

CHURCH ELITES IN VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA: CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND BELIEFS*

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Throughout the world, the Catholic Church has been in ferment since the Second Vatican Council. In Latin America, traditionally a Catholic region, the application of the council's ideas has stimulated dramatic changes in the outlook and practices of Church groups. These changes are particularly visible in the development of a new language for describing and evaluating temporal action ("the world"), and in the emergence of novel perspectives on the Church's proper relation to "the world." What is the import of such changes for the student of politics?

At the very least, changes in language and perception mean that Church elites may lend the legitimacy of their religious authority to new departures in society, economy, and politics. Examples such as Church backing for agrarian reform or its defense of human rights in various nations spring immediately to mind. Changes in language and perception may also have more subtle effects on beliefs and practices of religious followers. In addition to relating human beings to the transcendental and divine, religion provides bases for understanding and evaluating the world. As Geertz argues, its unique force lies in the ability to place "proximate acts in ultimate contexts" (p. 38) by infusing them with religious significance. In this way, long-term changes in the perceptions of religious elites have great potential significance for altering broad patterns of belief and action.

The study of Church elites is used here as a convenient point of departure for analysis of the religious institution in general. My interest is not in Church elites per se, or in elite analysis in general, but rather in the relation between elite perspectives and variations in social context, institutional structures, and background. Bishops are a clear and visible elite group in the Catholic Church, but empirical studies of Latin American bishops remain scarce and scattered: the only study specifically on bishops that is available to date is Sanders' 1968 essay on the Chilean hierarchy. This lack of information is increasingly troublesome, for the impetus given to collegiality and increased lateral communication among bishops by the Second Vatican Council has made it more important than ever to

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learn how the bishops as a group think about religious, social, and political issues. As the official leaders of the Catholic Church, their individual and collective actions are increasingly crucial for the way in which such problems are posed in their own nations.

So far, most studies of the Catholic Church in Latin America have concentrated on juridical or theological changes, or on the structural evolution of the Church in particular national cases, with little comparative analysis.¹ This article extends our knowledge in two ways: (1) by presenting data from structured interviews with the bishops in countries not hitherto studied in this way; and (2) by providing results that reach across national boundaries to offer comparative insights into the attitudes of Church elites. Thus, the main body of the article examines the backgrounds and beliefs of members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Venezuela and Colombia,² setting these data in the historical and institutional context of the two nations. In this way, the analysis of similarities and differences between groups of bishops and their respective national churches is grounded in the broader context provided by the social and political settings of the two nations themselves.

The following section analyzes the social, political, and religious histories of Venezuela and Colombia. In addition, a brief note may be in order here. As we shall see, the political and religious histories of the two nations are sufficiently different as to provide a useful basis for contrast and comparison. In addition, however, it is important to note that Venezuela and Colombia are the only remaining electoral democracies in South America. The recent surge of authoritarianism in the region, and the growing conflict of such regimes with the Church in nations as varied as Chile, Brazil, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, has led many observers to center attention on the Church's present and future role under authoritarian regimes—particularly the development of its "prophetic" role as a critic of injustice and defender of human rights (e.g., Levine 1974, Bruneau, Antoine, Sanders and Smith, Smith forthcoming). But Venezuela and Colombia, albeit for different reasons, have resisted the general trend. Here, political openness survives, and the Church retains considerable room to maneuver, with extensive freedom of speech and action. Thus, for all their marked differences from one another, Venezuela and Colombia together comprise a unique example of the role of the Church in pluralistic political systems of Latin America. The Church in these nations has a special opportunity to contribute to change in the framework of an open society.

The analysis of national context is quite important, for the Catholic Church's popular image of monolithic unity masks a reality of great heterogeneity and decentralized operations. Until recently, the relevant social context for most Church operations was the diocese—each governed independently by a bishop who was subject only to the authority of the Pope. While dioceses remain important, in recent years the nation-state has become a major focus of Church life. The Second Vatican Council recognized the need for greater communication among bishops and more elaborate planning at the national level, and encouraged the formation of national episcopal conferences to achieve this end. While these conferences have little formal authority, they do facilitate greater collabora-

tion among bishops and enhance the organizational development of the national Church. This growing institutional identity of each national Church compels those interested in the relation of religion to society and politics to examine the impact of national differences in a more systematic way.

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Venezuela and Colombia provide a useful setting for comparative analysis of the Church. Differences between the two nations are very great, and study of the same institution in such varied contexts helps explain how each particular Church came to be the way it is today, while providing a firmer basis for the understanding and prediction of future trends than may be derived from analysis of elite beliefs alone.³

Since colonial times, Venezuela and Colombia have developed markedly divergent patterns of social and political organization. These differences have grown in this century and are reflected in the diametrically opposed role and status of the Church in each nation.⁴ The Colombian Church was and is much more powerful and well-established than its Venezuelan neighbor, which remains poor, weak, and lacking in influence. In colonial times, Colombia was a center of governmental, military, and ecclesiastical organization. The Church thus came into the period of independence with a dense net of organizations and great traditions of social, cultural, and political leadership. Although this predominant role was periodically challenged and reversed throughout the nineteenth century, by 1887 proclerical Conservatives gained a complete victory and used their power to consolidate and reinforce the position of the Church. Venezuela, in contrast, was a pastoral backwater in colonial times, and the ecclesiastical organization carried over into independence was weak—for all practical purposes absent in broad regions of the nation. Moreover, anticlerical Liberals won the civil wars of nineteenth-century Venezuela, and what little the Church possessed in property, schools, and institutional support was taken away. The Venezuelan cultural and political pattern has been aggressively secular ever since, with civil registry, education, marriage, divorce, and cemeteries the norm.

These broad differences are visible in the pattern of growth of each Church and the resources available to it. Both have expanded notably since 1900, although many more dioceses have been created in Colombia. Greater numbers of dioceses reflect a more articulated administrative structure, more attuned to local and regional needs. The greatest gap is in clergy. Throughout the period, Colombia has had many more priests than Venezuela. In addition, over three-fourths of the priests in Venezuela are foreign, while in Colombia the vast majority are native-born. Colombia's advantage in dioceses and clergy is partly attributable to its greater size, but even comparing ratios of clergy to population in each country, Colombia appears in a much more favorable position. Each Colombian priest serves considerably fewer people than his Venezuelan counterpart, and the ratio of diocesan priests to population is particularly favorable in the former (see table 1). Diocesan priests (i.e., those under the direct authority

TABLE 1 *Selected Data on the Church in Venezuela and Colombia*

	Year	Venezuela	Colombia		
Number of Dioceses:	1900	6	7		
Selected Years ^a	1950	14	33		
	1960	16	48		
	1970	24	56		
	Year	Diocesan Priests	Persons per Diocesan Priest	Total Priests	Total Persons per Priest
Colombian Clergy:	1945	1549	6224	2557	3970
Selected Years ^b	1950	1750	6465	3003	3774
	1960	2339	6146	4094	3765
	1970	2980	7114	4864	4358
Venezuelan Clergy:	1944	357	12000	630	6900
Selected Years ^b	1950	399	13300	786	6900
	1960	536	12400	1218	5500
	1970	836	12004	1976	5079

Sources:

^aData for Venezuela from CISOR (1973), p. 24; data for Colombia from Zuluaga, p. 10.

^bData for Colombia from Zuluaga, pp. 14, 35. Venezuelan data for 1944, 1950, and 1960 from Alonso et al., p. 155; for 1970 from CISOR (1970), p. 24.

of the local bishop, not members of religious orders) staff most parishes, and given the dense net of Church schools in Colombia (largely staffed by religious orders), one might have expected a drop-off here due to the drain of clerical personnel to the schools.

