Chile: 1970-1973

by Leo Pyle

In December 1972 Luis Corvalán, the general secretary of the Chilean communist party, was asked if a coup d'etat was possible. 'It is theoretically possible. But I don't expect it to happen, because I'm full of confidence in the success of the policies being implemented by the Unidad Popular. And, moreover, there are two very important institutions, the Catholic Church and the armed forces, which have, through their leaders, made themselves very clear on this issue.' Ten months later Corvalán's expectations and the hopes of people inside and out of Chile were totally destroyed in a savage and brutal coup.

Corvalán and the communist party were not the only people to seriously misread the situation. I believe the Christian Democrats also totally misjudged the strength of extreme right wing forces. Certainly Corvalán was tragically wrong: the armed forces were the final agents of the coup; the Catholic Church stood by, and a couple of days later the hierarchy were gathered in prayer with the military leaders. The role of the church and of christianity in the Chilean process is important and I shall return to the theme towards the end of this account.

Most people probably have at least fragmentary ideas of the events which led to the death of Salvador Allende and the installation of the military junta. A complete analysis of the history of the U.P. would need a book. All I can hope to do in a short article is to try to outline some of the main changes in the balance of forces in Chile between 1970 and 1973. Inevitably I shall have to omit discussion of many important factors—for reasons of space there will be little discussion of the agrarian reform, important though it was. However, I believe the outline here to be a reasonably coherent version of events.

Three years along the Chilean road to socialism brought the country to a level of class consciousness and antagonism of almost unparalleled height. By the middle of 1973 the country's institutions were disintegrating; the economy was becoming almost impossible to control; anti-government propaganda and opposition had an all-pervasive ferocity and extent; fascist forces were increasingly powerful and active; food and goods were short following a prolonged series of strikes; the left itself was quite seriously divided. There were probably two main reasons for the timing of the coup: the Christian Democrats were on the point of splitting, and, following three years of increasing violence from the extreme right, the left had for the first time awakened to the serious possibilities of an armed struggle, and some sections had begun to arm themselves.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1973.tb07204.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Like the rest of Latin America, Chile is caught in a web of dependency on the major capitalistic powers. Industry and commerce were seriously penetrated by foreign capital: the copper industry in 1970 was controlled by foreign capital, as were about half the country's hundred largest firms; most of the manufacturing industry was linked to foreign interests by capital and by the identity of interests between foreign firms and the controlling groups in Chilean commercial life. The structure of industry—its technology, organisation and products—illustrate this very clearly.

Allende's aim to destroy capitalism's control of Chile thus had both internal and external significance. The proposals to nationalise a large sector of manufacturing industry and the financial institutions, and the agrarian reform, soon mobilised opposition from both the Chilean upper classes and foreign capital. For this reason it seems to me naive to look for a C.I.A.-engineered coup as if this would explain everything. The true significance of U.S. influence is to be found throughout the three years of Allende's rule. This point is very relevant to the subsequent policy of the Christian Democrats.

The Christian Democratic presidential candidate, Frei, came to power in 1964, with conservative and liberal support, on a programme full of the promise of the sixties. He promised reforms based on the provision of substantial foreign aid, and Chile became the showpiece of the Alliance for Progress, the demonstration of how reformist capitalism could assure development. Within four years the programme was in serious difficulties, with economic stagnation, endemic inflation, and high unemployment. The significant increase in the expectations of workers and peasants led to increasing trouble for Frei from both left and right. There were two significant electoral consequences. First, there was a split (in 1969) within the Christian Democrats which led to the formation of M.A.P.U., a party of explicit marxist leaning, which later was an important part of the U.P. M.A.P.U.'s defection arose from the growing realisation on the part of leftist liberals of the impossibility of significantly improving the lot of the poor without a complete rupture from the ties that bound Chile. This left a small body of opinion within the Christian Democrats which was to the left of Frei, and the party supported the spokesman for this wing, Tomic, in the 1970 elections. The second factor was the candidature of Alessandri on behalf of the right, who were becoming increasingly frustrated. He was an ex-President who stood for a return to the golden age of tranquility.

