

The Anatomy of a Death: Repression, Human Rights and the Case of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme in Authoritarian Brazil*

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Abstract. Employing new archival sources, this article reappraises the role of human rights in the opposition to Brazil's repressive military regime. While most interpretations pinpoint the protest against the 1975 murder of journalist Vladimir Herzog as the opposition's great awakening, this research focuses on a similar outcry against the 1973 killing of University of São Paulo student Alexandre Vannucchi Leme. His death led students and clergymen to defy riot troops and gather 3,000 people for a memorial service that was the first large-scale anti-regime demonstration of the 1970s and a decisive step in the Roman Catholic Church's development as leader of the opposition.

The passage of time and the appearance of new evidence bid us to rethink the history of the repressive Brazilian military regime of 1964–85.¹ Most

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¹ For example, in 1996 newly discovered documentation established proof that guerrilla leader Carlos Lamarca died not in combat, as the official version stated, but in an execution by soldiers; see Bernardino Furtado, 'Laudo cadavérico indica que Lamarca foi executado', *O Globo*, 7 July 1996, p. 12; also see Ricardo Miranda, 'Exército reage à reabertura do caso', *O Globo*, 9 July 1996, p. 3. A powerful example of new evidence is the rare recording of military memory; see the trilogy of interviews with leading officers by Maria Celina D'Araújo, Gláucio Ary Dillon Soares and Celso Castro, *Visões do golpe: a memória militar sobre 1964* (Rio de Janeiro, 1994), *Anos de chumbo: a memória militar sobre a repressão* (Rio de Janeiro, 1994), and *A volta aos quartéis: a memória militar sobre a abertura* (Rio de Janeiro, 1995). For examples of scholarly reinterpretation, see João Roberto Martins Filho, *O palácio e a caserna: a dinâmica militar das crises políticas na ditadura (1964–1969)* (S. Carlos, 1995); Anthony Pereira, 'Persecution and Farce': The Origins and Transformation of Brazil's Political Trials', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 33, no. 1 (forthcoming, 1998).

interpretations pinpoint a momentous religious protest against the torturous murder of journalist Vladimir Herzog in 1975 as the opposition's great awakening in the fight for human rights and democracy. In the words of fellow journalist and torture victim Paulo Markun, 'The death of Vladimir Herzog changed Brazil. It provoked the first great popular reaction against torture, arbitrary imprisonment, [and] disrespect for human rights.'² However, this incident occurred *after* violence and repression had dropped sharply; indeed, President Ernesto Geisel (1974–9) had already moved to liberalise the regime and restrict the repressive forces. This article reappraises the role of human rights in the opposition by focusing on an earlier, similar protest against the killing of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme, a 22-year-old student at the University of São Paulo. Leme died in jail on 17 March 1973, hours after his arrest and torture by security agents. One of the most shocking episodes of the term of President Emílio Garrastazú Médici (1969–74), his death led students and Roman Catholic clergymen to defy riot troops and gather 3,000 people to hear the archbishop of São Paulo criticise the government at a memorial service. This case is generally forgotten in discussions of military Brazil,³ yet as the truly first large-scale anti-regime demonstration of the 1970s it set a precedent for the key Herzog protest and helped raise the Church to its decisive leadership of the opposition.

This article examines three facets of the Leme case in order to understand the political stakes involved in the battle between repression and human rights. However, it goes beyond mere political analysis and is also aimed at helping to construct the history of the Médici years, the bloodiest yet least studied of the military periods.⁴ The intention is to

² Paulo Markun, 'Introdução', in Paulo Markun (ed.), *Vlado: retrato da morte de um homem e de uma época* (São Paulo, 1988); see also Alfred Stepan (ed.), *Democratizing Brazil: Problems of Transition and Consolidation* (New York, 1989).

³ For instance, the Leme case receives no mention in one of the primary texts on the period, Thomas E. Skidmore's *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1964–85* (New York, 1988).

⁴ A general outline of the military regime is available in a number of works written on the heels of events and therefore influenced by the ideological polarisation of the Cold War; see, for example, Maria Helena Moreira Alves, *Estado e oposição no Brasil (1964–1984)*, trans. Clóvis Marques (Petrópolis, 1985); also see Skidmore, *Military Rule*; Stepan (ed.), *Democratizing Brazil*, Stepan (ed.), *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies, and Future* (New Haven, 1973); Stepan (ed.), *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone* (Princeton, 1988); Ronald M. Schneider, *The Political System of Brazil: Emergence of a 'Modernizing' Authoritarian Regime, 1964–1970* (New York, 1971) and *'Order and Progress': A Political History of Brazil* (Boulder, CO, 1991); Peter Flynn, *Brazil: A Political Analysis* (Boulder, CO, 1978); on the influence of the Cold War on the literature, see Richard Fagen, 'Latin America and the Cold War: Oh For the Good Old Days?' *LASA Forum*, vol. 26 (autumn 1995), pp. 5–11. For a recent reinterpretation of the Médici years, see Carlos Fico, *Reinventando e otimismo: ditadura, propaganda e imaginário social no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1997).

provide a balanced, interpretive narrative of one of its key moments. The routine detention of a student activist escalated into murder and cover-up by the security forces and a political problem for the regime, which had cowed the opposition into silence since 1969. The first section of the article introduces the dispute over the incident, and seeks to clarify controversial questions about Leme's political activities and the circumstances of his death, including the behaviour of the security forces. In the 1970s censorship and Cold War polarisation distorted or hid the facts about conflict over the repression. Historical rigour demands rectifying the record. This will sharpen interpretations, build appreciation for historical complexities, and allow academic and political debates about the period to mature. It should also help us to understand how different interests create different images of important individuals: the regime saw Leme as a dangerous terrorist, while the opposition raised him up as a symbol of heroic resistance. The second section analyses reactions to the incident and its role in building up the opposition. The Church walked a tightrope between the desire for justice and the need to avoid further violence. It faced high risks in taking up the Leme cause, for instance, reprisal by the military for becoming too close to the revolutionary left, the principal enemy of the regime. Yet it also gained political strength by firmly defending human rights. The third part delves into the Church–military debate of the case. Meeting secretly with a top general, the key bishops pressured the military to investigate the Leme case. Both the general literature on the military regime and the more specialised works on the Brazilian Church correctly emphasise the conflict of the military period, but fail to consider attempts to resolve it through dialogue.⁵

This article explores four major, largely unstudied archival sources indispensable for understanding the Médici era. The 'Brasil: *Nunca Mais*' collection of military tribunal proceedings against alleged subversives contains a three-volume transcript of the Leme investigation. These records exist thanks to the Archdiocese of São Paulo's secret project to copy military trial records. It resulted in the most compelling account of torture in authoritarian Latin America, the best-seller *Brasil: Nunca Mais*.⁶ Opened to researchers in late 1994, the archive

⁵ For further discussion, see Kenneth P. Serbin, 'Social Justice or Subversion? The Secret Dialogues of Brazil's Bishops and Generals', unpublished manuscript, 1997, ch. 1.

⁶ The 'Brasil: Nunca Mais' (BNM) collection is housed at the Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação Social, Associação Cultural Arquivo Edgard Leuenroth (AEL), Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, S. Paulo. Hereafter these materials are cited as AEL, BNM. For the best-

of the former political police of São Paulo, the *Departamento Estadual de Ordem Política e Social* (DEOPS-SP), holds hundreds of documents on the Vannucchi case.⁷ Additional documentation is available in the archive of the *Departamento de Ordem Política e Social da Guanabara* (DOPS-GB), the former political police of the city of Rio de Janeiro.⁸ Upon the extinction of these two agencies in the early 1980s, their papers went to the Polícia Federal, the national investigative police, also a repressive agency. Democratic consolidation after 1985 brought these sensitive documents to local-level historical archives. The move exemplified how the political process affects the writing of history. These collections are especially important because they contain some papers from the military security services, whose archives remain closed. The archive of General Antônio Carlos da Silva Muricy, available to researchers as of 1992, reveals the discussions of the secret Church–military Bipartite Commission, previously unknown to scholars. Run by Muricy from 1970 to 1974, the Commission hotly debated the Leme incident.⁹ The Muricy

selling synopsis of this documentation, see Archdiocese of São Paulo, *Brasil: nunca mais* (Petrópolis, 1985); for the English version, see Joan Dassin (ed.), *Torture in Brazil: A Report by the Archdiocese of São Paulo* (New York, 1986); on the research for the book, see Lawrence Weschler, *A Miracle, a Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers* (New York, 1990); Jaime Wright, ‘D. Paulo e os direitos humanos – II’, in Helcion Ribeiro (ed.), *Paulo Evaristo Arns: cardeal da esperança e pastor da Igreja de São Paulo* (São Paulo, 1989), pp. 70–1.

⁷ For background on this archive, see João Paulo Garrido Pimenta, ‘Os arquivos do DEOPS-SP: nota preliminar’, *Revista de História*, vol. 132 (1995), pp. 149–54. The DEOPS-SP is housed in the Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo (AESP). Hereafter the DEOPS holdings are cited as AESP, DEOPS-SP.

⁸ For background on this archive, see Darién J. Davis, ‘The Arquivos das Polícias Políticas [*sic*] of the State of Rio de Janeiro’, *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1996), pp. 99–104; Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, *Os arquivos das polícias políticas: reflexos de nossa história contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996), and *DOPS: a lógica da desconfiança* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996). The DOPS-GB is held at the Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (APERJ). The DOPS material is hereafter cited as APERJ, DOPS-GB. The former federal capital of Rio de Janeiro became the state of Guanabara in 1960, and remained so until its absorption by the state of Rio de Janeiro in 1975. For background on the political police in Rio, see Elizabeth Cancelli, *O mundo da violência: a polícia da era Vargas* (Brasília, 1993).

⁹ For background on the Muricy archive, see Serbin, ‘Social Justice or Subversion?’ ch. 1; also see Serbin, ‘O diálogo secreto de bispos e generais nos anos da repressão’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 3 March 1996, pp. X1–X4. The Muricy archive is located at the Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (FGV/CPDOC). The Muricy papers are hereafter cited as FGV/CPDOC, ACM. For background on Muricy, see Antônio Carlos da Silva Muricy, *Antônio Carlos Muricy (depoimento, 1986)* (Rio de Janeiro: FGV/CPDOC, 1993); Muricy, *Palavras de um soldado* (Rio de Janeiro, 1971); Ignez de Cordeiro de Farias, ‘Um troupiér

collection is one of the few primary sources from a major military figure of the period. Each collection offers a rare glimpse of the regime's internal discourse on the Church, and of its strategies for dealing with the clergy. These archives have been supplemented through oral interviews with clergymen, military officers, friends and relatives of Leme, former militants, and others close to the case.

Upon seizing power in 1964 the armed forces applied a US-backed national security plan to make Brazil a strategic bulwark of 'Western Christian civilisation' against the international Communist movement, which had gained a toehold in the hemisphere with the Cuban Revolution. The entire Brazilian left, ranging from nationalist populists such as deposed President João Goulart to radical revolutionaries, became victims of a violent, Brazilian version of McCarthyism. Military takeover followed in other countries, until virtually all of Latin America came under military rule in the 1970s. In Brazil the military and the police arrested 50,000 people for political reasons in the period 1964–79. Thousands more went into exile. The repression cut deeply into the middle class, normally exempt from state violence.