These data reveal the greater social presence of the Church in Colombia, as more dioceses, parishes, and clergy make for more points of contact with the people. In addition, the Colombian Church is much more highly organized on the national level. The National Bishops' Conference of Colombia has been meeting regularly since 1903, and by 1972, the conference had developed a large, permanent professional staff secretariat, operating out of its own new six-story building in Bogota. Moreover, beginning in the 1940s, the Church hierarchy sponsored the creation of an extensive network of Catholic Action groups, trade unions, adult education programs, and community organization projects. In Venezuela there is little of this. It was only in 1972 that an effective permanent secretariat of the Venezuelan Bishops' Conference (explicitly founded on the Colombian model) was even established. The attempts of the Venezuelan hierarchy to stimulate Catholic Action type organizations have been limited by lack of resources and general popular apathy. In general, Catholic organizations in Venezuela are but a faint echo of their Colombian counterparts.⁵

The legal status of the two Churches is another useful indicator of their place in the institutional order, of the role *others* expect them to play, and of their

overall impact on national life. Here again, Colombia stands out as unusually favored. Until 1973, a concordat (originally negotiated in 1887) set the terms of the Church's legal status and role. This agreement is a model of the traditional idea of "Christendom"—complete Church-state integration. The Church is described as an "essential element of the social order" and given a major role in many aspects of social life. For example, education at all levels was to be maintained "in conformity with the dogma of the Catholic religion" (art. 12) and religious instruction was obligatory. The Church also received a predominant position in registry, with parish records having preference over civil records. In addition to the registry of birth, the management of death was placed in Church hands, as cemeteries were turned over to the ecclesiastical authorities.

Marriage, another major step in the life cycle, was also firmly under Church control. Civil divorce did not exist, and civil marriage for baptized Catholics was contingent on public declarations of abandonment of the faith. These statements were to be made before a judge, posted publicly, and communicated to the local bishop. It is difficult to imagine a more effective mechanism of ostracism, or a more telling example of the fusion of civil and religious powers, than these arrangements (cf. Jaramillo Salazar). Finally, the Church wields broad civil powers in the more than 60 percent of Colombia's area designated as "mission territories." Here, a 1953 agreement gave the missionary orders extensive control over education as well as broad civil powers.⁶

The concordat and additional accords clearly left many areas of Colombian life to Church control and management. Although the agreement was finally renegotiated in 1973, the only change visible so far is the *possibility* of civil divorce and elimination of public apostasy as a prerequisite for civil marriage of baptized Catholics. In some instances, the power of the Church actually *increased*. For example, its missionary role was extended, with provision made for development of a "special canonical regime" for mission territories and "marginal zones" (largely urban slum areas).⁷

This predominant position is unimaginable in Venezuela. For each stage of the life cycle in which the Colombian Church plays a major role (registry, education, marriage, and death) secular, governmental control is the rule in Venezuela. The Church is strictly a junior partner. Indeed, until 1964 state control was remarkably extensive. Under the 1824 Law of Ecclesiastical Patronage, the Church had no legal personality, could hold no property and enter no contracts. Bishops were in theory elected by the Congress, and local prefects were charged with preventing "innovation" in ecclesiastical matters. A *modus vivendi* signed in 1964 replaced this old statute and freed the Church of many onerous aspects of state control, while providing some concrete benefits such as legal personality and relaxed conditions for the immigration of clergy. However, the conditions of the agreement are generally modest, and the Church's position remains sharply limited, especially when compared to Colombia (cf. Rodríguez Iturbe, Kennedy).

The different status of these Churches reflects great differences in the modern development of the two countries. In the structure of its central institutions and the organization of social relations, Colombia is a much more traditional

society than Venezuela. A powerful Church is only one of the structures of nineteenth-century life that persists in Colombia. The old political parties, Liberals and Conservatives, continue to dominate national life. Moreover, these parties remain loose electoral alliances run by elite lineages, and there is little tradition of enduring autonomous mass organization.⁸ In Venezuela, on the other hand, very few national institutions survived from the nineteenth century—no powerful Church, no unified landholding elite, no central state apparatus, no permanent national army, no political parties. The impact of oil helped create a powerful state practically *de novo*, while stimulating extensive geographical and social mobility. These factors, added to the relative absence of continuing institutions commanding mass loyalties, produced great social and political change after 1936—a process in which the role of the Church was marginal (Levine 1973, chaps. 2–5).

As a result, the articulation of demands in Venezuela is, for all practical purposes, monopolized by the political parties that penetrate and control other demand-making institutions such as trade unions and professional associations. In Colombia, on the other hand, the Church continues to play a major role in articulating demands, particularly at the local level. No other organization in Colombia is as extensive or deeply rooted as the Catholic Church, and in many areas the population clearly expects its clergy to play many roles beyond the strictly religious—a greater role than the clergy itself often thinks appropriate (Jiménez Cadena, chap. 7).

Finally, the recent political history of the two nations has had a major impact on the Church. Since the late 1950s, Church elites in both countries have reached working accommodations with former political enemies. In the process, each has been converted from an active partisan of one side into a general supporter of the current political system. In Colombia, this transformation grew out of shock over the scale and savagery of the massive violence unleashed in 1948. While many saw the violence at first as an antireligious movement begun by Liberals and Communists and thus were willing to support violent countermeasures, by 1957 the bulk of the hierarchy had come to view the violence itself as a problem for the Church—the visible sign of a failure in spreading the Christian message.⁹ Wilde comments: “The violence implied the most fundamental kind of failure. In theological terms, the Church had to come to terms with the gap between public symbols and individual lives. Sociologically, the Church had to recognize that it had not responded successfully to the new society that modernization and secularization were creating. Institutionally, this traditional Church had to examine and reinterpret its whole past understanding of itself” (1972, pp. 224–25).

In the process, the Colombian hierarchy came to see the Liberal party (hitherto viewed as an implacable enemy) as neutral with respect to the Church, and gave its support to the National Front, the Liberal-Conservative pact that ended the violence by guaranteeing each party a regular turn in (and share of) power at all levels. In Venezuela, a similar move to political neutrality and general support of the current political arrangements arose out of the post-1958

restoration of democracy, and the determination of both Church and political parties to seek accommodation.¹⁰

In this way, for much of the hierarchy, religion as a political issue was "settled" by changing the Church as an institution from a partisan force into a general supporter of the political system, removed from direct action. But this settlement was short-lived. Throughout Latin America, the 1960s brought dramatic pressure for renewed political activism from within the Church itself, as radical Catholics tried to commit the ecclesiastical institution (and religious symbols and organizations in general) to the promotion of fundamental social, economic, and political change—by violence if necessary. The implications of this renewed drive to religiously motivated political activism are dealt with in the following section, but here it is important to point out that the stakes for the Church were and still are greater in Colombia. While both Churches moved to official political neutrality and developed mass organizations of various kinds, the absence of effective grass-roots competition in Colombia gave the Church a more central organizing and articulating role there than in Venezuela.

In sum, differences in the resources and institutional structures of the Colombian and Venezuelan Churches are reinforced by the social and political history of each nation. These general differences greatly affect the way in which the Church relates to surrounding society and help define the space in which it may articulate ideas and interests. With these aspects of national context well in hand, the following section considers the general dimensions of belief and orientation that guide the perceptions and actions of the hierarchy.

STRUCTURALISM, CHURCH ROLE, DIALOGUE

As noted at the outset, the Catholic Church has been in a state of continuous debate, tension, and self-examination since the Second Vatican Council. This process has been particularly salient in Latin America where it has centered on the proper relation of the Church, and religion in general, to society and politics. These themes were first drawn together for Latin America in 1968, when the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops (meeting in Medellín, Colombia) issued a set of documents intended to provide new orientations for the Latin American Church, adapting the general teachings of Vatican II to the concrete needs and situations of Latin America (CELAM). The Medellín conference broke the logjam, and subsequent years have witnessed an enormous outpouring of articles, books, polemics, and initiatives throughout Latin America, all bearing in some way on the Church's proper relation to the transformation of society and politics—to "the world" (cf. Levine 1974, Galilea, Peruvian Bishops, Smith 1975).

