

Between Religion and Politics: The Military Clergy during the Late Twentieth-Century Dictatorships in Argentina and Chile*

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Abstract. This article analyses the history of the military clergy and contrasts its role in the Argentine and Chilean dictatorships on the basis of new, previously inaccessible sources. It is argued here that, in addition to its ideological orientation, two further factors explain differences in the influence of the military clergy on the two regimes: first, the structural position that the Military Vicariates occupied between the Church and the armed forces, and, second, the two dictatorships' different needs for legitimisation. The analysis provides information relevant to understanding the public role of the Catholic Church and the dimensions of violence during the regimes.

Keywords: military clergy, chaplains, vicariates, dictatorship, Chile, Argentina, Catholic church, violence

Chaplains should provide us with the moral endorsement for this struggle and tell us that our struggle is a crusade ...¹

General Benjamín Menéndez, Argentina

Nothing, therefore, is more at odds with a believer than Marxist thought.²

Augusto Pinochet, Chile

These quotations each highlight the part played by religion in legitimising the two regimes, a role that can be linked directly to the issue of violence, its use and its causes, during the regimes. They also go some way towards exposing the similarities and differences regarding religious legitimisation in the two

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¹ Argentina, Military Vicariate, *Bulletin*, 51 (Aug. 1976), p. 23.

² Augusto Pinochet, *Política. Politiquería. Demagogia* (Santiago: Renacimiento, 1983), p. 58.

countries. Although arguments based on Christian belief were used in both Chile and Argentina to legitimise the fight against communism, there was a much stronger relationship between religion and the concrete violence administered in Argentina than there was in Chile.

The Military Vicariates were key institutions in this symbiosis between Catholicism and militarism, since they were located, by definition, exactly on the boundary between religion and politics, the Church and the state.³

In order to analyse the role of military chaplains during the dictatorships, the first section of the article puts forward a theoretical framework, illustrating the ambivalent relationship between religion, in this case Catholicism, and violence. In order to understand the Military Vicariates within their historical context, the second section briefly summarises the development of the relationship between Church and state in the two countries, the history of the last Argentine and Chilean dictatorships, and the positions that the Church in each country adopted towards the military regimes. The third part of the article undertakes an empirical analysis of the institutional establishment of the Military Vicariates and their discourses regarding violence, dealing with each country separately, but highlighting points of comparison. The article concludes by linking the theoretical discussion to the empirical analysis.

The article will show that the similarities and differences in the religious legitimisation of violence which the two quotations at its beginning reflect can be explained in terms of the attitudes of the military clergy in the two countries. In addition to their ideological orientation, two further factors explain the influence of the military clergy over the discourses that legitimised the regimes: first, the structural position of the vicariates between the Church and the armed forces, and, second, the two dictatorships' different needs for legitimisation. Analysis of this relationship between religion and politics helps in understanding the public role of the Catholic Church and the dimensions of violence during the regimes.

Very few historical studies have focused on the military clergy.⁴ This is largely because it has been virtually impossible to gain access to the necessary

³ Doris Bergen, 'Introduction', in Doris Bergen (ed.), *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), p. 16.

⁴ In the case of Argentina, only the classic studies by Emilio Mignone and Rubén Dri on the Catholic Church during the last Argentine dictatorship mention aspects of the military clergy: see Emilio Mignone, *Iglesia y dictadura: el papel de la Iglesia a la luz de sus relaciones con el régimen militar* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 2006); Rubén R. Dri, *Teología y dominación* (Buenos Aires: Roblanco 1987). Juan Cruz Esquivel adopts a sociological viewpoint in his article, 'A marca católica na legislação argentina: o caso da assistência religiosa nas forças armadas', in Roberto Arriada Lorea (ed.), *Em defesa das liberdades laicas* (Porto Alegre: Livraria do Advogada, 2008), pp. 117–28. In the case of Chile, there is a study by Hernán Vidal, who could not gain access to sources belonging to the clergy, and a legal study written by a member of Opus Dei who is now a bishop: see Hernán Vidal, *Las capellanías*

sources, since the vicariates have denied historians entry to their archives. Precisely for this reason, having gained access to previously unused material, the approach here is relatively empirical. The analysis of Argentina is based, to a large extent, on archival material from the archdiocese of Buenos Aires and the *Boletines* (Bulletins) that the Military Vicariate published during the dictatorship.⁵ For Chile, it was possible to consult the private archive of a former military bishop, Joaquín Matte Varas (1982–95), who stored practically all of the vicariate's documents in his room at the old people's home where he lived.⁶ It should be borne in mind, therefore, that the material consulted almost certainly fails to cover every aspect of the military clergy's history, but it provides a sufficiently solid grounding on which to base the analysis.⁷

Religion and Violence: An Ambivalent Relationship

The fact that religion is used to legitimise violence is connected with the 'autonomous potential for cultural production' which it embodies and which allows it to spawn a sense of community based on a transcendental greater good.⁸ Religions work as systems of reference which provide believers with highly integrating, stable frameworks of order. These religious reference systems take into account every sphere of human activity and determine both the individual's relationship with God and his/her relationship with the world, and, by extension, with society. It should come as no surprise that symbolic religious language is often used to strengthen emotional ties with the concept of nation and other collective identities. As one of the foremost legitimising principles of communities, religious symbolism helps to build nations, which are always 'created' by making a distinction between the 'inside' and the 'outside' (coupled with clear stereotypes of who

castrenses durante la dictadura: burgando en la ética militar chilena (Santiago: Mosquito Comunicaciones, 2005); and Juan Ignacio González Errázuriz, *Iglesia y fuerzas armadas: estudio canónico y jurídico sobre la asistencia espiritual a las fuerzas armadas en Chile* (Santiago: Universidad de los Andes, 1994).

⁵ My thanks to Horacio Verbitsky, who provided me with copies of the Military Vicariate's bulletins from the days of the dictatorship.

⁶ I have copies of all the documents cited here from the private archive belonging to Mgr Matte Varas (hereafter referred to as MVA).

⁷ A critical edition of the diary of Mgr Bonamin, the Military Pro-Vicar of Argentina, covering 1976–7, which fell into the hands of two researchers, Lucas Bilbao and Ariel Lede, is due to be published in the first half of 2015. Bilbao and Lede were kind enough to provide me with a copy of the diary, an extremely valuable source when it comes to understanding how the Vicariate worked and what one of its most prominent representatives thought, on the understanding that it should not be quoted prior to publication of their own work. A preliminary reading of the diary confirms the conclusions reached in this article.

⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Die Wiederkehr der Götter: Religion in der modernen Kultur* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2007), p. 110. For what follows, see *ibid.*, pp. 111–13.

should be considered the enemy). In the words of Friedrich Wilhelm Graf: ‘In modern-day nationalism, religious semantics serve, within the depths of the individual’s soul, to consolidate his/her tie with the nation and establish the national community as a broadly binding community of salvation.’⁹ Particularly at times of national crisis or threat (at least, as perceived by the key players in the conflict), the ‘consecrating influence’ (*Konsekrationswirkung*) of religion is used to legitimise violence and grant it theological justification.¹⁰ By invoking the sacred, violence is interpreted more broadly to encompass the ‘more transempirical’ (*transempirisches Mehr*),¹¹ going beyond material or political reasons to justify war and eliciting deep-rooted identification with the community of salvation. Religion provides acts of violence with a specific motivation. With reference to holy wars, Dietmar Willoweit defines it as ‘the conviction that one is fighting for the supreme truth and, therefore, ultimately for the well-being of society’.¹² In theological reasoning, ‘just wars’ are sanctioned as a last resort in order to avoid greater violence. For Thomas Aquinas, war, so defined, represented an act of love which made possible the eternal salvation of the enemy-sinner.¹³ In principle, Christian legitimisation of violence is subordinate to a greater good, a just cause, but, as academic debate rightly indicates, this concept is open to abuse when the ideologues of violence believe that they alone possess the only true political, ideological or religious beliefs.¹⁴

Monotheistic religions are particularly prone to establishing such a relationship between belief in the truth and the legitimisation of violence, because they were imposed, according to Jan Assmann, through a ‘language of violence’. In the early days of monotheism, violence was not only wielded to assert power,

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Das religiöse Feld: Texte zur Ökonomie des Heilsgeschehens* (Konstanz: UVK Universitätsverlag, 2000), p. 67.

¹¹ Carsten Colpe, *Der ‘Heilige Krieg’* (Bodenheim: Anton Hain Verlag, 1994), p. 10.