Campus activism mushroomed in the 1960s, leading students to become the military's most highly targeted group.¹⁰ The government banned the *União Nacional dos Estudantes*; troops occupied campuses; and agents hunted down suspected student subversives. In 1968 thousands of student demonstrators, encouraged by the international student activism of that year, called for an end of the status quo. In December the military issued the fifth in a series of Institutional Acts (AI-5). AI-5 closed Congress, suspended civil liberties, and gave the security forces carte blanche to wipe out subversion. Press censorship followed. The revolutionary left tried to topple the government through guerrilla warfare: kidnappings, bombings, assaults on banks and military installations, and other violent actions. Students and other youths made up most recruits. Many joined the *Ação Libertadora Nacional* (ALN), a nationalist offshoot of the Communist Party and the principal attempt to build an urban guerilla movement in Brazil.

Brazil and São Paulo in particular, entered a reign of terror as the police and military joined to battle the revolutionaries. Scores of people died

na política: entrevista com o general Antônio Carlos Muricy', in Marieta de Moraes Ferreira (ed.), *Entre-vistas: abordagens e usos da história oral* (Rio de Janeiro, 1994), pp. 124–46; 'Muricy, Antônio Carlos', *Dicionário Histórico-Biográfico Brasileiro, 1930–1983* (Rio de Janeiro, 1984), vol. 3, pp. 2350–2.

¹⁰ D'Araujo, Soares, and Castro, *Os anos de chumbo*, p. 22.

on both sides. Security agents tortured thousands of political prisoners to extract information and to intimidate the populace. In late 1969 the São Paulo police ambushed and killed ALN founder Carlos Marighela after the group participated in the abduction of the US ambassador. The police implicated and imprisoned pro-ALN Dominican priests. In 1970 Marighela's successor was tortured to death. By 1974 the revolutionary left was crushed by a campaign most observers considered overkill.¹¹

The bishops generally welcomed the coup as salvation from Communism, considered the antithesis of Christianity. They remained largely silent as Catholic radicals were arrested and tortured. Many even doubted that abuses existed.¹² However, at the historic Second Vatican Council (1962–5) Catholicism embraced human rights and social justice for the poor, leading many Latin American bishops to call for radical social change. Even before Vatican II a small group of Brazilian progressives started to question the Church's traditional ties to the elite. As the military deepened the repression it targeted the Church as a nest of subversion. In 1969, for instance, an anti-Communist group murdered a priest who worked for Dom Hélder Câmara, the leading progressive bishop and a government critic. Because of such incidents, the Church started to denounce torture and violence. Power shifted to the progressives, and most bishops endorsed human rights and criticism of the government's highly inegalitarian economic policies. In the early 1970s the Church stood as the only institution able to contest the regime.¹³

¹¹ For overviews of the Brazilian military regime, refer to note 4; on the revolutionary left, see Jacob Gorender, *Combate nas trevas* (São Paulo, 1987); Marcelo Ridenti, *O fantasma da revolução brasileira* (São Paulo, 1993); Carlos Eugênio [Sarmiento Coelho da] Paz, *Viagem à luta armada* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996); Archdiocese of S. Paulo, *Perfil dos atingidos* (Petrópolis, 1988); Luís Mir, *A revolução impossível: a esquerda e a luta armada no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1994); on the student movement, see João Roberto Martins Filho, *Movimento estudantil e ditadura militar* (Campinas, 1987); for a military view of the period, see Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, *Rompendo o silêncio* (Brasília, 1986).

¹² See, for example, Dom Luciano Mendes de Almeida, 'Igreja e regime militar de 64', in Instituto Nacional de Pastoral (ed.), *Pastoral da Igreja no Brasil nos anos 70: caminhos, experiências e dimensões* (Petrópolis, 1994), p. 16; this affirmation was also made by Candido Antonio José Francisco Mendes de Almeida in an interview with the author, Rio de Janeiro, 5 July 1995; also see the discussion in Scott Mainwaring, *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil, 1916–1985* (Stanford, 1986), pp. 83–4, 110.

¹³ Among the many works on the Church's transformation, also Mainwaring, *Catholic Church and Politics*; Thomas C. Bruneau, *The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church* (London, 1974); Ralph Della Cava, 'Catholicism and Society in Twentieth-Century Brazil', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 11 (1976), pp. 7–50; Della Cava, 'The "People's Church," the Vatican, and *Abertura*', in Stepan (ed.), *Democratizing Brazil*, pp. 143–67; Della Cava and Paula Montero, ... *E o verbo se faz imagem: Igreja católica e os meios de comunicação no Brasil, 1962–1989* (Petrópolis, 1991); Luiz

From arrest to coverup: setting the record straight

Leme's death shook the University of São Paulo (USP) campus and the São Paulo Church. Considered a model student, he had scored highest on the USP geology entrance exam. As a popular campus leader, he defended the university system against government interference. He also spoke out on national issues, criticising the drain on Brazil's resources through the export of mineral wealth and the construction of the Transamazon Highway, a symbol of Médici's so-called economic miracle. Significantly, Leme came from a leading Catholic family from the nearby traditional town of Sorocaba. Three aunts were nuns, and an uncle, Aldo Vannucchi, was a prominent priest in Sorocaba. Father Vannucchi had frequent contact with the clergy of the Archdiocese of São Paulo, Brazil's largest, and knew Archbishop Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, the emerging leader of Brazil's human rights movement. Leme expressed enthusiasm for Dom Hélder and other progressive bishops.¹⁴

The government saw Leme as a 'terrorist' of the armed branch of the ALN, which was mainly active in São Paulo. The police accused him of armed robbery, thefts, and helping to plan the execution of Manoel Henrique de Oliveira, a Portuguese restaurateur targeted by the ALN for informing on three militants who were subsequently killed.¹⁵

Similar disagreement existed over Leme's death. The authorities said that a truck hit Leme as he tried to flee his captors at a busy intersection. The Church asserted that he was torturously murdered. Students, lawyers for the family and clergymen pointed out faults in the police version, and in due course obtained decisive proof of death by torture. How they did so is told below. Suffice it to say here that the police version immediately raised suspicions. It was not the first time, nor the last, that they used stories of accidents, suicide and gunfights to explain the death of political prisoners. The best known example would be Herzog's subsequent, clumsily forged hanging after a few hours in jail. Moreover, despite government denials, torture was no secret. Furthermore, the police had prevented examination of Leme's body for signs of abuse by quickly

Gonzaga de Souza Lima, *Evolução política dos católicos e da Igreja no Brasil* (Petrópolis, 1979); Helena Salem (ed.), *A Igreja dos oprimidos* (São Paulo, 1981); Márcio Moreira Alves, *A Igreja e a política no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1979); for an overview of Church persecution in Latin America, see Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People* (New York, 1982).

¹⁴ Background on Leme comes from interviews with Egle Maria Vannucchi Leme and José de Oliveira Leme, Sorocaba, 19 Sep. 1996 and from *Meu filho Alexandre Vannucchi: depoimento de Egle e José Vannucchi a Teodomiro Braga e Paulo Barbosa* (Edição S.A., n.d.).

¹⁵ 'Terrorista morre atropelado no Brás', *Folha de S. Paulo*, 23 March 1973.

burying it in a pauper's cemetery and covering it with lime to speed decomposition.¹⁶ (The security forces used this cemetery, located on the outskirts in Perus, to hide the bodies of other political prisoners.¹⁷) After days of frantic searching for his son at police stations, the army, and then the morgue, José de Oliveira Leme learned of Alexandre's interment from detective Sérgio Paranhos Fleury, the notorious torturer who netted Marighela.¹⁸ Egle Maria Vannucchi Leme, Alexandre's mother, went to Perus, where a grounds keeper showed her the plot.¹⁹

The police evidence provides some clues about unexplained aspects of Leme's death. As in many cases, they relied heavily on depositions taken under torture, and in the absence of legal counsel. Mainly USP students and friends of Leme, these witnesses later retracted their statements before a military tribunal, where lawyers were present.²⁰ However, police lies and abuse do not invalidate all of their evidence.²¹ A critical reading of their version raises important questions for understanding the gravity of the case and its political implications.

A major question involves Leme's participation in the ALN. According to the police, Leme was the ALN's 'brain' at USP. He politicised students, distributed newspapers and recruited sympathisers. Leme hailed Church denunciations of regime abuses and allegedly contacted 'priests ready for engagement in the ALN'.²²

¹⁶ Comissão de Familiares de Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos, et al., *Dossiê dos mortos e desaparecidos políticos a partir de 1964* (São Paulo, 1996), p. 174.

¹⁷ Antonio Carlos Prado, 'Um corpo da ditadura', *IstoÉ/Senhor*, 19 Sep. 1990, pp. 20–2; Prado and Beatriz Fragelli, 'Luz nas trevas', *IstoÉ/Senhor*, 3 Oct. 1990, p. 30; also see the documentary film 'Vala Comum', directed by João Godoy (1994).

¹⁸ Interview with José de Oliveira Leme, Sorocaba, 19 Sep. 1996. For a basic outline of the publicly known events surrounding the Leme case, see 'Síntese cronológica dos fatos', *Serviço de Documentação (SEDOC)*, vol. 6 (July 1973), pp. 108–10; *Meu filho Alexandre Vannucchi*.

¹⁹ The cemetery worker who located the plot stated that the body had arrived half-wrapped in a cloth; interview with Egle Maria Vannucchi Leme, Sorocaba, 19 Sep. 1996. In May 1973 the police took several photographs of Leme's grave. The photos have no accompanying documentation. We can speculate that the controversy surrounding Leme's death caused the security forces to take this precautionary measure to be able to detect any tampering with the grave. See AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 30Z/160/12757.

²⁰ For retractions, see Superior Tribunal Militar, Apelação 40.425, AEL, BNM, case no. 670, vol. 3, pp. 436–9, 449–53, 462.

²¹ Along these lines, historian and victimised revolutionary Jacob Gorender makes an important point about torture: 'Torture did not bring out only false confessions, which was the argument of the defense lawyers. Most depositions wringed out under torture contained, amongst the untrue parts, information useful to the police repression'; Gorender, *Combate nas trevas*, p. 230. Torture could also be used to legitimise information from unknown sources, for example, protected informants.

²² Superior Tribunal Militar, Apelação 40.425, AEL, BNM, case no. 670, vol. 1, pp. 1A, 1E, 1H, 94–5, vol. 3, pp. 300, 348, 350, 352.

Indeed, Leme was in fact an ALN political coordinator. As the police claimed, he had close contact with ALN guerrilla Ronaldo Queiroz, who had praised Leme's political skills.²³ In mid-1972 Leme had a key meeting with a top leader of the armed wing, Carlos Eugênio Sarmiento Coelho da Paz, a tough, army-trained gunman who eluded the security forces. Leme and Paz discussed ALN political strategy as they sat in a getaway car. Leme was a crucial tie to the outside world for the increasingly isolated revolutionaries. After the ALN's devastating defeats, Paz looked to him to raise the badly needed student recruits, and membership rose. Leme reported to Paz that disgust with the regime was growing on campus and in the Church. Marighela had included the Church in his plan to unite a variety of social groups in the fight for national liberation against the military and US imperialism. With its nationwide presence the Church could provide an excellent support network. After the débâcle of 1969 over the Dominicans, the ALN counted on Leme to renew ties to Catholic progressives. Although Leme's support for ALN took the form of legal activities, he endorsed armed struggle. His death dealt a serious blow to the organisation.²⁴ A flyer of the revolutionary *Movimento de Libertação Popular* eulogised Leme as a 'popular combatant'.²⁵

However, except for one brief and vague statement by a tortured

²³ Information on Queiroz's evaluation came in an interview with Paulo de Tarso Vannuchi, São Paulo, 11 Sep. 1996. Information on the contact came in a telephone interview with Alberto Alonso Lázaro (São Paulo), Rio de Janeiro, 14 Jan. 1997. Alonso stated that Leme did not belong to the ALN but noted that he and other USP students looked to Queiroz for political guidance and lent him support in a number of ways. In 1972, for instance, geology students helped Queiroz escape when the security forces attempted to capture him. Non-violent ALN sympathisers such as Lázaro did not hesitate to provide information useful for the group's illegal operations. The police killed Queiroz shortly after the death of Leme; see *Dossiê dos mortos e desaparecidos políticos*, p. 202.

