because we are children of God, and we love God very much.”²⁷

The unresolved theme is the ability of dissident political organizations to organize and petition the government legally. The aim of the church is to nurture and defend the development of civil society, not specific civil organizations. Suárez bases the church's position on civil development on the church's love for God rather than the achievement of a political ideal (presumably because the political ideals espoused here are God's ideals for the fulfillment of human freedom) to maintain the basis of the church's actions in sacred transcendence. This is the essential source of protection for the church – its strict adherence to its religious duties and functions while avoiding any public forays into political activities.

Resolving not to offer direct assistance or recognition to specific dissident organizations has put the official church at odds with some grassroots sectors of the church and Catholic oppositional actors that would like the official church to adopt a more directly confrontational strategy and be an active participant in dissident activities. Oswaldo Payá, who's Christian Liberation Movement organized the Varela Project, has not received an endorsement from the official church. Events surrounding the development of the Varela Project signaled the distance that exists between the official church and Catholic lay activists that participate in dissident activities, illustrating the church's adherence to an indirectly confrontational strategy. Church leaders seem willing to encourage the laity to engage in dissident activities, but will publicly distance themselves from Catholic dissidents who draw the attention of the government.

Dagoberto Valdés, Director of the Center of Civic and Religious Formation of Pinar del Río, President of the Catholic Commission for Culture of Pinar del Río, and a member of the Vatican's Council on Peace and Justice, in the 1990s formed close relationships with Mons. José Siro González, Archbishop of Pinar del Río, and Mons. Meurice of Santiago de Cuba, making him a leading figure among Catholic laymen in Cuba. Though each diocese in Cuba has a Center of Formation in the Faith, Pinar del Río's diocese was the only in Cuba to feature a Center of *Civic*

²⁷ Rolando Suarez, interview with author, 4 May 2006.

and Religious Formation. Valdés used the Center to organize lectures on democracy, human rights, and civic responsibility. He also served as the director of *Vitral*, considered the most politically contentious of the Catholic publications. *Vitral* often made a habit of publishing direct denunciations of the Cuban government and many of its policies.

When Valdés agreed to begin supporting Payá's Varela Project at an October 2001 meeting of lay workers in Cienfuegos, they decided to work together to attempt to move Catholic lay workers into more openly politically contentious positions and activities.²⁸ The meeting had been organized by the COCC's Commission on Culture, Justice, and Peace, then presided over by Mons. Meurice. The resulting alliance brought Mons. Meurice, who had not attended the meeting, to declare in the pages of *Vitral*, "It is not the mission of the Church to remove or install kings. It is her mission to proclaim the Evangelization with all the values that the Evangelization has."²⁹ The remark was meant to distance the official church from the dealings between Payá and Valdés.

In early 2007, the church resigned to cut its ties with the increasingly contentious and directly confrontational tone of *Vitral*. Valdés' close associate and ally, Mons. González, retired in early 2007 and was replaced by Mons. Jorge Enrique Serpa as Archbishop of Pinar del Río. Among the first decisions made by the new bishop was that resources reserved for the publication of *Vitral* and running the Center of Civic and Religious Formation would be redirected. The publication of *Vitral* would no longer be guaranteed.

In an editorial announcing the new bishop's decision Valdés cited a lack of funds as the reason for the closing of *Vitral*. For a church that consistently bemoans its lack of access to media outlets, closing one of its own publications, the most critical of the Cuban government, was interpreted internationally as a concession to the Cuban government. In one of his only interviews following the closing of *Vitral*, Dagoberto Valdés lamented the fact that the church itself had shut the magazine down, rather than repressive government tactics: "What I could not believe was that the decision to close the magazine came from within the church."³⁰

Responding to the high level of international publicity the story of *Vitral's* closing received, Mons. Serpa stated in an official communique from the diocese of Pinar del Río that he never discussed closing or terminating *Vitral* or the Center of Civic and Religious Formation, only that it was decided that the resources of the diocese must be redistributed in corresponding diocesan commissions, to better serve the program of evangelization, noted by Mons. Serpa as the "most

²⁸ Nelson Valdés, "Neighbors to the South: The Varela Project and the Clash within the Catholic Church in Cuba," Radio Progreso Inc, 2001-'02..

²⁹ Lecture by Mons. Pedro Meurice, "Pronto el Sol Volverá a Salir Para Todos," 2002.

³⁰ Qtd. in Fernando Ravsberg, "Cuba: Cierra Revista Catolica," bbc mundo.com, 13 April 2007.

important program of action the church can have.”³¹ He continued: “I have asked that *Vitral* magazine keep to the truth based on the gospel and the church's social doctrine, without falling into aggressive and argumentative expressions.”³² Church activists in Pinar del Río and Havana said church leaders had been discussing the closing of *Vitral* for more than a year because of government pressure. A news article revealed that the sharpness of *Vitral* political critiques had come to worry both conservatives in the church and hard-liners in government, according to an anonymous dissident activist.³³

This self-policing by the Cuban hierarchy reflects their intent to distance themselves from acts of direct confrontation and the superiority of their corporate interests. Dissident actors were shocked to learn that the same church that produced *El amor todo lo espera* was willing to engage in self-censure, thus adhering to its indirectly confrontational strategy. The Center of Civic and Religious Formation has been dismantled. The church hierarchy had successfully removed its official stamp from the pages of *Vitral*, though a new edition was in fact published after Mons. Serpa's decision with a new director. It continued to address political themes, and contained an editorial on the theme of respect:

“The politicians can believe that the only way to conceive of society and construct a just society is according to their ideology, which they believe is the only truthful one. One must respect the politicians, as individuals, but they must also respect and defend the legitimate right that other individuals have to think in a different way, to be able to express themselves, in order to construct a plural and truly participative society.”³⁴

With Dagoberto Valdés and his group of editors no longer involved, *Vitral* assumed the indirectly confrontational and more conciliatory tone of the Cuban Church's official line.

3. Participation with the Opposition

This section looks specifically at whether or not church leaders participate with the opposition in confrontational activities. A strategy of direct confrontation would find church leaders openly participating in political debates and joining the opposition in public demonstrations protesting against the regime. In a strategy of indirect confrontation, church leaders encourage laypersons to participate in the political life of the nation, but do not themselves participate nor encourage laypersons to join specific organizations.

Cuban dissidents have not chosen to stage many formal protest marches/events or make public protest a part of their contentious repertoire. Only the Ladies in White, the wives of imprisoned dissidents who gather every Sunday at the Santa Rita Church and stage a walk through Havana, have made public protest their primary contentious action. Yet even this group, who walks

³¹ Mons. Jorge Enrique Serpa, Official Communique, Pinar del Río, 17 April 2007.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Wildredo Cancio Isla, “An Outspoken Magazine of Cuban Church Closing,” *El Nuevo Herald*, 2007 .

³⁴ “El Respeto que Añoramos y Merecemos”, *Vitral*, año XIV, no.79, mayo-junio 2007.

peacefully and virtually unencumbered through the streets of Havana, does not receive any public acknowledgement or participation from church officials. The Ladies in White are permitted to use the Santa Rita Church as their gathering place, but they do not receive any public recognition by leaders of the church itself. Their processions go largely unmolested by government forces, due in large part to the high level of international attention they have garnered as well as the fact that no political statements or directly confrontational actions accompany the processions.

