

# Socialist and Christian in Chile

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The focus of the world press upon Salvador Allende has, in 1972, given Chile the center stage occupied by Cuba fourteen years ago. For the first time in history a Marxist candidate who respected the rules of the game was freely elected by a democratic nation. So much is well known. What the "Popular Unity" program is all about and the difficulties encountered in the first year of government are not so well known. Nor, more particularly, have Christian attitudes toward developments in Chile received the attention they deserve. Both in Chile and in other countries many people are disoriented by the outcome of events, finding it difficult to understand how a nation with a Christian and democratic tradition could freely choose the leadership of a declared Marxist.

From the beginning, Popular Unity (U.P.) clearly advocated a new socialistic path, understood as a progressive control of the economy by the state. The principal sources of national wealth were to be totally exploited by the state, monopolies would be nationalized, credit controlled and the process of land reform accelerated. Three "areas" of production were to be created: state-owned property, "mixed" (both state and private capital) production, and the area of private capital.

In the social field U.P. promised a better distribution of income that would give the lower salaried groups a higher percentage of remuneration (higher even than the increase in the cost of living). This, of course, might bring about a rise in prices, but differentiation would be made in the cost of some commodities. For example, if consumption of electricity were low, the consumer would not pay the rise in price; in this way, the higher tariff would be ab-

sorbed by the middle and upper-income brackets. Thus the state would be able to aid various public services without raising prices, despite increases in costs, in public transportation, electricity, bread, meat products and other staples. A recent freeze has also moved toward a more just distribution of national income. Other changes include reforms in education and in the conscientization of the masses, all geared toward building public support for the new path of socialism, Chilean style. It is, as President Allende called it, "a socialism with the flavor of *tinto* and *empanadas*" (red wine and Chilean meat turnovers).

The transition to the U.P. program has been made without drama, without bloodshed and without the loss of basic liberties. In some ways the changes came as no surprise. The six years of Eduardo Frei's government achieved much economic consolidation, thanks to solid administration and favorable copper prices. A reform of agrarian structure was achieved not so much by redistributing land as by organizing rural workers in unions and cooperatives. From 1964 to 1970 rural union membership rose from 5,000 to 125,000, and the paternalistic relationship between owners and workers was profoundly changed. Educational reform had raised the literacy level to the second highest in Latin America, second only to Argentina. In these ways, plus the formation of grassroots organizations at the neighborhood level, the masses were formed, enabling them to take a more active and personal part in the control of their lives.

In addition, the Frei government had already taken the fundamental step to "Chileanize" the copper industry, which meant Chile's acquiring 51 per cent of the stock in the mines and, later, a partial nationalization that prepared the way for the total nationalization achieved by the U.P. government. Other factors also prepared the way for socialism. As in most developing countries the economy is largely and inevitably in the hands of the state: the government is the biggest investor, controls a greater part of the

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credit, directs exportations and supervises importations—all factors favorable to the transition to socialism. What the election proved is that the great majority of the Chilean people wanted a more radical and rapid transition. The Christian Democratic candidate and U.P. candidate presented strikingly similar programs; even the National Party spoke of change and the urgency of achieving a more just society.

The newly elected Popular Unity government faced the difficulty that those who were to effect these changes were from Marxist parties whose counterparts throughout the world did not have, to say the least, a democratic background. Anti-Marxist propaganda had long emphasized the violations of human dignity and liberty which marked Communist regimes in other countries. Thus, the Communist Party in Chile had emphasized its commitment to pluralist politics and respect for basic liberties. U.P. candidates promised a continuing democratic tradition with historic roots in Chilean society. In his inaugural speech Allende said that his government would not follow any pre-established model of socialism, that Marxism has many interpretations and that he would work for democracy and pluralism.