¹² Dietmar Willoweit, ‘*Verweigerte Toleranz und gebeiligte Kriegführung*’, in Klaus Schreiner (ed.), *Heilige Kriege: Religiöse Begründungen militärischer Gewaltanwendung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam im Vergleich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008), p. 260. Willoweit, like Colpe, refers to ‘Holy War’, not ‘Just War’. To differentiate between the terms, see Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, ‘Sakralisierung von Kriegen: Begriffs- und problemgeschichtliche Erwägungen’, in Schreiner (ed.), *Heilige Kriege*, pp. 7–8. Nevertheless, the potential of religion as a legitimising force is still valid in the case of just war, as the Argentine dictatorship defined it.

¹³ The theological concept of just war is based on St Augustine: see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae. Die deutsche Thomas-Ausgabe*, vol. 2 (Salzburg: Anton Pustet Verlag, 1934), 40, pp. 83–9.

¹⁴ See Graf, *Sakralisierung von Kriegen*, p. 9; Wolfgang Palaver, ‘Vom “gerechten Krieg” zum “gerechten Frieden”. Ein Beitrag aus theologischer Sicht’, in Georg Kreis (ed.), *Der ‘gerechte Krieg’. Zur Geschichte einer aktuellen Denkfigur* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2006), p. 104; Arnold Angenendt, *Toleranz und Gewalt. Das Christentum zwischen Bibel und Schwert* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2008), p. 412ff.

but also in conflicts that revolved around religious truth. Believing in a single god lent violence moral weight because devout believers thought they possessed a religious truth that legitimised their acts.¹⁵ Thus the peaceful ideal of the first Christian communities and the possibility of using violence were both intrinsic to early Catholicism.

The role of the Christian religion in legitimising violence was broadly accepted for centuries; we need look no further than the medieval crusades to see this.¹⁶ However, during the second half of the twentieth century, following the devastating experience of the two world wars, trends towards the development of an ethic of peace and the idea of Christian-inspired world peace started to gain sway within the Catholic Church.¹⁷ At the same time, the importance of religion in society was declining and a process of secularisation meant that it was gradually being pushed into the private realm.¹⁸ However, over the last few decades, as José Casanova points out, religion has been ‘deprivatised’ and the Catholic Church is now claiming a new role for itself as a public voice.¹⁹

These theoretical discussions are key to understanding the complex relationship between politics, violence and religion in Latin America. When, later in the article, reference is made to the ‘religious dimension’ of violence, the allusion not only means that a religious figure provides the legitimising discourse, but also that the religious legitimisation accompanying violence confers its ‘consecrating influence’ upon it.

A look at the Latin American dictatorships highlights the importance of the Catholic Church in the legitimisation of violence, even after the

¹⁵ Assmann does not claim that monotheism brought violence with it, but rather refers to the linguistic legitimisation of violence involved in imposing a single God, which is inherent to monotheism: see Jan Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung. Oder der Preis des Monotheismus* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003); Jan Assmann, ‘Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt’, in Peter Walter (ed.), *Das Gewaltpotential des Monotheismus und der Dreieine Gott* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2005), pp. 18–38; Jan Assmann, *Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt* (Vienna: Picus Verlag, 2006). For a critical discussion of Assmann’s ideas, see Klaus Müller, ‘Gewalt und Wahrheit. Zu Jan Assmanns Monotheismuskritik’, in Walter (ed.), *Das Gewaltpotential*, pp. 74–82; and Erich Zenger, ‘Der Mosaische Monotheismus im Spannungsfeld von Gewalttätigkeit und Gewaltverzicht. Eine Replik auf Jan Assmann’, in Walter (ed.), *Das Gewaltpotential*, pp. 39–73.

¹⁶ See Andreas Holzem, ‘Krieg und Christentum. Religiöse Gewalttheorien in den Kriegserfahrungen des Westens. Eine Einführung’, in Andreas Holzem (ed.), *Krieg und Christentum. Religiöse Gewalttheorien in den Kriegserfahrungen des Westens* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009), p. 32ff.; Angenendt, *Toleranz und Gewalt*, p. 419ff.; Gerd Althoff, *Selig sind die Verfolgung ausüben. Päpste und Gewalt im Hochmittelalter* (Darmstadt: Theiss Verlag, 2013), p. 121ff.

¹⁷ See Palaver, ‘Vom “gerechten Krieg”’, p. 108; and Angenendt, *Toleranz und Gewalt*, pp. 481–2.

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *Ein säkulares Zeitalter* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2009), p. 15.

¹⁹ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 211ff.

Second Vatican Council. The ongoing political and public influence of the Church existed, therefore, in parallel with this relationship between religion and legitimisation, and it is against such a backdrop that we now turn our attention to an institution that stood at the intersection between religion and politics (and one that also played a central role in the legitimisation of violence), the Military Vicariate. In order to understand the influence of these institutions in Argentina and Chile, they must be placed within the context of the relationship between Church and state in the two countries.

Argentina

The Catholic nation

Even as late as the 1990s, one member of the Argentine government still referred to his country as a ‘Catholic nation’.²⁰ This comment summed up a historical process, which had begun in the 1930s, in which the Catholic Church managed to penetrate almost every sphere of social life in Argentina and thus to assert the concept of a ‘Catholic nation’. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the country’s episcopate had achieved a greater degree of unity by establishing a conference of bishops, which allowed them to ‘reconquer’ Argentine society, guided by principles prescribed by the Vatican. The Church took a stance against liberal governments and secular modernity, and posited the concept of integral Catholicism as the basis for a new national and cultural identity.²¹ They focused on evangelisation of the masses through Catholic associations and the state as the means to reconquer society as a whole.²² In this context, the Argentine armed forces, whose influence had begun to grow after the first military coup in 1930, proved to be integral Catholicism’s most important ally. It should be noted that integral Catholicism was only one faction within the Church when Argentine Catholicism ‘made its “triumphal” entrance on the stage in the 1930s’, and

²⁰ Quoted in Fortunato Mallimaci, ‘Les courants au sein du catholicisme argentin: continuités et ruptures’, *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 40 (1995), p. 113.

²¹ According to Émile Poulat’s basic definition, integral Catholicism means a type of Catholicism which is Roman (guided by the vision of the Pope), intransigent (anti-liberal and anti-modern), integral (harbouring the idea of transforming society according to Catholic doctrine) and social (with a popular dimension): see Émile Poulat, *Le catholicisme sous observation* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1983).

²² Loris Zanatta, ‘Religión, nación y derechos humanos: el caso argentino en perspectiva histórica’, *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* (Buenos Aires), 7: 8 (1998), p. 170ff.; Verónica Giménez Béliveau and Fortunato Mallimaci, ‘Argentinien’, in Johannes Meier and Veit Strassner (eds.), *Kirche und Katholizismus seit 1945*, vol. 6: *Lateinamerika und Karibik* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009), p. 400f.

other tendencies much more open to modernity also existed.²³ However, integral Catholicism represented a significant current within the Argentine Church and the armed forces shared its rejection of modernity and democracy, which they regarded as corrupt, hedonistic and individualistic, thereby positioning themselves as the second pillar of the 'Catholic nation'. The relationship between the Church hierarchy and the Argentine military bore fruit for both institutions during the twentieth century. While the Church took advantage of the repeated military coups that occurred to increase its influence through authoritarian governments, the armed forces relied on Christian values to legitimise their disruption of democratic life and turned to lay Catholic technocrats to take up important posts in government administration.²⁴ During the twentieth century, the military and the Catholic Church considered themselves the most important pillars of the Argentine Catholic nation and the relationship between 'the cross and the sword' stood as its guardian.

The Argentine Church, however, was never a monolithic institution. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Cuban Revolution, the Second Vatican Council and the 1968 Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín drew many closer to the poor and increased their sympathy towards more progressive ideas.²⁵ These events led, for instance, to the formation of *Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo* (Priests for the Third World), a significant group whose ideas were radically opposed to the more conservative bishops in the country.²⁶ At the beginning of the 1970s, the Argentine Church experienced intense internal conflicts and, for many of the bishops who supported the military dictatorship, the regime that came to power in 1976 served as a tool through which to re-establish internal unity, ridding the institution of progressive views. Thus, although this analysis stresses the role of the military chaplains, one should not forget that dissenting voices against the dictatorship always existed within the Church.

This does not mean, however, that all the progressive priests condemned violence as a theologically invalid means of action. Camilo Torres, a Colombian priest who died fighting alongside Marxist guerrilla groups in his

²³ See the analyses given in Miranda Lida and Diego Mauro (eds.), *Catolicismo y sociedad de masas en Argentina, 1900–1950* (Buenos Aires: Prohistoria, 2009). The quotation is from page 13.

²⁴ Roberto Di Stefano and Loris Zanatta, *Historia de la Iglesia Argentina: desde la conquista hasta finales del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2009), p. 545ff.; José-María Ghio, *La Iglesia católica en la política argentina* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2007).