Mons. Alfredo Petit, Auxiliary Bishop of Havana, has witnessed a large number of believers flocking to the Catholic Church in search of political as much as religious leaders, and consequently a large number of disillusioned people: “Politics is the responsibility of laymen, they carry the social doctrine that we have. A lot of people come to the church thinking they’re going to find an alternative political party, and the church is not one.”³⁵ The Cuban Church has delegated the responsibility of political confrontation to laymen. According to the church’s strategy, laymen should be actively participating in politics, though church officials themselves cannot enter the political sphere. The political nature of *El amor todo lo espera* gave many Cubans the sense that the Catholic Church would lead a movement of dissident activists, but it has refused to assume this role. Though Cuban church leaders acknowledge that the Catholic Church now attracts almost exclusively Cubans who are unsympathetic to the Revolution, its ideology, and its political, economic, and social goals, they do not use their pulpits to make directly confrontational political pronouncements.

As adamant as church leaders are about refusing to become political figures, they forcefully argue that the Catholic laity must themselves become politically active. According to Rolando Suarez, “The Church doesn’t involve itself in politics. This is the duty of our faithful. However, many Catholic faithful often don’t realize that this is a social duty.”³⁶ It becomes apparent that church leaders feel they are endowed with a great responsibility to help develop a politically conscious citizenry, a responsibility that was neglected prior to the 1986 ENEC conference. Though they will not themselves assume a directly confrontational public voice, they are fomenting an able portion of the citizenry to think of themselves first and foremost as dignified Christian individuals, rather than simple parts of a large collective group. The Cuban Church does not want to be the voice of the opposition – but it does want to form and inform those who would become that voice.

Mons. Luigi Bonazzi is Cuba’s *Nuncio Apostólico*, the Vatican’s representative in Cuba. As he elaborates on the mission of the Catholic Church, in Cuba and in all places, it becomes apparent

³⁵ Mons. Alfredo Petit, interview with author, Havana, 19 April 2006.

³⁶ Rolando Suárez, interview with author, 4 May 2006.

that the Cuban church has the expressed approval of the Vatican in carrying out all facets of its strategy of indirect confrontation:

“The mission of the Cuban Church, as in all places, is to preach the Gospel, to proclaim that Jesus is present with us, to bring people toward a knowledge of Christ; Its mission is to help people take conscience of their dignity as children of God. Building society, the organization of civic life is the task of citizens, including Catholics who are citizens. The church doesn’t take a position in relation to social systems in the sense that it respects all political options from which citizens may decide to choose. Yet, the Gospel is also a powerful instrument of social transformation – it calls on society to construct itself with respect to the individual with citizens at the center of social life. Politics is the responsibility of citizens that are moved by the idea of a just society, constructed for the benefit of everyone.”³⁷

Mons. Bonazzi speaks the same message that Cuban church officials imparts, namely, putting the onus on citizens to build a just society while emphasizing the importance of their religious identity. He acknowledges that the Gospel itself can be transformative of citizens and should be used to build a moral political consciousness among the faithful so that they may be able to build just institutions for society to stand on – exactly the task the Cuban Church is working to achieve.

The Cuban Government Perspective

The harshest public critique of the Cuban government by the Cuban bishops since the initial years of the Revolution came in the 1993 pastoral letter *El amor todo lo espera*. Since being issued, church leaders have disagreed over the significance of the letter, largely reflecting the degree of commitment to remaining indirectly confrontational. For example, Mons. Petit fiercely defends the content and purpose of the pastoral letter, contributing to the view that its publication was a watershed event:

“*El amor todo lo espera* talks about reality, and it continues to represent the truth. The people were suffering. I participated in the writing of the document. The government never revealed the content of the text to the people, but it subsequently accused us of working for the CIA. People saw us accused but didn’t know what we said, so more and more began looking for the text of *El amor todo lo espera*. They say it was harsh; it was fair, not harsh. Nobody had ever said anything before that.”³⁸

The document was denounced, but never published, in the official government media. However, this led to more and more people seeking out the letter to discover its contents. As Mons. Petit notes, never before had an indigenous Cuban institution made such a statement questioning the ideology, practice, and direction of the Revolution.

Mention of *El amor todo lo espera* to Dorita Pérez, Director of the Office of Religious Subjects of the PCC, Havana Province, stirs a wrath of disdain toward the Cuban Catholic Church. Speaking for the Cuban government, her office handles all communications between the Catholic Church and the PCC in Havana Province. Fiercely disagreeing with Mons. Petit, Sra. Pérez points to *El*

³⁷ Papal Nuncio Mons. Luigi Bonazzi, interview with author, Havana, 11 May 2006.

³⁸ Mons. Alfredo Petit, interview with author, Havana, 19 April 2006.

amor todo lo espera as an example of the Cuban Church overstepping its bounds into the realm of political and economic issues in Cuba: “*El amor todo lo espera* made a very harsh critique. It criticized the treatment of youths, it criticized our educational system. They do politics in a devious, underhanded way. They are capitalists. They want education and healthcare to charge for these services. Cuba is not in want for any of this.”³⁹ These kinds of accusations represent the government’s view that the church is not only seeking to assist dissident activists in Cuba but also wants to reoccupy a social space that represents the most touted achievements of the Revolution, the fields of education and healthcare – two fields traditionally administered to by church institutions in Cuban society, but that now are under a state monopoly. Other leaders within the Cuban Church, such as Mons. Pérez Riera would prefer to avoid the kind of directly confrontational tone of *El amor todo lo espera*: “*El amor todo lo espera* was written in another era, during the worst juncture of the ‘special period.’ Today the situation is not the same. It was valid for that time, but I would slightly disagree with Mons. Petit. The principles continue being valid, but the situation is different.”⁴⁰

Indeed, *El amor todo lo espera* was written during the worst year of the economic crisis of the 1990s, when the government was in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis social actors that challenged the ideology and leadership of the Revolution. No such statement had been made by the Church while the Soviet Union still provided economic resources and international political and military backing to the revolutionary regime. Sensing that the government was in a position of weakness, the bishops acted. The Vatican signaled its approval of the Cuban Church’s direction by creating a cardenale for only the second time in Cuba’s history. Papal Nuncio Luigi Bonazzi recalls the significance of *El amor todo lo espera* in drawing a line in the sand between church and state in Cuba:

“*El amor todo le espera* seems to me to exemplify the difficulties that exist between the church and state. It is a bishop’s document that intended to invite all Cubans to look at each other as brothers and to work together as brothers in the construction of the Homeland. The state received it as a harsh criticism, as an attack on the system. I repeat that it was a difficulty in understanding one another, and it shouldn’t be surprising – these are the difficulties of joining entities, each with a very distinct identity, in a common project.”⁴¹

The debate over *El amor todo le espera* shows the sensitivity church leaders share toward crossing the line from indirect to direct confrontation. Yet, the Cuban government does not waiver in its view of the Cuban Church as a domestic antagonist, a non-revolutionary institution if not a counter-revolutionary one: “From the beginning of the Revolution the Catholics were against the revolutionary authority. Counterrevolutionaries hid within the church. They were against the Revolution and wanted to continue with their oligarchy.” This suspicion of religion

³⁹ Dorita Pérez, Head of the Office of Religious Subjects of the Communist Party of Havana, interview with author, Havana, 24 April 2006.