²⁴ Interview with Carlos Eugênio Sarmiento Coelho da Paz, Rio de Janeiro, 30 Jan. 1997. Paz was the only ALN leader to survive the repression. For a description of his activities, see Paz, *Viagem à luta armada*. This work is the first part of a planned trilogy on the ALN and its downfall. Gorender estimated that on average urban guerrillas lived only a year; see *Combate nas trevas*, p. 202. Leme's girlfriend Lisete Lídia de Sílvia Russo recalled that Leme participated in the ALN, although for security measures militants, even individuals who dated, did not reveal their specific activities to each other. Interview with Lisete Lídia de Sílvia Russo, São Paulo, 30 Sep. 1996. The Tortura Nunca Mais organisation's official report on political assassinations also lists Leme as an ALN 'militant'; see *Dossiê dos mortos e desaparecidos políticos*, p. 173. On ALN strategy shifts in 1972 and 1973, see *Perfil dos atingidos*, p. 48; Mir, *A revolução impossível*, pp. 658–9.

²⁵ Ministério da Educação e Cultura, Divisão de Segurança e Informações, Encaminhamento No. 1.034/AESI/USP/73, 11 April 1973, 'Assunto: panfletagem na Universidade de São Paulo', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50E/30/159.

student, the police showed no proof linking Leme to violence. First, their reports did not mention him in a description of robberies and thefts allegedly carried out by Queiroz and others.²⁶ Secondly, although detective Edsel Magnotti, the lead DEOPS-SP interrogator in the case of the Portuguese restaurateur, Oliveira, cited documents found on victim's ALN assassins linking Leme to the crime,²⁷ these documents are nowhere to be found in the DEOPS-SP papers or in the investigation. Moreover, it was unlikely for a guerrilla to carry information that could endanger a comrade. Thirdly, Paz, who ordered the execution, gave the task of shadowing Oliveira not to Leme, but to Francisco Penteado. The ALN could not afford to expose a valuable student organiser to violence.²⁸ Penteado allegedly participated in the assassination in February 1973, and died along with two other militants in a shootout with the police days before Leme's arrest.²⁹

Most significantly, the DEOPS-SP archive contains nothing on Leme *prior* to his death. The vast documentation of the political police testifies to their careful surveillance even of unthreatening groups and individuals. Leme was apparently too unimportant, or too unnoticeable in his peaceful ALN work, to attract police attention.³⁰

Exactly how the security forces learned of Leme and arrested him remains a mystery. They probably heard word of him in a furious sweep against the ALN for its assassination on 25 February of Octávio Gonçalves Moreira Júnior, a torturer at the Second Army's infamous DOI-CODI. The army created the *Destacamento de Operações de Informações* and the *Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna* to fight guerrillas. Its ranks included policemen such as Moreira Júnior,³¹ who also had links to the

²⁶ The student was Alberto Alonso Lázaro; in an interview (see note 23) Alonso denied the information attributed to him. On his testimony and the other crimes, see Superior Tribunal Militar, *Apelação* 40.425, AEL, BNM, case no. 670, vol. 1, pp. 1-B, 1-C, 1-D, vol. 3, pp. 348, 452-3.

²⁷ For Magnotti's allegation, see Magnotti to Lúcio Vieira, diretor do DEOPS, São Paulo, 12 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 30Z/165/38; also see Magnotti to Senhor Delegado Titular (unnamed police chief), São Paulo, 24 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 307/165/178.

²⁸ Interview with Carlos Eugênio Sarmiento Coelho da Paz, Rio de Janeiro, 30 Jan. 1997.

²⁹ Paz recalled that Penteado, who ate regularly in the restaurant to watch Oliveira, heard the merchant brag that he had telephoned the repressive unit known as the DOI-CODI to inform on the presence of ALN members in the establishment; interview with Carlos Eugênio Sarmiento Coelho da Paz, Rio de Janeiro, 30 Jan. 1997. The military and Oliveira's wife denied that he was an informant; Ustra, *Rompendo o silêncio*, pp. 209-11. As Gorender observes, this book is 'suspect because of the outrageous denial of the mountain of evidence of his responsibility in the torture of prisoners in the DOI-CODI'; Gorender, *Combate nas trevas*, p. 237.

³⁰ See note 34 for discussion of other possible sources.

³¹ On DOI-CODI, see D'Araújo, Soares and Castro, *Os anos de chumbo*; also see Expedito Filho, 'Autópsia da sombra', *Veja*, 18 Nov. 1992, pp. 20-32; for a military view, see

ultra-right *Comando de Caça aos Comunistas* and the extremist Catholic group *Tradição, Família e Propriedade*,³² which accused progressive clergymen of Communism. The DOI-CODI needed to assert itself because its future had clouded with the rise of General Ernesto Geisel, an advocate of liberalisation. About a week before his detention Leme noticed that he was being trailed.³³ The only other clue came in an ALN intelligence report carried to Paz, who was in Cuba undergoing further guerrilla training. It stated that Leme and other ALN militants had fallen because of an unknown security breach in the student movement.³⁴ Leme was undoubtedly picked up by the DOI-CODI.³⁵ There two interrogation squads successively brutalised him on 16 and 17 March. As the cell-keeper went to get Leme for yet another session, he was surprised to find him dead.³⁶

When only a couple of hundred of military Brazil's tens of thousands of victims perished, why did Leme die? The torturers alone know the intimate details of his calvary. However, the only named perpetrator in Leme's death (the others are known only by codenames), DOI-CODI

Ustra, *Rompendo o silêncio*; on police and the military regime, see Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, 'Polícia e crise política: o caso das polícias militares', in Maria Célia Paoli et al., *A violência brasileira* (São Paulo, 1982), pp. 57–91.

³² DOI-CODI agents expressed anger about this incident to political prisoners; telephone interview with Alberto Alonso Lázaro (São Paulo), Rio de Janeiro, 14 Jan. 1997; for a detailed description of the assassination, see Ustra, *Rompendo o silêncio*, pp. 212–18; on Moreira Júnior as a torturer and right-wing militant, see *Perfil dos atingidos*, p. 48; also see Mir, *A revolução impossível*, p. 659. According to Mir, one ALN member suggested capturing and torturing Moreira Júnior to extract information about police infiltration. Repulsed, other ALN members opposed this idea because it meant adopting the same inhuman methods used by the repressive forces.

³³ Interview with Lisete Lídia de Sílvia Russo, São Paulo, 30 Sep. 1996; telephone interview with Alberto Alonso Lázaro (São Paulo), Rio de Janeiro, 14 Jan. 1997.

³⁴ Interview with Carlos Eugênio Sarmento Coelho da Paz, Rio de Janeiro, 30 Jan. 1997. A key leader of the security forces, General Adyr Fiúza de Castro recalled that 'it was very easy to infiltrate the student movement, because they were very amateurish'; D'Araujo, Soares and Castro, *Anos de chumbo*, p. 40. For an example of infiltration, see the discussion below of the students' reaction to Leme's death. DEOPS-SP and DOPS-GB documentation maintains the anonymity of infiltrators. Information from as yet unopened DOI-CODI archives might provide the key to the infiltrators' identity and modus operandi and/or to the depositions of prisoners who may have revealed information about Leme. Some rare copies of unrelated DOI-CODI depositions do exist in the DOPS-GB archive, but they do not reveal the names of interrogators or informants; see, for example, Ministério do Exército, I Exército, Informação no. 404/74-C, 'Assunto: depoimentos prestados no DOI/I Ex', APERJ, DOPS, Setor Comunismo, pasta 128, pp. 1–26. On infiltrators and militants turned into informants, see Expedito Filho, 'Autópsia da sombra'.

³⁵ Edsel Magnotti to Lúcio Vieira, director of the DEOPS-SP, São Paulo, 12 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 30Z/165/38.

³⁶ *Dossiê dos mortos e desaparecidos*, p. 173.

commander Major Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, made no comment on Leme in his 1986 book on the repression. He denied engaging in torture.³⁷

Presumably Ustra and his agents did not intend Leme's death – at least not on the 17th. Although the sadistic traditions of Brazilian police work certainly thrived in the 1970s, the security forces basically used torture to gather intelligence. Torturers became professionals at testing the physical and psychological limits of their victims, sometimes with the assistance of physicians and psychologists.³⁸ There is no evidence of such help at Leme's interrogation.³⁹

Or perhaps Leme's tormentors applied wrathful force because of his relatives' political activities. Father Vannucchi, who treated Leme like a son, had worked with the radical *Juventude Operária Católica* and was briefly jailed by the Sorocaba police in 1964 on suspicion of Communism.⁴⁰ The security forces had also tortured two of Leme's cousins, student revolutionaries José Ivo and Paulo de Tarso Vannuchi. Paulo belonged to the ALN. Leme visited him in prison and discussed political issues. Deeply worried about his safety, Leme's relatives tried to convince him to reduce his political activity. Another factor was the proud defiance of youth. Leme did not give up easily in a fight.⁴¹ Days before his death he told a fellow student that he would resist arrest.⁴² At the DOI-CODI he entered a maximum security cell. While many prisoners gave up

³⁷ Ustra, *Rompendo o silêncio*. Ustra refused requests for an interview. He and other alleged torturers seem unlikely to give testimony, as the repugnance of many Brazilians towards the repression is still strong. For a rare exception, see Soares, D'Araujo, and Castro, *Os anos de chumbo*.

³⁸ See, for example, Cecília Coimbra, *Guardiões da ordem: uma viagem pelas práticas psi no Brasil do 'milagre'* (Rio de Janeiro, 1995), pp. 99–107, 194–206; Expedito Filho, 'Autópsia da sombra'; *Dossiê dos mortos e desaparecidos*, p. 33; *Brasil: nunca mais*; for a physician's confession of collaboration, see Amílcar Lobo, *A hora do lobo, a hora do carneiro* (Petrópolis, 1989).

³⁹ Perhaps the torturers did not know that Leme had undergone an appendectomy in late January; one source stated that the body 'was bleeding profusely in the abdominal region'; see *Dossiê dos mortos e desaparecidos políticos*, p. 174. However, this explanation for the presence of blood is unlikely, because sufficient post-operation scar tissue would have formed by the time of the torture. An alternative explanation is given below.

