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The Popular Church in Guatemala:
The Silent Voice

by

Christie Gombay, B.A.

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in International Affairs

The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs
Carleton University
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Canada

September, 1988

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THE POPULAR CHURCH IN GUATEMALA:

THE SILENT VOICE

submitted by Christie Gombay, B.A. (Hons.),
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Director

The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs

Carleton University

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ABSTRACT

This work is an examination of the Popular church in Guatemala. My thesis is that the Popular church in Guatemala took an active part in the revolutionary struggle of Guatemala based upon a revolutionary Christian ideology, the theology of Liberation, and was therefore, revolutionary in praxis. My concern is to examine the Popular church as a complex product of material and ideological factors. I suggest that the emergence of the Popular church in Guatemala has complex origins which do not fit comfortably in any one analytical model.

In order to explain the Popular church in Guatemala, I explore the political-economy of modern Guatemala including the development of the liberation struggle which has cost the lives of countless thousands; the growth of the Popular church within the context of the traditional Catholic church and the expanding revolutionary struggle; the history of the Catholic church in Guatemala; the development of liberation theology and its applications in Guatemala; and Marxian perspectives on religion and the sociology of religion.

I conclude that the Popular church was an important force in the revolutionary struggle in Guatemala owing to the specific nature of the class factions aligned within the church and the elaboration of a theology and religious praxis derived from Marxism.

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INTRODUCTION

The civil war in Guatemala grinds quietly into its twenty-eighth year. The toll upon the Guatemalan people has been staggering with certain estimates ranging as high as 150,000 people killed and 35,000 'disappeared' by government forces since 1954. These estimates conceal the fact that the majority of the killings have occurred quite recently. During the last decade, 50,000 to 70,000 lives have been taken; over one million have been displaced within Guatemala; 150,000 have fled abroad; 440 villages have been destroyed; 70 "model villages" have been built to house a fraction of the displaced; and over 900,000 have been "voluntarily" enrolled in Civil Defense Patrols (Guatemalan Church in Exile 1986: 2). The increasing brutality of successive military juntas has been masked by an Orwellian counterinsurgency program aimed at winning the "hearts and minds" of the indigenous peoples and rebuilding a badly eroded international reputation by installing a "democratically" elected civilian government.

In the context of an escalating civil war, elements of the Catholic church abandoned the traditional ecclesiastical role of legitimating the capitalist relations of production and moved towards a systematic critique of capitalism in Guatemala. The barbarous waves of repression coupled with increasing peasant resistance has moved various Catholic 'semi-lay' groups to actively participate in the revolutionary struggle to transform Guatemala into a socialist society. In 1980, the Guatemalan Church in Exile was formed in response to repression against the church in Guatemala. The closing call in its initial manifesto leaves little doubt of the active role foreseen for Christians in the popular struggle: "CHRISTIANS SOLIDARIZE WITH THE

LIBERATION STRUGGLE OF THE PEOPLE OF GUATEMALA" (NISGUA 1986: 22). The contribution of the Christians to the revolutionary struggle has also been recognized by the *Ejercito Guerillero de los Pobres* (EGP), the most militant guerilla force in the Guatemalan revolutionary coalition:

All the lay preachers, priests, nuns, and religious, Catholic or Protestant, have an open door in the Guerilla Army of the Poor if they want to share with us the unshakable struggle we are waging in the countryside and in the city. There is a place for each and every one on this path of hope for all the poor of Guatemala. In our country one cannot be a Christian and not a revolutionary. One cannot love his fellow human beings and not play a serious and concrete role in the popular war whether this be in the guerilla organization or in the different militant mass organizations. In any of the work taken up by true and committed Christians, they can count on our fullest revolutionary solidarity (EGP 1983:147-148).

In light of the historical enmity between the Catholic church and Marxist revolutionary groups, these public admissions of mutual support are intriguing. While the EGP position has historical roots in a Marxist inspired position on religion as developed by Friedrich Engels in some of his later works, the position of the Guatemalan Church in Exile and other Guatemalan Catholic organizations espousing Marxist derived programs, have few religious predecessors. Though I do intend to explore Marxist sociologies of religion, this work is devoted to exploring the emergence of the revolutionary church in Guatemala -- the "Popular church". My thesis is that the Popular church in Guatemala took an active part in the revolutionary struggle of Guatemala based upon a revolutionary Christian ideology, the theology of Liberation, and was therefore, revolutionary in praxis. My concern is to examine the Popular church as a complex product of material and ideological factors. I suggest that the emergence of the Popular church in

Guatemala has complex origins which do not fit comfortably in any one analytical model. As a result, this work is non-linear but is drawn together in the final chapter. To understand the evolution of the Popular church in Guatemala we must focus on the specific characteristics of capitalism and the class struggle both in Guatemala and internationally. We must also study the evolution of international Catholicism and theology, and its dialectical relationship with the national church in Guatemala. Of particular importance is the evolution and radicalization of various pastoral programs, like Catholic Action, which provided the organizational base for the development of the Popular church. By combining these approaches, we can develop an understanding of the Popular church based on its role within the popular struggle for liberation in Guatemala, and its relationship to the Catholic church as a whole.

My approach to the subject is based on a loosely defined Marxist framework informed by the work of various studies on religion. Antonio Gramsci's work is especially important in this respect. However, because of the complexity of the topic, my approach is somewhat eclectic drawing from theologians, historians, and theoreticians alike. To complete this thesis I carried out an exhaustive literature search of the relevant materials in English, French, and Spanish, and undertook a field research trip to Texas, Mexico, and Guatemala in the spring of 1987. The Benson Collection at the Texas University and the archives at CEDOLASI in Mexico city were veritable treasure troves of information. Interviews in Guatemala provided additional insights and testimonials to the role played by the Popular church in the liberation struggle. Nevertheless, more research is

needed before many of the questions raised in this thesis can be properly addressed.

Both Marxists and religious analysts interpreting the insertion of Christians into the revolutionary struggle have difficulties explaining the phenomenon of the Popular church. Marxist positions run the gamut from polemical rejection of the social movement on the basis of its ideologically weak Christian foundation, to a hesitant acceptance of its revolutionary role in praxis, but confusion on how best to accomplish a theoretical synthesis with more traditional Marxist revolutionary theory. Representing the former, the Marxist political-economist Fred Currier condemns the movement because: "it may obfuscate, misdirect appeal with hopeless ideals of love and dignity without any prospect of fulfilment -- that is, it may serve as an 'opiate of the masses'" (Currier 1987: 25). Edelberto Torres-Rivas, a Central American Marxist, adopts a more flexible approach by suggesting that the Christians have been an integral force in the Guatemalan revolutionary struggles which, however: "have so far, been inadequately theorized" (Torres-Rivas 1983: 168).

Christian commentators show a wide diversity of opinion from uncritical acceptance to the rejection of liberation theology because of its Marxist roots. Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, warned of: "the deviations and risks of deviations damaging to the faith and to the Christian living that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which used, in an insufficiently critical manner concepts borrowed from Marxist thought" (Ratzinger 1984: 198). In contrast, Miguel Bonino, a leading liberation theologian, presents the Popular church and liberation theology as the political and spiritual salvation for

Latin America since it represents a fruitful synthesis between Marxism and Christianity where the "dialogue arises from practice not from opposition" (Bonino 1976: 29).

The widely differing views on the nature of the Popular church and liberation theology are not surprising. What is surprising, however, is that the bulk of the studies are not based upon a systematic analysis of the terrain upon which the Popular church might be effectively assessed, namely, revolutionary praxis.

Many of the studies of the Popular church in Latin America which do address the terrain of praxis, fall into three broad categories. The first is that of ecclesiastical commentators who use the language of liberation theology but neglect the 'social-scientific' method explicitly advocated by liberation theologians, (Berryman 1984 [1] and [2], Bonpane 1986, Cleary 1987). The focus is upon religious workers involved in the revolutionary struggle without reference to the development of class forces and the politics of the class struggle. The studies offer a wealth of information on the activities of church personnel but fail to relate it systematically to wider political and economic issues.

The second group focuses upon an institutional analysis of the Catholic church as a whole. Although the analysis is broader than the first group there is still a tendency to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Studies of politically active Base Christian Communities, or active parishes in Latin America make no reference to the class struggle or the dynamics of local contradictions which are played out in practice. When there is political analysis the church is presented as a static institution operating independently of political or ideological considerations. While these studies may help to provide an indication of the size of individual base Christian

communities, or the numbers in a particular parish, and the nature of the specific link to the ecclesiastical structure, they say little about the relationship to local class struggles, let alone national ones, (F. Turner 1974, Hewitt 1986, Levine 1983, Mainwaring 1987).

Finally, there are a few studies, both liberal and Marxist in inspiration, which explore the Popular church from a universal, theoretical perspective. The Popular church is variously interpreted as a manifestation of the "popular will" or the "collective consciousness" and the issues to be resolved centre on refining particular concepts for use in analyzing religious movements generally (Houtart 1979, Maduro 1977, Dodson 1979 and 1986 and M. Novak 1984).

While all these approaches offer their own particular strengths, I suggest that a comprehensive analysis of the Popular church in Guatemala must start with the historical relations of class forces. The evolution of the Popular church is inextricably linked to the state of the class struggle and the relations of the various class factions which formed an alliance under a revolutionary Christian banner. To confirm my central thesis, I begin with an examination of the class and related ecclesiastical struggles in Guatemala before turning to theoretical considerations in the later chapters.

Chapter one is an examination of capitalist development and the socio-economic formation of Guatemala. In the first part, I will outline the history and nature of capitalist development in Guatemala. The specific context of plantation agriculture and capitalist industrialization sets the parameters within which the class forces develop. In the second part, I explore the penetration of capitalism into rural Guatemala, the process of differentiation, and the emergence of a

guerilla army composed of peasants, workers, factions of the rural petty-bourgeoisie, and vanguard intellectuals. The examination of the popular struggle focuses on the evolution of strategy and tactics used by the various organizations to confront the coercive state apparatus. The purpose is to establish both the scope of resistance and rebellion in Guatemala as the context within which the Popular church emerged.

Chapter two is a study of the growth of the Popular church in its various dimensions. In this chapter I examine those parts of the church which promoted facets of liberation theology in response to increasing state repression. I attempt to outline the nature and scope of the Popular church activities with reference to limitations imposed by the class alliance composed of bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, peasant and worker elements within the Catholic church. The increasing momentum of the popular resistance carried the struggle into the bosom of the church.

Chapter three focuses on the Roman Catholic church in Guatemala up to the 1970s. Here, I establish the history of the institution, the nature of its growth and development, the administrative structures established in Guatemala by the Vatican and the Archbishopric, the nature and context of the various missionary movements and the early efforts by the church to address social and development issues. I also explore the history of church-state relations in Guatemala to establish the relationship between the nature of capital accumulation and the ideological role of the state. The object of this chapter is to develop an analysis of the national and international ecclesiastical contradictions which opened the door, at least

institutionally and theologically, to the formulation of a Marxist inspired theology of liberation.

Chapter four is a discussion of liberation theology. I explore the central theological principles underlying and uniting liberation theologians but the stress is on drawing out the political ramifications of this particular theology. I argue that its political program is unquestionably based upon the politics of Marxism and that the evolution of various currents within the corpus of liberation theology reflect many of the vicissitudes of Marxist theory itself. I suggest that while there may be shortcomings in the formulation of the political project of liberation theology, the credo contains the kernel of a revolutionary program built on Marxist principles.

In chapter five, I explore the works of Marx and subsequent Marxists in order to examine, 1) the basis of the traditional Marxian hostility to religion, and, 2) concepts and approaches that might be useful in developing a Marxist analysis of religion which does not presuppose an a priori rejection of religious movements as ideological in a pejorative sense, but which seeks to establish an analysis upon the basis of concrete actions and programs undertaken by religious personnel. My objective is to contribute to a discussion of the dialectical relationship between contradictions arising in the socio-economic formation and contradictions in the religious terrain.

In chapter six I conclude that the Popular church in Guatemala was indeed revolutionary in praxis despite shortcomings in the ideological program linked to its Catholic foundation. From its petty-bourgeois origins in the rural Catholic Action, the Popular church emerged as a widespread, highly organized and effective force within

the revolutionary movement. I then offer further suggestions for research based upon questions raised during the course of the thesis. In the light of the role of the Popular church in the Guatemalan revolutionary struggle, I suggest that it is imperative to re-examine the nature and role of churches in the analysis of political economy. We must establish whether the study of religion is in fact peripheral before relegating it to secondary status.

CHAPTER ONE Guns in Guatemala

In this chapter I explore the roots of the popular struggle in Guatemala. To do so, I focus on the political-economy of Guatemala; the development of capitalism, class formation, and the struggle for control of the accumulation process. Only by understanding the political and economic context of the class struggle can we attempt to explain the development of the popular church in Guatemala. By looking at the colonial, post-independence, democratic, and authoritarian periods separately, it is possible to highlight a number of factors which are essential to understanding the present historical conjuncture.

The economic and political structures established during the 'Liberal Era' (which was neither liberal nor just) set the framework from which emerged the "Ten years of Democracy" of "spiritual capitalism" in which the embryonic national bourgeoisie in alliance with the petty-bourgeoisie and sectors of the masses attempted to combat both foreign capital and the remnants of feudalism in Guatemala (Handy 1984:58). During this period popular organizations of the peasantry and the nascent proletariat emerge on the political scene. The counter-revolution of 1954 and the subsequent three decades of military rule punctuated by brief periods of civilian authority ensured the deepening of foreign capital's control over the Guatemalan economy. It is in this period that the popular struggle developed into a popular revolutionary struggle fought by the peasantry and the working class against the forces of the state.

As part of the exposition on the various phases of popular struggle I will outline the various organizations and the evolution of the ideologies

which underpin the popular struggles in Guatemala today. Major emphasis is placed on exploring, first, the intra-bourgeois struggle between foreign capital embodied in agroexport, communication, and transportation, the landed oligarchy emerging from a quasi-feudal relation of production into fully-fledged capitalist ones, and factions of the national bourgeoisie -- and secondly, studying the emergence of an urban and rural working class, the proletarianisation of the peasantry and the development of an organized struggle based upon mass organizations.

The Guatemalan economy during the liberal era was a plantation economy and rested on two pillars: the landed oligarchy, and the rural peasantry as labour. In the late nineteenth century, the oligarchy gradually converted cochineal estates to coffee plantations based on forced labour. By 1871 coffee was the major export and its production tripled over the next 15 years (Handy 1984:74). The *Mandamiento* system, whereby planters could obtain forced labour by government decree, was used to boost coffee production along the *Boca Costa*. The absence of labour from the Indian highlands during the crucial periods of weeding and harvesting led to rapid decreases in subsistence crop production and, by the end of the nineteenth century, the peasantry in the highlands were experiencing cyclical droughts which had been unheard of before.

The arrival of the United Fruit Company (UFCO) in Guatemala in 1901, heralded the arrival of foreign capital in Guatemala. By 1912, the International Railway of Central America (IRCA) and the Great White Fleet, the sister shipping company, exercised a monopoly in transportation within Guatemala and the Caribbean basin. UFCO, with its affiliates, grew in size and stature. By 1925, UFCO controlled 1.8 million acres and ten years later over 3.6 million, most of which was held in reserve (Brockett 1984:460). By

1941, 25,000 people earned their livelihood from the banana industry and at its peak banana exports accounted for close to 30 percent of Guatemala's exports but through tax concessions to UFCO and IRCA, Guatemala saw little of the profits. In 1948, the IMF estimated UFCO's exports were worth Q 19 million while the company declared only Q 11 million for taxation purposes to the Guatemalan government. By way of comparison, the average tax on bananas amounted to 1.37 percent of export value while coffee exporters were charged 8.7 percent (Handy 1984:82). Representatives for other sectors of the economy, (the coffee oligarchy, professionals, and students), began to agitate against the omnipresent role of the United Fruit Company in Guatemala. In 1944, the opposition to UFCO culminated in a series of violent clashes. The last of the liberal caudillos, General Ubico, was abandoned by U.S. supporters and forced to resign. In elections held to replace the deposed dictator, a teacher, Juan Jose Arevalo, was chosen to lead the country into the 'new age of spiritual socialism'. He arrived in office supported by 80 percent of the electorate of 1945.

President Arevalo promoted a doctrine of 'spiritual socialism' to liberate Guatemalans from the chains of feudalism which were strangling the country's development. The liberation he espoused, however, did not include economic liberation, rather he hoped that through psychological liberation, Guatemalans would achieve a form of spiritual socialism. As a populist alliance, Arevalo's ideology, and that of his successor Jacobo Arbenz was nationalistic, democratic, and above all capitalist. Both Arevalo and Arbenz were determined to create a modern capitalist economy by eliminating the last vestiges of feudalism and putting a rein on the power of UFCO, IRCA and the Great White Fleet.

During the 'Ten Years of Spring' or the 'Democratic Interlude', the pressure of the workers and peasants pushed through legislation that limited the power of UFCO and laid the foundations for a vibrant mass movement. Arevalo's Labour Code of 1947 opened the door to labour organizing which had been abolished under Ubico. The *Partido Guatemalteco des Trabajadores* (PGT), the communist party, was legalized and quickly set to work organizing both rural and urban trade unions and rural agrarian committees. By 1953, one third of the economically active population was organized under either *la Confederacion General de Trabajadores de Guatemala* (CGTC) with 100,000 salaried employees as members of various unions, or, *la Confederacion Nacional Campesina de Guatemala* (CNCG) having between 200,000 and 250,000 campesino members (Le Bot 1983:97).

Jacobo Arbenz, under pressure from the CNCG was forced to address the question of land reform and in 1952 introduced Decree 900 to "eliminate all feudal type property in rural areas, abolish antiquated relations of production, especially work servitudes, and the remnants of slavery, such as *encomiendas*" (Brown 1974:19).

The land reform was conceived as the way to transform the Guatemalan agricultural sector into a small-scale capitalist one dominated by peasant producers producing for the market. The political objectives of the land reform were threefold. First, it was designed to appease the anti-imperialist, anti-US elements of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie by attacking the multinational UFCO from whom 387,000 acres were expropriated with compensation. Second, Decree 900 was an assault on the coffee oligarchy, the feudal element, since the decree stated that expropriation of holdings over 223 acres lying idle would also be included in the land reform (Brown 1974:19). And third, it was designed to win the support of the

peasantry in Guatemala and defuse the growing support for the PGT in certain regions of Guatemala. Although the reform was a rapid success, the method of implementation was to cost Arbenz dearly as it was the PGT agrarian committees which pushed hard, in some cases supporting land invasions, and thereby frightened the urban bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie factions supporting the populist alliance. Despite the growing unease, by 1954 over 100,000 families (approximately 500,000 people in a population of 3 million) had been beneficiaries of the land reform in which 10 million acres were redistributed (Handy 1984:128).

Under pressure from the United Fruit Company, the U.S. funded a C.I.A. backed invasion of Guatemala in March, 1954 which toppled Arbenz and brought the democratic interlude to an end. With the departure of Arbenz, efforts at democratic and popular reform were shelved. Within two years most of the land redistributed during the land reform was returned to its previous owners. Rural agrarian committees and labour unions were attacked and Guatemala was once again "made safe for democracy". As U.S. Vice President R. Nixon said upon visiting President Castillo Armas to congratulate him on the successful overthrow of the Arbenz:

The intention of Castillo Armas to do more for the people in two years than the communists were able to do in ten is very important. This is the first case in history that a communist government has been replaced by a free government. All the world is watching to see which will do a better job (Handy 1984:185).

Gabriel Aguilera, a Guatemalan historian, discusses the overthrow of the populist regime with the aid of hindsight in less glowing terms. For Aguilera, the quick demise of the Arbenz regime was the product of national

and international interests combining to dispose of a threatening political project:

... the notorious outcome in which imperialism and the dominant class allied with a petty bourgeoisie that feared the popular advance resolved the situation in their favour by using the state apparatus' most important branch from the viewpoint of social struggles - the armed forces (Aguilera 1978:15).

To insure that the Latin American "show-case of democracy" would prove equal to the task, the Eisenhower administration poured money into Guatemala. Total foreign economic assistance for the 1951-1954 period amounted to \$25 million, the figure jumped to \$101.2 million for the period of 1955-1958. To run the new government the U.S. International Cooperation Agency (ICA - a precursor of AID), hired the New York-based private consulting firm of Klein and Saks which specialized in a prescription of private enterprise for the weak national economies in the Third World (Barry 8). The "Spiritual Socialism" of Guatemala was replaced by a U.S. "ultra-laissez faire" economic policy in part based upon the elimination of organized opposition. In the popular organizations, over 4,000 "communists" were killed or jailed, the labour confederations of CGTC and the CNGC were abolished, the legal registration of over 553 unions was canceled, and by 1955 labour union membership had declined from 100,000 to 27,000 (Handy 1984:187). The confiscation of redistributed land led to serious corn shortages and forced the government to import 30,000 tons of corn in 1955 (Handy 1984:181).

With the inauguration of the Central American Common Market (CACM) in 1960, American investment in Central America increased dramatically. The Ydigoras regime passed legislation on industrial incentives in 1953, guaranteeing foreign investment against expropriations and in 1961

revised plans for state control of electrical generation. The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE), a conduit for U.S. capital, loaned funds to sectors of the Guatemalan bourgeoisie to encourage import-substitution industrialization. The first tire factory in Guatemala was quickly followed by a steel plant, a petrochemical complex, and a Kellogg's cereal plant.

Throughout the sixties, industrial production increased by 10 percent annually and by 1971, 81 percent of all U.S. investment in Central America was in Guatemala (Poitevin 1978:130).

Substantial investment was made by foreign capital in the agroexport sector as coffee production and export increased steadily in the sixties, but declined as a percentage of total exports. Bananas, by 1966, accounted for only 2 percent of total exports, and only after the United Fruit Company had sold out to Del Monte, did they begin to recover reaching 6.8 percent in 1973. The increase in exports came from cotton, cattle, and sugar-cane. Chilled beef exports constituted 6 percent of Guatemala's agricultural exports, sugar, 4.1 percent in 1973, and cotton, 19 percent by 1966. Land distribution remained as skewed as before the 1944 democracy. A 1970 report revealed that 365,000 minifundia comprising 90 percent of the farmers held only 20 percent of the land. Meanwhile, the coffee estates and cotton plantations continued to hold extensive parcels of land out of production. The lukewarm efforts of various juntas at land resettlement and colonization met with little success and served principally as a vehicle for military officers to acquire vast tracts of land in the *Transversal del Norte* and to import cheap labour to ranching, or mining areas in which there was a growing demand.

The economic structure of Guatemala in the sixties changed rapidly as investment in the agroexport sectors of the economy intensified the process of class formation in the countryside and industrialization swelled the ranks

of the working class. But as industrial and agroexport production grew, the failure of the state to address the issue of land reform reinforced the tendency to rely on repressive measures to keep the popular organizations in check. The dismantling of the land reform measures implemented by Arbenz and Arevalo pacified the United Fruit Company, foreign capital, and the landed oligarchy which had looked on with apprehension as the democratic nationalist populism of Arbenz had developed.

With the repression of the labour unions and the peasant leagues, opposition to Armas and his successor, Ydigoras Fuentes was muzzled. It was in fact, elements of the military which launched the first attack upon the junta and for reasons unrelated to the repression in Guatemala. The uprising of young officers against the government of Ydigoras Fuentes was sparked by the revelation that Cuban exiles had been permitted the use of Guatemala as a training base prior to the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1960. In Debray's view, the military struggle was:

Born out of a kind of patriotic humiliation of secular and nationalist inspiration taken with modernism and moralism but without any clearly defined political program (Debray 1978:271).