⁴⁰ Mons. José Félix Pérez Riera, interview with author, Havana, 4 May 2006.

⁴¹ Papal Nuncio Mons. Luigi Bonazzi, interview with author, Havana, 11 May 2006.

and the Catholic Church specifically continued throughout the revolutionary era. Following the ENEC conference, when Cuban church leaders emerged with a new theology that appeared to recognize the legitimacy of the Revolution and some of its achievements, rapprochement seemed possible. But issuing *El amor todo lo espera* at the low point of the “special period” confirmed government suspicions that the Church remained a counter-revolutionary organization: “This same church claims it doesn’t have anything to do with politics, and always it takes positions directly contradicting what we say. The Cuban Revolution is what teaches values. Now their pastoral letters speak against everything the Revolution says, and later they say that they don’t talk about politics.”⁴² The political character of much of the church’s writings and some of its activities does not go unnoticed by the government.

Sra. Pérez’s characterization of church-state relations centers on delineating boundaries. It would seem that relations could improve if the church would limit itself to matters of spirituality and nothing more:

“Relations between the Catholic church and the government are stable, more or less. They are relations of coexistence. The church has a specific objective of getting control of education and healthcare. These interests haven’t changed. They want them as they used to have them here, and like they have them in other countries, but here that is the work of the government, not the church.”⁴³

Education and healthcare are two areas of heightened contention, as these fields constituted the most touted achievements of the Revolution yet have historically been included in the domain of the Catholic Church: “After the ‘special period’ began they hoped to give they people a ‘little snack’ and health services. But that is the responsibility of the government, not the church.”⁴⁴ To highlight the hypocrisy of the church, she discussed the example of Cuban provincial schools, located primarily in the country. Church leaders have spoken against these schools, saying they break up the family structure, because children normally must attend school in the country for a period of approximately two weeks, visit home for a weekend, and then return to the countryside again. But, she argued, don’t the monasteries and seminaries do the same thing? In the end, according to Sra. Pérez, the schools only give a percentage of a child education and the rest must come from the family.

Sra. Pérez runs the Havana chapter of the very Office of Religious Subjects that monitors and vexes the Cuban Church. All communications go through Mons. Polcari, who Sra. Pérez describes as, “...not a revolutionary, although he is a fine comrade. There are others with whom relations are more tense.”⁴⁵ The intuition here is that Mons. Polcari is willing to put on a good face when dealing with the Office of Religious Subjects, though in private he advocates a transition to

⁴² Dorita Pérez, interview with author, Havana, 24 April 2006.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

representative democracy. Describing communications between the church and her office, Sra. Pérez states:

“Communications are fluid, there is no other word to describe them. But they don’t want to extend them. The objective of the church should be to serve and perform humanitarian services. But relations are normal. *El Comandante* had a meeting last year with the COCC and it went well, it was cordial. They say in front of him that they don’t want to alter socialism, but when they leave to do something else.”⁴⁶

In the Cuban government’s perspective, the church’s strategy of indirect confrontation consists of concealing its true objectives and desires, to return to the elite status the church enjoyed under the Republic, participate in a democratic transition, and reoccupy and administer Catholic services in education and healthcare. The philosophy of the revolutionary regime is that the state has the capacity to deliver all goods and services to the populace, so that efforts of the church to administer social services, even charitable ones, are considered a threat: “We don’t have anything but what the Revolution provides. Foreign priests often come to Havana and ask the people of the *barrio* what they need. But there is no lack of necessities here. The state performs this function, giving people what they need. They cannot teach us this, no priest can.”⁴⁷

A strategy of indirect confrontation is at its foundation confrontational. The Cuban Catholic Church and the Castro regime are institutions on opposite sides of broad political and philosophical questions in a decidedly adversarial relationship. Indirectly confronting the regime relieves the church from the threat of direct persecution, but the government has its own way of indirectly marginalizing the Cuban Church, to assure it does not become an autonomous *and* mainstream political institution.

Part of this strategy came in creating the *Concilio Evangélico*, which gives special privileges for Protestant religions, including permission to construct new churches. Sra. Pérez concedes, “Relations are normal with everybody, but with the Protestant churches they are better.”⁴⁸ According to Orlando Márquez, the existence of the *Concilio* has severed channels of communication between the Catholic Church and the more revolutionary-sympathetic Protestant faiths: “Really, there aren’t any relations between Catholicism other faiths. There are many Christian churches here but the communist system is paralyzing in terms of the relationships we are able to forge.”⁴⁹ The *Concilio* then serves to strengthen the capacity of Protestant churches to proselytize while isolating the Catholic Church.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Orlando Marquez, interview with author, Havana, 19 April 2006.

There is stark disagreement over the nature of the Church's relationship to dissident activists as well. In response to the question of whether the dissidents have an alliance with the church to confront the government, Rolando Suarez states:

“No. The church has always been of the opinion that our faithful is free to participate in politics. After declaring yourself faithful, all our faithful are free to choose any political path, it's the freedom that the church proposes, not that they must choose certain parties. The church, the hierarchy, has always been at the service of everyone. There are Catholics that are communist, that are liberal, the church is open to everything. There is no coalition between the church and a political party. I am a layperson, and the hierarchy has never told me what the best political option is. But the church is against the lack of options in our political system.”⁵⁰

This caveat allows the Cuban Church to position itself against the socialist system without denouncing it. However, it has not convinced the regime that there is not more than a symbolic relationship between the Cuban Church and Cuba's dissidents. According to Sra. Pérez, “The few counterrevolutionaries we have here, miserable as they are, hold their meetings in the Catholic church because they give them the space. The pulpit is not for counterrevolutionary activities.”⁵¹

The Cuban Catholic Church is firmly situated on the side of opposition to the Castro regime. Its relationship with the government is one of mutual dislike. The church has adopted strategies to conceal its desires for a regime transition and to mask what would be considered by the regime counter-revolutionary activities. It has chosen to indirectly confront the regime, deliberately avoiding overtly confronting the regime so as not to risk overt persecution. The government has responded with its own efforts to marginalize the Catholic Church in Cuba, creating a situation of heightened tensions between the two institutions beneath a publicly cordial veneer.

Church Strategy in Comparative Perspective

For much of Latin American history, church-state relations were based on formal and informal concordats between government elites and the upper levels of the church hierarchy. In most countries, the Catholic Church served to reinforce the traditional order of things. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) set the stage for a variety of new relationships between church and state. In the 1960s, many Latin American Catholic churches, seeking closer relationships with poor and marginalized people, began developing new pastoral practices and focused their evangelization efforts in these communities. Lines of authority were redrawn to give greater responsibility to the laity and the development of new forms of pastoral ministry were encouraged to focus on drawing the poor and marginalized into the church. Progressive Catholic theology soon spread throughout Latin America. *A Theology of Liberation*, published in 1970, blended elements of Marxist class struggle with a Christian view of social justice and political activism. Followers of liberation theology in its varying manifestations generally expressed a new

⁵⁰ Rolando Suarez, interview with author, 4 May 2006.