⁴⁰ Father Vannucchi was quickly released under pressure from local leaders; see 'Polícia deteve domingo, um padre, dois vereadores e o vice-prefeito', 'A prisão do padre', and 'Con. Vannucchi demitiu-se da Faculdade de Filosofia', *Folha Popular* (Sorocaba), 7 April 1964, p. 1; 'A prisão do padre' and 'Comunicado da cúria', *Folha Popular*, 8 April 1964, p. 1; 'Fez-se justiça[,] Pe. Aldo livre', *Folha Popular*, 15 April 1964, p. 1. The police also had a file on Father Vannucchi; interview with Aldo Vannucchi, Sorocaba, 19 Sept. 1996.

⁴¹ Interview with Paulo de Tarso Vannuchi, São Paulo, 11 Sep. 1996.

⁴² Telephone interview with Alberto Alonso Lázaro (São Paulo), Rio de Janeiro, 14 Jan 1997; and see Superior Tribunal Militar, *Apelação 40.425, AEL, BNM*, case no. 670, vol. 3, p. 189.

information, Leme refused. According to witnesses, Leme, carried by jailkeepers back to his cell after a torture session, cried out, ‘My name is Alexandre Vannucchi Leme. I am a geology student. They accuse me of belonging to the ALN. I only gave my name.’⁴³ One DOI-CODI man referred to Leme as ‘crazy’.⁴⁴ A friend who was also imprisoned and tortured stated the following: ‘The torturers were very impressed because he didn’t say anything . . . They would become enraged when we said that he was a Christian. They wanted to talk about Alexandre . . . Their concern was always to incriminate Alexandre, to create the image of an atheist, a sectarian, a violent person. But that image didn’t fit with the one that we had of him.’⁴⁵

Whatever the reason, the DOI-CODI agents were unprepared for Leme’s death. They rushed to forge two stories. The first was for those who knew that Leme died at DOI-CODI: prisoners, agents uninvolved in the interrogation, coroners who signed false reports and other police authorities. In this version Leme had committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor blade in the infirmary. To authenticate this story the interrogators and their commanders slit the neck from ear to ear while the body still lay in the cell. Other prisoners saw the body covered with blood as the agents dragged it away.⁴⁶ The jailors then faked a search for blades in other cells.⁴⁷ The second version, the truck accident, went to the press. It became imperative after a USP student phoned the family about the arrest, leading José Leme to search for his son. The security agents could not keep the stories straight. Fleury gave Leme’s father the accident version, while moments later Magnotti insisted it was suicide.⁴⁸ In a letter to a top prosecutor DEOPS-SP Director Lúcio Vieira mixed the two versions by referring to the truck accident as a ‘suicide’.⁴⁹ After the press belatedly reported the ‘accident’ on 23 March, a DOI-CODI man bragged to prisoners: ‘We give out any version we want.’⁵⁰ Cover-up and false

⁴³ *Dossiê dos mortos e desaparecidos políticos*, p. 175.

⁴⁴ Luís Estevam Pereira, ‘Alexandre Vannucchi Leme: verdades e mentiras’, *Jornal do Campus*, vol. 31 (1986), p. 6.

⁴⁵ Arlete Diogo cited in Luís Estevam Pereira, ‘Alexandre Vannucchi Leme’, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Fax communication to author from Marival Chaves Dias do Canto (Vila Velha, Espírito Santo), Rio de Janeiro, 28 Jan 1997. A sergeant in the São Paulo DOI-CODI, in 1992 Canto became the first (and to date only) member of a repressive organisation to reveal in detail his knowledge of abuses. Canto analysed interrogation reports and did not participate in torture. See Expedito Filho, ‘Autópsia da sombra’; also see ‘Ex-sargento revela local de ossadas’, *Jornal do Brasil*, 12 July 1996, p. 7; also see *Atenção*, Year 2, No. 8 (1996).

⁴⁷ *Brasil: nunca mais*, p. 256.

⁴⁸ Pereira, ‘Alexandre Vannucchi Leme’.

⁴⁹ Vieira to Oscar Xavier de Freitas, Procurador Geral da Justiça, São Paulo, 12 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 30Z/165/39.

⁵⁰ *Meu filho Alexandre Vannucchi*, p. 5.

accusations allowed the regime to focus attention on Leme as a dangerous ‘terrorist’.

The incident’s political implications led the police to justify Leme’s death by investigating him posthumously. Magnotti wrote his superior explaining Leme’s inclusion in the Oliveira murder case only after the family’s lawyers petitioned the courts for aid.⁵¹ In his case summary Magnotti revealed the underlying concern of the regime: students and the Church were protesting Leme’s death.⁵² The official public statement extended the lie by accusing Leme of crimes not even alleged by the police. The public statement also referred to Leme’s revelation of the names of other subversives,⁵³ but no such deposition exists in the police report.

The reaction to Leme’s death: moving to the brink, building opposition

Leme posed a bigger challenge to the regime in death than in life.

As the military muffled all opposition, the Church became the ‘voice of the voiceless’. The most authoritative statements came from the *Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil* (CNBB, or National Conference of the Bishops of Brazil), whose periodic assemblies united the country’s 300 bishops to deliberate on pastoral and political issues. After 1968 the CNBB increasingly criticised the regime’s abuses and economic policies in a series of official documents. In February 1973 the bishops commemorated the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and adopted an unprecedented educational campaign by distributing hundreds of thousands of copies of the declaration.⁵⁴ A month later the death of Leme tested the bishops’ commitment.

⁵¹ Magnotti to Senhor Delegado Titular (unnamed police chief), São Paulo, 24 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 307/165/178; also see Oscar Xavier de Freitas, Procurador Geral da Justiça, to Lúcio Vieira, diretor do DEOPS, São Paulo, 12 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 30Z/165/37; for the lawyers’ petition, see Mário de Passos Simas and José Carlos Dias to the Procurador Geral da Justiça do Estado de S. Paulo, São Paulo, 11 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 30Z/165/36. DEOPS-SP documents also demonstrate involvement in the investigation by police chief Romeu Tuma, the head of the DEOPS-SP information service. Tuma knew Ustra and Fleury and served as a link between the DEOPS-SP and the DOI-CODI. He later became director of the DEOPS-SP and then the country’s top law enforcement officer as head of the Polícia Federal in the administrations of President José Sarney (1985–90) and Fernando Collor de Mello (1990–2). He is now a senator. See Romeu Tuma to Celso Camargo Azevedo, São Paulo, 28 March 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 30Z/165/184; also see note 83; also see Ustra, *Rompendo o silêncio*, pp. 73, 153–4, 212–13.

⁵² Superior Tribunal Militar, Apelação 40.425, AEL, BNM, case no. 670, vol. 3, p. 362.

⁵³ ‘Ofício esclarece morte de subversivo’, *SEDOC*, vol. 6 (July 1973), pp. 103–5.

⁵⁴ On the declaration, see *Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos* (São Paulo, 1978); also see Amaury Castanho, *Direitos humanos: aspiração ou realidade?* (São Paulo, 1973); on the

The Church and the students protested the incident not just because Leme was a popular campus leader. Significantly, his was the only death of a USP activist who had not gone underground to join the guerrillas. There was no link between Leme and violence. Therefore, the opposition was all the more adamant about learning the circumstances of his demise. Leme's death also contributed to the growing perception among the students and in the Church that the repression had reached its limits. Leme became a symbol against the repression.

The first outcry came from the bishop of Sorocaba. Dom José Melhado Campos, who was a neighbour of the Lemes, and the local council of priests issued a scathing criticism of the police. It was read at Masses and published in the Sorocaba press, Church bulletins and *O São Paulo*, the weekly newspaper of the Archdiocese of São Paulo:

Why wasn't the family notified of the 'accident'? Why wasn't the body turned over to them? Who in the family carried out the proper identification of the cadaver before it was buried? Why did the family only learn about the occurrence in the newspapers, on Friday the 23rd, when, according to police, Alexandre had died the previous Saturday, the 17th? ... It does not lie within our competence to refute the accusations imputed against this young university student. God knows the truth, and judges. But it is evident that, torturing and killing the victim, the police authorities barbarically eliminated someone who could have recognised his acts and defended himself through the legal process.⁵⁵

Several days later Dom José and the priests' council published another protest in the local paper. They based their action on the CNBB's February document. They also asked President Médici to improve the protection of human rights.⁵⁶

These statements challenged the regime. However, they did not reveal the tensions behind Dom José's decision to speak out. He did not hesitate to take strong positions, for instance, by defending workers' causes on May Day.⁵⁷ But, like most bishops, Dom José staunchly opposed Communism. He became caught between the two extremes of the era, causing some radical priests to view him as 'pusillanimous' in taking a stance. These

rise of the CNBB, see Della Cava and Montero, ... *E o verbo se faz imagem*; Mainwaring, *Catholic Church and Politics*; Gervásio Fernandes de Queiroga, *Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil: comunhão e corresponsabilidade* (São Paulo, 1977).

⁵⁵ 'Comunicado do bispo de Sorocaba', *SEDOC*, vol. 6 (July 1973), p. 105.

⁵⁶ 'Nota do conselho de presbíteros', *SEDOC*, vol. 6 (July 1973), pp. 106–7; on the statement to Médici, see 'Síntese cronológica dos fatos', p. 109.

⁵⁷ Interview with Aldo Vannucchi, Sorocaba, 19 Sep. 1996.

priests convinced Dom José to denounce the Leme incident.⁵⁸ In fact, the first statement was not written by Dom José nor the priests' council, but by Father Vannucchi. His first draft aggressively demanded justice. As a concession to conservatives on the council, he softened the final draft by leaving open the question of Leme's involvement in subversive activities. To give the manifesto greater credibility Vannucchi did not sign it.⁵⁹ As letters of support came from abroad, Dom José felt vindicated in issuing the statements.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, students at USP and other universities protested Leme's death. In late March and April USP buzzed with activity with meetings, pamphleteering, discussion at information tables, and class stoppages. Students wore black arm bands and draped black banners around the campus.⁶¹ Leme's geology colleagues organised a joint student–faculty committee to investigate the circumstances of the death, and to establish proof of his innocence.⁶² Students from USP and other schools then issued a statement citing Leme's 'excellent reputation among students and professors' and his qualities as a leader.

This was a clandestine arrest, without any written order from the competent authority, innumerable instances of which have occurred in this country. Therefore, it constitutes gross arbitrariness and is a clear violation of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, which Brazil had adhered to.... The running over of political prisoners has occurred with such surprising frequency that the veracity of [the police] account becomes questionable.⁶³

The geology students declared a state of mourning, and proposed a memorial mass for Leme. The police monitored the students through an infiltrator and obtained copies of their manifestos.⁶⁴ The clergy also planned masses. On 29 March Dom José held one in Sorocaba. Another was set for 30 March in São Paulo.

How to carry it out was a delicate matter. São Paulo was the explosive centre of the guerrilla movement, and the repression. Second Army head

⁵⁸ Interview with Oswaldo Bazzo, Sorocaba, 18 Sep. 1996. At the time Bazzo belonged to the Sorocaba clergy.

⁵⁹ Interview with Aldo Vannucchi, Sorocaba, 19 Sep. 1996.

⁶⁰ Interview with Egle Maria Vannucchi Leme, Sorocaba, 19 Sep. 1996. For an example of support, see Simas, *Gritos de justiça*, p. 235.

⁶¹ *Boletim Informativo* (São Paulo), vol. 6 (26 March 1973), AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. 50K/104/326; 'A marca da cruz para trás ficou', *Em Tempo* (1978).

⁶² Simas, *Gritos de justiça*, p. 233; for details of student discussions, see 'Resoluções da assembléia de geologia', *Boletim Informativo*, vol. 6 (26 March 1973), p. 4, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. 50K/104/326.