²⁵ See Claudia Touris and Mariela Ceva (eds.), *Los avatares de la 'nación católica': cambios y permanencias en el campo religioso de la Argentina contemporánea* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Libros, 2012).

²⁶ See José Pablo Martín, *Movimiento de Sacerdotes del Tercer Mundo: un debate argentino* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2010).

country, for example, became an iconic figure for many Argentine Catholics.²⁷ Indeed, the current historiography of the Catholic Church emphasises the common principles shared not only by conservative and progressive Catholics, but also by Catholic generals, who believed they were saving the nation by fighting communism, and guerrilla groups which, like the Montoneros, were strongly influenced by Catholicism.²⁸ The relationship between Catholicism and violence was not, therefore, limited to a specific sector within the Church. This state of affairs coincided with an Argentine society which, in the years leading up to the most recent dictatorship, was marked by a history of violence which had grown well beyond the sphere of the Church.²⁹ The Argentine Military Vicariate worked within this historical context of violence.

The military dictatorship (1976–83)

General Videla's military junta based its 'process of national reorganisation' on two main pillars: the fight against subversion, giving rise to the most brutal repression in the history of the country, and a neoliberal economic policy, the brainchild of a minister of finance, José Martínez de Hoz, which aimed to solve the economic crisis in the country through privatisation and deregulation. Ultimately, the failure of Martínez de Hoz's policy to achieve the desired results meant that the military government found itself open to ever increasing criticism at the beginning of the 1980s. Following defeat in

²⁷ Daniel Levine, 'Camilo Torres. Fe, política y violencia', *Sociedad y Religión*, 21: 34/35 (2011), pp. 59–91; Gustavo Morello, *Cristianismo y revolución: los orígenes intelectuales de la guerrilla argentina* (Córdoba: Universidad Católica de Córdoba, 2003).

²⁸ Luis Miguel Donatello, 'La última dictadura militar como problema teológico-político', in Fortunato Mallimaci (ed.), *Modernidad, religión y memoria* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 2008), pp. 169–82; Fortunato Mallimacci, Humberto Cucchetti and Luis Donatello, 'Camino sinuoso: nacionalismo y catolicismo en la Argentina contemporánea', in Francisco Colom and Ángel Rivero (eds.), *El altar y el trono: ensayos sobre el catolicismo político latinoamericano* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2006); Luis Miguel Donatello, 'Sobre algunos conceptos para comprender las relaciones entre religión y guerrilla en la Argentina de los '60 y '70', *Nuevo Mundo/Mundos Nuevos*, available at <http://nuevo-mundo.revues.org/index38972.html> (last accessed, 20 Nov. 2012); Luis Miguel Donatello, 'Aristocrático de la salvación: el catolicismo liberacionista y los montoneros', *Prismas: Revista de Historia Intelectual*, 9 (2005), pp. 241–58.

²⁹ Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve historia contemporánea de la Argentina, 1916–2010* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica de España, 2012 edition), p. 200ff.; Hugo Vezetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria: memorias y olvidos* (Buenos Aires: Paidós Ibérica, 2009). Two recent articles provide further analysis of the climate of violence and right-wing fear in Argentina in the early 1970s: Sebastián Carassai, 'The Dark Side of Social Desire: Violence as Metaphor, Fantasy and Satire in Argentina, 1969–1975', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 47: 1 (2015), pp. xx–xx; Valeria Manzano, 'Sex, Gender and the Making of the "Enemy Within" in Cold War Argentina', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 47: 1 (2015), pp. xx–xx.

the Falklands/Malvinas War, the regime was forced to hand over power to a democratically elected president, Raúl Alfonsín, in 1983, having no say in the form that transition took.³⁰ During the dictatorship the armed forces had orchestrated ‘the greatest and most savage tragedy in [Argentina’s] history’, as the 1984 report of the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, CONADEP) put it.³¹ The repression was characterised by both its decentred execution and a high level of clandestinity. However, as early as 1977, following accusations by national and international human rights groups, the dictatorship was forced to acknowledge the existence of the ‘disappeared’.³²

The scale of human rights violations was alarming. CONADEP’s 1984 report describes 8,961 cases of ‘disappeared people’; human rights groups, however, now speak of 30,000. Many of these victims were thrown into the sea or the Río de la Plata from aircraft, while others were buried in mass graves or burned.³³ One of the most appalling crimes committed by the Argentine state’s terrorism consisted of killing women shortly after they had given birth in order to hand over their infants to military families or those close to the ‘process’. Torture, detentions and arbitrary military raids forced more than half a million people into exile.³⁴ The repression extended to a large part of society and became ‘the military regime’s chief resource for its legitimisation’.³⁵

The Argentine bishops’ attitude to the military coup and the establishment of the dictatorship has been addressed from multiple perspectives, most arriving at the same basic conclusion: ‘On the whole, the military coup of 24 March 1976 was welcomed by Argentina’s Catholic hierarchy.’³⁶ This statement is supported by many of the points already mentioned here: the multiple structural and ideological ties between the Church and the armed forces in the ‘Catholic nation’; a reluctance to accept the axioms of the Second Vatican Council; and a functional alliance to restore unity and order within the

³⁰ Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, *La dictadura militar (1976–1983): del golpe de estado a la restauración democrática* (Buenos Aires: Paidós Iberica, 2006), p. 33ff.

³¹ CONADEP, *Nunca más: Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1984), p. 7.

³² Emilio Crenzel, *La historia política del Nunca Más: la memoria de las desapariciones en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2008), p. 37; Romero, *Breve historia*, pp. 207–12.

³³ Official bodies currently list 13,500 people as ‘disappeared’: see Veit Strassner, *Die offenen Wunden Lateinamerikas. Vergangenheitspolitik im postautoritären Argentinien, Uruguay und Chile* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007), p. 78.

³⁴ Ruth Fuchs, *Umkämpfte Geschichte. Vergangenheitspolitik in Argentinien und Uruguay* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), p. 71.

³⁵ Paula Canelo, *El proceso en su laberinto: la interna militar de Videla a Bignone* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2008), p. 43.

³⁶ Martín Obregón, *Entre la cruz y la espada: la Iglesia católica durante los primeros años del ‘Proceso’* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2005), p. 58.

clergy itself by dint of the dictatorship.³⁷ Nevertheless, other positions also existed within this framework of general acceptance.³⁸ Thus it certainly cannot be claimed that the entire Argentine Church hierarchy backed the regime; some bishops, albeit a minority, voiced strong criticism. It is safe to say, however, that the Military Vicariate, which openly supported the ideology of the dictatorship, relied on the blessing (or, at least, silence) of many bishops.

Chile

Social Catholicism

In Chile the 1925 constitution led to a separation of Church and state negotiated with the Vatican, meaning that the Church subsequently enjoyed far greater independence from the state than in Argentina. At the same time, the long tradition of formal democracy in Chile also implied that the Church's first recourse when it came to exerting political influence was not the armed forces, but rather the political parties, and, more specifically, the Christian Democrats.³⁹ Although the Church was close to the Christian Democrat administration of Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964–70), it never openly supported any political party and jealously defended its political independence. Moreover, given that social Catholicism already had greater influence in Chile, the Second Vatican Council, which meant opening the doors of the Church to modernity, were welcomed.⁴⁰ The literature that focuses on this period also advances the theory that the Catholic Church positioned itself closer to the poor as a direct reaction to the great success that Protestant evangelical groups, which appeared in the second half of the century, had achieved and, consequently, the competition they represented in that particular sector of the population.⁴¹ As a result, two factors

³⁷ Fortunato Mallinaci, 'Catolicismo y militarismo en Argentina (1930–1983): de la Argentina liberal a la Argentina católica', *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* (Buenos Aires), 4 (1996), pp. 181–218; Anthony James Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 157ff.; Horacio Verbitsky, *Doble juego: la Argentina católica y militar* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2006); Di Stefano and Zanatta, *Historia*, p. 545ff.; Ghio, *La Iglesia católica*, p. 217ff.

³⁸ See Obregón, *Entre la cruz*, p. 66ff., who highlights three tendencies; Ghio, *La Iglesia católica*, p. 230ff.; and Claudia Touris, 'Ideas, actores y conflictos en el catolicismo argentino post-conciliar', *Todo es Historia*, 401 (2000), pp. 44–52.

³⁹ Brian H. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 210ff.; Veit Strassner, 'Chile', in Meier and Strassner (ed.), *Kirche und Katholizismus nach 1945*, vol. 6: *Karibik und Lateinamerika*, p. 402ff.

⁴⁰ Andrea Botto, 'Algunas tendencias del catolicismo social en Chile: reflexiones desde la historia', *Teología y Vida*, 49 (2008), p. 505ff.