Of course, the Church is not *primarily* an agent of social, economic, or political action. Its central mission remains diffusion of the message of salvation and service as an intermediary between people and God. Thus, one can not simply expect the Church to assume social and political positions, nor may one judge it solely by criteria appropriate to secular institutions like political parties

or public bureaucracies, without consideration of its transcendental and eschatological goals. Nevertheless, it is clear that the social role of religion and of the Church as an institution can not be adequately addressed in terms of a rigid dichotomy—it is not an all or nothing choice. The Church is made up of people and exists in concrete historical situations. Thus, religious positions inevitably have temporal consequences, just as temporal problems have an impact on the lives of believers and the focus of their beliefs. Indeed, much of the controversy now centers on precisely this point: the implications of religious faith for action “in the world” (and vice versa) and the way in which the two spheres can and should be joined.¹¹

This lengthy and often passionate debate has made it clear that the relation of the Church to the world involves several different dimensions that are not necessarily related to one another in any causal or temporal sense. Thus, at the very least, change includes the terms of reference the Church provides for understanding and evaluating the world, the guidelines set for action by the ecclesiastical institution and its faithful, and the relations deemed appropriate with non-Catholic groups. These aspects of change are addressed here in terms of the bishops’ attitudes on three dimensions: structuralism, church role, and dialogue. The subsequent discussion is based primarily on interviews conducted from 1971 to 1973 with most of the bishops in both countries. The interviews were structured and mostly open-ended, with the goal of eliciting a full range of responses and attitudes. The dimensions selected for analysis were drawn from the interviews themselves, and from a reading of the current theological and political debates.

Analysis of structuralism here is based on the bishops’ responses to this question: “In general, what do you think are the major problems facing the nation?” I have distinguished broadly between “structural” and “moral” kinds of answers. Structural responses see national problems primarily in terms of social, economic, and political *structures*—artificial, human, and therefore changeable sets of social arrangements. Moral responses, on the other hand, emphasize problems of individual culture and self-discipline or crises of belief and personal orientation. Individual virtue and private conversion are stressed. But from a structural point of view, a fully moral and authentically religious life cannot be ensured by moral indoctrination or cultic acts alone. Rather, social conditions must be transformed to provide the adequate income, education, health, housing, and the like that equip people to live a fuller life.

Detailed analysis will be undertaken in the next section, but it may be useful at this point to indicate briefly the nature of the responses. In general, structural responses dominate in each country, although more strongly in Colombia, where 79 percent of all answers fall into this group, as opposed to 56 percent in Venezuela. Among Colombians, the most commonly mentioned structural problems were social injustice and underdevelopment, followed closely by references to unequal income distribution, unemployment, and the need to reform education. Venezuelans, on the other hand, mentioned problems of political organization most frequently, followed by income inequality and social injustice. As one Venezuelan bishop put it: “There is a problem which is to implement a

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more effective equality and social participation, which will eliminate the gap between groups within the country. We are a rich country, but also a country (although rich as a whole) with grave deficiencies among large social groups in education, housing, and things of this kind. Thus, there are enormous and unacceptable differences" (Interview 60130, 27–28 May 1971).

As to moral responses, Venezuelans stressed problems of youth and the family, whereas Colombians complained most about the lack of "Christian formation" in the population, growing Communist penetration, and the family. Personal conversion and private virtue are emphasized in these responses. Listen to two bishops, the first Venezuelan, the next Colombian:

In terms of problems there is the problem of youth, which is growing up with an orientation which may lead to distortions. Also the problem of the family, which is getting worse with divorce. (Interview 60117, 18 August 1971)

We are faced with somewhat intensive protestant propaganda. And on the other hand, the conditions of underdevelopment, with Marxism and socialism, and some want to give all this a certain flavor of Christian socialism; in my opinion [they] are doing harm, because the poor and humble classes come to believe that their redemption will come through a socialist regime. . . . In my opinion, there is a lot of demagogic talk about "underdevelopment," and this is harming the constitution of the country. Marxism is atheistic, and thus affects the religious life of our country. (Interview 80128, 5 June 1972)

For each bishop, up to three responses were coded. Then an index of structuralism was built to gauge the extent to which each bishop viewed national problems as wholly or predominantly structural, moral, or mixed his responses equally. As noted above, while structural responses predominate in both countries, Colombians are much more strongly structural in their perceptions (see table 2).

TABLE 2 *Structuralism Index, by Country (percentages)**

	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Venezuela	38	19	43	37.5
Colombia	11	17	71	62.5
Totals	21	18	61	100 (N = 56)

*Percentages do not always sum to 100 because of rounding.

Consider briefly the implications of structuralism for Catholic thought. Viewing problems in structural terms opens the bishops (and the institution they lead) to a new and different kind of stance in social affairs. For religious thought and action, once isolated and strictly separated from the world, now reach into everyday life, drawing problems and solutions from it. Thus, the

world is no longer simply a stage on which eternal and unchanging moral principles are played out. Rather, it is a *source* of valid values. This perspective implies a considerably different thrust for Catholic social action. Although Catholics have always been urged to alleviate misery through charity, these views go far beyond charity, pointing to the need for basic social and political transformation. For if people are prevented from leading a fully moral life because of oppressive social, economic, and political structures, it then follows that complete religious liberation is in some measure contingent on change in these structures.¹² In the words of Camilo Torres, Colombia's guerrilla priest and martyr of the Catholic left in Latin America: "When circumstances impede men from devoting themselves to Christ, the priest's proper duty is to combat these circumstances . . . the revolutionary struggle is a Christian and priestly struggle" (pp. 264–65). But few bishops go this far. Although many share a structural language, only a handful are willing to pursue the implications of these new perspectives to their logical conclusions, turning a commitment to social justice into direct, active involvement in revolutionary struggle.

To understand the full meaning of this heavy emphasis on structuralism, such general perspectives must be tied directly to action. For it may well be that the spread of structural views is simply a reflection of international fashion in the Church, a kind of fad. Many bishops seem to sign "advanced" documents at conferences without weighing their full implications. This is not necessarily a sign of insincerity on their part, but rather reflects the domination of such gatherings by more intellectual and "liberal" bishops and staff. Certainly, since the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín conference, a more sociological and structural language has become common coin in the Church. In documents, speeches, pastoral letters, and interviews, Church leaders use structural terms to such an extent that Segundo Galilea, a Chilean theologian, writes of a "race of advanced ideas in a closed circle" (p. 29). He notes, however, that while ideas abound, "The tremendous ambiguity of the post-Medellín Latin American Church lies in possessing abundant principles and working hypotheses without having generated sufficient pastoral or social imperatives. This is a source of frustration for many" (p. 25).

This across-the-board inflation of language raises serious questions about the kinds of commitments new styles of thought and speech carry with them. Will new ways of describing the world lead to new forms of action, and for whom? Certainly it is an open question, for in the Church, as in most organizations, actions rarely flow directly from attitudes and perceptions. Many factors intervene, such as resources, opportunities, and the way in which elites define the most appropriate kinds of action for their institution. To assess the bishops' commitments to action, the question on national problems was *always* followed immediately by a probe, asking, "In your view, what can the Church contribute to solving them?"

A number of bishops distinguished the analysis of problems from specification of the Church's own role, arguing strongly that social and political action was outside the Church's sphere of competence. This position of strict separation reflects a theological stance emphasized in Vatican II, to the effect that the

Church lacks both the expertise and the authority to solve social problems (cf. O'Dea, pp. 187–91). So many variables affect the evaluation of temporal solutions that the Church can not justifiably give religious sanction to any particular choice—many are compatible with Christian values. Moreover, the Church's essential concern is with salvation and eternal life. Others argue that human life must be taken as a whole—spiritual and temporal dimensions can not be neatly separated. As one Colombian bishop put it: "Of course the Church was not sent to preach in the temporal field before the spiritual, but the fact is that you can not separate the two, you can not separate man. Thus, I have always felt that my mission as bishop has not been to save souls, but to save persons. Of course, eternal life comes later, but it begins here below" (Interview 80135, 12 July 1972).