The putsch erupted on November 13, 1960, in the departments of Zacapa and Izabal. The rebellion was quickly contained by forces loyal to President Ydigoras Fuentes, and the rebel forces took to the *Sierra de las Minas*, in the departments of Zacapa and Izabal, where they began a protracted guerilla war which lasted eight years. The movement took the name *Movimiento Rebelde -13* (MR-13) and by 1962, after establishing links with Cuba, announced themselves as revolutionaries committed to guerilla war. Inspired by the success of the Cuban revolution, the PGT adopted the

'foco theory of guerilla warfare' and joined with MR-13 as the political wing of the organization. In December 1962, *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR) was created, amalgamating the political bureau of the PGT and the national leadership of MR 13. Over the course of the next few years, the guerilla war was fought haphazardly in the departments of Zacapa and Izabal. The foco theory of guerilla warfare called for a small, compact group of revolutionaries to engage the army in a particular locale, or foco. It was rural warfare and each group was supposed to act as the detonator in the area in which they were operating. There was very little contact or political work amongst the peasantry; the foco guerillas were primarily drawn from urban petty-bourgeoisie and had had little, or no knowledge of local terrain, native languages, or warfare. For the duration of the seven year campaign 1962-1969, the focos tended to be isolated from one another and their urban directorate, distrusted by the peasantry amongst whom they were fighting, and constantly on the run from the army. Over the years political differences arose between the PGT and the MR 13 who briefly came under tutelage of the 'posadista' current of 'baroque Trotskyism' but eventually broke with them to adopt a more nationalistic Marxist-Leninist line, (Gott 1970:99, Debray 1978:289, Munck 1984: 85).

At the height of the uprising in 1966, the total number of trained, armed, and organized cadres was around 300 men (Debray 1978:1960). Although the numbers were small, with the exception of the Colombian guerilla movement, the Guatemalan movement had the largest support base to depend on in its area of operations. However, they were unable to benefit from it because neither the PGT, nor MR 13 ever dealt with the Indian population. Evaluating the early struggle, in 1964, Régis Debray captures the crux of the problem:

Relations between the vanguard and the masses are inextricably linked with relations between ladinos and Indians. Indians actually constitute the majority of the population and they live for the most part in the mountainous areas where agriculture and artisan forms of production dominate - areas which are ideal for the rearguards the support base on which the guerilla forces' survival depends. But those whose objective interests in the revolution is greatest, the most exploited, most humiliated, most oppressed - are also those least involved in it, those who are subjectively the furthest away (Debray 1978:307).

Debray points out that FAR had more men under arms than did Castro, in the Sierra Maestra of Cuba, in the summer of 1958. FAR's decision to fight in the Sierra de las Muestra was both military and political. The military initiative, the successor to the 1960 uprising, meant the ex-officers who directed MR 13 were from Zacapa and knew the terrain, peasantry and the military (Paige, 1983:711). The political line of the PGT was a source of contention with the leaders of MR-13 as PGT party cadres insisted that the struggle should be oriented toward achieving a bourgeois-democratic revolution before struggling for the creation of a socialist revolution while the leaders of MR-13 were fighting for the creation of a socialist state (Munck 1984: 92) nationalist regime (Gott 80-98). Effectively, the officers of MR-13 and PGT were fighting at cross purposes. As Munck argues, the contradiction between radical methods of struggle the MR-13, and of the bourgeois democratic context of the PGT program, proved to be fatal (Munck 1984[1]: 93).

The Guatemalan military response did not meet with initial success. Two unsuccessful campaigns of '64 and '65 proved that more spectacular means were needed to suppress the guerillas. On October 3 1966, the third military offensive was launched using new methods of counterinsurgency

warfare promoted by the US military strategists. Combining demagoguery and terror, counter-insurgency warfare made its debut in rural Guatemala.

On the demagogic side the Army undertook road building, school repair, and a minor agrarian reform (using nationalized estates). In the land reform, about 1,000 displaced peasants families were resettled in contested zones thereby insuring their loyalty and dependence.⁴ Under terror, the program used two prongs. One was to support civil repression; "to make the repression look not like a state system coming from above, but like a popular and spontaneous action coming from below" (Debray 1978:311).

Under the auspices of the *Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional* (the MLN), directed by Sandoval Alarcon, the death squads of MANO and NOA appeared in October of 1966. On the military front, using air force, improved communications, and increased rural occupations, the army succeeded in completely eliminating the guerilla fronts in Zacapa and Izabal by August of 1967. Between 1963 and 1966, the U.S. moved to bolster the junta. Through the Military Assistance Program (MAP), \$10 million was extended immediately after the failed military putsch of 1960. By 1966, MAP accounted for 21 percent of the Guatemalan military budget, 92 percent of all force improvement expenditures, and by 1965, 72 percent of all MAP funds were channelled to bolstering internal security, training, and counter-insurgency warfare (Bowen 279). The returns on this investment for the U.S. were realized during the third offensive. General Arana's campaign in the Eastern departments resulted in the deaths of 7000 people. For his efforts, Arana himself earned the name of "the butcher of Zacapa" (Black 1985:8).

So began the war of counterinsurgency and the militarization of the Guatemalan state which has continued to this day. The revolutionary movement was virtually eliminated and survivors of these campaigns fled to

Mexico or Guatemala City. In the following years, the foco theory of guerilla warfare based upon the spontaneous explosion of the oppressed masses came under serious criticism both by foreign observers and members of the revolutionary movement itself. In a self-critical review the PGT in '*El Camino de la Revolucion Guatemalteca*' blamed the defeat on:

the absence of any clear understanding of the development of the guerilla struggle and the influence it might have on a pre-insurreccional situation such as prevailed at the time. Consequently, serious military mistakes were made: real ignorance of the area chosen, lack of linguistic preparation, inadequate training of personnel, carelessness over the group's movements and transport arrangements in the area of operations, failure to grasp the need to organize a support network and organize political work among the local people (Quoted in Debray 281).

The foco conception suffered from grave strategic deficiencies. The lack of concrete analysis of the specific conditions which existed in rural Guatemala is unforgivable in hindsight. There was no long-term national strategy which integrated the political and military struggle into coherent framework nor were there organizations reflecting the aspirations of the people and providing mechanisms to make these aspirations realizable. The focos lacked contact with the rural masses and ignored entirely the role of the indigenous people in the revolutionary struggle. In chapter three we will explore the theorizing on the Indian issue in greater detail. At this point however, we are primarily concerned with an exposé of the political and economic features of Indian life in the Altiplano.

The penetration of capitalism in the rural highlands had uneven affects on this Indian peasantry. The peasants of Totonicapan studied by Carol Smith entered the market-place through petty commodity production. As

partial evidence, she cites the fact that at the turn of the twentieth century there were only twenty markets in the region; by 1950 there were 150 and by 1975, over 300, (C. Smith 1984:67). The second outcome, one which developed unevenly in different regions of the altiplano, was the growth of a Kulak faction amongst the peasantry. In the labour exporting departments this differentiation within the peasantry was particularly the case. Lester Schmid's study of the agricultural migration patterns of the mid-sixties concluded that close to 55% of all migrants came from Huehuetenango, El Quiche, and San Marcos. Of these many worked on the fincas during the harvest season and on highland farms as agricultural labourers during the rest of the year.

Handy's archival research on agriculture in El Quiche prior to the Arbenz era shows that along with the growing landlessness there was a tendency towards land concentration within the Indian population as well. In Huehuetenango 1.3% of Indians owned 26% of the land and in El Quiche, 2.5% of the Indians owned 31% of all lands (Handy 1985:304).

The third aspect which is consistent with the two previous dynamics was the formation of an Indian petty bourgeoisie engaged in trading, labour contracting, and transportation of labour and materials. The precariousness of the petty bourgeoisie as a class has been amply documented around the world and the conditions in Guatemala are no exception. It is this class which played the central role in the early growth of the "New Catholicism" which we examine in chapter two.

The revolutionary movement at the end of the sixties had been "reduced to one small pocket of revolutionaries buried deep in the jungles of Northern Quiche" (Handy 1984:236), and General Arana Osorio the "Butcher

of Zacapa" returned from exile¹ to rule Guatemala and embark on a fresh wave of terror (Handy 1986:399). So began the "Decade of Dinosaurs" (Black 1983:8).

The seventies in Guatemala were marked by a number of interrelated processes primary among which was the broadening and deepening of capitalism in all parts of the country. In agriculture, the 1970s witnessed the extension of the agroexport economy into both new crops, new land, but undertaken under similar relations of production with the exception of the banana production sector where, in a move to shift the risk to local contract producers, Del Monte began to establish production in some places by contract led systems on Del Monte land. By the end of the 1970's, Del Monte had become the single largest private employer with a workforce of 4,500 and controlling 55,000 acres, 9,000 of which were cultivated and 46,000 were used to graze cattle (Handy 1984:198). Although coffee and banana production increased over the course of the decade, their percentage as a part of total agricultural exports decreased as new forms of agro-export industry were developed.

Beef production for export began in the early '70s and by 1973 accounted for 6 percent of agricultural exports. By 1975 it accounted for 19 million dollars in export earnings. Worthy of mention is that during the same period, beef consumption in Guatemala decreased by 12.5 percent (Brockett 1984:480). The most important factor, however, in relation to beef production is the nature of the production process itself, particularly as it relates to land use. In Guatemala, ranching alienated immense tracts of from land

¹ Arana had been banished to Nicaragua for his part in a botched kidnapping of Archbishop Casariego. While in Nicaragua, Arana was befriended by President Somoza.

distribution schemes. Vast regions of El Peten and the Franja Transversal del Norte which had been designated as lands for peasant colonization managed to find their way into the hands of military officers who converted them into ranchland. The area was jokingly referred to in Guatemala as the 'land of the generals'.

Production of Guatemala's two other export crops, cotton and sugar, increased dramatically in the 1970's. Aided by private and public bank credits, production of these crops boomed during the sixties and seventies. Cotton lint production jumped from 57 thousand metric tonnes in 1971 to 156,000 in 1980, and cottonseed production from 92,000 tonnes to 251,000 tonnes in the same period. By 1975 exports amounted to \$74 million and 11.4 percent of total exports. By spraying their fields as many as 50 times a year with pesticides long since banned in the United States, Guatemalan coffee producers came to enjoy the highest yields for non-irrigated land in the world (Handy 1984:200). Sugar production during the seventies climbed to the 5 million tonne level; by 1975 sugar exports accounted for 17.8 percent of total exports worth 115.6 U.S. millions (Wilkie 385) but then exports plummeted in 1977-80.

The effect of this growth in the agro-export economy on land usage in Guatemala was dramatic. Not only was new land brought into cultivation, but existing land that had formerly been used for food crop production was converted to agro-export production. Land for food production increased by 37 percent compared to a 169 percent increase for agro-export production. In 1978, 10 percent of landowners controlled 76.6 percent of all land and 75 percent of landowners only 11.7 percent (Hansen 1978 11). In the Western Altiplano as many as 44 percent of the country's farms are located on 26 percent of the country's lands; 40 percent of the families with the lowest

incomes are situated in that region. Rural unemployment and underemployment had reached 42 percent by the mid-seventies according to a World Bank study (Brockett 492). The massive migrations from the highlands to the fincas continued as before but with a new twist. As the new agro-export rancheros and the landed oligarchy invested more in the agricultural technology, the demand for labour on plantations began to decrease. As a result the migrants began to venture farther afield to Soconusco in Mexico (Le Bot 1983:107).

The collapse of CACM led to the stagnation in the early import-substitution manufacturing growth. By the early 1970's, Guatemalan industry was functioning at only 38 percent of installed capacity. U.S. investment in Guatemala continued but it went into new sectors like minerals, power development, and construction, much of which was located in the Northern parts of Guatemala, (El Peten, Alta Verapaz, and parts of El Quiche). Spurred by the strikes in Sudbury in 1969, Inco, and Hanna mining company, under the Guatemalan subsidiary Eximbal, invested 120 million dollars and began construction on a plant in El Peten beside Lake Izabal which could produce 28 million pounds of nickel annually. The plant was highly capital and energy intensive, built with construction plans which predated the 1974 oil price hikes. When it came into production in 1977, its profitability was anything but insured. Facing rising oil prices and falling nickel prices the plant was mothballed in 1981, after the company recouped its capital investment. Oil was also discovered in El Peten in the fifties though exploitation did not begin until the seventies. Between 1971-75, 42 oil companies applied for exploration contracts and by the end of the decade, there was talk of potential reserves of 10 billion barrels which would have made Guatemala the third largest producer in Latin America. Between 1975-1980, 5,500 barrels a day were

being pumped out, one-third of the national need, and reached 12,000 a day by 1983, but fell off by 1985 to 37 percent of its 1983 level, and estimates of untapped reserves have been significantly scaled down (Handy 1984:221, GCE 1986:14, Le Bot:1983 61). The refineries built to process the oil were technologically inadequate so all of the brut oil must be exported (Le Bot 1983:61). By 1985 Exxon and Amoco both suspended operations citing guerilla harassment as the cause (Millet 1986:430).

The other major investments in the seventies were made in power development in the construction of three major hydroelectric projects. The largest, Chixoy Dam, had a projected cost of 165 million U.S. dollars in 1974 and revised to 414 million in 1978, and was expected to produce 70 percent of Guatemala's energy requirements. By 1982, as funding for the other two projects dried up, investment was poured into Chixoy but with the collapse of the main induction tunnel in 1984 and estimates of repair costs placed around \$36 million, the returns have not yet materialised.

Finally, there was significant growth in the construction industry after the massive earthquake of 1976. Tourism became the third largest foreign exchange earner and with commercial activities accounted for 26 percent of GDP by the end of the decade. Overall, the economy grew at an average rate of 5.5 percent per annum between 1960 and 1980 (Bowen 1984:270) and the GDP was estimated at 8.6 billion dollars. By 1980, the economy was showing signs of instability produced by "inequitable growth, an unreformed fiscal system and reliance upon foreign capital and foreign markets" (Handy 1984:202). This was exacerbated by blatant corruption in the ranks of the Lucas Garcia government, and the strains produced by having to wage an increasingly costly guerilla war, which showed more signs of escalating rather than dissipating at the time.

The political response to the sharpening contradictions in Guatemala evolved on a number of fronts. The labour struggles of the unions were initially limited to economic concerns and focused on wage complaints and trying to re-establish a labour code which had been annulled in 1955 (Le Bot 1983:99). Between 1969 and 1977, the number of labour unions increased by 30 percent but still accounted for no more than 5 percent of the economically active population (Concerned Guatemalan Scholars: 25). In March 1976, in response to the corruption in disbursement of aid funds following the quake, the major labour federations joined to form the *Comite Nacional de Unidad Sindical* (CNUS) which grouped together over 65 different unions. It played an instrumental role in supporting labour struggles. Initially, it limited itself to labour demands, but with the steady increase in political violence and repression in the late seventies, its positions became increasingly political and served as a rallying point for other sectors of the mass movement (CG Scholars 26 Le Bot 1983:104).

The student movement also came alive during the seventies in the traditions established during the 1944-54 period. Various student fronts which extended from the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City to the highschoools became increasingly critical of the military juntas. When the university movement became the target of the police and death squads, the student movement became even more hostile to the army.

The campesinos, for the most part outside the mainstream of Guatemalan political life after the disbanding of the rural unions in 1955 under Armas, became more organized in the seventies, thanks principally to the activities of the Roman Catholic Church. On May 1 1975, the Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC) an initiative of militant Christian groups was formed. It was composed of representatives from 40 peasant leagues,

committees and rural associations, and demanded an end to the exploitation and discrimination against Indians; rights to water; land reform; and wage increases. CUC secretly began organizing the migrant workers on the sugar, cotton, and coffee plantations. In February and March 1980, it was able to organize a farmworker's strike involving over 75,000 people which completely paralysed the cane cutting and earned the workers a dramatic wage increase. By 1980, impatient with the speed at which the CNUS was moving, CUC broke with it to form a more openly political front (Le Bot 1983:106 1983).

At the same time the guerilla fronts increased their activities in rural Guatemala. The *Ejercito Guerillio de los Pobres* (EGP) began working quietly in the Northeastern jungles of Ixcán in 1971-72 and spent four years quietly doing political work before undertaking any sort of military action: the execution of the tiger of Ixcán - a particularly brutal finca owner. The EGP called for a revolution to overthrow the capitalist state and placed the poor campesinos -- particularly the Indians, because of their semi-proletarian status as migrant workers, their importance to the export economy, and their numbers at the centre of the revolutionary struggle (Concerned Guatemalan Scholars 39). After 1976 the EGP concentrated on organizing in the countryside and began to move toward an ideology of a popular, democratic, revolutionary war. The ethnic-national question played a principal role and the EGP called for an end to cultural oppression and exploitation. At its height the EGP had six fronts covering Quiché, Huehuetenango, Alta and Baja Verapaz, Chimaltenango, Suchitepaquez, Escuintla, Sacatepaquez, and Guatemala City.

Fuerzas Armadas Rebelde (FAR), which petered out in the Peten in the early sixties, was resurrected in Guatemala City in 1974 and concentrated on

mass organizing in the labour sector. As repression grew, FAR decided to resume guerilla work and once again launched actions in the Peten and on the South coast. Ideologically, they call for a popular revolutionary war, based on a worker -campesino alliance in which the workers, the urban intellectuals, and the campesinos are the principal motor force. The *Organizacion Rebelde de Pueblas en Armas* (ORPA), influenced strongly by the national liberation position of Guzman, Bockler and Hebert, built their analysis on the principle of a fundamentally racist society in which Indians must take the leading role in the revolutionary process. They began organizing in San Marcos, Totonicapan, Quetzaltenango and San Marcos and did not emerge into the public eye until 1979. Finally the PGT, the Communist Party was active on the South Coast and in Guatemala City but contributed little to the struggle. Eventually, it was asked to leave the united front because it was no longer militarily active. The largest section of the PGT is still struggling for the national democratic bourgeois revolution and hence does not actively participate in armed struggle against the state.

As popular resistance to successive military regimes increased in the seventies, the initial uneasy tolerance gave way to a brutal war of counter-insurgency waged against the Guatemalan population reminiscent of the first war of the sixties launched in Zacapa and Izabal. The institutionalization of state terrorism (Bowen 282) included the emergence and use of death squads to eliminate opposition while giving the appearance of separation from government. The 'White Hand' and the 'Secret Anti-communist Army' became increasingly active in killing criminals or 'disappearing' undesirables. In an unusually strongly worded condemnation Amnesty International denounced Guatemala for organizing a program of government murder in which 20,000 people had become victims by 1976, 5,000 of these being

attributed to the death squads (Amnesty International 1981:1). In conjunction with the activity of the death squads the army resumed operations of widescale repression and terrorization of the civilian population.

The early U.S. military assistance program initiated in 1963 to bolster the Guatemalan Army after the army rebellion was important for developing the army, paramilitary, and police up until 1977 when Carter suspended aid because of human rights violations. In the seventies the army and police grew substantially and by 1978 there were 14,470 (29,000 by 1983) in the armed forces and over 8,000 various police units (Le Bot 1983:66). These figures do not include the numbers of people in the death squads. More importantly, the militarization of the countryside and the occupation of rural areas by the army began as a project to secure the countryside from rural insurgents. By February 1976 the town of Chajul in Quiche was under military occupation and later the same year the military launched a pilot cooperative scheme in Ixcán fashioned after the 'model hamlets' of Vietnam. Military garrisons and encampments became a regular feature in the Guatemalan countryside as did the repression.

By 1981, the Guatemalan economy had collapsed. The international prices for coffee and cotton were down, as was that of nickel. The Inco plant had been mothballed, and tourism, Guatemala's third largest foreign currency earner suffered as the war escalated. A trade deficit of \$30 million in 1980 had grown to \$200 million by 1981 (Black 1984:127). The GDP growth rate was negative. Private investment dropped off considerably and for the first time in years capital flight became a major problem in Guatemala. Between late 1976 and 1980 foreign capital invested in Guatemala declined by 900 percent and in one week more than \$114 million left the country (Handy 1984:202).

The success of the Nicaraguan revolution and the collapse of the Guatemalan economy prodded the guerilla armies to form a broad popular front to coordinate both the political and military struggle against the military junta. The military confrontations with the army became more numerous (see Paige 1984:712-713) and the U.S. State Department estimated that the total rebel army was 3,500 active combatants, 10,000 local irregular forces and 30,000 to 60,000 actively involved supporters (Black 1984:192). Other estimates put the number of active combatants around 2,000 (Le Bot 1983:66). While the Guatemalan Army was ably supplied by American, Israeli and French weapons, the guerilla forces were dependent upon hunting rifles, revolvers, and arms bought off the black market. Neither Cuba nor Nicaragua provided much military support (Le Bot 1983:67, Kraus 1987:579).

The army responded with a vengeance. After 1978 the death toll jumped dramatically. Fifty to seventy-five thousand people were killed or disappeared; 440 villages were destroyed; one million people were displaced internally and 150,000 refugees fled to neighbouring countries. Two massacres, Panzos on May 29 1978 in Alta Verapaz, and the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City on January 31 1980, were particularly significant as they were condemned nationally, and internationally as brutal examples of the way in which the army was dealing with political opposition.

In a terrifying show of force the army turned many areas rural Guatemala into war zones. But the destruction of the early eighties was haphazard and arbitrary. In fact, there was mounting evidence that the army was losing the war through its indiscriminate use of terror. In March 1982 the overthrow of General Lucas Garcia by General Rios Montt precipitated a new and more systematic form of repression. With the help of American, Taiwanese, Argentinian, and Israeli military specialists, the Guatemalan army

put into place an administrative structure of such clinical efficiency that the terror campaigns of the sixties and seventies pale in comparison.

On April 5, 1982, the Director of the Centre of Military Studies presented his 'National Plan for Security and Development' to the ruling junta which reflected the attitudes of garrison commanders who felt that repression alone would not be sufficient to overcome the insurgency (Centro de Estudios Militar 1982:1). In order to effectively combat the "communists" the army needed to develop a policy whereby the 'hearts and minds' of the peasants could be won back from the guerillas. The plan equates security with development and elaborates a series of interfacing plans which would eventually secure the highlands from the guerillas and in turn create a new agro-export zone in which cool season fruits and vegetables could be grown (Brockett 86). The plan called for a combination of military and economic measures to win the war set out in a five-year plan. The first phase, Victory '82, was designed to pacify the contaminated areas. Civilian populations were targeted for attack, villages and crops were burned to the ground, and masses of refugees were moved in order to secure the highlands and beat back the rebel armies. 'Firmness '83' was meant to consolidate the gains made in 1982. Development poles governed by the military were established and model villages sprang up in the contested areas. Various food for work programs funded by US AID and World Food Program were used to lure, then feed the displaced people. At the same time, Civil Defence Patrols (PAC) were established in most villages. These militias served many functions. First, they cut the guerillas off from the villages by insuring that all male members of the community 'volunteer for patrol duty. Second, PACs kept the villagers in the village and accounted for. Third, it made the villages more dependent upon the army as permission had to be obtained to leave on the

seasonal migrations. Four, they were used as propaganda tools to turn the peasantry against the guerillas. And five, the irregulars were used as cannon fodder by the military who would use local villagers as "scouts" to take the lead in "search and destroy missions" (Simon 1986: 2). By the end of 1982 there were 25,000 militiamen and by 1986 over 1 million people had been press-ganged into PACs.

Phase three, 'Institutional Reencounter '84', was developed to resettle the remaining internal refugees, establish the Interinstitutional Coordinating System as a parallel but superior military administration; and begin the 'democratic opening' by preparing elections for the National Constituent Assembly. This step was deemed necessary to improve the international image of Guatemala.

