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Abstract

This essay looks at the Catholic Church and political mediation in the Dominican Republic during the 1980's and 1990's. It opens with a review of the Latin American context regarding the transition to democracy, the debt crisis, and the church's response to the new political reality. It draws some comparisons from Bolivia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, where the church played an important role mediating political conflicts. The core of the article concentrates on three parts: the Dominican transition to democracy, the church mediation in the Tripartite Dialogue of the 1980's and early 1990's, and in the general elections of 1986 and 1994.

Keywords

Catholic Church, Dominican Republic, Democracy, Debt Crisis, Tripartite Dialogue

Disciplines

Latin American Studies | Politics and Social Change | Sociology

The Catholic Church and Political Mediation in the Dominican Republic: A Comparative Perspective

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This essay looks at the Catholic Church and political mediation in the Dominican Republic during the 1980s and 1990s. It opens with a review of the Latin American context regarding the transition to democracy, the debt crisis, and the church's response to the new political reality. It draws some comparisons from Bolivia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, where the church played an important role mediating political conflicts. The core of the article concentrates on three parts: the Dominican transition to democracy, the church mediation in the Tripartite Dialogue of the 1980s and early 1990s, and in the general elections of 1986 and 1994.

The purpose of this article is to make the case that transition to democracy provided the framework for church participation in political mediation. Church mediation tends to occur in countries with weak political institutions or where political instability threatens the status quo. Political mediation offers the church a unique new role in Latin America because it appears as non-partisan in societies filled with social and political conflicts. I argue that a non-partisan political position does not mean that the church is neutral vis-à-vis politics or that it is not interested in politics or in order and stability. In fact, the church promotes liberal democracy as the most adequate political system. I submit that the church uses mediation as a way to

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reincorporate itself into the new political reality that results from transition to democracy in Latin America and, particularly, in the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic is used here to illustrate the political consequences of weak institutions and how the church accommodated democracy.

DISCOVERING THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

The church as a political mediator in the transition to democracy has not been studied extensively. The authors of references concerning the issue have limited themselves to marginal comments about the church.¹ Church scholars, on the other hand, have produced a substantial amount of literature on the church, but they focus mainly on church and politics and not on issues that pertain to the transition to democracy.² Studies that examine the role of the church in the

1. Guillermo O'Donnell, "Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy," in *Promise of Development: Theories of Change in Latin America*, eds. Peter Klarén and Thomas Bossert (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986); Larry Diamond, Larry Juan Linz, and Martin Lipset, *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1989); John Booth and Mitchell A. Seligson, *Elections and Democracy in Central America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Scott Mainwaring, *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspectives* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Richard Gunther, P. Diamandouros, and Hans-Jürgen Puhle, eds., *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe in Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Philippe Schmitter, "Dangers and Dilemmas of Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (April 1994): 58-73; Philip Oxhorn and Graciela Ducatzenzeiler, eds., *What Kind of Democracy? What Kind of Market? Latin America in the Age of Neoliberalism* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

2. Thomas Bruneau, *The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Daniel H. Levine, *Religion and Politics in Latin America: The Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); and Daniel H. Levine, ed., *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Scott Mainwaring, *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil, 1916-1985* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986); Brian H. Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: The Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); Dermot Keogh, ed., *Church and Politics in Latin America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Hannah Steward-Gambino, *The Church and Politics in the Chilean Countryside* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992); Roberto Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia Católica en México* (México, D.F.: El Colegio Mexiquense/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992); Jean Mayer, *Historia de los Cristianos en América Latina. Siglos XIX y XX* (Mexico, D.F.:

transition to democracy, and particularly the issue of mediation, are very limited. The most important include Fleet and Smith's *The Catholic Church and Democracy in Chile and Perú* (1998), Klaiber's *The Church, Dictatorship, and Democracy in Latin America* (1998), and Meyer's *Samuel Ruiz in San Cristobal* (2000). Among these studies, Klaiber's stands out as the best because of its insightful historical analysis of eleven countries and its comparative perspective regarding both the transition to democracy and the role of the church as mediator in Bolivia, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Chiapas, Mexico.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The post-Vatican II church was significantly affected by Latin American social and political events. It was compelled to become involved in the political and social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s when military regimes ruled supreme. In many countries, the church became the "voice of those without a voice" and primary defender of human rights. These were the years of the Latin American Bishops' conferences in Medellín (Colombia, 1968) and Puebla (Mexico 1979). In these meetings the bishops condemned Latin American social structures as sinful, and recommended a prophetic option for the poor.

Church involvement in politics varied from country to country, but in general one notes the emergence of a commitment among the clergy to seek social justice. As part of this commitment, a liberation movement, also known as the Popular Church, developed to oppose political oppression and human rights violations. Those who joined the liberation movement were concerned with social injustice and poverty and embraced socialist policies as a way to address these issues. In short, this movement proposed a church model that required it to support people's struggles for social justice and national liberation. The liberation movement was supported by a small but active group of theologians who pondered about the relation between salvation and the historical process of liberation of man. They looked at theology as man's critical reflection on himself and his basic principles. According to Gustavo Gutiérrez, "only with this approach will theology be a serious discourse, aware of itself, in full possession of its conceptual elements . . . (it) also refer(s) to a clear and critical attitude regarding economic and socio-cultural issues in the life and reflection of the

Christian Community."³

Liberation theology had a large number of followers throughout Latin America. It was particularly strong in Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and El Salvador where it received support from important bishops. While it is true that the liberation movement did not dominate the orientation of Latin American church hierarchies, it did have a powerful influence on many bishops, and its legacy still lingers on. Despite their political moderation, important members of the Catholic hierarchies of Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, and, more recently, Guatemala, played decisive roles by offering protection to those persecuted for political reasons. Some of these national churches created commissions for the defense of human rights, which included the Commission of Justice and Peace in Brazil (1968), Vicariate of Solidarity in Chile (1975), the Justice and Peace Commission in Bolivia (1973), Legal Defense in El Salvador (1983), and the Office of Human Rights of the Archdiocese of Guatemala (1989). By creating awareness of the repressive nature of the military regimes and defending human rights and the rule of law, the work of these commissions helped prepare the way for a transition to more open and democratic societies.