These considerations highlight the great complexities of the Church's role. In the analysis that follows, three kinds of role are distinguished for the Church: *traditional*, *activation*, and *activism*. Traditional and activation views dominate the responses. Traditional roles for the Church (mentioned in 39 percent of Venezuelan and 41 percent of Colombian answers) stress charity and the provision of general moral guidelines to society. These were the most popular traditional responses in both countries, along with mention of the Church's role in maintaining Christian unity as a counter to class conflict. Some representative views follow:

The Church's role? To illuminate above all. If we believe that the goal is the common good, then the Church has a role. It already possesses, in the great encyclicals, in the Council, a position on these questions, and tries to enlighten people according to these perspectives. All the more so since here everyone wants the Church to make declarations. (Interview 80109, 15 March 1972)

Now what can the Church do? Well, provide norms in this process, and of course foresee and correct errors which may arise. (Interview 80141, 29 July 1972)

The Church should be like Christ crucified—with its arms open to all people. With each arm open to a different part of the people. In other words, it should be a point of unification for all people, a point in which all can collaborate. (Interview 60110, 4 June 1971)

Traditional positions typically work within the limits of existing social and political arrangements, which are taken as given. Efforts are then directed towards the resolution of more conventional moral quandaries. Stances more oriented to social action take several forms. A central distinction can be drawn between strategies favoring the *activation* of others (especially the laity) and those promoting or sanctioning *activism* by leaders of the ecclesiastical institution itself.

This distinction has a long and lately turbulent history in the Church, and rests on who acts, in what capacity, and with what authority. As Catholic thinkers gradually abandoned traditional models of "Christendom" and began to stress the autonomy of temporal values and actions, they sought to formulate doctrines to describe and legitimize this new situation more adequately. One of the most influential models was proposed by Jacques Maritain, who distin-

guished between “acting as a Christian” and “acting as a Christian as such” (p. 291). In the former case, action is guided by Christian principles, but each Christian takes exclusive personal responsibility for his actions. Each is thus free in his political choices. In the latter case, the Christian acts as a member of the Church—representing the institution. This is the case, for example, with leaders of Catholic Action groups, or even more clearly, with priests or other ecclesiastical personnel. Maritain’s views had great impact in Latin America, especially in the incipient Christian Democratic parties (Moreno).

In practice, this distinction directs the Church to evangelize the faithful and provide inspiration to the temporal sphere, while leaving the construction of a just society to laymen. The roles of priest and laity are thus sharply differentiated.¹³ Activation strategies (in Maritain’s terms, “acting as Christians”) thus stimulate action by others, while activism, in contrast, involves Church personnel (clergy, brothers, and sisters) directly in social and political conflict.

Activation is far more popular among the bishops than is activism. Indeed, activation is the dominant type of response in both countries (42 percent of all mentions in each). The most popular single response defines the Church’s role as stimulating others to act. Proponents of activation argue that for the Church as an institution to intervene directly in society and politics means the reconstruction of a discredited clericalism—a return to the kind of partisanship only recently abandoned. As an alternative, great emphasis is placed on the training and “formation” of lay activists—economic, social, and cultural elites, trade union and peasant leaders, politicians, and the like. A recent collective pastoral letter by the Colombian Bishops’ Conference put the case for activation in these terms:

While it is necessary to affirm clearly that the mission of the Catholic layman is to order temporal affairs correctly in the light of the gospel, the office and duty of Pastors does not consist in resolving economic and social questions, but rather in teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in the arena of faith, communicating to the faithful those renovating energies of grace which they will later project into public life, on their own account and risk, with the liberty and responsibility which corresponds to them as laymen. . . . To proceed in any other way would be to abdicate our role as Pastors of a Church which cannot identify itself with any civilization, culture, regime, or ideology, and convert it instead into simply one more worldly force. (Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia, p. 23)

In this way, a sharp distinction is drawn between the kinds of activity appropriate to clergy (and especially to bishops) and that proper for lay people. The Church cannot offer solutions for social problems, nor can she undertake to implement them directly. This is both bad theology and imprudent policy—bad theology as it ignores the proper autonomy of the temporal world (emphasized at the Second Vatican Council), and imprudent policy as it involves the ecclesiastical institution per se in political and policy disputes. Laymen must act on their own—inspired and guided by Christian principles, but on their own. First a Venezuelan, then a Colombian comment:

I believe that the Church's contribution, the contribution she can and must give, is through creating consciousness among laity, so that they will solve their own problems. That is, the Church must serve as a stimulator and mentalizer of solutions. The Church *per se*, as a juridical entity, can not create solutions. (Interview 60118, 14 June 1971)

The most important thing is to spread ideas. I do not give out money for food, for houses, or for welfare projects. Because if I can provide ideas to the rich, I create in them awareness of the need to create sources of employment. Thus I get more out of giving ideas to the rich. No, no, no, not a single piece of bread. Man does not live by bread alone [laughter]. (Interview 80110, 11 July 1972)

Activism is a notable step beyond this position. While in activation strategies the Church is prepared to co-opt and legitimize groups once they are formed, it rarely commits itself (or its resources) to their success or failure. Proponents of activism, on the other hand, call the Church to the direct and open use of its own human and material resources in the promotion of change. Less than a fifth of responses fall in this category (19 percent in Venezuela and 17 percent in Colombia), with concrete actions ranging from "bearing witness," by sharing the lives of the poor, to vigorously denouncing injustice in all fields, and at the extreme, organizing, leading, and acting as members of groups promoting change. These kinds of action often overlap and mix together. Thus, in a speech to the Superior War College, one Colombian bishop noted that if the established social order was based on injustice, then its destruction was legitimate. The Church was obliged to "go beyond the clear exposition of principles regulating economic and sociopolitical relations to the frank and brave denunciation of situations which violate the ethical order, even if this puts the mere established order in danger" (Castrillón, p. 90). Several Venezuelans went further:

I believe that the priest must place himself at the head of the people in the solution of its problems, of all its problems, with the goal of arriving at a complete liberation of man. (Interview 60126, 9 July 1971)

The problem is how to orient the actions of the Church. I believe that the actions of the Church must be directed towards service. Not pacifist in the bad sense of the term—to avoid conflict, that there be no frictions—but rather in the sense of achieving a better structured society, much more just and solidary. All of which necessarily implies that the Church has to side with the weak, the weakest . . . and the goal is not simply, as I said, a rather fictitious peace, but rather the establishment of a different order. (Interview 60130, 27–28 May 1971)

For each bishop, up to two responses were coded on the role of the Church, and separate indices were constructed for the three positions just discussed. Leaving more detailed analysis for the next section, let me note here that while Colombians may have more structural views than Venezuelans, relatively little difference appears between the two groups of bishops in terms of the role they define for the Church.

*T A B L E 3 Church Role Indices, by Country (percentages)**

	<i>Traditional</i>			<i>Activation</i>			<i>Activism</i>			<i>Totals</i>
	<i>Low</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Hi</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Hi</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Hi</i>	
Venezuela	45	32	23	32	45	23	73	23	5	37
Colombia	47	29	24	34	37	29	74	24	2	63
Totals	47	30	23	33	40	27	73	23	3	100 (N = 60)

*Percentages do not always sum to 100 because of rounding.

Yet even this discussion of the role of the Church is too vague. In assessing the relation between general perspectives on society and views of the role of the Church, concrete alternatives must be considered. The relation of Catholics to Marxism and Marxist groups is a major issue in Latin America today. Thus, openness to dialogue and cooperation with Marxists provides a useful and convenient guide to the action-implications of general views on the role of the Church. To gauge opinion here, I put this question to the bishops: "Nowadays, one finds among many people a desire to dialogue, cooperate, and even participate with people of a Marxist orientation in common organizations and actions. Do you believe this constitutes a problem, or can it be a legitimate expression of Catholic social action?" The bishops' attitudes toward dialogue and cooperation with Marxism fall into three broad categories: acceptance, qualified acceptance, and complete rejection. Contrary to the results on the Church's general role, as table 4 shows, notable differences emerge between Venezuelans and Colombians on this issue.