⁵¹ Dorita Pérez, interview with author, Havana, 24 April 2006.

commitment to mobilize the poor to struggle for their own liberation and emphasized the need for broader social and economic rights. These progressive church leaders not only adopted a new view of salvation – centered on the construction of a better temporal reality – but felt a *political* responsibility to help the poor and promote social justice.⁵² The emergence of a well-articulated and developed socio-political religious theology gave coherence and direction to scores of bishops, priests, and grassroots Catholic activists that stood in opposition to militaristic forms of governance adopted by right-wing authoritarian regimes throughout the Americas.

The Second Vatican Council and the Latin American Episcopal Conference at Medellín (1968) coincided with the rise of a panoply of right-wing authoritarian regimes in Latin America that promoted the idea of the national security state, set up in some cases explicitly to defend “Western Christian civilization” against communist and other ‘subversive’ socio-political influences. That a progressive church in Latin America emerged out of these developments demonstrated the responsiveness of church leaders to critical events that either change thinking within the church or alter domestic political arrangements. Mainwaring and Wilde (1989) argue that these two phenomena – the institutional reforms orchestrated during the Second Vatican Council and Medellín and the concurrent rise of right-wing dictatorships – together explain the emergence of the progressive church in Latin America: “Alone, neither the broader institutional reforms nor political dictatorship explain the strength of radical Catholic sectors...together, they had a catalytic effect upon the ecclesiastical institution.”⁵³ It was the combination of these phenomena (rather than either in isolation) that produced a stronger progressive church that sought to confront the military regimes that ruled their countries. Taking this argument a step further, it is argued here that the institutional reforms made in the church conferences toward a more progressive, leftist political vision combined with the rise of authoritarian regimes of a right-wing militaristic bent created a contentious situation that led the church into a strategy of *direct confrontation*. It was not simply ecclesial reforms but left-wing theological developments implemented by church leaders in countries facing the new experience of right-wing political dictatorship that made confrontational church-state relationships more likely to be *directly* confrontational. Broadly stated, the church and the regime as institutions were on polar opposite sides of the political spectrum with very little room on either end for political compromise or the moderation of rhetoric and action.

The churches that adopted a directly confrontational approach stood at the forefront of the opposition to the authoritarian regimes of their home countries. Many also established direct ties with dissident social and political actors. A fundamental pastoral activity of progressive church

⁵² Mainwaring and Wilde, eds., *The Progressive Church in Latin America*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989, 6-7.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 15.

leaders was the establishment of ecclesial base communities (CEBs), grassroots structures led by pastoral agents that organized Catholic followers in poor urban and rural areas. Liberation theology thrived in the CEBs, putting them theologically and politically on the side of opposition to the military regimes. The directly confrontational posture taken by the church served to create alliances with civil oppositional actors, who found in the church willing participants in the dissident movement and a private institutional space unpenetrated by the ruling regimes, in many cases the only such space still open and available to social dissenters. This gave the Catholic Church a privileged status in dissident civil society during the years of dictatorship. Both the Brazilian and Chilean Catholic Churches exemplify the directly confrontational strategy adopted by church officials heavily influenced by a new insurgent ideology that challenged the efforts of right-wing dictators to construct national security states. This created very tense, contentious relationships between church and state in these countries. For example, in 1976, responding to the murders of two priests and the kidnapping of a Brazilian bishop, the CNBB issued a communique entitled "Pastoral Message to the People of God." The bishops used the letter to denounce the death squads that carried out the dirty work of the military regime, asserted that the state was not equivalent to the nation, and outrightly compared the national security state to a communist totalitarian regime. In Chile, from 1976-1985, the *Vicaría de Solidaridad* provided moral leadership to the opposition and stood out for its defense of victims of state repression. Created by Chile's Cardinal Silva, the *Vicaría* provided legal assistance to victims of repression, housing assistance to the poor, it established moral cooperatives, and documented human rights abuses. Quite often, church members became targets of persecution, unable to immunize themselves from the repressive apparatus of the military regimes they confronted. This had a pivotal effect on the Latin American church in general: suffering political persecution refocused church leaders on the religious mission of the Catholic Church. Straying too far into politics made the church more dynamic but endangered its institutional integrity and brought harsh repercussions for radical church members that directly confronted the regime.

The 1979 meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) at Puebla marked a turning point for the Latin American Catholic Church. A balance between the influence of conservatives and progressives emerged that was not evident at Medellín, when progressives dominated CELAM. Apart from reiterating a focus on working for the poor, the question of authority was broached with a renewed emphasis placed on acknowledging the highest positions in the hierarchy as the leaders and spokesmen of the Catholic Church. Under the new papacy of John Paul II, the Vatican began to reassert the importance of maintaining strict lines of authority and reigned in the grassroots structures created by progressive church leaders. Along with enforcing tighter lines of authority, John Paul II worked to delegitimize liberation theology. The Vatican took the position that the main problem facing the church in Latin America was the threat

of a Marxist-inspired unorthodoxy that only served to imperil the church's unity by dividing the hierarchy from the grassroots.⁵⁴

The effects of the renewed conservative outlook of the papacy were manifested in limited options for churches facing authoritarian regimes. John Paul II was vociferously anti-communist and anti-authoritarian in general, but reining in the popular church and showing disapproval of liberation theology undercut the efforts of some progressive church leaders to articulate a directly confrontational message based on urging victims of military dictatorships to fight for their own liberation. A distinctly Catholic social message was still put forth by the church hierarchy, but the language of human rights and human dignity did not have the same confrontational impact or insurgent connotation of the language of liberation. Starting in the 1980s the right-wing authoritarian regimes that had ruled most of Latin America began to crumble. While the national churches of countries in transition faced new challenges associated with oncoming democratization and the rising strength of Protestant churches, other national Catholic churches continued confronting left-wing authoritarian regimes. Left-wing authoritarianism presented a different set of circumstances and challenges for church leaders that were repressed or marginalized by such regimes. Liberation theology could not serve as a viable confrontational theology, as it shared in broad ideological terms many of the political goals sought after by these left-wing regimes. No comparable conservative political theology existed that called on church leaders and pastoral agents to directly challenge these regimes with political activism. Furthermore, church members had learned that they too could become targets of persecution when they took directly confrontational approaches. Confrontation was still an option for church leaders, as the Vatican rejected Marxism and promoted an anti-communist political agenda. However, new strategies of contention would have to be developed to successfully confront left-wing authoritarianism.