In this presidential campaign Allende was, in many respects, a compromise candidate between the communists, socialists, radicals and M.A.P.U. A veteran of many election campaigns, and an extraordinarily skilful politician, he was only supported by his own party, the socialists (P.S.), after a great deal of discussion.

This, then, was the position at the time of Allende's election. On the extreme right was the strongly conservative National Party (P.N.), representing important sectors of business life and with strong links to some of the forces' officer corps. Then there were the Christian Democrats (P.D.C.), an uneasy grouping of the powerful Freist wing with a more strongly reformist group who still believed in the possibility of a middle way between capitalism and socialism; the party's strongly anti-communist history certainly played an important role in their policies. Allende's own group united the cautious, highly disciplined communists (C.P.), with the less disciplined, more aggressive socialists. Both these parties had strong working class support, although the communists were much stronger in industry than on the land. The radicals were primarily middle class parties; M.A.P.U., although at first not very large, had also a strong base. Outside the parliamentary framework two other political groups were later to prove important: the movement of the revolutionary left, M.I.R., and a fascist grouping *Patria y Libertad* (Fatherland & Freedom) formed by a lawyer, Rodriguez, with the sole objective of 'liberating Chile from the yoke of marxism'.

It seems likely that it was the Christian Democrats' regard for constitutional rights rather than any particular love for Allende which led them to support him rather than Alessandri's minority position. Be that as it may, he came to power in September 1970 in a climate of violence and fear already fostered by fascist groups: during the election period the right wing press had carried pictures of soviet tanks in the streets of Santiago, and horrible predictions of Russian take-over; violence broke out with the assassination of the army commander, General Schneider. On the other hand, there was a widespread climate of expectation and hope. Within Chile the poorest and most exploited sections of the community looked forward to a government of the people, which would provide them with the work, income, housing and social services that had been denied them in the past. Outside Chile there was, of course, great interest in the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism, based on an alliance between the working class and progressive sections of the middle and professional classes.

In the autumn of 1970 the economic conditions appeared favourable for the first stages of the U.P. programme. There was considerable unemployment (7-8 per cent. in Santiago itself, higher outside), and considerable under-utilisation of manufacturing capacity: it was estimated that many industries were running at only 60 per cent. of their full capacity. This provided good opportunities for beginning a substantial redistribution of income and for pushing along industrial output. In the first year of office there was much success along these classical Keynesian lines: unemployment fell, the share of wage-owners in the national income rose from 51 per cent. to 59 per cent.,

industrial output and consumption rose dramatically. From this point of view the situation looked fairly hopeful—the only people who could claim to have suffered were those earning the top 1 per cent. of incomes. Overall, purchasing power grew at double the rate of inflation, and production was increasing at around 18-20 per cent. per annum.

These economic factors were deeply related to other factors affecting Chilean life. Any long-term benefits from the economic policies mentioned above depended heavily on increasing the levels of investment, so as to create new industry. Not surprisingly, since the strategy was clear for all to see, and the transfer of industries from the private to the public sectors was going ahead, the levels of private investment —still crucial to economic policy—began to fall. The opposition were strident in their criticism of the handling of the economy, whilst they themselves did all they could to create economic pressures on Allende.