*T A B L E 4 Dialogue and Cooperation with Marxists, by Country (percentages)**

	<i>Accept</i>	<i>Qualified</i>	<i>Reject</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Venezuela	48	29	24	36
Colombia	24	38	38	64
Totals	33	34	33	100 (N = 58)

*Percentages do not always sum to 100 because of rounding.

What do these responses mean? As used here, acceptance refers either to full approval of both dialogue and cooperation or to acceptance of concrete cooperation alone. The assumption behind this classification is that common initiatives are a more valid indicator of the strength of dispositions to action than dialogue alone, which can easily turn into a stylized exercise, devoid of real significance. One Colombian stressed the need for common action in this way: "With respect to the Marxists, I would almost say, if their intentions are good,

that there is more that unites us than divides us. Thus, there will be areas in which we can work together, without our trying to convince them that they are in error, or their trying to convert us into Marxists, each instead respecting the mentality and philosophy of the other" (Interview 80116, 19 May 1972).

Many hedge their bets, approving dialogue and cooperation only with numerous qualifications, such as limiting participation to the highly trained and educated, for fear that less sophisticated Catholics would be lost to Marxist wiles. One bishop argued that exposing such persons to Marxist ideas "would be equivalent to setting them to think along Marxist lines, and the next step is to act according to Marxist methods" (Interview 80125, 10 July 1972). Several expressed fear of being used by Marxist politicians for their own political ends: "Now this lack of honesty on the part of the Communist Party would be reinforced in its impact [by dialogue and cooperation] because our people would never understand the Church's walking arm in arm with Marxism. Acting in this way we would create a confusion as great as that we already have in so many ideas" (Interview 60114, 1 August 1971).

Finally, a substantial group rejected dialogue and cooperation outright. One bishop noted that they *could* get together to pray an Our Father, while others simply reiterated the Church's traditional opposition to Marxism: "I know that in Chile recently fifty priests visited Fidel Castro and declared themselves identified with his Marxist ideas. I judge this to be a very grave error and a contradictory position. Marxism is atheist and materialist, and the Church is a spiritual leader. Thus it is absolutely scandalous to manifest sympathies for the grave errors the Church has always condemned . . . this is unacceptable, unacceptable" (Interview 80128, 5 June 1972). One Venezuelan bishop compared Marxism to a disease, noting that: "I do not believe that their desire to dialogue is in good faith . . . moreover, I need not catch a disease in order to know about it. For example, take tuberculosis. If I want to know about tuberculosis, I can go to a medical book where they will tell me the symptoms, but I need not catch it to know about it" (Interview 60108, 12 July 1971).

Looking briefly at the figures in table 4, it is apparent that a strikingly large proportion of bishops in each country is willing to accept *some* kind of dialogue and/or cooperation with Marxism. This is surprising given the Church's traditional condemnation of Marxism and the generally conservative image of Venezuelan and Colombian bishops within the Church as a whole. A survey of the reputedly more progressive Chilean hierarchy in 1968 revealed considerable openness to Christian cooperation with Marxists in projects promoting the common good (Sanders). The disposition of the supposedly more conservative Venezuelan and Colombian bishops to similar trends indicates that this kind of orientation is perhaps far more prevalent in Latin American episcopal thinking than had previously been imagined. It is difficult to be precise about the sources of this new openness to Marxism. Undoubtedly, a variety of factors, ranging from the influence of recent papal documents to delayed impact of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*, play a major role (cf. Hebblethwaite, pp. 149–79). Furthermore, as we shall see in the following section, national differences are significant, particularly in determining which kinds of bishops are favorably disposed to dialogue

and cooperation with Marxism, and how attitudes on this dimension are related to the other dimensions reviewed here.

So far structuralism, church role, and dialogue have been examined in general terms, and a first step has been taken in delineating national differences. How are these dimensions related to one another? A common assumption is that structural perspectives would be associated with greater dispositions to action and more open stances toward dialogue and cooperation with Marxists. This hypothesis rests on the supposition that those who perceive problems in structural terms will want to participate in changing the very social factors they themselves consider crucial. Instead of simply reiterating moral doctrine, or getting lay people to act, they will thus become involved in community organization and social action of various kinds. By the same logic, seeing problems in structural terms ought to make bishops more open to cooperation with others concerned with the same concrete problems, regardless of ideology.

But no such direct progression from perceptions to role definitions and actions is visible. Why? First, as we have seen, language may change faster than action, and *in any case*, general perceptions of social problems may be independent of role definitions. Moreover, the pattern of response is different in each nation, and national differences may have a hand in setting the relation between perceptions and action. How can these national differences be explained? The historical and structural evolution of the two Churches has already been considered in some detail. Are there also notable differences between the two groups of bishops, which might help account for the findings so far? The next section takes a closer look at the bishops.

THE BISHOPS: BACKGROUND AND BELIEFS

What are the bishops like? As a group, they are quite homogeneous. If one were to draw a profile, or collective portrait of the men, the typical bishop would emerge more or less as follows: in the rank of bishop for about ten years, he is of middle- or lower middle-class background, in his fifties, from small town or rural origins. There is also some regional concentration, with bishops derived disproportionately from the traditionally Catholic areas of their nation (Andean states in Venezuela and Antioquia and Caldas in Colombia). National differences are notable only in terms of age, education, and career patterns. Colombians are somewhat younger and much more likely to have followed the classic path to promotion in the Catholic Church through positions in education (primarily as professor or rector in a seminary, training future generations of clergy) and in the curia or Church bureaucracy (e.g., as private secretary to a bishop, or vicar general of a diocese).¹⁴ They are also more likely to have advanced education beyond the seminary, leading to a licenciante or doctorate. Table 5 shows some of the relevant biographical data.

While the personal and social traits of the bishops are interesting, this analysis is concerned not with social background, but rather with its relation to belief and action. Of all the background variables considered, only nationality and level of education are consistently associated with differences of some mag-

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TABLE 5 Personal and Social Characteristics of the Bishops

	Venezuela		Colombia	
	N	%	N	%
	(Total N = 22)		(Total N = 38)	
<i>Position</i>				
Auxiliary Bishop	3	14	6	16
Bishop	14	64	25	66
Archbishop	5	23	8	18
<i>Years as a Bishop</i>				
Less than Five	6	27	13	34
Five to Fifteen	10	45	13	34
Over Fifteen	6	27	12	32
<i>Age</i>				
Over 55	14	64	17	45
Under 55	8	36	21	55
<i>Education</i>				
Seminary Only	13	59	12	32
Advanced	9	41	26	68
Studies in Rome	9	41	12	32
<i>Career (posts mentioned)*</i>				
Education	8	36	27	71
Curia	10	45	21	55
Parish Work	15	68	12	32
Adviser to Movements	2	9	5	13
Journalist	1	5	1	3
<i>Father's Occupation</i>				
Professional-Civil Servant	8	36	13	34
Business-Commerce	7	32	15	40
Small Landowner	4	18	5	13
Peasant-Worker	1	5	3	8
Large Cattle Rancher	1	5	—	—
Military	—	—	1	3
Not Ascertained	1	5	1	3
<i>Origins</i>				
Urban Area—Large City	5	23	12	32
Small City	3	14	6	16
Small Town	14	64	19	50
Countryside	—	—	1	3
<i>Region of Birth**</i>				
<i>Venezuela</i>				
Andes	6	27		
Central	7	32		
Plains	1	5		
East	5	22		
West	3	13		

TABLE 5 Personal and Social Characteristics of the Bishops

	Venezuela		Colombia	
	N	%	N	%
	(Total N = 22)		(Total N = 38)	
<i>Colombia</i>				
Antioquia & Caldas			18	47
South (Narino, Cauca)			2	5
Center (Tolima, Huila, Valle)			7	18
Cundinamarca-Boyaca-Santander			11	29

*Up to two mentions of a career position prior to promotion to bishop were coded for each individual. Hence, the results cannot be directly summed.

