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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Modernizing the Soul:
Catholic Social Doctrine, Gender, and the Politics of Education in Chile, 1964-1973

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirement for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Holly Marie Gibbens

Committee in charge:

Professor Benjamin A Cowan, chair
Professor Jessica Graham
Professor David K. Jordan
Professor Dana Velasco Murillo
Professor Matthew Vitz

2026

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The dissertation of Holly Marie Gibbens is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2026

DEDICATION

To my parents, Dub and Kitty, for the sacrifices they made to encourage my love of learning in so many ways and teaching me at a young age that “every cop is a criminal, and all the sinners, saints”; to my siblings, Patrick, Katie, and Grace for being my first comrades in this world and all that has entailed; to my friends–particularly Denise, Maddie, Matt, Saribel, Trace, and Zach–for being consistent pillars of joy, support, and adventure in my life; a mis amigos en Chile–especialmente Tiare, Raimundo, Miguel, Belén, y Paloma, por haberme adoptado durante el año mas importante de mi vida. To my partner Tyler, for being as golden, steady, and hot as the sun. Your love and support made finishing this work possible.

EPIGRAPH

“A la juventud, a aquellos que cantaron, entregaron su alegría y su espíritu de lucha.”

Salvador Allende Gossens

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CELAM	Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y Caribeño (Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council)
CIAS	Centro de Investigación y Acción Social (Center for the Social and Economic Development of Latin America)
CIDE	Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo Educativo (Center of Education Research and Development)
CORA	Corporación de Reforma Agrária (Agrarian Reform Corporation)
CUT	Central Única de Trabajadores de Chile (Unified Center of Chilean Workers)
DESAL	Centro para el Desarrollo Económico y Social de América Latina (Center for the Social and Economic Development of Latin America)
DUOC	Departamento Universitario Obrero Campesino (University Worker-Peasant Department)
ENU	Escuela Nacional Unificada (National Unified School)
FEDECh	Federación de Educadores de Chile (Federation of Chilean Educators)
FEUC	Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad Católica (Catholic University Student Federation)
IER	Instituto de Educación Rural (Institute of Rural Education)
INDAP	Instituto de Desarrollo Agroprecuario (Institute of Agricultural Development)
PDC	Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party)
PIIE	
PUC	Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile)
SUTE	Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de Educación (Unified Union of Education Workers)

UP	Unidad Popular (Popular Unity)

CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

October 1962–December 1965
Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) convenes in Rome, initiating major reforms within the Catholic Church and encouraging greater engagement with contemporary social and political issues.

November 1964
Eduardo Frei Montalva of the Christian Democratic Party is elected President of Chile.

1965
The Frei administration launches a comprehensive educational reform program aimed at expanding access to schooling, the number of years of compulsory primary education, and modernizing the national education system.

July 1967
The Agrarian Reform Law is enacted, accelerating land redistribution and rural modernization efforts.

August 24–September 6, 1968
The Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate (CELAM) meets in Medellín, Colombia, adapting the reforms of Vatican II to the Latin American context and emphasizing the Church's responsibility toward social justice and development.

November 1970
Salvador Allende Gossens is elected President of Chile.

February 1971
The Unidad Popular government initiates a nationwide debate amongst educators, parents, clergy, students, and parents over the proposed National Unified School (Escuela Nacional Unificada, ENU), envisioning a democratic, participatory, and integrated educational system.

March 1973
Implementation of the ENU project is postponed amid mounting political opposition and controversy.

September 11, 1973
The Chilean armed forces overthrow the government of Salvador Allende. Allende dies during the military coup, and General Augusto Pinochet assumes power.

March 11, 1990
Chile's military dictatorship formally ends, followed by the inauguration of President Patricio Aylwin and the restoration of democratic government.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

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Since my arrival at the University of California San Diego, I have been lucky to be surrounded by a supportive and thoughtful community of scholars and peers. First and foremost, I am very grateful to my advisor and chair, Benjamin A. Cowan who took me on as a grad student in his own first year teaching at UCSD. Your exceptional breadth and depth of knowledge in Latin American history helped shape the kinds of research questions I ask, and the seriousness with which I have tried to understand the history of gender, culture, and power in the lives and political movements of people, both past and present. Our countless conversations throughout the years

regarding coursework, research, and grant proposals helped shape me into a better writer and better historian in innumerable ways. Any aspiring historian would be lucky to have been guided by you, and I am so glad I was able to have such a committed professor read each one of my chapters' drafts with such diligence and insightfulness. I also wish to express many thanks to my committee members, Dana Velasco Murillo, Matthew Vitz, Jessica Graham, and David Jordan. Dana, you have consistently offered your time and energy whenever I needed it on everything from how to structure grant proposals to how to prepare for my qualifying exams without becoming overwhelmed, and I'm infinitely grateful for your kind reminders throughout the years that finishing this work would be possible, and that I was capable of doing so. Matt, you have been a wonderful professor and committee member, and I am so thankful for how often you've made time throughout the years to read my writing, or find me a TAship, and for always sending me academic and professional opportunities when you see them. Your lighthearted humor and enthusiasm for history made every class I took with you so rewarding. Jessica, you were one of the first professors I ever TAed for and your ability to really engage students in class and tie various social and political movements to broader cultural phenomena has always stuck with me; it is something I truly hope to emulate as a professor one day. I greatly appreciate your kindness and promptness throughout the years in providing helpful feedback on my writing and reading. David, our anthropology-lunch-seminars were a highlight of my first year of grad school. Your training and insights helped me immensely by shaping the kinds of social history I read and how to interpret other disciplines' scholarship on the study of religion more broadly, all of which were crucial to my study of Catholicism. Thank you for being a diligent and helpful committee member. I also wish to thank Professor Gloria Chacón for her help in improving my Spanish and for writing

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Finally, I wish to thank those in Chile who helped me complete the research necessary for the writing of this dissertation. My first research trip to Chile was funded in 2019 by the Tinker Foundation, and without its Field Research Grant, many of the documents I found in Chilean archives and the professional connections I made with local scholars would not have been possible. My 2019 research trip facilitated my meetings with Professors Brandi Townsend, José Ragas, and Pablo Whipple among others, all of whom were exceptionally helpful to me throughout the process of applying for year-long research fellowships to Chile. Without their institutional and academic support, I would not have been awarded a Fulbright Award. I am extremely indebted to each of you for the time and effort you put into making sure my 2023 year in Chile was incredibly enriching. I also wish to thank the archivists and librarians who were always patient and helpful in recommending sources pertinent to my work, especially Adolfo Marinello Hurtado at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, Rosario Willumsen Jigins at the Historical Archive of the Archbishopric of Santiago de Chile, Maite Gallego at the House Museum of Eduardo Frei Montalva, and Althea Silvera at the Florida International University's Special Collections Library, as well as the teams who assisted me at the Diego de Medellín Ecumenical Center, the National Library of Chile, the Chilean Ministry of Education Library, the National Congressional Library of Chile, and those at the Gabriela Mistral Museum of Education. Finally, I wish to thank the Fulbright Program for funding my 2023 year of research in Chile, without which, this dissertation never would have been written.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Modernizing the Soul: Catholic Social Doctrine, Gender, and the Politics of Education in Chile, 1964-1973

by

Holly Marie Gibbens

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California San Diego, 2026

Professor Benjamin A. Cowan, chair

This dissertation examines the role of Catholicism in shaping educational reform, political conflict, and gendered authority in Chile between 1964 and 1973. Scholarship has often treated the Catholic Church as either a cohesive institutional actor or as a reactive force in the face of

political polarization. By contrast, this project argues that Catholicism functioned as an internally fragmented political field, in which clergy, lay organizations, educators, and students mobilized shared theological frameworks to advance competing visions of social and political change. Focusing on the reformist period of Christian Democratic governance and the subsequent Popular Unity years, this dissertation traces how education became a central arena in which these conflicts unfolded. Drawing on archival sources from the Archbishopric's Archive of Santiago, educational policy documents of the era, Catholic periodicals, and university publications, it examines debates over agrarian reform, literacy campaigns, and the Popular Unity government's National Unified School (ENU) proposal to show how Catholic actors across the political spectrum engaged with concepts such as pluralism, subsidiarity, and conscientization. I illustrate how these concepts rooted in Catholic Social Doctrine, (especially as expressed in Vatican II and Medellín Council writings), did not produce consensus but instead enabled divergent–and at times contradictory–political projects. This dissertation further argues that these conflicts were structured by a gendered logic of authority which underpinned the modernization projects of both governments. Through the expansion and feminization of teaching, educational reform institutionalized a model of the "woman-as-mother-educator," positioning women as key moral and pedagogical authorities while simultaneously delimiting their political roles. I illustrate how opposition to the ENU thus drew on anxieties over the displacement of maternal authority by the state, revealing the extent to which debates over education were also debates over family, morality, and social order. By situating Catholicism at the center of these transformations, this study contributes to the historiography of modern Chile, the global 1960s, and the Cold War by demonstrating that ideological conflict was not only political and economic, but also moral and gendered. In doing so, it highlights education

as a critical site through which competing visions of authority, citizenship, and social change were articulated and contested.

Introduction

In a 1987 interview conducted with the Jesuit priest Ignacio Ellacuria shortly before his murder in El Salvador, Ellacuria stated that "The difference between the social doctrine of the Church and Liberation Theology is that the social doctrine believes that capitalism is reformable and Marxism is irreformable, while Liberation Theology believes that Marxism is reformable and capitalism is not."[1] While not all liberation theologians would have characterized the relationship between Catholic Social Doctrine and Liberation Theology in precisely these terms, Ellacuría's statement captures a central tension that emerged within Catholic thought during the Cold War: the extent to which existing political and economic structures could be reformed to achieve social justice. His formulation distills one influential understanding of the conceptual rupture that Liberation Theology represented within twentieth-century Catholic social thought. Throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century, Catholics across Latin America sought to grapple with the extent to which capitalism, socialism, or communism could be reformed and implemented in their country, and how it might be reconciled with their faith, if at all. In the context of "the global sixties," postconciliar Catholic thought became deeply entwined with political praxis–whether it took the form of reformism, revolution, or counterrevolution–in ways that shaped both religion and the political landscape of the region more broadly. This dissertation analyzes the way in which these theological and political debates were refracted through the domain of education in Chile between 1964 and 1973, a period marked by successive reformist and socialist projects that placed schooling at the center of national transformation. It argues that Catholic actors were not merely reactive participants in these processes, nor uniformly aligned along a predictable conservative–

[1] Paul E. Sigmund, "'Christian Democracy, Liberation Theology, the Catholic Right, and Democracy in Latin America,'" 1993, in *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context*, ed. John Witte, Jr. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 203.

progressive spectrum, but were instead deeply implicated in shaping the terms of educational reform itself. By tracing the evolution of Catholic engagement with state-led initiatives—from the Christian Democratic reform of 1965 to the Popular Unity's proposed Escuela Nacional Unificada (National Unified School)—this study reveals both continuities and ruptures in how Catholics conceptualized social change, authority, and moral formation. In doing so, it foregrounds education as a privileged site through which broader conflicts over capitalism, socialism, and the role of the Church were negotiated, while also demonstrating how these debates were inflected by questions of gender, family, and the locus of moral authority in everyday life. At the same time, it situates Chile within broader regional and global historiography—on Catholic anticommunism, the political mobilization of women, and the entanglement of religion and Cold War politics—while also demonstrating how the particular trajectory of Christian Democratic reformism and Popular Unity socialism enabled forms of religious thought and political experimentation that were distinctive to Chile and the kinds of projects that were able to germinate there between 1964 and 1973.

While scholarship of the last two decades has emphasized the Cold War as a multidirectional and internally contested process within Latin America, this dissertation shifts attention to conflicts within Catholicism itself, emphasizing internal Catholic fragmentation and foregrounding gender and education.[2] More recently, the historiography has expanded to include

[2] A good example can be found in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, comps., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Duke University Press, 2008), which has been recognized as a key contribution to "New Cold War" historiography. Rather than portraying the region as a passive arena for superpower rivalry, it emphasizes how Latin American governments, movements, and intellectuals shaped and reinterpreted Cold War dynamics within their own societies. Its methodological mixing of diplomatic, social, and cultural history helped redefine how the Cold War is understood in Latin America. The contributors' case studies employed transnational lenses to reveal how ideological struggles intertwined with local issues of modernization, nationalism, and social justice. Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2012), is another good example of this comparative and multinational approach, since he portrays these decades as overlapping contests between U.S. power, Latin American nationalism, revolutionary aspirations, and authoritarian reactions. He weaves together

examinations of social and political history that center Latin America as a site of ideological production and exchange, rather than simply a tangential arena of struggle between the USSR and the United States. Aldo Marchesi's *Latin America's Radical Left: Rebellion and Cold War in the Global 1960s* for example demonstrates that the Latin American "New Left" emerged through transnational circuits of exile, coordination, and political exchange, especially in the Southern Cone.[3] This dissertation reveals across five chapters that such transnational dynamics were not limited to revolutionary movements: by foregrounding the Catholic Church, it shows how a global religious institution similarly mediated the circulation of ideas and practices, shaping local struggles over education, family, and moral authority, and embedding Cold War conflict within deeply gendered social debates. Building upon a substantial literature that has examined the Catholic Church as a central actor in Latin American political life—including studies by Scott Mainwaring, Penny Lernoux, and others on popular education, human rights, democratization, and liberation theology—this dissertation shifts attention to education and gender as critical arenas through which Catholic actors sought to shape projects of modernization. Rather than focusing primarily on ecclesiastical responses to political conflict, it examines how Catholic Social Doctrine informed competing visions of social reform, citizenship, family life, and moral formation in Chile between 1964 and 1973.[4][5]

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diplomacy, ideology, and grassroots conflict to show how international pressures interacted with local inequalities and political ambitions.

[3] Aldo Marchesi, *Latin America's Radical Left: Rebellion and Cold War in the Global 1960s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[4] See for example, Scott Mainwaring, "The Catholic Church, Popular Education, and Political Change in Brazil" *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1984): 97-124, and Scott Mainwaring and Alexander Wilde, *The Progressive Church in Latin America* (Notre Dame Press, 1989). Both examine the role that progressive sectors in the Latin American Church play in processes of both internal church democratization and larger national projects of democratic social change.

[5] Penny Lernoux, "The Latin American Church," *Latin American Research Review* 15, no. 2 (1980): 201-211. Lernoux argues that the Latin American Church was one of the most important institutions to watch politically because it was increasingly siding with the poor, defending human rights, and fostering new forms of popular education and organization.

Another relevant factor in Cold War Chilean politics before the Pinochet dictatorship was the fact that Chilean political actors across the ideological spectrum frequently understood their country as exceptional within the Latin American context. Pointing to its relatively stable system of representative democracy and regular transfers of power between governments, they contrasted Chile with what they perceived as the populist regimes of countries such as Brazil under Getúlio Vargas or Argentina under Juan Perón.[6] Yet, as several scholars have argued, Chile was not devoid of populism so much as it exhibited a distinct variant. Rather than organizing political life around a single charismatic leader who mediated between the state and mass constituencies, Chilean politics remained structured by a competitive party system in which parties sought to mobilize and represent social groups, including organized labor, peasants, and the urban popular sectors.[7] In the postwar period, this competition intensified, as parties increasingly sought to bind these constituencies not only to the state, but to their own political party's projects. Within this context, Catholic actors introduced an additional dimension to Chilean political mobilization. Clergy, lay organizations, and the newly created Christian Democratic Party increasingly drew on Catholic Social Doctrine as a framework for organizing political participation, one that could be adapted to multiple ideological positions while remaining legible within Chile's established traditions of coalition politics. The openness of postconciliar Catholic thought, particularly as articulated at the Council of Medellín, further encouraged Catholics across the political spectrum to engage in large-scale projects of social reform. In practice, this meant that Catholic participation at times cut across

[6] Igor Goicovic, "The Populist Left in Chile: Socialists and Communists from 1936 to 1973," in *Populism: Latin American Perspectives*, ed. Ronaldo Munck, et al. (Agenda Publishing, 2023), 49-68. See also, Lessie Jo Frazier, *Salt in the Sand: Memory, Violence, and the Nation-State in Chile, 1890 to the Present* (Duke University Press, 2007), 1-18.

[7] Susan Franceshet, *Women and Politics in Chile* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 48.

expected party divisions, even as it continued to reinforce shared assumptions about the centrality of the family as the primary unit of social organization and the ultimate beneficiary of reform.

In practice, these political and religious developments unfolded not only through parties and institutions, but within the everyday spaces where clergy and lay Catholics interacted, negotiated authority, and translated reform into lived experience. The first chapter argues that the emergence of Liberation Theology in Chile was not simply the product of clerical innovation, but rather took shape through sustained interactions between clergy and lay Catholics whose engagement with poverty, education, and social reform reshaped Catholic debates from the ground up. Catholic lay women were often at the heart of these exchanges. Margaret Chowning and Sol Serrano have made a strong case for gender as key to understanding nineteenth-century Christianity, illustrating how, as men's adherence to the traditional church and to religion waned over the century, women's devotion waxed, something which I demonstrate was equally apparent in the twentieth century.[8] Focusing on the period between 1964 and 1973, I trace how conflicts over agrarian reform, educational policy, and ecclesial authority unfolded across a range of institutional and grassroots spaces, including Catholic policy institutes, parish organizations, and Ecclesial Base Communities. In these contexts, lay participation—especially that of women—proved central to redefining both the Church's social mission and its relationship to political life. By highlighting women's roles as educators, catechists, and community leaders, the chapter reveals how gender structured both the expansion of lay authority and its limits, as women exercised significant influence in everyday religious and educational settings while remaining

[8] See, Sol Serrano, *Vírgines Viajeras: Diarios de religiosas francesas en su ruta a Chile, 1838-1874* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica, 2000), and Margaret Chowning, *Rebellious Nuns: The Troubled History of a Mexican Convent, 1752-1863* (Oxford University Press, 2006), as well as her more recent work Margaret Chowning, "The Catholic Church and the Ladies of the Vela Perpetua: Gender and Devotional Change in Nineteenth Century Mexico," *Past & Present*, no. 221 (November 2013).

excluded from formal decision-making hierarchies. In doing so, it demonstrates that the theological and political transformations associated with Liberation Theology, including its Chilean culmination in the priest-led group, Cristianos por el Socialismo (Christians for Socialism), emerged not only from intellectual or episcopal debates, but from contested, gendered forms of participation that developed within the lived spaces of Chilean Catholicism. At the same time, it situates Chile within a broader historiography that has reconceptualized religion as a lived and politically generative domain, while pushing beyond accounts that privilege institutional reform or structural transformation to show how liberationist Catholicism in Chile emerged through contested, gendered negotiations between clergy and lay actors in everyday religious and educational practice.[9]

Recent historiography on religion in Latin America has moved decisively away from secularization-centered frameworks, instead emphasizing the persistence, adaptability, and political significance of religious belief and practice in modern contexts. Foundational works by William B. Taylor and João José Reis have demonstrated the importance of examining religion at the level of everyday practice, showing how local devotional life, ritual, and community structures shaped broader social and political dynamics.[10] Historians such as Eric Van Young and Pamela Voekel have also challenged the secularization thesis by demonstrating that religious belief

[9] Brian Smith's seminal work, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), gave extended attention to the Chilean Church's twentieth-century trajectory in terms of its transition from conservatism to progressive engagement and its increasingly complex relationship with Marxism and social reform. However, by privileging institutional and ideological change, such approaches often understate the extent to which these transformations were negotiated through everyday struggles over authority within schools, families, and lay organizations.