Internal factors were far from being the only elements affecting the government's economic policies. Seventy per cent. of Chile's export earnings, and about a quarter of the national income, depend on copper which in 1970 was largely in the hands of U.S. firms (Kennecott, Anaconda, Braden). The industry started about 45 years ago with an initial investment of around $35m. No new investment from outside the country took place, and in the years of U.S. ownership around $400m. was exported from Chile, and credits outstanding were $700m. To put these figures in more concrete terms, the amount of money taken out of the country was greater than the total investment in the *whole* of Chilean industry, roads, hospitals, etc. It was also about the same as the external debt handed on to Allende by Frei. Besides being a highly profitable investment for the foreign companies—in 1969 the Anaconda Co. derived 79 per cent. of all its earnings from Chile, where it had a mere 17 per cent. of its investments—it also gave them a very tight control over industrial development. For example, expansion plans were produced or frustrated to serve the interests of the company and their Chilean friends rather than the country itself. Manufacturing industry was oriented to the production of goods for the middle and upper classes—large cars, refrigerators, etc.—using imported technology, machinery and spare parts—which, of course, made it extremely difficult to break with the past. The proposals to nationalise the copper industry found strong support from the Chilean people, and the necessary legislation was soon passed in the parliament. Needless to say, neither the plan nor its terms were acceptable to the U.S. companies, who initiated continued and protracted pressure on the economy.

The copper companies were joined by other international firms in their pressures on Chile. The scandalous behaviour of the I.T.T. in attempting to provoke the immediate downfall of Allende, and its subsequent—and successful—plans for sowing the seeds of economic

disaster, is well known. Under this sort of pressure the U.S.-dominated aid-giving bodies cut long-term credits from around $300m. to nearly zero, within a year. Short-term credits went the same way, so that very quickly Chile had serious foreign exchange problems. The severity of the situation can be judged from the following statistics. About 30 per cent. of Chile's dollar earnings were needed just to pay interest on her external debt—in other words, for every 100 dollars entering the country, 33 left immediately to finance the debt. A large proportion of the dollar aid to Chile was effectively being used to pay for itself. Chilean exports were worth around $1,300m. per annum, which was needed to pay the debt already referred to, and to purchase raw materials and machinery and agricultural products (which took around one-fifth of all imports). Added to the problems with credits was the disastrous fall in the price of copper on international markets which were dominated by the same expropriated firms; the fall in price led to a drop in earnings of between $200m. and $300m., despite increased production. Together, these different facts spotlight the essential links between the internal and external workings of the economy, so vital to the position of the country in the capitalist system.

U.S. intervention in economic problems was understandably played down by the opposition: it was, for them, a convenient oversimplification to point to government failings and mistakes. At the same time it is clear that this pressure was actively welcomed by much of the opposition, reinforcing as it did their own attack, and Frei himself toured Europe in his role as prophet of doom, supporting economic pressure on the U.P.

The propagandist role played by the Chilean press in this situation reveals both the role of the opposition groups and the links between them and U.S. interests. Like all institutions in Chile, the press, radio and TV were highly political, and dominated by the right wing opposition. A key link in the campaign against Allende was the Edwards clan, especially through their chain of newspapers led by the prestigious daily *El Mercurio*. *El Mercurio* was one of the main elements chosen by I.T.T. for their attack on the U.P. Its owner, Augustín Edwards, had held directorships in a number of Chilean subsidiaries of U.S. firms, and fled Chile in 1970 to take up a senior post with Pepsi Cola. Despite continued claims about suppression of the liberty of expression, a continuous stream of invective and unscrupulous propaganda was maintained against Allende, from *El Mercurio* and the rest of the press, radio and TV. Two important examples were Radio Agricultura (which was linked to landowners, the National Party, and was a mouthpiece for *Patria y Libertad*) and the dollar-financed TV channel of the Catholic University. A typical example of the extremes to which these collar-and-tie delinquents were prepared to go arose over the illegal opening of a station of this TV channel in

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1973.tb07204.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Concepcion. The U.P. government chose to try to close the station through the courts, and in the meantime resorted to jamming. A group of agents of the Catholic University station broke into the jamming station and killed a quite innocent bystander in the process. So much for constitutionality and christian values. . . .