THE CHURCH AND THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

The transition to democracy occurs in the 1980s as the various ecclesiological models of the church readapted their strategies. The political climate changed as a result of the transition from military to civilian rule. The church was no longer needed to protect those persecuted for political reasons. The church hierarchies read the "signs of the time" and sought ways to incorporate themselves into the promotion of liberal democracy. The liberation movement within the Church lost support within and outside the church as political and social groupings became increasingly able to express themselves without being repressed for political reasons. Guatemala is the exception to this pattern because though repression diminished, it still has not ended. Traditional pre-Vatican II forces within the Church, who adhered to a conservative position that accepts the status quo uncritically, joined with those who believed that Latin American societies needed to be modernized. Those who identified with the modernization model believed that the church needed to carry out its mission more effectively. They shared a similar outlook with traditionalists concerning the need for church unity, authority of the

3. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Liberation Theology: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), 11.

bishops, community building, fraternity, and a sense of belonging, but they were more open-minded than traditional bishops. In short, this new model proposed disengagement from direct, partisan politics in favor of a more general stress on highlighting and denouncing injustice, creating vital Christian communities, and extending pastoral activities. Pope John Paul II joined in support of this new direction of the church in Latin America and promoted its new role as mediator and conciliator of social and political conflicts.⁴

The transition to democracy in Latin America was complex and took place in the context of widespread poverty. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) required the implementation of economic adjustment programs to approve new loans to cash-starved governments. These programs usually demand cutting the national budget to reduce spending, privatize government assets, reduce trade tariffs, etc. The implementation of these programs usually increases poverty and makes social relations more tense and conflictive. These programs are particularly problematic in countries with weak political institutions, such as Bolivia and the Dominican Republic, or involved in civil wars such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Following the fall of the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer (1971-1978), the Bolivian hierarchy became involved in mediating both social and political disputes. Despite numerous political frictions between the hierarchy and the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua after 1986, the former agreed to mediate between the government and the counterrevolution, or Contra, to bring an end to the military conflict. Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas played a crucial role in El Salvador by bringing the Salvadoran guerrillas and the government to the negotiating table. Similarly, in Guatemala, a group of committed bishops led by Archbishop Próspero Penados del Barrio encouraged and mediated the peace settlement in the mid-1990s. In Chiapas, Mexico, Msgr. Samuel Ruiz was a central figure in the negotiations that took place between the Mexican government and the Zapatista guerrillas. Political actors and observers have widely acknowledged the importance of church mediation to bring about peace and stability in the region.⁵

4. Jeffrey Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 13-14.

5. *Ibid.*; Keogh, *Church and Politics in Latin America*; John M. Kirk, *Politics and the Catholic Church in Nicaragua* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1992); Edward T. Brett, "Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas and the Struggle for Social Justice in El Salvador," paper presented at the Henry Institute Symposium on Religion and Politics, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 3-4 May 2002.

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION, ECONOMIC POLICIES, AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The slow process of the Dominican transition to democracy is largely due to the long dictatorial rule of Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961), the U.S. military intervention in 1965, and the authoritarian rule of Joaquín Balaguer (1966-1978). In this section, I argue that Balaguer is a factor we do not find in Bolivia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. This is what is peculiar about the Dominican Republic.

Transition to democracy in the Dominican Republic was accomplished in two stages. The first transition began with the fall of the Rafael Trujillo dictatorship in 1961, had a short interlude with the democratic experiment of Juan Bosch (1963), and ended in 1978 when Joaquín Balaguer was voted out of office. This transition was difficult because Trujillo had blocked the development of the social and economic elite. When he was assassinated, the elite did not have the capacity to build a democratic society. The second transition stretches from 1978 to the present (2004). This transition occurred in the context of socio-economic transformation, widespread social protests against the implementation of IMF structural adjustment programs, and the emergence of the Catholic Church as a non-partisan mediator.

The authoritarian government of Joaquín Balaguer (1966-1978) was the result of the U.S. intervention and the incapacity of local elites to produce a democratic leader. The collapse of the Trujillo dictatorship occurred during the Cold War, which meant that any attempt to build a democracy, such as that of Juan Bosch in 1963, was aborted. Bosch was an exiled writer and politician who returned to the country after the fall of Trujillo and re-organized the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD). He won the 1962 election by a landslide against Viriato Fiallo of the National Civic Union (UCN), a party identified with the national socio-economic elite. Bosch framed a new and democratic constitution, which promised social justice, freedoms, and strengthening the institutions of democracy. The socio-economic elite enlisted the support of the Catholic Church and the armed forces to oppose Bosch. Bosch was overthrown seven months after his inauguration. The frustration of the Bosch experiment resulted in a period of political instability that culminated with a civil revolt that threatened the status quo. The United States perceived this revolt as communist-led and invaded the country in 1965—supposedly to prevent a communist takeover. The result of this intervention was the authoritarian government of Joaquín Balaguer, who was “elected” president while

U.S. troops occupied the country.⁶ With U.S. support, he attracted foreign investments into the country, developed a state-sponsored construction program which rebuilt the national road network, expanded the construction of public buildings and housing, opened new wide avenues in the cities of Santo Domingo and Santiago, and jump-started the tourism industry and the free trade zones. These developments represent the modern face of the Balaguer regime. However, it is worth noting that he ruled in an authoritarian fashion (1966-1978), killing thousands in the streets during the early years of his regime, jailing political opponents or sending them to exile, and keeping the liberal democratic opposition in check. He held elections (1970 and 1974) in which his opponents could not run their campaigns effectively because of political repression. As a consequence, the political opposition, led by the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano or Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), withdrew from the electoral campaign.