The 1980s witnessed in Latin America the decline of right-wing authoritarianism and, for the first time, the presence of two left-wing authoritarian regimes, in Nicaragua and Cuba. Forced to deal with the emergence of a left-wing regime that came to power on the cusp of John Paul II's ascension into the papacy and the Vatican's shift toward a more conservative world outlook, the Nicaraguan Church was especially divided during the decade in which Nicaragua was ruled by the Sandinista government. The Nicaraguan church had been a politically active institution under the previous dictatorship, and had welcomed the end of Somoza's reign. Various grassroots Catholic groups supported the nascent Sandinista revolutionary army. When the FSLN took power, a large segment of radical church leaders and lay activists openly participated in the new government. Many progressive grassroots sectors of the Nicaraguan Church supported the socialist project of

⁵⁴ Peter Hebbelthwaite, "The Vatican's Latin American Policy," in Dermot Keogh, ed., *Church and Politics in Latin America*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990, 57-59.

the Ortega government while Cardinal Obando y Bravo and most of the middle and upper classes openly supported the Contras and US President Ronald Reagan's war against the regime, in direct confrontation. However, the church hierarchy eschewed grassroots mobilization while the regime based its power on mobilizing the grassroots. The presence of competing agendas *within* the church led to division and intra-church conflict, as the Nicaraguan church found itself unable to find a unifying strategy under conditions of left-wing authoritarianism and a conservative church hierarchy. Division created by the regime's deep social penetration and the church's anti-authoritarian position reflected the difficulties associated with choosing direct confrontation under these social and political conditions.

Directly confrontational church strategies faded along with the decline of right-wing authoritarianism. In countries where right-wing dictatorships lingered on, the church moved toward strategies of mediation and reconciliation, perhaps prescient of the oncoming wave of democratization. However, indirect confrontation as a contentious church strategy developed out of the Polish Church's and the Cuban Church's experiences confronting communist regimes. The Polish Church embodied John Paul II's definitive stand against communism without directly confronting the Polish communist regime, choosing instead to nurture dissident civil society and serve as a mediator between the government and dissident forces. In a country that was almost uniformly Catholic, the Catholic Church was able to wield a great deal of influence without making church officials the leaders of the dissident movement, thereby relieving them from becoming subjects of repression. New ecclesial institutional reforms in a conservative direction combined with the distinct oppressive tactics and social conditions created by left-wing authoritarian regimes made these confrontational relationships more likely to be *indirectly* confrontational. Before John Paul II ascended to the papacy, both the Polish and Cuban churches experienced extended periods of tension between church and state that did not become openly confrontational. The rise of a conservative papacy under conditions of left-wing authoritarianism unified these churches and made confrontation in this world-historical time period sustainable and more likely to take on an indirectly confrontational character.

Indirectly confronting left-wing authoritarian regimes meant that the church would no longer put itself on the frontlines of political opposition. Rather, laymen and grassroots activists would be encouraged, at times assisted, in their efforts to organize dissent. The rhetoric of pastoral letters and communiqués did not fervently denounce the regime or its ideology, nor did it call for the liberation of the general population. Instead, church leaders broadly criticized certain policies or social ills while recognizing the regime's authority and couching their language in a tone of reconciliation, the promotion of human dignity and the pursuit of dialogue with the regime. These churches sought to elevate the church's social position by symbolically positioning itself on the side of the opposition without extending its confrontational efforts to a point where the

institutional autonomy of the church would be threatened or church members would become the targets of repression.

The Cuban Catholic Church in Comparative Perspective

Cuban Church leaders have a tendency to regard their experience with revolutionary authoritarianism as unique amongst other national churches in Latin America and elsewhere. Cuba does stand alone as the only country in Latin America headed by a communist regime that came to power before the Second Vatican Council, survived through the end of the Cold War, and remains in power today. The key difference the Cuban bishops see between themselves and the rest of Latin America is that they experienced a sweeping, leftist, social revolution that was unique in the region. Comparing the Cuban Church to other Latin American churches during his lecture commemorating the 20th anniversary of the ENEC, Cardinal Ortega stated that the Cuban Church is unique for being in a “post-revolutionary” situation.⁵⁵ In the “pre-revolutionary” situation – referring to the early years of the revolution when the Cuban Catholic Church had not yet adapted to the new social and political reality created by the revolutionary regime and the newly mobilized Cuban population – many Cuban Catholics risked their lives and died in the internal struggle against the consolidation of the new revolutionary government. According to Cardinal Ortega, the “post-revolutionary” situation constitutes the aftermath of the complete decimation of the Catholic Church’s social-standing and cultural influence: “Now, Cuban Catholics live with their faith folded back in communities decimated by emigration or by fear of the kind of social sanction that can fall on those who attend the Church.” Summarizing the motive behind the church’s emergence from its period of silence, Cardinal Ortega states, “Our objective, in recognition of the reality in which we find ourselves, was to find paths to remove the Church from its immobility, to rise from its knees.”⁵⁶

Being in the “post-revolutionary” situation meant the Cuban Church had to acknowledge the fact that the Cuban revolutionary regime had consolidated its political power and social influence. It also meant it could not confront the regime with the tactics employed by some Latin American Catholics against authoritarian regimes in previous decades, or by Cuban Catholics during the early years of the Revolution. Referencing the progressive church leaders that embraced liberation theology, Cardinal Ortega warns that in no circumstance should members of the Cuban Church participate in revolutionary actions or join Marxist guerrilla groups – even if, Cardinal Ortega concedes, this was done by Latin American Catholics in the name of Christian love.⁵⁷ Cardinal Ortega’s critique of the violent consequences that come from adopting liberation theology reflects an intense suspicion and revulsion of that theology, shared by Cuban Church

⁵⁵ Cardinal Jaime Ortega, “XX años del E.N.E.C. y Nuevo Plan Pastoral”, Convento de San Juan de Letran, 6 April 2006.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

leaders who, having lived under a revolutionary government for over 45 years, have become skeptical of all leftist ideologies. Instead of mimicking the directly confrontational churches, the Cuban Church had to reinvent its strategy for dealing with the regime and evangelizing the Cuban people. In the political realm, this meant endorsing increased political pluralism, open dialogue, public debate, and the entry of new political ideas into the nation's political discourse – a discourse that is controlled, along with all national media, by the ruling regime. But the memories of intense oppression experienced during the early years of the revolution remained with the bishops, and kept them from treading into open confrontation with the regime. According to Mons. Polcari, the Cuban Church's deep commitment in the struggle to find a place for Catholicism in Cuba prevented the church hierarchy from looking outward for examples of churches that directly challenged authoritarian regimes: "Our bishops have this mentality, they take into account a series of experiences that we have lived through; we cannot live so dangerously, or try to transplant (another church's) experience here; we only have our own experience; we must give our response to society from the perspective of the faith; no specific church has inspired us."⁵⁸ Despite the stated desire of Cuban church leaders to portray their struggle as unique (and the justification they have in doing so) there are observable trends in church strategy that have taken place in Cuba and elsewhere, and international influences that have guided events surrounding the Cuban Church's entry into contentious politics. Occasionally at least, Cuban Church members have admitted as much.