It is fairly straightforward to explain the role and attitudes of the different sectors of the parliamentary opposition in this process. The National Party was never interested in any form of accommodation with Allende: they represented the most entrenched, privileged and conservative groups in Chilean life. They were in continual close contact with *Patria y Libertad,* an explicitly Fascist movement, who were responsible for a number of appalling massacres of peasants in the south, and who had strong links both to important businessmen and agriculturalists. As the situation developed, these two groups acted ever more closely together. Following Allende's success in the March 1973 elections, Onofre Jarpa, the P.N. leader, remarked that they would find some way of getting rid of Allende despite their lack of the necessary majority to impeach him, and both groups were closely involved in the coup. Both groups immediately recognised the military junta as the embodiment of their policies, and it appears that the junta's policies follow a line very close to that pursued by these extreme right-wing groups.

The Christian Democrats were a more complex amalgam of forces. A split occurred with the formation of *Izquierda Christiana* (Christian Left) a small group who were incorporated into the U.P. They were ex-supporters of Tomic, and their political line was inspired by the ideals of Camilo Torres (which, interestingly enough, usually put their policies well to the left within the U.P.). They seceded because they realised the impossibility of trying to appear a party opposed to capitalism whilst in opposition to Allende, and this left the Tomic wing of the P.D.C. extremely weak. There was also a small centrist group of parliamentarians, whose best known members were Fuentealba and Leighton (a founder of the P.D.C.): their main political objective was to try to isolate the revolutionary left (i.e. M.I.R. and the strong elements within the P.S.) in an attempt to try and create a new centre-left (democratic) alliance. It was to this group that elements (especially the C.P.) within the government directed their efforts to try to arrive at some tactical agreement. Finally, much the strongest group in the P.D.C. was associated with a person—Frei—rather than a clear policy. In practice, this group took an aggressive, right-wing line; they were the people most in favour of a military intervention following the March elections.

Frei's main aim was, from the first, to regain power. Despite the collapse of his own policies, and the repressive line he took against some groups of peasants, he still retains in the West at least, the image

of a wise, moderate, statesman. The opinion voiced in the I.T.T. papers is nearer the truth:

> 'Never known for displaying guts in a crunch, he is faced with a dilemma of not wanting to be charged with either turning Chile over to Communist rule or contributing to a possible civil war. A parlay of highly inflated ego and a chance to occupy the presidency six more years may provide the necessary starch for his decision'.

A more savage view still is provided by the well-known novelist Carlos Droguett. I quote his views here because they seem to me to apply to many other people who parade under the titles of Christian and democrat:

> 'Frei was a young man from the most modest middle Chilean class, the son of a worthy little-known farmer from Los Andes . . . and look at him now, transformed into an aristocratic apprentice, into the exultant guest of top yankees, taking refuge in exclusive European hotels. Look at him now, far from his poverty and his old illusions, exchanging Christ for the C.I.A. and Kennecott, and the host for the dollar . . . in America there has been only one Martí, one Fidel, one Che, one Camilo Torres, but many traitors, innumerable Freis, for whom the ideas of country, of justice and revolution are just a pretext and an excuse, a springboard to scale the heights of business and to set up their stall in the temple'.

Frei himself maintained a 'low profile' until the March elections, when he scored a personal triumph at the head of the P.D.C.-P.N. alliance. He absented himself from public debate behind the rising hysteria led by his own party in a clever move to project himself as the only hope for the reconstruction of Chile. Not for the first time, opportunism and political sense have not gone hand in hand, and it appears at the present moment as if Frei's policy, even on his terms, has been a disaster.