Balaguer was a factor not found in any of the countries selected for comparison with the Dominican case. Unlike the dictators of Central America and Bolivia, Balaguer was a civilian politician who served under Trujillo for thirty-one years. He made a series of agreements with neo-Trujillistas political forces in order to succeed during his twelve years in power. This explains why important personalities within the Trujillo dictatorship served under the various Balaguer administrations and why Balaguer did not dismantle the basic design of the state built during the Trujillo dictatorship. Significantly, Balaguer served as a channel of communication between the Catholic Church and the Trujillo regime during a crisis that erupted as a result of church denunciation of political oppression in the last two years of the dictatorship.

Unlike Hugo Banzer of Bolivia (1971-1979), Balaguer exerted complete control over the military and developed a good relationship with the Catholic hierarchy. The Bolivian situation contrasts sharply with that of the Dominican Republic because the popular church took a radical position vis-à-vis Banzer, denouncing human rights violations and supporting those persecuted for political reasons. The Bolivian popular church became one of the most progressive in Latin America during the Banzer regime.⁷

6. Piero Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis. The 1965 Constitutionalist Revolt and the American Intervention* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Abraham Lowenthal, *The American Intervention* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); Jerome Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation: The United States and the Dominican Republic* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

7. Jorge Manrique, *El Socialismo y la Iglesia en Bolivia*, La Paz, 9 October 1970; Klaiber,

In Nicaragua, the Anastasio Somoza dynasty prevented the emergence of any political force that opposed it. It took a revolution led by Sandinista revolutionaries (1979) to overthrow Somoza and eventually install a popular and democratic regime. In El Salvador and Guatemala the military did not allow any civilian to gain sufficient power to become independent and pretend to subordinate them as Balaguer did in the Dominican Republic. Balaguer ensured the church was a factor of cohesion in society rather than a critical political force.

THE END OF THE BALAGUER REGIME AND THE SECOND TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

International factors, combined with a powerful local political opposition, ended Balaguer authoritarian rule in 1978. A dramatic decrease in the international market prices of traditional Dominican exports (sugar, coffee, cacao, and tobacco) coincided with the election of Jimmy Carter to the presidency of the United States. Carter promoted a foreign policy that opposed human rights violations, and Balaguer came under political pressure. The decrease in international market prices left Balaguer with no money to sustain his political machine, a factor that helped to push a powerful social and political movement that culminated in the election of Silvestre Antonio Guzmán Fernández, candidate of the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) to the presidency. Balaguer was defeated for reelection, but the powerful political forces that supported him were not ready to concede defeat and, through negotiations, the PRD agreed to let Balaguer gain a majority in Congress, which he had not won in the election.

The political forces that supported Balaguer were the legacy of the Trujillo dictatorship. These Neo-Trujillistas political forces agreed to let Guzmán Fernández take office and begin a second transition to democracy, but they wanted to be ensured that they would retain important areas of control in the political power structure. The compromised nature of this transition had important consequences for the development of democratic institutions in the second transition to democracy. We do not find this ingredient in the countries selected for comparison. There was little room for compromise in the volatile political process of Bolivia or in war-torn Central America during the 1980s.

The second transition to democracy stretches from 1978 to 2004. As elsewhere in Latin America, this transition started in the context of widespread economic and social change. These changes were of four

types, occurring at the same time: 1) transition from agro-export economy to a service economy, such as tourism, free exporting zones and banking; 2) increased remittances as the 1980s and 1990s saw a dramatic increase in Dominican international migration to the point that today over a million Dominicans reside abroad and send back home around two billion dollars a year; 3) a huge increase in the foreign debt, which went from 2,002 billion dollars in 1980 to 7,564 billion in 2004); 4) the collapse of traditional exports, which included sugar, cacao, coffee, and minerals. As a consequence of these changes, the state no longer had control of the main sectors of the economy nor could it exact a significant tax on exports. The state was diminished in its capacity to manage and control resources at the time when local social demands increased and the IMF demanded a balanced budget. This situation obviously makes the transition to democracy more complex when the executive prefers to centralize rather than decentralize the political decision-making process.

The socio-economic transformation during the 1980s from agro-export to service produced a modernized economy and society while excluding the vast majority of the population from the benefits of modernity. In an attempt to meet International Monetary Fund requirements, President Salvador Jorge Blanco (1982-1986) agreed to implement structural adjustment programs that cut the deficit, reduced social spending, and devalued the national currency. The new economic policies were announced while thousands of people were vacationing during Holy Week of 1984. Upon returning home, they found that the government had changed their world. A week of riots followed and, according to the National Police, over 150 people were killed and thousands arrested nationwide. The riots were unprecedented and the government responded with unusually harsh and repressive measures to control the situation.⁸ Jorge Blanco earned respect with the local socio-economic elite and his international backers, but lost legitimacy in the eyes of those who elected him. These riots were not repeated during the Jorge Blanco period in office, but his successor, Joaquín Balaguer (1986-1990 and 1990-1994), saw the emergence of a powerful social movement that organized frequent regional and nationwide strikes demanding wage increases, employment, and social services. Nationwide strikes paralyzed the

8. Roberto Cassá, "Recent Popular Movements in the Dominican Republic," *Latin American Perspectives* 22, no. 3, (Summer 1995); César Pérez and Ariles Leopoldo, *Movimientos sociales dominicanos: Identidad y Dilemas* (Santo Domingo, 1992); and Cesar Pérez, *Urbanización y Municipio en Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo: Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo, 1996).