International religious conferences were watershed events for the Latin American Church in which new theological visions were fleshed out and new directions were sanctioned by CELAM. The Second Vatican Council and the Medellín, and Puebla conferences all dealt with the problem of how the church should deal with modern political systems and what should be the church's role in society. The 1965 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), distributed at the conclusion of Vatican II, endorsed democracy as the Catholic Church's preferred form of government for both moral reasons (it would best guarantee individual freedom) and institutional reasons (it would best guarantee the autonomy and freedom of the church). Each of these conferences fundamentally changed the way church leaders perceived their religious missions, leading to changes in the way they intervened in political matters. They were also occasions during which various national churches could learn from each other's experiences and seek solutions to common problems. The Cuban Church, however, did not have a significant presence in either the Medellín or Puebla Conferences and, not having any affinity for the progressive direction being taken by the Latin American Church (especially at Medellín), was isolated from the developments associated with liberation theology and the new pastoral practices that sprung from progressive thinking. Nevertheless, Cuban Church leaders did take

⁵⁸ Mons. Ramon Suarez Polcari, interview with author, Havana, 9 May 2006.

note of the value of these conferences in preparation for the development of their own ecclesial conference and a uniquely Cuban theology.

When reflecting on the significance of the CELAM conferences, Cuban Church leaders express a clear feeling of detachment from the Latin American church's evolution in favor of a more progressive outlook during the 1960s and 1970s. "The content of Puebla did not correspond to our reality," says Mons. Pérez Riera. "The grand themes of the conference were valid but the content wasn't applicable to our reality. But the conference, the style of the conference, was the inspiration for ENEC."⁵⁹ Echoing this theme of showing admiration for the style of the CELAM conferences but not their content, Mons. Polcari suggests the Cuban Church's distrust of leftist religious theology resulted from Cuba's harsh experience with left-wing authoritarianism:

"We think that it is necessary to familiarize ourselves with the official conferences; what was said in Medellín and Puebla was good, but Cuba is distinct from the rest of Latin America. We are in agreement with the preferential option for the poor, but liberation theology was not applicable here in Cuba; the problem of the poor in Latin America is not like what we have in Cuba – we have our own experience. We didn't apply the teachings of these conferences to Cuba, rather, we held ENEC from within, from our own perspective."⁶⁰

Here, Mons. Polcari highlights a unique element of the Cuban system that made liberation theology untenable for Cuban Church leaders: the poor in Cuba were being tended to by a regime that already purported to "liberate" the populace.

During his lecture marking the 20th anniversary of ENEC, Cardinal Ortega acknowledged that liberation theology was born out of a situation of grave injustice, but admonished the example set by those theologians that degraded themselves by employing Marxist analysis and advocating methods in their struggle against injustice that could lead to violence, including expressing a mentality that would "justify that killing of the rich for the love of the poor."⁶¹ According to Cardinal Ortega, the Cuban Church's experience with socialist revolution gave it a higher wisdom, a knowledge of the wickedness of leftist ideology that liberation theologians could not understand or appreciate, as they still had a "pre-revolutionary" state of mind. Yet, as Orlando Márquez states, the Puebla conference changed modes of thinking within the Cuban Church even as they continued to promote their uniqueness: "The situation in Cuba is unique and distinct from Latin America. The ENEC Conference was preceded by a period of reflection over the reality of the country that came after Puebla. The goal was to formulate our own pastoral."⁶² Emboldened by the prospect of a new direction in the Latin American church, the Cuban Church sought to

⁵⁹ Mons. José Félix Pérez Riera, interview with author, Havana, 4 May 2006.

⁶⁰ Mons. Ramon Suarez Polcari, interview with author, Havana, 9 May 2006.

⁶¹ Cardinal Jaime Ortega, "XX años del E.N.E.C. y Nuevo Plan Pastoral," Convento de San Juan de Letrán, 6 April 2006.

⁶² Orlando Marquez, interview with author, Havana, 19 April 2006.

develop a theology of communion, one that would unite all Christian brothers in love and elevate them above all separations and divisions.⁶³

After holding the ENEC conference in 1986, the Cuban Church felt more comfortable engaging in broader religious and social themes that were affecting Latin America as a whole. The Cuban Church is still unsettled by its period of silence – it has tried to explain its inability to assert itself in the first 20 years of the revolution by calling attention to the dramatic extent of the revolutionary regime’s social and political control. Yet, it has also failed to acknowledge the fact that Catholicism in Cuba had not penetrated the grassroots of society, had not established roots that would be strong enough to withstand the challenge of revolutionary political ideology.

Consequently, the Cuban Church adopted an indirectly confrontational strategy to redress their stagnant social position while minimizing the risk of political retribution. Indirect confrontation was more in line with the trajectory of thinking in CELAM and the Vatican after Puebla and up to and including the 1992 CELAM conference at Santo Domingo. Cuban Church leaders did participate at the Santo Domingo conference and have acknowledged that, in the words of Mons. Polcari, “the conference at Santo Domingo was closer to our reality.”⁶⁴ During the 1992 CELAM conference Latin American church leaders decided they would seek to reclaim the public sphere for religious morality by reinjecting the church into civil society, but not specifically into political organizations or by taking sides in political conflicts. It was recognized at the conference that the church became vulnerable to repression and persecution in the past when it took sides in political conflicts. The influence of Santo Domingo is apparent in the efforts the Cuban Church has devoted to encouraging the growth of civil society (while maintaining distance from dissident actors) and building its own cultural-meaning system. In 1992 CELAM did reiterate the Catholic Church’s defense of representative democracy as the preferred form of governance, a view that is not often openly professed by Cuban Church leaders but one that is certainly the prevailing conviction behind the closed doors of the church itself.

The fundamental difference between the national churches in contentious relationships with authoritarian regimes in the period between the Medellín and Puebla conferences and the post-Puebla period is the way in which churches chose to confront these regimes. The contentiousness between church and state throughout many Latin American countries that witnessed the coming to power of military dictatorships dissipated over time; many progressive church leaders continued evangelizing with liberation theology, but the repression many had suffered served as a vivid cautionary tale for clergy and lay alike. Furthermore, the Vatican’s denunciation of liberation theology and appointment of many conservative bishops sent clear signals as to where

⁶³ Cardinal Jaime Ortega, “XX años del E.N.E.C. y Nuevo Plan Pastoral,” Convento de San Juan de Letrán, 6 April 2006.

⁶⁴ Mons. Ramon Suarez Polcari, interview with author, Havana, 9 May 2006.

the highest positions of the hierarchy decided the Catholic Church was heading. As right-wing authoritarian regimes began to fall, church leaders that had been marginalized in left-wing dictatorships searched for ways to assert themselves while taking into account a myriad of oppressive social, political, and institutional conditions.

For the Polish, Nicaraguan, and Cuban church hierarchies, critical events provided re-entry points to assume positions of prominence in their societies and opportunities to develop confrontational strategies. All of these churches benefited from high-profile papal visits from a very popular pope that provided social legitimacy to the political stances of the church hierarchies. The social status of the Polish church was immediately elevated by the election of a Polish pope in 1978. John Paul II effectively used his internationally recognized moral stature and notoriety to focus world attention on the plight of his brethren in communist Poland.⁶⁵ The collapse of the USSR was the momentous event that spurred change in the behavior of the Cuban Church in a more contentious direction, leading to the creation of a Cuban cardenale and a 1998 papal visit. For all three of these churches, approval from the Vatican and increased international attention combined with regime statements espousing admiration for the pope and respect for the Catholic Church made it less likely that church would itself be persecuted. However, while Nicaraguan Church leaders used the occasion to elevate their directly confrontational rhetoric – leading to increased division within the Nicaraguan Church, church leaders from the Polish and Cuban churches were careful not to overestimate gains made from the papal visits and deviate from their fundamental strategy of confronting the regime indirectly.