[10] See William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred : Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford University Press, 1996), and João Jose Reis, *Death is a Festival: Funeral Rites and Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003). By reconstructing popular religious mentalities through non-elite sources, these studies have challenged the assumption that religion receded in importance with the advance of modernity, instead revealing its continued centrality to processes of state formation, social conflict, and cultural change.

remained deeply embedded in political mobilization and ideological life well into the nineteenth century and beyond.[11] Complementing these approaches, anthropological and cultural frameworks—from Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation to the work of Sidney Mintz and Richard Price—have further underscored the dialogic and co-constitutive nature of cultural and religious production, challenging diffusionist models in which ideas flow unidirectionally from institutional centers to passive recipients.[12] Though there exists substantial scholarship on the Catholic Church in Cold War Latin America, much of this scholarship is nevertheless institutional in focus, analyzing change over time in the national Churches' relationships to a given government or regime, or the emergence of Liberation Theology as an intellectual project.[13] Taken together, this body of scholarship has reoriented the field toward understanding religion as a lived, socially embedded, and politically generative domain, but one which still privileges Catholic priests, bishops, and theologians as the primary sources of theological production.

The first chapter builds on these insights by approaching Chilean Catholicism in the 1960s not as a coherent institutional force, but as a field of contestation in which theological and political

[11] Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810-1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), and Pamela Voekel, *Alone Before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). Both illustrate that religious belief remained deeply embedded in political mobilization and ideological life, even among actors traditionally understood as agents of secular modernity. Rather than viewing religion and modern politics as mutually exclusive domains, their works highlight the ways in which religious frameworks have continued to inform political subjectivities, moral economies, and collective action.

[12] Pamela Voekel and Reinaldo L. Román, "Popular Religion in Latin American Historiography," 2012, in *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American History*, ed. Jose C. Moya (Oxford University Press, 2010), 454-488.

[13] See for example, Scott Mainwaring, *The Church and Politics in Brazil* (Stanford University Press, 1986), which examines how the Catholic Church in Brazil transitioned from a conservative institution allied with state elites to a major force supporting democratization and social justice during the twentieth century. Another early example of historical Church studies can be found in José Comblín, *The Church and the National Security State* (Orbis Books, 1979), which examines how Latin American "national security" regimes used anti-communist ideology to justify repression, and critiques the ways the Catholic Church responded to, resisted, or accommodated those regimes. A later example of this kind of Church history can be found in Kenneth P. Serbin, *Secret Dialogues: Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Authoritarian Brazil* (University of Pitsburg Press, 2000), which analyzes clandestine negotiations between Brazil's military rulers and the Roman Catholic Church during the country's 1964–1985 dictatorship.

meanings were produced through interaction between clergy and lay Catholics. In doing so, it departs from accounts that privilege institutional reform, structural transformation, or elite theological production as the primary drivers of change. Scholars such as Christian Smith and Michael Löwy have skillfully situated liberation theology within broader processes of modernization, inequality, and political mobilization, while Phillip Berryman has emphasized its entanglement with Cold War violence and revolutionary struggle.[14] Yet these frameworks often presume a coherence between religious ideas and political action, or foreground dramatic moments of conflict at the expense of the everyday practices through which such ideas were negotiated. Similarly, while Thomas Bruneau and Bonar Hernández Sandoval highlight the importance of grassroots Catholic initiatives and the longer institutional roots of progressive Catholicism, their emphasis on top-down strategies of reform offers more limited insight into how such initiatives were interpreted, contested, and reshaped by lay actors themselves.[15] By contrast, drawing on Daniel H. Levine's emphasis on the negotiation of religious authority in everyday life, my first chapter foregrounds the reciprocal and often uneven interactions between clergy and lay Catholics, demonstrating how educational, parish, and community spaces functioned as sites of theological production, especially in an era marked by popular education and adult literacy efforts internal to modernization projects.[16] In this respect, it also extends the work of Edward Wright-Rios, whose studies of Mexican Catholicism highlight the internal diversity and negotiated character of

[14] Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 1991); Michael Lowy, *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America* (Verso, 1996); Phillip Berryman, *Stubborn Hope : Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).
[15] Thomas Bruneau, *The Church in Brazil: The Politics of Religion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); Bonar L. Hernandez Sandoval, *Guatemala's Catholic Revolution: A History of Religious and Social Reform, 1920-1968* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2018).
[16] Daniel H. Levine, *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

religious change, by foregrounding the specifically gendered dimensions of these processes.[17] By centering women's participation in educational and pastoral spaces, this chapter shows how liberationist Catholicism in Chile emerged not only from institutional reform or intellectual debate, but from contested, gendered forms of authority that developed within the lived practices of everyday religious life, where women were often the de facto conduits of the Church's postconciliar social mission.

These dynamics did not remain confined to local religious communities, but extended into universities and student organizations, where the expansion of explicitly Catholic participation in public life took on new institutional and political forms. Catholic student activism is the subject of the second chapter. Recent scholarship has increasingly situated twentieth-century Latin America within the broader frameworks of the Global 1960s and Cold War history, emphasizing the centrality of youth and student movements as key sites of political formation, ideological contestation, and transnational exchange. Works such as Vania Markarian's *Uruguay, 1968: Student Activism from Global Counterculture to Molotov Cocktails* foreground the ways in which student activism emerged within overlapping circuits of anti-imperialism, intellectual life, and global youth culture, while Patrick Barr-Melej and Marion Schlotterbeck have also demonstrated the importance of cultural and political experimentation in shaping the Chilean experiences of the period.[18] At the same time, historiographical syntheses such as those by Pablo Toro Blanco,

[17] Edward Wright-Ríos, *Revolutions in Mexican Catholicism: Reform and Revelation in Oaxaca, 1874-1934* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). Wright-Rios reconceptualizes the history of modern Catholicism by foregrounding its internal diversity and the dynamic interplay between ecclesiastical reform and popular religious practice. His book interweaves episcopal efforts at institutional modernization with local, often indigenous revival movements, demonstrating that Catholic renewal was neither purely top-down nor wholly controlled by the hierarchy. Rather, Wright-Rios shows that lay actors—frequently operating through localized devotional practices and apparition movements—both participated in and subtly reshaped broader Church reforms, producing a religious landscape marked by negotiation, tension, and partial autonomy from clerical authority.

[18] Vania Markarian, *Uruguay, 1968: Student Activism from Global Counterculture to Molotov Cocktails* (University of California Press, 2016); Patrick Barr-Melej, *Psychedelic Chile: Youth, Counterculture, and Politics on the Road*

Nicolás Dip, and Ana Lucía Álvarez have noted the tendency to treat student movements as episodic, teleologically anchored to 1968, or ideologically reducible to the left, thereby obscuring both their internal diversity and their broader institutional contexts.[19] Recent scholarship has increasingly challenged such frameworks. Volumes such as Jaime M. Pensado and Enrique C. Ochoa's *México Beyond 1968*: *Revolutionaries, Radicals, and Repression during the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies* have called for scholars to move beyond the canonical events of 1968 and instead examine a wider range of actors, regions, and political trajectories, highlighting the persistence of youth mobilization across Latin America.[20] Similarly, efforts to reconceptualize student activism, such as Imanol Ordorika's emphasis on cyclical "repertoires" of mobilization, have further challenged earlier "decline" narratives of student activism advanced by José Joaquín Brunner, Philip G. Altbach, and Daniel C. Levy, by instead highlighting the persistence and adaptability of student political engagement across time.[21] Yet despite this rich multidisciplinary literature, Catholic students have rarely been analyzed as a distinct political and religious formation, and the role of universities as sites of intra-Catholic fragmentation remains underexplored.[22]

to Socialism and Dictatorship (University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Marion Schlotterbeck, *Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende's Chile* (University of California Press, 2018), especially her second chapter, "'We Lived Those Years with a Lot of Passion': University Reform and the Rise of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria."

[19] Pablo Andrés Toro Blanco et al., "Education, University, and Student Movements in the History of Latin America: Some Considerations on the Historiography of the 20th and 21st Centuries," *Historia y Memoria de la Educación*, no. 20 (June 2024): 11-42.

[20] Jaime M. Pensado and Enrique C. Ochoa, eds., *México Beyond 1968: Revolutionaries, Radicals, and Repression during the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies* (University of Arizona Press, 2018), ix-xx.

[21] Imanol Ordorika, "Student movements and politics in Latin America: a historical reconceptualization," *Higher Education* 83, no. 2 (2022): 297-315.

[22] Jaime Pensado's *Love and Despair: How Catholic Activism Shaped Politics and the Counterculture in Modern Mexico* (University of California Press, 2023), is a notable recent exception, though the focus is not exclusively on Catholic students.

My second chapter intervenes in these debates by situating Catholic student activism within the reformist project of the newly-created Christian Democratic Party and its broader transnational and ideological contexts. Building on scholarship that has emphasized the global dimensions of Catholicism—such as John T. McGreevy's work on Jesuit networks and Mateo Jarquín's analysis of Latin America as a site of Cold War diplomacy—it shifts the focus from clerical and institutional actors to lay Catholics, particularly students, whose political trajectories both drew on and reshaped these networks.[23] In doing so, it also engages earlier efforts to theorize Christian Democracy and religiously inspired political movements, while moving beyond schematic or sociological accounts to examine how reformist ideology was lived and contested in practice.[24] By tracing how participation in agrarian reform, literacy campaigns, and university politics exposed Catholic students to the limits of the Christian Democratic project, the chapter demonstrates that reform itself functioned as a catalyst for ideological fragmentation. In this respect, it complicates narratives that treat Catholic political engagement as either a coherent centrist project or a straightforward precursor to right-wing mobilization, as well as those that treat student activism of the late sixties as synonymous with the left. I show instead how the spaces of participation created by the Christian Democratic state generated divergent political trajectories across the Catholic spectrum. In doing so, I foreground how concepts such as "pluralism," and "conscientization" (rooted in Catholic Social Doctrine and Vatican II–era thought), were mobilized by students across

[23] John T. McGreevy, *American Jesuits and the World: How an Embattled Religious Order Made Modern Catholicism Global* (Princeton University Press, 2016); Mateo Jarquín's *The Sandinista Revolution: A Global Latin American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2024) convincingly demonstrates that international alliances were not purely ideological but strategic and often moderating, shaping internal revolutionary dynamics (e.g., encouraging elections, pluralism, or restraint).

[24] Ivan Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control, and Modernization in Latin America* (Prentice-Hall, 1970). See also John Witte, Jr., ed., *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993) for a multidisciplinary and global, comparative approach. More recently, Allen Wells' *Latin America's Democratic Crusade: The Transnational Struggle Against Dictatorship, 1920s-1960s* (Yale University Press, 2023) has offered useful transnational insights on the region's moderates, examining how they also made use of Cold War rhetoric like those on the right and the left, to generate popular support.

the political spectrum, highlighting the ways in which shared theological frameworks enabled competing—and at times contradictory—visions of political action.[25]

Crucially, these competing visions of political action were structured by gendered understandings of family, authority, and social responsibility, which shaped both the possibilities and limits of Catholic participation in reform. Scholarship on gender, family, and the state in Latin America has long emphasized the centrality of maternalist frameworks in shaping women's political participation and social reform. Earlier works by Asunción Lavrin and Francesca Miller have shown how women activists mobilized motherhood as a legitimizing discourse, redefining it as a social and civic function in order to gain access to public life without fully abandoning its traditional associations.[26] Building on this insight, Karin Rosemblatt's *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures and the State in Chile, 1920–1950* demonstrated how mid-twentieth-century Chilean reform projects, particularly under the Popular Front government, embedded gendered assumptions about the male breadwinner and female caregiver into state-building processes,

[25] Chilean Catholics' interpretation of "pluralism" varied, but they essentially drew on a cluster of Vatican II–era Social Doctrine (especially *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965)) that legitimated diversity of social forms, protected religious liberty, institutional autonomy, and lay political discretion. In Chile during this time, that language was condensed into "pluralism" and repurposed in very specific political ways, especially by the Catholic right, who connected it to the papal articulation of "subsidiarity," first formulated in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). Derived from the Latin *subsidium* (aid or support), subsidiarity held that higher-order communities should assist rather than supplant lower-order ones (families, local groups, associations). While often mobilized by right-wing Catholics to oppose the expansion of the welfare state, the principle did not preclude state intervention. Indeed, *Mater et Magistra* (1961) reaffirmed subsidiarity while expanding the legitimacy of state responsibility for social welfare, a position many moderates and leftists in the Christian Democratic Party drew upon during the 1964–1970 government of Eduardo Frei Montalva to advance rather ambitious social reforms. "Conscientization" (sometimes translated as "consciousness-raising") was popularized by Paulo Freire and by educational writings emerging from the 1968 Medellín Conference of Latin American Bishops. As my second and fourth chapters demonstrate, the left often invoked conscientization in a Freirean sense that emphasized education as a tool for social transformation, solidarity, and structural critique, while Catholic conservatives sought to reframe it in more individualized and localized terms of moral and civic formation.

[26] Asunción Lavrín, *Women, Feminism and Social Change in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, 1890–1940* (University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (University Press of New England, 1991).

producing forms of social inclusion that simultaneously reinforced patriarchal norms.[27] Heidi Tinsman's *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973* extended this analysis into the context of the agrarian reform movement, showing how efforts to transform rural society—while materially improving campesino life—ultimately reproduced gender hierarchies, as state agencies, unions, political parties, and Church actors reinforced patriarchal relations under the guise of promoting gender complementarity.[28] Other historians have extended these insights into the later twentieth century. Margaret Power and Lisa Baldez, for example, highlighted the political potency of maternalist mobilization in the context of opposition to the Unidad Popular government, while Patricia Richards has underscored the classed and racialized tensions that structure women's relationship to the state.[29] Comparative work on the Cold War such as Mala Htun's analysis of "gender regimes" further demonstrates how state institutions and political coalitions shape policies surrounding family, reproduction, and women's rights, revealing the extent to which gender is embedded within broader structures of governance.[30] All of these works establish maternalism as a central framework through which women engaged politics, while also demonstrating how gendered ideologies of family and social order were deeply intertwined with projects of modernization and state formation.

[27] Karin Rosemblatt, *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures and the State in Chile, 1920–1950* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
[28] Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
[29] Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende, 1964–1973* (Penn State University Press, 2002); Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Patricia Richards, *Pobladoras, Indígenas, and the State: Conflicts Over Women's Rights in Chile* (Rutgers University Press, 2004).
[30] Mala Htun, *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

My third chapter builds on this scholarship but shifts the analytical focus from maternalism as a framework primarily associated with women's political activism to the ways maternalist assumptions became embedded within broader projects of educational and social reform. By examining both state and Catholic initiatives, the chapter shows how maternalism functioned not only as a rhetorical strategy but also as a structuring logic through which reformers imagined citizenship, family life, and social development. By examining agrarian reform, educational expansion, and family planning initiatives during the 1960s, it shows how both Catholic and developmentalist actors converged on a shared vision of feminine modernity rooted in the figure of the "woman-as-mother-educator."[31] In doing so, it demonstrates that women's roles as teachers, caregivers, and community organizers were not simply sites of political participation, but were central to how modernization was imagined and implemented in Cold War Chile. This perspective extends scholarship by historians like Benjamin Cowan and Susan Besse that has emphasized the relationship between morality, gender, and political power, by showing how moral authority functioned as a form of political infrastructure, shaping not only moments of crisis but the everyday operations of reform.[32] It also complements studies of Catholic politics in the Southern Cone by

[31] I adopt the term "woman-as-mother-educator" as an analytical category to capture the intersection of maternalist discourse, the feminization of teaching, and the expansion of state-directed educational and welfare initiatives in mid-twentieth-century Latin America. Although the linkage between motherhood and women's pedagogical or moral authority has a long genealogy, the specific formulation used here is my own and is intended to name a particular historical configuration shaped by Catholic social thought, developmentalist policy, and technocratic educational reform.

[32] Benjamin A. Cowan's *Moral Majorities across the Americas: Brazil, the United States, and the Creation of the Religious Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), illustrated how right-wing mobilization emerged not only through state repression but through transnational networks of religious activism that linked anti-communism to broader concerns about morality, social order, and the transformation of youth and family life. Susan K. Besse's *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914–1940* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996) examines how Brazil's transition to an urban-industrial society reshaped, but ultimately preserved, patriarchal gender hierarchies in the early twentieth century. Her analysis revealed how gender relations became a key arena for consolidating state power in Brazil from 1914 to 1940, and argues that President Getúlio Vargas's *Estado Novo* regime relied heavily on reorganizing private-sphere relations—especially family life and women's roles—to legitimize its authority. She illustrated a phenomenon my third chapter also explores, which is that modernization created new expectations for middle- and upper-class women as workers, consumers, and citizens, yet these changes were managed so that underlying gender inequality remained intact.

demonstrating that claims to moral authority were often mobilized in defense of family and social order, which I illustrate in the Chilean case were actively produced through the reforms of the 1960s.[33] By tracing how these processes institutionalized a feminized model of civic participation while simultaneously constraining women within a "politics of difference," the chapter reveals how the gendered foundations of Catholic developmental modernity helped generate the conditions under which later conflicts over education—most notably the controversy surrounding the Popular Unity government's National Unified School proposal—would unfold.[34]

These dynamics underscore that conflicts over education were inseparable from broader struggles over gender, family, and moral authority—an insight that has been central to a significant body of scholarship on Latin America. Studies on gender, family, and the state in Latin America have demonstrated that political conflict has often been organized through the regulation of intimate life, particularly through competing claims over morality, sexuality, and familial authority. Foundational works by Sueann Caulfield and Donna J. Guy illustrated how states sought to regulate sexual behavior and family honor as a means of consolidating authority, while Elizabeth Quay Hutchison and Heidi Tinsman show how labor regimes, agrarian reform, and social policy reconfigured—but ultimately preserved—patriarchal relations across class lines.[35] Building on this tradition, Susan Besse argued that modernization projects in twentieth-century Brazil depended on restructuring gender relations in ways that expanded women's participation while

[33] See for example Amy Edmonds, "Moral Authority and Authoritarianism: The Catholic Church and the Military Regime in Uruguay," *Journal of Church and State* 56, no. 4 (2014).
[34] For a detailed history of the emergence of a "politics of difference" that women in Latin America and in Chile specifically advanced across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Susan Franceshet, *Women and Politics in Chile* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).
[35] Sueann Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early-Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Duke University Press, 2000); Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Elizabeth Quay Hutchinson, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900–1930* (Duke University Press, 2001); Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*.

maintaining hierarchical family structures, a dynamic that resonates across the region.[36] As a result, historians such as Nara Milanich have called for renewed attention to the family as a central site of political power, noting that while recent scholarship has privileged gender and sexuality as analytical categories, it has often lost sight of the family as a structure through which authority, inequality, and state formation are reproduced.[37] Her work demonstrated that legal and cultural distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate forms of kinship provides a crucial lens for understanding how claims about "parents' rights" and moral authority are themselves historically contingent, rather than natural or self-evident.[38] Together, this body of work reveals that gendered authority and familial ideology have long functioned as key terrains through which political projects are articulated, contested, and legitimized.

Chapters 4 and 5 bring this historiography into dialogue with scholarship on Cold War Latin America and Catholic politics by examining debates over the Popular Unity government's National Unified School project as a focal point for struggles over moral and familial authority within the Catholic world itself. Drawing on Benjamin A. Cowan's argument that moral and sexual anxieties were central to Cold War political mobilization, as well as Margaret Power's demonstration that conservative movements in Chile mobilized women through appeals to motherhood, family, and anti-communism, these chapters show how such cultural discourses were not only deployed against the Left but were also contested within Catholic communities.[39]

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[36] Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy.*

[37] Nara Milanich, "The Historiography of Latin American Families," 2012, in *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American History*, ed. Jose C. Moya (Oxford University Press, 2010).

[38] Nara Milanich, *Children of Fate: Childhood, Class, and the State in Chile, 1850–1930* (Duke University Press, 2009), 25, notes that the tensions within the growing political liberalism of early twentieth-century Chile highlighted that ''its secularizing impulse implies an expansion of state power (at the expense of religious authority) but its emphasis on personal freedom and free will in economic and social life implies state constriction," something that my dissertation demonstrates was still a tension in the 1960s and early 1970s.