Interviewed by Régis Debray, President Allende stated: "The Chilean State has a long tradition of intervention in economic activities—of course in a capitalist context—a great number of state-owned companies, price control of consumer necessities, total or partial control of exports. We are already in the anteroom of socialism."<sup>1</sup>

Allende's assurances notwithstanding, the Popular Unity government at first inspired a certain amount of panic; many of the more affluent abandoned the country, thus creating a paralysis in private investment, especially in the construction field, but also in other industries. Soon the economic situation began to return to a somewhat normal state—as normal, that is, as could be expected within a process of radical change. The government's basic strategy for economic expansion has been to increase consumption in the lower and middle sectors through increasing salaries, thus creating increase in demand and a corresponding increase in production. An initial increase in production was made possible by the fact that many factories had been working at less than 100 per cent capacity and were therefore able to augment production rapidly. On the other hand, many industries were nationalized, among them almost all of the textile industry. Other manufacturers, notably those in the metal and tire industries, entered the "mixed area," but were for all practical purposes nationalized.

The banks were nationalized with evident success, thereby placing all credit and the total control of economic life in government hands. These measures were followed by a very considerable increase of money in circulation (from seven billion to fourteen

billion escudos). The government has tried to maintain a high consumption level through continued importation of foodstuffs during the first year. The total spent on foodstuffs doubled.

The logical object of nationalization is greater control by the government of all key industries in order to diversify production, to cover the more basic needs of the people, to reduce production of luxury items, to profit from the gains, and to break the back of the monopolies. The government has had few legal problems since, in 1932, a short-lived Socialist Republic, lasting a hundred days, passed the necessary laws that are now being applied.<sup>2</sup> In an April, 1971, interview the Minister of Economy, Pedro Vuskovic, said: "Our principal responsibility is to defend the essential bridges of provisions and employment; from this standpoint we are nationalizing and expanding the production of the enterprises in the state property area, or intervening in their management in order to rapidly better their financial situation, with the support and active participation of the workers themselves." It seems evident that these measures have enjoyed a certain amount of early success and that, at least on a short-term basis, they provide an image of well-being.

The newness of the U.P. approach makes it hard to envision the long-term consequences. Laws of a capitalist society, based on motives of profit, must be switched to a different code, which, in turn, implies a major social transformation over a long period of time. Among the major problems for which no solutions are forthcoming is that private investment has been all but paralyzed. At the same time, foreign investment and lines of foreign credit have been almost totally cut. These realities will finally bring the country to an extremely dangerous economic state, in which, lacking investment and having little internal capital, it will be difficult to maintain the necessary rhythm of production or to create jobs for people accustomed to a certain consumption level.

While the increase in salaries has created an increase in demand aimed principally at consumer products and perishables, very little money has been diverted to savings which might serve future capitalization and industrial expansion. As an example, food production has increased 8 per cent, while electronics (appliances) has jumped over 30 per cent.

So far, changes have taken place without suppression of civil liberties or freedom of the press, and with normal congressional activity, including its exercise of powers in relation to the executive branch of government. In the southern region, especially in rural areas, there have been serious problems with illegal take-overs of land from private owners. Although the government is opposed to these actions, one extreme leftist group within the government (M.I.R.) has been very active in these take-overs, thus undermining the government's efforts to project an image of law and order.

The Christian attitude toward the U.P. program is based in part on the points of its similarity with the Christian hope for a society offering a more just life. In addition, the Christian attitude is shaped by the experience of the majority of people living in underdeveloped countries under a capitalist system. Among such people the conviction grows that capitalism cannot bridge the abyss separating the underdeveloped from the developed nations. In Chile two political programs, Christian Democrat and Popular Unity, are committed to democratic, as opposed to totalitarian, socialism. Defenders of capitalism might object by citing the examples of European countries, as well as of Japan and the United States. But these countries secured their bases of development when the industrialization process began in England in the eighteenth century, a period far less technological than our own. There was also a firm will to progress technically and economically; leading industrialists did not shrink from inhuman measures during an epoch in which the workers were unable to protect themselves. In our present efforts to develop we find capitalism not only inadequate but essentially anti-popular. As we in the underdeveloped countries have experienced capitalism, it looks for easy and immediate wealth, exploiting, however possible, the working classes and consumers, without working toward the technical and economic progress such as that achieved by European nations and the U.S.