The Christian Democrats moved more and more towards support for a military intervention as the class struggle intensified. For two years or so they had visions of sweeping away Allende in the March 1973 elections. To do that they and the P.N. needed to secure more than two-thirds of the seats in the upper house. That they failed was directly due to the development of political consciousness in the workers, the peasants and the poor. After March, there was little hope of finding a parliamentary end, despite a series of farcical impeachment actions against members of the cabinet. Instead, the policy moved closer and closer to that of total collaboration with the extreme right. The first concerted use of an essentially middle-class strike as a weapon against Allende came in October 1972, after weeks of rumour about the possibility of an armed coup. The strike was engineered

around the supposed nationalisation threat to lorry-owners in the province of Aysen. (The fact that the province was one of the smallest and most remote from the capital, and that the threat was largely a misrepresentation of the facts, did not deter the strikers.) The lorry owner's union which struck first was dominated by a handful of extremely powerful owners linked to *Patria y Libertad,* and to U.S. interests. For once, dollars began to flow in to Chile—this time to finance the strike. The lorry-owners were followed by shop-owners, especially the owners of the large supermarket and distribution chains, industrialists, and then some of the professional groups—engineers, doctors and so on. The result of the strike was, on balance, a victory for Allende and his supporters, for the strikers did not succeed in their attempt to bring the country to a complete halt, and in the end their ranks began to break as many small owners felt the pinch. On the other hand, the strike did profound damage to the economy, for disruption was very severe, and the long-term effects in the agricultural sector were very serious because of the blow to fertiliser shipments and the supply of seed to the farmers. The second major strike, still in progress at the time of Allende's death, followed a similar pattern: the lorry owners presented a list of demands to the government, and struck to enforce their claims. Agreement was in fact reached quite quickly, so the lorry owners' union concocted a further set of reasons for extending the strike. Simultaneously the parliamentary opposition brought in impeachment actions against the ministers most closely involved, to add further confusion.

The strategy of using the lorry owners as the spearhead of the attack was a clever one. It proved extremely easy to bring the country close to a state of desperation, because of the great dependence on the movement of goods and food by road and the facility with which the few main roads could be effectively closed down. The situation very soon developed into a full-scale confrontation, with the atmosphere exacerbated by the shortages of food and fuel, by the hysteria whipped up in the press and on radio and TV, the violence against strike-breakers, and the general atmosphere of hatred. The college of doctors justified their adhesion to the strike in these terms:

> 'People are going to die or the country will die. It is the same as a war. Nobody voluntarily goes out into the street to kill, but in a war you've got to kill people'.

On the whole the political parties of the opposition let the unions remain in the foreground of the strike, to maintain the myth of their independence. In fact it is here that the christian tradition in Chile proved to be most powerful. Christian democracy was formed in the attempt to embody christian social teaching in political action. Its background goes back to the Falange, although the rhetoric is more up to date. The important point is that it has proved easy in a country

with a strong tradition of Catholicism for concepts like freedom, for example, to become sacralised and to take on a very specific meaning which derives from a tradition of deep anti-communism formed under a highly reactionary capitalist government. Thus screams in the opposition press about, say, the supposed suppression of liberty could be guaranteed to provoke an immediate and deep-felt response. The fact that the so-called liberty that was supposed to be threatened was the liberty of a privileged minority to carry on their life of luxury, and that this involved at the same time hundreds of thousands of people living in conditions of absolute destitution, was beside the point. In other words the values of specific forms of capitalist society had become closely identified with christian ideals, which meant, of course, that socialism itself was under a double-pronged attack. Before returning to take up this point in more detail in a discussion of the actual role of the church, we should first consider the response of the workers, and peasants to the developing crisis.

The Chilean poor have a tradition of political awareness and vitality, born of their struggles under desperate conditions. Frei's government had recourse on occasion to bloody repression to contain their demands. Thus a key element in any proposals to move towards the destruction of the patterns and structures of capitalist society would be the extent of the success in mobilising these urban and rural poor.

Allende had a number of weapons at his disposal. There can be no denying the extraordinary efforts to make economic progress by redistributing income, improving social benefits, imposing minimum wage conditions, improving the disastrous health and educational services. (Perhaps it should be pointed out again that *some* people had high salaries, access to impeccable health services, private schools and so on. To many of them it was a sign of the deterioration in Chilean life that a *roto* should now want to visit the seaside.) So, for the first time in their lives, and in Chilean history, the poor began to have some access to markets and goods previously out of reach and possibly out of mind; we should not underestimate the long-term effects of this. The same would be true of the immense efforts at providing cultural and recreational facilities.