⁶³ 'Comunicado dos centros acadêmicos', *SEDOC*, vol. 6 (July 1973), p. 107.

⁶⁴ For the infiltrator's information, see unsigned report titled 'Observações realizadas na USP', 29 March 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50K/104/324.

General Humberto de Souza Mello, the city's top military authority, fully backed the security forces, while Dom Paulo built a campaign for human rights. He visited prisoners, exposed torture and formed a Peace and Justice Commission to investigate abuses.⁶⁵ In 1972 he led the bishops of the state of São Paulo in a vigorous denunciation of torture.⁶⁶ Days before Leme's death Pope Paul VI lent prestige to Dom Paulo's efforts by naming him a cardinal. Through the secret Bipartite Commission the military had managed to tone down some of the São Paulo Church's protest and even tried to coopt Dom Paulo.⁶⁷ Seeking dialogue, he visited Second Army headquarters three times by mid-1972, but General Mello refused to see him.⁶⁸ Emotions rising, the Leme issue threatened to burst into a major crisis.

Dom Paulo had to work carefully. He was archbishop of South America's largest city, and an honorary vice-president of Brazil. To celebrate mass for a suspected subversive could only anger the authorities. But Dom Paulo was also a pastor to students. Twenty-two of their leaders went to Dom Paulo's home. They informed him that the police had surrounded the USP. The leaders demanded that he say mass there for 10,000 students expected to appear. If not, they would start a riot. However, going to USP could only further provoke the generals. Dom Paulo sought a non-violent alternative. He convinced the students that a mass at the Sé Cathedral in downtown São Paulo would be an act for all Brazil to witness.⁶⁹

On the eve of the ninth anniversary of the coup, and despite the censors' ban on publicity and the presence of riot troops near the Sé and at USP, 3,000 people attended the service. Upon entering the cathedral each received a prayer sheet that also served to cover the face from police

⁶⁵ Clara Amanda Pope, 'Human Rights and the Catholic Church in Brazil, 1970-1983', *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Autumn 1985), pp. 429-52; also see Jaime Wright, 'D. Paulo e os direitos humanos - II'.

⁶⁶ 'Testemunho de paz', *SEDOC*, vol. 5 (July 1972), pp. 107-9.

⁶⁷ Serbin, 'O diálogo secreto de bispos e generais'.

⁶⁸ On Dom Paulo's attempts to contact Mello see, 'Relatório especial do grupo bipartite, sobre problemas surgidos na área Igreja X governo, referentes à participação do clero nas comemorações do sesquicentenário do Brasil', FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. nos. 989-90, 993, p. 1; on his relations with São Paulo generals, see Roldão O. Arruda, 'D. Paulo relembra diálogo com generais', *O Estado de S. paulo*, 8 Sep. 1996, p. A30.

⁶⁹ Interview with Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, São Paulo, 10 Sep. 1996. A DEOPS infiltrator was aware of the students' intention to contact Dom Paulo; see 'Observações realizadas na USP', 29 march 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50K/104/324. According to another version, Dom Paulo at first wanted to use a smaller church, but the students convinced him that they would fill the cathedral; interview with Egle Maria Vannucchi Leme, Sorocaba, 19 Sep. 1996.

cameras.⁷⁰ The police distributed a falsified version of the student leadership's manifesto.⁷¹ As police sirens blared outside, Dom Paulo, Dom José and 24 priests led the people in prayer and song, including a prohibited tune by exiled composer Geraldo Vandré.⁷² Using Biblical passages, Dom Paulo rebuked the authorities:

Only God owns life. He is its origin, and only He can decide its end... When he was born, Christ himself wanted to feel the tenderness of his mother and the warmth of the family. And even after he died, his corpse was returned to his mother, friends, and relatives. This justice was done to Christ by a representative of the Roman government who was totally against His mission as the Messiah... 'Where is your brother? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to Me from the ground!'... Who has done justice – the Supreme Judge asks – who has seen to it that the truth is said and that love has been given a chance?... Men are being imprisoned! Has anybody been able to visit them and free them?⁷³

After the mass the people sang and calmly left the cathedral as the security forces stood by in a 100-block area ready to repress any attempt at political demonstration.

Not all students and clergy supported Dom Paulo. Dom Vicente Marchetti Zioni, the conservative archbishop whose arrival in Botucatu led to the exit of many clergymen, refused a request by students to say mass. The police were pleased.⁷⁴ In São Paulo right-wing organisations distributed flyers against the mass. A group at the highly conservative USP law school, for instance, called Leme a 'terrorist' and the memorial

⁷⁰ Interview with Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, São Paulo, 10 Sep. 1996. For the text of the sheet, see 'Celebração da esperança', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50C/22/9325.

⁷¹ This charge was made by MOLIPO in its document titled 'Glória aos que tomaram lutando por seu povo!'; see Ministério da Educação e Cultura, Divisão de Segurança e Informações, Encaminhamento No. 1.034/AESI/USP/73, 11 April 1973, 'Assunto: panfletagem na Universidade de São Paulo', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50E/30/159.

⁷² For details on the mass, see César Silva, 'La muerte de un estudiante en San Pablo actualiza el problema de las torturas', *La Opinión* (Argentina), 7 April 1973, p. 2; 'A marca da cruz para trás ficou'; 'Brasil: Deus será o juiz', the military's translation of an article published in *Latin America*, vol. 3, no. 16 (29 April 1973), FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. nos. 867–9; 'Missa para um estudante morto', *Opinião*, 2–9 April 1973; 'Estudiantes protestan por compañero asesinado', *Campanha* (Santiago, Chile), 1 May 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50F/4/107; on press censorship, see 'Comunicado do bispo de Sorocaba', p. 105.

⁷³ Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, 'Palavras de fé sobre a vida, a dignidade e a missão do homem', *O São Paulo*, 7 April 1973. Dom Paulo's citation is from the story of Cain and Abel in the Book of Genesis, ch. 4.

⁷⁴ Secretaria de Segurança Pública, Delegacia Seccional de Polícia-Botucatu, 'Relatório', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50H/63/1428.

‘ridiculous’. It concluded: ‘Heads are going to roll, and you can be sure that they won’t be ours.’⁷⁵

An exchange of private letters between Dom Paulo and Minister of Education Jarbas Passarinho revealed the extremes to which each side believed the other had gone. Dom Paulo complained that the security forces took ‘justice into their own hands’ and were ignorant of ‘the most elemental principles of human rights’. ‘A crime – if it occurred – is not punished with an even larger crime,’ Dom Paulo added. He continued:

Your Excellency, Senhor Minister, knows as well as I do what Brazil expects from its youth... to whom lessons of this ilk, especially coming from where they do, are not the most apt for making this generation believe in the future or be ready to take charge of it. Whatever its source, violence is the most fertile seed from whose bosom hate will be born many times over and whose brutality and stupidity prepare the ruin of any nation. Violence is even more serious, incomprehensible, and unpardonable if it begins precisely with those whose highest mission is to safeguard the peace, protect families, and show tolerance and understanding towards those on whom age has not yet conferred maturity, and who often confuse healthy ideals with the impetuous generosity of their young years.... There once was a time when having a son in the university was reason for just pride and serene tranquility for parents. Today with ever greater frequency it is motive for fear and anxiety.

Dom Paulo asked Passarinho to use his prestige within the government to clarify the many doubts about the case.⁷⁶

Passarinho’s response was severe. He claimed that the episode did not concern the Ministry of Education (although DEOPS documentation showed that its spy service watched the situation at the USP⁷⁷). Leme died because he was trying to overthrow the regime. ‘Alexandre was a student terrorist.... He belonged to the Armed Tactical Group of the ALN, whose mission, as is known, is armed combat. He was not affected as a student, but as a terrorist.’ Passarinho then attacked the Church’s human rights campaign.

Eminence, I cannot fathom a justice (I prefer to call it a pretence of justice) which consists only of invoking... defence of the prerogatives of human beings when they are guerrillas. I do not understand why nothing is said about the right to life

⁷⁵ Comitê de Advertência aos Que Estão em Perigo, ‘A morte de um terrorista’, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50Z/13/845.

⁷⁶ Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns to Jarbas Passarinho, São Paulo, 4 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Ordem Política’, pasta 14, doc. no. 64. I am grateful to Anthony Pereira for having pointed out the existence of correspondence between Dom Paulo and Passarinho.

⁷⁷ Ministério da Educação e Cultura, Divisão de Segurança e Informações, Informação NO. 1.049/AESI/USP/73, 10 May 1973, ‘Assunto: Marcos Alberto Castelhana Bruno’, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50E/30/212.

of people like the Portuguese merchant, machine-gunned thanks to information from Alexandre and others.

Passarinho praised Dom Paulo's denunciation of violence, and urged him to defend his position publicly, but he criticised the cardinal for holding the memorial.

That mass, celebrated...when the day's activities are coming to an end and crowds become inevitable in downtown São Paulo; a mass awaited with intense expectation because of activists' publicity spread as a challenge to the temporal Power; a mass marked by a homily extremely harsh towards those responsible for state security (and therefore judging them *in absentia*); that mass, Senhor Cardinal, could have caused a river of blood, and yes, this time, the blood of the innocent and the pious! Fortunately, thanks to the Mercy of God and the prudence of the authorities, this did not happen. But the probability was extremely high. I believe that Your Excellency considered that possibility but preferred to run the risk for reasons surely ponderable, but beyond me.⁷⁸

The government reacted strongly. Censors blocked news of Dom Paulo's sermon,⁷⁹ although some reports did slip through, resulting in the punishment of a São Paulo television station under the National Security Law, and prior censorship of the Rio opposition weekly *Opinião*.⁸⁰ In the Chamber of Deputies Congressman Lysâneas Maciel berated the government, but no newspaper printed his speech or the demand of a colleague that the Congress investigate human rights violations.⁸¹ The security forces arrested dozens in a search for the campus organisers of the event. Students were also detained in Rio de Janeiro.⁸² The episode reverberated across the state of São Paulo, keeping the DEOPS and intelligence units on alert for months. In an unusual development President Médici's public relations office received a notice about the case. Like Communism, mention of Leme's name immediately raised suspicions

⁷⁸ Passarinho to Dom Paulo, Brasília, June 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Ordem Política', pasta 14, doc. no. 64. Passarinho does not comment on the Leme case in his memoirs, which have two substantial chapters on education and the universities and yet a third that treats the Médici government; see his *Um híbrido fértil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996).

⁷⁹ Silva, 'La muerte de un estudiante'.

⁸⁰ 'Brasil: Deus será o juiz', the military's translation of an article published in *Latin America* vol. 3, no. 16 (29 April 1973), FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 868, p. 2.

⁸¹ For the text of one of the censored articles, see AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50Z/9/31631; for the text of the congressional debate, see Lysâneas Maciel, 'Um assassinato político', pamphlet distributed at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (1974), APERJ, DOPS-GB, Setor DOPS, pasta 217, docs. 126-37.