[39] Benjamin A. Cowan, *Securing Sex: Morality and Repression in the Making of Cold War Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Power, *Right-Wing Women.*

Extending Patrick Iber's emphasis on intra-ideological conflict in Cold War Latin America, Chapter 4 reveals analogous fractures within Catholicism, as reformist educators, episcopal leaders, and conservative lay actors advanced competing visions of education, authority, and social order.[40] Chapter 5 illustrates that these divisions were not merely ideological, but were structured by gendered anxieties over the displacement of maternal and feminized forms of moral authority by the state, and attendant fears of youth politicization and sexual immoderation. In this respect, it also complements the transnational frameworks advanced by Tanya Harmer and Vanni Pettinà by demonstrating that the "internal fractures" of the Latin American Cold War were mediated through other institutions, such as the Catholic Church, where global doctrines and local political struggles intersected.[41] By foregrounding how education became a key arena in which these tensions were negotiated, these chapters argue that conflicts over the National Unified School proposal were not simply ideological or institutional disputes, but were structured by competing claims over who possessed the legitimate authority to shape children, the family, and the moral order. In doing so, I show that Catholic responses to the ENU were neither unified nor inherently oppositional, but instead emblematic of deep internal divisions that were themselves grounded in gendered understandings of authority, citizenship, and social reproduction.

These works have demonstrated that Cold War political cultures in Latin America cannot be understood solely through the lens of ideology or geopolitics, but must also be analyzed through the moral and cultural frameworks that structured everyday political life. This more recent historiography on gender and sexuality have shown that questions of sexuality, family, and gender

[40] Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Harvard University Press, 2015).
[41] Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and The Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Vanni Pettinà, *A Compact History of Latin America's Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022).

were not peripheral to social and political order, but constituted a form of political architecture through which regimes articulated authority, legitimacy, and national security.[42] In this light, anticommunism—and in Chile, the broader opposition to the Popular Unity government with which it was deeply intertwined—emerges not simply as an ideological position, but as a cultural project rooted in anxieties about moral disorder, social hierarchy, and the transformation of intimate life. This dissertation builds on that growing historiography by demonstrating that debates over Chile's National Unified School (ENU) became a flashpoint not merely because of its educational or economic implications, but because it threatened deeply embedded systems of gendered moral authority within both the Church and secular society. By tracing how conflicts over education were framed as struggles over family, children, and moral formation, my dissertation shows that the ENU controversy must be understood as a contest over who possessed the legitimate authority to shape the social order itself.

At the same time, my dissertation contributes to a growing body of scholarship that has emphasized the dynamism and internal diversity of Catholic political thought in the twentieth century. Across Latin America, movements such as the Third World Priests in Argentina, the National Office of Social Investigation (ONIS) in Peru, the Golconda Group in Colombia, and the Christians for Socialism in Chile drew on the language of episcopal documents like those produced at the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín Council to critique dependency, developmentalism, and the assumptions underlying projects such as the Alliance for Progress. In Chile, these debates often unfolded within Catholic intellectual, educational, and pastoral networks, including sectors of the Jesuit order and their widely-circulated publication *Mensaje*, where Catholic figures–including those who formed Christians for Socialism–engaged critically

[42] Cowan, *Securing Sex*.

with both state-led reform and global development paradigms. While existing scholarship has demonstrated to some extent the way that lay Catholics shaped the emergence of liberationist thought, this dissertation argues that the key site of these exchanges was not only theological reflection or pastoral activism, but educational practice itself. Popular education initiatives, Catholic schools, literacy campaigns, and university reform all functioned as spaces in which Catholic Social Doctrine was translated into lived political praxis. Crucially, these were also spaces in which women played central yet often subordinated roles, making education a primary arena through which gender, religion, and politics intersected.

Taken together, the chapters of this dissertation trace a trajectory from reform to rupture, showing how the very processes that expanded Catholics' confessional political participation in public life ultimately generated new forms of division and conflict. Chapter 1 demonstrates how lay Catholic activism emerged from grassroots organizing and everyday religious practice, revealing that Catholic political engagement was not simply imposed from above but developed through lived experience. Chapter 2 shows how Christian Democratic reform projects expanded these spaces of cross-class participation, while simultaneously politicizing Catholic students and fracturing previously cohesive university communities. Chapter 3 examines how these reforms reshaped gendered citizenship, as both Church and state promoted a developmental modernity that hinged on education and was implicitly centered on the figure of the "woman-as-mother-educator." Chapters 4 and 5 then illustrate how these gendered assumptions became the basis for political conflict during the ENU debates, as competing Catholic actors advanced divergent claims about education, family, and moral authority. In this sense, my dissertation argues that Catholic Social Doctrine did not simply guide political action, but was transformed through it: as reform initiatives expanded the scope and meaning of Catholic engagement, they also exposed the limits of

consensus, producing ideological rupture within the Catholic world itself. More broadly, by moving from grassroots activism to national political conflict, my dissertation demonstrates that the history of Cold War Latin America must be understood not only through institutions and ideologies, but through the moral, gendered, and educational practices that gave them meaning.

Chapter One: Grassroots Catholicism and the Emergence of Liberationist Thought in Chile, 1963-1973

Introduction

In August 1952, María Luisa Undurraga Ossa, a student in Education at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, published an essay in the Jesuit magazine *Mensaje* titled "The Current State of Rural Education." Drawing on statistics about poverty, literacy rates, and the particularly limited educational opportunities available to campesina women, Undurraga argued that Chile's rural education crisis demanded urgent attention. Yet her analysis did not rely solely on empirical observation. At several points she cited *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929), Pope Pius XI's encyclical on Christian education, to argue that alleviating ignorance and social suffering was a responsibility shared by all Christians. She concluded that the educational crisis in the countryside would only be resolved when "the family, the school, and the Parish" could work together in harmony to fulfill their shared mission of education.[43] Essays such as Undurraga's appeared frequently in Catholic publications in Chile during the 1950s and 1960s, revealing the extent to which lay Catholics were already engaging questions of social inequality, education, and religious

[43] Maria Luisa Undurraga Ossa, "Estado Actual de la Educación Campesina" [The Current State of Rural Education], *Mensaje*, August 1952, 425.

responsibility well before the transformations unleashed by the Second Vatican Council and the 1968 Medellín Conference.

This chapter argues that the emergence of Liberation Theology in Chile was not simply the result of clerical intellectual innovation. Rather, it developed through an ongoing exchange between clergy and lay Catholics whose experiences of poverty, education, and political mobilization shaped Catholic debates about social reform. Between 1963 and 1973, discussions surrounding agrarian reform, education policy, and social justice produced deep divisions within the Chilean Catholic Church concerning both the role of the laity and the proper place of the Church in political life. These tensions became visible in debates over the expansion of Ecclesial Base Communities, the development of Catholic policy institutes, and ultimately the formation of the priest-led movement Cristianos por el Socialismo. In this context, lay participation—particularly the growing involvement of women in grassroots Catholic communities—played a crucial role in reshaping both ecclesiological thinking and Catholic political praxis. By foregrounding these interactions between clergy and laity, this chapter highlights an important but often overlooked dimension of Chilean Catholic history. Women's participation in parish organizations, community education initiatives, and base communities reveals that they were not merely recipients of new Catholic teachings about social justice. Rather, they helped shape the very debates that produced new theological and political frameworks within the Church. The growing visibility of women in these spaces introduced a gendered dimension to intra-Catholic disputes over authority, participation, and the Church's relationship to the state.

The chapter traces the development of these debates throughout the 1960s by examining the intellectual networks of Catholic policy institutes, the influence of the Medellín Conference and the Episcopal Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) on ecclesiological thinking,

and the spread of participatory educational models influenced by figures such as Paulo Freire. Taken together, these developments reveal how competing visions of the Church's social mission emerged through dialogue—and conflict—between different sectors of Chilean Catholicism. These tensions would ultimately shape Catholic responses to the political transformations of the late 1960s and early 1970s, laying the groundwork for later disputes over agrarian reform, education policy, and the role of religion in Chilean political life. These dynamics also reveal the gendered structure of Catholic participation in debates over social reform. The rapid expansion of secondary education following the Frei administration's National Education Reform of 1965 brought unprecedented numbers of young women into Chile's educational system, while the teaching profession itself remained overwhelmingly feminized. Catholic women therefore occupied positions that made them central to the moral and civic formation of Chilean society: as teachers responsible for the education of children, as catechists and organizers within parish communities, and increasingly as leaders within emerging Ecclesial Base Communities. Yet the institutional arenas in which educational policy and ecclesiastical doctrine were formulated remained overwhelmingly male. Women exercised considerable moral authority within what Undurraga described as the interconnected spheres of "the family, the school, and the Parish," but they remained structurally excluded from the hierarchies that governed those institutions. The tensions produced by this imbalance—between women's everyday authority and their exclusion from formal decision-making—would later become central to Catholic debates over education, family life, and political participation during the polarized years leading to Salvador Allende's election. While later chapters examine how these tensions unfolded in national debates over education reform, this chapter focuses on the grassroots religious spaces—particularly Ecclesial

Base Communities—where many of these dynamics first became visible within Chilean Catholicism.

Historiography

The 1960s in Chile has been analyzed abundantly by Church scholars, largely because of the implications of the Second Vatican Council for Latin America, and for the later emergence of Liberation Theology in the early 1970s. Brian Smith for example has discussed in his work a variety of Church and State issues across twentieth century Chile, noting how the Chilean Church's hierarchy pivoted away from the Conservative party towards a tacit alliance with the Christian Democratic Party, and what the emergence of the Cristianos Por el Socialismo (Christians for Socialism) and the Popular Unity government signified to the clergy.[44] Sol Serrano has written extensively on the secularization of the Chilean state and the history of public and Catholic educational institutions in the country.[45] More recent scholarship has attempted to focus on the many different kinds of Catholic activism in Latin America in the decades leading up to Vatican II, rather than the decades which followed.[46] The period has also been studied by historians such as Heidi Tinsman and Brian Loveman who focus on social and labor history, because of the fact that Chile's decade long Agrarian Reform was one of the most ambitious overhauls of the *latifundia* system in modern history. The land redistribution process was implemented simultaneously with a National Literacy Campaign, in which the Catholic Church–via its various rural charity and educational organizations–played a large role.[47]

[44] Brian Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982)
[45] See for example *El liceo: Relato, memoria, política* (Santiago de Chile, Taurus, 2018) or *Historia de la Educación en Chile [1810-2010]*: Tomo I (Santiago de Chile, Taurus, 2013).
[46] Stephen J.C. Andes and Julia Young, eds., *Local Church, Global Church: Catholic Activism in Latin America from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016).
[47] Robert Austin, *The State, Literacy, and Popular Education in Chile, 1964-1990* (Oxford, U.K.: Lexington Books, 2003), 96.

These tensions between Church, state, and laity in Cold War Chile also contribute to broader historiographical debates about the role of religion in the ideological and developmental contests that shaped the global Cold War. Scholars like Odd Arne Westad and Gilbert Joseph have argued that the Cold War was not merely a geopolitical standoff between superpowers but a global struggle over competing visions of modernity, in which the Global South became both battleground and protagonist.[48] Within this framework, the Catholic Church—particularly through the teachings of Vatican II, the Council of Medellín, and the increasingly radicalized positions adopted by some clergy and lay movements in Latin America—emerged as a key ideological actor, though not a monolithically unified one. What is missing from the current historiography is a more detailed understanding of gendered lay agency, mutual production of theology, and ecclesiological shifts from below. The Catholic emphasis on social justice and human dignity placed the Church and its believers in a contradictory position, often oscillating between support for state-led modernization and critique of its capitalist underpinnings. Scholars such as Michael Latham and Stephen Rabe have traced how development policies in Latin America, frequently backed by the U.S. and multilateral institutions like the OAS, sought to use education, land reform, and family planning as tools of anti-communist stabilization.[49] These initiatives often relied on religious actors to legitimize their goals, while also clashing with the more radical visions emerging from within Liberation Theology.[50] By tracing the Catholic Church's internal debates over family, education, and social justice in Chile, this chapter speaks to a wider body of scholarship on how religion

[48] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).
[49] Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[50] Vanni Pettinà, "Development, Intellectuals, and the Global Cold War in Latin America," in *Latin America and the Global Cold War*, eds. Thomas C. Field Jr., Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 23–45.

shaped and was shaped by the developmentalist paradigms of the Cold War. But more importantly, it does so by contextualizing Catholic lay women's increasing (though limited) activism in the Church's daily structure as one of the components that was critical to these debates; it moves beyond a class-based analysis of women's politicization of the era that has been treated in works such as Margaret Power's *Right Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende, 1964*-1973, or Lisa Baldez's *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile*, and instead centers on women's experiences of Catholic spirituality and ecclesial structure as sites of gendered politicization in the decade. In this sense, my chapter also joins work by John McGreevy and Anna Peterson in highlighting how lay Catholics redefined their political subjectivity during moments of heightened ideological conflict, positioning themselves at times not only in opposition to state policy but also to official Church doctrine.[51] In doing so, I underscore the transnational character of Catholic political engagement and suggest that the Catholic Church's unusual combination of global hierarchy, doctrinal coherence, and enduring institutional reach makes it a particularly revealing lens through which to examine how religious actors shaped and contested modern state-building projects.

Latin American Bishops and the Latin American Laity: Regional Congresses of the 1960s

Despite disagreements between the Catholic hierarchy and lay Catholics over specific political strategies, there was broad consensus among Chilean bishops in the 1960s that Catholics should direct their efforts toward land redistribution, educational access, and the material

[51] John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003); Anna Lisa Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

conditions of working-class families.[52] This consensus was visible not only in episcopal documents or later CELAM statements such as those produced at Medellín in 1968, but also in the deliberations of lay Catholic organizations earlier in the decade. During the week-long Interamerican Congress of Catholic Action held in Mexico in 1960, participants drew extensively on national census data and research produced by international organizations to diagnose the structural problems facing Latin America: widespread illiteracy, malnutrition, highly unequal land distribution, and rapid demographic growth. After reviewing country-by-country indicators—including infant mortality, school dropout rates, and land concentration—the congress concluded that incremental reforms were insufficient, warning that the scale of projected population growth made the urgency of structural transformation, "the need for a solution, which could no longer be based on simple palliatives or state patches" unmistakable, as they asked " How will it be possible for the hundreds of millions of new beings who will burst onto the scene in the following years to find education, housing, and work within these [shaky structures]?"[53]

Such discussions illustrate how organized lay Catholic networks framed socioeconomic inequality as both a moral crisis and a pastoral challenge. They also insisted that Catholics themselves, rather than technocratic planners alone, must participate in transforming the structures that produced poverty and exclusion. These debates did not remain confined to lay activism. In

[52] See for example, the 1962 pastoral letters, Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, *"La Iglesia y el problema del campesinado chileno,"* pastoral letter, Santiago, March 1, 1962, Iglesia.cl, https://www.iglesia.cl/968-la-iglesia-y-el-problema-del-campesinado-chileno.htm and Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, *"El deber social y político en la hora presente,"* pastoral letter, Santiago, September 18, 1962, Iglesia.cl, https://www.iglesia.cl/970-el-deber-social-y-politico-en-la-hora-presente.htm. These statements reflected broad episcopal agreement on the urgency of agrarian reform, describing Chilean rural workers as "exploited to the point of unrest" and insisting that "neither can an agrarian reform be conceived which improves rural conditions without the true and sometimes painful sacrifices that certain restrictions will impose to many who until the present have undoubtedly been privileged… Those who think contrary have not yet understood the signs of the times, nor the demands of the common good, which are the same as those of the Gospel."

[53] Acción Católica, "V Semana Interamericana de Acción Católica," in *La Acción Católica Frente a los Problemas Apostólicos de América Latina* (1960), 9-14.

Chile, they were increasingly mediated through research institutions that placed clergy in sustained contact with the social practices and political demands of lay Catholics. Jesuit intellectuals such as Roger Vekemans and Patricio Cariola played a central role in this process by establishing organizations that combined empirical research with pastoral engagement. Through the institutions these Jesuits created, such as the Center for Research and Social Action (CIAS), the Center for the Social and Economic Development of Latin America (DESAL), and later, the Center of Education Research and Development (CIDE), clergy and Catholic professionals produced social-scientific analyses of poverty, education, and political participation that drew heavily on the experiences of grassroots Catholic organizing. As sociologist Alexis Cortés observes, figures such as Vekemans exemplified a broader moment within Catholicism when the emerging social sciences were embraced as tools for understanding religious practice, popular religiosity, and the changing social position of Catholics in rapidly modernizing societies. [54]

Within this intellectual sphere, Vekemans' influential "theory of marginality" conceptualized Latin American societies as divided between an institutionally integrated sector and a vast population that was structurally excluded from economic and political participation. Importantly, this framework emerged not simply from abstract theorization but from engagement with the forms of collective organization developing among marginalized Catholics themselves. At DESAL, his insights provided the basis for the concept of what became the Frei administration's key social policy, *promoción popular* (Popular Promotion), which emphasized grassroots organization, education, and community participation as mechanisms for integrating marginalized populations into social and political life. As Cortés points out, "The figure of Vekemans is

[54] Alexis Cortés, "Clodomiro Almeyda and Roger Vekemans: The tension between autonomy and political commitment in the institutionalization of Chilean sociology, 1957–1973," *Current Sociology* 69, no. 6 (2021): 910, SAGE Journals Online.

representative of a time in the Catholic world that was particularly inclined to cultivation of the social sciences, as they were in the process of institutionalization and consolidation in the region and provided indispensable tools to address religious problems from a scientific point of view" including "the decline of the priestly vocation."[55] Similar dynamics shaped the work of Patricio Cariola, whose educational research at CIDE connected Catholic institutions to broader debates about pedagogy, public policy, and the democratization of schooling (all of which became a flashpoint in 1973, and is the subject of my fourth chapter).

Taken together, these initiatives illustrate how the Catholic Church's growing engagement with the social sciences in the 1960s did not simply produce technocratic expertise. Rather, research centers such as CIAS, DESAL, and CIDE functioned as intermediary spaces where clergy encountered, analyzed, and translated the political beliefs of lay Catholics into broader frameworks for social reform. In this sense, the Church's intellectual infrastructure of the period should be understood less as a top-down apparatus of policy design than as a set of institutional channels through which clerical actors absorbed and reframed forms of lay praxis already reshaping Catholic engagement with questions of poverty, education, and social justice across Latin America. These institutions therefore blurred the boundary between pastoral work, social research, and political strategy, positioning Catholic clergy not only as interpreters of social change but also as participants in the forms of collective action emerging among lay Catholics during the decade, in some ways familiar to the region more broadly, and in others, specific to Chile.

Changing Catholic Views on Education: The 1968 Council of Medellín

[55] Cortés, *Current Sociology,* 911.

In a 1967 article published in the influential U.S. Jesuit magazine *America*, Jesuit priest Francis P. Chamberlain, who spent years teaching in Peru, called into question the whole project of Catholic education, in terms similar to those that would be expressed by some of the Chilean clergy in years to come.[56] Chamberlain however offered several insights that prefigure some of the criticisms about education in the region that would be discussed a year later at the Council of Medellín. He calls attention to what he terms the "U.S. mythologies of the middle class" in Latin America: that the middle class is on the side of social and economic revolution, and/or that the middle class has more in common with the "common man" than the elite. After noting that he supports the aims of the democratic left, Chamberlain states that it is nevertheless a movement bound up in a social and economic elite atmosphere that "shows unmistakable signs of the innate and visceral conservatism that is the patrimony of the middle and upper classes," and that "Catholics who believe that the democratic left is equal to the gigantic task of social reconstruction in Latin America will, I fear, be sadly disillusioned."[57] He goes on to criticize the tendency in Catholic circles in both North and South America to overestimate the usefulness of Christian Democracy (specifically citing Venezuela, Peru, and Chile multiple times). He implores Catholics to "see this tendency for what it is: a mistake based on the myth of the revolutionary middle class. In particular, the uncritical expansion of Catholic schools for the middle class must be examined. Unless it is, we may wake one day and find that we have unwittingly identified the Church with the new conservative obstructionists."[58]

[56] Catholic criticisms of private education will be discussed in depth in chapters 3 and 4.
[57] Francis P. Chamberlain, "Catholic Education in Latin America," *America Magazine*, May 20, 1967, 751.
[58] Chamberlain, "Catholic Education," 752.