⁴¹ Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar*.

differentiated the Chilean Catholic Church from its Argentine counterpart at the beginning of the 1970s: first, the Chilean Church had no direct relationship either with the government or the military, seeing itself more as a mediator among the different political parties; second, the Church was already engaged in social outreach work with the poor and working classes, and actually intensified its efforts in this direction following the 1973 coup.

It is also important to note that, as in Argentina, the Chilean Church experienced intense internal conflicts at the beginning of the 1970s. A group similar to *Sacerdotes del Tercer Mundo*, known as *Cristianos por el Socialismo* (Christians for Socialism), was formed and demanded that the Church hierarchy should speak out in favour of Salvador Allende's government.⁴² Meanwhile, conservative lay groups, such as *Tradición, Familia y Propiedad* (Tradition, Family and Property), which had a significant influence in the armed forces thanks to good contacts between their members (children of the landowning and business elite) and conservative military leaders and politicians, also existed.⁴³ As in Argentina, the Chilean Church could not dissociate itself from the social conflicts which were affecting society as a whole and becoming increasingly violent and polarised.

The military dictatorship (1973–90)

The military coup of 11 September 1973 brought an end to Allende's 'Chilean road to socialism'. The ensuing dictatorship was remarkable both for its length (17 years) and the unity demonstrated by the different branches of the armed forces and *Carabineros* that supported Pinochet.⁴⁴ Like its Argentine counterpart, the regime was based, above all, on a policy of repression and a neoliberal economic model.⁴⁵ These two policies were closely interwoven, since the neoliberal shock therapy administered by the 'Chicago Boys' was only possible

⁴² See Pablo Richard, *Cristianos por el socialismo. Historia y documentación* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1976).

⁴³ *Tradición, Familia y Propiedad* had its closest contacts in the Navy; see Stephan Ruderer, 'Cruzada contra el comunismo: Tradición, Familia y Propiedad (TFP) en Chile y Argentina', *Sociedad y Religión*, 22: 38 (2012), pp. 79–108.

⁴⁴ Members of the armed forces who came out against the coup, such as General Alberto Bachelet, father of a future president, Michelle Bachelet, were eliminated shortly after the coup itself. For the example of the marines opposed to the coup, see Jorge Magasich, *Los que dijeron 'No': historia del movimiento de los marinos antigolpistas de 1973*, 2 volumes (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2008). Unity within the military junta was ultimately achieved with Pinochet's 'coup' against the commander-in-chief and until-then member of the junta, Gustavo Leigh, in 1978: see Verónica Valdivia Ortiz de Zárate, *El golpe después del golpe: Leigh vs. Pinochet: Chile 1960–1980* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2003).

⁴⁵ For a detailed analysis of the dictatorship, see Carlos Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007). Also see Stefan Rinke, *Kleine Geschichte Chiles* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2007), p. 158ff.; Simon Collier and William F. Sater, *A History of Chile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 359ff.

thanks to the dictatorship's repression and its iron grip on the population. Inspired by Milton Friedman's theories and under Pinochet's wing, a group of young Chileans from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Santiago (Pontifical Catholic University of Santiago, PUC), instructed in neoliberal theories by economics graduates from the University of Chicago, steered the dictatorship's economic agenda. Cuts in social expenditure, deregulation of the banking system and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises succeeded in stabilising the Chilean economy, but the Chilean 'economic miracle' came at a high social price: substantial reductions in wages and salaries; the shattering of trade union power; an end to solidarity; and a growth in unemployment. A large part of the population fell into poverty and, ultimately, the greater part of Chilean society paid for the dictatorship's economic policies.⁴⁶

Alongside this, the scale and methods of violence the dictatorship used in order to quash 'internal enemies' were hitherto unknown in Latin America. The main period of repression lasted until 1978 and consisted of a policy of 'disappearances', torture and the assassination of prominent opponents abroad. The updated report of the Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación (National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, CNVR) lists 3,197 dead or 'disappeared'. Human rights were violated in other ways as well, the dictatorship using torture, detentions, military raids, threats and exile to create a climate of fear which cast a shadow over Chilean society.⁴⁷

In the political arena, Pinochet reacted to international criticism over human rights and enacted a new constitution in 1980, thereby providing his regime with a legal façade, and making it possible to institutionalise his authoritarian system and dictate the transition to democracy. Pinochet's dictatorship began to collapse, however, following his defeat in the October 1988 referendum, which forced him to hand power over to a new democratically elected president in March 1990.⁴⁸

The Chilean Church hierarchy's reaction to the military coup of 11 September 1973 resembled, in essence, that of the Argentine bishops three years later, most of its members approving of the intervention of the army. Academic publications referred to the Church's moral legitimisation of the

⁴⁶ See Max Koch, *Unternehmen Transformation: Sozialstruktur und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Chile* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Verwuert, 1998), p. 35ff.; Rinke, *Kleine Geschichte*, p. 162ff., Collier and Sater, *A History*, p. 365ff.

⁴⁷ Stephan Ruderer, *Das Erbe Pinochets: Vergangenheitspolitik und Demokratisierung in Chile 1990–2006* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), pp. 49–50. See also Steve Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 160, in which the author speaks of 3,500–4,500 dead or 'disappeared', 150,000–200,000 politically-motivated detentions, and almost 400,000 exiles. Stern provides plausible explanations for his estimates.

⁴⁸ Rinke *Kleine Geschichte*, p. 166ff.; Huneus, *The Pinochet Regime*, p. 551ff.

military government, at least with regard to the first six months of the regime.⁴⁹ Several factors may explain this initial cooperation: some stress the personal conviction of many of the bishops that the coup was necessary and their hope that the Church might regain its unity; others point to the prospect of preserving a privileged negotiating position with the new government.⁵⁰ However, when the Church realised that the army intended to remain in power indefinitely and the brutality of the repression became increasingly evident, it changed its stance. Even in mid-1974, initially cautious criticism was gaining momentum, and after 1976 the Church openly opposed the military government. With the creation of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity) in that year, the Catholic Church became the ‘moral opposition’ to the dictatorship, assisting and serving as a meeting point for opponents to the regime.⁵¹ The Chilean Church, therefore, never allowed itself to be used as a channel of propaganda for the ideology of the dictatorship and ultimately represented a threat to Pinochet’s desire for legitimisation.⁵² This change of attitude was due, above all, to the long-standing structural distance that existed between Church and government in Chile; widespread acceptance, within the Chilean Church, of the Second Vatican Council’s decisions; and the personality of the cardinal of Santiago, Raúl Silva Henríquez.⁵³ The Military Vicariate’s open support for the dictatorship, therefore, met with strong opposition from within the Chilean episcopate, in contrast to the Argentine case.⁵⁴

The Military Vicariate in Argentina

The institutional integration of the Military Vicariate

Military Vicariates are the very embodiment of ‘institutional duality’ between religion and politics, Church and state, and the Argentine vicariate is no

⁴⁹ Smith, *Church and Politics*, p. 287ff.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Hugo Cancino Troncoso, *Chile: Iglesia y dictadura, 1973–1989. Un estudio sobre el rol político de la Iglesia católica y el conflicto con el régimen militar* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1997), p. 21ff.; Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar*, p. 141.

⁵¹ Pamela Lowden, *Moral Opposition to Authoritarian Rule in Chile, 1973–1990* (Oxford: St Anthony Press, 1996).

⁵² Smith, *Church and Politics*, p. 305ff.; Enrique Correa, *José Antonio Viera-Gallo, Iglesia y dictadura* (Santiago: CESOC, Ediciones Chile y América, 1986), p. 90ff.

⁵³ Smith, *Church and Politics*, p. 294ff.; Cancino Troncoso, *Iglesia y dictadura*, p. 43ff.; Mario I. Aguilar, *A Social History of the Catholic Church in Chile. vol. I: The First Period of the Pinochet Government 1973–1980* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), p. 23ff.

⁵⁴ It should be noted that this refers to the public position of the majority of the Chilean episcopate. This does not mean that the Chilean Church behaved as a homogeneous block. Diverging and contradictory stances, and even outright support for the dictatorship, also existed amongst the bishops. For an ‘inside’ account referring to these differing views, see Jorge Hourton, *Memorias de un obispo sobreviviente. Episcopado y dictadura* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2009).

exception.⁵⁵ Although appointed from Rome, the military vicar must be approved by the Argentine president and is paid by the Ministry of Defence. The vicariate, which was established in 1957, is, therefore, financially dependent on the state.⁵⁶ Unlike Chile, where their counterparts are always commissioned, Argentine chaplains are not always awarded a military rank. The military vicar, who in Argentina is always a bishop and, at least until the 1980s, one who was notable in terms of both personality and rank, heads the institution. The Archbishop of Paraná, Mgr Tortolo, who also presided over the Bishops' Conference until 1976, held the position from 1968 to 1982. His prominence highlighted the close-knit relationship between the Church hierarchy and the Military Vicariate in Argentina, which did not exist in Chile.