The final phase entitled 'Stability '85', was designed to consolidate the Army's control on rural Guatemala while broadening the aperture of the 'democratic opening'. Presidential elections were scheduled, and a "new approach to civilian affairs would be launched" (Black 1985 11). The inauguration of President Cerezo has not radically altered the class coalition supporting the capitalist project in Guatemala. Rumours of coup attempts and acrimonious attacks by political representatives of the conservatives have blunted what little there was of populist rhetoric in the Social Democratic program. While the "Democratic Opening" may have succeeded in some sectors, the civil war is resurgent and the body counts of the dead and disappeared show no signs of diminishing.

In the next chapter we turn to an examination of the Popular church in Guatemala. In the midst of such a structure of repression and systemic oppression, it is important to evaluate the contribution made by the radical Christian organizations to the popular struggle in Guatemala.

CHAPTER TWO Guns and God in Guatemala

The concept of the *Iglesia Popular* (Popular church), is derived from Pope John Paul II encyclical *Laborem Exercens* no. 8: "it is a church which defines its mission and service in relation to its commitment to the cause of the poor; moreover, in its like commitment it verifies its fidelity to Christ" (Richards and Melendez 1982:21). The term has become the focus of theological controversy. Liberation theologians stress the following characteristics to distinguish the 'church of the Poor' from the traditional church. First, they argue that the church of the Poor is not another church, nor a parallel church, but rather a new model of being church, one based upon the poor, both financially and politically. Hence, the church of the Poor is a movement of ecclesiastical renovation, not a heresy or a schism. The sanctity and universality of the church is maintained, only its political allegiances and presuppositions are brought into question. Second, the church of the Poor responds to, and reflects the voice of the people in a fashion alien to existing ecclesiastical dogma. The church is to bring the word to the people and also brings the word of the people to the church. The church thus becomes a vehicle for expressing and acting upon those matters that are from the poor, the "voice for those who have no voice". Third, the church of the Poor is of this world, in this world, and interprets the world through a "scientific", rigorous analysis of the social reality in which people operate rather than at an "idealistic" and ineffective method of analysis.

While this definition may be adequate for theological controversies, it does not provide a foundation for informing political analysis. I propose that

the church of the Poor should be interpreted as a political movement, both in terms of ideology and praxis, which articulates a revolutionary message for the proletariat, peasantry, and semi-proletariat. The terrain of struggle extends beyond the confines of the church into areas such as education, political organizing, propaganda, armed action, and ideological construction based on a revolutionary doctrine. While the church of the Poor serves as a vehicle for expressing the views of the peasantry and the proletariat, it remains structurally linked to the larger institution of the church and subject to larger ideological dictates. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the church of the Poor in Guatemala fell from being uneasily tolerated by the traditional church to being the target of systematic repression endorsed by members of the church.

In this chapter I focus on the trajectory of the popular church in Guatemala. I am concerned primarily with the development and struggles of the popular church within the Guatemalan church. I document the evolution of the Popular church within the institutional setting of the traditional church by examining its roots within the *catequista* movement, and the means the church of the poor used to implement its political agenda during the late seventies and early eighties. I also study the class struggle within the church and document the ways in which the church hierarchy actively worked to undermine the church of the Poor. When they were unable to do so within the confines of the institutional church I document how they relied upon the repressive apparatus of the state to accomplish the task on their behalf. First, I focus on the development of the Popular church with its roots in petty-bourgeois, and peasant organizations. This uneasy coalition was the basis of much of the initial organizing and it was not until the systematic repression of the late seventies that the coalition collapsed. I

then move on to discussing the events which launched the waves of repression and document the ways in which the traditional church both explicitly and implicitly endorsed the elimination of the Popular church by the army.

The growth of the church of the Poor in Guatemala paralleled events at the international ecclesiastical level. While the Latin American Bishops were holding the second CELAM conference at Medellin in Columbia in 1968, 800 pastoral workers from around Guatemala met for a '*Semana de Pastoral de Conjunto*' (A Week of Pastoral Work). The stated aim of the program was to reflect upon ways of renovating the church, of bringing its activities more in line with the social realities of Guatemala. The outcome reflected pastoral workers' concerns arising from five previous years of haphazard planning. The final document reflected many of the concerns of liberation theology. It supported the creation of centres for Integral Development in various parts of the country. The object of these centres was not only to train campesinos to become more effective community spokespeople, but also to improve the missionaries' effectiveness in dealing with their parishioners. Within two years there were centres in Huehuetenango, Coban, Peten, and Escuintla. For both religious and village leaders the courses taught them to "delineate and define the role of the church in a situation of extreme oppression" (Richard and Melendez:211). The second outcome was the creation of urban Catholic discussion groups in Guatemala city to discuss matters of the church. These groups of intellectuals, religious, and students discussed the nature of liberation theology and started a journal Dialogo which focused on exploring ways to make the 'commitment to the poor' a greater factor within the Roman Catholic church in Guatemala.

These developments were set within the context of a changing church in Guatemala which reflected pressures emanating both from the Vatican in Rome as a result of Vatican II, and the political agenda of the United States. In conjunction with U.S.AID, and the Peace Corps, religious personnel were given training and material support for their projects. It was assumed that the catequistas would be instrumental in implementing what came their way, (Le Bot 1977:229, Mondragon 1983:56). The first training course for the clergy organized by USAID consultants (Bendana:466) spread the message that "local ladinos are the major stumbling block for the actualization of economic equivalence for all individuals; and proposed ladinoization as a means to achieving social and economic equivalence of Indian and Ladino in the broader society" (K. Warren 1978:94). To translate this message into practice, the religious set about rebuilding the peasant cooperative movement which had been brutally repressed under Castillo Armas. By 1967 there were 145 cooperatives with 27,000 members, and before they once again became targets in the late seventies, the number had reached 510 with more than 132,000 members. (Plant:87); half of them concentrated in the western highlands.

In the sixties, as the army mounted its first counterinsurgency campaign in the eastern departments of Zacapa and Izabal, the western departments survived unscathed except for brief army forays into El Peten. While the fighting concentrated on the ladino peasants in the eastern departments, the university students began to organize movements against the military. One group of particular interest in the formation of the Popular church was a body called Crater which began to organize and teach university students about the Freirian methods of 'conscientization' and, with the help of Maryknoll Father Blase Bonpane, began to plan *cursillos* (workshops), in the departments of Huehuetenango and El Quiche.

The first stage in the process was to teach the peasants Spanish, for migrant labourers and traders engaged in direct capitalist relations of production were subject to greater exploitation because of their inability to speak the language. During 1967 and 1968, the number of students involved in those projects reached 90 and although it was a part-time project, carried on during the university holidays, the courses represented the first sustained attempt to wed political socializing with evangelizing (Blase Bonpane 1985: chps. 2-4). The "guerillas of peace" as they were known, were banned by Archbishop Casariego in early 1967. The response of Crater and was to declare itself a secular movement independent of the church hierarchy.

The cursillos were especially effective, in Huehuetenango and Quiche (Bonpane 1985:29) where the students were delivering courses. Members of FAR began to arrive at cursillo meetings and in late 1967 student leaders, and Sister Marion Peters met the leader of FAR in a farmhouse near Escuintla to form a new Guerilla group to be named the Christian Revolutionary Front (Bonpane 72). By the end of December, Archbishop Casariego caught wind of the project and had the Maryknoll fathers Blase Bonpane and Thomas Melville, with Sister Marion Peters, expelled from the country. The cursillo leaders were already on death lists but they all managed to escape to Mexico City where they created the first Christian revolutionary group which, after some months, was merged with the FAR itself (Bonpane 23-62).

In explaining his actions Thomas Melville argued that in Guatemala, the repression and violence left only one option: "A revolution which will effect the complete change in structures with the body of the faithful and within the civil society where the faithful must live" (Melville 1968:15). The first episode of the Marxian inspired Catholicism came to a quick end.

Thereafter both U.S. Aid, the State, and the church paid closer attention to the

orientation of the socio-economic pastoral plans that were being established in the highlands (Le Bot 1983:241).

While the Melvilles generated a great deal of attention for their involvement in the revolutionary struggle, the co-ordination between the members of Crater, the local catequistas, and the guerillas of FAR is of more significance for it set the pattern of an expanding popular struggle embracing various class fractions mobilized under the auspices of the Popular church. The ultra-conservative church hierarchy struggled from the outset to suppress or contain the growth of a Popular church in Guatemala (Bonpane 1985: 33).

While the Crater episode was the most exciting of this early period in Guatemala, the majority of the religious were engaged in pastoral planning based upon the "social doctrine" which emerged from Vatican II. The work was geared to alleviating the poverty of the peasants and migrant workers in the Altiplano. The shift in focus of certain pastoral workers did not consist in a renunciation of previous efforts of evangelizing, but rather, should be interpreted as an expansion of the role of religion to include areas that formerly had been the domain of political parties or government ministries. Thus, from the early stages, the Maryknoll Fathers placed heavy emphasis upon building primary health care units, starting schools, organizing small infrastructural projects such as roads, agricultural extension, setting up cooperatives, etc. (Le Bot 1977:229). In most respects, the Order of the Sacred Heart (Spanish Clergy in Quiche), the Belgian Sacred Heart of Mary Congregation on the South Coast and the American Benedictines in Alta Verapaz, followed their lead (Le Bot 1977:229, Berryman 1984[1]:15).

Even in the sixties, the explicitly political nature of church activities began to emerge. In El Quiche, some of the priests embarked on a program of

forming peasant leagues whose objectives were to defend the general interests of the peasantry politically. In many instances, the peasant leagues were directly linked to the local cooperative. At the same time the local leaders of the *Partida Democratica Cristiana*, were creating rural bases to be used for their own ends. As Le Bot concludes:

... dans nombres de municipes les militants et les membres de la ligue paysenne étaient les mêmes individus qui faisaient fonctionner ou participaient à la coopérative, et tous se recrutait dans les rangs de l'Action Catholique, si bien qu'au niveau local Acción Catolica-coopérative- ligue DC constituaient une même force, souvent soutenue et parfois orientée par la curé (Le Bot 1977:240).

The Melville affair in 1969 caused a realignment in the positions of the *Partida Democratica Cristiana* and the *Acción Catolica*. The church wanted to downplay any explicit political involvement, while the *Partida Democratica Cristiana*, to prevent any criticism of its involvement with a church that was far too radical. For its part, the clergy in Quiche and Huehuetenango continued to work closely with the government ministries and USAID, while the *Partida Democratica Cristiana* moved toward more strict patron-client relationships and emphasized acquisitions of the votes in the alcaldes rather than creating a mass base.

After the *Partida Democratica Cristiana* had cut its moorings from the anti-communist line of Casariego in the early sixties, it gradually moved toward the centre of the political spectrum while still maintaining its political links with the peasantry in the highlands through the peasant leagues and *Acción Catolica*. With the advent of the Melville affair and the subsequent response of the *Partida Democratica Cristiana*, *Acción Catolica*

was effectively set loose and severed its affiliation with any political party. As the *Partida Democratica Cristiana* drifted further to the right in order to maintain its credibility in the national political structure, *Acción Católica*, or certain elements of it, became increasingly radicalized and began to force the local community leaders and religious personnel to address the issues of land reform and military violence.

The National Conference of Bishops endorsed the creation of Base Christian Communities (BCCs) in 1969 on the South Coast but for various reasons they were not given substantial support by the traditional church or the ladinos amongst who they were set up. Melendez blames their failure on lack of national coordination and the incapacity of the Episcopal Conference to collectively pronounce themselves supportive of BCCs as the ecclesiastical model to be followed nationally (Richard and Melendez:213). The repercussions of this were "an underestimation of ecclesiastical authority and an anarchaic proliferation of initiatives which caused great consternation amongst the Catholics" (Richard and Melendez: 215). Efforts to introduce BCCs as a pastoral program were centred in the *Bocacosta* where communities of migrant ladinos were targeted for this experiment (Falla 1984:218). The experiment did not spread much beyond this region under the form elaborated by Medellín.

In the early seventies, the dynamics of a Catholic church '*mas comprometido con los pobres*' (committed to the poor) began to produce some interesting results. The emphasis on starting and sustaining cooperatives in the highlands was the central piece in the pastoral programming plan of action. Generally, the cooperatives were agricultural cooperatives concerned with increasing agricultural productivity through the application of chemical fertilizers, and to a lesser extent, producer

cooperatives committed to marketing the produce of the minifundia. In the 1972-73 season, 83.5 percent of minifundia farmers applied fertilizer to their acreage which increased annual output substantially (Early 1982:72). But massive fluctuations in the price of fertilizers and hence the ability of peasants to buy them combined with an ever-growing mass of rural landless labourers (Bowen:272) and shrinking farm sizes, offset the overall subsistence gains garnered from the use of fertilizers.

Another avenue of planning that developed during the seventies was an attempt at land colonization in Quiche and El Peten spearheaded by the Maryknoller Father William Woods and Padre Luis Gurriaran of The Order of the Sacred Heart. Father Woods helped move 2,000 families into Ixcán Grande and Luis Gurriaran's cousin, Xavier Gurriaran did the same to the East. In both cases, the catequistas were indispensable to the colonization project as they helped to organize the population move and set up the new locale (Berryman 1984[1]:179).

In the course of this project, Xavier Gurriaran came face to face with the complications surrounding the community-level power struggle between the *cofradías* and the *Acción Católica*. Adapting a pastoral technique developed by American Capucins in the late sixties in Nicaragua called "*Delegados de la Palabra*" (delegates of the word) (Berryman 1984[1]:82), Gurriaran managed to arrange a structural setting that was both consistent with the aims of the catequistas and at the same time accommodating to the *cofradías*. The delegates of the word were leaders trained in worship and community development. They received basic health education, agricultural education, literacy and consciousness raising at the various centros set up in the altiplano. When they returned to their communities, they returned as trained catechists whose role was much wider than that originally foreseen by

Acción Católica . They were equipped not only to teach religion but also to teach and help community members deal with the larger national system (Berryman 1984[1]:82).

Normally, these *Delegados* were chosen from amongst the catequistas, but in Gurriarán's colonization scheme, they were chosen from amongst both *Acción Católica* and the *cofradías*. The leaders were rotated frequently and women were included in the ministerial roles. Leaders spent one day a month planning the programs for the next month and one week each year evaluating and planning. As a measure of the seriousness with which the program was taken, in the parish of Nebaj there were 400 coordinators in 68 communities by the end of 1978 (Berryman [1]:79).

While some priests and pastoral agents experimented with new and more worldly programming, it is only fair to say that the majority pursued conventional programming while others explored even more retrograde approaches to Catholicism. In EL Peten, the site of FAR guerilla activities in the sixties, the Apostolic Administrator promoted a Catholic charismatic movement to compete with the pentacostalist sects. When various missionaries in the region tried to confront the support for canonical charismatic programs and proposed instead to develop programs more in line with those developing elsewhere, the administrator forced the missionaries to leave the country (Bendana:473).

The early developmentalist phase of the church produced varied results. The Central American church chronicler Guillermo Melendez describes the period as follows:

two lines of action are outlined, almost in totally opposite directions; one, the developmentalist - productionist line... the other, through a scientific analysis of reality, making its own acceptance of social change and development of the workers'

consciousness as fundamental to eradicate economic, social, and political injustices (Quoted in Sierra Pop 329).

His assessment is more ambitious than real for it is not clear that the 'scientific' line of analysis was substantial in any way. If it did exist, it was probably limited to a very select number of people within the church. While liberation theology commentators are keen to play up the degree of commitment and activity on the part of members of the church, Yvon Le Bot is not as generous.

Les programmes qui ont vu un début d'application dans le Quiché (peu ont été menés jusqu'à leur terme tel qu'il était conçu au niveau des projets) sont apparus dans leurs véritable dimension: mesures d'assistance (dont l'écoulement de divers surplus constitue la forme la plus explicite) plus que leviers du développement. L'assistance même sous les formes plus «progressistes» des écoles, des routes et des hôpitaux, etc., produit la dépendance quand elle n'est pas accompagnée de la destruction des structures de domination et des mécanismes d'exploitation (Le Bot 1977: 237.).

If Melendez' claims are overly generous, Lebot's are overly critical. While his concerns over the charitable nature of the projects and their failure to confront the structures of oppression may be accurate, he underestimates two aspects of the developmentalist phase. First, during this period, the church established organizations at the community, departmental, and national level that drew heavily upon the people of the Altiplano. In the Departments of Quiché and Huehuetenango in which the peasants had enthusiastically participated in Arbenz' land reform of 1954 and had subsequently been represented by local latifundia, the *Acción Católica* and co-ops provided an organizational structure with which to confront and deal with the deteriorating conditions in the rural sector. As Melville argues, the guerilla organization EGP concentrated on the Quiché because it was the area

in which rural organizations were the strongest (Melville 1983:25). And second, the organization of education, stressing literacy training and conscientization was an important avenue for raising consciousness in rural areas, both for the pastoral agents applying the programs and for the peasantry and semi-proletariat. In one of the most famous individual testimonials to emerge from Guatemala, Rigoberta Menchu in 'Me llamo Rigoberta Menchu' explains how the process of conscientization worked. In discussing *Acción Católica* she says "Acción Católica too, submitted us to tremendous oppression. It kept our people dormant while others took advantage of our passivity" (Burgos Debray. 122)

While one must suppose that the inhabitants of the Altiplano were critical of the nature of their lives prior to the advent of a socially committed church, the training programs developed by the "guerillas for peace" and other pastoral agents were instrumental in systematizing and explaining various critiques of the Guatemalan society in a way that had previously not been attempted by the guerilla groups of the sixties who relied on the Cuban style foco theory of guerilla warfare. The efforts at raising political consciousness of the peasantry by the pastoral agents in the Western Highlands began to bear fruit by the late seventies as we shall see.

The institutional church, including the Maryknollers and other pastoral agents, embraced USAID and modernization theories of development in the mid-sixties. However, the faith of the agents in the viability of this model of development was severely tested in the mid-seventies by events surrounding reconstruction efforts of Guatemala after a massive earthquake (Fernandez de Laserna 55). On February 4, 1976, earthquakes rocked Guatemala killing 22,000 people, injuring 77,000 more, and leaving one million people homeless. The Laugerud junta attempted to

avoid the scandalous misappropriation of funds which had been so damaging to Somozas in Nicaragua by setting up a National Reconstruction Committee to oversee the reconstruction efforts. While the move was successful in deflecting much of the corruption that plagued Nicaragua's construction efforts, it was not very successful at promoting and distributing materials to those hardest hit (Plant chs. 1-2).

Archbishop Casariego "interpreted the earthquake as a punishment of God" (Sierra Pop 344); the Bishops, members of the clergy, and Catholic lay organizations responded somewhat less apocalyptically. The immediate response was the organization of a broad coalition under the Catholic organization CARITAS to provide emergency relief. However, as planners did not develop a long-term organizational program beyond emergency relief, the coalition began to collapse in less than two months. As business, government, army, and death squads used the opportunity of the quake to unleash a new wave of violence against unions and popular organizations, the *Comite Cristiano*, broke away from CARITAS and began to pressure the Episcopal Conference to issue a clearer denunciation of the social and political situation.

Their pressure was successful and while Archbishop Casariego was out of the country, the Bishops published a pastoral letter entitled 'United in Hope' in which they presented their strongest critique yet concerning the political, economic, and social situation in the country. Using vocabulary taken from Medellin like "situation of sin" and "institutionalized violence" to describe the political climate in Guatemala, the Bishops chastised the "so-called upper classes" for "giving in to immorality, the immoderate desire for profit, and the insatiable search for pleasure" (Richard and Melendez:221). In discussing land-tenure and agrarian reform:

Most of the arable land is in the hands of an insignificant minority of the population, while the bulk of the peasants lack even a bit of land of their own for their own crops.... The oligarchy, which has insistently tried to maintain its privileged situation at the expense of a whole population being marginalized has been upset over the few labour reforms in our laws. (Berryman 1984[1]: 182).

They remarked upon "tensions between social classes, eruption of violence, and limited participation of the people in the management of the commonwealth" (Richard and Melendez:221). In discussing Nebaj in Quiché they denounced conditions where "peasants often die for the crime of defending lands they have held peacefully for a long time" (Berryman 1984: 183).

The pastoral letter, while not mentioning the army and right-wing death squads by name, for the first time pointed the finger at the army. Pastoral agents and groups united under the Comité Cristiano received the letter with "satisfaction and interest" and quickly popularized it as a tool in the base communities. However, upon Casariego's return, the document was recalled and sent to gather dust in the archives (Richard and Melendez:222).

In 1977 the systematic repression of the base of the Roman Catholic church began in earnest. The important turning point in the eyes of the army was the execution by EGP guerillas of the "Tiger of Ixcán" in Northern El Quiché on June 7, 1975. Though the band was small and had been operating in the region for three years doing propaganda work, its first act brought swift retribution. The army planes and helicopters searched the whole area. Paratroopers raided the colonizing communities organized by Luis Gurriaran and William Woods. Thirty-seven cooperative leaders and catechists were

kidnapped - twenty eight of them forced to dig their own graves before being executed. In 1976 army kidnapping in the area of Nebaj, Chajul and Cortzal increased and bombings began. Again, catechists were high on the list (Plant:91). Father Woods, devoted to "developmentalist" work, died in a mysterious plane crash in November 1976.

The war against the cooperative movement spread rapidly and the Army proposals amongst other things tried to develop the first model hamlet scheme in 1976 in Ixcán to replace the cooperative structure already in place. The scheme called for 64 hamlets equipped with basic services but the sites chosen for these villages were generally on land unable to support large settlements over the long term. Eventually the army resorted to "settlement by coercion" in bringing 12,000 more peasants into the Ixcán to join the few already there (Black 1983:13).

While the catechists in the Ixcán came under suspicion, those elsewhere continued to organize and politicize the campesinos. The Miners March from Ixtahuacán, Huehuetenango arrived in the capital to be greeted by an estimated 100,000. The march was organized in part by CNT leader Mario Muja who worked for years at the Maryknoll Centre for Integral Development in Huehuetenango (Berryman 1984[1]:186). Elsewhere in Quiché, in the villages of Xolcnay and Pulay, catechists began to spread out carrying the message of community health centres, schools, and agricultural extension to the other villages in the Nebaj area (GCE Sept-Oct 1984:16). In the village of Tzalbal, to the North West of Nebaj, the accomplishments of the village prior to the wave of repression which began in 1976 were momentous: In a village of 5,600, there were committees for piped water ; beekeeping, Caritas committee, school committee, bilingual promoters, and development workers. The projects which the various committees had

undertaken included sheep rearing, bee-keeping, credit and savings cooperatives, school building, latrine building, literacy, and nutrition. By the end of the mid-sixties the collective efforts in this community had borne fruit. There were four community centres, seven schools, sports fields, a health centre, bridges, piped water, and an *auxiliatura* (Indian municipal building). The impetus provided by grass roots organizing had certainly produced remarkable results. And the village of Tzalbal was by no means an isolated instance of the organizing of the church (IGE *ibid* 117).

In many respects, the repression against the church followed the Banzer plan worked out by the C.I.A. in Bolivia to deal with the church there that had chosen to work systematically with the poor. The cornerstone of this approach was not to attack the church as an institution but to focus rather on those elements that were most committed. Point 7 of the Banzer plan is revealing for it presages what was to become a not unusual tactic in Guatemala against the church: It states that: "Black-listed priests should be apprehended in deserted streets or in the countryside. The agents should be in civies and in taxis taken for the purpose" (Alvaro Oviado and Stephan Mamonteir 1986:5). And while this became the *modus operandi* of the death squads, it was not the approach preferred by the more right-wing politicians.