It was in this broader context of critique—against both the class stratification of Catholic education and the illusion of a revolutionary middle class—that the 1968 Medellín Conference offered a decisive ecclesial intervention. In its final documents, the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) sharply criticized the elitist orientation of Catholic schools and affirmed the Church's responsibility to serve the poor not only through charity but through structural transformation in education. The bishops explicitly condemned educational institutions that catered to the upper and middle classes while neglecting the marginalized, and they called for pedagogical models that would awaken the oppressed to their social condition, giving special attention to the kinds of prejudice faced by indigenous peoples of Latin America. Echoing Paulo Freire's emerging concept of *conscientización*, the documents demanded a new kind of education—one rooted in dialogue, collective reflection, and action "in order to help students become aware of their situation and commit themselves to the transformation of their reality."[59] Education, the bishops insisted, must reject its function as a mechanism of domination and instead serve as "an instrument of liberation," forming critically aware citizens who could participate fully in building a just society.[60] In this way, the Medellín documents not only mirrored the pedagogical ethos of Freire's work but helped institutionalize a framework through which Catholic educational philosophy would increasingly overlap with the tenets of liberation theology, especially in Chile, where Paulo Freire worked for the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture from 1964 to 1969.

[59] Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council: Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops* (Medellín: CELAM, 1968), "Education," no. 4.
[60] CELAM, *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council*, "Education," nos. 6–7.

The concluding Medellín documents however also demonstrate the divisions amongst the Catholic episcopacy on sociopolitical issues–evidenced by the appearance of "liberation" and "development" side by side throughout the concluding text. Although Medellín built upon pastoral and intellectual processes that had been developing within Latin American Catholicism throughout the early 1960s, many contemporaries nonetheless perceived the conference as a decisive break in the Church's approach to social and political questions.[61] This highlights what William T. Cavanaugh calls "competing ecclesiologies:" that is, competing ideas on how the Church should be organized, and to what ends.[62] The emergence of Ecclesial Base Communities (EBCs) had brought liberationist versus traditionalist views to the forefront of debates within the Church hierarchy, and these debates were often marked not only by conceptual disagreement but also by sharp institutional tensions and reactions among bishops, priests, and lay Catholics across the region. These divisions are evident in the Chilean episcopate's analyses of the EBCs in Chile and the CELAM's subsequent discussions of the role that the laity should play in the formulation of Church doctrine. This is visible in the Medellín discussions on the laity and on education, as well as in other CELAM meetings that followed in the years immediately after the Medellín Council. These tensions within the Church hierarchy, together with the expanding participation of lay Catholics in the life of the Church—especially through educational institutions—profoundly

[61] See for example, Jeffrey Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 5-10, in which he discusses how the bishops at Medellín made a "dramatic call to create a new social order based on justice and social rights" and how "with the support of Medellín, the popular classes forged a new identity as Christians, an identity that was an amalgam of values drawn from popular religiosity and the mystique of popular struggle." See also Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492–1979)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), in which he framed Christian communities as located in a linked set of contexts and dialectical moments of domination. He uses this dialectical framing to explain the evolution of church-related "mediations" (institutions, rites, liturgies) as well as their intersection with Latin American society and culture.

[62] William T. Cavanaugh, "The Ecclesiologies of Medellín and the Lessons of the Base Communities," *CrossCurrents* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 68, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24460066.

shaped episcopal debates over Catholic education in Latin America and help explain why these questions became particularly salient in Chilean politics between 1964 and 1973..

The Second Vatican Council's mandates in *Lumen Gentium* to include "the entire body of the faithful" in "matters of belief," in an unprecedented move, urged the clergy to "know that they were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church…[and] should therefore work together with the laity."[63] The Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America held in Medellín in 1968 expanded on this idea, by stating that "Laypersons are not merely the objects of the Church's pastoral action. They are also, and increasingly so, active subjects in the Church's life and mission."[64] In addition to noting the increased importance in the Church's pastoral action, they also highlight the laity's relevance to doctrinal formation of the Church in two separate parts of the concluding documents, arguing that "The contribution of lay people to the elaboration of a living, committed theology is not only legitimate but necessary. Their experience, reflection, and praxis nourish theological reflection and pastoral action."[65] They even go so far as to state more explicitly in another section that "It is urgent to stimulate the participation of laypersons in the reflection and elaboration of theology, especially in regard to the realities they experience most directly."[66] The notions of a "committed theology," grounded in the experiences of the laity, and their reflection on and development of said theology, speaks to the fact that the laity had already begun organizing themselves in a way that episcopacies recognized they must reckon with. Their organization and praxis, and the CELAM's recognition of it had a profound effect on the way in

[63] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), §12, §30.
[64] Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council: Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Medellín, Colombia, 1968: Conclusions* (Bogotá: General Secretariat of CELAM, 1970), "The Lay Person," §3.
[65] Ibid., "The Lay Person," §7.
[66] Ibid., "Pastoral de Conjunto," §9

which Catholic intellectuals participated in Chilean politics, especially with regards to education planning.

Liberatory Pedagogy and Popular Education

Questions surrounding education—both access to it and the content of that education—occupied a central place in Catholic discussions of social reform during the 1960s. These concerns were especially visible in the documents of the 1968 Medellín Conference, where bishops emphasized education as both a human right and a necessary tool for confronting structural injustice. Within Catholic intellectual circles, discussions of education increasingly intersected with broader concerns about liberation from social and economic inequality. Few figures illustrate this convergence more clearly than the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Although Freire was neither a theologian nor a member of the clergy, his work profoundly shaped discussions of education and social transformation throughout Latin America. Raised within a Catholic milieu and influenced by currents of Catholic social thought circulating throughout the region, Freire developed a pedagogical framework that sought to link education with political and social consciousness. His most famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was largely written during his years in Chile between 1964 and 1969, when he worked with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture during Eduardo Frei Montalva's administration.

At the center of Freire's pedagogy was the concept of *conscientización*, or the process through which individuals develop a critical awareness of the social structures shaping their lives. Rejecting what he termed the "banking model" of education—in which teachers deposit knowledge into passive students—Freire instead advocated a dialogical model in which educators and students learn through mutual exchange. Education, in this framework, becomes a process

through which marginalized populations can interpret their own experiences of inequality and participate in transforming the conditions that produce them. Freire's work resonated strongly with the broader pastoral and intellectual transformations occurring within Latin American Catholicism during the 1960s. As historian Robert Austin has noted, Freire's early work reflected the reformist optimism of the Frei administration's "Revolution in Liberty," but his thinking became increasingly radicalized as he engaged more deeply with grassroots political activism and the mobilization of peasants and workers. Importantly, this intellectual development did not occur in isolation.

Freire's pedagogical ideas were shaped through his interactions with the very communities whose educational experiences he sought to transform. Freire himself later reflected on the profound impact that his time in Chile had on his intellectual development, noting the ways in which dialogue with peasants and workers reshaped his own understanding of social conflict:

> The Chilean masses know very well that the fundamental contradiction human beings face is not between them and nature but that it takes place in the economic, political, and social spheres. Those are the things, I confess, that I learned in Chile. It is not that Chile made me a completely different man from the person I was before, but what it did exactly was to deepen in me a radicalization that was already in process.[67]

Freire's reflection highlights the reciprocal nature of the intellectual exchanges that characterized this period. While his pedagogical ideas influenced Catholic educators, clergy, and activists across Latin America, they were themselves shaped through encounters with the lived experiences of peasants and workers. In this sense, Freire's work illustrates the broader dialectical relationship between lived social realities and emerging theological and pedagogical frameworks that defined the development of liberationist thought during the 1960s. These pedagogical principles also

[67] Sérgio Guimarães and Paulo Freire, *Aprendendo com a Própria História* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Paz e Terra, 1987), 127.

closely paralleled developments within Catholic pastoral practice at the grassroots level. In Ecclesial Base Communities (EBCs), small groups of lay Catholics gathered to read scripture collectively, reflect on their social conditions, and discuss the relationship between faith and social justice. These communities often adopted forms of collective reflection and discussion that echoed Freire's dialogical model of learning, emphasizing shared interpretation rather than hierarchical instruction. The language of *conscientización* and liberation that circulated within Catholic intellectual networks thus both reflected and reinforced processes already unfolding within grassroots Catholic communities.

Seen in this light, Freire's pedagogy should not be understood simply as an external intellectual influence on liberation theology. Rather, it formed part of a broader exchange of ideas linking educators, clergy, and lay activists during a decade of profound political and religious transformation. The pedagogical practices associated with Freire captured and helped articulate changes that were already taking place within the Catholic Church's most grassroots spaces—particularly within the Ecclesial Base Communities that would become central to debates about lay participation, social justice, and the Church's role in political life.

Chile's Ecclesial Base Communities and Popular Education

In the years leading up to the Medellín Conference of 1968, which is often cited as the origins of Liberation Theology, Christian Democratic parties and Catholic labor associations were on the rise throughout Latin America, as was the formation of Ecclesial Base Communities (EBCs).[68] These small neighborhood groups of poor and working-class lay Catholics formed

[68] Examples of scholars referring to the Medellín Conference as the origin point of Liberation Theology are countless; see for example Ivan Petrella, "The Intellectual Roots of Liberation Theology," in *The Cambridge History*

throughout Latin America, and essentially tried to fuse spiritual and social issues, mainly by reflecting on the dialectic between Scripture and lived experience. Many Catholics who participated in EBCs were also very politically or socially conscious as well—some were members of labor unions, others of the Communist or Socialist Parties of Chile, and many more were Christian Democrats. Though some Church scholars and historians make a distinction between "Liberation Theology as an intellectual current" on the one hand, and "the dynamic grassroots church movement" of progressive sectors of the Church (including EBCs) on the other, I argue that the two cannot be untangled.[69] In looking at the words of first-hand participants in EBCs, it becomes clear that the "critical consciousness" and political activism that EBC members developed bear a striking resemblance to both the language of liberation theology, as well as that of Catholic educator and philosopher Paulo Freire. It also becomes apparent that within EBCs, women played a particularly important leadership role. I therefore argue for a new directionality in how we interpret the exchange of liberatory theological ideas and the role that women played in the emergence of what would subsequently become termed "liberation theology." They flowed not from theologians and philosophers into the laity, but rather were mutually constitutive: ideas and lived experiences flowed from the laity (vis-a-vis EBCs interactions with clergy members) into theologians' and philosophers' thinking and writing, manifest in the eventual vociferous and public emergence of Cristianos Por el Socialismo. The language in which the Medellin Conference called for increased lay involvement in the "reflection and elaboration of theology" in conjunction

of Religions in Latin America, ed. Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Paul Freston, and Stephen C. Dove (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 359–71, doi:10.1017/CHO9781139032698.024; Ryan P. Heywood, "The Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America (Medellín) and the Birth of Liberation Theology," *Journal of World Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 217–32; or Tony Bradbury and Adrian Geraghty, *A Review of Liberation Theology and Praxis in Contemporary Latin America: As It Was in the Beginning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2025), introduction.

[69] Jeffrey L. Klaiber, S.J., "Prophets and Populists: Liberation Theology, 1968-1988," *The Americas* 46, no. 1 (1989): 2, JSTOR.

with the active role that Catholic women played in EBCs are important because they shaped the politicization of laypeople and clergy members.[70]

In a collection of interviews with women EBC members, historian Maxine Lowy's subjects speak about their political awakenings as a direct result of the theology they developed within EBCs, alongside the social justice and literacy programs that emerged with them. Alicia Cácares, who was active in an Ecclesial Base Community during the 1960s, described her childhood exposure to Catholicism as focused on indoctrination rather than critical education. She recounted how her husband was involved in the La Victoria land occupation in 1957, which eventually led them to move there. Although she did not believe in God at the time, she joined the local parish because they were actively supporting the land seizure. Reflecting on her earlier views, she characterized religion in vaguely Marxist terms, calling it "the opium of the people." However, her perspective began to shift in 1966 when Father Pierre Roland, a missionary priest known for his work with EBCs, encouraged her to complete a three-year course on popular theology in San Miguel, a working-class and historically Communist neighborhood in Santiago. Cácares linked her education there to both Vatican II and the development of individual and collective critical consciousness. She described this transformative period as feeling "like someone in love for the first time, discovering things, finding everything wonderful." Unlike the "nun or the priest who repress," she said, the Church she came to know was one aligned with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.[71] Cácares' experience, particularly her word choices and the priest's support of her continued religious education are important because it is emblematic of a larger current of debates within the Catholic hierarchy that were taking place at this time surrounding the topic of

[70] For this reason, I also highlight how the exchange of ideas in Catholic circles tangentially affected policy makers' plans for the Agrarian Reform and its attendant education programs, in chapter three. How these plans and programs were interpreted by the Catholic hierarchy are evident in the curriculum of their rural education institutions.
[71] Cáceres, "Empecé a Conocer," interview, 28

democratizing the Church. As stated elsewhere, some of these debates during the period following Vatican II and Medellín revolved around the degree to which the Catholic laity should be consulted in formulating doctrine and not merely be passive recipients of doctrine.

The following year Cácares became involved in numerous sociopolitical popular organizations. While previously she had been part of a syndicate (of the *Partido Comunista*/Communist Party), she also started working at a Mother's Center, a public health committee, land expropriation committees, and notes that "we were all also part of the Allende campaign."[72] This supports Margaret Power's assertion that the Mother's Centers generated both an anti-Allende female mobilization *and* a pro-Allende movement.[73] Cácares goes on to describe the arrival of a deacon named Sergio Nasar, who initiated rehabilitation centers for alcohol use disorder, childcare facilities, and workshops for education on social justice and political issues, as well as adult literacy. She notes that the end of all of this, alongside her experiences in an EBC, "These concrete facts of personal and group liberation made me value the Faith and life."[74] There are several facets of Alicia Cácares' testimony that are significant. First, she illustrates from the personal perspective of a poor and politically engaged, leftist activist, the change over time in Catholic social thought. Second, the priests who figure in her personal story indicate that by the mid and late 1960s, Church officials wanted priests to be more integrated into the working class and actively shaping the grassroots theological and political development of poor and often rural Chileans that had *already* begun at the grassroots themselves. (As later liberation theology

[72] Chilean *Centros de Madres* began as a paternalistic institution to the poorest women in Chilean society. However, by the 1960s they had become agents of social transformation, helping with family planning, basic education, and were central in debates on the social question. For more, see the *memoria chilena* section of the National Library of Chile.

[73] Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende, 1964–1973* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), chap. "Poder Femenino and the Anti-Allende Women's Movement."

[74] Cáceres, "Empecé a Conocer," interview, 30.

publications indicate, priests' engagement with and witness of the grassroots organizing by EBCs also fundamentally shaped the articulation of subsequent Catholic social justice praxis, as is shown in ecumenical councils that shall be examined in sections to come). Finally, she links her own *preexisting* ideas of class consciousness to her later political activism, volunteer work, and personal faith development via the EBC. Though she also connects these with the critical and liberatory education she received at the behest of a local priest, Cácares' story demonstrates that the Catholic hierarchy was already wary of the political and faith development of working class Chileans, illustrated by the fact that a priest was installed as intermediary, and people like Alicia entered into more official Church education pipelines.

Seen in this light, Ecclesial Base Communities and popular education initiatives functioned not simply as spaces of religious devotion or political mobilization, but as pedagogical environments in which lay Catholics and clergy collectively produced new interpretations of Catholic social doctrine. Another interviewee, Juanita Alvarado, demonstrates this dynamic. She described a similar return to religious practice through her participation in both a popular education center and an Ecclesial Base Community (EBC). Her reengagement with the Church began through leadership work in her *población* and involvement with the Institute for Popular Education, an organization founded by former members of the Catholic Youth Workers movement. There, she explained, she developed "a sense of social consciousness" and gained "a great mysticism from the other people that were of a deeper Christian formation."[75] Through this work Alvarado came to see "the importance of the political dimension" of social life and began to

[75] Juanita Alvarado, "No Participaba en la Iglesia Porque No Me Interpretaba," interview, in *Sembradoras de Fe y Esperanza: El Legado de Mujeres de Comunidades Cristianas Populares*, comp. Maxine Lowry (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Universidad Bolivariana, 2008), 29-30.

"value [herself] as a person."[76] While raising three children she completed her secondary education, later enrolling in university in 1970 and serving as the social director of her EBC. Alvarado's testimony highlights a central feature of Liberation Theology as it was lived by lay Catholics: education and collective reflection were understood as pathways to political consciousness and social action. Her observation that the Church had previously failed to "interpret" her experience—an expression echoed throughout the interviews in Lowy's study—reflects a broader critique that animated Catholic renewal movements after the Second Vatican Council. Within these communities, political activism was not seen as external to religious life but as a direct expression of Christian faith. Priests and lay participants alike frequently understood engagement in popular education, workers' organizations, and civic activism as integral to Catholic spirituality rather than opposed to it.

A similar synthesis appears in the testimony of Victoria Plaza, who described her upbringing as both Christian and Communist. Although she encountered Marx's famous description of religion as "the opium of the people," she rejected the idea that Catholicism and Communism were incompatible. "On the contrary," she explained, "Jesus was a tremendous revolutionary of history."[77] Through her participation in the Catholic Youth Workers movement and subsequent involvement in an EBC, Plaza came to identify strongly with the figure of "Christ the worker," whose life she interpreted as a model of struggle for social justice. What these testimonies reveal is not simply that some lay Catholics adopted leftist political commitments, but that liberationist interpretations of Christianity emerged through ongoing exchanges between

[76] Alvarado, "No Participaba," interview, 30.

[77] Victoria Plaza, "La Iglesia fue mi gran Formadora," interview, in *Sembradoras de Fe y Esperanza: El Legado de Mujeres de Comunidades Cristianas Populares*, comp. Maxine Lowy (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Universidad Bolivariana, 2008), 31.

clergy and lay activists**.** Participants in EBCs interpreted Marxist critiques of inequality through the moral language of Catholic social teaching, while clergy and theologians increasingly drew upon the experiences of workers and peasants as sources for theological reflection. In this sense, liberation theology did not reach lay Catholics fully formed through theological texts or episcopal pronouncements. Rather, it crystallized through the encounters between clergy and the organized poor in spaces such as popular education programs and base communities. Plaza similarly emphasized that her understanding of Catholic theology emerged not through formal doctrinal instruction but through participation in collective political practice. As she explained, her involvement in literacy campaigns and youth organizing during the early 1970s led participants to see themselves as "actors, not spectators," capable of transforming the unjust social structures that shaped their lives. [78] Through these experiences she came to understand Christian faith and sociopolitical commitment as inseparable, discovering what she described as a "social and political commitment through the Church."[79]

Plaza's language of commitment, consciousness, and structural transformation reflects the broader pedagogical and political frameworks circulating within Catholic movements of the period, including popular education initiatives and the *see–judge–act* methodology associated with the Catholic Worker movements. Yet her testimony also suggests that these ideas did not simply flow from theologians or Church authorities downward to lay participants. Rather, they developed through ongoing interactions between the clergy and politically active lay Catholics within spaces such as EBCs, literacy campaigns, and youth organizations–precisely those arenas in which Catholic women outnumbered men. In these settings, working-class Catholics interpreted

[78] Plaza, "La Iglesia," interview, 31
[79] Ibid.