In Argentina, there is a pro-vicar, who directs the work of the vicariate (Mgr Bonamín in the days of the dictatorship), and one principal chaplain for each of the three branches of the armed forces. The vicar directly appoints them all. The number of military chaplains during the dictatorship was very high considering the number of soldiers and their families in their charge: Mignone refers to 270 chaplains ministering to almost 500,000 of the faithful and compares these figures with certain dioceses, where far fewer priests served a larger number of parishioners.⁵⁷ The vicariate's December 1976 bulletin speaks of 214 chaplains for 260,000 troops.⁵⁸ Regardless of the precise figures, this disproportionate ratio testifies to the Argentine state's great interest in caring for the souls of the military.

The role of the Military Vicariate

The institution's position at the intersection between Church and state directly affected its work. The handbook issued by the Capellanía Mayor (principal chaplaincy) of the army, published in 1960, during the vicariate's early years, began with a description of the religious and spiritual state of affairs among young Argentines. It stated that almost 80 per cent of the young men called up each year for military service had drifted away from the Church and, worse still, 'in many cases, foreign ideas and theories [had] killed the Christian meaning of life and nullified Argentine sentiment'.⁵⁹ As a result, military service provided a last chance to regain this 80 per cent for

⁵⁵ The expression comes from Martin Bock, *Religion im Militär. Soldatenseelsorge im internationalen Vergleich* (Munich: Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut der Bundeswehr, 1993), p. 180.

⁵⁶ Acuerdo entre la República Argentina y la Santa Sede, 28 de junio de 1957, in Obispado Castrense de Argentina, *Anuario 2006*, pp. 21–4.

⁵⁷ Mignone, *Iglesia y dictadura*, p. 47.

⁵⁸ Argentina, Military Vicariate, *Bulletin*, 52 (Dec. 1976), p. 31.

⁵⁹ *Manual de la capellanía mayor del ejército*, 1960, AABA, Legajo 1915 'Vicariato castrense', p. 2.

‘God and the fatherland, the foundations of the Argentine nation’.⁶⁰ Military chaplains should:

recover for the nation in one year what [had] not been done in twenty. Root out anti-Argentine ideas and theories; sow and secure positive Christian concepts. The chaplain must arm young conscripts spiritually so that, when they leave the barracks, they may steer their civilian lives with a Christian concept of life; zealous defenders of [Argentina’s] national heritage and historical tradition.⁶¹

This equating of a Christian way of life and Argentina’s historical tradition shows that the vicariate’s intention was not only to take the Gospel to the soldiers in its care, but also to eradicate anti-Argentine ideas, in other words, to guide them ideologically.

The different forms of indoctrination employed also highlight the fact that ideological instruction was high on the Military Vicariate’s agenda. Courses on Christian morality, called *acampadas* (camps), where chaplains indoctrinated groups of soldiers in Christian thought, and *jornadas* and *semanas de formación cristiana* (Christian education days and weeks) were held frequently. The creation of the Military Vicariate was also relevant in this respect, as a simple look at the figures illustrates: in 1960, the army ran 5,207 courses on Christian morality, more than doubling the 2,256 organised in 1959.⁶² The contents of these courses clearly illustrated the intention to encourage anti-communist theological indoctrination. The vicariate’s 1964 bulletin, for example, published the text of one of these lectures for the benefit of the military hierarchy. The lecture analysed different types of government to determine whether they were based on Catholic ideals. Its analysis of communism was unambiguous:

This short list of the main principles of communism should suffice in order for Catholic members of the armed forces to redouble their opposition to it, not just because of the danger of riots or terrorist attacks, or for fear that democracy may fall, but, first and foremost, because the principles on which it is based are anti-Christian and frankly materialistic. If justice tells us to give everyone what they deserve, then Christians should reject and radically oppose crude materialism.⁶³

The spiritual formation of the troops, therefore, involved a clear ideological indoctrination, which was maintained during the 1960s and 1970s, and preserved, and even strengthened, by the dictatorship after 1976. From the military clergy’s own perspective, its religious influence over the military hit a high point during the dictatorship. When invited to open a chapel in the presidential palace, the military pro-vicar, Victorio Bonamín, gave a speech to the then

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, Appendix.

⁶³ Argentina, Vicariato castrense, *Boletín* 14 (1964), AABA, ‘Vicariato castrense’, p. 64.

dictator, General Jorge Rafael Videla, in which he expressed the need to make Catholicism the single leading principle of the armed forces' activity: for the pro-vicar, the building of the chapel meant that 'everyone can rest assured because they know that when the Office of the President has to make a serious decision, the president of the Republic will visit this, the "office" of Christ the King, to ask Him how he should do what He wants him to do'.⁶⁴ The pro-vicar took it for granted that the president would make all his decisions in the spirit of *Cristo Rey*. As the armed forces embraced religion, so the military clergy reciprocated. According to Bonamín in 1981, 'we identify, as much as we can, with the spirit of the armed forces'.⁶⁵ These statements indicate that the period of the military dictatorship marked a peak in the symbiotic relationship between the country's military leaders and the military clergy, an interdependence which was not only religious, but also possessed a clear ideological orientation. What, therefore, was the relationship between this symbiosis and the dictatorship's violence against the population?

Christianity's potential when it comes to legitimising violence has already been mentioned in the theoretical discussion about the ambivalent relationship between religion and violence. Aware of this potential, the military leadership entertained certain expectations of the military clergy, and acknowledged and encouraged the blend of religious and ideological instruction received by the troops. The repercussions of this influence on violence against the population were clearly expressed in a speech given by General Abel Cantuzzi at a meeting of military chaplains in 1976, which he ended with the words: 'Finally, chaplains must encourage the fight against subversion. This struggle is necessary in order to defend a set of values ... It is ultimately a fight between God and the ungodly, between one cause and another.'⁶⁶ The military clergy's ideological influence not only led to the fight against subversion being portrayed as necessary in order to defend values, but also to the enemy being denied any positive attributes at all, to its being depicted as the negation of all Christian values, the ungodly. The Christian legitimacy of fighting against such an enemy was evident.

Nevertheless, the generals were also aware of the problem that state terrorism posed for the Christian legitimisation that the regime required. In the view of the armed forces, the clergy's job consisted of unmistakably and consciously legitimising violence. This is clear in General Benjamín Menéndez's appeal to the military clergy which was quoted at the beginning of this article: 'Chaplains should morally endorse this struggle and tell us that our endeavour is a crusade, in order to distinguish it from violence in general, against which so

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Argentina, Vicariato castrense, *Boletín* 65 (April 1981), p. 17.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

many cry out'.⁶⁷ In accordance with the ideological spirit of the vicariate, the military clergy acceded to the request.

In particular, it was the heads of the Military Vicariate, the vicar and pro-vicar, who insisted, before both troops and chaplains, on the Christian motivation of the fight against subversion. The vicariate was convinced that the spiritual nature of the armed forces was in full agreement with Christian values and that the military government, therefore, was contributing to the moral improvement of the country. Even prior to the dictatorship, in December 1975, Pro-vicar Bonamín capitalised on a military campaign against guerrilla groups in Tucumán to declare that the troops were 'instruments of God' who needed the chaplains' special care.⁶⁸

This declaration illustrates the perception that the military clergy had of the armed forces. In 1982, a new military vicar, José Miguel Medina, declared that 'armed forces have been necessary ever since Original Sin, and their members fulfil a vocation, a call from God, and are, therefore, loved by God'.⁶⁹ These words expose a conception of the armed forces not as servants of the state, but, above all, as religious instruments of the power of God. Religious significance was, therefore, conferred on the violence they meted out, which could be regarded as violence legitimised by God.

This interpretation was illustrated explicitly in Military Vicar Tortolo's sermons, which often used biblical metaphors to give the fight against subversion a religious aura. In 1975 Tortolo was already comparing the fallen in the fight against guerrillas with Christ: 'The offering of life may end in the sacrifice of life itself, in an oblation of blood, an immolation. Jesus Christ went before us – now as then, God descends to receive this offering in his own hands – and death, as in Christ, becomes life'. He also clarified the purpose which such a death might serve: 'In order to save these people and avoid becoming enslaved to any power – save God – it is necessary to inject pure blood and redeeming blood.'⁷⁰ The purification of the country through blood as a sacred deed, God's will – this is all reminiscent of the legitimisation of the medieval crusades.⁷¹ No less explicit was his comparison of the troops with Cain and Abel at a mass held for the fallen in 1977: 'Abel was murdered for giving God the best. Cain's malevolence was unable to tolerate his brother's greatness of spirit and while Abel was sleeping the sleep of the just in God's arms, Cain bears the burden of his crime and lives out his own death at every instant.'⁷²

⁶⁷ Argentina, Military Vicariate, *Bulletin* 51 (Aug. 1976), p. 23.