In 1977 Vice President Sandoval Alarcon attending the inaugural congress of the World Anti-Communist League, denounced "the church in Latin America as a propagator of communism". The reaction within the church hierarchy was immediate. Cardinal Casariego reminded Sandoval Alarcon of the role of the church in liberating Guatemala from Arbenz and went out of his way to equate the struggle with communism as "amputating a cancerous part of the body". Many of the Bishops were outraged by this

response and Bishop Prospero Penados of San Marcos presented a poignant rejoinder:

"is communism to preoccupy oneself with education of the people where more than half of the inhabitants are illiterate, or for the health of the people who have high levels of endemic infirmity and infant mortality, or the sanction of the church for development programs leading toward the alleviation of hunger or misery of the people? Or denouncing unemployment, low and unjust salaries, inhuman working conditions, and racial discrimination? Denouncing torture, disappearance and death of so many innocent?...That the church gave its support to organizations and movements striving for a more dignified and human life?...If this is communism Senor Vice-President, yes, we are communists, from Pope Paul VI to the Bishops who signed the document 'United in Hope' (Melendez 228).

The event that "contributed to the increasing internal contradictions" within the church was undoubtedly the Massacre at Panzos in which over 100 Kekchi Indians were massacred by the army on May 29, 1978. The Indians who had a land tenure dispute with the coffee baron Ricardo Sapper Corcha, were met by a detachment of troops from the military garrison at Zacapa. When the firing was over, 119 to 140 were dead. Many witnesses agreed that the graves had been dug prior to the massacre with earth-moving equipment owned by the local MLN politician Flayo Monzon (Black 1983:103). The strategic importance of Panzos and the surrounding area in the Transversal is particularly important to the development of export-mining and cattle ranching operations that had started in the region (see Aguilar, Maloney).

The response from the church was immediate; even the hierarchy joined the condemnation. The Lucas Garcia government attempted to blame the massacre on the local parish priest who had stirred up the residents of Panzos. A host of organizations published denunciations against the military

and the MLN spokesmen who tried to blame the church. CONFREGUA took a very strong stand but they were outflanked by the newly-formed Committee for Justice and Peace.

Emerging from some of the urban petty-bourgeois Catholic groups was the Guatemalan Committee for Justice and Peace which was formed after the Panzos massacre. The coalition emerged from urban lay organizations; those centred around the Catholic magazine 'Dialogo', some who were pastoral workers, and others from the Catholic intellectuals, who were attempting to deepen the commitment of the church to the 'poor' and began as "an organization claiming to unite and coordinate all those Christians who as members of the church, in practice and in different forms, opt and commit themselves to the poor, their struggles, their organization, and their historical project of liberation and who, in this option, want to express and live their Christian faith and contribute to the construction of the Popular church" (Galeano 1983:240).—

The mandate of the organization was broad. It was committed to organizing cursillos, courses to teach about the economic and political foundations of Guatemala and their implications for the Christian faith; to denouncing massacres, disappearances, and cases of torture, of devising new celebrations of the sacraments along the lines developed by Ernesto Cardenal's groups on the island of Solentiname in Nicaragua; of writing, publishing, and disseminating popularized educational comic-books for the use of catechists in their communities; and of generally helping with the expansion, growth, and preservation of the Iglesia Popular in Guatemala (Galeano 1983:242). As George Black describes the organization:

Moving rapidly from a stand against repression into active opposition to the existing social order, justice and peace swiftly became one of the most broadly based of the popular organization (Black 1984:103).

Even more interesting in 1978, was the formation of the Peasant Unity Committee (CUC) on May 1. CUC was a new level of organization in rural Guatemala highlands. It represented an attempt at federation between cooperatives, peasant leagues, and "perhaps - most important - Christian base groups" (Black 1984:104). The dissatisfaction within the highlands with existing political organizations was expressed. Even the church based organizations were dissatisfied with the pace and sensitivity of the clergy to their conditions. Rigoberta Menchu expressed it clearly:

I mean, it is clear that a priest never works in the fincas, picking cotton or coffee. Many priests don't even know what cotton is. But our reality teaches us that as Christians, we must create a church of the poor, that we don't need a church imposed from outside which knows nothing of hunger (Bugos-Debray 133).

CUC was primarily an Indian organization dedicated to "uproot the tree of exploitation" and organize a national peasant movement uniting both Indian and Ladino groups. The work of building the organization took five years and originated in the departments of El Quiché, and Chimaltenango but quickly spread to San Marcos, Huehuetenango, and then to the plantations. It bridged various language groups and managed to work politicizing the migrants at the base -- their village. Peasant organizers tried to coordinate land invasions and settle land conflicts in the highlands but achieved their greatest success in organizing the plantation workers. Initially the organization was semi-official but as military death squads struggled to contain it by assassinating peasant leaders, it took on a more clandestine role,

broke with the CNUS, and began to operate in a manner similar to the guerilla organizations (Concerned Guatemalan Scholars 29. McClintock 1985:133-45). They organized and carried their message in sometimes unconventional style. On plantations, workers confronted by a lack of billboards and walls began to paint their slogans on cattle. Then as landowners began to slaughter these beasts, CUC propagandists turned to painting stray dogs instead with the slogans "Viva CUC" and "GPR" ("Guerra Populara Revolucionaria - Popular Revolutionary War") (Black 1984:105). It is unlikely that CUC could have been organized without the support of catequistas and BCC coordinators, and clearly CUC represented in an indirect way, the product of over a decade of pastoral planning committed to the highland peasantry by the pastoral agents of the church. While the ideology and the aims of the movement were not necessarily those expressed by all members of the Popular church, it was generally believed that the Popular church was instrumental in bringing CUC into fruition (Bendana [2] 1984: Burgos-Debray 7). The organizing skills developed by the catequistas harnessed to a nation-wide movement was an important catalyst in the highlands for making the peasantry and rural proletariat aware of the nature of the economic system exploiting them.

In 1979, as the military campaign against the Catholic church mounted, the tensions within the church became more pronounced. Cardinal Casariego pressured the Bishops to abstain from politics. He affirmed that "class struggle is an activity which must be rejected as anti-Christian" (Melendez 234). Seven bishops resigned as a statement against the Cardinal's continued obstruction of episcopal efforts to denounce human rights violations. The official position of the hierarchy:

If a priest or religious opts to enlist in any political faction or subversive group, he ceases to belong to the pastoral organisms of the church and the hierarchy cannot therefore take any responsibility for his subsequent actions (Black 1988:104).

A similar sentiment was expressed by the Apostolic Administrator of the Peten (San Martin 1983:35).

As the repression intensified, the Christian catequistas became increasingly outspoken and concerned with developing means of protecting themselves (Antonio Bran 18; Burgos Debray 131-135). The following year matters became even worse as repression against the catequistas in the Peten became even more ferocious. In late January of 1980, leaders of CUC and Christian groups from El Quiché made a special trip to Guatemala City in order to call for an independent inquiry into the violence, the army atrocities. The Ambassador of Spain was seen as the most likely intermediary in this process as the Diocese of Quiché was staffed primarily by Spanish missionaries who had been describing the atrocities to the Embassy. At 2 a.m. that morning the police attacked the Embassy and by morning, the bodies of thirty-nine peasant leaders were pulled from the debris. One peasant leader, Gregorio Yuja Xona survived and was taken to hospital. The next day he was dragged from his hospital bed by 'unknown assailants'. His mutilated corpse was dumped at the University of San Carlos later the same day.

The Spanish Embassy massacre, like Panzos before it, forced the Popular church to question its links to the hierarchy and those 'mas comprometido' began to move more quickly towards working for revolutionary change. Soon after the massacre, the Vicente Menchu Revolutionary Christian Front was formed - named after one of the Christian

leaders killed in the Spanish Embassy (Galeano 1983:250 Also see IGE Bolet no. 5 March on CRVM mandate 1981).

From the late seventies onwards, Catholics, and catequistas especially were a principal target of the 'kaibiles' (specially trained counterinsurgency units) in their genocidal sweeps through the highlands. The testimonies of survivors in the late seventies and early eighties describe terrifying scenes. The church became the 'Church of the Catacombs' (Pax Christi:37). In a chilling story, one survivor who escaped the scene described how one afternoon the 'kaibiles' entered the village and called a meeting in the village square. The commander asked for the Catequistas of the village to present themselves. Slowly, five men detached themselves from the crowd in front of him and came forward, in a calm voice he announced that as catequistas were communists, and as it was a crime to harbour communists he would leave the village with two choices. First, they could take the machetes he was offering them, take the five catechists, all with extended families in the village, and hacked them to death. Alternatively, they could keep the catequistas alive and he would be back the next day to massacre the entire village and raze the huts to the ground. That evening, the catequistas convinced the rest of the village that it was better for the five to die than for the village to disappear (Bermudez 1985:25-30).

Under such conditions, the Bishop of El Quiché, Monsignor Juan Gerardi was forced to take a more active role in opposing the army. On February 2 1980 the Diocese issued a statement condemning the military for their role in the Spanish Embassy massacre. Then on March 11, 1980, another pastoral statement from the diocese referred to the military as murderers. On July 20 1980, after two priests, countless numbers of catequistas, and repeated attempts on the Bishop's life, Bishop Juan Gerardi called together the

religious of the Diocese and announced that he intended to withdraw from the diocese, in order to pursue other methods of opposing the violence. In explaining his actions Gerardi stated "it is an extreme measure as was the extreme situation being lived in El Quiché (Fernand de Laserna:136). In October 1980, Gerardi spoke again: "The people are in a situation of great persecution, a situation which is not precisely a dialectic of army-church or state-church, but rather army - people and state - people; and the church, as a servant of the people must be involved" (author's translation) (IGE Boletín Oct. 1980: 1).

Gerardi went to Rome to press his case more forcefully in front of the Curia and before the Pope. The 25 religious and 18 priests who left the Diocese went into exile in Costa Rica and some of them started up a new and radical voice for Christians in Guatemala called the Guatemalan church in Exile (Erlick 1981: 6).

The organization rapidly surpassed Comité Pro Justicia y Paz in its critical stance towards the military. The organization, which was constituted in San Jose Costa Rica in August 1980, outlined three objectives. First, it dedicated itself to responding and helping the Guatemalan people in their actions of liberation; second, to offer Guatemalans in exile "a possibility to organize themselves and pursue active struggle against the oppressive forces"; and third, to allow the Christians of the world to participate in the evangelic wealth of the process of liberation of our people in Guatemala and gain their solidarity in favour of it". In a stirring clarion call IGE concluded with "Christians solidaryize yourselves with the liberation struggle of the people of Guatemala" (Nisqua church Packet no.2).

They became an important source of documentation on the reaction of the popular organizations to the increasing counterinsurgency program of

the military. IGE not only kept archives and sent fact-finding missions into Guatemala but they were instrumental in providing emergency relief aid to the thousands who fled into the highland mountains and to Mexico to avoid the army raids.

By mid-1980, there was a general feeling amongst the four revolutionary groups, committed pastoral agents, and various political fronts that the revolution was imminent. José Antonio Bran in 'Popular Organization and Class Struggle in the Country' described the situation as "the last stages of an openly pre-insurreccional phase" and that "now more than ever, and for the unity as well, victory is an objective possibility in the class struggle... Without any triumphalism, without any overestimation of the correlation of forces" (Antonio Bran 1980:15). The success of the Nicaraguan Revolution, the apparent inability of the military counterinsurgency program to confront the spreading insurrection, and the on-going discussions between the various revolutionary organizations attempting to form a broader political and military alliance all contributed to this sense of optimism.

One priest I talked with concerning this period recounted a comi-tragic episode in El Quiché in his parish. Two peasants came to him to seek his help as an adjudicator in the settlement of a conflict over land-use in the village. During the long process of negotiations, the Nicaraguan Revolution triumphed and these campesinos felt themselves directly involved. The dispute was settled the next time quite amicably as the peasants announced to the priest that very soon the revolution would succeed in Guatemala and then land would be nationalized and redistributed. Thus their squabbling over this land might as well wait until after the revolution

As the repression against the church intensified in El Quiché, Solola, Huehuetenango, El Peten, and San Marcos, the guerilla organizations began to re-examine their ideological positions on the Catholic church as they realized not only the degree of organization, but also the degree of commitment of many catequistas to the revolutionary struggle inspired by their faith. In July 1980 the Guatemalan Army of the Poor issued an intriguing communique to "Those Christians who Struggle Alongside the People". It pointed out that "the truth is that every day there are more Christians, both on a base level, and throughout the hierarchy who, faced with the grave misery and merciless repression suffered by the majority of Guatemalans, have stopped supporting and giving a facade of legitimacy to the voracious interests of the rich and the government". It concluded with the following statement:

All the lay preachers, priests, nuns, and religious, Catholic or Protestant, have an open door in the Guerilla Army of the Poor if they want to share with us the unshakable struggle we are waging in the countryside and in the city. There is a place for each and every one on this path of hope for all the poor of Guatemala. In our country one cannot be a Christian and not a revolutionary. One cannot love his fellow human beings and not play a serious and concrete role in the popular war whether this be in the guerilla organization or in the different militant mass organizations. In any of the work taken up by true and committed Christians, they can count on our fullest revolutionary solidarity (EGP 1983: 147-148).

The FAR extended the same invitation not long afterwards. In order to persuade rural campesinos of the seriousness of their commitment, EGP guerillas began to work to protect the catequistas from military repression and in some parts of the country, Christian celebrations were only possible because of the protection provided by the revolutionary organizations (Jose

Gutierrez 1982: 52-54). At the same time, some priests became active collaborators of the guerillas offering sanctuary, supplies and logistical support. One such is Sr. Sean MacKenna who joined the EGP and fought on the northern front in El Quiché. In an interview with a Mexican journalist MacKenna said:

The project of the EGP is the same as the project of the Christians: to form a united people, in solidarity, with a consciousness of being the people, of being equal, of being brothers, where there is respect amongst all and full liberty (IGE Bol.9 Aug 1981:pg. 8).

As the Catequistas increasingly became the focus of military repression in the highlands, more subtle methods of counterinsurgency were deployed. In the early eighties it was common practice to use members of the *Patrulla Autodefensa Civil* (PACs), the "voluntary" civil defense patrols, as cannon fodder sending them out on patrols in front of the army detachments and local military organizers often sought catequistas as primary 'volunteers' in order to sever the links between the catequistas and the rest of the population by sowing mistrust, or better yet having the catequistas killed by the guerillas (Simon 1986:80).

The Catholic Hierarchy has, in this instance taken a strong stand against PAC's calling for their elimination in each Pastoral Letter since May 1983. In 'Confirmed in Faith' (May 22 1983) PAC's were described as "an imposed service of obligatory nature that falls almost exclusively on peasants and Indians". And in "Building Peace" (June 1984) the Episcopal Conference stated "What most worries us is the moral damage affecting our brothers' conscience when they are obligated to act against innocent people and when they are encouraged to act with a war-like spirit" (Simon 1986:81).

In El Quiché, the abandoned churches and chapels in the Diocese were either destroyed by the army or occupied by units on a permanent basis as barracks, others on a temporary basis. In January 1981, an attempt was made to re-open the Diocese but the next month another priest was assassinated and once again it was closed. In 1983 again an attempt was made with an Apostolic Administrator, a native of El Quiché and in a limited fashion, the Diocese continued to operate henceforward.

It is difficult to estimate with certainty the direct impact of the counterinsurgency campaign of Rios Montt. The estimates, however, are appalling: 50-70,000 dead since 1978, 35,000 disappeared, 1 million people displaced either in the mountains or in refugee camps in Mexico and El Salvador, or within Guatemala itself, 150,000 refugees abroad, 440 villages destroyed, and 70 model villages "protecting" their inhabitants (IGE 6-1 1986-2). Of this tally, it is difficult to determine the approximate numbers of religious who suffered persecution. Between January 1980 and June 1981 Comité pro Justicia y Paz produced a breakdown of the persecution against the church personnel defined in this case as religious or clergy. The vast majority of the attacks were against foreign clergy and many of them left the country in response to these attacks. There is general agreement on the number of priests killed in 1982 as 12; some of these priests had no links whatsoever to the guerillas nor were they supportive of the revolutionary *proyecto*. By 1980, the number of catequistas killed in El Quiché was 400, with 60 in San Marcos, Solola, and Escuintla (Fernand de Laserna: 60). This estimate leaves out many of the departments in which the counter-insurgency program was intense and was established in 1980 prior to the more systematic genocidal wave. By 1985, the estimates of catequistas and pastoral workers slain was put at 10,000 by the Catholic Institute of International Relations (CAIIR 1985:849). The

catequistas occupied a precarious rung in the church and were the most visible element to be targeted. An example of the ambivalent attitude of the church hierarchy towards the catequistas was offered by an unusually frank interview of the apostolic administrator in El Peten, Mons. Avila. When asked if the pastoral agents in his diocese had met with violent death he replied:

Priests and religious no. Catequistas yes. I would not be able to say how many. It is difficult to give a number since some die violently, others leave the Peten and still more move from one area to another. Yes, I believe the number is rather high (San Martin 1983:35).

By 1983, the church hierarchy was moving away from the popular church. In 'To Construct Peace', the conference of Bishops described the guerillas as "at the margin of the orderly, peaceful movement of the people"(LADOC 15:2 Pg.4). The next year, the same conference endorsed Ratzinger's instruction as a "sane doctrine" versus liberation theology which preached "messianisms that fracture the unity of our faith and obstruct the unity among people"(LADOC 15:3 ,pg.25). The guerillas are "ably organized and guided by extremist sectors and stimulated by messianic ideals which fall into violent subversive ways"(CEDELA;5). As the Guatemalan military's *Plan Nacional* called for the return to democratic rule, a front for continued military control of the key sectors of the Guatemalan economy, the church hierarchy tried to build bridges to support the *Partida Democratica Cristiana* and work within the context of the 'political opening'. When Bishop Prospero de Penados was installed as the archbishop, the hierarchy began rehabilitating the traditional "Third Way", and under pressure from the Vatican and CELAM, support for pastoral planning began to wane(CEDELA 1986:22). The 'Church of the Poor' became the church of the widows and the

orphans; "the church of silence", (Comite pro Justicia y Paz 1987:5). A study undertaken by the juvenile division of the Guatemalan Supreme Court estimated that over 200,000 children had lost at least one parent since 1980. Various base Christian groups have turned to helping the widows and orphans resulting in further persecution against those involved, (CEDELA 1986:17)

The military repression has succeeded in silencing the church and ending any grass-roots planning and education. The 'Church of the Poor' continues in exile through organizations like the Guatemalan church in Exile and the Comite Pro Justicia y Paz but the experiment within the country is moribund and there is little likelihood that it can be resurrected. In 'Guatemalan Christians between pain and Hope', the Comite Pro Justicia y Paz described the situation as "a silence of hope, a silence of maturation, a silence of searching, a silence that incubates and rejuvenates the hope that a country so full of blood, tears, heroism, and love cannot fail to produce an abundant harvest" (CPJyP 1986:2:2). With the military still in control of rural Guatemala, and the church backing President Cerezo and the democratic opening, one wonders if the silence is not that of the wake for the dead rather than the announcement of the imminent resurrection.

In the next chapter, I explore the history of the church in Guatemala to find the ecclesiastical roots of the popular church within the church structures. At the same time, we examine changes in the ecclesiastical structures in rural Guatemala, the result of both national class struggles within the church, and of the international demands of Catholicism. I argue that the penetration of capitalism and the resulting differentiation amongst the peasantry are central to any understanding of the process of conversion and radicalization which spawned the popular church.

CHAPTER THREE

God in Guatemala before the Guns

In this chapter I draw a picture of the Guatemalan church prior to the advent of liberation theology and the Popular church.¹ I begin with a discussion of the colonial church and trace its fortunes through the various Guatemalan political eras. While I touch on the continental and global church structures where necessary, the bulk of the chapter deals with church-state relations in Guatemala, religious conversion and its foundations within the class structure of rural Guatemala, the ecclesiastical development and structure of the church in Guatemala, and the development of various pastoral programs which, while ostensibly limited to economic and religious objectives, had very real political designs.

I suggest that the roots of the 'Church of the Poor' are embedded in contradictions within the Catholic church attempting to retain its ideological privileges in an international capitalist mode of production which has displaced it from a position of ideological hegemony. To prevent further erosion of its power, the Catholic church embarked on a program of creating organizations capable of mobilizing public support in defense of church policies and objectives. In Guatemala, the contradiction between creating organizations compatible with European liberal-democratic ideals -- implemented by foreign religious, and opting to pursue political objectives determined by the Guatemalan landed oligarchy and foreign capital was manifested in the various forms of opposition we explored in chapter two.

¹ This event coincided rather closely with the Second General Episcopal Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM), held in Medellín in 1968.

As Gramsci noticed in his study of Roman Catholicism's adaptations to capitalism in Italy, the church was forced to reorder its project in order to deal more efficiently with the liberal bourgeois society. He pointed to the emergence of semi-lay organizations like Catholic Action (AC) and Catholic labour unions as the major tools of the church in the new age. What was not apparent at the time, was the susceptibility of these institutions to become a religious terrain for class struggles.

In this chapter, I focus on the historical evolution of the Catholic church from the colonial era up to the early sixties. The colonial and independence eras established the Catholic church in Guatemala as a major force in the highlands. However, due to financial constraints and political opposition, the church was amorphous and understaffed at the turn of the twentieth century. When the church hierarchy launched into re-"evangelizing" the highlands from the 1930s onwards, they did so in the context of a rapidly changing class structure amongst the Indians. The class basis of the "new converts" and the way in which cultural notions of indigenous unity were crucial factors in the shaping of a Popular church in the late 1960s.

Historical accounts of the colonial church dwell on Fray Bartolome de Las Casas, a Dominican monk and early medieval crusader against unbridled exploitation of Indians in sixteenth century Guatemala. He condemned Spanish colonists for their treatment of these 'simple souls' and threatened to excommunicate the worst offenders. In his pastoral work The Only Way, he pleaded for a peaceful evangelization to be undertaken without the use of arms, (Pro Mundi Vita p.5). Paradoxically, when questioned on how the Spanish settlers should acquire labour to develop their estates Las Casas' solution was to have black slaves imported from the Caribbean (Van Oss 8).⁴

Though Las Casas did become the Bishop of New Spain, his attempts to protect the Indians from the avaricious grasp of the colonial settlers were unsuccessful. The emerging colonial landed oligarchy felt that Caribbean slaves were not as adaptable as the local Indians and could not work in the highlands, consequently, the colony had to rely on the Indians.

After the death of Las Casas, the church adopted a more conciliatory position toward the state in Guatemala the Roman Catholic church began supporting the crown in many of its initiatives. During the colonial era, the Roman Catholic church was pre-eminently concerned with evangelizing the indigenous peoples and catering to the needs of the Spanish settlers in Guatemala. The growth of Christianity in the new world was carried out by the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Mercedarians whose rivalry led to "carving up the Guatemalan highlands into distinct fiefs, which each order guarded jealously from the others" (Van Oss 46).

In an intriguing study of the colonial church in Guatemala, Adriaan Van Oss argues that, far from seeing New Spain as economically expedient, the Spanish empire considered the "conversion of the native population to Christianity a sine qua non for colonization" (Van Oss 181) because:

Spanish colonialism in the New World rested upon the premise of a medieval concept of order. America and its inhabitants confronted Europe not only with an opportunity for economic expansion but with a theological challenge. The New World was assigned a place in an old order, a scheme of creation descending as links in a chain from the Almighty Father through angels, ether, stars and fortune, to man, and below man, to the animals, plants, and stones of the earth (Van Oss 184).