Christian teachings through their experiences of social inequality, while priests and pastoral workers simultaneously drew upon these encounters to rethink the Church's social mission, and crucially at a moment when that social mission was rapidly expanding to include NGOs and research institutions that—in the Chilean case—were directly involved in the formulation of public policy like educational reform and civic inclusion. These exchanges produced a dynamic relationship in which lay activism and clerical reflection shaped one another. In other words, Liberation Theology did not simply move from theologians to the laity after Vatican II but rather crystallized through encounters between clergy and politically engaged lay Catholics in spaces such as popular education programs and ecclesial base communities. For many participants, the democratic opening represented by Salvador Allende's government did not appear as a departure from their religious commitments but rather as an opportunity to realize the social justice ideals they had come to understand through their involvement in Catholic communities.

Ecclesial Base Communities and Chilean Bishops: Gender Roles Under Scrutiny

The Chilean episcopacy closely monitored the emergence of Ecclesial Base Communities, attempting to ensure that there was a connection and relationship fostered between these grassroots organizations and the official channels of Church authority. In January of 1968, seven months before the Medellín Council, the Episcopal Conference of Chilean bishops convened "in the climate of the Second Vatican Council" to determine to what ends the Church's "pastoral

orientation" should be directed.[80] Although the Chilean bishops do not mention Liberation Theology directly, they clearly were aware of its presence in EBCs, and suggest that these lay communities were "the first and most fundamental pastoral nuclei, and their attention should be the first pastoral priority for achieving solid growth, that they [EBCs] may bring the plentitude of their own fruits of charity [to the whole Church]."[81] While Chilean priests generally supported the formation of EBCs as vehicles of pastoral renewal, episcopal documents reveal a persistent concern amongst Bishops that these communities remain firmly integrated within existing ecclesial structures and under clerical guidance. The document describes what it sees as the reasons for EBC formation, among them: poverty, illiteracy, and overall unjust economic structures. The bishops then go on to state clearly the need for clerical interference and oversight in EBCs: "They should be grouped as local units: Parishes and Dioceses, or in basic environmental units, like the apostolic movements, or other kinds and always linked with the Bishop by means of his immediate pastor, the local priest, or, in certain cases, the deacon. We cannot foresee a determined structure for each community [however]…this assures each community [has] its own features within the lines of unity of the local Church and the Universal Church."[82]

It is clear then that by the late 1960s, Catholic officials recognized Ecclesial Base Communities as a large enough phenomenon that they merited supervision and intervention. The clearest explanation for the overlap in discourse amongst liberation theologians, political and education activists, and the Catholic laity, is that Ecclesial Base Communities were not developing all of their ideas internally, in abstraction from Catholic priests, but rather that these priests were

[80] Los Obispos de Chile, "Orientaciones Pastorales 1968," in *Orientaciones Pastorales 1968*, comp. Conferencia Episcopal de Chile (Chillán, Chile: Asamblea Plenaria del Episcopado Chillán, 1968), accessed November 5, 2018, http://documentos.iglesia.cl/documento.php?id=978.
[81] Los Obispos de Chile, "Orientaciones Pastorales," 1968.
[82] Ibid.

affected and inspired by the lived experiences of working class Chileans whom they lived and worked beside. Alicia Cáceres' story of both the priest and the deacon who arrived to her *población* outside Santiago demonstrate this clearly. By June of 1969, the Bishops of Chile once again convened in the city of La Serena to discuss the growing phenomenon of EBCs in Chile. The document begins by stating that the data and notes were gathered in various regions over that year, noting that "this study was not done via indirect reports, but rather by direct contacts with responsible members of the community which are studied" and that "different environments and stratums of society were chosen with the goal of better analyzing the communal characteristics of every social class."[83] Though the report is not exhaustive, they chose different cities and towns throughout the country to analyze, and seeking EBCs that they deemed representative of the "rural sector," "workers' sector," "university sector," "middle class sector" and the "independent youth sector" respectively. It therefore offers a useful window into how EBCs formed, their differences according to region and socio-economic status, and the clerical attention that Bishops gave them.

In the rural sector, the priest who compiled and authored the final report noted that the chosen zone of study, Futrono, had a highly organized EBC system due to the geographical limitations and lack of priests in the area. The only priests near the area were French missionaries who–in noting that the establishment of traditional parishes would be difficult farther from the two largest communities in the zone–suggested that each local community form a "nucleus" and elect a leader, designated as "*un Responsable*" who would gather those interested in Catholicism together, to have meetings to discuss the Bible and sacraments; and that when enough interest arose, the *Responsable* would send word to the nearest parish to dispatch a priest for baptisms,

[83] Pbro. Juan A. Martinez, "Experiencias en Chile sobre Comunidades Cristianas de Base" [Experiences in Chile on Christian Base Communities], Iglesia.cl, Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, last modified June 1, 1969, accessed May 6, 2023.

marriages, and other sacraments. *Responsables*, once chosen, had to attend one of the two-day training sessions offered four times a year, which were held in local Catholic schools.[84] Mandates were also set for the priests dispatched to the small communities, most importantly, "That the Priest was going to work to earn a living, just as the *Responsables* earned a living in their own workplaces (the Priest began by dedicating himself to beekeeping, with which he not only earns a living, but also subsidizes the meeting house for the leaders of the Community, which they consider, when they arrive in the village, as their own home)."[85]

The report also highlights that the majority of participants in the "workers' sector" were women, noting that "about 20 [people] per community attend regularly, of whom around 8 are men and the rest are women."[86] In the section that surveyed the "popular middle class," the mutual aid system brought on by the organizational strategy of the EBCs highlights women once again as the primary organizers of community in the region. The priest's report includes a story emphasizing how "a woman had to be rushed to the hospital, and before her husband returned from work, the members of the Bible group had already divided up care for her 9 children among their own homes."[87] While women in the EBCs clearly formed solidarity around motherhood and caretaking roles as would be expected in the late 1960s, the EBCs also fostered some unexpected challenges to traditional gender norms via their insistence (as observed by the priest completing the report for the Bishops) on co-education of Catholic adolescents of both sexes. In the section on the "university sector," Father Martinez approvingly writes that "A group of Catholic university students, men and women [...] decided to live together" in Santiago, but notes that they did

[84] Martinez, "Experiencias en Chile," Iglesia.cl.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

experience "environmental prejudices due to men and women living together in the same house."[88] Similarly, in the section which analyzed "the youth sector," Martinez writes about an EBC organized amongst teenagers in Concepción: "a co-ed camp was organized; with all the difficulties that entailed," likely referring once again to the cultural judgement the male and female youths may have faced for living, teaching, and working together. Martinez praises the fact that "The lifestyle was one of hardship and service among the young men and women who formed the group" and concludes that "In the pedagogy of community spirit in youth, one cannot do without the coeducation of men and women."

Despite the broader public's suspicion of cohabitation and coeducation of young men and women in various Catholic communities, the reception of many diocesan priests to the growing phenomenon was surprisingly welcoming. Interestingly, the report also lacks any skepticism or alarm at the disproportionately female leadership in various kinds of EBCs, perhaps because, as Martinez notes in the subsection report on "the workers' sector," "The working man has much greater distrust of the Church than the working woman (as shown by the percentage of attendance at community meetings we studied)."[89] By the late 1960s, Catholic women made up a majority of the teachers in Catholic schools, as well as a majority of the catechists in many parishes, making their leadership in certain pastoral roles—like the EBCs—culturally familiar to many.[90]

Though gender is not explicitly named during it, the 1969 episcopal meeting to discuss this study on EBCs in Chile concludes with suggestions that highlight one faction of the Chilean hierarchy's stance on a more democratic—rather than a more hierarchical-–approach to ecclesiology. After noting towards the end of the report that many rural and working class Chileans

[88] Ibid.
[89] Martinez, "Experiencias en Chile," Iglesia.cl.
[90] The gendered division of teaching and pastoral work in Chile and in the Church will be discussed at length in chapters 3 and 4.

are "sacramentalized" (i.e. Catholic in the sense that they've received the sacraments) but not "evangelized," (i.e. familiar with the Gospels and the Church's teachings on it), the report praises the ways in which the EBCs are accomplishing the latter, stating "fraternal contact is the normal climate for the transmission of the Message so that it is grafted into the life of man."[91] It even goes one step further and argues that "When the priest mediates the layperson without considering their responsibility in the Church, it contributes to keeping them as minors within the ecclesial community."[92] Though the language used in the original Spanish is not technically feminized, their framing represents an implicitly gendered and novel stance regarding ecclesial structures of authority, even as it does not directly name women. By criticizing the tendency of priests to mediate lay participation and warning that such mediation keeps lay Catholics "as minors within the ecclesial community," the report implicitly endorsed—or at least recognized the logistical reality of—a model of pastoral life in which religious instruction, community organization, and the transmission of the Gospel would increasingly occur outside the direct control of clergy. In practice, these responsibilities frequently fell to lay leaders within the base communities themselves. Given both the chronic shortage of priests and the demographic composition of many EBCs—where women often constituted the majority of active participants—this shift effectively expanded the space for women to assume roles as catechists, mutual-aid organizers, and community authorities.

The report therefore gestures toward a subtle but significant reconfiguration of ecclesial authority. While the episcopacy did not explicitly articulate a theology of women's leadership, its emphasis on lay responsibility and fraternal transmission of the Gospel legitimized forms of

[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

pastoral practice already in place that depended heavily on women's participation. As a result, the everyday functioning of EBCs often placed women in positions of spiritual and organizational leadership that exceeded the formal roles traditionally available to them within the institutional Church. This push for increasing the responsibility and leadership of laypeople within the Church is connected to the gender dynamics that the researchers for the report had observed. In the conclusion section of the report, Martinez writes to the Bishops that "Work with adolescent groups can have great pedagogical value in shaping community-minded attitudes and styles," something women were traditionally tasked with instilling; and that "awakening the community spirit in youth, who are not yet marked by an individualistic world, is a great task in the Church."[93] This was implicitly and culturally a task deemed suitable for women, not only because (as documented throughout the report) they make up a majority of the *Responsables* (Community Leaders) of the EBCs, but also because of the broader cultural acceptability around women's responsibility for the moral upbringing of minors–both in informal, domestic settings, as well as in formal schooling, where women made up a vast majority of the primary school professoriate.[94] In the sentences that follow, gender is again visible: "Each man must put their own particular and unique charisms at the service of the Church and must find fulfillment through them." The wording here in the original Spanish is important, because Martinez writes "*Cada hombre"* instead of "*Cada persona*" or even "*todos los hombres,*" which–though still gendered and exclusionary language-–one could argue (in the Castilian language tradition and in the context of the 1960s) is nevertheless meant to refer to "all people" or "all Catholics." Martinez's choice however of "each man" signals that he is intentionally referring to men specifically to use their "particular and unique charisms," which fits

[93] Martinez, "Experiencias en Chile," Iglesia.cl.
[94] The ways in which primary school teachers being disproportionately female shaped debates about education policy during the Frei and Allende years is the subject of chapter 3.

well within both Catholic traditional teachings of complementarity (that men and women possess specific, innate traits, inherent to their gender) as well as the fear that the Bishops noted in regarding working class men's deeper distrust of the Church. The call to "all men" reflects the episcopacy's fear of overly-feminizing Church spaces, where women—who cannot be ordained as priests—are carrying the bulk of casual daily evangelization, but it is the men–those who might one day become priests–that still need to devote themselves "at the service of the Church." The final recommendations of the report, posed as questions, hint at the limitations of more democratic participation in the Church, given cultural and Catholic gender beliefs..

The final remarks at the end of the study of EBCs commissioned by the Bishops is important in several ways. First, it illustrates the push for some within the clerical hierarchy to democratize the structure of the Church in ways that foreshadow the eventual demands of the priests who went on to form Cristianos Por el Socialismo, as it links democratic change within the Church to the need for more systemic change in Chile more broadly. In other words, it links the need for wealth redistribution to Catholicism, by asking "Will we dare to call 'community' those groups of people who, even though they claim to believe in Christ, do not share the benefits of labor fraternally, with misery and opulence at opposite extremes?"[95] For Martinez, the study of EBCs necessitates a criticism of the massive wealth inequality in Chile, something he clearly urged the Bishops to see in his report. Martinez's concluding question therefore points to a deeper tension, one that he raises directly: "What will be the new image of the priesthood within a Church driven by the spirit of base communities?"[96] By asking this question, he implicitly acknowledged that the pastoral renewal unfolding within EBCs—often led by lay participants and particularly by

[95] Martinez, "Experiencias en Chile."
[96] Ibid.

women—was reshaping the everyday distribution of religious authority. In a Church whose formal hierarchy remained exclusively male, the expanding role of lay leadership raised new questions about the future relevance and function of the priesthood itself.

El Departamento de los Laicos: CELAM's Increasing Scrutiny of Lay Movements

These competing understandings of the Church's role in society were not merely theoretical distinctions but shaped how Latin American bishops attempted to guide lay Catholic political participation in the years immediately following Vatican II. In November of 1969, the CELAM held its 12th Ordinary Meeting in Sao Paulo. There, the Latin American Catholic Bishops voted to merge two previously existing departments within the Church–the Department of the Apostolate of the Laity (DAL) and the Department of University Pastoral Care (DPU)– to form what would be known as the *Departamento de los Laicos* or the Department of the Laity. This move resulted in the subsequent meeting of the Episcopal Commission of the Department of the Laity which was held in Bogotá, from November 30 to December 5, 1970. The CELAM's increased concern with the role the laity should have in Church life, and the related issue of the role Catholics should play in their respective countries' political life, are the central issues addressed in the concluding document of the meeting. The *memoria* (proceedings) of the December 1970 meeting demonstrates this, noting that the Department of the Laity's purposes "obviously required prior basic information on the current situation of the lay apostolate in Latin America, which would reveal its specific problems, its characteristic tensions, and the variety of its organizational forms and methods."[97] The Department of the Laity contracted the services of

[97] Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), *Primer Encuentro del Departamento de Laicos* (Bogotá, Colombia: CELAM, 1973), 1-2, Bidegain Papers, Special Collections, Florida International University, Miami, FL.

one of the coordinators for the publication office of the International Movement of Catholic Students and International Young Catholic Students, known as the MIEC-JECI Documentation Center, named Cesar Aguiar, stating that "Aguiar, utilizing the network of correspondents and informants of the MIEC-JECI Documentation Center, which exists in most Latin American countries, carried out a baseline survey program on the situation of the lay apostolate in Latin America. The final report of this survey, previously discussed in Montevideo by a small team of experts, with the participation of a member of the Department, served as a baseline working instrument for the Bogotá meeting."[98]

The CELAM's discussion at the meeting revealed that many Bishops viewed lay participation in the Catholic Church and Catholic people's politicization as interrelated issues in need of clerical intervention. In one section of the document, they state "the big problem" facing the Department was how to

> represent and conceive this articulation between faith and political commitment, especially when the latter is of a radical nature[.] To clarify, let's consider the case of a revolutionary Christian militant. If we pose the problem to him, he might express himself thus at the level of his lived experience: 'I am not a revolutionary simply because I am a Christian; rather, being revolutionary is my way of being a Christian.' That is to say: on the one hand, it is not the content of my faith that determines my revolutionary option [commitment], but, on the other hand, that my faith informs the totality of my revolutionary existence.[99]

The Bishops then go on to state that "the structure of revolutionary behavior, common to believers and non-believers" follow the same pattern: an analysis of reality and "alternative projects," coupled with "a mobilizing utopia that channels human energies" and focuses on concepts such as

[98]Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), *Primer Encuentro del Departamento de Laicos* (Bogotá, Colombia: CELAM, 1973), 1-2.
[99] Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), *Primer Encuentro del Departamento de Laicos* (Bogotá, Colombia: CELAM, 1973), 39-40, Bidegain Papers, Special Collections, Florida International University, Miami, FL.

"the New Man," "Liberation," and the moral dimensions of hope and love; all of which culminate in taking the "revolutionary option."[100]

Though the bishops comprising the CELAM do not ever explicitly criticize Catholics taking a revolutionary approach to politics, the document nonetheless reflects uncertainty amongst Latin American bishops about how lay Catholics should participate in political life outside the institutional Church. Their efforts to collaborate more closely with the laity in Church affairs were therefore closely tied to broader debates about the proper relationship between Catholic faith and political engagement in the years following Vatican II. Early on in the conclusionary document from the 1970 Department of the Laity meeting, they write that "the community of believers finds itself in two basic situations that belong to the very structure of the Church and of Christian existence."[101] They describe these two situations as a state of "assembly"–described using the formal *ecclesia* to refer to being in settings such as Mass or other community settings when Catholics gather together–and the other as a "state of diaspora." This state of "diaspora" that they refer to is described as the dispersed Christians throughout the world who bring their faith into everyday life, work, politics, and society through their "witness and temporal commitment."[102] The conceptualization of these two "states" is useful for allowing us to understand the growing division amongst the progressive elements of the Catholic clergy (whose concern is mainly with the "diaspora"), versus the more traditional, conservative elements of the hierarchy, who are mainly concerned with the "assembly." In other words, the first meeting of the newly formed

[100] *Opción* in this context in Spanish means something more like "path" or "committment."
[101] Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), *Primer Encuentro del Departamento de Laicos* (Bogotá, Colombia: CELAM, 1973), 38.
[102] Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), *Primer Encuentro del Departamento de Laicos* (Bogotá, Colombia: CELAM, 1973), 39.

Department illustrates that divisions amongst the clergy during this period had to do not only with socio-political issues, but also their overlap with ecclesiological issues.

During the meeting, the bishops were divided into two working groups: one tasked with proposing solutions to better address issues of an *ecclesia*/assembly nature, the other to address issues related to the "diaspora." The group that discussed throughout the week the "diaspora" of Catholics throughout the world stated that the primary goal moving forward should be to "represent the inspiration of the laity in the Church" and stated that "the awareness of Bishops, priests and lay people to ensure and accentuate their presence in the Church and in the world" which "would imply, as a permanent task, the effort to achieve a quantitative increase of committed lay people."[103] They stated that more effort should be concentrated on organizing regional meetings of Bishops, priests, and lay people to "ensure that it [the Church] is representative of the reality of the laity in our continent."[104] Notably, they included a quote from the well-known socialist theologian Paul Tillich at the end of their group's conclusion: "The assembly is the space where Christians can do two things: withdraw from the situation in order to attack the situation." For some Bishops then–and presumably other priests–the Catholic Church in Latin America should offer formal channels (such as prayer groups, lay associations, Mass etc) not *in lieu of* revolutionary social and political change, but as places where Catholics could come together in order to "withdraw" from social and political realities temporarily, to then later return and "attack" or transform them. This discussion group's inclusion of a socialist theologian's quotation, coupled with their insistence that Bishops and priests should have to regularly meet with the laity and take their lived experiences into consideration with regards to Church teaching are connected to their ecclesiological vision. This is confirmed in their assertion that "In the current Latin American

[103] Ibid, 42.
[104] Ibid.

context, the Church has redefined its mission as a 'sign of liberation' in alignment with the continent's historical process, thus translating the mission attributed to the Church by Vatican II's ecclesiology: 'the sacrament of the salvation of the world.'"[105] In other words, some Bishops saw a more democratic Church structure and collaboration with the laity in the social and political spheres as the natural continuation to the "new ecclesiology," they thought was embodied by the Second Vatican Council.