In addition, capitalism in underdeveloped countries simply cannot practice today the unpopular measures imposed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And, of course, these were not only unpopular but cruelly unjust, leading to inhuman standards of living. This is why some underdeveloped forms of capitalism (e.g., Brazil) find a dictatorial regime necessary in order to impose by force of arms and at the cost of personal freedoms an impossible system. Although it is true that underdeveloped nations need capital, this capital has been conditioned in such a way that its donors, whether they call themselves socialists or capitalists, do not truly collaborate in the struggle for development, but actually exploit the countries they presume to aid.

If capitalism is defined as the private ownership of capital which legitimates political, economic, social and cultural power—that is, a system which is directed by authorities deriving their power from the private property of capital—it is then necessary to search for another system, which, in this case, we call socialism. This socialism is, quite simply, the negation of the legitimating power derived from private property.

Between such socialism and Christian thought there is no conflict. To be sure, the social doctrine of the Church has defended private property and the profits of productive activity,

but this was due to a lack of consciousness of the inevitable abuses resulting from the capitalistic system. Leo XIII warned against these abuses and he, together with all succeeding pontiffs, insisted on the social dimension of property. The private ownership of the goods of production was defended out of a desire to protect personal liberty and the security of the family. However, if personal liberty is assured (together with initiative, creativity and the security of the family) by a system that accepts work rather than private capital as the legitimating source of power, the Church can hardly oppose the socialist spirit that fundamentally animates her own doctrine. The experience of the underdeveloped nations is that capitalism foments an industrial production oriented to the desires of those who imitate the consumer society rather than to the needs of the masses. Such a situation must be profoundly offensive to the most elementary Christian teaching of social justice. Faced with this reality Christians have looked sympathetically upon the socialist system, especially in its utopian aspect and its sincere desire for greater justice for all people. While socialism makes no exclusive claim on Christian sympathies (for no political system can exhaust a faith), the Christian tendency toward a democratic socialism in Chile is now clear beyond doubt.

We are in danger of forgetting that history offers examples of socialism, such as that of Russia and China, which, though doubtless achieving economic development, have sacrificed essential human values. Such a sacrifice cannot be considered legitimate. As important as development is, we remember that development is made for man, not man for development. Totalitarian socialism substitutes the capitalist class with another class—an elite unrepresentative of the masses, a centralized bureaucracy of dogmatic monopoly, a one-party ideology dictatorially imposed and excluding as heretical or subversive all dissident thinking by individuals or groups, even when such groups are in the majority.

Just as capitalism legitimates its power by private ownership of capital, totalitarian socialism legitimates it by the centralism of a distinct bureaucracy which elects itself. In principle and in conformity with a utopian idealization of the future (a fraternal society without classes, without a state, without conflict), man is an end in himself. But under such a socialism man is no longer an absolute being but becomes an instrumentalized object without personal achievement; he is the tool of a tomorrow that never arrives because it has not emerged from a state of dogmatic idealization.

It may be that the bureaucracy of socialist totalitarianism is established on a different basis from that of the dominant class in capitalist society. Such a bureaucracy does not legitimate its power by private ownership of capital but by the centralism of a party imposing its ideology by force, without true

popular representation. Nevertheless, the bureaucracy has the same power in its hands as does the dominant capitalist class; it decides the quantity and direction of investment, controls communication and manipulates consumer needs through centralized planning and a monopoly of commercial advertising. For these reasons the Christian rejects the socialism of one party, the totalitarian dictatorship supported by a self-elected centralized bureaucracy. On these essential points we can make no compromise.

At the same time, Christians in Chile have shown a great openness toward democratic socialism in the measure that the democratic factor is stressed. Ours is a contingent approval. By democratic socialism I mean that system in which "the economic, social, political and cultural power is legitimized through the representation of the masses which, of course, it affects. It is not a case of an elite generation or a self-election to power. Self-election must disappear as it existed in the class society, be it capitalist or a bureaucratic socialist society. Economic power must represent popular sovereignty."<sup>3</sup>

Fundamental to this concept is the movement of grass-roots masses, founded on mutual solidarity among workers, in a truly democratic engagement in their own historical project. If the masses are able to become responsible citizens, they themselves will be the prime movers of the country's development, controlling the leaders, whose legitimacy derives only from their being representatives of the people. In this way a conscientized people will sense the mystique of work and will spontaneously and consciously raise their productivity in order to make the necessary jump toward desperately needed progress. Through such participation of their own usefulness the workers can control their leadership and prevent the leaders from becoming an antagonistic class.