The Venezuelan polity is currently teetering on the brink between democracy and left-wing authoritarianism. When the Chávez regime began moving toward authoritarian socialism, the Venezuelan bishops' responded with some harsh statements reminiscent of a pattern that was laid out by both the Polish and Cuban churches: reacting to the onset of left-wing authoritarianism with acts of direct confrontation. After experiencing periods of severe retaliation by their governments, both the Polish and Cuban churches then entered periods of acquiescence as the regimes consolidated their power. The Venezuelan Bishops' Conference (CEV) seems to be discovering the virtues of indirect confrontation earlier than those churches, having already sensed the extent to which Chavez is willing to restructure Venezuelan society and realizing that direct confrontation could put their institutional survival at risk. Yet, the country has not been completely 'socialized' to the extent of what occurred in Cuba or Poland, and the CEV is still expressing disapproval for certain Chavez policies in a directly confrontational manner.

⁶⁵ Timothy A. Byrnes, "The Polish Church: Catholic Hierarchy and Polish Politics," in Manuel, et al., eds., *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State: Comparative Perspectives*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 104-6.

During the failed 2002 coup attempt against the Chávez regime, the CEV used the language of indirect confrontation to help quell the crisis, repeatedly calling for national dialogue and reconciliation. It has since continually addressed political themes in its pastoral letters and communiques, blending directly and indirectly confrontational statements throughout. They have warned against the deteriorating integrity of the country's political institutions, the increasing militarization of Venezuelan society, polarization between supporters of the government and the social opposition, and threats to political and civil liberties. A critical Chavez political initiative was his 2007 proposed reform of the Venezuelan constitution to remove term limits, allowing him to serve as president indefinitely. The CEV responded to this proposal with a communiqué condemning the push the Chavez regime is making toward installing socialism:

“The model of a Marxist-Leninist, socialist state is contrary to the thinking of the Liberator Simón Bolívar and is also contrary to the personal nature of the human being and the Christian vision of man, because it establishes the absolute dominion of the state over the individual... The reform proposal excludes political and social sectors of the country that do not support a socialist state, restricts personal freedoms and represents a retreat in the progress of human rights.”⁶⁶

Statements like these closely approximate a directly confrontational strategy. The CEV here sets socialism in opposition to values held not only by the Catholic Church but to human rights in general and the legacy of the nation's greatest hero, Simon Bolivar. The failure of the referendum could lead Venezuelan church leaders to continue confronting the regime directly. Yet, the channels of communication between church and state have stayed open. On occasion the bishops have met personally with Chávez in the spirit of maintaining a dialogue. It remains to be seen if the Venezuelan bishops will mimic the strategy of the Cuban bishops to the extent that the Venezuelan regime has mimicked the Cuban regime.

Some conditions and strategic tactics were constant across different political systems and time periods. In Chile, Brazil, Poland, and Cuba, the Catholic Church remained the only significant independent institution with a public oppositional voice. Civil society used the church in these cases to create a political space autonomous from the state. While some leaders of the Brazilian and Chilean churches became very vocal and active in their confrontational activities, the Polish and Cuban church leadership lent themselves to a symbolic association with dissidence. The regimes in these four cases worked to marginalize the church, but only in the Polish and Cuban cases was *religion* per se attacked by regimes that declared themselves atheist. This not only made confrontation dangerous but evangelization itself – especially in the Cuban case where Catholicism did not have the social reach of the Polish Church, though the regime sought to extend revolutionary political and cultural domination over every corner of the island.

⁶⁶ Conferencia Episcopal Venezolana, "Llamados a Vivir en Libertad", Exhortación del Episcopado Venezolano sobre la propuesta de la Reforma Constitucional, Caracas, 19 October 2007.

A common strategy in all the cases of church confrontation is the development of alternative cultural meaning-systems. The popular church in Latin America set itself up as defender of the poor and marginalized, and had in liberation theology an ideological antidote to the ideology of national security promoted by the military dictatorships. But while in cases of right-wing authoritarianism the Catholic church and the state ferociously disagreed over *how* to best interpret Christianity (most regimes fancied themselves the defenders of Christian civilization), churches under communist regimes needed simply to invoke a transcendental religious order to stand in opposition to regimes promoting a Marxist, atheist national ideology. According to Osa (1996), the convening of the Great Novena of the Millennium in Poland established a symbolic and tactical paradigm for contention – the Black Madonna as the primary symbol of the Church as embodiment and defender of the Polish nation against the atheist and traditionless communist state.⁶⁷ The establishment of a cultural meaning-system that countered the state ideology enhanced Solidarity’s potential for mass mobilization and made the crosses, flowers, and religious pictures used in the Gdansk shipyards in 1980 instantly comprehensible to the Polish populace.⁶⁸ The Cuban Catholic Church now represents an equally contentious symbol in Cuban society: its focus on individual human dignity serves to counter the Cuban regime’s socialist ideology and it is widely recognized as an institution that welcomes those unsympathetic to the Revolution. Cuban dissidents have tied their organizations and activities to Catholic symbols, though they have to date not achieved the organizational capacity or level of popular support that Solidarity enjoyed.

When becoming one of the only independent institutions with an oppositional public voice (in cases of both right and left-wing authoritarianism), the Catholic Church’s public statements became an important tool for extricating themselves from the regime and its ideology, and expressing their support for victims of the regime and oppositional actors. Distributing pastoral letters and communiques allowed the hierarchy to communicate with the population beyond their temples in cases where the regime imposed censorship over the media. When they provided an oppositional, independent message to society they served as a beacon for dissidents and repressed citizens. When directing these messages to regime officials, the bishops spoke in a voice on behalf of those who had no outlet to speak for themselves. The Chilean, Brazilian, and Nicaraguan hierarchies all used written statements to condemn the regime and its ideology. The Polish and Cuban episcopates never outrightly condemned the regime or expressed support for oppositional political organizations, but made clear the distinctly religious philosophical grounding of the church in relation to their respective regime’s Marxist foundations. In the case of Cuba, one politically contentious pastoral letter had enough of an effect to ignite and sustain a contentious relationship between church and state. Nothing had been expressed by a Cuban institution since

⁶⁷ Maryjane Osa, “Pastoral Mobilization and Contention: The Religious Foundations of the Solidarity Movement in Poland,” in Christian Smith, ed., *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*, New York: Routledge, 1996, 75.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

the triumph of the Revolution quite like *El amor todo lo espera*, and, having felt that the socio-political situation never drastically changed, the bishops felt nothing quite so contentious needed to be repeated. The Venezuelan Bishops' Conference is still finding its voice through its pastoral letters and communiques. But it has already developed a contentious relationship with the regime. It remains to be seen whether the CEV will formulate a coherent indirectly confrontational strategy or become directly confrontational as the Chavez regime continues to consolidate itself. The risk of going forward with direct confrontation could be a highly repressive backlash, as occurred in the Polish and Cuban cases, or potentially increased division within the church if poorer sectors stay loyal to Chavez, a la the Nicaraguan case.