The other half of the bishops, whose discussion group revolved around "the assembly," instead point to more hierarchical arrangements rather than collaborative ones. They proposed "as a long-term objective of the Department, to guide Episcopal Conferences on the problems of the lay apostolate and promote the committed participation of the laity in the double area of Church-world" and argued that priests and Bishops should "continuously interpret and accompany, from a pastoral perspective and with the participation of laypeople themselves, the process of the laity's integration into both Latin American reality and the Church, while simultaneously valuing their contribution toward the purification of the Church and the indispensable ministry of the Church in articulating the faith within temporal commitments."[106] Though the focus here is still on clerical engagement with the laity and is ostensibly encouraging lay Catholics to participate in the social and political spheres, the overall tone of their suggestions is still one of caution and paternalism. In their framing, that participation in "the Latin American reality" is meant to be *guided* by the clergy. This is most evident in the concluding section of their discussion, where they list their ideas for how to "implement this objective" of guiding Catholics' participation in the modern world. They suggest launching "documentation, studies, and publications," to monitor the laity; they

[105]Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), *Primer Encuentro del Departamento de Laicos* (Bogotá, Colombia: CELAM, 1973), 42.
[106] Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), *Primer Encuentro del Departamento de Laicos* (Bogotá, Colombia: CELAM, 1973), 43-44.

suggest offering "interpretation, reflection, and development via study seminars," to lay people, and suggest the Department of the Laity should serve as a "mediating body between the hierarchy and the laity." Specifically they state that that mediation "Toward the hierarchy…should help to highlight and appreciate the contribution of laypeople to the Church, representing their concerns, struggles, needs, and aspirations," and "Toward the laity…should help to revalue the priestly ministry as a service dedicated to nourishing, articulating, and communicating the faith within temporal commitments."[107] Their suggestions are telling in several ways. Firstly, this group within the CELAM differs from the previous in that it is not trying to bring priests and Bishops towards a better understanding of the laity's lived realities, such that the Church and its teachings or activities better reflect that reality; instead, this group wants to bring the *laity* closer to the official hierarchy. Second, this group calls for empirical analysis *of* (documentation and publications) and *for* the laity (and study seminars), rather than a more immediate, direct interface between the laity and the clergy. Finally, in aiming to "revalue the priestly ministry," this group foreshadows what the Chilean priests who formed Cristianos Por el Socialismo a year later argued: that the priesthood was becoming a less prestigious and/or less relevant position in the eyes of lay Catholics. This concern also echoes the anxieties articulated in the Chilean study of Ecclesial Base Communities discussed earlier. There, Father Martínez concluded his report by asking what the "new image of the priesthood" might be in a Church increasingly animated by the spirit of base communities. His question captured the same underlying tension evident in the larger CELAM debates: as lay Catholics assumed greater responsibility for pastoral and social initiatives—often within communities led in practice by lay women—the traditional role of the priesthood within everyday Catholic life appeared increasingly uncertain.

[107] Ibid, 44-45.

The Emergence of Christians for Socialism

On April 16, 1971, five months into the presidency of Salvador Allende, a group of 80 Catholic priests, known as "Los Ochenta," published a statement that was reprinted in several journals as well as national newspapers, titled "Declaración del Grupo de los 80: Participación de los 80 en la construcción del socialismo en Chile" ["Declaration of the Group of 80: Christians' Participation in the Construction of Socialism in Chile"]. This letter began by introducing its authors: "A group of 80 priests who have lived alongside the working class have gathered to analyze the current process that Chile is experiencing as it begins the construction of socialism."[108] In their "Declaration," these 80 priests echo the Bishops of Chile with regards to unequal educational access when they mention that this means many Chileans have a "limited access to culture."[109] They also echo and expand the CELAM's Medellín conclusions when they state "We support the measures that aim toward the social appropriation of the means of production, such as the nationalization of mining resources, the socialization of banks and monopolistic industries, the acceleration and deepening of Agrarian Reform, etc."[110] Even in their assertion that there is a serious lack of class consciousness amongst the working class in Chile and that this is encouraged by the dominating classes, Los Ochenta do not deviate from Catholic Social Doctrine which condemns class warfare. Instead they call for unity of the working class without directly touching on violence (against people of other classes) as a means of achieving it. In other words, what is clear from this Declaration is that these priests did not see their beliefs and their statements as being antithetical to Catholicism or even challenging established dogma, but rather as the

[108] Michael Ramminger, *Éramos Iglesia en medio del Pueblo* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2019), 272, pdf.
[109] Letter by Los Obispos de Chile, "Orientaciones Pastorales 1968," May 1, 1968, La Conferencia Episcopal de Chile.
[110] Michael Ramminger, *Éramos Iglesia en medio del Pueblo*, 273, pdf.

extension of it. Furthermore, they seem to view it as the natural conclusion to Christian Democracy in Chile, when they write "There is still a long road ahead; but the evolution that has taken place in both Marxist and Christian circles today allows for common action toward the historical project that the country has set for itself." These 80 priests represent not only the increasing efforts throughout the 1960s by the Chilean Bishops to bring the clergy and the laity closer together and to monitor the activities of EBCs; they also illustrate the reality that many who were stationed in urban and rural poor areas became increasingly sympathetic to the plight of Chile's working class, to the point of supporting a socialist government. The message received the published support of the Catholic University's theology faculty, adhering to all the main points of the Ochenta's declaration, as well as a short reprimand from the Chilean Episcopal Conference's office. Despite the fact that the Ochenta's "Declaration" had cited the Cardinal Raúl Silva Henriquez (Archbishop of Santiago) himself– who had publicly stated that "In socialism, there are more evangelical values than in capitalism"–the Episcopal Conference of Chile's statement criticized the "Declaration." The purported issue the Chilean Episcopal Conference took with the Declaration issued by Los Ochenta was not the political statements themselves, but rather the fact that *priests* making these statements could be an abuse of their office, noting that though a priest–like any citizen–had a right to vote as they prefer, "he should never give those preferences moral authority based on his priestly role."[111] The Chilean Bishops argued that "when a priest publicly declares his political position, it risks dividing the Christian community and disrupting their unity with their pastors."[112] The choice to emphasize that the 80 priests' public political declaration of support for the Popular Unity government could jeopardize laypeople's "unity with their pastors," once again speaks to the fact

[111] Miguel Ángel Ferrando, "El Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano 'Cristianos por el Socialismo'," *Teología y Vida* 13, no. 6 (1972): 119–123.
[112] Ibid., 123.

that some Bishops clearly favored tighter control and hierarchical relationships between the laity and the clergy amidst the rise of EBCs and Catholic political radicalization in some circles.

Los Ochenta's political views were also tied to their ecclesiological commitments—that is, their ideas about how authority *within* the Church should be structured and about the proper relationship between clergy, laity, and political engagement—but scholarship has largely focused on the conference's political declarations while overlooking these internal ecclesiological implications. Two years later, the 80 priests had expanded to include more Chilean priests and theologians,[113] and decided to organize a conference that included like-minded priests, theologians, and lay people from throughout Latin America.[114] They titled it the "First International Congress of Christians for Socialism" and hosted a week-long series of discussions, lectures, and workshops in a textile union hall in Santiago from April 23rd to April 30th 1972. This conference garnered international attention because of its political nature, and because the priests who organized the conference chose the date so that it would coincide with the III United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which was also being hosted that same week in Santiago, bringing in numerous foreign journalists. In the opening address of the First International Congress of Christians for Socialism, "The incorporation of women in the processes of change" is listed as one of the ten central topics of the conference.[115] This topic and its discussion at the conference were both political *and* ecclesiological. As demonstrated previously in this chapter, women were taking on increasingly important roles within ECBs and

[113] By that point they were often referred to in the press as "Los 200" because 200 Chilean priests had openly joined the movement.

[114] Historian Luz Maria Diaz Valdes noted in her work that "The invitation was directly extended to the leaders of other leftist clerical movements, such as the Argentinian Movement of Priests for the Third World (MSTM), Movements of Laity for the Third World (MLTM), the Peruvian clerical group National Office of Social Information (ONIS), Golconda, from Colombia, and a Protestant group known as Social Institute for Latin America (ISAL)."

[115] Ferrando, "El Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano 'Cristianos por el Socialismo'","120.

were likely more involved in Church parishes than Catholic men were. This fact was something that the 80 priests who lived in urban and rural working-class settings as well as the other Chilean organizers of the conference were well aware of. It would also help explain why one of the conferences' discussion groups asserted that the Catholic hierarchy "must stop the project of continuing to gather priests alone. The clergy is a species that is disappearing. Increasingly, Christian communities are becoming visible, fundamentally equal, where some members will exercise specific functions linked to an institutionalized ministry."[116] This statement is extremely important, even though scholars of the Chilean Catholic Church have not touched on the ecclesiological vision it implies. The attendees of the First International Congress of Christians for Socialism clearly had an understanding–informed by their lived experiences amongst working class Catholics–that the roles of women and priests in the Church were organically changing, and in response, they envisioned a more egalitarian and democratically structured Church as something that could support that organic growth. Furthermore, their political beliefs (to support the spread and/or fruition of socialism) cannot be untangled from their own perception that Catholic Social Teaching supported socialism. This was manifested in the fact that high-ranking officials such as Cardinal Raúl Silva and the Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs Clodomiro Almeyda were invited and indeed attended the conference. The Grupo de los Ochenta very explicitly stated that they saw Christians for Socialism not as a separatist movement within the Church, but rather the natural culmination and conclusion to Vatican II's mandates to bring the Church into the modern world, and Medellín's commands to bring about "liberation." Their political commitments therefore cannot be understood simply as external ideological influences on Catholic actors. Rather, they emerged from a particular ecclesiological vision of the Church—one that emphasized lay

[116] Ferrando, "El Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano 'Cristianos por el Socialismo'," 123.

participation, social equality, and the Church's responsibility to transform unjust social structures. Recognizing this ecclesiological dimension helps explain why the political positions adopted by these priests were understood by participants not as departures from Catholic doctrine, but as expressions of it.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that liberationist Catholic politics in Chile did not originate solely in theological debates or episcopal pronouncements, but rather emerged through everyday interactions between clergy and politically active lay communities. More importantly, it has demonstrated that the emergence of Cristianos por el Socialismo in Chile was not an abrupt radicalization of the Catholic Church, nor simply the product of a small group of politically engaged clergy: it represented the culmination of a decade-long transformation within Chilean Catholicism in which the political experiences of lay Catholics—especially those organized through Ecclesial Base Communities and popular education initiatives—reshaped the relationship between faith, social justice, and political action. These developments unfolded within a Church increasingly defined by tensions between hierarchical authority and grassroots participation. As I have highlighted throughout, the pastoral reforms encouraged by the Second Vatican Council and later articulated at Medellín expanded the scope of lay participation in Catholic life, but they also generated new debates about the boundaries of ecclesiastical authority. In Chile, these debates were especially visible in the growth of Ecclesial Base Communities, where lay leadership—often exercised by working-class women—became central to the everyday transmission of Catholic teaching and social activism. Within this context, the formation of Cristianos por el Socialismo in the early 1970s represented the most visible expression of these transformations that—given the democratic election of a socialist—were able to germinate in Chile in ways distinct from elsewhere

in the region. Although the organization existed for only a short period before the 1973 military coup dismantled the broader socialist project in Chile, its significance extended beyond its membership numbers. [117]

By bringing together priests, religious workers, and lay activists who viewed socialist politics as compatible with Catholic doctrine, the movement crystallized years of dialogue between grassroots Catholic activism and clerical engagement with social justice struggles. The participation of figures such as Clodomiro Almeyda and the message of support from President Salvador Allende at the congress reflected the broader, unique political environment in which these debates unfolded. [118] For many Chilean Catholics, the Popular Unity project appeared to offer a political framework compatible with Catholic social teaching, particularly its emphasis on social justice, economic equality, and democratic pluralism. Crucially, the ideological convergence represented by Cristianos por el Socialismo cannot be understood without examining the grassroots spaces where Catholic political consciousness was formed, and the gendered division of the labor associated with that formation. Popular education initiatives, base communities, and parish organizations—many of them led or sustained by women—served as sites where religious belief and political commitment became mutually reinforcing. In these environments, education was not simply the transmission of doctrine but a process through which lay Catholics interpreted their lived experiences through the language of Catholic Social Doctrine. At the same time, Jesuit-led research centers such as CIAS, DESAL, and CIDE sought to translate these grassroots experiences into the language of the social sciences, producing studies on popular religiosity, education, and marginality that brought clergy, lay activists, and state policymakers into

[117] By 1973, estimates of the number of clergy participants in Cristianos por el Socialismo were around three hundred, nearly 12 percent of the total number of priests in Chile in the early 1970s. See: Smith, Brian. *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.
[118] Luz María Díaz de Valdés, *Leftist Christians in Chile, 1957–1973* (PhD diss., Tufts University, 2018), 152-153.

conversation about the Church's role in addressing Chile's social and economic inequalities. The story of Cristianos por el Socialismo therefore reveals a broader transformation in Chilean Catholicism during the 1960s and early 1970s: a shift from a Church defined primarily by hierarchical authority toward one increasingly shaped by the political experiences of its lay members. In the chapters that follow, I examine how these transformations profoundly influenced different Catholic sectors' views of education, political organizing, and gender relations, demonstrating how Catholic debates over schooling, lay participation, and social reform became central to the political conflicts that culminated in Chile's democratic road to socialism, and eventually, its destruction. These developments unfolded alongside the ambitious reform program of Eduardo Frei Montalva's Christian Democratic government, which sought to implement Catholic Social Doctrine through state-led modernization projects in agrarian reform, education, and social development. Frei's so-called "Revolution in Liberty" not only reshaped Chile's political economy but also expanded the spaces through which Catholic citizens—especially university students—became directly involved in projects of national transformation. The following chapter examines how the Christian Democratic reform project unintentionally contributed to the politicization of Catholic university students, many of whom would ultimately conclude that the Christian Democratic vision of reform did not go far enough.

Chapter Two: The 'Revolution in Liberty' and its Discontents: Catholic Students and the Limits of Christian Democratic Reform

Introduction

The emergence of liberationist Catholic politics in Chile did not occur solely within grassroots ecclesial communities. As the previous chapter demonstrated, lay Catholics

increasingly interpreted political engagement as a form of religious praxis during the 1960s, particularly through popular education initiatives, community organizing, and new forms of pastoral activism. Yet these developments also unfolded within a broader political context shaped by the Christian Democratic Party (Partido Demócrata Cristiano, PDC) and its ambitious project to modernize Chilean society through what President Eduardo Frei Montalva famously called a "Revolution in Liberty." Inspired by Catholic Social Doctrine and developmentalist visions of social reform, the Frei administration sought to address longstanding inequalities through sweeping programs in agrarian reform, education, and community development. These initiatives were widely understood by contemporaries as an attempt to translate Catholic social thought into state policy.[119]

This chapter argues that the Christian Democratic (PDC)'s reform project unintentionally contributed to the politicization and fragmentation of Catholic university students. Although the PDC initially appeared to embody the political aspirations of many Catholic intellectuals and lay activists, the implementation of its reform programs—particularly in the countryside and in

[119] See for example Phillip J. Williams *The Catholic Church and Politics in Nicaragua and Costa Rica*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989; Thomas Bruneau, *The Church in Brazil: The Politics of Religion*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982. Both authors frame Catholic Social Doctrine as the embodiment of the Church's desire to influence society and political order, and frame this as a central objective of the institutional Church. J. Bryan Hehir in "Catholicism and Democracy: Conflict, Change, and Collaboration," in *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context*, ed. John Witte, Jr. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 24, notes that Vatican II settled that direct political involvement (e.g., association with political parties, priests or nuns in political office) is officially, doctrinally ruled out, but "a socially activist role for the church is legitimized and encouraged" and that "This style of social ministry involves both the teaching-preaching role of the church and use of church institutions to come to the defense and aid of those under repression or those marginalized in the economy," all of which helps explain the formation of Christian Democratic Parties during the Cold War, and the Chilean episcopacy's close (though unofficial) alliance with the Chilean PDC. Paul E. Sigmund, in "'Christian Democracy, Liberation Theology, the Catholic Right, and Democracy in Latin America,'" 1993, in *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context*, ed. John Witte, Jr. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 190, echoes this view, noting that the main commitments of Christian Democratic parties were political democracy, religious pluralism, and human rights, and that their programs and ideology favored a pluralist welfare-state democracy as the form of government most faithful to the gospels' teachings (echoing not only Vatican II, but also Jacques Maritain's political philosophy's emphasis on personalism, pluralism, and communitarianism).

education—exposed students to the structural inequalities those reforms sought, but often failed, to resolve. Through their participation in university reform movements, agrarian reform brigades, literacy campaigns, and rural development programs, Catholic university students encountered firsthand the social conditions that reformist policy aimed to transform. These experiences often led them to question whether the Christian Democratic model of gradual reform adequately addressed Chile's structural inequalities. By the late 1960s, a growing number of Catholic students and young professionals began to move toward more radical critiques of the PDC, becoming increasingly open to the political alternatives offered by the left.[120]

In making this argument, the chapter challenges a common historiographical tendency to portray Catholic university students as uniformly opposed to the policies of the Unidad Popular government. While conservative student movements—most notably the *gremialistas* at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC)—would later become prominent actors in Pinochet's political base, Catholic student activism during the late 1960s was far more heterogeneous than studies of student activism of the era usually concede. Many students who had initially supported the Christian Democratic project became disillusioned with the pace and limits of reform, and some ultimately aligned themselves with the broader currents of Christian leftism that emerged in Chile during this period. Rather than representing a sudden rupture in Catholic political thought, the radicalization of these students grew directly out of their participation in reform initiatives that were themselves grounded in Catholic social ideals. Historians of Latin America more broadly have recognized Catholic student radicalism and the heterogeneity of

[120] This was most visible in the 1968 creation of the Popular Unitary Action Movement (MAPU) in 1969, and the Christian Left (IC) in 1971, both of which were political parties of (mostly young) Christian Democrats who broke with the PDC and formally joined the Popular Unity coalition led by Salvador Allende.

Catholic political currents.[121] In much of the Chilean scholarship however, the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC) is mainly treated as the institutional base of conservative student politics: Catholic student activism is often discussed through the filter of *gremialismo* and its leader, Jaime Guzmán, who went on to be a chief architect of Pinochet's constitution and other dictatorship-era legislation.[122] In other words, rather than analyzing how the PUC experienced 1960s student politics, histories focused on the Catholic Universities of Chile often highlight it as the birthplace the gremialist movement or of the "Chicago Boys"-–the PUC and University of Chicago-trained economists who went on to draft some of the most extreme neoliberal economic reforms of the Pinochet years.[123] Recent scholarship on Chile's student movement has emphasized the centrality of leftist student activism, university reform, and revolutionary organizing, often as mutually constitutive processes; but those that do offer little sustained attention to Catholic student actors

[121] Jeffrey Klaiber's *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America* emphasizes the role of Catholic youth and student movements in radicalizing Church politics across the region. Gustavo Morello's *The Catholic Church and Argentina's Dirty War* shows Catholic lay activism—including student movements—as key to liberationist politics. Scott Mainwaring's *The Catholic Church and Politics in Brazil, 1916–1985* includes discussion of the Brazilian JUC (Juventude Universitária Católica) and highlights how Catholic students were central actors in radical student politics. Jaime Pensado's more recent *Love and Despair: How Catholic Activism Shaped Politics and the Counterculture in Modern Mexico* illustrates how progressive Catholic currents and actors shaped a unique Mexican counterculture of the 1960s, giving particular emphasis to students throughout.