Of course, the economic benefits could only be really useful if people had access to goods, and were satisfied that some measure of equity was involved in their distribution. In the many urban areas of desperately poor housing, shops were poor and few and far between: the contrast between a *callampa* and the smart avenues of Providencia a few miles away could hardly be more complete. So the U.P. was faced with a double problem: to increase production and also to ensure fair distribution. In the industrial and manufacturing sectors production increased enormously between 1970 and 1972, despite all the problems of foreign exchange. Nonetheless, shortages

developed, partly because consumption had risen markedly (though that argument was hard to sustain in the case of toilet rolls, of which there was a notable shortage), and also because of the significant hoarding and black market activities of the well-to-do. It was not unusual to meet wealthy people with stocks of sugar, meat, canned goods, etc., sufficient for several months of high living. (It didn't stop these same people from sending their servants into the kitchens to fetch out the saucepans to be clanged of an evening in protest at the food shortages.) The problems of ensuring a fair distribution were enormous, and the problems led (in early 1972) to the formation of supply organisations, run by the local people. These organisations (J.A.P.s) were intended to provide a regular, fair, supply of basic foodstuffs at controlled prices. The central distribution network run by the state was slowly enlarged, but by the end of the three years of U.P. government still accounted for only about one-third of all goods. Despite parliamentary obstruction and mountains of propaganda against these wicked soviets, which were taking bread out of the mouths of the supermarket owners, the J.A.P.s did begin to have some effect in working class areas. Nonetheless the sad truth remained that a majority of the population were, to all intents and purposes, still living in a state of rationing, simply because they didn't have the money to buy more than the barest essentials.

The J.A.P.s played a dual role. Apart from their role as suppliers, they were also a means of involving people—the same shiftless *rotos* so despised by the upper classes—in controlling their own affairs. A measure of their effectiveness is the extent of the propaganda levelled at them, and the parallel growth of the black market.

These local distribution groups were crucially important at the time of the October strike, when armies of U.P. supporters were mobilised to move essential supplies around. Their role in mobilising people to take control was paralleled by moves towards workers' control in other sectors of the economy. In agriculture the U.P., using the legislation enacted under the Christian Democrats, accelerated the rate of expropriation of the larger farms. Within a year and a half they had completed as much nationalisation as occurred in six years of Christian Democrat rule. Perhaps the weakest aspects of this policy were the failure to agree satisfactory production targets, and the lack of clarity and follow-up in defining the nature of the control to be exercised by the peasants. There was a deal of confusion here, between those favouring a form of ownership which converted the peasant into a mini-landowner, and those favouring a more socialist concept of common ownership on behalf of society. Despite these weaknesses, there was an enormous awareness of the significance of the reforms, and a genuine demand for more power. The policy in the industrial sector and in commerce had also been to take over the most prominent firms and banking institutions, again

introducing control through workers' councils. Once again there were problems in the implementation of these policies, due to bureacracy, sectarianism, and timidity; the important agreement signed between the government and the very powerful central trades union organisation, the C.U.T., which united workers of all parties, was barely working. Just as in the case of food distribution, the October strike was a shot in the arm for these councils. As the owners tried to close down the factories and some of the engineers joined the strikes, so the workers stepped in, took them over, and ran them themselves. So grew up an impressive chain of local workers' groups, set up to maintain production and to defend the industries against attempts at closure.