The churches that were directly confrontational built Catholic socio-political institutions to monitor human rights abuses and assist victims of the regime. In Chile, when the first two ecumenical institutions formed to monitor human rights abuses and assist victims (CONAR and COPACHI) were shut down by the Pinochet regime, Cardinal Silva responded by creating the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* under the explicit protection of the Chilean Church and worked to build an international financial support network to reduce dependency on the state. In contrast, the Cuban Church has proceeded far more cautiously than the churches that took directly confrontational approaches. It was the Cuban Church itself that cut off resources to Pinar del Río's Center of Civic and Religious Formation - an educational center that dealt explicitly with religious morality and democratic political theory that did not go so far as to provide aid to dissidents but was still viewed as subversive by the Cuban government. The *Centro*, and its literary organ *Vitral*, were brought up by government officials as a point of contention in virtually all discussions between church and state since its inception. Significantly, the church hierarchy shut down the center on its own initiative, rather than at the regime's behest.

No sectors of the Cuban Church ever shared the theological vision or substantive political objectives of the progressive church in Latin America. While the revolutionary movement in Nicaragua was able to court a large portion of the Catholic population that had been inculcated with liberation theology in Nicaraguan CEBs, the Cuban Church never built any grassroots organizations similar to CEBs, nor had any church members worked to foment a popular movement within the church, thus limiting the amount of potential support the revolutionary government could draw from the church.⁶⁹ However, having received no permission to build new temples by the Cuban government, the Cuban Church found ways to develop new spaces for worship and to evangelize in areas with no church facilities. In the 1990s, Cuban Church members created *Casas de Oración* (Houses of Prayer), as a way to evangelize and provide houses of worship in places with no Catholic temples. The *Casas* also serve as informal religious

⁶⁹ Margaret E. Crahan, "Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Nicaragua," in Mainwaring and Wilde, eds. *The Progressive Church in Latin America*, 58.

gatherings for prayer and bible discussion. Politics are not formally discussed in the *Casas*, but they are attended exclusively by those who are unsympathetic to the Revolution.

The churches that engaged in indirect confrontation also found areas of agreement on key policy issues with the regime that kept relations from sinking into direct confrontation. The Polish Church always supported the government's position on the retention of the Western and Northern territories established in the Potsdam Conference – to the extent that it openly disagreed with the Vatican on this issue. For this reason the Party Secretary recognized the Polish church as the “loyal opposition” in that the church did not support the Polish United Workers' Party because it was opposed to the philosophy of Marxism but was nevertheless loyal to the interests of the Polish nation. Similarly, the Cuban Church has always denounced the US trade embargo on Cuba – the most sensitive foreign policy issue for the Cuban government – to the extent that relations with the Cuban-American Church based in Miami have been continuously sour since the first decades of the Revolution over the issue.

Directly confrontational episcopates were widely regarded as the leaders, or most vocal representatives, of the opposition to their regimes. In Brazil, assuming this role meant becoming the “voice of the voiceless” – providing a voice not simply to the opposition but to the poor and marginalized. Brazilian priests and bishops organized masses and funerals for the regime's opponents. In Nicaragua, the episcopacy railed against the Sandinistas and lionized the Contras – to the extent that Cardinal Obando y Bravo appeared side by side with Contra soldiers in Miami and defended the internationally-funded insurgent war against the Sandinista government. Chilean Catholic institutions provided legal and humanitarian aid to victims of oppression, and created umbrella organizations for various dissident groups. In these three cases, some members of the church hierarchy openly associated themselves with the political opposition. Whether working clandestinely with oppositional actors, publicly providing aid, or using their pulpits and pastoral messages to denounce the regime and rally the opposition, the level of open association, assistance, and participation of church leaders with oppositional forces put these churches squarely in a directly confrontational relationship with their regimes.

For the Cuban and Polish churches, association with the opposition in public arenas was more symbolic than open. The Polish Church undoubtedly provided aid, space, and counsel to members of the Solidarity movement. But church members were never present at the movements public gatherings, strikes, or massive street demonstrations. The Polish episcopate took the official position that the church is neutral vis-à-vis political systems and organizations, but encouraged Catholics to join organizations that fit a Christian world outlook and deplored the fact that they would be forced to join organizations that did not reflect such a worldview – a classic indirectly confrontational statement against the involuntary enlistment of Poles into various state

organizations that has also been expressed by Cuban Church leaders in the context of Cuban revolutionary society.

Though Cuban dissidents have not yet organized the kind of visibly oppositional activities that Solidarity was able to orchestrate, they have still used Catholic symbolism to lend a spiritual aura to activities that would otherwise appear more overtly political. The clearest and most internationally renowned example of such behavior is the Ladies in White. Though they gather after Sunday mass at the Santa Rita Church to begin their procession, the Ladies are not accompanied by any clergy in the march that carries them through the streets of Havana – but they are monitored closely by state security and often pursued by international photographers.

The Solidarity movement offers a prime example of a dissident movement that began in the realm of symbolic politics, tying activism to Catholic symbols the way the Ladies in White have done with their protest marches against political repression and the dissident Cuban organizations the Christian Liberation Movement and the Democratic Christian Movement have done by explicitly joining the label ‘Christian’ with ‘Liberation’ and ‘Democratic’ in the titles of their organizations. While the Polish Church was more clandestinely active in helping the leaders of Solidarity form their political message and strategy to deal with the regime, the Cuban Church has kept politically dissident organizations at arms length, encouraging the laity to be active in the political life of the country and join organizations that are in line with Catholic social doctrine but not allowing any direct ties between church members and political organizations. Yet, while not endorsing the political organizations that employ Catholic symbolism, the Cuban Church has not actively discredited them either. To a large extent, it was sufficient that church leaders under communist regimes stayed neutral in reference to many political issues, critical events, and dissident groups to remain in the realm of contentious politics; in a socio-political milieu where revolutionary support is demanded by the structures of authority, silence can be vociferously declarative and neutrality itself an act of confrontation.

Analyzing and defining a church’s contentious strategy under oppressive conditions reveals what church leaders believe about the mission of their church and how church leaders think about political issues. *How* a church approaches contention signifies what their leaders believe their role should be in politics and what church leaders are willing to risk – that is, how far they are willing to go in challenging authoritarian governments – as well as what they may be willing to contribute during a transition period. The choice of contentious strategy may reflect the scope of religious penetration in society and the extent to which religion and politics are intertwined. A church’s choice to enter the realm of political contention instantly politicizes religion and can make the church a subject of repression. Among Cuban Church leaders, there are both soft-liners and hard-liners, those who would like to pursue a more open dialogue with the government and

work together toward mutually desired goals and those who maintain harsh feelings toward the revolution after 48 years of continual marginalization of the church by the state. Some believe evangelization is the only mission of the church, while others would like to pursue a more directly confrontational political agenda and fight for social justice while fulfilling the church's religious mission. In practice, the public manifestation of church confrontation is guarded, diplomatic, respectful, even optimistic – reflecting an indirectly confrontational strategy. However, in private, it is apparent that many church attitudes toward the Cuban government reflect a resolute defiance of tyranny, firm, impassioned, and combative – a directly confrontational posture, but one that rarely emerges in Cuban society from behind closed doors.

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