By capturing the prominent souls in the Guatemalan Indian communities in the sixteenth century and by obtaining their consent for mass

conversions to Christianity (albeit nominal Christianity on the part of the converts), the church established itself as an administrative institution to govern indigenous peoples prior to 1600 (Van Oss 162). Indeed the process of villagization in the Guatemalan highlands, launched in the late sixteenth century, was carried out under the auspices of the various religious orders. Two thirds of all settlements founded during the colonial period came into being before 1600 (Van Oss 182).

As nominal Christianity was grafted onto existing Mayan religious systems, the development of religious lay confraternities took on special importance. These confraternities (*cofradías*) were modeled on Spanish *cofradías* of the eleventh and twelfth century. Beside serving as a mutual aid society, the *cofradía* was developed as a "voluntary society formed by individuals motivated by the desire to worship or pay homage to a particular saint of their choice" (Van Oss 89). The *cofradías* were supervised by the parish priest and were his most important source of income for the parish as the priest would be paid to perform various ceremonies including masses, baptisms, marriages, and elections. In 1775 the diocese of Guatemala counted 1,963 *cofradías* with a combined capital of 290,000 pesos, 42,000 head of cattle, and more than 10,000 horses. Of these *cofradías*, the vast majority were amongst the indigenous peoples. The *alcalde mayor* of the province of Suchitepáquez estimated that 160,000 man-days a year were lost to agriculture in his department alone. This translated into fifty times as much labour devoted to the religious observances of the *cofradías* as was spent annually on road-building and repairs (Van Oss 91-92).

The instalment of a "Liberal" government after Independence on September 15, 1821 led to the decline of the church. The first two Guatemalan legislatures passed harsh anti-clerical laws which suppressed personal service

to priests and forms of parish revenue including the reduction of tithes by half. Between 1815-1825 parish incomes declined by one-third and in 1829, a decree of the Guatemalan assembly expropriated the possessions of the religious orders. Complaints by the Archbishop and religious communities led to the expulsions of the litigants from the country. Between 1805-1872 the total number of priests dropped from 453 to 119 and the Roman Catholic church never recovered (Van Oss 187). During the rest of the 'liberal' era the church remained at roughly the same size to the point where in 1944 the number of priests in the country was just 120 (Holleran 236). In contrast to some other Latin American states, the church in Guatemala remained a peripheral force throughout the liberal era. The religious worked predominantly in the capital. The Diocese of Huehuetenango with a population of 176,000 people had only two priests in 1944 (Van Oss 187). The church was small, politically weak, and limited in its geographic range of activities.

After 1930 when missionaries and priests began to filter back into the countryside, they encountered a vibrant religion that contained elements of Spanish colonial Christianity and pre-colonial mythological beliefs. While the *cofradias* generally welcomed the arrival of the Catholic priest to perform mass, give sermons, and take his rightful place in village life, the priests, on the other hand, viewed the '*buen catolicos*' of rural Guatemala as sheep who had strayed from the fold. The return of the priest to the local church became a great disappointment, for far from embracing the community, the priests admonished it and began to create a new community, the 'new Catholics'. The Catholics of the fifties were organically linked to a revamped Catholicism which repudiated the '*costumbres*'. The Catholicism of the missionaries was based squarely on 'converting' the Indians to a "purer" form of Catholicism.

The excessive veneration of saints was attacked and fiestas on saints days discouraged. But the most common source of conflict between the *cofradías* and the emergent Catholicism was over the control of the keys to the church and church properties. In a number of documented cases, this struggle reached violent proportions (Brintnall 118) with the priest having to leave the community in order to protect his life (Brintnall 118, Sexton 249). Jim Handy argues that the competition for control over the local church stemmed from competition for access to the municipal lands held by the church in each parish. As access to productive land was an important source of capital formation for kulak farmers and petty-bourgeois traders who hired *colonos* to work their small plots, and an important source of subsistence for impoverished small peasants, the religious struggles between *catequistas* and members of the *cofradías* acquired increasing importance (Handy 1985:335).

The reintroduction of missionaries, Protestant and Catholic, occurred during the fifties and sixties. While the competition between the religious personnel was intense in places, both made substantial headway in gaining 'converts'. Though it is difficult to argue that these conversions were necessarily determined by changes in the class struggle, clearly the complex process of the proletarianization of the peasantry combined with differentiation within rural communities in the highlands provides sufficient grounds for arguing that the basis of the religious transformation lies in the penetration of capitalism into rural Guatemala.

As capitalism expanded into rural Guatemala the impoverished *minifundia* were forced to engage in other practices while rich and middle peasants expanded their land holdings and engaged in petty-commodity production. In the departments of Huehuetenango and El Quiché, inequality in land holding increased dramatically. In 1940, 2.5 percent of the Indians

owned 31 percent of the land in El Quiché and 1.3 percent of the Indians owned 26 percent of the land in Huehuetenango. Average landholdings in the central highland departments of Totonicapan, Solola, and Sacatepequez were less than half the size of those in the north (Handy 1985:304) and the 'middle peasants' were preserved from the semi-proletarianization which characterized the northern departments (C. Smith 1984[2]:67). The emergence of an indigenous petty-bourgeoisie which had dislodged ladinos from various sectors such as labour recruitment of migrant workers to the coastal estates, transportation, and some commercial farming, led to a sharpening of rural class antagonisms amongst the indigenous (Schmid 1973:187). With the emergence of Protestantism and "New Catholicism" as religious alternatives, both with links extending beyond the community, ethnic group, and region, the ideological and social hegemony exerted by the costumbristas was challenged. There is virtual unanimity that the process of conversion from the costumbres, or *cofradías* represents "a symbol of class antagonism", however the specific class nature of the various movements still remains to be investigated.

Before exploring this issue in detail, we should briefly explore the concept of indigenous itself. The indigenous question has bedeviled Guatemalan theorists for decades. The centrality of the issue to the political reality of the popular struggle has raised the question to one of the first order. Hebert, Bockler and Guzman outlined the definitive position for the radical indigenists in their treatise of the early seventies. They argue that the revolutionary agent in Guatemala is the indigenous for it is they who are the most exploited and oppressed of the society. While cognizant of the growing class divisions within the indigenous people including the formation of an Indian bourgeoisie, they argue that:

L'existence de couches sociales différentes à l'intérieur de la classe «indigène» n'élimine pas un fait fondamental: elle constitue la classe la plus exploitée qui a résisté à quatre siècles et demi d'imperialisme; c'est pourquoi nous pensons que cela la qualifie, elle plus que toute autre, pour approfondir le mouvement de libération et de révolution agraire déjà en marche (Herbert 1970:125).

Jim Handy argues that the existence of these strong communitarian ties makes the application of class analysis misleading for it cannot account for, nor properly integrate, the centrality of community relations and identification. While it is possible to examine differentiation in terms of access to means of production, it is difficult to formally distinguish between the various peasant factions as the ideological stress on community identification still prevails (Handy 1985:304-5).

Carol Smith presents a new formulation of the problem which stresses the subjective perception of the actors. She suggests:

An Indian 'class' does not now exist nor has it ever. But a long-standing subjective reality in Guatemala - for both Indians and non-Indians has been that Indians form a class, whether that class is considered peasant, proletariat, or an oppressed racial category, and this belief has shaped real and material political struggles. In so doing it has created a class of Indian political actors (C.Smith 1984[1]:9).

My suspicion is that there are very real factors mitigating against the application of a formal class analysis to the rural reality. There are linguistic divisions within communities, between various ethnic groups, and between the Indigenous and the Ladino as a whole. Moreover the process of proletarianization is both uneven and incomplete. It is most advanced in the labour-exporting departments of the north but even in Huehuetenango and El

Quiché, there is a large body of "semi-proletariat" engaged in labour migrations and sub-subsistence farming (Ibarra 1980:161). Herbert's assertion that there is a unified class of Indians is also unacceptable for clearly there are major divisions within the Indians which cannot be wiped away by a wave of an ideological wand. The penetration of capitalism is creating a class of indigenous rural semi-proletariat who are directly linked through the labour process to the agroexport estates on the coast. Clearly, both groups are subject to various modes of exploitation achieved through mechanisms of exchange and production. I would also suggest that there is a growing class of rich peasants producing primarily for the market who employ labour who are a faction apart from the poor peasants. As we explore the process of proletarianisation it is important to stress that class relations and intra-class relations are constantly in flux.

"The expansion of capitalism has been uneven in Guatemala. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than through the patterns of labour migration to the coastal estates. Lester Schmid, in his study of the 1965-66 labour migration, suggests that approximately 55 percent of the over 200,000 seasonal migrants came from the departments of Huehuetenango, El Quiché, and San Marcos (Schmid 1973:112). In certain departments the growth of capitalist agriculture and the subsequent demands for labour were unevenly distributed throughout the highlands. In the central highland departments of Totonicapan, Quetzaltenango, and Chimaltenango the response to the crisis of peasant production and the ensuing proletarianization was to emphasize the capitalisation of agricultural production through the application of fertilizers for both domestic and market crops and to engage in petty commodity production - artisanal handicrafts for the growing tourist trade (Smith 1984:7). On the other hand the departments of Huehuetenango, San Marcos and El

Quiché, where the population pressure on the land was as great as in the central departments, turned into labour reserves for the South coast coffee and cotton plantations. The process of proletarianization occurred more rapidly increasing the nascent conflicts amongst the threatened Indian peasantry.

The Catholic church administratively began to grow during the 'Ubico' period. Until 1921, the Archdiocese of Guatemala covered the entire country. Then Quetzaltenango in 1921, and Verapaz in 1935 were created as separate dioceses. In 1936 a Papal Nuncio was appointed to Guatemala. As the direct representative of the Holy See, he was responsible for administrative policies and religious appointments. While the Archbishop was the titular head of the church in Guatemala the administrative structure was such that the Bishops were independent of the Archbishop and only responsible to Rome. In issuing pastoral statements, the Archbishop of Guatemala could do so in the name of Guatemalan church. However, the decisions concerning who was appointed as bishop, when, and where new Dioceses were to be created, and negotiating with the government for religious concessions fell under the nuncio's jurisdiction. Though the Nuncio succeeded in obtaining permission for the Jesuits to re-enter the country in 1937 and two Maryknoller priests by way of the United States, he did so with the reluctant approval of Archbishop Rossell y Arellano (appointed in 1937) a staunch nationalist (Calder 52). Under Ubico, the Church's main interest was in insuring the institutional survival of the church in Guatemala (Adams 280).

The 1945 constitution continued many of the restrictions imposed on the church during the liberal era excluding it from owning properties, delegating education to the state sector, and enshrining freedom of religion (Pro Mundi 6). The initial honeymoon between the church and State came to an abrupt end. Over the course of the following years the church hierarchy

increasingly espoused a visceral anti-communism which came to dominate relations between Rossell and the administrations of Arevalo and Arbenz. While confrontation between Rossell and Arevalo remained muted, the tension was pronounced under Arbenz when members of the PGT were in Arbenz' cabinet. At this point Rossell had no hesitation at labeling the entire government as "communist" (Pro Mundi 6). However, despite Rossell's spirited attacks upon the government, the Catholic church under Arevalo and Arbenz fared much better than it had under the liberal caudillos. The number of religious allowed into Guatemala during the 1944-54 increased; the number of hospitals and *collegios* run by the religious, and the amount of pastoral work undertaken by the church also increased substantially (Bendana 372).

The development of the church during the revolutionary period proceeded along lines dictated by the anti-communist sentiment of the Vatican and the Archbishop. Emphasis was placed on three levels of organization. A number of pastoral programs concentrated on education. New colleges like the Collegio Santiago (1945) and a sister college (1949) opened for Indians in the capital (Adams 281). In the department of Quetzaltenango, the Order of the Sacred Heart opened medical clinics, (1952) (Bendana 372). The Maryknollers whose numbers increased steadily after they were ejected from China after the revolution brought with them their successful pastoral program of training catechists.

The second organization was Catholic Action which had a tremendous impact in rural Guatemala through *Accion Catolica Rural*. After an abortive first attempt in the parish in 1934, it began to be applied in earnest after 1945 when Mons. R. Gonzalez, the auxiliary Bishop of los Altos organized it on a diocesan level (Falla 1978:427). *Accion Catolica* was designed as a means of involving lay-people more directly in the work of the church. Catholic Action

in Guatemala was divided into various branches (men, women, girls, and boys), and A.C. Rural. At a national level there was a Presidencia General, and below, a larger council including parishioners. In practical terms A.C. Rural depended heavily upon the enthusiasm of the provincial parish priest for the project. In *Accion Catolica Rural*, the major emphasis was upon teaching the catechism and preparing the population to take the sacraments (Adams 295 Lengyel 1979).

Reasons for its success are many. Most explanations stress the consideration that those who converted to official Catholicism were released from the financial obligation exacted by the Cofradias. However it is clear that the national and international networks of the churches were also a powerful incentive. Though it is difficult to uncover the information on A.C. Rural during the 40s, it is clear that it had a major impact in the countryside. There were many converts and by 1948, the mass movement was enrolled in the struggle against communism.

The third major level of organization was the Church's political wing: the party and labour union. As they were banned from involvement in both politics and labour in Guatemala during the revolutionary decade the church was unable to develop an overt political wing. However, Rossel clandestinely helped launch the *Movimiento de Afiracion Nacional de Cristianidad* (MANC), the political forerunner to the Christian Democratic Party.

By 1950, the tension between Rossell and Arevalo had reached major proportions. On April 5th 1951, the First National Eucharistic Conference was held. Attended by close to 200,000 people drawing principally from A.C. Archbishop Rossell unleashed his most vociferous attack on "communism" to date. The conference bore witness to the growing anti-communism within the church hierarchy and to its ability to mobilize popular support for its aims.

In the same year five new dioceses were created: San Marcos Solola, Jalapa, Zacapa, and El Peten. The thinking was that communist indoctrination was stronger in those zones in which there was little or no church presence, therefore by creating new dioceses more missionaries could protect the parishioners from communist infiltration (Melendez and Richards 198). In 1953 relations between Arbenz and Rossell continued to deteriorate. Rossell launched the National Pilgrimage of the Christ of Esquipulas, the opening of the National Crusade against communism. Two days later the '*Partida Anticomunista Democratica Cristiano*' (PACD) was formed (Bendana 372). Meanwhile the Nuncio convinced Arbenz to allow new religious communities into the country. But in the struggle against communist atheism, Rossell had various comments to make concerning the Pilgrimage of the Image of the Holy Christ:

The presence of the Sacred Christ did more against communists, than if 100 missionaries and millions of books and hundreds of hours of Catholic radio had been dedicated to the anti-communist campaign (Bendana 372).

On December 14, 1953, the Pact of Tegucigalpa organized by members of the exile community with representatives of the army, the coffee oligarches, and U.S. representatives laid the foundations for the counter-revolutionary project of 1954, under the command of Colonel Castillo Armas. Article 12 of the pact, given approval by Archbishop Rossell, recognized the functions of the church in the educational, social, and labour work. After this Rossell gave his full support to the counterrevolutionaries.

In his Pastoral Letter of April 4, 1954 entitled On the Advance of Communism in Guatemala, Rossell called the people to action:

The people of Guatemala must arise as one man to fight the enemy of God and of their country. Our fight against communism, therefore must be based upon a nationalistic and a catholic attitude. Let us undertake the campaign against communism in the name of God and with God, but never animated by petty political interests (Rossell in Melville 1983:23).

After the fall of Arbenz and the inauguration of the anti-communist era under Castillo Armas, Archbishop Rossell was made a national hero by Castillo Armas for his contribution in the struggle against communism.

In the aftermath of the counter-revolution, the church grew quickly. Between 1954 and 1960, the number of priests increased from 192 to 346, (the majority of whom were foreign missionaries), and the number of nuns increased from 89 to 364 (ProMundi 7). Guatemala was again carved up into separate religious chiefdoms. The Maryknoll Fathers continued in Huehuetenango, the Sacred Heart from Spain moved into Quiché, the Belgian Sacred Heart of Mary congregation began to work on the South coast, and the American Benedictines occupied Alta Verapaz (Berryman 1984[2]:8). They used the traditional style of missionary living in the central towns and going circuit riding to tend to the spiritual and sacramental needs of their charges. The church opened a seminary which was run by the Jesuits, and during the 50s, and much of the 60s, the number of seminarians hovered around 40 (Wilkie 217).

The rapid influx of foreigners to staff the growing Catholic church and the inability of the National Seminary to train Guatemalans for the priesthood led to the development of a national church composed principally of foreigners, 80 percent of the clergy in fact (Berryman 1984 [2]:15). With little history of tithes, the church was dependent upon external sources of funding for its growth. Though the precise amounts have never been disclosed, both

the Vatican and Misericordia (the German Bishop's funding agency) were instrumental in helping the church rebuild (Adams 291). The American Bishops through Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Oxfam U.K. also contributed to the support of the church (Calder 61). Another source of funding at this early stage was the practice of accepting American Diocesan priests who did fund raising in the American dioceses to finance their pastoral programs. In the Diocese of Solola, priests came from Oklahoma, Montana, and Minnesota. Unlike many of the other priests who were affiliated with religious orders, these priests worked independently and could be authorized by their Diocesan Bishop in Guatemala to leave for the United States to solicit funds for "social needs" projects. The stress was still however, upon evangelization of the pagans and protecting the flock from "communism".

The Archdiocese of Guatemala began to foster secular movements, particularly the student and university ones. The creation of the Movement of the Central American University Youth affiliated to Pax Romana, and Catholic Action Universitaria stand out as good examples. Both movements were vocally anti-communist, and were eventually financially supported by the government (ProMundi 7).

As the initial period of anti-communism receded, the Alliance for Progress and the beginning of import-substitution industrialization under the CACM program began in the early sixties. The role of the church changed from that of being a vehicle for anti-communist sentiment to one of social Christianity characterized by the open participation of Christian movements in political life through the *Partida Democratica Cristiana*, as well as supporting different development projects in the various parties and sector of development. The Bishops Pastoral Letter of Aug. 15 1962 "The Social Problems and the Communists", abandoned the previous strategy of calls for

greater social justice to overcome the "communist threat". As the number of priests coming to Guatemala increased a number of secular movements were launched such as the Christian Family Movement, the Christian Workshop Movement, the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala, and the Catholic University of Simon Landivar.

On 10 November 1964, Archbishop Rossel y Arellano died and was replaced by Monsignor Mario Casariego y Acevedo, a former Chief Chaplain to the Guatemalan Army (Calder 190). Together with the Nuncio, Casariego managed to have the 1966 Constitution include significant financial and social concessions to the church (Adams 311). As a result of the growing presence of Roman Catholic missionaries in various sectors of social work, it was not long before priests, prompted by U.S. Aid, began to get involved in the cooperative movement (Bendana 466). By 1967 there were over 145 co-ops with over 27,000 members located in Quiché, the Oriente and Alta Verapaz. Under President Méndez Montenegro the foundations of institutionalized repression began to take shape as the army waged its repressive counter-insurgency war in Zacapa and Izabal. The clergy ignored the event and continued to pursue "developmentalist" programs. Archbishop Casariego condemned any political activity that questioned the legitimate authority of the government. In the face of such open cynicism even *Partida Democrática Cristiana* (PDC) began to drift from its moorings and disentangle itself from the ultra-conservative stance of the church hierarchy, PDC got involved with the National Peasants Federation, labour unions, and the National Movement of Slum Dwellers. They also tried to develop their own cooperative movement divorced from those directly controlled by the church (Melendez 208).

A final episode which served to further entrench the reactionary bent in the Catholic hierarchy was the "kidnapping" of Archbishop Casariego in

March 1968. Melendez and Richards claim the kidnapping could not have happened without the support of the government and suggest the army and police collaborated in the undertaking (Richards 209). The intention of blaming it upon the guerillas petered out as even the Vice President Clemmente Marroquin Ryan called it a "self-kidnapping" (Berryman 1984[1]:177). Pope Paul VI, describing Casariego as an innocent victim, elevated Casariego to the position of Counsellor of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation which carried with it the power to name bishops in Central America (Pro Mundi 8). The next year on the 29 March 1969, Casariego was named Cardinal and on the 1 of May he was invested as such by the Pope in Rome.

To draw together the material on the church prior to Medellin, it is possible to distinguish a number of characteristics. First, the church in Guatemala was a traditional church pursuing traditional theological goals, but with an emerging emphasis on "social works" and social commitment, which translated into emergent tensions within the church itself. Second, the church was still very highly centralized despite the new dioceses which had been created. Third, over one-half of the religious personnel in Guatemala, up to this present day work in the capital Guatemala City, (ProMundi 21). This reflects the concentration of religious educational institutions in the city itself (Berryman 1984: 194-5). Fourth, there was growing tension between the Guatemalan clergy and the foreigners. After the influx of missionaries in 1956 the number of foreign priests climbed quickly to the point where Guatemala's religious constituted only 15-20 percent of the religious personnel.

Within the clergy itself the tension between Guatemalan and non-Guatemalan clergy became manifest as foreign personnel tended to be paid substantially more than their local brethren. This erupted into a minor

church struggle in 1969 when COSDEGUA, the Conference of Diocesan Priests of Guatemala, was formed to push for, amongst other things, wage parity with their foreign counterparts (Mendez 219). The preponderance of foreigners was not limited simply to the clergy as many of the Bishops in Guatemala were also foreign-born. National tensions between the Archbishop and the Papal Nuncio over the appointment of Bishops was overcome in 1968 with the transferral of the power of naming to Casariego.

But perhaps the most salient point about the Catholic church in Guatemala was the small number of religious available to implement programs. In 1968 it had one archbishop, 17 bishops, 498 priests, 294 Brothers, and 717 Sisters amounting to a total of 1,579 religious personnel (Wilkie 217), for a population of over five million people, 95 percent of whom professed to be Catholics. It was one of the weakest and smallest church establishments in Latin America (ProMundi 18). To compete with the Protestant and Fundamentalist Churches that began to arrive in Guatemala after 1965, there was pressure on the church to increase its pastoral program and create more pastoral agents to deal effectively with the religious threat posed by the competition. In order to preserve the domain which it had religiously carved out for itself, the church was forced to explore pastoral programs that transfer various religious responsibilities to the laity.

Regarding the emergence of class conflict within the clergy, the period in question can at best be described as the "embryonic stage" (Rodriguez and Peters 1982:226). The Melville case was a relatively isolated incident and those priests who were politicized remained both on the margins of the church and the revolutionary movement. Oscar Sierra Pop's assessment stresses the "cautious" position taken by the politicized clergy in Huehuetenango and El

Peten with respect to their engagement with FAR, and summarizes the overall situation as follows:

Although an important sector of the clergy was politicized - particularly the religious ones, the majority maintained conservative positions due to the absence of a political project which would articulate the objectives of the pastoral work with the interests of the popular masses (Sierra Pop 328).

To make sense of the emergence of the Popular church in Guatemala then, we have to look beyond the confines of the national church and look for supporting evidence within the continental church. In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of liberation theology, its dissemination through the CELAM conferences, and its political content both vis a vis (1) the church and the pastoral programming on which it should be focusing, and (2) the wider socio-political struggle envisioned in quasi-Marxist terms.

CHAPTER FOUR

Catholicism and Marxism: Liberation Theology

Over the course of the last two decades, liberation theology has grown into a broad theological movement with many dimensions and a number of currents. As I am primarily interested in the praxis of liberation theology I will present only a brief overview of the theological aspects of liberation theology, beginning with a history of its relationship to other theological movements within the Catholic church, and an explanation of some key factors that distinguish liberation theology from other Roman Catholic theologies. The focus of the chapter is, however, upon the political program of liberation theology and within that range, a fairly specific area.