⁶⁸ Argentina, Military Vicariate, *Bulletin* 49 (Dec. 1975), p. 1.

⁶⁹ Argentina, Military Vicariate, *Bulletin* 68 (April 1982), p. 2.

⁷⁰ Both quotations from Military Vicariate, *Bulletin* 49 (Dec. 1975), pp. 21–2.

⁷¹ Angenendt, *Toleranz und Gewalt*, pp. 419–24.

⁷² Argentina, Military Vicariate, *Bulletin* 55 (Dec. 1977), p. 30.

Soldiers as martyrs, redeeming blood to save the nation, Cain and Abel: hearing such words, it is not surprising that some generals believed they were on a crusade or, at least, claimed religious legitimisation for their acts. The Military Vicariate defined the enemy, Cain, in political terms. The enemy, therefore, was a political enemy; certain political convictions automatically made a person an enemy of religion. Violence against this enemy, however, was legitimised, above all, on religious grounds. This legitimisation relied on the theological concept of 'Just War' and 'legitimate defence', the latter something that the second Vatican Council still permitted. Two books written by Argentine military chaplains explicitly to instruct 'officers in the field', are peppered with quotations from St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francisco de Vitoria and the Bible referring to Just War and legitimate defence in order to justify military repression.⁷³ Chaplain Marcial Castillo Castro defended the eradication of 'Marxist subversion' with reference to the danger that communists posed to the divine 'natural order'.⁷⁴ The other book was written by Chaplain Alberto Ezcurra at the explicit request of Military Vicar Tortolo, and cites Francisco de Vitoria when referring to Just War: 'When Just War exists, everything is lawful when it is necessary for the defence of the public good'.⁷⁵ These texts clearly apply traditional Catholic doctrine to the Argentine military dictatorship to lend religious legitimacy to its repression. The hierarchy of the Military Vicariate also made statements in a similar vein. Tortolo, for example, referred to Thomas Aquinas and Pope Pius XI in order to apply the theory of legitimate defence to the fight against communism. His words express the view that the vicariate held of its mission quite explicitly:

We must not forget that legitimate defence is 'legitimate'. Also bear in mind that subversive criminals are generally saturated by an ideology that even prompts those detained to say 'I will kill again'. Those who defend their country in the name of the fatherland do their duty by engaging in warfare. And Thomas Aquinas studies the subject of war in his chapter on the virtue of charity as an act of love.

Let us, therefore, be delicate and also balanced in order properly to gauge the enemy, whom, in 1925, Pius XI declared 'intrinsically perverse' and who have become more specialised in their malice. Let us give ourselves and the armed forces the theological motives required in order to act without fear and according to conscience.⁷⁶

⁷³ The term used by Marcial Castro Castillo, *Fuerzas armadas: ética y represión* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Nuevo Orden, 1979), p. 13, is 'oficial combatiente'.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–6. This does not mean that the dissidents against the dictatorship ('subversion') were mainly communists. This association only appears in the chaplains' discourse.

⁷⁵ Alberto Ezcurra, *Moral cristiana y guerra antisubversiva. Enseñanzas de un capellán castrense* (Buenos Aires: Santiago Apóstol, 2007), p. 49. (Original manuscript *De bello gerendo*, 1975).

⁷⁶ Argentina, Military Vicariate, *Bulletin* 52 (Dec. 1976), p. 30.

There was, therefore, no reason to have doubts about acts of violence because when the military was defending itself against an ‘intrinsically perverse’ enemy, it was performing an act of love towards its fellow men.⁷⁷

Argentine history, in which religion has always been entwined with patriotism and politics, can explain this religious transfiguration of violence. The explicit symbiosis between the Military Vicariate and the armed forces in Argentina can only be understood in the context of the ‘Catholic nation’ outlined earlier. During the military dictatorship, this led to religion going beyond its instrumental role as a means of legitimising violence and violence itself acquiring religious attributes. This meant that some really believed themselves to be in possession of religious truth, for which they had to fight and, in this struggle, mechanisms which might limit violence no longer existed. For this reason, one can argue that the fight against subversion in Argentina was also a fight for religious values, and one in which the Military Vicariate played a significant role.⁷⁸ This is demonstrated not only by some of the quotations in this article, but also by certain accounts given by torture victims, who tell of the religious zeal of their tormentors, forcing them to pray or using terms such as Antichrist or Judas in order to insult them.⁷⁹ This would appear to be one explanation for the immense scale of state terrorism in Argentina, given that this religious dimension of violence did not exist in other cases; in Chile, for example.

The Military Vicariate in Chile

The institutional integration of the Military Vicariate

The Chilean Military Vicariate is the oldest in Latin America. The Pope established the institution in 1910 to hand responsibility for the pastoral care of all Chilean soldiers over to the military vicar. The vicar is appointed following consultation with the Chilean government and automatically receives a commission (as a general if he is already a bishop, or colonel if not). Since the state paid the military clergy during the dictatorship, as in Argentina, the vicariate not only depended on it financially, but also held a clear position within the military power structure.⁸⁰ It would seem, however, that the military clergy in

⁷⁷ This does not mean that the entire Argentine Church shared the theology of Just War, nor that it was not challenged or criticised, but rather, as the two quotations indicate, that significant members of the Military Vicariate and the armed forces accepted such arguments.

⁷⁸ Given the empirical documentation quoted here, I consider that Mallimaci, ‘Catolicismo y militarismo’, p. 207, underestimates the role of the military chaplains.

⁷⁹ CONADEP, *Nunca más. Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1984), I.E.

⁸⁰ González Errázuriz, *Iglesia y fuerzas armadas*, p. 17ff.

Chile formed a more integral part of the structures of the state and their direct position within the military hierarchy implied a lack of independence with respect to the actual community under their care. This led to the military clergy being isolated within the national Church.

The Chilean military vicar did not have to be a bishop. Nor did he have to perform the dual function of diocesan bishop and member of the armed forces, as his counterpart did in Argentina. From 1959 to 1982, the military vicar was Mgr Gillmore Stock; Military Chaplain Joaquín Matte Varas succeeded him in 1982. Unlike its Argentine counterpart, the Chilean vicariate was not heavily staffed in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1977, there were 93 chaplains for all three branches of the armed forces, most of them working on a voluntary basis.⁸¹ In 1984, Matte complained to the Pope that the vicariate was working with less than half the number of chaplains it needed. One of the reasons he gave for this lack of priests was the rift between many bishops and the dictatorship, and, consequently, the Military Vicariate: 'The antipathy of some bishops and priests towards the ruling political regime has resulted in a lack of priests available to the Military Vicariate in order to perform its ministry among this important flock'.⁸² These words reflect the Military Vicariate's greater structural isolation within the national Church and more significant ideological differences between the Bishops' Conference and the Military Vicariate in Chile. As a result, the military clergy always endeavoured to present themselves as an integral part of the Chilean Church and acknowledged the importance of ecclesiastical unity. In the same letter to the Pope, the vicar wrote that 'This Vicariate is determined to demonstrate irrefutably, through the part it plays in the Chilean Bishops' Conference and its everyday work, its profound communion with the pastoral line and directives of the entire Chilean Church with, of course, the adaptations that such a special ministry requires'.⁸³

Chile: the role of the Military Vicariate

This willingness to form part of the national Church was also evident in the work of the military clergy, although the 'adaptations that such a special ministry requires' were also clear.

The Chilean military clergy believed that their chief task was to care for the souls of their flock. It was clear that '*Evangelisation* [was] the *priority* of the Religious Service of the Armed Forces and Carabineros'.⁸⁴ For the Chilean

⁸¹ Mgr Gillmore, *Exposición de Chile, II. Encuentro Latinoamericano de Pastoral Castrense*, CELAM, Bogotá, 6–11 March 1977, MVA, p. 2.

⁸² Mgr Matte Varas, *Relación sobre situación del vicariato castrense de Chile presentada a S. S. El Papa Juan Pablo II.*, 1984, MVA, p. 2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Mgr Gillmore, *Exposición de Chile, II. Encuentro Latinoamericano de Pastoral Castrense*, CELAM, Bogotá, 6–11 March 1977, MVA, p. 3. Emphasis in original.

military clergy, the religious-theological service they provided came first, but, as we shall show, patriotic/political guidance would also appear to have been important, although it never reached the same extent as in Argentina.