economic activities of the country and, at times, threatened the country's social fabric. Both the social and political elite of the country viewed the increase of social protests with concern. In this context, the Catholic Church emerged with a non-partisan strategy to deal with growing social and political polarization that resulted from the reinsertion of the local economy into the international markets.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS A NON-PARTISAN POLITICAL ACTOR

Catholic Church mediation in politics constitutes a central element in the development of its new role in society. Mediation is the means that reintegrates the Church into mainstream politics. The church had played an important role during the 1965 Revolution when Nuncio Emmanuele Clarizio mediated between the Constitutionals and the United States to end the war. In 1970, Msgr. Hugo Polanco Brito mediated the conflict that resulted from the kidnapping of U.S. Colonel Donald Crowley. Msgr. Polanco Brito also offered his mediating services during the 1974 and 1978 electoral campaigns when violence erupted. However, none of these mediations had any effect on the larger strategy to turn the church into a special political actor. This strategy emerged on 30 November 1980, when the hierarchy issued a pastoral letter that outlined the role of the church vis-à-vis government and politics. The bishops expressed:

The Church neither has nor abrogates a "political formula," but it does have criteria and principles according to which lay Christians should create feasible and correct political formulas. The Church would rather offer a framework of a plurality of possible systems, regimes, models and projects, which are opened to lawful and careful human action to face the great challenge of the Continent and our country. The Church does not opt for a system or party, but maintains itself free before all of them to opt for man only. It does not do it for opportunistic reasons, but to respect the autonomy of temporal realities, freedom, and the rights of man. At the same time, it urges its faithful laities to responsibly fulfill their unavoidable commitment with the temporal and political world. . . .⁹

This pastoral letter was well received by the business community, the mainstream political parties, the government, and the press. They applauded the hierarchy's decision to be non-partisan in a society where nearly everything is politicized. The hierarchy sent a signal to all political parties and social movements that it was going to play a non-partisan role in national politics. A non-partisan position does not mean that the church was not interested in politics or in order and

9. Francisco José Arnáiz, ed., *Documentos de la Conferencia Del Episcopado Dominicano (1955-1990)* (Santo Domingo: Editora Amigo del Hogar, 1990): 398-99 (Translation is mine).

stability. It meant that the church was not joining other political groupings or parties competing for power. This position was attractive because under these circumstances the church was endowed with power without making it look like just another actor in the endgame.

The church wanted to be recognized as a special actor that could offer a vision of man and society while not compromising its principles. This framework, however, aligned the church with the status quo and re-established it as a pillar in the political architecture of society. This time, the church not only recognized liberal democracy as an adequate political system, but as the only practical one. This explains why the business community, the mainstream political parties, and the government praised the pastoral letter. The church had said that it was willing to work within the political system and to promote ways to resolve social and political conflicts through mediation.

THE DOMINICAN CHURCH IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

What I find common among the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, El Salvador, and Guatemala is that in all of them an important sector of the hierarchy assumed a non-partisan political position. This position allows the church to mediate political conflicts and thus reassures itself a special role in the system. Similarly, in all of them one finds weak political institutions under considerable tensions. These tense circumstances are what bring the church to mediate political conflicts and, at the same time, make it possible for it to reintegrate itself into the mainstream of the political system as a special actor that appears to be above political differences.

When we examine church-state relations in Bolivia, we find that the Popular Church took a critical position vis-à-vis the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer (1971-1978). It became one of the most progressive in South America under the Banzer regime. The Popular Church denounced human right violations and suffered the consequences of political repression. However, when democracy was restored in 1982, the church hierarchy, once more, offered its service as mediator in various social and political conflicts that emerged in the process of transition to democracy. These conflicts included mediation between the miners and the government, but also between the different political parties and the government. The church emerged as a mediator due to the weakness of political institutions and the consequent absence of democratic stability. In this context, "the Church, with deep historical roots, stood out as the only national institution with the necessary moral authority to call upon all political and social forces to enter into a

real dialogue. The Church carried out this role with notable success."¹⁰ As a result of this success, the church became an integral part of a political system that was unable to regulate itself and needed an outside agent to bring it back in line.

In El Salvador, the conflict between church and state intensified following the appointment of Archbishop Arnulfo Romero. Romero had been appointed to lead the Salvadoran Church because of his conservative views, but the unfolding events of the Salvadoran social and political crisis led him to change his mind when a number of his priests were assassinated. He took a seemingly partisan position in the midst of a brutal campaign that hit hard on the Salvadoran people and the church. Romero decided to support the struggles of the people of El Salvador. In addition, he decided to promote the Ecclesiastic Base Communities (CEBs) that he had opposed. A number of his priests were accused of supporting the guerrilla movement and many were killed. Romero himself was assassinated in 1980 while celebrating mass in El Salvador.

Unlike the Bolivian Church, where progressive bishops were a small but significant group, Romero did not have the support of most of the Salvadoran hierarchy in his struggles against political repression and human rights violations. However, he did have the support of Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas who represented a moderate position within the church hierarchy. This moderate position eventually earned Rivera y Damas support in the Vatican and the appointment as Archbishop of San Salvador, a position he used to mediate between the guerrillas and the Salvadoran government in the late 1980s and early 1990s to bring an end to the military conflict. The United Nations completed this mediation, but the church had laid the groundwork without which peace and reconciliation would have been impossible.¹¹

Similarly, the Guatemalan church moved from a partisan position during the ecclesiastic government of Archbishop Mario Casariego (1969-1984) to a non-partisan position under Archbishop Próspero Penados Del Barrio in 1984. Penados del Barrio founded the Office of Human Rights in the Archdiocese of Guatemala and involved himself directly in the promotion of negotiations between the guerrillas and the government. The Office of Human Rights of the Archdiocese of Guatemala became the principal defender of those persecuted for

10. Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America*, 122-39.

11. Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), 63-106; and his *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 91-161; James R. Brockman, *Romero: A Life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 80-133; Brett, "Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas and the Struggle for Social Justice in El Salvador," 1-24.

political reasons. It was the equivalent of Tutela Legal of El Salvador (Legal Defense), founded by Archbishop Rivera y Damas in 1983 and the Vicariate of Solidarity in Chile in the 1970s, or the Peace Commissions in Bolivia and Brazil. This defense, however, did not prevent the church's hierarchy from mediating in order to bring an end to the armed conflict.¹²

In contrast to the cases discussed thus far, the leadership of the Nicaraguan church took a position which, at times, appeared to be supporting the political opposition against the Sandinista Revolution (1979-1990). From the outset, the Archbishop of Managua, Miguel Obando y Bravo, saw the Sandinista Revolution as an enemy of the Church. For example, the official Church was silent when church workers were assassinated by the National Resistance or Contras. Church officials visited the United States to ask different conservative groups to support the Contras at a time when Congress was debating the issue. When raised to the rank of Cardinal in 1985, Obando y Bravo celebrated his first mass in Miami surrounded by the Contra leadership, not in Managua with the presence of public authorities.¹³ The hierarchy as a whole did not publicly express its support for the Contras and it is public knowledge that not everyone supported Obando y Bravo's militant position against the Sandinistas. However, Obando y Bravo's strong leadership left little room for moderates within the hierarchy to express their views. The radical political position of Obando y Bravo led Pope John Paul II to send Msgr. Paolo Giglio as apostolic nuncio to Managua in 1986 with a mission to convince the archbishop to stay away from partisan politics. It was only because of this intervention that Obando y Bravo participated in the negotiations that led to a peace settlement in Nicaragua. In short, the militant position of Obando y Bravo distinguishes Nicaragua from El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic.

THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL MEDIATIONS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The commitment of the Dominican church to a non-partisan role moved from theory to practice in 1985 when the Episcopal Conference issued a pastoral letter that reflected on the riots that took place in 1984. These riots had a remarkable impact on a religious hierarchy that

12. Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America*, 222-38.

13. Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions*, 34; and Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America*, 207.

saw the social fabric of society under a great threat. In the letter, the Episcopal Conference described a true state of anomie, reminding everyone that the poor, the vast majority of Dominicans, were right when they expressed their lack of hope in the national economy. They proposed dialogue as the key to resolve national issues and recommended a series of norms for the parties in conflict to come to agreements.¹⁴ The Pastoral of Dialogue, as it became known, brought applause from the business community, mainstream political parties, and the government.

Church participation in mediation is rather complex and takes place at various levels of society. I focus on the social and political mediation sponsored by the Dominican Episcopal Conference through the Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra. This mediation takes place at the national level with social and political organizations that have a nationwide presence. Shortly after the publication of the Pastoral of Dialogue in 1985, the Episcopal Conference appointed Msgrs. Agripino Núñez Collado and Francisco José Arnáiz to coordinate the church's mediating efforts. The Universidad became a center for international conferences, policy discussions, and a meeting place for parties in conflict. The central idea of these meetings was to bring business, labor, and government together to discuss a series of issues. The participation of these three actors led the organizers of these meetings to call this process the Tripartite Dialogue. From the beginning, they were concerned with the following issues: labor, productivity, agrarian reform, social security, taxation, and strategies for dialogue. The first meeting took place in Jarabacoa in 1985, and many other meetings followed in Santo Domingo and at the Universidad in Santiago. In addition to being a forum to discuss public issues, these meetings were also meant to educate participants about the values of the culture of dialogue. International speakers were usually invited to discuss the mediation process elsewhere in Latin America and Spain.¹⁵

Tripartite negotiations led to an important agreement in 1988 where labor, business, and government agreed on the need to extend social security benefits to all family members, revise tax laws, modify the minimum wage, re-examine various important articles in the labor code, include Tripartite Dialogue in government agencies, increase the pensions of retirees, and create the Permanent Secretariat of Dialogue.

14. Arnáiz, *Documentos de la Conferencia Del Episcopado Dominicano (1955-1990)*, 507-17.

15. Agripino Núñez Collado, *Concertación: La Cultura del Diálogo* (Santiago: Departamento Editorial PUCMM, 1993), 43-101.

In 1990, the government of Joaquín Balaguer (1990-1994) agreed to sign a solidarity pact with both labor and business and promised to fulfill the agreements of 1988 and expand on a series of other issues that included, among other things, balancing the national budget, implementing a tributary reform, increasing wages for state workers, indexing the prices of basic goods, and expanding on a program of social assistance. As part of the solidarity pact, business promised to maintain the prices of basic goods for ninety days, increase wages, support the government fiscal reform, deliver dollars generated in international transactions to the government, and cooperate with labor. Labor promised harmonious relations with capital, increased productivity, maintenance of public services, and defense of the public order. They promised to organize housewives to support the government, while the government agreed to submit legislation to the National Congress to ban monopolies, and promised to create a follow-up commission to reassure fulfillment of the Pact.¹⁶

Despite the enormous effort that went into organizing the various meetings that produced these agreements, co-signers ignored all but a few of them. For example, Balaguer signed the Tripartite Agreement of 1988 to buy time in order to show that he was not a recalcitrant ruler. Similarly, he signed the Pact of Solidarity in 1990 after he was declared the winner in a controversial election; he won by less than one percent of the vote against Juan Bosch, the candidate of the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD). Bosch did not recognize him as the winner and called on public demonstrations to press Balaguer to resign (*Que se vaya ya!*), which he never did. Less than a month after his inauguration on 16 August 1990, Balaguer signed yet another agreement where he made concessions that he could only fulfill partially. It is also worth noting that neither business nor labor fulfilled all of their promises either, making the work of the Catholic Church's mediators more difficult.