**In Venezuela, the regions refer to the following states: Andes (Táchira, Mérida, Trujillo), Central (Carabobo, Aragua, Federal District, Miranda), Plains (Barinas, Apure, Guárico), East (Anzoátegui, Monagas, Bolívar, Sucre, and Nueva Esparta), and West (Zulia, Falcón, Lara, Yaracuy). In Colombia, Caldas refers to the old state of Caldas, which comprises the present departments of Caldas, Quindío and Risaralda.

nitude (15–20 percent). National differences have already been examined in some detail. Consider now the meaning of education in the Church.

Clerical education is traditionally quite limited in scope, with heavy emphasis on abstract learning (primarily philosophy and theology), largely divorced from the concerns of day-to-day life. This abstract learning was reinforced by the structure of the traditional seminary. Set off from the community as separate boarding schools, the typical seminary kept future priests rigidly isolated. Thus, future members of the clergy lived in a sheltered and artificial environment “removed from the world and taught that it was to be approached only with extreme caution” (Bruneau 1974, p. 133) Of the sixty bishops interviewed, only four (three Venezuelans and one Colombian) entered the seminary as “adult vocations” (after high school or from university). The rest began their clerical careers at the age of eleven or twelve. Advanced education has typically been more of the same in terms of scope and setting. Most advanced training takes place in Church institutions, concentrated in Rome. Thus, of the thirty-five bishops with advanced education, twenty-one studied in Rome. Moreover, their studies are also quite limited in content, with heavy emphasis on canon law and theology. Training in “modern” areas like education or psychology is rare.

In general, advanced education is clearly on the rise in these two Churches. Only half the bishops over fifty-five years of age have taken advanced studies, as opposed to two-thirds of those under fifty-five. But national patterns differ strikingly. As table 6 shows, in contrast to the general pattern, younger Venezuelans are substantially less educated than their elders. Among Colombians, on the other hand, over 80 percent of those under 55 years of age have advanced education, while almost two-thirds of the entire group with advanced training is under fifty-five. Advanced education is not only less common in Venezuela, and concentrated in different age groups, it is also considera-

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bly more limited in scope. All Venezuelans with advanced education studied in Rome, and all were trained in traditional fields. Meanwhile, in Colombia, less than half the group studied in Rome, and "modern" fields of study, while still rare, are at least represented.

T A B L E 6 *Age and Education by Country (percentages)*

	<i>Advanced</i>	<i>Seminary</i>	<i>Totals</i>
<i>Totals</i>			
Over 55	48	52	52%
Under 55	69	31	48
<i>Totals</i>	58	42	100 (N = 60)
<i>Venezuela</i>			
Over 55	43	57	64
Under 55	37	63	36
<i>Totals</i>	41	59	100 (N = 22)
<i>Colombia</i>			
Over 55	53	47	45
Under 55	81	19	55
<i>Totals</i>	68	32	100 (N = 38)

How is level of education related to the attitudes of the bishops? Controlling for education makes relatively little difference to the results on structuralism or the several indices of the role of the Church. In each country, the more educated are slightly more structural and more likely to score low on tradition and medium or high on activation. But the variations are not very great. The most striking differences emerge, once again, in connection with Marxism. Education is associated with notably different patterns of response in each country. As table 7 shows, Colombians with advanced education are generally more open to dialogue and cooperation and more likely to qualify their answers, moving away from outright rejection. But in Venezuela advanced education completely reverses the overall national pattern of openness; moreover, the magnitude of change is much greater.

To understand these patterns more fully, structuralism, Church role, and dialogue must be related directly to one another. Once this is done, it becomes clear that contrary to much popular wisdom on the subject, structural perspectives are neither uniquely nor even especially associated with activation or activism. Rather, one finds that *all* views of the role of the Church share the language of structuralism to a great extent. Striking by their absence are any substantial number of bishops who fit conventional stereotypes, combining moralistic views with traditional ideas about the Church's proper social role. Indeed, of those scoring high on traditionalism, almost 80 percent are high on structuralism!

With a more detailed breakdown of the data, unfortunately, the numbers

TABLE 7 Dialogue and Cooperation with Marxists, by Country and Education (percentages)*

	Venezuela			Colombia		
	Advanced	Seminary	Totals	Advanced	Seminary	Totals
Accept	12	69	48	28	17	24
Qualified	38	23	29	40	33	38
Reject	50	8	24	32	50	38
Totals	38	62	100	68	32	100
			(N = 21)			(N = 37)

*Percentages do not always sum to 100 because of rounding.

in each cell become quite small, and percentages may be misleading. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that controlling for nation and education yields little or no variation in the distribution of responses. In general, national differences follow the pattern of greater Colombian structuralism noted earlier, while level of education makes little difference to the overall pattern.

Only when we examine the relation between the role of the Church and attitudes towards dialogue and cooperation with Marxists do notable patterns emerge, confirming the trends already described. Although Venezuelans and Colombians specify broadly comparable roles for the Church, among Venezuelans almost every category of role definition is more favorably disposed to dialogue and cooperation than its Colombian counterpart. The results on activation are particularly striking. As one moves from low to high on this index, the proportion accepting dialogue and cooperation almost doubles in Venezuela, while it drops sharply for Colombians. Finally, although almost three-fourths of the bishops in both countries score low on activism, almost twice as large a proportion of the Venezuelans in this group favor dialogue (see table 8). The results are comparable controlling for education. As we have seen, the more educated are wary of dialogue and more likely to qualify their responses. Of those scoring medium or high on activation, only 21 percent of the more educated accept dialogue and cooperation, as opposed to 37 percent of those with seminary training only.

What do these results mean? What do they reveal about the likely patterns of action now and in the future? Answers to these questions require attention to two distinct issues: the nature of national differences and the implications of the different role definitions favored by the bishops. Let us deal with these in turn.

Contrasted to their Colombian colleagues, Venezuelan bishops are much less structural in their views of the world, but much more willing to accept dialogue and cooperation with Marxists. The issue of Marxism is significant, for relations between Christians and Marxists are often taken in Latin America as an acid test of the Church's real willingness to cooperate in the transformation of society. Moreover, the question of relations with Marxism is a point of growing

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TABLE 8 Church Role Indices and Dialogue and Cooperation with Marxists, by Country (percentages)*

	Traditional			Activation			Activism			Totals
	Low	Med	Hi	Low	Med	Hi	Low	Med	Hi	
<i>Venezuela</i>										
Accept	67	29	40	43	40	75	40	80	—	48
Qualified	11	43	40	43	30	—	33	—	100	29
Reject	22	29	20	14	30	25	27	20	—	23
Totals	43	33	24	33	48	19	71	24	5	100 (N = 21)
<i>Colombia</i>										
Accept	17	18	50	42	21	9	22	33	—	24
Qualified	44	27	37.5	42	36	36	33	44	100	38
Reject	39	55	12.5	17	43	55	44	22	—	38
Totals	49	30	22	32	38	30	73	24	3	100 (N = 37)

*Percentages do not always sum to 100 because of rounding.

controversy within many national Churches (cf. Eagleson). Yet acceptance of dialogue and cooperation with Marxists seems to be a step required neither by structural perspectives nor by less traditional definitions of the role of the Church. Instead, national context appears particularly important. Why is the Venezuelan pattern so striking and so different from the Colombian?