In contrast to totalitarian, bureaucratic socialism, democratic socialism does not deny the existence of conflicts, but tries to overcome them through the institutionalization of free dialogue and constructive criticism, which are enriching in themselves. This mutual and permanent relationship between people and leaders requires planning, since it is crucial in determining the destiny of natural wealth and resources, in deciding the quantity, quality and variety of goods and services to be produced, in providing for savings, the structure and distribution of income, and so forth. In a word, it is on this system of planning that major and transcendental decisions about the economic and social life of the country are based. As state power becomes stronger, it becomes more important to institutionalize the participation of the working community so that power does not drift toward totalitarianism and the society once more fall into the injustices of capitalism. This journey into democratic socialism calls the

working community to a systematic role in planning the socializing of financial systems—banks, the forming of insurance companies, the conversion of vital production centers, the formation of democratic labor communities to be the new organization within the manufacturing enterprises. In such a system of democratic socialism we could trust the government to promote the movement and conscientization of the masses, thus assuring efficient organization, with little fear that the government would assume a dictatorial role.

Democratic socialism assumes popular participation not only in the decisions of government but also in the economic life of industry and the local community. This is the type of socialism that the Chilean bishops have said they could support and toward which they hope the present program will move. They have declared such a socialism to be rich in Christian values: sense of fraternity, solidarity, strength and promotion of the grand masses; an acceptance of sacrifice, not only among those who have taken advantage of certain privileges and the abundance of their goods, but also on the part of all laboring men who strive to increase both production and quality.

The Cardinal of Santiago, in his message at the *Te Deum* in the Santiago Cathedral which marked President Allende's inauguration, recalled biblical texts touching on human liberation and justice:

Open the way, remove the obstacles in the road of my people. Break the unjust chains, give back freedom to the oppressed, toss away the yokes. This is the way an authentic and prophetic message sounds—vigorous and demanding; thus one incarnates and proves a truly vivid religious faith. Rituals and ceremonies, fasts and penitence please God when they are inspired by a desire and duty to do justice to our brother. Share your bread with the hungry, shelter those without a roof . . . and do not shun those of your own blood. Is this not the fast that pleases God? We have just listened to words from a Book that belongs to all humanity. Those of us who believe and live by this word cannot change it. It isn't for us to lessen, in any way, the vigor of its demands. We cannot vitiate our faith, change it into a pretext to shun the misery surrounding our own people. The heaven we wait for begins here on earth and one of its pillars is justice. For this reason, on a purely religious occasion as this is, we do not doubt or vacillate in speaking of an urgent mission, involving all of us. Yes, all of us, those who have received a legitimate mandate from the people and those who have received an authentic mandate from God. Two mandates that, with diverse and complementary paths, point out the same urgent mission of liberation. God, who in Jesus Christ identified with the poor and oppressed, will judge us according to our fidelity to this mandate.

The bishops, in their document *Gospel, Politics and Socialism*, declare:

If we truly love the poor, this love should manifest itself as an efficient liberator and translate itself into a courageous and profound vehicle for overcoming all those unjust structures that are currently oppressing a great part of our land, appearing as the cause of marginalization and misery. This inhuman situation in which so many thousands of Chileans live, gives way to the question of the socioeconomic system and to the political option taken by Christians, given its urgent character. It is because of this anguished situation that we have presented this document.<sup>4</sup>

The bishops call for serious thought on the subject of Christians and socialism. They ask "that equality of opportunities be based on a recognition of human dignity—that all men enjoy equally all the possibilities of a real participation in the different aspects of national life."<sup>5</sup> Criticizing some historic forms of socialism they say that surely socialism has at times been based on incompatible ideologies with respect to Faith, and thus a firm and careful judgment is always in order.<sup>6</sup>