The discourse of certain military chaplains illustrates the significant role played by patriotic instruction. In 1971 Mgr Gillmore quoted the Military Vicariate's new regulations in a circular sent to chaplains in order to emphasise that chaplains should 'inspire true patriotism and ensure it is felt'.⁸⁵

During the period of the dictatorship, patriotism chiefly meant identifying with the military government, the ideological orientation of the military clergy's patriotic work being equally defined: 'it is necessary to block Marxist penetration in military families'.⁸⁶ For the Chilean military clergy, Marxism and communism were the most important political enemies and it was necessary to 'immunise' the troops. Fear of a Marxist reinterpretation of events led the Military Vicariate to consider teaching history one of its most important tasks. In 1977, the military school chaplain explained to his colleagues that:

Regarding our fatherland, the entire period from 1960 to 1973, a period of decadence and deterioration of our democracy, must be known and explained. The reason for the Military Movement of 11 September. And the criteria for the reconstruction of the fatherland. In this regard, the guidelines come in the recent speeches made by the President of the Republic in Chacarillas and on 11 September, and the Junta's Statement of Principles.⁸⁷

The military clergy identified fully with the dictatorship's interpretation of history and took it upon themselves to pass its ideological narrative on to the troops. In so doing, it intertwined a theological interpretation which gave religious content to the events, providing the military with Christian legitimisation and reinforcing the military junta's theological interpretation justifying the coup of 11 September 1973. Because overthrowing Allende had meant deposing a democratically elected president, they resorted to Thomas Aquinas' theological concepts justifying resistance against illegitimate tyranny.

In an article published in September 1973, Héctor Riesle, Pinochet's ambassador to the Holy See, directly defended the coup by reference to Aquinas' theory on the right to oppose tyranny. Riesle combined arguments based on theology and natural rights to reach the conclusion that it was 'morally certain that the Allende government was illegitimate, seditious, sectarian, ruinous for the country, totalitarian, subordinate to foreign ideologies and

⁸⁵ Mgr Gillmore, Circular No. 46, 1971, MVA.

⁸⁶ Conclusiones de la Quinta Comisión, Jornadas de Pastoral Castrense, 26.02. 1976, MVA, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Military school chaplain J. M. Cañabate Fernández, 'La problemática juvenil actual latinoamericana y su repercusión en la pedagogía militar', 1. 12. 1977, MVA.

interests, and deliberately encouraging the gestation of a civil war.’⁸⁸ The classic moral doctrine of Christianity served as a basis to present the coup and Pinochet’s government as legal, legitimate and timely.

The military vicar took the same theological line at the mass held to celebrate the anniversary of the coup in 1974:

An attempt was made in Chile to establish a government within the law which would end up in a Marxist dictatorship. And the Chilean people’s Via Crucis lasted three years ... But Divine Providence, there is no other way to say it, arranged the circumstances and details for the genuine representatives of the people ... to define their position and rebel against an officially illegal and anti-constitutional government.⁸⁹

In this way the vicar lent religious content to the justification of the coup based on natural rights, saying that the suffering when Allende was in power came to an end thanks to the action taken by the armed forces guided by Divine Providence. According to Gillmore, the coup and military government arrived according to God’s will to prevent the ‘hate and spite of stateless, atheistic, materialistic, international Marxism’ from taking a hold in Chile.⁹⁰

It is important to note, in analysing these words, that the religious legitimisation refers to the coup and the military government, but the dictatorship’s violence received only marginal attention.⁹¹ In fact, Gillmore only referred to repression when he described the soldiers who had fallen in the first year of the government as a ‘holocaust that the fatherland offered’, religiously hyperbolising the dead, just as Tortolo did in Argentina.⁹² Unlike the Argentine vicar, however, who believed that, like Cain, the communist enemy had no chance of salvation, the following year Gillmore prayed for the victims from both sides, centring the focus of attention on the consequences of violence. This attitude was more in line with the view held by Chilean bishops as a whole.

Although the Chilean military clergy’s patriotic endeavours legitimised the coup and the military government, therefore, implicitly justifying the violence of 11 September, this was not extrapolated to the repression that the latter practised after the coup. An influential book published in 1976 and written by a military chaplain, Florencio Infante, reflected this distinction between a direct Christian/Catholic legitimisation of Pinochet’s government and an

⁸⁸ Hector Riesle Contreras, ‘La legitimidad de la junta de gobierno’, in Instituto de Estudios Generales (ed.), *Fuerzas armadas y seguridad nacional* (Santiago: Ediciones Portada, 1973), p. 300.

⁸⁹ Mgr Gillmore, ‘Homilía castrense, 11 de setiembre de 1974’, *Revista Católica* 1030 (1974), pp. 235–6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁹¹ See Gennaro Arriagada, *Pinochet: The Politics of Power* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p. 4ff., and Marcela Cristi, *From Civil to Political Religion. The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), p. 169.

⁹² Mgr Gillmore, ‘Homilía castrense’, p. 236.

indirect religious defence of its violence.⁹³ Basing himself on statements by Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, the Second Vatican Council, and certain Chilean bishops, Infante stressed an exact match between the junta's objectives and those of the Catholic Church.⁹⁴ In this book, though, the military government's violence was either obscured or reduced to errors which were, in Infante's words, 'not the fruit of [the] government's desire, but of the irresponsible acts of subalterns'.⁹⁵

In the vision and the statements of the Chilean vicariate there was no reference to 'Just War'. There was no talk of 'legitimate defence' or a crusade. Instead, violence appeared more as 'the price to be paid for calm, order and social peace'.⁹⁶ The legitimisation of state terrorism, while not altogether absent, was not religiously charged, in contrast to Argentina.

This can be explained not only by the different political situation in each country, calling for the military to resort to different legitimising arguments, but also by the relationships between the two Military Vicariates and their respective national churches. The criticism of the military government voiced by many Chilean bishops made it difficult for the military clergy openly to legitimise repression, because this would mean publicly contradicting the rest of the Church.

The Military Vicariate was aware that, ideologically speaking, it was at odds with the 'normal' clergy. In a secret report stemming from an internal meeting held in February 1976, the military chaplains, listing reasons why they got on so well together, commented on 'the incomprehension, resistance and opposition that chaplains currently face from many priests and some bishops as a result of our position within the armed forces in relation to the country'.⁹⁷ Referring directly to their relations with the diocesan clergy and congregations, they stated that 'there exists a great lack of awareness and ignorance regarding the work we do', as some may fear that 'we are traitors and government informers', or that 'a chaplain might report a priest to the DINA'.⁹⁸ The chaplains

⁹³ The influence of the book in Military Vicariate circles is evident in the conclusions to the second committee of the military clergy in 1976: 'El libro *Iglesia, gobierno, principios* del capellán Florencio Infante D., es utilísimo'. Conclusiones de la Segunda Comisión, Jornadas de Pastoral Castrense, 26 Feb. 1976, MVA, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Florencio Infante Díaz, *Iglesia, gobierno, principio* (Santiago: Vicaría Castrense, 1976), p. 7ff. The book has a prologue by Military Vicar Gillmore, which highlights its importance in military circles. Infante himself, while working as a military chaplain, witnessed the execution of victims of the dictatorship by firing squad and, thereby, legitimised such violence. Compare this with Patricio Aylwin's memoirs: Patricio Aylwin, *El reencuentro de los demócratas del golpe al triunfo del No* (Santiago: Ediciones B Chile, 1998), p. 41.

⁹⁵ Infante, *Iglesia, gobierno*, p. 56.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁹⁷ 'Reservado – reunión de estudio, conferencia y diálogo presidida por Mons. Augusto Salinas F.', 23 Feb. 1976, MVA, p. 1.

⁹⁸ The DINA was the Chilean state intelligence agency at the time.

had no doubt that ‘the primary cause of opposition ... lies in [our] ideology, [and] identification with the government’.⁹⁹ This affirmation, however, did not lead to any critical reflection regarding this identification, not even when, as part of the same report, the chaplains recognised that priests taken into custody had also died during ‘interrogation’, because they – and the government along with them – were in possession of religious truth. On the contrary, ‘the Vicariate should influence each chaplain to bear witness to the truth and defend it against bishops and priests who combat anti-Marxism’.¹⁰⁰ Those responsible for the internal differences, therefore, were those that combated anti-Marxism and failed to understand the work of the Military Vicariate properly.

The vicariate did, however, make efforts not to widen these divisions. Vicar Matte’s words expressing the vicariate’s commitment to the Chilean Church and the chaplains’ desire to explain their work to the ‘normal’ clergy in order to stave off preconceived ideas highlight the significance of Church unity to the Chilean military clergy. As this unity could not be achieved through ideology in Chile, the Military Vicariate stressed the religious importance of pastoral care.