Inability of the government to fulfill agreements that it signed led many critics to argue that the Tripartite Dialogue was a failure. Msgr. Núñez Collado acknowledged that Dominican society lacked a culture of dialogue and the bare minimum for political accords. For him, Dominican society does not have social discipline or a culture of negotiation (*concertación*) that can lead to continuity in the implementation of long-term objectives. Despite these failures, Núñez Collado believes that the Tripartite Dialogue brought significant gains in the short run such as balancing the budget, stopping the emission of money without hard currency in the national reserve, executing

16. *Ibid.*, 141-70.

adjustment of prices, implementing a tributary reform, adjusting wages in the private and the public sectors, exempting wages from taxation, approving a social security law that expands family coverage, reassuring the approval of a new labor code, and promulgating the civil service law.¹⁷

Church participation in the promotion of dialogue and mediation has not been a complete success, but it has secured for the church a special place in the Dominican political system. By the late 1980s, church mediators were accepted as participants in Dominican politics. It is worth noting that while this mediation was taking place at the national level, bishops mediated important conflicts within the territory of their dioceses and parish priests did the same at the local level. In the summer of 2001, I interviewed the eleven bishops of the country, who reported to me that Dominican society is so filled with social and political tensions that they could spend most of their time mediating social and political conflict rather than tending to their religious mission. This participation does not receive the same level of coverage in the press as national mediations do, but it is a significant part of the church effort to contribute to peace and conciliation in society. In fact, these mediations are important because they address local issues such as land tenure, agricultural credit, natural disasters, Haitian migration, government support to farmers, tourism, etc.

The archbishop of Santo Domingo, Nicolás de Jesús Cardinal López Rodríguez, stands out among bishops for his frequent comments in nearly every aspect of politics, economics, culture, society, and religion. Upon his appointment in 1981 as archbishop of Santo Domingo, he became so active in national life that many thought that he was interested in joining Joaquín Balaguer as the vice presidential candidate in the 1986 elections. López Rodríguez denied these assertions and put the issue to rest by saying that he was committed to his vocation as a priest. Nonetheless, under his leadership the Episcopal Conference has become one of the main pillars of the Dominican political architecture while Núñez Collado and Arnáiz are recognized as the public personalities in charge of social and political mediation.

PARTICIPATION AND MEDIATION IN ELECTORAL CONFLICTS

Two cases stand out as the most important church participation in electoral matters: the presidential elections of 1986 and 1994. In 1986, President Salvador Jorge Blanco appointed López Rodríguez to preside

17. *Ibid.*, 161-69.

over a Commission of Electoral Advisers (CEA) to assist the Junta Central Electoral (Central Electoral Board or JCE). According to Dominican law, the JCE is an electoral tribunal that no other court can override. Local electoral experts and Balaguer himself recommended the appointment of the CEA to reassure that the elections were free and fair. The work of CEA was difficult because its members were appointed just a few days prior to the elections. Nonetheless, it provided the JCE with a list of technical issues that it had to address. The recommendations of the CEA are indicative of the lack of appropriate management and institutional capacity of the JCE. Among other things, it made the following recommendations:

1. Prohibit admission to the main offices of JCE by unauthorized personnel.
2. Prohibit access to data processing centers by unauthorized personnel.
3. Request two additional copies of the magnetic tape with the data fed to discs, programs, proceedings, and data related to the computation of votes.
4. One of these copies should be kept in a safety vault outside the JCE.
5. Have the military police provide security to the director and deputy director of the Computation Center.
6. Ensure the presence of an adequate number of technical experts from the suppliers of computer equipment and air conditioners as well as an electric power generator in case of a blackout.¹⁸

The institutional weakness of the JCE can be traced back to Balaguer's twelve years in office. Balaguer used the electoral court to re-elect himself to office and to ensure that it remained subordinated to him by appointing judges who respected his political orientations. The government of Guzmán Fernández (1978-1982) was effective in delivering a democratic opening to society—allowing, for example, all political exiles to return home, restoring democratic freedom, and retiring the most influential military leaders—but it was not able to design economic and social policies that could strengthen the fabric of society or consolidate political institutions such as the JCE. The government of Salvador Jorge Blanco (1982-1986) did not make any significant attempts to strengthen the JCE as an institution. Popular mobilizations against the implementation of the IMF recommen-

18. Document of the CAE/013/86 in *ibid.*, 168-76 (translation is mine).

dations and political divisions within his own party apparently prevented Jorge Blanco from concentrating on the development of the institutions that could enhance the transition to democracy. This explains why the CEA had to recommend the implementation of basic institutional procedures to the JCE.

Political divisions within the official party led Jorge Blanco to withdraw his support of Jacobo Majluta, PRD's presidential candidate. As president of the Senate, Majluta assured that Jorge Blanco did not get approval for IMF international loans. Thus, when Jorge Blanco appointed the CEA at the recommendation of Balaguer, the main opposition candidate, Majluta and his followers had suspicions about their impartiality and reliability. They perceived that several members of the CEA supported Balaguer. As the electoral campaign came to an end, opinion polls indicated that the election was going to be a close one. According to one survey, Majluta of the PRD would receive 32 percent, Balaguer of PRSC 31 percent, and Bosch of the PLD 19 percent. The remaining 10 percent was still undecided.¹⁹ When comparing the results of this survey to the final electoral results we find that the PRD received 33.5 percent, PRSC 40.5 percent, and the PLD 18.4 percent. The remaining 7.6 percent went to smaller political parties.²⁰ Clearly the narrow margin of the election results increased political tensions and thus rendered the work of CEA more complicated.