"In Chile it is not necessary," the bishops state, "to discuss socialism in general, nor its multiple possibilities, but only a model or form of socialism that could be realized among us, which many have begun to call Socialism, 'the Chilean way.'"<sup>7</sup> They recognize that it is difficult to judge at this moment because "we do not yet know what form this could take." Socialism in Chile has "a definite Marxist inspiration." "Socialism and Marxism do not necessarily coincide, for many people have followed a form of socialism long before the existence of our Bible."<sup>8</sup> The bishops also speak of the dehumanizing effects of capitalism and its assumptions, both of which they know from long experience. Calling attention to the Pope's words in the Apostolic Letter, Par. No. 32, they say: "We could often feel ourselves inclined to a sort of naive sympathy toward socialism, since it is still a projection in the future, and we would imagine it rather idyllically and define it in rather a generous way."<sup>9</sup> The bishops warn against the direct dangers of Marxism and declare their support for Christians who might, at personal and political risk, seek some other socioeconomic system that more fully conforms to their faith. On the other hand, "We are not saying that we propose a timid or defensive attitude on the part of Christians; by no means, since a real Christian should be, by definition, a man who has conquered fear because, if his faith is really alive, nothing should cloud the sacrificial victory of his hope." This document, inviting us to join God in his liberating work, has been a great aid to Christians who seek to ally themselves with the necessary change in our society.

Such documents and statements, together with the highly visible participation of Church dignitaries in public functions of great significance (e.g., the mass meeting of workers on Labor

Day, the ceremony marking the nationalization of the copper industry, *et al.*), tend to legitimize the changes taking place, or, at least, to give them the weight of legality, for the Church still has great prestige in Chile. It also prevents these public events from being monopolized by the Marxists. There is no doubt that Christian participation and presence help to calm the fears of many people.

Beyond the hierarchy itself, diverse groups of priests have organized to "help toward the building of socialism." One prominent group is well known in Chile as "The 80." Through meetings and published statements they have offered their support to all the government's plans:

We feel completely identified with this process now under way and we want to contribute to its success. The profound reason behind this identification is our faith in Jesus Christ, deepening, renewing itself and taking on more meaning in accordance with these historical circumstances. To be a Christian is to feel solidarity, and to feel this solidarity in these times in Chile is to participate in this historic project that our country is now undertaking.

As Christians we see no incompatibility between Christianity and socialism. On the contrary, as our Cardinal said last November, "Socialism has many more evangelical values than capitalism." Socialism provides a hope that man can fulfill himself and, because of this fulfillment, be a better Christian, a closer follower of Jesus, who came to free all his servants.

We believe that socialism is built with a great deal of sacrifice and that it carries with it a task of solidarity, a constructive task that is aimed at overcoming the underdevelopment existing and at the creation of a new society. All of this, of course, provokes strong resistance among those who stand to lose their privileges. For this reason it is imperative that we mobilize the masses. We note with a certain concern that this has not yet been accomplished.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to such clerical groups, there are explicitly Christian groups formed into political movements, such as MAPU (Movement of Popular Unified Action) and the recently formed O.I.C. (Christian Left), which are now part of the Popular Unity Coalition and demonstrate widespread Christian support for the experience called "Marxist Socialism, Chilean style."

Obviously, Christians who identify with the political Right are opposed and condemn Chilean socialism as an openly Marxist force that will lead the country into chaos. They claim to fear not only an economic chaos but a loss of basic freedom, for it seems to them impossible that the government can fulfill its program without congressional support.

Yet other Christians, possibly the largest group, see the path toward socialism beset by enormous difficulties. Theirs is a mixture of fear and hope. They too hope for a more just society. But then, who doesn't? They fear, however, that they can already see some troubling measures being imposed in

order to reach the common goal. They study this government's tendencies, as expressed in its program, actions, declarations and reactions, and are reinforced in their fear that Marxism, Chilean style, is heading toward the dreary old model of socialism with its conventional works: (1) state-centralized economic control, combined with a lack of confidence in this control because of the usual market mechanisms—benefits, prices, and interest from capital; (2) nationalization of means of production; (3) monolithic government of the Popular Unity coalition in search of "total power."