[122] Scholarship on the University Reform Movement of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and the broader student movement has frequently emphasized the emergence of conservative Catholic student sectors—particularly the Movimiento Gremial and its leadership—in accounts of university conflict. See Cristián Cox, *La reforma en la Universidad Católica de Chile* (Santiago: SUR, 1985); Manuel Antonio Garretón, *Notas sobre los orígenes y desarrollo de la reforma en la Universidad Católica de Chile (1967–1973)* (Santiago: FLACSO, 1985); Pablo Rubio Apiolaza, "El Cardenal Silva Henríquez frente al movimiento gremial. Progresismo y conservadurismo en la reforma universitaria de la Universidad Católica de Chile, 1967," *Revista de Historia y Geografía* 21 (2007): 159–176; and Carlos Huneeus, *Movimiento estudiantil y generación de elites dirigentes* (Santiago: CPU, 1988). In these accounts, Catholic student actors appear most prominently in relation to anti-reform mobilization and the formation of conservative intellectual and political networks. At the same time, other studies of the period highlight reformist and democratizing currents within Catholic student politics, particularly within the Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad Católica (FEUC). See Víctor Muñoz Tamayo, "Los jóvenes, la política y los movimientos estudiantiles en el Chile reciente: ciclos sociopolíticos entre 1967 y 2017," *Última Década* 27, no. 52 (2019): 119–141.

[123] See for example Sebastian Edwards' *The Chile Project: The Story of the Chicago Boys and the Downfall of Neoliberalism* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2023) which focuses on the institutional history of the PUC's scholarship and exchange practice with the University of Chicago and the resulting of dramatic change from the late 1950s onwards of the PUC's economics department and curricula.

as a distinct political force in the broader late 1960s student mobilization.[124] I offer instead a nuanced analysis of the various political blocs at the Pontifical Catholic University during the Frei and Allende presidencies to illustrate not only the heterogeneity of Catholic student politics, but more importantly, the PDC's own role in fomenting Catholic students' discontent on both the right and the left.

The chapter proceeds in four sections. The first situates the rise of the Christian Democratic Party within the broader expansion of Catholic lay activism and international Christian Democratic networks during the Cold War, while emphasizing the particular importance of Frei's reform agenda for mobilizing Catholic youth. The second examines how university students became involved in agrarian reform and literacy campaigns, tracing how these programs exposed them to rural inequality and shaped their evolving political commitments. The third explores the growing tensions within Catholic student organizations and university politics during the late 1960s, highlighting how experiences in reform projects contributed to ideological fragmentation within the Catholic student milieu. The final section examines how these divisions became increasingly visible in campus politics on the eve of the Unidad Popular period, as Catholic students split across competing political visions for Chile's future. By situating Catholic student radicalization within the reformist context of the Christian Democratic period, this chapter demonstrates that the political fragmentation of Catholic Chile during the late 1960s was not simply the product of

[124] See Marian E. Schlotterbeck, *Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende's Chile* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), particularly chapter 1, "'We Lived Those Years with a Lot of Passion': University Reform and the Rise of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria." Patrick Barr-Melej's *Psychedelic Chile: Youth Counterculture, and Politics on the Road to Socialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017) despite covering youth culture and student politics throughout only really mentions the PUC or Catholic students of the era insofar as he briefly discusses that the broader Chilean University Reform Movement started there, led by the reformist wing of the PDC-led student federation (See chapter 2) and a 1968 church occupation, both of which he frames as isolated incidents rather than evidence of a Catholic brand of youth counterculture. He also mentions episcopal reactions to youth culture scattered throughout the book, but Catholic youth as a distinct sector is not a focal point of the work.

external ideological influences, or something which emerged during the polarization of the Unidad Popular years. Rather, it emerged from the internal contradictions of a reform project that sought to modernize Chilean society while preserving a centrist political vision rooted in Catholic Social Doctrine. The spaces of participation created by the Christian Democratic state ultimately produced new forms of Catholic political engagement—some of which would move beyond the boundaries of Christian Democracy itself.

Rise of the Christian Democratic Party

The Chilean Christian Democratic Party (PDC), formally established in 1957, emerged from earlier Catholic political movements that sought to translate the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine into a modern democratic framework. Across Latin America and Europe, Christian Democratic leaders promoted a vision of social reform grounded in Christian humanism, emphasizing political democracy, social justice, and the rejection of both communism and unfettered capitalism.[125] In this sense, Catholic Social Doctrine—as interpreted by political leaders and Church hierarchy—was not inherently radical, but rather oriented toward reformist solutions that sought to avoid both class conflict and revolutionary rupture.[126] The election of Eduardo Frei

[125] Centrist Democrat International, "Historia de la IDC-CDI" (paper presented at Organización Demócrata Cristiana de América, Montevideo, Uruguay, April 23, 1947), https://democraciacristiana.com.ar/pdf/Estatuto-de-la-ODCA.pdf. On April 23, 1947, politicians from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay (including future Chilean President Eduardo Frei Montalva) met in Montevideo, Uruguay to discuss the need to form a supranational organization founded on the principles of Christian humanism that would promote policy and political parties that encouraged "a true political, economic and cultural democracy…within the methods of freedom, respect for the human person and development of the spirit of community against totalitarian dangers" in their own countries.he concluding document (which was also signed by representatives from Bolivia and Peru who could not attend the meeting) became the foundational document of the Organización Demócrata Cristiana de América (Democratic Christian Organization of America or ODCA), which still exists today.

[126] "Common Goals: Conclusions and Resolutions of the Congress" (paper presented at The First International Christian Democratic Congress, Paris, France, 1956), 10-15. In 1950, a group of political exiles from various parts of Europe met in New York City to form the Christian Democratic Union of Central Europe, which maintained

Montalva in 1964 marked the consolidation of this reformist project. Moreover, his election coincided with a broader shift in Catholic political identity. As historian Brian Smith noted, Frei's election and the rise of the PDC in other municipal elections between 1958 and 1964 represented a dramatic reordering in the way religious practice correlated to political preference. According to surveys conducted in Santiago one month before the 1964 election by the Center of Public Opinion, "among Catholics of every category of religious practice there was a significant shift away from the Right, a substantial gain for the Center and a slight increase for the Left. Whereas in 1958 a plurality of all types of Catholics identified with the Right, six years later those who attended Mass regularly or occasionally were decidedly more in the Center and a plurality of nonpracticing Catholics defined themselves as leftists."[127] In postconciliar Chile, Frei's "Revolution in Liberty" promised sweeping transformations in agrarian relations, education, and social welfare while maintaining a commitment to democratic institutions and gradual reform—something that, as

contact and coordinated with the ODCA and other supranational groups that adhered to the principles of social-democracy and Christian humanism. In the summer of 1956, the ODCA and the CDUCE along with their Western European counterparts, the Nouvelles Équipes Internationales (NEI) met in Paris. This 1956 meeting (sometimes referred to as the First International Congress of Christian Democracy) consisted of 33 delegations from 28 countries. The concluding documents from this meeting are significant because they reference the previous regional meetings of Christian Democratic parties that took place in Montevideo, and another in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Building from those meetings they made several assertions and plans for Latin America specifically. They stated that the main objectives of Christian Democratic parties were: "effective representative political democracy [and] implementation of an economic democracy which permits the participation of all in the natural and industrial wealth of the continent with the traditional target of improving conditions of hygiene, health, and civilization in Latin American nations" and the "strengthening of social democracy, which implies justice for all and the emancipation of the working masses, bringing them to the highest levels of life." They emphasized throughout the document their firm "rejection of communism, imperialistic exploitation, and colonialism." The Latin American portion of the concluding documents state that a key condition of bringing these goals to fruition would be inter-American cooperation and foreign investment. Specifically, they state that the implementation of the "Charter of the Organization of American States, by a form of mutual assistance which does not tend to continental isolation but rather, is prepared to cooperate" in accordance with their "understanding of the Inter-American system" was necessary, in order to give legal and political form to continental solidarity. They took care to note that this continental solidarity "implies agreement between the United States and 20 countries of Latin America [because] they have a common destiny which binds all of them to unite in facing the grave problems and threats of the contemporary world" emphasizing that nothing was more important than "balanc[ing] reasonably the advantages and the obligations, complementary and reciprocal, between both Americas." The document repeatedly references agrarian reform (i.e. land redistribution to peasant workers), and more cooperative relationships between business owners, management, and laborers such that all received equitable compensation.

[127] Brian Smith, *The Church and Politics in Chile: Challenges to Modern Catholicism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 107.

Sebastián Hurtado Torres and others have shown, resonated broadly because it offered a vision of development that addressed widespread economic inequality, without embracing the structural overhaul proposed by the Marxist Left.[128] [129] His 56 percent electoral victory reflected this appeal to a wide constituency—particularly to those who sought reform but feared revolution. Yet, because of its connection to Catholic Social Doctrine (which some of the laity interpreted as having more in common with socialism than capitalism), internal divisions were all but inevitable, and a left wing versus a right wing quickly emerged within the PDC.[130]

Internal divisions notwithstanding, the PDC's positioning also aligned closely with U.S. Cold War priorities. As Torres notes, U.S. officials viewed the coalition of Communists and Socialists that would later formally become the Popular Unity ticket "as a mortal threat to Chilean democracy," and saw Frei's project as a viable alternative, capable of stabilizing Chile within the Western political and economic order.[131] As a result, the United States provided significant financial and political support to both Frei's campaign and his subsequent reform initiatives.[132] Yet this support was not without hesitation. A 1964 memorandum circulated among Alliance for Progress officials warned that while Allende represented a "horrible" outcome, Frei's ambitious reform agenda might still produce unintended consequences, including increased demands for U.S.

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[128] Sebastian Hurtado Torres, *The Gathering Storm: Eduardo Frei's Revolution in Liberty and Chile's Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 13.

[129] Allen Wells' book *Latin America's Democratic Crusade: The Transnational Struggle against Dictatorship, 1920s-1960s* (Yale University Press, 2023), highlights this not only of Frei's political trajectory but also that of other Christian Democratic parties' leaders in the mid-twentieth century.

[130] As Mary Hobgood points out in *Catholic Social Teaching and Economic Theory: Paradigms in Conflict* (pg 96-98), the type of corporatist thought found in the writings of Leo XIII and Pius XI predisposed the church both to a critique of the individualism of capitalism but also acceptance of its hierarchical arrangements. She argues that the popes' structural analysis led to a critique of capitalism, but their need to protect the church from the threat of communism led to an acceptance of a moderated capitalism (pg 106-123).

[131] Sebastian Hurtado Torres, *The Gathering Storm: Eduardo Frei's Revolution in Liberty and Chile's Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 3.

[132] Michael J. Francis and Hernan Vera-Godoy, "Chile: Christian Democracy to Marxism," *The Review of Politics* 33, no. 3 (1971): 323. In the years following Frei's election and PDC politicians' rapid success in Parliamentary elections, Chile was the Latin American country receiving the most US foreign aid per capita.

funding and internal divisions within the Christian Democratic Party itself.[133] Advising a cautious approach, U.S. officials expressed concern that insufficient or misdirected support could ultimately result in "permanent change for the worse"—and even lead to "Allende next time around."[134] These tensions reflected the inherently precarious position of the Christian Democratic project. Frei's administration sought to balance competing pressures: appealing to reformist sectors of Chilean society, maintaining support from the Catholic hierarchy, and satisfying U.S. expectations for moderate, anti-communist development. Yet, while the PDC presented itself as a unified Catholic political alternative, its reform agenda in practice required the mobilization of a wide range of social actors—including students, professionals, Church-run institutions, and lay volunteers—to implement programs in agrarian reform, literacy, and rural development.

In fact, many of these initiatives built directly on earlier efforts led by the Chilean Catholic hierarchy itself. Beginning in the late 1950s, Church-affiliated organizations such as the Institute of Rural Education (IER) had already established literacy programs, rural training centers, and cooperative development projects, while figures like Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez and Bishop Manuel Larraín promoted limited land redistribution and agrarian reform through ecclesiastical channels.[135] [136] The Frei administration thus expanded and formalized a reformist infrastructure that was already deeply rooted in Catholic institutional life, creating a continuum between

[133] *Foreign Relations of the United States,* 1964-1968, Volume XXXI, South and Central America; Mexico, (Washington, D.C. February 28, 1964) Document 266.
[134] *Foreign Relations of the United States,* 1964-1968, Volume XXXI, South and Central America; Mexico, (Washington, D.C. February 28, 1964) Document 266.
[135] In 1956, several priests and bishops created the Instituto de Educación Rural (Rural Education Institute) and by 1962, Cardenal Raúl Silva had already begun overseeing the turnover of some Church lands to the State. He and Bishop Manuel Larraín went on to form the Instituto de Promoción Agraria (Institute of Agrarian Promotion, INPROA) in 1963.
[136] Robert Austin, *The State, Literacy, and Popular Education in Chile, 1964-1990* (Lexington Books, 2003), 115-117. That same year, the Union de Federaciones Universitarias Chilena (UFUCH, Union of Chilean University Confederations)–with U.S. State Department funding and organizational input–launched its own literacy campaign, alongside the Catholic Church, via its existing IER centers.

ecclesiastical activism and state-led development. For Catholic university students in particular, these initiatives created new opportunities to engage directly with the social inequalities that Christian Democratic reform sought to address. As the following sections demonstrate, participation in these programs would prove formative, exposing students to the limits of gradual reform and contributing to the ideological fragmentation of Catholic student movements by the early 1970s.

The Catholic Clergy and PDC initiatives

Collaboration between the Christian Democratic government and the Catholic Church was central to the implementation of Frei's reform agenda, but it did not begin with his presidency. Rather, Frei's program built upon reform initiatives that the Chilean Catholic hierarchy had already begun in the late 1950s and early 1960s, creating a formal link between ecclesiastical activism and state-led development. This convergence not only enabled the expansion of agrarian reform and literacy campaigns, but also opened new spaces for Catholic university students to participate directly in projects of social transformation, under the banner of Catholic identity itself. Shortly after his election, Eduardo Frei Montalva sought to formalize this collaboration. On November 25, 1964 Frei wrote a letter to the apostolic nuncio of Chile, Egano Righi Lambertini.[137] In his letter, Frei framed agrarian reform as a matter of human dignity, emphasizing the need "to incorporate the thousands of peasants who work the land into a property system that provides support to them and their families."[138] He explicitly called on the Church to participate by placing its lands at the disposal of the state for redistribution. This appeal resonated with concerns already circulating

[137] An apostolic nuncio (often called a papal nuncio in English) serves as the diplomatic representative of the Holy See for a region or country. Lambertini served as nuncio to Chile from 1963-1967.

[138] Eduardo Frei Montalva to Egano Righi Lambertini, November 25, 1964, Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Santiago, Chile.

within the Chilean clergy, particularly clerical anxieties that the Church had come to be identified with landed elites in rural areas.[139] In response, the Church transferred over 5,500 hectares of land—roughly 11 percent of its holdings—to be redistributed as cooperatives, signaling a significant shift in the Church's relationship to agrarian reform and to popular sectors more broadly.[140]

Importantly, these developments were not initiated by the Christian Democratic state alone. Throughout the early 1960s, the Church had already begun organizing in rural communities and promoting non-Marxist forms of peasant mobilization through diocesan programs and national organizations.[141] At the same time, it launched a "national literacy campaign" that would later serve as a model for the Frei administration's own initiatives. A 1962 episcopal planning document outlined an ambitious, nationwide effort characterized as "non-partisan" and "deeply

[139] The Catholic clergy's concern with this issue comes up repeatedly in letters and reports written by priests who spent time working with ecclesial base communities (sometimes referred to as basic Christian communities) in Chile throughout the sixties. The issue is also discussed several times in the concluding documents of the II Episcopal Council of Latin America (more commonly referred to as the Medellín Council) of 1968.

[140] Sergio Gómez Echenique, *Anales de la Universidad de Chile*, vol. 6, *50 Años de la Reforma Agraria* (Santiago, Chile: Revista Anales, 2017), 5.

[141] Hannah Stewart-Gambino, *The Church and Politics in the Chilean Countryside* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 110, 117, 132-134. Stewart-Gambino highlights how the Church hierarchy throughout the 1950s and 1960s began local programs specifically designed to promote peasant interests in their dioceses and several new peasant organizations at the national level, such as t the Christian Peasants Union (UCC) the National Association of Peasant Organizations (ANOC) and the Independent Peasant Movement (MCI). The UCC specifically channelled the majority of their resources into the formation of "free unions" (*sindicatos* and *comites libres*) in direct defiance of the 1947 Law of Peasant Unionization. UCC organizers helped formulate complaints, represented the interest of the peasants before the appropriate authorities and in extreme circumstances, provided leadership and materials for peasant strikes. was technically an independent organization but it relied on its close ties to the church for financial support. Importantly, "the UCC was financed almost entirely in its first two years by the personal contributions of clergy members…after 1963 the UCC began receiving funds from the national episcopacy, Misereor Aktion (a German Catholic organization), the International Confederation of Christian Unions (CISC), the Latin American Confederation of christian Unions (CISC), the Latin American Confederation of Christian Unions (CLASC), plus several U.S. sources such as the Inter-American Development Fund."[#] This involvement in agrarian reform and welfare efforts on part of the Chilean Catholic and away from a tacit alliance with the Conservative Party can be explained in large part by "the right's insistence on branding as Marxist sympathizers anyone who defended the PDC, agrarian reform, or peasant unionization alienated many Catholic leaders" which had made the traditional alliance with the Conservative party difficult to maintain. The proliferation of church-sponsored peasant organizations before the 1964 elections signaled "alterations in the church's rural policy [that] were especially significant signals of changes in the church's sociopolitical sympathies" which certainly helped propel the Eduardo Frei to victory.

civic," emphasizing grassroots participation and the recruitment of volunteer teachers through schools, parishes, and other social institutions.[142] This framework explicitly encouraged "activist action to stimulate interest" and prioritized recruitment through educational institutions—conditions that naturally drew in university students, particularly those studying education or pedagogy (as it was often listed in course catalogues of the period).[143]

The 1963 pilot campaign in working-class neighborhoods such as La Legua and San Gregorio demonstrates how these efforts operated in practice. While the program faced challenges—including shortages of trained teachers and irregular attendance—it successfully mobilized hundreds of adult learners and relied heavily on volunteer instructors. As one 1963 report noted, many of these volunteers were university students, even if "they should not be relied upon too much" due to inconsistent participation.[144] Despite this initial irregularity, these early initiatives established a pattern: Church-sponsored reform projects depended on the participation of students, who entered these spaces as volunteers but increasingly encountered firsthand the lived experiences of adult students that such programs sought to address. Once the PDC government expanded these initiatives after 1964, Church institutions became key intermediaries in implementing both the National Literacy Campaign and the educational components of agrarian reform. In doing so, they drew growing numbers of Catholic university students and professors into state-sponsored programs of social reform. Participation in these initiatives proved politically formative. What began as volunteer service within a framework of Christian Democratic reform

[142] "General Bases of the National Literacy Plan [Draft for public release]," Document 4, folders 17–18, bundle 167, Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Santiago, Chile, ca. 1962, 1.
[143] "General Bases of the National Literacy Plan [Draft for public release]," Document 4, folders 17–18, bundle 167, Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Santiago, Chile, ca. 1962, 6.
[144] "Report on the Pilot Literacy Plan in 'La Legua' and 'San Gregorio,'" Document 3, folders 17–18, bundle 167, Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Santiago, Chile, ca. 1963, 6.

increasingly exposed students to the limits of gradual change, contributing to their politicization and, ultimately, to tensions with the Catholic hierarchy itself—a process that will be explored in the following section.