Unfortunately the U.P. policy towards these groups became confused. Once the strike was over the presence of occupying groups became a severe embarrassment, especially to the more cautious groups in the government. The existence of groups which had formed without pressure or impulse from the official union was a great problem, and particularly to the communists, who wanted to see a tightly controlled industrial movement. Thus there arose on the left a great deal of discussion, much of it acrimonious, about the existence of workers groups independent of the formal party or union machines. On the other hand to the more revolutionary sectors of the workers (M.I.R.—through its workers' arm, the F.T.R.—and radical groups in the socialists and M.A.P.U.) the groups were seen as the first elements in the formation of soviets.

The conflicts and tensions on this issue were typical of the Chilean process. Putting on one side the history behind the formation of these councils and the take-over of factories, the situation was ready meat for an opposition wearing its constitutionalist hat. For sectors in the U.P. anxious to keep on terms with the opposition, their existence was easily interpreted as a provocation from spontaneous ultra-leftist groups, and thus posed a very real threat to the constitutional process.

The opposition was quick to capitalise on the strictly legal potential of their case, and the U.P. response was often divided and unhappy. This probably reflected a serious weakness in the U.P., for here, as in other aspects of policy-making (e.g. cabinet changes) there was often a disturbing lack of contact and interaction between the base and the actual policy makers, which led to misunderstanding and mistrust. One sad episode just prior to the coup illustrates these problems. It was reported (and, of course, taken up in the U.K. press) that a revolt by left wing sailors had been suppressed. It was further claimed that some of the sailors arrested had named a number of prominent left wing leaders as instigators of the revolt; those named included Carlos Altamirano, the secretary of the P.S., Oscar Garreton, the secretary of M.A.P.U. (both of course U.P. parties),

and Miguel Enriquez, the leader of M.I.R. The accusations were taken up on all sides. The opposition saw the events as clear evidence of the dangerous elements within the U.P.; President Allende himself appeared to accept the navy's account of the M.I.R.-inspired uprising and condemned it bitterly. In fact the situation was almost certainly quite different. The sailors involved had been imprisoned for refusing to join in an attempt to overthrow the government, and were subsequently tortured. This latter account seems highly probable, both in view of subsequent events, and also taking into account the many well-documented cases of repression and torture against U.P. supporters during arms searches by the armed forces in the month before the coup.

This, then, was the climate in these months before the final coup. Luis Corvalán's hope that the armed forces and the church would prevent a putsch was an empty one, and I think that part of his error was to identify each of these bodies too closely with a single leader (General Prats and Cardinal Silva). President Allende successfully maintained stability for about a year by taking senior members of the armed forces into his cabinet. General Prats' resignation from the cabinet and as commander of the army finally revealed to what degree the senior officers felt their own interests to be threatened by the ongoing political movement. And of course it was clear and predictable that a majority of these officers should reveal their true political colours when the chips were down. Perhaps the famous political neutrality of the Chilean forces was a consequence of the fact that in the recent past their class interests have never been so threatened as in the last few months. (Corvalán's simple equation of an institution with its leader is revealing, and was also reflected in the relations between the U.P. and the P.D.C. The communists in particular were anxious to find at least tactical agreement with the Christian Democrats and, of course, if a constitutional way forward was to have been found President Allende would have needed all the support he could muster. Yet it was clearly a bad mistake to concentrate attention on talks with P.D.C. leaders—some of whom were, following the Frei line, extremely hostile to the U.P.—rather than on trying much more seriously to gain support from workers supporting the Christian Democrats. Such a policy could well have succeeded, for these same workers came to help of the left when, as in the October strike, they felt their own class interests were being threatened. A lot of harm was done, however, by sectarianism between these groups.)