Those who share this fear sense that the model is being imposed upon the nation in an uncritical way, without analyzing the experience of other socialist countries. Government energies seem to concentrate singlemindedly on its desire and capacity simply to annihilate the past and present holders of power. An adequate model of social development must take many other basic variables into account. The destruction of the previously powerful cannot be the only chief measure of success. While some destruction may be a prerequisite for the implantation of socialism, such destruction does not justify the use of "any means that are necessary." The means chosen can produce a series of reactions that are extremely injurious to other goals of development. For this reason many decry the social absurdity of remaining indifferent to the chaos produced by certain measures as long as they produce the desired effect of liquidating the currently powerful.

The model our Marxism is increasingly taking is that of a liquidating force. Many of us feel that present measures are not only unjustified but may, as circumstances change, prove disastrous for Chile. There are alternative forms permitting the achievement of the social development goals defined by Marxism. The socio-economic goals of Marxism, in order to achieve the disalienation of man, are: (1) the overcoming of necessities; (2) the overcoming of classes; (3) the overcoming of the state. The disalienated man is a man living in a society without shortages, without classes and without a state.

In non-Marxist language, and in terms of the Chilean situation, these goals can be recast: (1) the highest possible development of human well-being as an expression of the overcoming of all needs; (2) the best possible distribution of this well-being and of efforts toward an equality which implies the disappearance of classes as such; and (3) a maximum participation of all persons and groups in a democracy that implies the overcoming of the state.

In order to achieve its goals Marxism reverted to three basic processes in the ingenuous early stages of its growth: (1) total state centralization of social activity, especially economic; (2) liquidation of private property of the goods of production; (3) the ex-

ercise of total political power by the Marxist party in a system of democratic centralism.

An endorsement of the goals can be accompanied by a rejection of the means. Goals and means are equally important. Before imposing the old means, it is important to know the self-criticism of Marxists in Russia, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia with regard to their results. This self-criticism reveals the following principal deficiencies: (1) the nationalization or central supervision of the economy brings with it a clear suppression of stimuli toward incentive, thus leading to lower economic development. It is advisable to reintroduce the elements of a proper market regulation within the system—benefits, prices, and interest from capital; (2) the equality based on the abolition of private enterprise has not suppressed social classes; (3) democratic centralism has resulted in a maximum alienation of the laborer.

The experience of other countries offers important lessons for our experience. Although central lines of social politics based on the nationalization of private enterprise and political authoritarianism are characteristic of traditional Marxism, they are seriously challenged by modern Marxists as essentials of the Marxist concept. In fact, such measures have not worked in freeing man from needs, classes and the state. Regimes that have employed these measures have not achieved the goal of disalienation, and the measures themselves have become the object of bitter internal polemics. The most basic criterion for judging the means used is their efficiency in achieving the goals desired. This is the reason for widespread misgiving in today's Chile. By this criterion a Christian's choice may range from unrestricted collaboration to destructive opposition, or, as one might prefer, from critical collaboration to constructive opposition.

The government has two mirrors into which it can peer in order to judge its popularity—the mirror of periodic elections and the mirror of a supervisory Congress. Popularity is absolutely essential if the U.P. seeks to govern by democratic means, and it should therefore regularly and respectfully consult the mirrors provided by a fundamentally democratic people.

1. *Punto Final* (February, 1971).
2. Eduardo Novoa Monreal, "Vías Legales Para Avanzar Hacia el Socialismo," *Revista Mensaje* (March/April, 1971), p. 84.
3. Frank Hinkelhammert, *Problemas del Desarrollo* (1969), p. 107.
4. *Evangelio, Política y Socialismo*, Working Document, Bishops of Chile, No. 16, p. 24.
5. Working Document, No. 20, p. 32.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
7. Working Document, No. 28, p. 36.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
10. *Mensaje*, "Carta sobre la participación de Cristianos en la construcción de Socialismo en Chile" (May, 1971), p. 176.