First, the greater willingness of the Venezuelan hierarchy to accept dialogue and common effort with Marxists may reflect a realistic acceptance of the nature of their society and of the Church's actual status in it. As we have seen, in Venezuela the Church is far from dominant. Rather, as one group among many in a pluralist society, the Church has perforce learned to coexist with powerful and articulate parties on the left, ranging from the mild democratic socialism of *Acción Democrática* (long the dominant political force) to more radical Marxist positions. Moreover, many Venezuelan bishops have had lengthy experience as parish priests, in which they had to deal with many different groups and situations—an experience that helps move them away from the rigidly held positions inculcated by a predominantly abstract education and bureaucratic career. In Colombia, on the other hand, the Church has long held a predominant position—seen by others and self-perceived as a central source of national culture and traditions. Given this role, for the Colombian hierarchy a commitment to national change is likely to be seen as something uniquely *theirs* to legitimize and set in motion. Finally, of course, the greater resources of the Colombian Church make such pretensions a real option.

In any case, there are no strong Marxist parties in Colombia, and those that do exist are almost all committed to violent revolutionary strategies. Hence, dialogue and cooperation with Marxists is likely to be seen as superfluous—a Pandora's box better left closed, particularly when a central role in society is at

stake.¹⁵ Marxist parties are stronger in Venezuela, although even there they remain relatively minor groups; however, the entire political spectrum is further to the left than in Colombia, and the political system as a whole is permeated by the semisocialist legacy of Acción Democrática's long periods in power. Moreover, the Venezuelan Church is weak and a central role in society is beyond the reach (and aspirations) of most of its bishops. Hence, accommodation is better suited to their situation (cf. Levine 1976). Differences in national context are further evident in the reasons offered by those bishops cautious or fearful about interaction with Marxists. Reality and direct experience seem to play a major role here. Thus, almost 30 percent of the Colombians fear losing the unsophisticated to Marxist influence and 22 percent reject dialogue and cooperation on the grounds that Marxists are simply evil and cannot be trusted. On the other hand, only 14 percent of the Venezuelans cite each of these reasons. At the same time, among the Venezuelans, who have more occasion to deal with potentially effective leftist parties, 27 percent fear being used by such groups, while only 8 percent of the Colombians cite this possibility.

In this light, the large impact of advanced education on bishops' attitudes in Venezuela begins to make sense. Recall that the Venezuelans with advanced education all studied in Rome. In Rome, they absorbed grand visions of the role of the Church—surely, from a Roman perspective the status and role of the Church appear greater than when seen from the eye-level view of a poor, weak, and isolated diocese. It is also likely that they absorbed the strong anticommunism then prevalent in Rome, and thus continue to reflect, twenty years later, the attitudes and values then espoused in central Church institutions.¹⁶ Meanwhile, younger Venezuelans, who are less educated, reflect the political evolution of recent years and the general accommodation between groups in Venezuelan society. A concluding section places these differences in a broader context, with particular reference to the choice and impact of the roles favored by the bishops.

CONCLUSIONS

Much of the impact of religious institutions depends on those who lead them—the problems they see, the roles they assume, and the imperatives and constraints they shape their actions to fit. But the activities of the Church are not a simple function of the nature of its leaders, nor of their beliefs on social issues alone. At the very least, elements of institutional and social context must be added to the study of elites in order to gain a full appreciation of the Church's actual and potential role in society.

The national differences are great. Colombian bishops rise in an institution that is well-organized and staffed, tied into elite groups at all levels, and generally expected to take on a central social role. Thus, while the greater structuralism of Colombian bishops may well dispose them to promote social reform, such initiatives emerge and take form within well-established traditions of clerical domination. Whatever the direction of Church action in Colombia, the style will be of a piece with the past. For Venezuelan bishops, on the other hand, such a role is simply not in the cards. Indeed, as we have seen, the very weakness of

the Venezuelan Church reinforces a disposition to tolerance and cooperation, despite a generally less structural set of social views.

Of course, the constraints of national context are only one side of the coin. If nations shape the Church, how do the views and strategies of Church leaders affect the nation around them? In both Venezuela and Colombia, the Church accommodated itself to the present political system, moving away from active partisanship to become, instead, a supporter of the system in general. But the rapid evolution of issues within the Church has outdated this position very quickly. While the bishops responded to the challenges of the past by getting out of politics and taking more structural views of social problems, new challenges have caught them by surprise, most notably the demands for activism coming from the Catholic left. To these radical groups, withdrawal from partisanship and the pursuit of political neutrality mean simply passive acceptance of the status quo. Instead, they demand active promotion of change. But for most bishops, this puts the Church right back into politics, from which they thought they had escaped. Hence, many resist such a step quite vigorously.

While they see social problems in structural terms and genuinely want to contribute to their solution, the majority do not view direct involvement as appropriate for the Church. Hence the popularity of traditional and activation strategies. In contrast to activism these are flexible, comfortable, and safe. Activation in particular represents a middle ground. Its proponents reject the direct involvement of the Church espoused by traditionalists and activists alike, and seek instead to get others to undertake initiatives guided by Catholic principles. Neither the individual bishops, nor the hierarchy, nor the Church as a whole is committed to the outcome of any of these initiatives, or to the support of any alliances lay leaders may create. Moreover, the initial risk is small, as new groups can be created at minimal cost through reliance on resources and structures already present in the community. But this dependence on resources embedded in the status quo severely restricts the range and type of issues lay groups can address: potentially "political" issues are dangerous for they imperil local, national, or external sources of support. Thus, most groups stick closer to themes of individual conversion, personal morality, and piety.¹⁷

The limitations this strategy imposes grow directly from the social role and status of the bishop. As one Venezuelan observer has pointed out: "The bishop is a notable in the community. He has no independent support or means of raising it. So all he can do is receive homages—accept loyalties that are offered and give his blessing in return. Thus, he is at the mercy of any and every current, social and political" (Interview 60603, 9 July 1973). As notables, Church leaders receive deference, but their "power" or "influence" is more the reflected aura of related and allied groups than the result of autonomous efforts. Bishops thus typically fit into an already established situation in each diocese, and in many cases end up as captives of the local structure of power. Captives, yes, but not necessarily unwilling, for as Bruneau points out for Brazil, "the bishops are not prone to question their captivity, because it is a pleasant one" (p. 135).

These aspects of the status of the bishop help explain the predominance of traditional and activation strategies. Activism per se endangers the Church's

sources of support and threatens the bishop's acceptance within the structure of values and interests that dominate the community—a structure of which he is, most often, a part. In this way, a combination of material and symbolic identifications reinforces certain strategies within the Church, while these, in turn, implicitly lend the legitimacy of religious authority to the continued existence of the society in its present form.

Clearly, in Latin America today religion is once again a problem for politics, and politics is no less a problem for religion. The likely future stance of the Church is indicated by the mixed results examined here—a cautious opening to new possibilities, confined largely within the limits of existing social, economic, and political structures. But clearly there is no single future for the Church, just as there is no single pattern adequate to describe the many different national versions of the Catholic Church that exist today. New trends will not produce a uniform future any more than past developments engendered a common history. Rather, many paths are likely to develop, each growing and changing constantly to fit the societies in which the institution itself lives and makes its way through history.

FURTHER RESEARCH: A BRIEF SUGGESTION

The findings presented in this article throw some light on the dynamic relation between beliefs and action for the leaders of the Catholic Church. But the results are complex and ambiguous, for it is apparent that no simple one-to-one relation exists between social views and strategies for action. Rather, as we have seen, structural perceptions pervade many different definitions of the role of the Church. Moreover, when concrete alternatives for action are proposed (as in the case of Marxism), national differences become prominent.

These findings suggest the need to go beyond the data, to consider the possibility and desirability of reformulating the question itself and recasting the causal relations implicit in the preceding discussion (and in the popular wisdom on the subject). It is apparent that the relation of structural perspectives to action is not particularly notable—but perhaps this is only to be expected. As we have seen, many bishops draw a clear and firm distinction between the general analysis of society (for which “sociological” categories are quite appropriate) and specification of the Church's proper role in social life. For the latter, social views are perhaps less important than the bishops' vision of the very nature of the Church itself.