Liberation theologians are the first to admit their intellectual debt to Marxism. However, as with Marxism, there is in liberation theology, a wide range of focus and study derived from Marxist studies. At the level of political theory, there is the work of Hinkelammert, Boff, Houtart, Dussel, and Maduro dealing with an articulation of Marxism and Catholicism on such questions as history, modes of production, economics, collective consciousness, and general will. While these questions may be of interest to reconciling Catholicism and Marxism, they are not necessarily of use to Catholic organizers attempting to promote political organizing. For this, we must look to the second level of political theory in liberation theology -- that dealing with political agendas of the movement. At this level, there is also a large measure of disagreement. I argue that there is an important split which emerged at the beginning of the discourse between proponents of an open-ended position for the church in the liberation struggle, and those favouring

a circumscribed role. Gustavo Gutierrez represents the former while Hugo Assmann, Pablo Richards and the *Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones* in Costa Rica represent the latter. To understand the differences between the two positions, their relevance to the Guatemalan situation, and their respective weaknesses, we must begin with the fundamentals of liberation theology.

The foundations of liberation theology were laid by Gustavo Gutierrez in A Theology of Liberation and Hugo Assmann in A Theology for the Nomad church, both published in the early seventies. By focusing on the two works we can sketch an outline of the central tenets of liberation theology and establish its distance from traditional theology.

Liberation theology explicitly sets out from an awareness of the social and economic problems prevalent in Latin America: "The starting point is our objective situation as oppressed and dependent peoples" (Assmann 1975:43). Liberation theologians argue that to understand the present socio-economic conjuncture, one must also study the historical background of this situation. This is impossible using the tools of traditional theology; therefore one must adopt and use methods developed by the social sciences. Such an approach argues that capitalism is to blame for the gross inequalities that pervade Latin America (Mainwaring 1984:232). In theological terms the implications are major. First, in contrast to traditional theology, the material world, not the metaphysical one is seen as of paramount importance (Gutierrez 1973; 66). This is not meant to deny the existence of the metaphysical realm but to dislodge it from its theological position of primacy. Second, unlike the political theology of Europe which accepts secularization, the 'death of God', and attempts to reformulate a faith for non-believers, liberation theology is squarely faced with "believers who are non-persons" (Boff 1984: 14). Thus it is within a framework

of poverty that liberation theology attempts to situate itself. Finally, by focusing on history and socio-economic analysis liberation theology tries to diagnose the ills that beset Latin American societies and the role of the Roman Catholic church and theology as institutions that ideologically legitimate and perpetuate poverty.

The second component is a reflection on liberation. In the words of Leonardo Boff, a leading liberation theologian, "There is only one point of departure - a reality of social misery - and one goal - the liberation of the oppressed" (Boff 1984:24). The reflections on liberation distinguish three interrelated levels of liberation. First, there is liberation on the political level of oppressed peoples and nations (Assmann 1975:55, Gutierrez 1973:36). In recognition of the economic, social, and political conflict that sets the poor against the oppressive classes, class conflict and liberation will only be achieved through struggle. The second dimension is to see liberation as a process through history. People must take conscious responsibility for their own destiny to create a qualitatively different society (Gutierrez 1973:32, Segundo 1974:112). For Gutierrez this is embodied in the creation of a "new" person. Finally, liberation must be seen as an element of salvation to the kingdom of God, to the individual and his maker (Gutierrez 1983: 29). Thus, for Gutierrez, to accomplish political and historical liberation is not sufficient. One must never forget final salvation comes only from God. In other words, liberation from exploitation and oppression cannot be confused with total emancipation. Political and economic liberation are a necessary, but not sufficient condition for liberation. For this, personal and spiritual liberation is also essential.

If liberation is the goal, the question arises of how it is to be attained - the question of praxis of theology. Here again I will limit my remarks to the

very broad outlines and leave the discussion until the presentation of the political imperatives of liberation theology in the following section. The most radical demand of religion is presented by Hugo Assmann:

Of course actions speak louder than words, and the words in the book, although they concern action, are not the action itself. They can only allude to it. That is the only dignity they have if what they refer to doesn't exist they have no dignity at all - for another or for reader (Assmann 1975:26).

The discussions of praxis tend to conflate various levels of praxis: praxis as universal dictum, praxis as applied to theological discussions the aims of pastoral work, and praxis as applied to political action, in this case more as strategic directives. In general the unifying link is the stress on 'doing' as opposed to speaking (Assmann 1975:77). For Assmann, "Speaking the truth is no longer an acceptable substitute for doing the truth" (Assmann 1975:74). For Gutierrez, "orthopraxis" must take precedence over orthodoxy:

The goal is to balance and even to reject the primacy and almost exclusiveness which doctrine has enjoyed in Christian life and above all to modify the emphasis often obsessive upon the attainment of an orthodoxy which is often nothing more than fidelity to an obsolete tradition or a debatable interpretation (Gutierrez 1973:10).

When applied to theological discussion praxis is a critique of traditional theology, of its emptiness and collusion with oppressive classes. Gutierrez sets praxis in a much wider vein when applied to theology by stressing theology as the "second act"; the first is to become one with the poor. This distinction is of tremendous importance as it highlights a critical contradiction within liberation theology. For Assmann, liberation theology is the product of theologians and its major ambition is to criticize and de-

ideologize theology. For Gutierrez the scope of liberation theology is much wider:

theologies arise out of concrete historical ambiances, and then go ahead and produce a theology out of our own ambience... with the theologian becoming one with the poor liberation theology is an expression of a dialectical opposition to bourgeois ideology and the dominant culture that comes up out of the popular classes. It is the exploited segments of society, the despised ethnic groups, the marginalized cultures, the persons we may know in their energy and vitality only by looking at them from the underside of history... in a word, those whom the Bible calls 'the poor' -- who are the historical agent and the repository of this new understanding of the faith (Gutierrez 1983:93).

In effect while Assmann argues for a limited scope for liberation theology, Gutierrez appropriates the social terrain as both source and domain of liberation theologians.

The last element of liberation theology is the conceptualization that is developed of a different church. For Assmann who stresses the limited role of the Christian theologian in the struggle the scope of the church is also restricted (Assmann 1975:129). The role of the church should be to "open a breach in the superstructure of traditional bourgeois values" because:

The obstacles to change at the 'superstructural' level, particularly those represented by petit bourgeois values and the tendency to acquiesce in the passivity of the populace, undoubtedly owe much to pseudo-Christian traditions and values both in origin and in maintenance (Assmann 1975:139).

For Assmann the struggle against capitalism takes precedence over the role of the church in the struggle. But for Gutierrez, radical Christianity displaces radical politics and subsumes it. The hierarchical institution of the Roman Catholic church takes on a different form. For Gutierrez, the role of the

church is "to promote conscientizing evangelization, poverty in the church through the focus on the poor with simultaneous denunciation of injustice, and thirdly, church structures must not be renewed (Gutierrez 1973: 116) -- an oblique reference to uncentring the church with respect to Base Christian Communities (BCCs). His views on BCCs are stated more strongly in later works where he writes on the relationship between liberatory faith and the development of Base Christian Communities in a very positive vein (Gutierrez 1983: 97-98).

Leonardo Boff places the most emphasis on Base Christian Communities as the material embodiment of liberation theology. Citing the present institutional structure as a reflection of prevalent domination he argues that in opting for the poor the church must move on 'Freirian methodology' against the structures of the ruling class within the church itself. The division of labour in the church means a certain group controls the production of symbolic goods while the other, the poor, are relegated to simply consuming them. To overcome this, Base Christian Communities are desirable:

these communities mean a break with the monopoly of social and religious power and the inauguration of a new religion and social process for restructuring both the church and society with a different social division of labour as well as an alternative religious division of ecclesiastical labour (Boff 1985:116).

Interestingly CELAM II at Medellin in 1968 gave greater official sanction to Base Christian Communities and between 1968-1979 they flourished like "mushrooms in a rainforest" (Cleary 120). Only after Puebla were efforts made to retard their growth.

This view of the church strains at the institutional bonds of the church hierarchical structure. But the same can be said for liberation theology in

general. The starting point of dependency, the goal of liberation, the stress on praxis to supplant reflection, and the specter of an important institution calling for a socialist society is disquieting enough to most critics. But when we add to that the other strands the image is positively haunting. Liberation theologians, over the years, have made statements on the traditional categories of theology. The Boff brothers have worked on developing a new Christology; others have focused on a new exegesis greatly inspired by Karl Marx. Gutierrez has tried to develop the spirituality aspect. Still others have focused on a rehabilitation of eschatological tradition within Christianity defined in terms of the Kingdom of Heaven here and now. Finally a number of writers have concerned themselves with the semantics of theology and have tried to develop a fresh approach to replace the traditional one.

The general principles outlined above focus on liberation theology as a theology and stress the aspects that set it apart from previous theologies be they the Post-Conciliar 'Sign of the Times' or the German Political theology so much in vogue in Europe. Now, let us change the frame of analysis and focus on liberation theology through the lens of political theory. To be dedicated to the liberation of the poor theologically is one thing, but to do so politically is another. In this section I will draw out those characteristics that come to bear specifically on the political universe.

For liberation theologians, the issue of the relationship to Marxian thought has been a source of tension with the Vatican. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger launched a blistering attack on liberation theology warning of "the deviations and risks of deviations damaging to the faith and to Christian living that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist

thought" (Ratzinger 1984:198).¹ But diatribes aside, how is the relationship presented and what aspects of Marxian thought do find their way into the proclamations of liberation theologians?

The relationship with Marxism puts Catholic theologians on shaky ground. Consider Pius XI's enunciation on moral doctrine in the *Quadragesimo Anno* of 1937: "No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true socialist" (in McGovern 104). Conversely, the liberation theologian Jose Bonino argues "that Marxism has unsubstitutable relevance" (Bonino 19) and that whereas in Europe the Marxist-Christian dialogues evolved at the level of theory, in Latin America it is the product of practice, as allies rather than opponents (Bonino 29). Gutierrez in his introduction to "A Theology of Liberation" opts for the high ground and avoids direct confrontation:

contemporary theology does in fact find itself in direct and fruitful confrontation with Marxism and it is to a large extent due to Marxism's influence that theological thought searching for its own sources, has begun to reflect on the meaning of the transformation of the world and the action of man in history (Gutierrez 1973: 9).

Trying to wade through the quagmire of the Marxist-Christian dialogue is a forbidding task. Both Marxists and Catholic Theologians who attempted the traverse did not succeed. On the one hand Bonino's assertion of liberation theology constituting 'fait accompli' because there are Christians fighting in the revolutionary struggles is tempting but begs the question. Conversely Ratzinger's diatribe against Marxism conjures up images of Don Quixote

¹Leonardo Boff's response was to compare, unfavorably, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the Medieval Inquisition (Boff 1985:42).

, charging the windmills instead of St. George slaying the dragon. What lies between?

Perhaps the most surprising characteristic of liberation theology is that it does not confront the issue of Marxian-Christian synthesis. With the exception of Bonino and Miranda who, writing in the early stages of the development of liberation theology, produced analogical accounts of Christ and Marx or exegetical accounts showing not simply the validity - but the necessity of interpreting the bible in this light, most liberation theologians steer clear of the issues. When referred to, the stress is placed on the objective social science analysis derived from Marxism. When concepts such as 'praxis', 'class struggle', 'dialectical structuralism' are used, they are used in the context of liberation theology and are not used with the traditional Marxian meanings (Kruger 5). Clearly many of the liberation theologians have read Marx, and Marxist works, but the use and references to them are oblique and lie embedded in the text without drawing attention to their sources. Depending upon the line of inquiry being pursued, more, or less, use is made of Marxist concepts.

Like their precursors in the Marxist-Christian dialogue, liberation theologians are interested in extracting from the Marxian corpus what is of use and rejecting that which is damaging. In his attack on liberation theology, Cardinal Ratzinger claims that with Marxism "no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible (Ratzinger 1984: 199). In other words to accept any Marxist concept is tantamount to accepting the complete whole which in his interpretation

The liberation theology argument for the separation of ideology from analysis derives very loosely from an Althusserian reading of Marx (McGovern 76). Althusser argues that a careful examination of Karl Marx's writings shows clearly that an epistemological break takes place between the early and later

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Marx. The ground for the break is the rejection of a Feuerbachian Humanism for an "objective scientific analysis" of reality. Thus in the late Marx, *Das Capital* particularly, Marx concerned himself with developing "scientific" categories rather than focusing on alienation and human nature. For liberation theologians the anti-humanistic thrust of the argument is ignored (McGovern 83); what is important is the separation between an objective social science and an ideology. In effect Marxism becomes a "scientific tool" to be used in the analysis of society with the political project, the goal of liberation in all its manifestations, remains the sphere of theologians. Marx's criticism of religion is barely touched on. His legacy is to have produced a scientific method of analysis that explain socio-economic realities in Latin America (Assmann 1975:71, Gutierrez 1973: 27 b., Boff 1985: 136, Boff 1984: 50).

From the outset, class and class struggle are integral to the liberation theology perspective (Assmann 1975:118, Gutierrez 1982:273). Taking inspiration from the bible not Marx, liberation theologians frame the class struggle in terms of the poor or the oppressed against the oppressors. For the material poor the kingdom of God is to be now on earth, for the materially not so poor, liberation can be achieved by accepting spiritual poverty and breaking with one's class and opting for the poor. Only in the last two pages of his opus does Gutierrez touch on a description of the poor :

The 'poor' person today is the oppressed one, the one margined from society, the member of the class struggling for his most basic rights; he is the exploited and plundered social class, the country struggling for liberation (Gutierrez 1973:302).

If the definition of the poor class is elusive, the definition of the others is even more so. There are sporadic references to petit-bourgeois and bourgeois

values but nowhere is there anything more than the oppressors juxtaposed to the oppressed. Leonardo Boff discusses the ruling classes fleetingly (Boff 1985: 112), Assmann and Gutierrez stick with oppressors and the closest one comes to any other group resembling the bourgeoisie are 'entrepreneurial metaphysicians' (Hinkelammert 1983: 184), pursuers and upholders of the law of profitability. Though occupations are referred to no theologian makes a systematic attempt to group and define the oppressors in any terms other than their relationship to the oppressed. The oppressed struggle against the oppressors.

A curious twist develops with the liberation theologian becoming the "organic leaders" of the poor:

the theologian is to be an organic intellectual, a thinker with organic links to the popular liberation undertaking and with the Christian communities that live their faith by taking this historical task upon themselves as their own sometimes this commitment entails the risk of physical death. And it always means the death of the intelligence of the intelligent, the wisdom of the wise (Gutierrez 1983 :103).

This vision of liberation theologians as the organic leaders of the poor was adopted by many liberation theologies but was called into question some years later, both on the grounds of logical confusion and a shifting perception of the role of theologians and the church in the popular struggle of Latin America.

The question of the struggle is also ambivalent in the liberation theology guide-lines. Liberation as developed by theologians is more than the political revolution but it is unclear whether liberation can occur without a revolution. For Assmann both the revolution and Christians' role is quite straightforward:

Perhaps the first important contribution Christians can make to the process of liberation is not to add to the process of diluting the revolutionary implication that circumstances have dictated it should entertain (Assmann 1975:129).

The Christians are well poised to open a breach in the superstructure of bourgeois values (Assmann 1975:39).

Gutierrez' vision of the revolution begins as one which is both radical and Christian.

To say that liberation theology makes no claim to be a revolutionary Christian ideology is not to say that it stands aloof from the very process. On the contrary, it has its point of departure precisely in an involvement with that process and attempts to help make it more critical of itself and hence more radical and global. And the way it attempts to do this is to situate liberating political commitment within a perspective of the free gift of Christ's total liberation (Gutierrez 1983:61).

Finally, in a curious auto-critique of liberation theology as a possible danger, Leonardo Boff points out semantic co-mixture which is:

The same two languages are simply mixed together by drawing now on the resources of social analysis, now on those of theology. The result is a conceptual hodge podge to the detriment of both analysis and theology. What is left is an ill fashioned articulation of the two (Boff 1984:48).

The second issue of political import which liberation theologians address is that of violence. One of the recurrent criticisms of liberation theology is its sanction of violence or its failure to reject it. And to this there are two arguments. First, liberation theologians countercharge that liberation theology is in this respect no different from all traditional theology. To examine the history of Christianity is to discover the Holy Crusades and the terror of the

Mediaeval Inquisition. To attack liberation theology for not rejecting violence is thus something of a lame duck argument (Segundo 1983:1). The second position focuses on the use of violence by the oppressors - heteropraxis which is inimical to Christian values and must be actively combated, with violence if necessary. At Medellin in 1968 Pope Paul VI, in his opening address stated that "violence is neither Christian nor evangelical" (Segundo 1985:283) but the conference went on to characterize Latin America as a "sinful situation unjustly ruled through institutionalized violence..." :

We should not be surprised therefore, that the temptation to violence is surfacing in Latin America. One should not abuse the patience of a people that for years has borne a situation that would not be acceptable to anyone with any degree of awareness of human rights (Med II '78 in Segundo 1985-283).

Thus the issue of violence and the political espousal of a course of action that might become violent is presented without fanfare.

In 1973 Hugo Assmann's final cry was unequivocal:

There is no sense in discussing these matters in the abstract unless discussions lead to the one thing that counts: our effective commitment to the liberation of the oppressed (Assmann 1975:145).

Twenty years later fellow liberation theologians see the discourse as "a repetitive apology for itself" (Segundo 1983 13) and written to avoid provoking the hierarchy (Casanas 1983:130). Strategy and tactics of the struggle have given way to works on liberation spirituality and polemical arguments with North American and European theologians (Segundo 1983: 19). Is it possible that a

theological discourse created to promote the liberation of the poor has abandoned the poor to their own devices ?

In the two decades that liberation theology has evolved, the most significant change has been for most theologians to drop the discussion of most political matters. This is the result of a combination of factors. In many cases, institutional repression within the church and political repression by the forces of the state have been sufficient. In others, the movement away from direct military rule has sown confusion amongst the base communities and thus blunted the edge of the radical Christian program. But perhaps the most important factor was the lack of development of any specifically theological discussion on strategy and tactics even amongst those theologians most dedicated to the liberation of the poor.

In the previous section I mentioned an important cleavage in liberation theology between a narrow and a broad view of the role of theology, the first associated with Assmann, the second with Gutierrez. In the first view, the theologian is a theologian and his aim should be to open a breach in the bourgeois superstructure. In the second, the theologian is to become one with the people, is to become the people and eventually to become their mouthpiece. In this view liberation theology is nothing but the product and voice of the poor. In the second vein, the voice of the people is fostered and heard in the Base Christian Communities where the church is born again, the option of the poor is exercised, and theologians can learn from the poor. But here we encounter a major stumbling block, so big that Juan Luis Segundo identifies it as the basis upon which one can distinguish two theologies of liberation (Segundo 1983):

The differences follow from two conceptions of the role of the theologians. In the first, the theologian is a critic on behalf of the poor, of the

existing political and church structures. He directs his criticism not only toward the institutional structures, but also toward the false, ideological beliefs of the structures that may be held by the poor. Segundo classifies this project as de-ideologizing the middle-class. The project is unsuccessful because it has little to do with the poor. The second stream is to become one with the poor but here again there is a central problem. As Boff writes in Ecclesiogenesis:

In a church that has opted for the people, for the poor and for their liberation, the principal learning of theology comes from contact with (grass roots) people. Who evangelizes the theologian? The faith witnessed by faithful people, their capacity to introduce God in all their struggling, their resistance against the oppression they constantly suffer (Boff 1986:55).

Here we see on the one hand the liberation theologians acting as the teacher and bringing liberation while on the other he is to be taught by a passive and fatalistic view of Christianity (Segundo 1983:11). Though it may appear contradictory, the dialectical exchange may be beneficial to both. Unlike Segundo, I do not see this as a problem; my major difficulty is with the supposition that theologians can become one with the poor, that they can become the "organic intellectuals" of the poor. The implication of this position is to downplay the role of the intellectual and the knowledge that the intellectual has acquired. This has serious consequences. An anti-intellectual attitude manifested within the Base Christian Community can discourage members from learning about the full range of social and economic analyses. It denies the effect these intellectuals have in the creation of the popular church. Second, as far as the theologian is concerned, it can lead to the denial of much of his learning which might be valuable to the community. As Scott Mainwaring charges:

In all its manifestations, veneration of popular consciousness can discourage pastoral agents from helping the popular sectors to develop a more critical faith and political vision. The popular classes are clearly not the incompetents that society traditionally made them out to be, and popular consciousness does contain elements of resistance to the dominant culture and values. But at the same time, popular consciousness contains many elements of the dominant culture, including some forms of fatalism and submission (Mainwaring 1984:607).

On the other hand the imposition of theological or social analyses that differ significantly from those held by the poor is seen as interference by outsiders. Thus in the second stream of liberation theology there is first the impossibility of becoming 'one with the poor', given a different background, training, and knowledge, and assuming that becoming one is more rhetorical than real, the problem is the role of the lay person and attempting to find some sort of balance between the demands of the poor and those of change.

But assuming that discussion is carried out in Base Christian Communities using the bible as the primary pedagogical tool, it is not clear what would be taught. Should discussions focus on relations of production, relations of exchange, alienation and exploitation? Is property discussed? Should the Base Christian Community members talk about socialism, or is the conversation focused upon the kingdom of heaven which still remains ambivalent hovering in mid-air? On this, liberation theology is mysteriously silent.

When political action is discussed, what forms do the discussions take? On the one hand, the narrow position eschews any efforts to discover a unique Christian project - the broad, essentially attempts to shelter all resistance under its wings. With the tendency of the broad position to dominate the liberation

theology discourse, it is surprising that there is little mention of the organizational structure of Base Christian Communities and their links to one another and other social movements. In its current form, Base Christian Communities are relatively isolated units that are not inordinately concerned with establishing links with other Base Christian Communities. It is difficult to envisage a broad movement that could influence political affairs in any given direction, be it in Latin American countries where the military has stepped down, or where the revolutionary struggle is gaining momentum. The emphasis on individual cell-like structures might well be conducive to waging a protracted guerilla war but any expectation of theology moving to support this position is not forthcoming.

At the level of theory, liberation theologians eschew any relationship between their praxis and Marxist praxis. But when discussing praxis itself, they are strangely silent. A key issue must be the relationship between Base Christian Communities and any guerilla movement for the struggle to create a socialist society is ultimately the product of an orchestrated political struggle. But here again, very little is said and we are left in the dark as to what course Base Christian Communities must take.

Perhaps the most serious omission in the work of liberation theologians is the lack of sociological analysis within the church (Smith 1975:18). There are occasional enigmatic references to accepting the notion of class struggle within the church itself but because the liberation discourse on class is so underdeveloped, there is little of substance. Even the most astute analysts of the Guatemalan case like Pablo Richards and Oscar Sierra Pop do not identify various positions within the Guatemalan church as linked to various class factions, or classes in Guatemala. They never deal effectively with concepts of

authority, dominators and dominated within and consequently, are never able to see themselves, or the actors, in any critical sociological framework.

An extension of this failure is that no mention is made of the socio-economic status of the church itself. The sources of funding, the origins and composition of the clergy, the influence of higher authority overseas are all ignored in any study of liberation theology. As a result we are left completely in the dark as to what theologians think about themselves and in this case we are far from achieving a clearer picture of church affairs. In sum we are left with very little guidance in practical matters. What liberation theologians do say is extremely abstract and in the eyes of one critic, "works in favour of the oppressors" (Casanas 125). What they do write about revolves around the role of theology and individual leadership in Base Christian Communities. For this omission, many Christian peasant catequistas in Guatemala paid with their lives.