⁸² On the search for organisers, see, for example, Ministério da Educação e Cultura, Divisão de Segurança e Informações, Informação No. 1.049/AESI/USP/73, 10 May 1973, 'Assunto: Marcos Alberto Castelhana Bruno', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50E/30/212; for interrogations of alleged organisers carried out by Edsel Magnotti, see AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. nos. 50C/22/7202, 7206, 7207.

and led to the opening of intelligence files on individuals.⁸³ As one report put it, the regime now had an ‘Alexandre Vannucc[h]i Leme problem’.⁸⁴

The government feared, and the campuses hoped for, one thing: the revival of the student movement. The mass was the first large political gathering of students since 1969.⁸⁵ One flyer stated that it showed the ‘force of mobilisation and unity, which leave the repressors with their hands tied’ against the masses.⁸⁶ Another called the demonstrations ‘a firm and clear act of repudiation’ against the government’s repressive measures.⁸⁷ The spy services in Rio de Janeiro and across São Paulo analysed the ‘fresh outbreak of leftist activities’ at colleges and schools, some experiencing agitation for the first time. Activists were organising meetings, strikes, marches, and murals; distributing literature; and seeking ties to the progressive clergy.⁸⁸ In São Carlos students started a petition for the exhumation of Leme’s body.⁸⁹ Fearing the spread of

⁸³ Intelligence officials in Bauru, Botucatu, Marília, Piracicaba, Presidente Prudente, Ribeirão Preto, Rio Claro, Sorocaba and Votorantim all filed reports related to Leme. So did officers in Rio de Janeiro. See, for example, Ministério da Aeronáutica, Gabinete do Ministro, CISA [Centro de Informações da Aeronáutica], Documento de Informações No. 13/CISA-ESC RCD, ‘Assunto: movimento estudantil’, 8 May 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50D/26/4391; Francisco J. C. Barros, Delegacia Seccional de Polícia de Sorocaba, to Romeu Tuma, Chefe do Serviço de Informações, Sorocaba, 28 March 1973, Of. no. 374/73, AESP, DEOPS-SP, doc. nos. 50Z/300/2169-71; for documentation in Rio de Janeiro, see Estado da Guanabara, Secretaria de Segurança Pública, DOPS, Divisão de Operações, Serviço de Buscas, Seção de Buscas Especiais, ‘Ass.: apologia de fato criminoso’, 6 April 1973, APERJ, DOPS-GB, Setor Comunismo, pasta 114, doc. nos. 254–6; for examples of files on individuals, see Ministério da Aeronáutica, Comando Geral de Apoio, Comando da 4a. Zona Aérea, Divisão de Informações de Segurança, ‘Assunto: Aeroclube de São Carlos/SP’, 2 June 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50Z/138/525; Secretaria da Segurança Pública, Coordenação de Informações e Operações, Seção de Informações, ‘Assunto: José Everaldo Vanzo’, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50Z/138/530.

⁸⁴ Companhia Paulista de Força e Luz, Assessoria de Segurança e Informações, Informe No. 26/ASSI/10/CS/73, 30 April 1973, ‘Assunto: recrudescimento de atividades esquerdistas’, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50J/0/2984.

⁸⁵ ‘A marca da cruz para trás ficou.’

⁸⁶ Ministério da Educação e Cultura, Divisão de Segurança e Informações, Encaminhamento No. 1.033/AESI/USP/73, 10 April 1973, ‘Assunto: panfletagem na Universidade de São Paulo’, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50E/30/158.

⁸⁷ ‘Desde 68... a major manifestação’, *Jornal da História*, vol. 6 (April 1973), p. 6, in AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50C/22/7016.

⁸⁸ For Rio, see ‘Atuação das esquerdas no movimento estudantil’, APERJ, DOPS-GB, Setor DOPS, pasta 193, doc. nos. 477-192; for São Paulo, see Companhia Paulista de Força e Luz, Assessoria de Segurança e Informações, Informe No. 26/ASSI/10/CS/73, 30 April 1973, ‘Assunto: recrudescimento de atividades esquerdistas’, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50J/0/2984.

⁸⁹ Zahir Dornaika to DOPS-SP, telegram, 26 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50Z/138/526; Delegacia Auxiliar da Quinta Divisão Policial,

Communist influence, the Polícia Federal saw the need for all spy agencies to ‘conduct a general investigation of the entire student movement’.⁹⁰

The Bipartite Commission: pressure behind the scenes

In the weeks after Leme’s death the opposition continued to pressure the government to resolve the case. Responding to faculty and student demands, USP President Miguel Reale sent a laconic, formal request for an explanation to Brigadier General Sérvulo Mota Lima, the Secretary of Public Security for the state of São Paulo.⁹¹

In an attempt to erase all suspicion of wrongdoing, General Lima publicly replied to Reale. The statement appeared widely in the press. Lima reaffirmed the accusations as well as the accident story. He added that Leme had revealed names of other ALN members and *confessed* participating in two robberies and the Oliveira murder. However, Leme had refused to state his occupation or his address, where he kept subversive documents. Moreover, Lima asserted that the security forces delayed public notification because they needed secrecy to break up a ‘terrorist cell’ at the USP. Lima claimed he had witnesses to prove that Leme died from an accident. The burial took place quickly to prevent what had happened in Recife, where ‘terrorists’ tried to steal a comrade’s cadaver from the morgue to exploit his death politically.⁹² As the secret Bipartite meeting subsequently revealed, the military feared that Leme would become another Edson Luís, a student victim of the repression whose publicly displayed corpse inspired nationwide protests in 1968.⁹³

After Lima’s statement the Leme family and the Church opened another front. Mário de Passos Simas and José Carlos Dias, lawyers for the São

‘Relatório do plantão’, 27 April 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50Z/129/13365.

⁹⁰ Ministério da Justiça, Departamento de Polícia Federal, Centro de Informações, Informação no. 1512, ‘Assunto: movimento estudantil’, 18 May 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50Z/9/33962.

⁹¹ Miguel Reale to General Sérvulo Mota Lima, São Paulo, 27 March 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’; Ministério da Aeronáutica, Gabinete do Ministro, CISA, Documento de Informações No. 13/CISA-ESC RCD, ‘Assunto: movimento estudantil’, 8 May 1973, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series ‘Dossiês’, doc. no. 50D/26/4388.

⁹² ‘Ofício esclarece morte de subversivo’, *SEDOC*, vol. 6 (July 1973), pp. 103–5. General Lima’s statement appeared in the *Folha da Tarde* (São Paulo), *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *O Dia* (Rio), and other papers. In *O Dia*, for example, the headline read ‘Terrorista atropelado aliciava universitários’ (‘Run-over terrorist lured university students’); see FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 37, p. 2. As stated above, no record of any deposition by Leme has been found in the archives.

⁹³ ‘Relatório do XVI encontro bipartite’, FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 14, p. 2.

Paulo Peace and Justice Commission, petitioned the police, the courts and the military to turn over the body and to investigate the incident thoroughly. Simas obtained the support of the São Paulo branch of the *Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil*. He pointed out errors in the government version, for example, the lack of a normally routine investigation of the truck accident. The requests went up the chain of command to General Mello.⁹⁴ His failure to respond or to send the case to the civilian authorities signified implicit recognition that the death had occurred in a military installation (DOI-CODI).⁹⁵

The episode gained international dimensions when Leme's mother wrote a letter to Pope Paul VI on Good Friday, the day of Christ's death. 'My son Alexandre, who was a person of ideals and self-giving, was summarily assassinated by the organs of repression exactly because he was struggling for the protection of human rights in Brazil and defending justice and liberty,' she wrote. She asked the Pontiff to help bring 'peace and justice' to Brazil.⁹⁶ The bishops of São Paulo had the message delivered directly to the Pope.⁹⁷ The foreign press also reported on the case.⁹⁸

Such negative publicity worried the regime. The Pope had already criticised the government because of torture. As a result, the military pressed the Church to stop denouncing human rights violations. Ironically, torture itself was used in the attempt to discover the sources of news about it.⁹⁹

When all else failed, a group of Brazil's leading bishops took the Leme case to the Bipartite Commission. The Bipartite was founded in November 1970 by Muricy – a four-star general and the powerful army Chief of Staff – and episcopal advisor Candido Antonio José Francisco Mendes de Almeida, president of the *Comissão Pontifícia Justiça e Paz-Seção Brasileira*, the first group of its kind in Brazil. The Bipartite met two dozen times during the Médici years and the first five months of the Geisel presidency. The bishops composed the so-called '*Grupo Religioso*,' while Muricy, Catholic philosopher Tarcísio Meirelles Padilha, other high-ranking officials, and intelligence officers formed the so-called '*Grupo da Situação*'.

⁹⁴ Simas, *Gritos de justiça*, ch. 16.

⁹⁵ Interview with Mário dos Passos Simas, São Paulo, 30 Sep. 1996.

⁹⁶ *Meu filho Alexandre Vannucchi*. ⁹⁷ 'Síntese cronológica dos fatos', p. 110.

⁹⁸ Two examples were *Le Figaro* and *Latin America*; see FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 880, p. 1, doc. nos. 876–9; also see the military's translation of a June 1973 Jack Anderson column entitled 'Opressão política no Brasil', FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. nos. 99–100, doc. no. 101, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Interview with Cecília Coimbra, Rio de Janeiro, 9 Nov. 1996. Coimbra as well as her husband were tortured because security officers believed they were the sources of foreign news on human rights violations. She is today the president of the Rio chapter of *Tortura Nunca Mais*.

While Church and state seemingly headed on a collision course in the early 1970s, the Bipartite demonstrated that the two sides also made a serious attempt at systematic dialogue. It was an important and rare channel of communication. The Bipartite sought to preserve traditional Church–state harmony, and it avoided a number of serious clashes over national security policy and social justice. As the repression deepened the Bipartite’s focus shifted to disputes over human rights violations. The Church pressed Muricy and the *Situação* for explanations of numerous cases. The military helped locate some detainees, but it also upheld the accusations of subversion against political prisoners. While Dom Paulo and others in the Church denounced abuses *publicly*, the *Grupo Religioso* worked *privately*.¹⁰⁰ The Leme incident was the climax of the Bipartite’s efforts.

The *Grupo Religioso* persistently pressed the *Situação* for an accounting of Leme’s death. At the 30 May meeting Candido Mendes described the moment as an important ‘test’ of the Bipartite’s dialogue.¹⁰¹ He presented the petitions from the Leme family drafted by Dias and Simas. The attorneys enumerated inconsistencies in the official version, including the claim that Leme was buried as an anonymous indigent because nothing was known of him. The death certificate carried full information. The petitioners requested an exhumation and a detailed autopsy in the presence of the family’s doctor, dentist and lawyers. They explained that their motive was not political but to ‘discover the truth’.¹⁰²

General Muricy declared that the government wanted to clarify the incident. However, Major Leone da Silveira Lee of the *Centro de Informações do Exército* (CIE), a unit largely responsible for the destruction of the guerrillas, attempted to rebut the petition point by point using the same argumentation as General Lima. He denied that the security forces knew that either Leme or those he allegedly denounced were students. Moreover, there was ‘nothing strange’ about the truck accident. Most significantly, Lee said that the time, place, and circumstances of Leme’s arrest were unimportant.¹⁰³ Candido Mendes insisted that the government bear upon the judiciary to approve the petition, but Padilha refused the

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed discussion of the Bipartite, see Serbin, ‘Social Justice or Subversion?’

¹⁰¹ ‘Relatório do XVI encontro bipartite’, FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 13, p. 2, doc. no. 14, p. 1.