The CEA played a crucial role supporting the JCE so that the process of counting the votes was impartial. It received denunciations and complaints from all the political parties and responded in timely fashion to the various recommendations that emerged from the political parties. The most difficult issue resulted from the examination of the invalidated and monitored votes. The JCE electoral team invalidated 84,695 votes and put 28,707 on the monitored list. Counting these votes occurred in the context of a challenge to two judges who had to be replaced by the deputies. Despite these difficulties the CEA emerged untarnished by the conflict, and Jacobo Majluta recognized that Balaguer was the winner of the elections.²¹

19. Letter from Bernardo Vega to Núñez Collado in Núñez Collado, *Testigo de una Crisis ... Diez Años Después*. Editorial Taller: Santo Domingo, 186-87.

20. Rosario Espinal, "The Defeat of the Dominican Revolutionary Party in the 1986 Elections: Causes and Implications," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 9 (1990): 113.

21. Núñez Collado, *Concertación: La Cultura del Diálogo*, 99; Jonathan Hartlyn, *The Struggle for Democratic Politics in the Dominican Republic* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 160-98.

REFORM OF THE ELECTORAL LAW AND THE 1994 ELECTIONS

Balaguer did not resolve the credibility problem of the JCE during his new administration (1986-1990). It took another electoral crisis in 1990 for him to start a discussion with the political opposition to address the issue. As a result of negotiations brokered by the Catholic Church, the National Congress passed a new electoral law that increased the number of judges from three to five. The law stipulated that the judges would be appointed by the three principal political parties represented in Congress and ordered the creation of a new identity card – the Identification and Voter Registration Card – which replaced the old two-identity-card system. It was expected that the new identify card, which included a photograph, would reduce the possibility of electoral fraud, a main complaint in past elections.

Although the major political parties supported the 1992 electoral reform, the credibility issue was not resolved. Opposition parties raised serious questions about the JCE's capacity to freely organize the elections. A "National Voter Registration Drive" was conducted in February 1993 to replace the old voter registration cards. The number of polling stations (*mesas*) was increased from 6,663 to 9,528. The JCE accepted the technical assistance of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in order to implement the electoral reforms (IFES is a non-governmental organization based in Washington, D.C., and it provides technical support to electoral processes in the world). Even so, the PRD, the PLD, and the PRI (or Institutional Revolutionary Party) criticized the JCE for being too slow, bureaucratic, and inefficient. They still doubted it was fit to organize free and fair elections.

The opposition's doubts reached a critical point when it appeared that the JCE was not going to implement a public bid for the contract to buy the technology necessary in the data processing center and photographic equipment needed for the new voter identity card. A pool formed by IBM-Kodak was the principal competitor for the contract. Opposition political parties, however, considered this pool to be politically connected to high government officials. These fears were confirmed when a vote to open a public bid was three-to-two. The judges who sympathized with the government voted against the public bid. This rejection of a public bid raised suspicions about the seriousness of the JCE. The opposition claimed that the fraud was going to take place in the data processing center during the process of voter registration and during the vote count. The government party responded by accusing the opposition of attempting to discredit the JCE before holding the elections. In the midst of this debate, the Catholic Church offered to mediate between the parties in conflict,

and it successfully defused a political impasse that could have had serious political consequences.

The OAS and IFES worked with the JCE to produce significant technical improvements in the electoral process of 1993-1994. These advancements, however, were not sufficient to overcome the decision of the parties to politicize the appointment of the judges to JCE. The judges of the JCE responded to different political parties and that compromised their impartiality. This mechanism obviously did not resist the acid test of Dominican electoral politics. Even before the elections took place, the Catholic Church was called in again to mediate as the campaign was unfolding. Violence erupted and several people were killed. Church mediators coordinated with the leading political parties to sign a Civility Compact that would put an end to the violence. This pact was signed 10 May 1994, six days before the election. Juan Bosch, presidential candidate of the PLD, refused to sign the pact, allegedly because Balaguer never respected the pacts he had signed in the past.

The Civility Compact was not just about a concern with political violence. It required the JCE to provide the final lists of eligible voters to all the political parties so that there would be no doubt as to the transparency of the process. The signers of the pact pledged neither to obstruct the activities conducted by rival political organizations nor to stage victory celebrations before the JCE officially announced the results. In addition, the parties to the agreement promised to pursue a program of legislative collaboration during the new administration's first year in office. The government promised that it would give every courtesy and facility to enable the members of international delegations of observers to discharge their duties.²²

Despite technical improvement and international technical support, the JCE was not able to produce free and fair elections. On election day, it became clear that the list of voters the JCE had given to the political parties was not the same as the list that it sent to the polling stations. The PRD claimed that over 150,000 people could not vote on election day because their names did not appear on the list at the assigned polling station. Their names appeared in polling stations far away from the place in which people were assigned to vote. In this context, on 18 May 1994, Balaguer claimed to be the "virtual winner" of the election with 95 percent of the votes counted, a clear violation of the Civility Compact. He had apparently received 42.5 percent of the votes and Peña Gómez 41.2 percent. In addition to this claim, he sent combined units of army and police to make spot inspections of vehicles

22. Texto del Pacto de la Civilidad, *Listín Diario*, 11 May 1994.

in search of arms. This was a warning to Peña Gómez and his allies in case they wanted to make public demonstrations. However, Peña Gómez understood the message and asked his followers to abstain from holding public demonstrations as a way to avoid government provocation.

International observers and the IFES agreed that there had been irregularities in the election. Representative Stephen Solarz of New York, who led the delegation of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), told *The New York Times* that thousands of Dominicans had been "deliberately excluded" from the voting process.²³ The PRSC orchestrated a nationalist movement which claimed that foreign observers and the U.S. Embassy were behind those who accused JCE of organizing fraudulent elections. Cardinal López Rodríguez joined those who rejected foreign intervention in Dominican affairs, compromising the non-partisan position of the Dominican Episcopal Conference. The political situation became quite polarized because the PRD led a huge national and international campaign to denounce fraud in the election and called for a thorough investigation into what had happened.