Conclusions

The ideological instruction received by troops in Argentina concurred with the view of the majority of the country’s ecclesiastical hierarchy, but in Chile, the military clergy faced ever-growing opposition from the bishops. The need for legitimisation was also different in each country: in Chile, it was necessary to justify, above all, a coup against a democratically elected government while, in Argentina, the Church and the armed forces had worked in unison for a long time and there existed a long tradition of military governments. This meant that although the Chilean military clergy regarded evangelisation as a patriotic duty, violence against the ‘communist enemy’ did not form part of the religious legitimisation that, unlike its Argentine counterpart, it was prepared to provide. In both cases, the relationship between those at the intersection between religion and politics shaped the way in which Catholicism was used to legitimise violence. The different ways in which the relationship between

⁹⁹ ‘Reservado – reunión de estudio, conferencia y diálogo presidida por Mons. Augusto Salinas F.’, 24 Feb. 1976, MVA, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2. It is not possible to determine individual motivations for the Chilean chaplains to support the dictatorship ideologically. The sources cited show, however, that an internal meeting did not condemn the dictatorship’s methods, allowing us to conclude that, as in Argentina and barring specific exceptions, most military chaplains were convinced of their work in legitimising the regime. My colleague, Antje Schnoor, who is writing his doctoral thesis on the Jesuits in Chile, informed me that one Jesuit military chaplain, Leonel Ibacache, left the military clergy during the dictatorship for reasons of conscience. This is the only case that has come to my attention to date. My thanks to Antje Schnoor for the information.

Church and state developed in each country also explains the different ways in which Catholicism was used. It is hard to understand fully the differing roles of the Military Vicariates without taking into account the long-term structural factors that determined relations between the Chilean and Argentine Churches and their respective states.

In general, comparison of the two cases demonstrates Christianity's ambivalence towards violence. When the religious fanaticism of jihadists, and Islam's supposedly intrinsic predisposition to legitimise violence, arises as part of the public debate over the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, one does not need to go as far back as the Middle Ages to remind oneself that Catholicism also has a history of legitimising violence. The Argentine and Chilean military dictatorships show that Catholicism was used to legitimise acts of violence as late as the 1970s and early 1980s. Differences between the two countries existed which need to be taken into consideration, however, in order to define the relationship between Catholicism and violence in any detail. An analysis of the Military Vicariates in the two countries can help determine these differences on the boundary between religion and politics more precisely.

In Argentina, the armed forces and the bishops shared the same ideological outlook regarding communism and the military chaplains circulated this view widely. Within the armed forces, this only strengthened the belief that violence was being used legitimately against foreign, non-Argentine subversion.¹⁰¹ The military command and clergy converted Argentine society into a community of salvation waging a Just War for the common good, the well-being of the Christian fatherland and 'the supreme truth'. The worldwide trend towards modernity in the Catholic Church (which, despite its ambivalence, was steering the theological debate on Just War towards the possibility of Just Peace) was either completely ignored or only partly accepted;¹⁰² that is, when it did not contradict traditional doctrine, as occurred with the Second Vatican Council's ruling on legitimate defence. This worldview was based on a real belief held by the Argentine military elite and clergy, deeply rooted in medieval theology, which could be fully supported by reference to fundamental texts defining Catholic doctrine.¹⁰³ Two equally important factors enabled the

¹⁰¹ Videla always legitimised repression by defending 'the condition of being a westerner and a Christian': Jorge Rafael Videla, *Mensajes presidenciales. Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, 2 vols (Buenos Aires: Presidencia de la Nación, 1977), p. 105. Videla repeated this argument every time he referred to the human rights situation: see, for example, Videla, *Mensajes presidenciales*, vol. 1, 1979, p. 175, p. 181, p. 208, vol. 2, p. 144ff., p. 202, p. 211, p. 240, p. 255.

¹⁰² Palaver, *Vom 'Gerechten Krieg'*, p. 108.

¹⁰³ Stephan Ruderer, "'Gerechter Krieg' oder, Würde des Menschen'. Religion und Gewalt in Argentinien und Chile. Eine Frage der Legitimation', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 12 (2010), pp. 973–93. This does not mean that the entire Argentine Church thought this way. In fact, the position of the Military Vicariate represented a minority within the Church, albeit a fairly influential one as far as the stance and public image of the Church, and the way in which the armed forces viewed the situation, were concerned.

military clergy to act as the central broker of this traditional doctrine: its institutional and ideological proximity to the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the Argentine armed forces' need to legitimise its ruthless violence theologically.

The Chilean military chaplains also tried to convert the dictatorship into a community of national salvation through religion, but the problems they faced from the Church hierarchy led them to focus more on their pastoral role and they seldom attempted to legitimise violence openly in moral and religious terms. This meant that the army could not seek to legitimise its acts solely through religion and had to resort to other justifications, such as economic development and political institutionalisation.¹⁰⁴ This does not mean that Pinochet did not try to use religion to legitimise his regime and war on Marxism, but, over the years, the regime abandoned religion as a means of justifying its human rights violations.¹⁰⁵ This change of course in terms of legitimisation led to a shift, at least in the medium term, in the dictatorship's policy on repression.¹⁰⁶ This did not occur in Argentina.¹⁰⁷

The complex relationship between religion and politics in the twentieth century, and particularly during the military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina, proved decisive when it came to determining the extent to which Catholicism was used in order to legitimise violence and whether violence could be religiously legitimised throughout each dictatorship. So, if we return to the quotations at the beginning of the article, the difference between simply believing in God and rejecting Marxism (Pinochet), and

¹⁰⁴ Huneus, *The Pinochet Regime*, p. 140.

¹⁰⁵ This is not only evident in some of the quotations by chaplains cited in this article, but also in Pinochet's own speeches, which, unlike Videla's, seldom mention being a 'westerner' or a 'Christian' as a means of legitimising repression: see his speeches in Centro de Estudios Sociopolíticos (ed.), *Presidente Pinochet: transición y consolidación democrática, 1984–1989* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Sociopolíticos, 1989), p. 68ff. Cristi's interpretation of Pinochet's legitimising discourse as an attempt at establishing a civil religion is substantiated when referring to legitimising the coup and the fact that the military stayed in power so long, but does not cover the concrete violence he used: see Cristi, *From Civil to Political Religion*, p. 165ff. This can also be seen in the quotations on religious legitimisation of the Chilean dictatorship by Chacón and Lagos, which, except for a few exceptional cases, do not refer to the regime's violence: see Arturo Chacón and Humberto Lagos (eds.), *La religión en las fuerzas armadas y de orden* (Santiago: Ediciones Literatura Americana Reunida, 1987), p. 15ff.

¹⁰⁶ The end of the principal stage of repression in Chile coincided with greater public criticism by the Catholic Church and a change in the government's discourse of legitimisation, which no longer referred to the defence of 'Christian order', but to the regime's economic successes: see Darren Hawkins, *International Human Rights and Authoritarian Regime in Chile* (Lincoln, NE, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 77ff. and Armando de Ramón, *Historia de Chile. Desde la invasión incaica hasta nuestros días (1500–2000)* (Santiago: Catalonia, 2003), p. 250ff.

¹⁰⁷ There were also attempts at broadening the spectrum of legitimisation in Argentina, but when it came to the violation of human rights, the military almost always returned to religious legitimisation.

actually believing yourself to be on a crusade against communism (Menéndez) did define the dimensions of the violence used in each country.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo analiza la historia del clero militar y contrasta su papel al interior de las dictaduras argentina y chilena sobre la base de nuevas fuentes previamente inaccesibles. Se señala que, aparte de la orientación ideológica, dos factores más explican las disimilitudes de la influencia del clero militar sobre los dos regímenes: primeramente, la posición estructural que ocuparon los Vicariatos Militares entre la Iglesia y las fuerzas armadas y, en segundo lugar, las diferentes necesidades de legitimización de las dos dictaduras. El análisis provee información relevante para entender el papel público de la Iglesia Católica así como la violencia durante esos regímenes.

Spanish keywords: clero militar, capellanes, vicariatos, dictadura, Chile, Argentina, Iglesia Católica, violencia

Portuguese abstract. Baseado em fontes novas, antes inacessíveis, este artigo analisa a história dos cleros militares argentinos e chilenos contrastando os papéis desempenhados por eles nas ditaduras de ambos os países. Argumenta-se aqui que, além da orientação ideológica, dois outros fatores explicam as diferenças das influências do clero militar nos dois regimes: primeiro, a posição estrutural que o Vicariato Militar ocupou entre a Igreja Católica e as forças armadas e, segundo, as necessidades de legitimação distintas das duas ditaduras. A análise fornece informações relevantes para a compreensão do papel público da Igreja Católica e as dimensões da violência durante os dois regimes.

Portuguese keywords: clero militar, capelães, vicariato, ditadura, Chile, Argentina, Igreja Católica, violência