There are a number of weaknesses in the political program of liberation theology. However the discourse is without doubt a revolutionary program and many peasants in Guatemala responded to the project in ways that far surpassed the accomplishments of the various guerilla organizations. In chapter one, I described the various guerilla organizations, their ideologies, and their strategies to organize the revolutionary forces. While some of their initial failure was due to ill conceived and naively appropriated programs from the Cuban case, blame must be put on the historical tendency of Marxist groups to view religion with mistrust. In the next chapter we explore this legacy; first, in order to explore the subtleties of the Marxist positions, and second, to see if it is possible to construct a Marxist sociology of religion which not only analyzes class divisions within the church, but which also can explain a Marxian inspired Catholic movement in more than reductionist terms.

CHAPTER FIVE
 Revolution and Religion:
 Marxism on Christianity.

If Catholicism has historically been hostile to radical Marxist movements, the same can also be said of revolutionary groups' attitudes toward Catholicism. In Guatemala, the EGP, FAR and ORPA did not focus on the revolutionary potential of the radicalized catequistas until the early eighties despite the clear evidence that the base groups were involved in political organizing some years before then. When the URNG did eventually realize the importance of the Popular church, much of the damage had already been done by the army. The slow response of the guerilla forces is due in large measure to the historical legacy of suspicion towards the motives of the church, and religion in general, which emerged from a history of conservative ideological positions supported by the Catholic hierarchy, reinforced by an oversimplified account of Marxist political analyses of religion.

Jean Pierre Cots' introduction to H. Portelli's Gramsci et la Question Religieuse captures the essential dilemma that characterizes Marxist writings on the subject of religion. On the one hand, Marxist analysis attacks religion philosophically, taking up the position of a historical materialist philosophy, while on the other hand it examines religion politically and oscillates between anti-clericalism and compromise depending upon the situation and the author. The Marxist sociology of religion is, therefore, "curiously incomplete" (Portelli 10). The dilemma is neatly expressed by Marx :

Religious distress at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress, religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.

(Marx and Engels 1955:42).

In this chapter I examine this theoretical legacy as it developed within Marxism. By examining the works of Marx and Engels, we can outline the essential features and the conflicting nature of the Marxist position on religion. From there, we examine the work of subsequent Marxists who have tried to overcome the contradictory tendencies with respect to religion. Of specific interest is the work of Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu, both of whom recognized the significance of religion in society, and devoted considerable efforts to its study. Their contributions are very important to the final section of the chapter where I explore the notion of a Marxist sociology of religion which can analyze the class content of various religious movements, the ideology of the movement, and the political ramifications of religious movements which are liberatory.

Marx's thoughts on religion are fragmentary and scattered throughout his works. Perhaps being convinced of its eventual disappearance in a communist society he saw little need to devote much thought to the critique and analysis of religion. Nevertheless, throughout his writings, his thoughts on religion are consistent even though his references to Christianity become more sarcastic as he is progressively concerned with economics. Marx devoted himself more to the study of religion in the early period -- in the works prior to 1847, specifically, in Towards the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction, On the Jewish Question, (both 1843), The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 and The German Ideology, written in 1846, but not published until some eighty years later.

Some participants in the European Marxist - Christian dialogues and liberation theologians claim that Marx was not hostile to religion qua religion, but to religion as alienation. By this interpretation Marx's hostility

was directed toward its earthly manifestations, not the sentiment which inspired them (Garaudy, Miranda). However, the bulk of his writings point in the other direction. In the Contribution to the Critique, Marx asserts : "criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism". (Marx and Engels:45). The criticism of religion is strategically important for it demonstrates that "Man makes religion, religion does not make man"(Marx and Engels:41). Religion thus is a fantastic realization of human essence, a reversed world - consciousness:

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up all illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions (Marx and Engels:42).

Marx never developed a definition of religion in any systematic form. His references to it, and use of the scriptures in allegorical form reveal a knowledge of its theology and major texts, but the bulk of his references to religion centre on its functions. A religious person, as an alienated person, is subject to external forces which run counter to the individual's objective need.

Only once does Marx refer to religion in sympathetic tones, as the "expression of real distress... the sigh of the oppressed creature". This gentle treatment of religion was never repeated for the suggestion is that religion does constitute some form of protest directed against the ruling classes. This statement suggests that religion accomplishes both "palliative and consolatory functions" (McKlown:53). It simultaneously consoles the bearer by softening the harsh realities of the spiritless world, and acts as a palliative by providing visions of a fruitful afterlife. Any further development of this view of religion by Marx alluding to the real suffering and real protest of

religion are left unfinished for he never again refers to religion as an expression of popular protest.

To Marx, religion is the product of alienation and is both false and perverted. It turns man into a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence (Marx and Engels:50): "Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself." (Marx and Engels:22). There is no distinction between good and bad religions, superstitions, and metaphysics. All are equally false and in need of criticism. Only with a proletariat that has divorced itself from religion and has accepted the responsibility for its own actions will a successful revolutionary struggle be possible.

Marx argued that religious configurations are not independent of the existing mode of production but are the product of it. Indeed, any appearance of contradictions between religion and civil society and the state are not the product of autonomous processes within the sphere of religion but rather arise because of contradictions arising within social relations of production themselves:

But even if this theory, theology, philosophy, morals, etc., enter into contradiction with the existing relations, this can happen only because the existing relations have entered into contradiction with the existing production forces (Marx and Engels:76).

His argument that religion as ideology in the pejorative sense (i.e. a form of false consciousness) reflects contradictions arising in production relations and production forces, lays the foundation for understanding the critiques of the functions of Christianity. Marx, when commenting on the social principles of Christianity in the Communism of the Paper Rheinischer Beobachter wrote:

The social principles of Christianity justified the slavery of Antiquity, glorified the serfdom of the Middle Ages,....,preached the necessity of a ruling and an oppressed class,... and ... taught cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, dejection, in a word all the qualities of the *canaille* (Marx and Engels:84).

Thus, religion is socially conservative, a tool used by the ruling classes to dominate the oppressed. As well as legitimating the production relations of successive modes of production, religion is also a weapon to buy off the oppressed classes. In the Communist Manifesto he states:

Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the state? Has it not preached in the place of these charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat (Tucker 498).

Clearly, Marx's opinion of Christianity and religion in general is highly critical. To claim that he left any space for mysticism or religion of any sort is difficult. Because he believed that religion was the product of man's confrontation with the "unassailable power of nature" (Marx and Engels:75), there was ample reason to believe that through the development of the productive forces, and the development of reasoning in relation to those forces religion could be overcome. He was also reluctant to force the disappearance of religion through any other means than reasoning. Both in On the Jewish Question and Capital Marx makes this point:

The religious reflex of the real world can, in any case only then finally vanish when the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relation with regard to his fellow man and to nature (Marx and Engels:136).

To summarize Marx's views on religion, we can say that he was opposed to it in virtually every form, as ideological¹, manipulative of the oppressed and proletarian classes, degrading and alienating. It was eventually bound to disappear and only the proletariat would be able to replace the mystified, fetishized, reversed world vision with a real one in which humans reflect on humanity, unmediated by religious institutions. The means by which the proletariat would realize this necessity are 1) partly through realizing the hypocrisy of existing religious forces and unmasking their sanctioning and manipulative techniques; and 2) by being made aware of these religious forms by materialists who are able to enlighten them and make their consciousness a real world consciousness as opposed to a magical one.

In contrast to Marx, Engels wrote sparingly on religion during the early years and then turned to it repeatedly in his later works. In a study of the failed German uprisings of 1540 and 1848 Engels first delved into religion in the Peasant Wars (1850) and then turned to it in a more sustained way in Socialism: Utopian and Scientific (1877), Anti-Duhring (1878), The Dialectics of Nature (1886), and finally the History of Early Christianity (1895). Engels attempted to develop a materialist analysis of religion that begins with its etiology, includes a historical analysis of its roots within specific modes of production, and attempts to explain schisms and heresies by relating them to the specific class struggles within particular national contexts. Engels shared

¹ Marx's definition of ideology is best captured in his Contribution to the Critique of Political Philosophy (1859), where he writes:

"The distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production ... and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic -- in short, ideological -- forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out" (Marx and Engels:65).

Marx's rejection of religion but he was more interested in producing a naturalistic account of the origins and historical development of religion (Christianity) in order to explain it "historically and overpower it scientifically":

A religion that brought the Roman World Empire into subjection and dominated by far the larger part of civilized humanity for 1800 years cannot be disposed of merely by declaring it to be nonsense gleaned together by frauds (Marx and Engels:195).

While Marx dispensed with a study of religion altogether, Engels devoted considerable attention to the study of the subject. Like Marx he saw the fundamental root of religion in man's fear of nature, but he also conferred much greater importance upon the "protest" side of religion than did his collaborator. Engels is particularly interested in an historical study of religion which relates religion directly to various ancient and feudal revolutionary movements. Here, Engels argues that religion in certain instances is not simply a narcotic, but that in fact, it is the basis of organized resistance to the ruling bloc. Under ancient and feudal modes of production, class struggle was expressed through the development of various heretical movements which were confronted by the theological expressions of the dominant class religion.

In the Peasant Wars in Germany, Engels focuses on the major difference between the theological movements led by Martin Luther, (burgher heresy) and Thomas Munzer (plebeian heresy)(Marx and Engels:101). While the burgher heresies demanded an "*église à bon marché*" the peasant and plebeian heresies demanded "the restoration of earthly Christian equality among members of the community and the recognition of this equality as a

prescript for the burgher world as well" (Engels 1927: 49). Engels characterized Thomas Munzer and the Anabaptists as anti-clerical, anti-feudal, violent, and egalitarian. He argues that during the feudal era, church domination of social and political life meant:

... all general and overt attacks on feudalism, in the first place attacks on the church, all revolutionary, social, and political doctrines necessarily became 'theological heresies'. In order to be attacked existing social conditions had to be stripped of their aureole of sanctity (Engels 1927:52).

Primitive Christianity, which arrives in Rome as a slave religion manages to entice the rich and become the universal religion of the Roman Empire because as a religion it best suits the "economic, political, and ideological conditions" of the time. In his analysis of primitive Christianity, the synthesis of Judaic, Hellenic, and Gnostic ideologies created a radical point of departure. Engels' fascination with Christianity extends beyond designating certain heresies as disguised class struggles. As his focus on early Christianity increased, his judgement fell on the side of Christianity as "like every great revolutionary movement... made by the masses" (Marx and Engels : 207). The religious doctrines of Christianity are initially vague:

It arose in Palestine, in a manner utterly unknown to us, at a time when new sects, new religions, new prophets arose by the hundred. It is, in fact, a mere average, forced spontaneously out of the mutual fraction of the more progressive of such sects, and afterwards forced into a doctrine by the addition of theories of the Alexandrian Jew, Philo, and later, of strong stoic infiltrations (Marx and Engels:59).

In outlining the fundamental appeal of Christianity to the masses, Engels writes:

Christianity got hold of the masses exactly as modern socialism does, under the shape of a variety of sects, and still more of conflicting individual views - some clearer, some more confused, these latter the great majority - but all opposed to the ruling systems, to the powers that be (Engels 1927:26)

In On the History of Early Christianity (1894-95) Engels takes up the theme of early Christianity and its "resemblance" to the modern working class movement again. In place of the earlier dismissal of religious movements being "formally a reaction, an alleged return to the old" (Engels to Marx May 24 1853), by 1895 he is contrasting favourably early Christianity with early working class organizations and movements. Both "preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery" though for Christianity, salvation lies in heaven (Marx and Engels:316). Just as Christianity was able to become the recognized state religion after 300 years so too for socialism will "victory be absolutely certain" (Marx and Engels:316). Moreover, "mass movements of the middle ages were bound to wear the mask of religion and appeared as the restoration of early Christianity from spreading degeneration" (Marx and Engels:317). Early Christianity and socialism are two great mass movements initially confused "because the thinking of the masses at first moves among contradictions, lack of clarity and lack of cohesion, and also because of the role that prophets still play in them at the beginning" (Marx and Engels:330).

Moving further toward recognizing the specificity of the religious field in the famous letter to Bloch, Engels establishes the lack of direct determination of ideology and superstructural elements by the base. The economic is the basis, "but various elements of the superstructure,... religious views and their development into the systems and dogmas also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases

preponderate in determining their form" (Tucker 768). A significant revision of his position on religion outlined in Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy in which any transformations in religion are still presented as springing out of the economic relations of the persons who execute these transformations (Engels 1941:59).

Engels focused on early Christianity, rarely its later manifestations. Catholicism by the eighteenth century was already "beneath all criticism" (Engels 1927:232). And his drawing of comparisons is limited to three historical tactical lessons: first that early Christianity and socialism appeal to the oppressed; second, that they are schismatic; and third they are ultimately triumphant. His analysis of subsequent religious heresies, Luther, Munzer, the Anabaptists, the Taborites, suggests that he saw a similar revolutionary impetus in these Christian movements, which was not necessarily extinguished as Christianity became an 'artificial religion' using "deception and falsification of history" in order "to spread its tentacles amongst the masses" (Marx and Engels:195). Under feudalism "positive material interests" and class struggles were "carried on under religious shibboleths" and demands were "concealed behind a religious screen" (Marx and Engels: 54). However under capitalism religion is the manipulative tool of the bourgeoisie: man proposes and God (that is, the alien domination of the capitalist mode of production) disposes" (Marx and Engels:149). When discussing a strategy for confronting religion Engels follows and elaborates on the lines developed by Marx. In 1878 in an article entitled 'Emigrant Literature', Engels attacks the Bakunists for abolishing God and religious institutions "by decree" which he sees as a "misguided strategy": "the only possible service that can be rendered to God today is to declare atheism a compulsory article of faith and to outdo Bismarck's *Kirchenkulturkampf* laws

by prohibiting religion generally" (Marx and Engels:143). In Anti-Duhring he expresses similar views. For Engels, the conscious proletariat will wage their revolutionary struggle unfettered by the chains of "religious phantoms" and only thorough going materialism will be able to provide the ideological framework in which socialism can develop.

Thus, even at this stage, the differences in interpretation of religious phenomena begin to emerge in Marxism. With Engels, religion is rehabilitated as a field of study for Marxist theorists. Although Engels' formulations of the nature of peasant movements and the role of religion in the middle ages is far in advance of Marx's view on the subject, there are many questions left unanswered. In the next section we try to answer some of these questions by studying the work of Gramsci and Bourdieu.

Gramsci's contribution to the study of religion marks a watershed beyond which analysis of religion and the church becomes more sophisticated. Gramsci examines religion as an ideology and the church as an instrument which subjects its followers to social control but it is also subject to popular pressures emerging from the masses, in particular, the peasantry. The vision of religion as part of the state ideological apparatus (Portelli 48) highlights a number of questions that occupied Gramsci. First it raises questions concerning religion as an ideology trying to transform the world of transforming a world view into norms of every-day behaviour. Second it highlights the difficulties posed by trying to create an ideology which controls and unifies contending social classes, and third, it focuses on issues which are theoretical relating to religion itself (Portelli 28). All three issues, however, are dealt with within the context of the evolution of the Catholic church through various historical phases, in which its role as an ideological state

apparati undergoes transformation, both in terms of its relations to the ruling bloc and other social classes.

In the tradition of Marx, Engels and Lenin, Gramsci is hostile to religion. For Gramsci, religion represents "the most grandiose attempt to reconcile in mythological form, the real contradiction of historical life" (Gramsci:405, antithesis of praxis 332). In various instances Gramsci categorizes religion with beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting which "are collectively bundled together under the name of folklore" (Gramsci:332). As an Italian theoretician primarily developing a national praxis independent of the Second International, Gramsci's focus on religion is in the first instance practical, and only secondarily philosophical. Where Engels, Marx, and Lenin were concerned with the source of religion, for Gramsci this is a question of the second order.

Religion to Gramsci is an ideology lacking "unity and coherence even within an individual let alone collective consciousness" (Gramsci:326). The ostensible ideological homogeneity of Christianity masks a multifarious world of religious subdivisions:

Toute religion (et même spécialement la catholique, justement par ses efforts pour rester unitaire superficiellement), pour ne pas se briser en Eglises naturelles et en stratifications sociales) est en réalité une multiplicité de religions distinctes et souvent contradictoires. Il y a un Catholicisme des paysans, un Catholicisme des petites bourgeois et des ouvriers des villes, un Catholicisme des femmes et un Catholicisme des intellectuels, lui-même voilé et incohérent (Portelli:27).

He approaches the primitive Christianity with suspicion disputing its revolutionary nature and stressing its apolitical character -- "résistance passive à la domination romaine" (Portelli:60). However Gramsci suggests that in certain periods and historically determined conditions Christian

religion " a été et continue d'être une «nécessité», une forme nécessaire de la volonté des masses populaires, une forme déterminée de rationalité des modes et de la vie" (Portelli:34).

For Gramsci, religion takes many forms historically , and in its present condition it can be an expression of class or gender interests as well as a manipulative tool for the dominant bloc. But in a step that moves him beyond Engels' 'relative autonomy', Gramsci notes that the internal necessities of "an organizational character" can dictate political acts of the church which clearly set church and state on a collision course:

... if for every ideological struggle within the church are wanted to find an immediate primary explanation in the structure one would really be caught napping; all sorts of politico-economic romance have been written for this reason. It is evident on the contrary that the majority of these discussions are connected with sectarian and organizational necessities (Gramsci:408).

The church reached its zenith during the feudal ages. The clergy were the "organic intellectuals" of the feudal aristocracy providing it with "homogeneity and awareness of its own functions" (Gramsci:6). Not only did the clergy hold an ideological monopoly, but they also accomplished "un osmose économique-politique avec l'aristocratie" (Portelli:60). With the advent of capitalism and displacement of the feudal aristocracy by the bourgeoisie, the Roman Catholic church went into decline with its intellectuals becoming the traditional intellectuals "often relegated to rural intellectuals catering to the peasantry and the masses"(Gramsci:22). They no longer constituted the ideological organic intellectual of the new dominant bloc and eventually, in order to prevent further deterioration of their economic and ideological position, the church was forced to come to terms with the Liberal Democratic state as it did in Italy in 1929. The strength of

religion and Catholicism lies in "the fact that they feel very strongly the need for doctrinal unity of the whole mass of the faithful and strive to ensure that the higher intellectual stratum does not get separated from the lower"

(Gramsci:328). They struggle against the formation of two religions, one for intellectuals, and the other for simple souls (Gramsci:329). The Jesuit order is the major architect of this equilibrium and accomplishes the task through the church which:

... nourishes the faith permanently and in an organized fashion, indefatigably repeating its apologetics, struggling at all times and always with the same kind of arguments and maintaining a hierarchy of intellectuals who give to the faith in appearance at least the dignity of thought (Gramsci:340).

Divisions amongst the faithful are 'healed' by strong mass movements which create new religious orders and internal theological debate:

Il convient de noter que toutes les innovations au sein de l'Eglise, lorsqu'elles ne sont pas dues à des initiatives du centre, ont en soi quelque chose du hérétique et finissent par assumer explicitement ce caractère, jusqu'à ce que le centre réagisse énergiquement en bouleversant les forces innovatrices en réabsorbant les hésitants et en excluant les réfractaires (Portelli: 177).

The Catholic church's adjustment to its position as the traditional intellectual forced to confront a new dominant ideology and ruling bloc is incisive. With the supersession of the "religious conception of the world" the church is forced to struggle on the new terrain using means that are imposed on them by their adversary. To compete with political parties, the church creates their own popular organizations, the most important of which is Catholic Action:

... organisation de masse semi-laïque véritable parti de l'église ayant pour fonction d'encadrer les masses catholiques et d'en faire une arene offensive puis défensive suivant les nécessités de la lutte (Portelli:132).

In conjunction with Catholic Action (AC), the church superimpose organizations more directly involved in political and ideological struggle, namely political parties and trade unions. However AC is the real party of the church which will not be abandoned in the same fashion as other lay organizations. The growth of AC internationally produces a major contradiction between national apparatus and International domination of the Vatican:

A mesure que l'Action Catholique Nationale s'étend et devient organisme de masse, elle tend à devenir un vrai et propre parti dont les directives sont imposées par les nécessités internes de l'organisation mais ce processus ne peut jamais devenir organique justement par l'intervention du Saint-Siège (Portelli:245).

Though Gramsci admires and draws lessons from the "remarkable" organization of the Catholic church and its various structures, it is still the antithesis of the philosophy of praxis (Gramsci:532) and although strategic alliances can be effected with traditional intellectuals, it is done in order to convert them so that they, in turn, can convert the masses to Marxism (Portelli:278). Gramsci's stress on the role of intellectuals and the distinction between organic and traditional, hegemony, ideology, civil society, and ideological struggle are all illuminating for the study of religion and offer a number of interesting insights. Not surprisingly, many liberation theologians borrow elements of his analysis.

Bourdieu's efforts to deal with religion take him far afield from the traditional Marxian position, at least in the manner in which he formulates

his hypothesis and questions for analysis. He incorporates some of Weber's insights on religion into a Marxian framework that focuses specifically upon the religious field as an area of ideological competition between contending classes. Bourdieu sees religion as a symbolic system, a language which is structured and structures includes/excludes, associated/disassociated, integrates/disintegrates. Its primary function is to:

... contribue à l'imposition (dissimulée) des principes de structuration de la perception et de la pensée du monde et en particulier, du monde social dans la mesure où elle impose un système de pratiques et de représentations dont la structure, objectivement fondée sur un principe de division politique, se présente comme la structure naturelle - surnaturelle du cosmos (Bourdieu 1971[1]:300).

According to Bourdieu, Weber's major contribution to the sociology of religion is his focus on the critical impact of urbanization which not only intensified the division of labour between mental and material forces, but led to the development of a specialist corps of functionaries for managing salvation whose major task was to rationalize, systematize, and interiorize doctrines of salvation. It is in the production of ethno-rational standards and the movement to interiorize these standards that modern religion is required by the masses (in opposition to natural or psychological reasons), and in which the autonomy of religion is confirmed. But a historical analysis of Christianity and its doctrines brings to light the incredible diversity and contradictory nature of many religious ideologies. Bourdieu argues that not one principle can be consistently traced and described as being Christian, leading him to the conclusion that religion is performing an essentially ideological function, "la pratique et politique d'absolutisation du relatif et de légitimation de l'arbitraire". It sanctifies economic and political limits by

symbolic manipulation. Conversely by establishing limits to what is knowable it renders other options and thoughts unknowable. Thus, where Engels described the peasant wars as masks for class struggle Bourdieu disagrees stating that the wars were both disguised class struggles and real theological battles, for the limits on knowledge imposed by the church prevented participants from perceiving their actions in anything but religious terms.

Religion's primary interest is to legitimate, as far as sociological analysis is concerned, the : "propriétés attachées à un type déterminé de condition d'existence et de position dans la structure sociale" (Bourdieu 1971[1]:313). The major source of movement within religion is based on:

Les relations de transaction qui s'établissent sur la base d'intérêts différents entre les spécialistes et les laïcs et les relations de concurrence qui opposent les différents spécialistes à l'intérieur du champ religieux constituent le principe de la dynamique du champ religieux et, par là, des transformations de l'idéologie religieuse (Bourdieu 1971[1]:313).