International and national political pressures forced the JCE to appoint a Verification Commission on 15 June 1994, nearly a month after the elections, to investigate the allegations of fraud. The Commission presented its report on 16 July. Regarding the allegations that there existed two voting lists, it said:

The electoral lists submitted by the Central Electoral Commission to the polling places for the general elections did not match with the lists of electors submitted to the political parties. At least 45 municipalities were reported as affected. The Verification Commission received complaints from over 1,900 polling places. It evaluated no less than 1,468 polling places with an average of 20 substitutes per polling place. It concluded that according to the information reported, around 45,000 voters were deprived of their right to vote and no less than 28,672, according to the information evaluated.²⁴

The Commission left no doubt that irregularity carried out during the election process could have changed the presidential, congressional, and municipal results of the elections. Despite these findings, the JCE declared Balaguer the winner of the 1994 elections. Balaguer and his allies received 42.3 percent, Peña Gómez and his allies received 41.5 percent, Bosch and his allies received 13 percent, and Majluta got 2.3 percent. The JCE had certified an electoral coup d'état and Balaguer knew that he had to negotiate to get out of this

23. *The New York Times*, 19 May 1994, A5.

24. Proceso Electoral 1994. Informe de la Comisión de Verificación, 31-32 (Translation is mine).

messy political situation.

The Catholic Church joined the OAS to seek a mediated solution to the crisis. Núñez Collado and John Graham, general coordinators of the OAS election observers, became key players in the mediation process to get Balaguer and Peña Gómez to agree on a solution to the crisis. After numerous meetings, the two leaders signed what became known as the Pact for Democracy on 9 August 1994, at the Biblioteca Dominicana in Santo Domingo. It included the following issues:

1. Prohibition of re-election of the president for two consecutive periods.
2. Reinstatement of the Dominican citizenship for those individuals who had assumed the citizenship of another country.
3. Reformation of the judicial system, and the passage of two transitory amendments; these limited the presidency and the vice presidency to eighteen months (18), that is, from 16 August 1994 to 27 February 1996.
4. Elections for president and vice president were supposed to be held on 16 November 1995. Those elected would inaugurate on 27 February 1996.
5. Congressional and municipal authorities elected on 16 May 1994, would remain in office until August 1998.
6. A second round of elections was to be held if no single candidate received at least 40 percent of the votes.²⁵

After this pact was signed, the leadership of PRSC in Congress altered it so President Balaguer would stay in office for two years rather than eighteen months. The second round of elections was raised to 50 percent plus one of the valid votes. Peña Gómez protested these violations of the Pact, but in the interest of preventing violence he cancelled a general strike and the Balaguer inauguration took place on 16 August 1994. Needless to say, altering the Pact was another fraud, which illustrates the untrustworthiness of Balaguer and his political entourage.

CONCLUSION

Transition to democracy in Latin America provides the framework for the Catholic Church to participate in social and political mediation. It created the circumstances for the modernization model of the

25. Listín Diario, 11 August 1994 (Translation is mine).

church to consolidate itself while subordinating traditionalist and liberation models. The success of the modernization model consists of featuring the church as a non-partisan actor in political events. This position gives the church credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. However, a non-partisan position does not mean neutrality, because the church is not neutral vis-à-vis the political system of liberal democracy. In fact, through its non-partisan role the Church defends democracy as the only worthwhile political system and as such takes a conservative political position. Thus, the Church is a special actor of the political architecture and as such defends the status quo.

Non-partisanship has offered the church the ability to participate in social and political mediation in Latin America. This role allowed the church to successfully mediate political conflict in Bolivia, Central America, and the Dominican Republic. Most political analysts agreed that these mediations have been positive in promoting peace and reconciliation. Despite the inability of the members of the Tripartite Dialogue to fulfill their part in agreements brokered by the Dominican church, in the short run, mediation produced important gains that improved the life of many people and contributed significantly to political stability. Similarly, church mediation in the 1986 and 1994 electoral crises helped to avoid never-ending political impasses that could have had disastrous consequences for the country.

In contrast to Central America, what is unique in the Bolivian and Dominican cases is that church mediation has become an ordinary feature of social and political life. I attribute this phenomenon to the particularly weak political institutions and the fact that transition to democracy is still incomplete. In Bolivia, neither revolutionary nor authoritarian governments have been able to build solid political institutions. The Dominican Republic has not been able to overcome the strong legacy of the Trujillo dictatorship. Unlike Bolivia, however, the Dominican political leaders have found ways to negotiate political impasses that have permitted a degree of social and economic modernization, even if under an authoritarian regime.

The role of the Catholic Church in this process cannot be underestimated. The Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, and Guatemalan churches succeeded as mediators and promoters of reconciliation, but not all of them have remained non-partisan. In the case of Nicaragua, for instance, the hierarchy developed a cozy relationship with conservative governments while rejecting any relationship with the Sandinistas. Similarly, the hierarchy became a lot more conservative in El Salvador, particularly after the death of Archbishop Rivera y Damas in 1994. In contrast, the Guatemalan hierarchy continues to call for conciliation, but it also issues pastoral letters critical of human rights

violations and offers protection to those persecuted for political reasons. This is the case in Bolivia and the Dominican Republic as well.

All political actors and observers agree that church mediation has been positive and contributed to social peace and reconciliation. Mediation has also been a means to reintegrate the church into the architecture of the political system. As a result of this reintegration into politics, the church is non-partisan, but not neutral vis-à-vis the political system. Reintegration to the political system brings new challenges to the church because the new framework aligned it with the status quo, which means establishing it as a pillar of the political system.