¹⁰² Mário de Passos Simas and José Carlos Dias to Judge Tácito Morbach de Goes Nobre, São Paulo, 10 April 1973, FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 13, p. 2, doc. no. 34, p. 2, doc. no. 35, doc. no. 36, p. 1; ‘Petição do advogado da família do Alexandre Vannucchi’, FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 13, p. 2, doc. no. 36, p. 2, doc. no. 37, p. 1.

¹⁰³ ‘Relatório do XVI encontro bipartite’, FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 14, doc. no. 15, p. 1; compare Lee’s comments with ‘Petição do advogado da família do Alexandre Vannucchi’, FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 13, p. 2, doc. no. 36, p. 2, doc. no. 37, p. 1.

idea as a violation of the separation of powers. The *Situação's* post-meeting report stated that the Leme case 'polarised' the two sides. Yet the military was confident that its version would eventually be proved correct, thus forcing Dom José and other clergymen to retract their criticisms.¹⁰⁴

The *Grupo Religioso* came well-prepared to counter-argue the military's points at the 25 July Bipartite. Dom Lucas Moreira Neves, one of Dom Paulo's auxiliary bishops, presented documents verifying Leme's appendectomy in late January and his recuperation in Sorocaba during part of February. This evidence contradicted the security forces' mention of an 'old incision' on the corpse and the assertion that Leme was engaged in subversive activity in São Paulo in February. Thus an exhumation might show the cadaver to be of another person. (As CNBB Secretary General Dom Ivo Lorscheiter observed, the security forces switched the identities of prisoners to prevent their location by friends or family. Dom José had raised this possibility during the Sorocaba mass.) Dom Lucas also revealed that Leme's family was receiving threatening phone calls. Candido Mendes added that the petition stood valid not only for the civilian justice system, but the military courts that judged cases of alleged subversion. General Muricy tried to deflect these arguments. The family had not approached the army with its petition, he stated. The case was 'practically closed', but Candido Mendes was 'pressuring' the Lemes to continue. The bishops forced the issue yet further, with Dom Ivo defending Candido Mendes. Even the more conciliatory Dom Avelar Brandão Vilela, the CNBB vice-president and primate of Brazil, entered the debate, affirming that 'this case should be carried to its ultimate consequences...because it involved the probity of the CNBB and the bishop of Sorocaba'.¹⁰⁵

Dom Lucas then dropped a bombshell: another prisoner would testify that Leme had died differently from the military version. Candido Mendes suggested that attorney Simas be brought to the Bipartite. General Muricy refused, stating that Simas was 'against the government'. He preferred a member of the Leme family. Padilha added that the family had given up on its petition.¹⁰⁶ (In fact, it had not.) But the evidence continued to mount against the *Situação*. At the August Bipartite Dom Ivo showed the commission the depositions of five witnesses stating in a military court that Leme had died in his cell after torture by DOI-CODI agents.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ 'Relatório do XVI encontro bipartite', FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 15.

¹⁰⁵ 'Relatório do XVII encontro bipartite', FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 39.

¹⁰⁶ 'Relatório do XVII encontro bipartite', FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 40, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ 'Relatório do XIX encontro bipartite', FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 96, p. 2.

Dom Ivo's words were the last recorded by the Bipartite on the Leme death. As it predicted, the military had won a battle against the *Grupo Religioso* because the official version stood. No body was exhumed, no satisfaction or further explanation given the family and the public. Wittingly or unwittingly, the *Situação* took part in the cover-up. Yet in its estimation the bishops had persisted because the case was 'polemical' and thus gave them 'certain triumphs'.¹⁰⁸

The ultimate moral victory came for the Church in 1985, when it published testimony about Leme's death in *Brasil: Nunca Mais*. One eyewitness at the DOI-CODI spoke of seeing 'many people being tortured'. 'The worst case took place with a young man named Alexandre Vannucchi. For two or three days I heard his cries and, in the end, ... I saw his cadaver taken out of the maximum security cell, with blood spreading all over the floor.'¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

As his death produced repercussions throughout the 1970s, Leme's name became a symbol of resistance for the opposition, but also a signal to record subversive activity in the police registries. In 1974 Amnesty International included a description of Leme's death in its human rights report on Brazil.¹¹⁰ USP's *Diretório Central dos Estudantes* (DCE) was renamed the 'DCE Alexandre Vannucchi Leme'. In 1977 a group of student representatives at the CNBB assembly, which was debating a key document on the political situation, demanded that the bishops keep human rights as a priority and cited the Leme case to support their argument.¹¹¹ Leme was remembered again after the security forces invaded the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo and destroyed its theatre.¹¹² In March 1978 students across Brazil organised a day of protest to commemorate the fifth anniversary of Leme's death and the tenth

¹⁰⁸ 'Relatório do XIX encontro bipartite', FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 98, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Brasil: nunca mais*, p. 256.

¹¹⁰ Amnesty International, 'Deaths in Custody in Brazil' (Jan. 1974), in AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês'.

¹¹¹ Setor de Ordem Política e Social e Telecomunicações, Delsepol Campinas, 'Informação. Assunto: manifesto de universitários aos bispos reunidos da Vila Kostka, Mosteiro de Itaici, de 08 a 17 fev. 77', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50Z/32/3350-3; also see Serviço de Informações, Informação No. 189-B/77, 'Assunto: 15a. Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil', 18 Feb. 1977, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50Z/32/3709-28.

¹¹² Divisão de Informações, Setor Estudantil, RE 233/77, 'Assunto: depoimento dos DCEs PUC e USP, e demais centros acadêmicos da PUC, na CEI, que apura violências da invasão da PUC', 24 Nov. 1977, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50C/0/5986-95; 'Manifesto dos estudantes brasileiros no dia 23 de março', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50Z/130/5276.

anniversary of the Edson Luís incident. They used the occasion to demonstrate against President Geisel and the visit of US President Jimmy Carter.¹¹³ Leme's parents became rallying points in the broad-based amnesty movement for exiles and political prisoners. With the political opening, a number of opposition candidates tried to recruit the couple to support their campaigns.¹¹⁴ Leme's case also appeared in denunciations of physicians accused of signing false death certificates to hide torture.¹¹⁵ Many of these and other recollections of Leme caught the attention of DEOPS officers. Thus different interpretations of his importance contributed to the creation of the historical memory of the incident. The opposition cast Leme as a martyr, while the police saw him as a dangerous individual who, when remembered, inspired further subversion.

Justice came slowly. Disillusioned with the bishops' subsequent silence on the case, and fearing for his safety, Father Vannucchi left Brazil for Europe in 1974 and quit the ministry. In Switzerland, where information about prisoners was often easier to come by than in Brazil itself, he continued to the search for clues about Leme's fate.¹¹⁶ In late 1978 the Superior Military Tribunal, which heard all appeals cases involving political prisoners, reviewed testimony of six witnesses to Leme's torture in the DOI-CODI. One of the judges, General Rodrigo Octávio Jordão, proposed an investigation, but was outvoted 13–1. Encouraged by Jordão's initiative, attorney Simas once again petitioned the military justice system. He too was denied.¹¹⁷ In 1983, with Brazil clearly headed for civilian rule, the Leme family finally received permission to remove their son's bones from the Perus cemetery. With the help of a dental mould taken in early 1973 two dentists confirmed that the bones were Leme's.¹¹⁸ They were buried in the family plot in Sorocaba after a

¹¹³ 'Foi calmo o "Dia do Protesto"', *Diário da Noite*, 29 March 1978; 'Manifesto dos estudantes paulistas', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 43C/1/27; 'Manifesto', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50Z/300/2509; Divisão de Informações, Setor Estudantil, DOPS, RE 482/78, 'Assunto: sessão de abertura do congresso nacional pela anistia no Tuca, PUC-SP', 2 Nov. 1978, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50Z/130/5116–22.

¹¹⁴ Interviews with Egle Maria Vannucchi Leme and José de Oliveira Leme, Sorocaba, 19 Sep. 1996; Congresso Nacional pela Anistia, 'Resoluções', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50J/0/6204; Direito, USP, 'Avançar na luta pela anistia', AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50Z/130/5285; on the amnesty movement, see Skidmore, 'Brazil's Slow Road to Democratization: 1974–1985', in Stepan (ed.), *Democratizing Brazil*, pp. 21–2.

¹¹⁵ 3a. Delegacia da Divisão de Informações, DOPS, RE/326-79, 'Assunto: encontro de profissionais de saúde,' 24 Aug. 1979, AESP, DEOPS-SP, series 'Dossiês', doc. no. 50Z/130/2504–5; 'O falso laudo de Alexandre Vannuchi', *Jornal da República*, 27 Aug. 1979.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Aldo Vannucchi, Sorocaba, 19 Sep. 1996.

¹¹⁷ Simas, *Gritos de justiça*, pp. 237–9.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Dr. José Prestes de Barros Junior, Sorocaba, 17 Sep. 1996.

ceremony in São Paulo that also welcomed home the remains of Friar Tito de Alencar Lima, a brutally tortured Dominican who committed suicide in France. In December of 1995 President Fernando Henrique Cardoso signed into law a bill making government compensation possible for families of victims of the dictatorship. Leme's name was approved as a government commission began reviewing cases in 1996.¹¹⁹

New evidence and the perspective of time have made possible an historical anatomy of the Leme case that helps explain both the Church's evolution as a defender of human rights, and the priorities and *modus operandi* of the repressive forces. While most people at USP and in the Church primarily viewed Leme as a student and doubted the regime's version of events, the security forces had nevertheless accurately identified him as an important ALN militant. When he unexpectedly died, they resorted to a dual cover-up of their botched torture. While clerics and students sought to clarify the incident, the police and the military worked to preserve the image of the regime, which was seriously damaged by denunciations of torture. Protest caused them to justify their actions by falsely magnifying Leme's crimes. The threat posed by Leme in life and especially in death also served as a rationale for increased vigilance of the campuses and, indirectly, for continued support for the intelligence agencies.

Leme's death struck profoundly at the student and ecclesiastical communities, and put the security services on alert for months. The episode was unique. For the first time in four years of all-out war on the left Brazilians gathered *en masse* to protest torture and death. Clergy and students challenged the repressive system and its leaders at the peak of the violence. The reawakening of civil society against the regime had begun.

The swell of outrage against Leme's death led the Church to exercise its new policies in defence of human rights. It became the 'voice of the voiceless' for the family and the thousands of mourners prohibited from protesting. The notion of human rights passed from abstraction to concrete action. Dom José's and Dom Paulo's gestures did not represent individual positions but the national consensus of the bishops.

The Church's position was fraught with risks. First, the potential for violence was great. In Rio in 1968 the police did not hesitate to strike against people leaving a memorial mass for Edson Luís. Secondly, vigorous defence of human rights caused tensions among the clergy, as illustrated by the examples of Father Vannucchi, the Sorocaba priests' council, and Dom Zioni. Thirdly, the Leme mass identified the Church

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Ricardo Miranda, 'Famílias de 160 desaparecidos serão indenizadas', *O Globo*, 25 July 1996, p. 12. As of September 1996, however, the family still had not received compensation.

with subversion and endangered its historically non-partisan stance. Had it known fully Leme's ALN ties, it might have trodden more cautiously.