Cardinal Silva is probably one of the more enlightened prelates in Latin America. He is not, however, a revolutionary. In other words he has, as he could not fail to do, adopted a particular political position: in this case reformism (however radical). The relations between the church, christian values, and society that I discussed

earlier are such that this type of political stance can have the appearance of neutrality. We are all familiar with situations in which ministers and priests of the left are accused of involving the church in politics. In the three years of Allende's rule Cardinal Silva made a number of wise and balanced statements. All that must count for nothing when, as happened, the hierarchy and church stood feebly by when the tanks rolled in. Their role as passive witnesses, feebly protesting at the loss of human rights, concluding with a Te Deum a couple of days after the coup, is as appalling as Pope Paul's description of the Chilean bloodbath as a 'drama'. That word exactly places the church. (Of course when 'christian' values were threatened, as in the proposed educational reforms in Chile, the hierarchy became more explicit, in the familiar role as a sort of superior trades union.)

In Chile, the church and the hierarchy have sold out. Acting generally within the framework of capitalist society, they put the emphasis on values which spring from 'the faith' (love, unity) and thus serve only to confirm bourgeois ideals. The only way forward is through reform, never revolution or conflict, since, for example, unity is seen as an existing state to be safeguarded, not the form of a society to be struggled for.

Latin America, fortunately, has also seen the growth of significant numbers of christians who reject these interpretations. These small groups of christians have become revolutionaries, committed to the struggle for a fraternal socialist society, through their experience of living with, ministering to, and struggling alongside the oppressed and the poor. In other words, for them the christian gospel does not pre-empt the form of commitment; their commitment comes from their lived experience and is judged by their reflection on the Word. As yet the numbers of people prepared to make this commitment are not great; in Chile there were many catholics and christians amongst all the parties and groups on the left, who had seen the nature of the choice before them. For the Chilean situation was, in essence, a simple one. On the one hand there was an alliance committed to the hopes and aspirations of the oppressed; on the other, an opposition whose function could only be, in the end, to *oppose* this process. How, then, would it be possible to proclaim a faith and hope in the person of Christ 'sent to bring liberty to the oppressed' without being prepared to make precisely that commitment?

I believe that Luis Corvalán was right to recognise the immense role that christians have to play in Chile, as in the rest of Latin America. (It is a pity that in the name of the C.P. he should have mistaken reform for revolution, but that is by the way.) Che Guevara, too, saw the importance of christians in the struggle to break the ties of capitalism when he said:

'When christians dare to give a revolutionary witness then the Latin American revolution will be invincible'.

The Chilean tragedy has illustrated only too clearly that christians are not yet prepared to give that witness; a majority, it might seem, rather than ally themselves with a transition to socialism have chosen to support the existence of capitalism. They are, unfortunately, in very dangerous company, and the lesson is only too clear. In fact it was pointed out by Radomiro Tomic at the time of President Allende's election: 'When you win with the support of the right, it is the right that wins'. One thing is certain: many of the changes brought in by three years of Allende's rule must be irreversible. Not the least important is the increased awareness on the part of many christians of the need for a revolutionary commitment. They need our help.

The 'Essence' of Christianity: Notes after de Certeau

by Fergus Kerr, O.P.

The French theological landscape seems to have been lying comparatively fallow for the ten years since the great days of the Vatican Council, but the periodicals are now laden with the first fruits of a new generation. The notes that follow have been made in the course of reading essays by Michel de Certeau[1], and attempt to transpose his style and preoccupations into terms related to our own out of an idiom that is very different from most theological writing in English (though compare the valuable studies by Bernard Sharratt, hidden in the files of a sadly defunct review: 'Locating theology', *Slant* No 22 (1968), 'Absent centre', *Slant* Nos 24 and 25 (1969).

The Empty Tomb as Ideogram

On literary and text-historical grounds, as virtually all scholars now agree, the narrative of St Mark's Gospel ends at verse 8 of the

[1] 'Apologie de la différence', *Etudes*, Janvier 1968: 'La révolution fondatrice', *Etudes* Juin-Juillet 1968; 'Autorités chrétiennes', *Etudes*, Fevrier 1970; 'Faire de l'histoire', *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, Octobre-Décembre 1970; 'La rupture instauratrice', *Esprit*, Juin 1971.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1973.tb07204.x Published online by Cambridge University Press