Many studies of religion reveal an unfortunate tendency to treat the Church as just another organization—albeit an extremely complex and widespread one. But the simple, mechanical application of categories derived from politics and social life is inadequate, for it ignores the essentially transcendental goals of the Church. Thus, classifying religious leaders solely in terms of social and political perspectives may miss much of the point. For the view of the Church itself that predominates among bishops and Catholic activists at all levels shapes the priorities they set for the institution, the kinds of organizations they build, and the activities they see as necessary and proper extensions of

their religious role. Recently, research on religion and politics in Latin America has begun to explore this area, relating the self-image of the Church to its understanding of society and characteristic patterns of action (Levine 1978, Levine and Wilde, Smith forthcoming, Smith and Sanks). Such an approach has the advantage of working with the concepts and categories religious leaders use every day, and thus avoiding the temptation to reduce meaning and action to an externally imposed logic.

In summary, I am suggesting that a fruitful path for future study may begin with religious concepts and issues, working outward from these to social and political action, and not, as is commonly the case now, beginning with social and political issues and assessing the Church's position in the terms set by others. It is time, in short, to take religion seriously as a source of guiding concepts and principles, instead of merely subsuming religious phenomena under secular rubrics. Further development of this kind of research will advance our understanding of the general relation of religion and society in Latin America and bring this body of work more in line with recent trends in the sociology and anthropology of religion generally.

NOTES

1. Although religion and politics in Latin America have been the subject of study for many years, few genuinely comparative works exist and almost none uses empirical data on the attitudes and orientations of Church elites. The traditional school took a rather static legal and juridical approach (Mecham). More recent studies, emphasizing dynamic sociological and political formulations, also lack such data. For example, Vallier's work, which stimulated much recent research, is more an outline of problems and a call for further research than research itself. Most recent studies are either broad-brush reviews of the Church in all Latin America, such as Turner, or detailed case studies of single nations, like Bruneau's work on Brazil. One recent Latin American study that provides comparative data is limited to attitudes on population and family planning (cf. Leñero Otero).
2. In Venezuela, twenty-two interviews were conducted, with one refusal and three bishops unavailable because of sickness or travel. Of those interviewed, three were auxiliary bishops, fourteen were bishops, and five were archbishops. In Colombia, thirty-eight interviews were completed, with six auxiliary bishops, twenty-five bishops, and seven archbishops. There were five refusals and three bishops unavailable because of sickness or travel. For all practical purposes, the interviews cover the entire group of bishops in each country, with the exception of prelates in charge of mission territories, who were excluded as they are almost entirely foreign. Those in charge of mission territories, of which there are four in Venezuela and seventeen in Colombia, do not generally play a major role in the episcopal conference of either nation. In any case, most mission territories have a lower ecclesiastical rank and status than dioceses; rather, they are apostolic vicarates, apostolic prefectures, and prelaties. The greater number of mission jurisdictions in Colombia reflects the vast extension of sparsely populated territory under mission control in that country.

Of course, bishops are not the only elite group in the Church. Others include officials of large religious orders (such as Jesuits or Salesians) and leaders of educational and welfare institutions nominally affiliated with the Church but financially and organizationally independent of the hierarchy. But the bishops, by virtue of their central role in the organizational and sacramental life of the Church, form a uniquely important group. In Vallier's words, the bishop is, "in the broadest sense of the term,

- a local religious king" (p. 86). The bishop's independence is considerable. As O'Dea points out, "Catholic theology considered them 'successors to the Apostles' and canon law defined the episcopal office as possessing 'ordinary authority', that is, authority in its own right, not authority delegated by the Pope" (p. 122).
3. In general, although elite studies devote much attention to background and career variables, they have been less successful in relating these variables to measures of attitudes. Searing and Edinger point out that background variables are often "brought to the research from the outside and not themselves evaluated within the context of the research project. Moreover, not only does the relevance of the social background variables as a set remain unquestioned, but the relative strength of one background variable vis-à-vis another is rarely determined" (p. 431). Their discussion of the use of nationality is also of great interest. See also, Putnam, particularly chaps. 1 and 2.
 4. The best general studies of the Colombian Church are Wilde and Jiménez Cadena. On the Venezuelan Church see Watters, and for more recent developments, Levine (1976). Contemporary problems in Colombia are discussed in Levine and Wilde. A generally useful guide to recent legal changes is Kennedy.
 5. On Catholic organizations in Colombia, see Jiménez Cadena (esp. pp. 82–153), and Mutchler. Studies of popular religiosity reveal much lower levels of mass involvement in Catholic organizations in Venezuela (cf. CISOR 1970, pp. 124–25, and ICODES, pp. 25–28). The growth of Catholic organization in Venezuela is examined in Levine (1976 and 1973, chaps. 4 and 5).
 6. Most of this territory is sparsely populated, largely by tribal Indians. In recent years the missions have come under sharp attack. A well-known critique is Bonilla.
 7. The new concordat was extensively discussed in the Colombian press. My account draws heavily on *El Tiempo* (Bogotá) in July 1973 and articles in *ANALI-CIAS*, a Jesuit monthly, in August and September 1973.
 8. A standard account of the Colombian party system remains Dix (chaps. 8 and 9). Another good study, stressing the social roots of parties, is Garcés. The failure of mass organization in the countryside is reviewed in Gilhodes.
 9. On the violence, see Levine and Wilde.
 10. On the National Front, see Dix (chap. 6) and Payne (chap. 6).
 11. These concerns have crystallized in recent years in a "theology of liberation" in Latin America. The literature on the theology of liberation is enormous and ever-growing. Some useful reviews include Berryman and Dussel.
 12. Gustavo Gutiérrez, a leading exponent of the theology of liberation, argues: "The unity of the Church is not truly achieved without the unity of the world. In a radically divided world, the function of the ecclesial community is to struggle against the profound causes of the division among men. It is only this commitment that can make of it an authentic sign of unity. Today, in Latin America especially, this unity implies the option for the oppressed; to opt for them is the honest, resolute way to combat that which gives rise to this social division" (p. 278). A sharply contrary view can be found in Vekemans (1973 and 1976).
 13. Gutiérrez argues that in practice this distinction was never clear: "The greater part of the Church remained untouched by this Church-world distinction, for it was contradicted by the strong bonds which consciously or unconsciously tied the Church to the existing social order" (p. 58). The activation role criticized by Gutiérrez has been prominent at the official level of the Church for over fifty years, and was strongly reaffirmed at the Second Vatican Council in "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," widely known by the first Latin words in the document, *Gaudium et Spes* (cf. Abbott, p. 287).
 14. For comparable background data on Colombian bishops since 1930, see Ugalde and Schwann.
 15. The central role assumed by the Colombian Church (and the contrast to Venezuela) is further visible in the bishops' responses to questions about the major problems of the Church. Colombians mentioned moral and social problems of the nation much more often than internal Church problems such as personnel or finances. In Venezuela, on

- the other hand, Church problems were largely identified as internal to the organization and not identified with problems of the society at large. These responses reinforce our belief that Colombian bishops identify the Church with the nation to a great extent. Thus, in discussions of social and political changes, they move quickly to assume a central role.
16. For an excellent study of the fundamental assumptions and perspectives of the "Roman School" of thought on the Church, as embodied in teaching at the Gregorian University, see Sanks (passim and esp. pp. 21–102, 108–28).
 17. A classic study of the ties of local churches to various interest groups is Pope. Discussing the limitations of the local churches, Pope writes: "A minister occasionally expressed a sentiment which he himself designated as very 'radical,' but such statements were always so indefinite and veiled in content that they obviously represented an effort to assert personal independence rather than social dissent. One of the ministers in the country opened a prayer by saying: 'O God, we thank thee that Jesus Christ is not a stick of candy, but a stick of dynamite.' Many similar statements, purporting to represent Christianity as world-changing, were made, but generally failed to specify what was to be blown up" (p. 164). On the dynamics of local level change, see also Bruneau (chap. 9) and Levine (1978).

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