The competition within the religious field for monopoly over "les biens de salut" (religious, capital) and the legitimate exercise of power as power to modify the religious habitus ("principe générateur de toutes les pensées, perceptions, et actions conformés aux normes d'une représentativité religieuse" [Bourdieu 1971[1]:319]) depends on the objective relation between religious demand by classes and religious supply, i.e. what is available in both orthodox and heterodox thought, and this in turn orders "la nature, la forme, et la force des stratégies que ces instances peuvent mettre au service de la satisfaction de leurs intérêts religieux ainsi que les fonctions qu'elles remplissent dans la division du travail religieux donc dans la division du travail politique" (Bourdieu 1971[1]:319). In its phenomenal form this

struggle for the monopoly of religious capital is constituted by the opposition between an established church which attempts to prohibit the entry on the market of new enterprises of salvation like sects or independent communities as well as individuals seeking individual salvation, (ascetism, meditation, orgies), and a prophet or heresiarch which attempts to realize "l'accumulation initiale du capital religieux" (Bourdieu 1971[1]:320). A more particular form of struggle for monopoly which occurs when the church holds a total monopoly is that between orthodoxy and heresy. Here the conflict occurs primarily between religious specialists:

Les conflits pour la conquête de l'autorité spirituelle qui s'instaurent dans le sous-champ relativement autonome des savants (théologiens), *produisent pour d'autres savants*, et portés par la recherche proprement intellectuelle de la *distinction* à des prises de position schismatiques dans le domaine et du dogme, sont voués par leur nature à demeurer circonscrits au monde «universitaire» et la transformation de ce que nous appellerons les schismes cléricaux en hérésies populaires et peut-être toujours plus apparentes que réelles (Bourdieu 1971[1]:323).

Competition from without and criticism from within lead to a causistico-rational systematisation and banalisation of religion.

As to the relation between religion and the church's political power, the church contributes to the maintenance of the political order by imposing and inculcating schemes of thought and thoughts of objective action objectively in accord with the political order and by using its own religious authority to combat symbolic subversion by prophets and heresiarchs. This is not to say that tensions and conflict between church and state do not arise which can enter into conflict over control in the division of labour of domination. At the same time prophets and heresiarchs can play a critical role in political revolutions:

Mais, s'il est vrai que la révolution politique ne trouve son accomplissement que dans la révolution symbolique qui la fait exister pleinement en lui donnant les moyens de se penser dans sa vérité, i.e. comme inouïe, impensable et innommable selon toutes les grilles anciennes, au lieu de se prendre pour l'une ou l'autre des révolutions du passé; s'il est vrai donc que toute révolution politique appelle cette révolution des systèmes symboliques que la tradition métaphysique désigne du nom de *metanoia*, il reste que la conversion des esprits comme révolution en pensée n'est une révolution que dans les esprits d'avance convertis des prophètes religieux qui, faute de pouvoir penser les limites de leur pouvoir, i.e. de leur pensée du pouvoir, ne peuvent donner les moyens de penser cet impensable qu'est la crise sans imposer du même coup cet impensé qu'est la signification de la crise, se rendant ainsi coupables, sans le savoir ni le vouloir, du *vol de pensée* qui leur est fait (Bourdieu 1971[1]:89).

Thus Bordieu concludes that prophets can indeed create the revolution in vision which is critical to the success of any revolution for a revolution without a mental revolution is bound to fail.

In their haste to validate Marx's materialist injunctions, many of the early Marxists writers on religion sought ideological causes for religion. Thus, for many of the early accounts, the paradigmatic etiology of natural religion, social religion, and animism were easily overcome by postulating their antithesis under socialist production. In other words, those phenomena which gave rise to religion would disappear once the proletarian revolution had been achieved. This simplistic etiology which does not heed psychological concerns and existential ones such as death, illness, mishaps, etc., gave rise to equally simplistic solutions. No wonder religion has not disappeared in communist societies. Amongst Bourdieu's contributions to the study of religion is the recognition that psychological and existential concerns are important sources of religious sentiment. Bourdieu's

examination of the context of the religious field moves him closely into line with Durkheim's religion as a "social fact" and implicitly suggest that religion may not be epiphenomenal after all.

By over-emphasizing the historical relativity and arbitrary nature of Christian principals, Bourdieu falls into the trap of denying meaningful context to the religious terrain, which though historically correct, is inadequate for providing an understanding of the choices people make between different faith's reasons for conversion and adherence to the particular dogma and rituals of the new faith. It also presupposes an absence of choice, the existence of a monopoly which is no longer the case in the modern world where there are a plethora of sects and religions to choose from in most contexts. Bourdieu does not follow the lead of Gramsci in an important respect in that he fails to stress the distance that exists between the ideological context of the various religious messages, and their relationship to their intended target. In other words, the formulation of a particular religious doctrine is not necessarily congruent with the behaviour of the consumers for whom it is espoused.

However, his treatment of the relationship between religious struggle and theological struggle is definitely worth considering as a component of the religious struggle as a whole. He draws out both the nature and the context of theological struggles and their relationship to the lay world in a surprising, insightful manner. Another major contribution is the notion of a religious "habitus" which shapes, and is shaped by the relation of class forces and the demand for religious salvation..

Gramsci's contribution is helpful for situating the church within the class struggle, situating its historical evolution within broader historical movements, analyzing the relationship between the church and bourgeois

democracy in institutional terms and presenting a conception of religion which accommodates the interest of various segments and classes in society in a more thorough and convincing manner. But all of them could not have foreseen what was going to happen; that a certain sector of the church was going to begin espousing the philosophy of praxis, a doctrine, an ideology clearly influenced, and in some instances, very close to Marxism.

In the final chapter, we will try to draw this Marxist inspired sociology of religion to bear on the events of Guatemala. By examining the movement of the Popular church, its ideology, its struggles within the church and society, and its class base, we can raise questions for further research in the area.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The Popular church in Guatemala has been instrumental in promoting the development of a popular movement in Guatemala which strives to create a socialist society after the revolution. While Marxist, ecclesiastical, and Guatemalan revolutionary theorists have struggled to provide adequate explanations for the phenomenon, the Popular church in Guatemala has worked to support and create organizations capable of transforming the capitalist state which continues to survive through implementing counterinsurgency measures which cost thousands of lives annually; the Popular church has been revolutionary in praxis. I want, in conclusion, to draw together the various elements which led to the creation of a revolutionary church committed to revolutionary change.

I have gone to some lengths to emphasize that the emergence of a revolutionary church is organically linked to the society of which it is a part. In chapter one, I explored the historical development of capitalism in Guatemala and the historical class struggles over the control of the means of production, especially land, to demonstrate that the current pre-revolutionary context in Guatemala has a determining effect on the political options of the church and the popular church.

I argued that the emergence of capitalist agriculture, the process of proletarianization of the peasantry, and the growth of an Indian petty-bourgeoisie in the Altiplano were important developments in class struggle during the 1930s and 40s. As a result of the shift in class relations, the nascent national bourgeoisie in alliance with sectors of the petty-bourgeoisie and the masses, confronted international capital during the 'Democratic Interlude'

and met with initial success but floundered on the very issue which was integral to the entire political project -- land reform. The land reform of 1954 was designed to address the already grave crisis of subsistence production amongst the peasantry by creating the conditions for the development of small-scale capitalist agriculture, but due to opposition from the oligarchy and problems in implementation, the land reform alienated those factions of the urban bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie which had initially supported the populist project. With the imperialist intervention of 1954, the Guatemalan army once again emerged as the dominant state apparatus to insure the interests of foreign capital.

The deepening of foreign capital's control over the Guatemalan economy was reinforced during the sixties by the creation of the Central American Common Market and the implementation of an Import-Substitution Industrialization policy in Guatemala. The initial economic growth coupled with growth in agricultural exports enabled the Guatemalan state to ignore the rural crisis, but with the global recession of the 1970s and the ensuing recession in Guatemala, the support for the industrialization of Guatemala ground to a halt. Once again, the peasantry, workers, and factions of the petty-bourgeoisie took to the offensive, and once again, the dominant bloc responded by relying upon the repressive apparatus of the state, the army.

The organized struggle was launched in 1980 in an all out effort to overthrow the capitalist state but the counterinsurgency tactics of the Guatemalan army were able to effectively control the guerilla forces. With the virtual elimination of rebel forces, the army embarked on fashioning a "popularly elected" democratic government. The inauguration of the democratic government under President Cerezo rearranged the political map of Guatemala as far as conducting a political and military campaign against the

capitalist state. While attention continues to focus on the achievement of the Cerezo regime, the guerilla forces have begun to reassert themselves in the northern departments of the highlands and although URNG does not currently pose a military threat to the Guatemalan army, they continue to harass and disrupt army plans.

In chapter two, I explored the development of the Popular church in Guatemala both within the context of the accelerating revolutionary struggle being waged in rural Guatemala, and within the context of the traditional Catholic church. I suggested that the Popular church in Guatemala was composed of elements of the peasantry, the rural Indian petty-bourgeoisie, university students, and urban intellectuals both within the church and through associated lay organizations. I emphasized the role played by organizations like Crater, the journal Dialogo, the Committee for Justice and Peace, and the Guatemalan Church in Exile as important forums for the elaboration of a Guatemalan ideology of liberation.

Amongst the peasantry, I documented the political role played by *Accion Catolica* and the regeneration of nationally sanctioned Catholicism in the highlands which provided the organizational foundation for a widespread popular movement. Envisioned by its creators as a bulwark against "communism", *Accion Catolica* became an important training ground for village leaders and in many cases, an important component in the reorganized popular struggle launched in the early 80s. Members of the two guerilla fronts -- the *Cristianos Revolucionarios* and the *Cristianos Revolucionarios Vicente Menchu* -- emerged from the catequista movement.

The repression against the Popular church by the army led to the intensification of the struggle within the traditional church. After the massacres of Panzos (1978) and the Spanish Embassy (1980), the church

hierarchy jettisoned the Popular church and did little to obstruct the army in its sweeps through the highlands. The class coalition within the Popular church began to unravel with many of the surviving liberation ideologues moving into exile, and the catequistas continuing to work as best they could under strenuous conditions in the altiplano. While the Popular church was cowed into the "church of silence" after 1982, it has recently begun to show signs of resurrection under Cerezo.

In chapter three, I focused on the history of the Catholic church in Guatemala prior to the Popular church. I argued that the religious roots of the Popular church are to be found in contradictions arising between the interests of international and national ecclesiastical objectives. With a dearth of Guatemalan religious workers in the early twentieth century, the Guatemalan church became dependent upon importing foreign clergy and religious (i.e. the Maryknollers and the Spanish Order of the Sacred Heart to name just two). As these orders were more closely linked to the dictates of the Vatican than to the national church, pastoral programming was heavily influenced by ecclesiastical developments elsewhere. The Vatican's efforts to legitimate the Catholic church in the liberal democratic states of Europe led to the creation of popular organizations like Catholic Action, Christian Democratic Parties, and Catholic labour unions all of which were instrumental in expanding the institutional basis of the Catholic church in Guatemala when transferred there beginning in the 1920s.

I suggested that the success of Catholic Action in the highlands in the 1940s after its initial failure in 1924 was due to the sharpening of class tensions within the Guatemalan highlands as the peasants were increasingly squeezed out of a subsistence economy and an indigenous petty-bourgeoisie was created. This faction, engaged in local trade, petty commodity production, and labour

recruitment embraced *'une église à bon marché'* and a network of regional and national contacts for developing rural markets and trading. Catholic Action grew beyond its petty-bourgeois roots and gradually incorporated elements of the peasantry and the semi-proletariat into its activities. It became a veritable community organization which transcended and blurred emerging class divisions under the rubric of a revamped Catholic religious ideology.

I argued that the contradictions between the liberal, ideological program promoted by the international Catholic church after Vatican II, clashed with the religious project pursued by the Catholic church in Guatemala after the 'Democratic Interlude'. The fact that the religious project of the church was increasingly implemented by foreign missionaries did little to ease the tension and indeed launched Catholic Action on a course of involvement in 'social works'. As the limitations of capitalist development became apparent to catequistas, a number of them, aided by a handful of religious, became involved in the revolutionary struggle.

In chapter four, I examined the development of liberation theology with reference to praxis. As liberation theology provided the ideological justification and underpinning for the Popular church in Guatemala, it was important to see what precisely was being advocated. Much of the work of the Guatemalan Church in Exile and the Committee for Justice and Peace drew inspiration from the writings of Boff, Gutierrez, and Assmann. I concluded that ideological shortcomings in the praxis of liberation theology seriously hampered any efforts to implement a pastoral program based upon it. The failure of liberation theologians to deal adequately with a definition of class led to serious problems which are evident in the activities and writings of the Popular church in Guatemala. By settling for a simply dichotomy between the "oppressors" and the "oppressed", liberation theology did not provide

adequate analytical tools to undertake a "scientific" study of Guatemalan society. When the army launched its attacks upon the church in the 1980s, catequistas were politically unprepared for the struggle.

A second major shortcoming of liberation theology was its failure to analyze the class divisions within the church itself. Again, in Guatemala, this weakness translated into an underestimation of the hierarchy's desire to suppress the Popular church and an overly simple view of what constituted the Popular church. For example, the Guatemalan Church in Exile and the Committee for Justice and Peace often talk about the Popular church as a homogeneous entity unencumbered by class divisions. However, in light of the fact that thousands of catequistas were killed while only a dozen clergy suffered the same fate raises questions about the imputed commitment of parish clergy to the Popular church. Rigoberta Menchu, a catequista from El Quiché, left little doubt over the animosity that had developed between the catequistas and the priest in her village. There is no reason why this should not have been the case elsewhere in the Altiplano where catequistas had to confront reluctant clergymen. Conversely, the failure of the Conference of Bishops to speak out about the atrocities being perpetrated upon their parishioners by the army before the pastoral letter 'United in Hope' drafted in 1976 raises serious doubts about their commitment to the pronouncements of CELAM II of Medellín from nine years before.

In some respects, this failure to discuss class divisions within the church is an extension of the weak formulation of class analysis generally. However, in light of Assmann's proposition in 1967 that liberation theology should focus on creating a "breach in the superstructure of traditional bourgeois values", it is surprising that few theologians attempted to deepen

that breach through a more rigorous study of the way in which class structures are reproduced within the church.

In chapter five, I focused on the Marxian perspectives on religion to explore the foundations of the traditional hostility of revolutionary movements to religion, and to develop concepts for a Marxist analysis of religion in praxis. Jean-Pierre Cot's statement on the Marxian approach to religion is germane. He suggests that Marxism vacillates between philosophical rejection on the one hand, and on the other, examining religion politically and oscillating between anti-clericalism and compromise" (Portelli:10). This ambiguity arises from Marx who prefaced his famous dictum that religion "is the opium of the people" with: "Religion is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress, religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation" (Marx and Engels 1955:42). I suggest there is a Marxist sociology of religion which provides significant insights into the evolution of religious praxis and its relationship to the class struggle. In this final section, I will examine some of this sociology in light of the Popular church in Guatemala and suggest questions which require further elaboration and investigation both for a Marxist sociology and for studies of the Popular church in Guatemala.

Marx's great contribution to the study of religion is to situate religion, as ideology, within specific modes of production, and thus subject to contradictions arising from clashes between existing relations of production and the existing production forces. In Guatemala, this is well illustrated by the process of religious conversion from the *cofradías* to the "new Catholicism" in the departments of El Quiché and Huehuetenango beginning with the reintroduction of missionaries in the early twentieth

century. As the peasant mode of production continued to be eroded by capitalism, one avenue for expression of this change was the emergence of a revised religion. Through Catholic Action, the emergent rural petty-bourgeoisie was able to religiously distance themselves from the peasantry and legitimize a new community order (Falla 1978). The question central to this thesis however, is how, some fifty odd years later, did this religious conversion culminate in the emergence of the Popular church in Guatemala. For this we must turn to the work of Gramsci on the ideological role of the church, and to Bourdieu for an examination of the role of theologians and their relationship to the religious 'habitus'.

Gramsci's views on the political role of religion -- that religion is both an instrument which subjects its followers to social control but is also subject to pressures emerging from the masses -- establishes the struggle within the church as a significant one. The idea that the church is composed of many different class-based conceptions of Catholicism struggling to become "natural churches" captures an essential theme running through the Catholic church in Guatemala. From Archbishop Casariego's denunciation of the notion of class struggle, to the declarations in support of the revolutionary struggle by the Guatemalan Church in Exile, to the critique of the clergy by Rigoberta Menchu, it is clear that there are multiple interpretations of the role of Christianity.

His study of the movement of the Catholic church towards more direct involvement in Italian political life provides many parallels to the evolution of the church in Guatemala. In Guatemala, the church began with Catholic Action in the 1920s, the Christian Democratic Party and labour unions in the 1950s. However, Gramsci's argument that Catholic Action is the true political party of the church is not borne out by the evidence in Guatemala. Although

this might have been the case in the 1940s and 50s when Archbishop Rossell used *Acción Católica*, to galvanize the peasantry against Arevalo and Arbenz, by the 60s, significant splits were developing in AC which provided the support for the Popular church which struggled for the creation of a socialist society. In Guatemala, the development of the Popular church from within AC and the election of the Christian Democratic Party to power resulted in the traditional church jettisoning *Acción Católica* and trying to effect a rapprochement with the PDC.

While Gramsci's theoretical insights are useful in analysing the institutional logic of the growth and development of the Catholic church, the model is predicated upon the assumption that the church and/or theology can never be revolutionary. Indeed, Gramsci concludes that movements of religious innovation face two options; to be dismissed as heretical, or to be absorbed into the mainstream of theological dogma (Portelli: 177). For Gramsci, the church was the antithesis of the people's party. However, given the very strong evidence that the Popular church in Guatemala has been instrumental in conscientizing the rural peasantry and acting as a vanguard in the revolutionary struggle, Gramsci's assumption, in this respect, is less tenable. As Portelli documents, Gramsci flirted within the Catholic Church in the 1920s and it was not until the signing of the Concordat with Mussolini that Gramsci abandoned any hope of effecting an alliance. If this is so, it is possible that a historically specific church ministering in a different socio-economic, political, and theological environment might espouse a revolutionary ideology. In this respect, Gramsci's eventual retreat to the classical Marxian interpretation of religion as alienating is unsatisfactory.

Bourdieu's insights offer some interesting perspectives on the relationship between religious reformers/theologians and the ecclesiastical

hierarchy within the church, and the predisposition of believers to operate in a religious mode of thought. In a broad sense, Bourdieu's thesis that the power to modify the religious habitus ("principe generateur de toutes les pensées, perceptions, et actions conformés aux normes d'une représentative religieuse") depends upon the religious demand by classes and the religious supply, provides scope for enlargement in a number of directions. First, it highlights the dependence of dogma upon the coalition of class interests in the church and the combative role played by religious reformers and theologians in shifting the religious control. Broadly speaking, the struggle of liberation theologians during the last two decades to insure the evolution of liberation theology and its dissemination around the world falls into the category of struggle over the religious capital. The fact that no liberation theologian has emerged from Guatemala does little to minimize the impact of liberation theology within the national Catholic church as I have shown.

Bourdieu's conclusion that a political revolution can never be accomplished without a symbolic revolution, and that this symbolic revolution can be launched by religious prophets underestimates, I argue, the impact of theologians and their ability to produce the same results. For Bourdieu, theologians are restricted to the "relatively autonomous" sub-field of theology which has little bearing on the every day world of religious belief. In Latin America, this has not been the case with liberation theology which has moved from the cloistered courtyards of theological seminaries into the *barrios* and *campos*, and back again. Based on a Marxist "science" of society, liberation theology has had a tremendous impact far beyond the confines of the universities. The Popular church in Guatemala, as influenced by liberation

theology, is quite real¹ and owes its inspiration to the works of liberation theologians like Assmann, Gutierrez, and Boff.

The second concept which has tremendous potential for application is the notion of a religious habitus. In the Altiplano, the *costumbres* represent a complex synthesis between pre-colonial and colonial religious beliefs and provided the backdrop for the emergence of the Church of the Poor. A religious habitus then becomes a convenient tool for designating a religious disposition which has no clear ideological precursors but which still carries tremendous weight. The religious disposition of the indigenous people was a crucial element in the eventual growth of a "new Catholicism" and religious struggle between the *cofradías* and the *catequistas* continues to be intense in a number of areas.

At the same time, however, the habitus can perhaps gloss over important questions which have a bearing on understanding both the emergence and importance of various religious phenomena. How, for example, do we account for the failure of AC in the 1920s and its success in the 1940s? What affect does the class struggle have upon the transformation of the habitus? What class factions or intellectuals transform this habitus? What are the common symbols which transcend class boundaries? Which ones do not, and why? How do we distinguish between the different habitus, and how do we explain instances where people convert to other religions altogether (i.e. the phenomenal growth of the fundamentalist sects in Guatemala during the last two decades)? It is a concept with great potential but one which needs further elaboration.

¹ la transformation de ce que nous appellerons les schismes cléricaux en hérésies populaires est peut-être toujours plus apparente que réelle (Bourdieu 1971[1]:323).

To understand the growth of the Popular church in Guatemala, there are more questions that need to be asked. To begin with, there are the important considerations of race which, while prevalent in much of the political analysis on Guatemala, rarely enters into discussions about religion or religious conversion to the Popular church. It is dealt with either as the central contradiction in Guatemalan society pitting *indigena* against *ladino*, or it is subsumed under class analysis which barely recognizes its importance. Another factor which is lost on everyone is the role of women in the Popular church. Neither liberation theologians nor any commentators on the Popular church in Guatemala deal with the issue. Yet there is every reason to believe that women have been an important force in the Popular church and it would be fascinating to study how they affected its growth.

Perhaps most importantly, much more work must be done to examine the Popular church in Guatemala empirically. Much of the documentation is polemical -- either apologists for, or critics of the Popular church-- and fragmentary. When there are studies undertaken, they tend to gloss over the fundamental question of the class basis of the movement and present the Popular church as a fait accompli which will eventually challenge the traditional church. Specifically, it would be fascinating to gather more information on the growth of Accion Catolica and its activities from its inception. It would also be fruitful to examine its current class composition to see how it has evolved since the 1940s. A study of the *Centros de Capacitacion Social*, and the other urban liberation organizations would also be useful.

In summary, I have argued in this thesis that the evolution of the Popular church in Guatemala reflects many of the economic and political contradictions manifest in Guatemalan society. Indeed, the growth of the

Popular church was based primarily upon the petty-bourgeoisie of the altiplano who first embraced a new Catholicism as a means to escape from the requirements of the *cofradia* system, but then as the highland economy began to enter a prolonged period of economic involution during the latter seventies and the eighties, certain elements of AC embraced the revolutionary dogma of liberation theology.

In a magnificent study of similar processes in El Salvador, Carlos Cabarrus documents the class basis of the revolutionary Christian movement in that country. Similar documentation does not exist on Guatemala, nor is it likely that similar research can be undertaken under the present dangerous conditions. While the evidence is fragmentary and incomplete in the Guatemalan case, there is little doubt that the Popular church has played an instrumental role in the Guatemalan revolutionary struggle.

In Guatemala, religion, and religious institutions continue to play a major part in the everyday lives of millions of people. While the Popular church continues to take stock of the current situation and catequistas in a number of departments continue to press for land reform, the traditional church is busy working to shore up the Christian Democratic Party and prevent the imposition of another military junta. Religion plays a much larger role in the political life of Guatemala today than it did a century ago as various sects and churches battle for the 'hearts and minds' of the people. Thus the study of religion in this context requires even more concerted study. In view of the revolutionary force that has emerged from within the church, I hope more work is done to develop a Marxist sociology of religion which analyzes the character and content of the religious movement in a constructive fashion. The study of religion must be rehabilitated from its

current stature if we hope to develop a broader framework for political economy of underdeveloped societies.

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