Paradoxically, the Church's position increased its political strength. As the intelligence services feared, the Leme incident forged a tighter bond between the Church and the students. The growing confluence between the Church and the left laid the basis for a strategic alliance that would help knit together the opposition during the transition to democracy.¹²⁰

Dom Paulo demonstrated the complexities and tensions involved in building the opposition. He walked a thin line between violence and demands for justice. He went with the students to the brink of confrontation with the government, but, unbeknownst to the regime, he also played a moderating role by staying away from the political hotbed of the USP campus and insisting on non-violent protest. Dom Paulo understood well how to test the limits of the generals' patience. He was prudent but firm in his opposition against the repression. The Leme protest removed any doubt that he might be coopted. It was a defining moment for Dom Paulo and the Church. Keeping the institution intact, he skillfully manoeuvred it into opposition.

The Leme mass served as a key rehearsal for Dom Paulo's highly important ecumenical memorial service for well-known Jewish journalist Herzog in 1975. This protest presented an even greater challenge to the regime because it united the opposition – not only students and Catholic clergymen, but Jews, media professionals, intellectuals and other members of the elite. Thirty thousand students at USP went on strike, and 42 bishops signed a statement denouncing the regime's violence. Two rabbis and a Protestant minister helped preside over the memorial at the cathedral, which drew 8,000 people despite the authorities' attempts to prevent the event. Dom Hélder, a pariah of the regime, also attended. The Herzog death came after Giesel had created new expectations about the end of the repression. Indeed, by then the regime had begun to use repression more selectively, a result of Médici's effective stifling of the opposition. The debate over the case took place in public. The censors, for instance, did not stop a thousand journalists from publishing a petition in newspapers demanding an investigation. Herzog's status as a member of the media elite further magnified the indignation about his death.¹²¹ The

¹²⁰ Della Cava, 'The "People's Church," the Vatican, and *Abertura*'; Mainwaring, *Catholic Church and Politics*, part III; Ana Maria Doimo, 'Igreja e movimentos sociais pós-70 no Brasil', in Pierre Sanchis (ed.), *Catolicismo* (São Paulo, 1992), vol. 2, 'Cotidiano e movimentos', pp. 275–308.

¹²¹ On Herzog see Markun (ed.), *Vlado*; Hamilton Almeida Filho, *A sangue-quente: a morte do jornalista Vladimir Herzog* (São Paulo, 1978); Fernando Jordão, *Dossiê Herzog: prisão, tortura e morte no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1984); Trudi Landau, *Vlado Herzog: o que faltava contar* (Petrópolis, 1986); Skidmore, 'Brazil's Slow Road to Democratization',

protest against his death marked a turning point in the struggle for democracy.

However, two and a half years earlier the Leme mass served as a key precedent by drawing 3,000 people in protest during one of the bloodiest moments of the regime and *before* the Geisel administration's attempts to reduce human rights abuses. The opening of Dom Paulo's Herzog sermon echoed his earlier commentary: 'God owns life.'¹²² The Leme case did not have greater impact because the regime imposed a big lie about his death. Herzog's colleague Fernando Jordão observed that Dom Paulo had regularly denounced human rights violations throughout the Médici years, but 'we journalists, because of pressure from our bosses, selfishness, professional incompetence professional, or lack of political awareness, often did not cover or make [the denunciations] public.'¹²³

Another tension resulted from the Church's confluence with the left. Dom Paulo's embrace of the Leme case and other similar actions by the Church marked a certain bias resulting from the sharp polarisation of Brazilian society. Defenders of the regime complained that human rights often meant defence of the left, but not of its victims. Minister Passarinho expressed this theme to Dom Paulo, and it was also an important subtext of the police investigation of Leme. Officer Magnotti wrote that 'elements of the left in the Catholic Church... who knew how to protest, although without justification, the death of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme,... did not mention a single word in the pulpits of the Church in protest of the barbarous murder carried out by the subversive agents of the ALN against a... simple and humble merchant.'¹²⁴ The right, too, suffered losses and held its memorial ceremonies.¹²⁵

This observation is not to justify the right nor diminish the security forces' barbarism, but to point out the historical constraints on the Church's campaign to introduce basic notions of human rights. Ideological polarisation shaped that campaign and the understanding of human rights in Brazil. Disagreement, distortion and misunderstanding about human rights still abound. A poignant example occurred in 1996, when relatives

pp. 11–12; Ralph Della Cava, 'The "People's Church," the Vatican, and *Abertura*', p. 148, and 'Brazil: The Struggle for Human Rights', *Commonweal*, vol. 52, no. 20 (19 Dec. 1975), pp. 623–6; Fernando Prandini, Victor A. Petrucci, and Romeu Dale, *As relações Igreja-estado no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1986–7), 5 vols., vol. 4, pp. 89–91; Wright, 'D. Paulo e os direitos humanos', pp. 72–3. Major US newspapers and newsmagazines also published articles on the case. On the selective use of violence, see Gorender, *Combate nas trevas*, p. 232.

¹²² Prandini, Petrucci, and Dale, *Relações Igreja-estado*, vol. 4, p. 90.

¹²³ Jordão, *Dossiê Herzog*, p. 37.

¹²⁴ Superior Tribunal Militar, Apelação 40.425, AEL, BNM, case no. 670, vol. 3, p. 362.

¹²⁵ Ustra, *Rompendo o silêncio*.

of murdered middle-class youths accused Dom Paulo of placing the human rights of criminals above those of the victims. Many equate the ‘subversives’ of the past with the ‘criminals’ of the present. In turn, Dom Paulo criticised the media for blaming defence of human rights for a rise in violence.¹²⁶ The free media repeat the errors of their censored past, when murdered opponents were transformed into ‘terrorists’, and human rights organisations into ‘defenders of bandits’. The Church’s campaign for human rights in the 1970s was only a beginning. It continues to emphasise education on human rights in its pastoral work.¹²⁷

Similarly, the defence of political prisoners overshadowed the more common human rights violations that had long occurred in Brazil’s jail cells. USP students called attention to such everyday abuses, as did a prominent member of the São Paulo Peace and Justice Commission.¹²⁸ However, while political torture of middle-class militants disappeared, mistreatment of the poor remains a serious structural problem.¹²⁹

The Bipartite Commission’s treatment of the Leme case displayed this class bias. A crucial point was whether the security agents knew Leme was a student. Another fundamental factor was Leme’s connection to the Church through relatives. These considerations implied that high social status and institutional ties somehow made the violation more serious – more heinous for the Church, more politically troublesome for the military. As in the Herzog case, indignation corresponded to a person’s fame and importance. Both the military and the Church thus reflected the highly stratified Brazilian class system. Not everybody had the same human rights.

The Bipartite Commission demonstrated that while the Church struggled to develop a public stance on human rights, it also resorted to behind-the-scenes dialogue. When all other efforts failed and repression and censorship muffled the Church’s public voice, the *Grupo Religioso* kept pressure on the regime by demanding information about political prisoners and victims of torture. A military commentary on the Bipartite

¹²⁶ Carlos Eduardo Alves, ‘Polícia é fraca contra bandidos, diz d. Paulo’, *Folha de S. Paulo*, 21 Aug. 1996.

¹²⁷ In 1997, for instance, the Church focused on these issues by adopting the controversial theme of ‘Fraternity and the Imprisoned’ for its annual Lenten campaign; see CNBB, *Cristo liberta de todas as prisões* (São Paulo, 1997).

¹²⁸ Hélio Pereira Bicudo, *Meu depoimento sobre o esquadrão da morte* (São Paulo, 1976).

¹²⁹ See, for example, Amnesty International, *Brazil: Torture and Extrajudicial Execution in Brazil* (London, 1990); ‘O poder da pauleira e do choque’, *Veja*, 1 Nov. 1995, pp. 28–35; ‘Suspeito de seqüestro é morto dentro da DAS’, *Jornal do Brasil*, 3 Jan. 1996; ‘Divisão já foi motivo de denúncia’, *Jornal do Brasil*, 3 Jan. 1996; also see Sérgio Verani, *Assassinatos em nome da lei* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996). Brazilians were shocked in early 1997 as television stations revealed video recordings of policemen in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro torturing citizens in public.

stated that ‘it has become evident that the intention of the *Grupo Religioso*, in this case led by Prof. Candido Mendes, is to persist in the search for the whereabouts of elements noted as “pending cases,” that is, persons that they considered to be *desparecidos* or fugitives’.¹³⁰ As one of Candido Mendes’s collaborators remembered, the Commission prevented the military from denying knowledge of human rights violations.¹³¹ As Candido Mendes himself recalled, the circulation of information about abuses caused an increased ‘awareness’ about human rights that preempted further violations. The accumulation of denunciations by the *Grupo Religioso* and other Church groups helped demonstrate that violence had reached its ‘saturation point’, causing Geisel to react against it.¹³²

The existence of dialogue is usually overlooked in the writings on authoritarianism in Brazil and other Latin American countries. The Bipartite Commission revealed that both the Brazilian Church and the Médici administration were somewhat more flexible than previously thought in their approach to each other. Repression and resistance marked the period, but so did the search for a political solution. The Church acted differently according to the setting and historical circumstances of each Latin American regime, ranging from conservative clerics’ outright collaboration with the repressive forces in Argentina to different degrees and forms of opposition in countries such as Chile, Paraguay, and Brazil.¹³³ As a systematic dialogue the Bipartite Commission represented a unique attempt at dealing with human rights violations.

As the military correctly perceived, human rights were a profoundly political question. Both sides were biased. The regime worked to present Leme as a terrorist. The Church used the case to denounce human rights abuses. In fairness to the Church, repression and censorship placed limits on the frequency and manner of its protests. The Church selected its cases well, capitalising on the security forces’ clumsy choices of victims and

¹³⁰ ‘Relatório do XXIV encontro bipartite’, FGV/CPDOC, ACM, pm, 67.01.05, doc. no. 134, p. 4.

¹³¹ Marina Bandeira, ‘Alguns aspectos. Acentuações’, in Instituto Nacional de Pastoral (ed.), *Pastoral da Igreja no Brasil nos anos 70*, p. 77.

¹³² Interview with Candido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, 5 July 1995. Alfred Stepan states that ‘liberalization began within the state apparatus owing to the contradictions generated by the increasing autonomy of the security apparatus’; Stepan, *Rethinking*, p. 13; also see pp. 27–8, 38. At the start of his term Geisel called in General Milton Tavares, the head of the CIE under Médici, for a complete report on the repression; interview with General Octávio Costa, Rio de Janeiro, 17 March 1997.

¹³³ On Argentina, see Emilio F. Mignone, *Witness to the Truth: The Complicity of Church and Dictatorship in Argentina, 1976–1983* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1988); on Chile, see Brian H. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile* (Princeton, 1982); Pamela Lowden, *Moral Opposition to Authoritarian Rule in Chile, 1973–90* (Basingstoke, 1996); on Paraguay, see Miguel Carter, *El papel de la Iglesia en la caída de Stroessner* (Asunción, 1991).

implausible explanations of jailings, disappearances and deaths. The Church took advantage of the opening provided by the Leme case to challenge the repression.

As the authoritarian era fades, the appearance of other primary sources will lead to further reinterpretation and a deepening of our understanding of the period. This process is essential in a post-authoritarian society whose majority learned only the regime's version about individuals such as Leme. Political opening produces a documentary opening which illuminates the past. The most important archives – of the DOI-CODI and the various intelligence services – still remain hidden. The degree to which researchers gain access to these sensitive materials will be an important measure of the commitment to building a lasting democracy in Brazil. Likewise, the refusal of former members of the repressive apparatus to admit mistakes sets a bad example for the Brazilian military and police forces, and undermines civil and human rights.