Catholic Student Activism and the University Reform Movement

Reformist Catholic students before 1967

Though Catholic students did not begin the 1960s as radicals, their participation in Christian Democratic reform projects—especially agrarian reform and literacy campaigns—transformed their political and religious commitments, pushing many toward more radical critiques of inequality and aligning themselves increasingly with the left. This occurred against the backdrop of broader student organizing, known in Chilean historiography as the University Reform Movement. This movement, which transformed Chilean higher education in the late 1960s, did not originate exclusively in the secular left or at the public University of Chile. In fact, it began at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC), where important elements of reform were already taking shape during the late 1950s and early 1960s under the leadership of students affiliated with the university wing of the PDC, known as the Democracía Crisitana Universitaria (DCU), who came to dominate the Catholic University Student Federation (FEUC) after their electoral victory in 1959. This electoral dominance was not incidental. It reflected both the growing appeal of Christian Democratic reformism among Catholic youth and the DCU's ability to organize around a program that linked university reform to broader national debates about development and social justice. As several historians of the Chilean university reform process have noted, this victory marked a decisive break with the FEUC's earlier orientation; after winning the

1959 FEUC elections, the DCU "set forth a radical change compared with its predecessors. Until then, student activity had been limited to organizing parties, outings, university weeks, and similar activities" but, as historian Cristián Cox highlights in his work on the student movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Chile, the FEUC under DCU leadership "committed itself to reaching the student body with a clear perspective on the university, framed within a defined conception of humanity and society," giving it "an ideological content—namely, that of Christian Democracy."[145][146] Student politics, once largely confined to social and recreational activities, began to take on a more explicitly ideological and institutional character. Under Christian Democratic leadership, the FEUC advanced a new conception of the university—one tied not only to professional training, but also to broader questions of social responsibility, political participation, and national development.

This change reflected the broader transformation then underway within Chilean Christian Democracy itself. Between 1959 and 1966, FEUC leaders increasingly argued that the university should be democratized internally and opened outward socially.[147] Their demands centered on reforming university governance, expanding the role of students and faculty in decision-making, and redefining the university's place within the national community.[148] Just as important, however, was their growing emphasis on what they called *extensión social*: the idea that university life should be rooted in direct engagement with the country's most marginalized sectors. This

[145] Cristián Cox, *La reforma en la Universidad Católica de Chile*, comp. Manuel Antonio Garretón and Javier Martinez, vol. II, *Biblioteca del Movimiento Estudiantil* (Santiago: Ediciones Sur, 1987), 13.
[146] He even states "it is not misleading to equate the FEUC with the student movement itself in this period," 15.
[147] These are made evident in the concluding documents of the VI Convention of the Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad Católica, *The University: Our Task-- Documents for the VI Convention of the FEUC* (Santiago: La Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad Católica, 1964).
[148] Cox, *La Reforma,* 24. In their proposals at the conclusion of the VI Convention, students called for a reform of university authority that gave greater weight to the Superior Council, which they argued could correct the "lack of direction" and "inorganic growth" that had marked the institution.

orientation found one of its clearest expressions in the FEUC's *Trabajos de Verano*: summer work projects in which students spent their vacations in rural communities and mining zones.[149] Initially conceived as charitable service, these projects gradually took on a more political character. Contact with peasants and workers led many students to critique the university's distance from Chilean social realities and to imagine forms of higher education more directly oriented toward social transformation. What began as volunteerism thus became, for many Catholic students, a formative experience in political and moral consciousness. These demands emerged from the intersection of two processes: the expansion of Christian Democratic political culture among university students, and their increasing exposure—through extension work—to the social inequalities that reformist discourse sought to address.

The FEUC's Sixth Convention, held just weeks after Eduardo Frei Montalva's election in 1964, revealed that by the mid-1960s, these commitments had already begun to cohere into a recognizable reform program. The convention materials reveal the breadth of the questions under discussion: whether the university should remain primarily a site of elite professional formation, or whether it had an obligation to participate more directly in social change; whether Catholic higher education could be defined chiefly by institutional ties to ecclesiastical authority, or whether "Catholicity" itself required a more active engagement with the nation's inequalities.[150] The inclusion of texts by figures across the political spectrum reflected the PUC's longstanding language of pluralism, but the convention's conclusions pointed in a distinctly reformist direction.

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[149] Cox, *La reforma*, 16.

[150] By "Catholicity" (*catolicidad*), students and faculty referred to a "Catholicness" not simply limited to institutional affiliation with the Church, but to the university's social and moral mission as a Catholic institution. In the context of the mid 1960s, calls for a "new Catholicity" invoked a redefinition of that mission in light of Vatican II, one that emphasized social engagement, solidarity with marginalized communities, and the alignment of Catholic teaching with processes of structural reform.

The delegates called for a restructuring of university authority, greater participation by students in governance, and a clearer distinction between academic and administrative leadership. They also proposed a "new definition of Catholicity," one that would grant the university greater autonomy from direct ecclesiastical control while orienting it more explicitly toward the country's social needs.[151] In this vision, the university's responsibility to national development required more than curricular modernization or rhetorical commitments to service. It demanded the formation of young professionals "made socially conscious through permanent practical work in the most marginalized social sectors," the redirection of research toward national priorities, and the reorientation of extension activities toward the popular classes.[152] In retrospect, the 1964 convention anticipated many of the demands that would become central to the better-known University Reform Movement of 1967. The student occupation of the Catholic University in August 1967 thus marked the culmination of a reformist current that Catholic students had been developing for nearly a decade. Long before university reform became a national crisis, FEUC activists had already begun to redefine the Catholic university as a site of democratization, social engagement, and institutional transformation. Their project emerged from within the world of reformist Catholicism itself and was deeply shaped by the political culture of Christian Democracy, even as it would eventually push beyond the limits of that tradition.

The 1967 Occupation and the Redefinition of Catholic University governance

The reformist impulses of Catholic University students had been developing throughout the early 1960s came to a head in August 11, 1967, when student leaders of the FEUC occupied the Casa Central of the Pontifical Catholic University in Santiago, demanding a reform of

[151] Cox, *La Reforma*, 24-26.
[152] Ibid.

university government: the right to vote to elect the highest authorities within it; that these should be lay people and not members of the Catholic clergy; and that access to university education should be expanded and made free to workers and peasants. In a move that was photographed by newspapers and became emblematic of the University Reform Movement of the period, they launched a massive banner across the occupied building's balcony that read "EL MERCURIO MIENTE" ("El Mercurio lies")—a reference to the right-wing media outlet *El Mercurio* which had recently labeled the growing university student movements across the country as "a bold new maneuver of marxism against democracy."[153] The occupation marked a turning point not only for the institution itself but for the broader trajectory of university reform in Chile. What had previously taken the form of conventions, proposals, and social extension projects had now become an open institutional crisis over authority, governance, and what it meant to be a Catholic university in a rapidly changing society. The students' demands reflected a program they had been elaborating for nearly a decade. At stake was not simply administrative reform, but a deeper reconfiguration of authority: in rejecting *El Mercurio*'s label of "marxism," students revealed that they were not rejecting the institution's identity as Catholic, but rather questioning whether a university that remained hierarchically structured and socially exclusive could genuinely fulfill the ethical and social commitments articulated by contemporary Catholic thought.

In other words, the students' critiques were not confined to external political actors: they were also directed inward, toward the university itself and its perceived failure to engage with Chile's social realities. For many student leaders, the problem was not that the university was insufficiently Catholic, but that it had not fully internalized the social imperatives of Catholic Social Doctrine, particularly as reframed by the Second Vatican Council. This framing proved

[153] El Mercurio (9 de agosto de 1967). Secularización de las universidades católicas. Línea editorial. El Mercurio.

crucial in shaping the response of university authorities and the Chilean episcopate. Between June and September of 1967, the leaders of the FEUC made their demands known not only to faculty and the Rectors of the Catholic University in Santiago, but also to the Chilean episcopacy, sending correspondence to the Archbishop Raúl Silva, as well as the Bishops of parishes where other Catholic students were taking part in protests (notably at the campuses in Valparaíso and Concepción). The correspondence between the FEUC and the Chilean episcopate, as well as the notes taken to document the Chilean Bishops' during this time illustrate the clergy's fear that the FEUC–historically led mainly by members of the Democracia Cristiana Universitaria (the youth wing of the PDC)–was becoming increasingly influenced by left wing political parties.[154] Though Church leaders expressed concern about the growing influence of left-wing politics among students, they also acknowledged the legitimacy of several key demands. In episcopal discussions following the occupation, bishops affirmed that a Catholic university must be oriented toward the broader society, particularly toward the poor, and that expanding access to higher education for marginalized sectors was consistent with its mission.[155] They likewise accepted, albeit cautiously, the principle of greater participation by students and faculty in university governance.[156] At the same time, however, they insisted that institutional reform could not come at the expense of the university's religious identity, emphasizing that "Catholic universities cannot become the monopoly of any Party whatsoever; nor of a human ideology; nor of any economic, cultural, or political power or group."[157]

[154] Letter from auxiliary Bishop of Santiago, Gabriel Larrain to the vice president and secretary of the Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, July 1967.
[155] Comité Permanente del Episcopado, "Necesidad y urgencia de reforma en la Universidad," August 14, 1967, Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Santiago, Chile.
[156] Comité Permanente del Episcopado, "Necesidad y urgencia de reforma en la Universidad," August 14, 1967, Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Santiago, Chile.
[157] Ibid.

Importantly, support for university reform was not limited to student activists or progressive clergy. Figures within the Catholic University's own faculty articulated critiques that closely paralleled those of the students. Among the most influential was law professor Gastón Cruzat Paul, whose report to the Chilean bishops stated that "The University…is completely disconnected from the social and cultural reality of the country, with the double consequence of forming professionals…eager to enter the established order, instead of wanting to transform and guide it;" students who he said remained "absent from Chile's major problems, whether social, cultural, medical, agrarian, or urban."[158] Cruzat argued that the institution was socially and culturally disconnected from the country it purported to serve, producing professionals more inclined to reproduce the existing order than to change it. He further emphasized the university's class composition, noting its overwhelmingly elite student body, and linked these shortcomings to a broader failure to engage with the Church's evolving social doctrine.[159] What seems to have been most convincing to the Chilean episcopacy and the Catholic University leadership was the way in which Cruzat Paul tied these criticisms to Catholic Social Doctrine. He wrote in one part of the report to the clergy that "The University is…detached from the pastoral renewal plan of the Chilean Church and remains…an extra-territorial island, alien to the dynamism impressed by the Council, entrenched in a kind of defensive Catholicism…indifferent to the Church's social doctrine." In another he wrote:

> There is indeed a crisis of authority at the Catholic University of Chile, a crisis that has led to the feudalism described above. This crisis is a direct cause of the unequal, inorganic, and unjust growth of the University…The conservative mentality closed to change is the cause of…the absence of a true scientific spirit, of the disconnection from social reality, and of the lack of an authentic and fruitful Catholicity.[160]

[158] Gastón Cruzat Paul to Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, memorandum, "La Universidad Católica de Santiago," July 25, 1967, legado 168, carpeta 6, documento 20, Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Santiago, Chile.
[159] Ibid,
[160] Cruzat Paul to Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, memorandum, "La Universidad."

Significantly, Cruzat did not present students' critiques as a rejection of Catholicism, but as a call to bring the university into closer alignment with the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II and the Church's renewed emphasis on social responsibility. His critique was less a theological departure than an institutional one: it did not reject Catholic authority, but argued that existing structures had failed to embody the Church's *own* evolving social commitments.

The convergence of student mobilization, faculty critique, and episcopal negotiation ultimately produced concrete institutional changes. By the end of 1967, the Pontifical Catholic University had implemented significant reforms in its governance structures, including the election of university authorities and expanded participation by students and faculty. At the same time, the university undertook new initiatives aimed at addressing its social mission more directly. Among the most important were the creation of the Peasant and Workers' University Department (DUOC) in 1968, and later, the Interdisciplinary Program of Educational Research (PIIE).[161] These institutions reflected the core demands of the reform movement: DUOC sought to extend access to higher education to workers and peasants by offering technical and other short-term degree pathways taught by volunteer faculty and students. Meanwhile the PIIE created new channels for research and state collaboration oriented toward Chile's educational and social challenges. Taken together, these developments marked a fundamental redefinition of Catholic university governance. Authority was no longer conceived solely in hierarchical or clerical terms, but as something that required broader participation and accountability. At the same time, "Catholicity" itself was being reinterpreted—not as a static institutional identity, but as a mandate for social engagement, educational expansion, and structural reform. The 1967 occupation thus did more

[161] The PIIE was created in 1970 and formally institutionalized in 1971. It will be discussed in another chapter since its activities fall within the Popular Unity years, but because its creation was spurred by the University Reform, I chose to mention it here.

than resolve a moment of crisis, or inspire student activism at the other major public universities; it institutionalized a new vision of the Catholic university, one that would both enable and intensify the political and ideological conflicts that unfolded in the years that followed.

From reformism to polarization: Agrarian Reform, Freire, and the fragmentation of the DCU center

The reforms achieved at the Catholic University in 1967 and 1968 did not stabilize the reformist project that had produced them. On the contrary, they helped set in motion a process that would erode the Christian Democratic center from which that project had emerged. The same networks of social engagement, institutional experimentation, and political formation that had sustained reformist Catholic student activism in the early 1960s increasingly became sites of ideological differentiation and, ultimately, polarization. A key factor in this transformation was the deepening involvement of Catholic University students and young professionals not only in the DUOC but in the state-led programs of agrarian reform, adult education, and *promoción popular* during the Frei administration. As these initiatives expanded after 1965, Catholic institutions—including the Pontifical Catholic University—played an active role in supplying both personnel and intellectual frameworks. Students and recent graduates participated in literacy campaigns, worked alongside government agencies in rural development projects, and continued to engage in volunteer works that brought them into sustained contact with peasants and workers. These experiences extended and intensified the earlier "social extension" efforts of the FEUC, but they also exposed participants more directly to the structural dimensions of inequality in the Chilean countryside.

For many, this contact proved transformative. What had initially been framed as service or development work increasingly took on a political and even revolutionary valence. The influence

of Paulo Freire—who worked closely with Chilean state agencies and educators during this period—was especially significant in this regard. Freire's pedagogical approach, grounded in dialogue and critical consciousness, reframed literacy and education as processes through which marginalized populations could come to understand and challenge the social structures that shaped their lives, and served as an important undercurrent for the Frei administration's Popular Promotion. Crucially, this dialectical process did not move in one direction alone. Just as Freire's thinking was shaped by his encounters with Chilean peasants and educators, so too were the students, teachers, and officials who worked alongside him transformed by these experiences. As has been noted by historian Andrew J. Kirkendall, this dialectic very clearly shaped those who worked with Freire as well, including the young Catholic university volunteers and graduates (the vast majority of whom were PDC adherents):

> An important, if not large, faction within the Christian Democrats which was pressing for more 'revolutionary' change was the youth organisation, Juventud Demócrata Cristiana. Since 1963, the JDC had been one of the factions most critical of capitalism and individualism. They had argued that a Christian Democratic government would represent the Chilean poor and create an 'authentically human society.' By the second half of the Frei administration, members of the JDC were engaged in such activities as encouraging land invasions. In November 1968, they enthusiastically supported the idea of creating a 'popular force capable of constructing socialism.' US ambassador Edward Korry saw them as viewing Chile 'through a Marxist optic with revolutionary Christian overtones.' The Christian Democratic party, from this perspective and from that of Chonchol (with whom the youth were aligned), needed to rid itself of more conservative figures like Interior Minister Edmundo Perez Zukovic.[162] Although elder statesmen in the party disagreed with the younger Christian Democrats' methods and diagnosis, they did not want to lose what they considered the 'most vital elements' of the party.'[163]

[162] Jacques Chonchol was appointed by Frei to head the Institute for Agricultural Development (INDAP). He later became a founding member of MAPU, and was appointed as Minister of Agriculture by Allende. Edmundo Perez Zukovic was Minister of State under Frei, and was assassinated by the far left group, Vanguardia Organizada del Pueblo, in 1971 for his perceived responsibility in the 1969 Puerto Montt massacre of 11 peasants engaged in an illegal land occupation.

[163] Andrew J. Kirkendall, "Paulo Freire, Eduardo Frei, Literacy Training and the Politics of Consciousness Raising in Chile, 1964 to 1970," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 36, no. 4 (2004): 709.

The radicalization of Catholic students at the Pontifical Catholic University was not occurring in isolation. Parallel tensions were unfolding within the Chilean Church itself, most dramatically illustrated by the August 1968 occupation of the Metropolitan Cathedral by the group Iglesia Joven (Young Church).[164] Composed of younger clergy and lay activists, many with ties to working-class communities, the occupiers denounced the Church's reluctance to embrace more transformative forms of social action. While maintaining traditional positions on issues such as contraception that aligned with official doctrine, they simultaneously declared their solidarity with revolutionary movements, with one spokesperson asserting that they stood "hand-in-hand with our Marxist brothers… on the barricades of the people against capitalism."[165] The Young Church episode exposed deep fissures within Chilean Catholicism. Although he initially condemned the occupation as "arrogant and profane," Archbishop Raúl Silva Henríquez ultimately adopted a more conciliatory stance, acknowledging that the group's demands could not be dismissed outright.[166] In this sense, Iglesia Joven both reflected and anticipated a broader shift within sectors of the Chilean Church toward greater openness to structural reform and even revolutionary change—developments that would become more visible following the election of Salvador Allende in 1970, when even Raul Silva, announced that "the basic reforms contained in the program of the Popular Unity are supported by the Chilean Church. We look upon this with intense sympathy."[167] The trajectories unfolding among Catholic University students therefore formed part of a wider process

[164] The incident and its implications, as well as the group's connection via overlapping members between the IJ, CPS, and the CUT are discussed in further detail in Michael Ramminger, *Éramos Iglesia...en el medio del Pueblo: El Legado de los Cristianos por el Socialismo en Chile, 1971-1973* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2019), 24-25, 37, 111. For a complete copy of the IJ's Manifesto read during the occupation of the Cathedral see pages 269-272.
[165] Patrick Barr-Melej, *Psychedelic Chile: Youth Counterculture, and Politics on the Road to Socialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 57.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Barr-Melej, *Psychedelic Chile*, 57.

in which Catholic actors across institutional settings grappled with the implications of social inequality, political transformation, and the Church's role in a rapidly changing society.

By 1970, members of the Christian Democratic Youth (JDC) and affiliated student groups were among the most vocal critics of the limits of the Frei government's reform program, as evidenced in PUC student journalism. Published from early 1970 until shortly after the September 1973 coup, *Debate Universitario* (University Debate), a biweekly student newspaper, illustrated a clear picture of the University Reform's spirit, increased politicization, and eventual fracture of the Christian Democratic majority. Throughout all three years of its publishing one thing that remains consistent is the high level of student recruitment for study and volunteer work in the agrarian sector: nearly every issue in the magazine's three years of publishing contains either ads for volunteer projects led by agronomy, engineering, or social work professors, or student published research papers on their time working in cooperatives. Catholic University student presence in the countryside especially increased after the creation in 1968 of the Agrarian Studies Center (CEA) led by its director Jaime Gazmuri.[168] The growth of a FEUC left wing bloc during this time demonstrates that many Catholic students' frustrations were rooted not only in ideological debates, but in their direct experience implementing reform policies on the ground. Participation in agrarian reform and adult education campaigns exposed them to both the possibilities and the constraints of gradualist change, leading many to conclude that more profound transformations were necessary.

[168] Gazmuri was among the left wing faculty members at the PUC and moved away from the PDC, in favor of the MAPU, and eventually the Socialist Party. He was active in the former two, serving as senator in the Socialist Party, and eventually became the Chilean ambassador to Brazil under Michelle Bachelet.

These tensions were reflected within the Catholic University itself. While the reforms of 1967 had been driven largely by DCU-aligned student leadership, the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed a rapid fragmentation of that political base. Institutional growth and curricular shifts reinforced these dynamics. Enrollment at the Catholic University increased significantly–by 65%–-between 1967 and 1973, in both Santiago and its campuses in the provinces, suggesting that the university became somewhat less Santiago-centric, broadening its social reach during the reform period.[169] Programs in fields closely tied to national development—such as agronomy, engineering, architecture, and social work—expanded in both size and importance.[170] At the same time, university resources increasingly flowed toward research areas connected to agrarian reform and modernization, with a substantial portion of funding directed to agronomy and the biological sciences.[171] These developments further embedded students within the broader project of national transformation and intensified their engagement with the social and political questions it raised.

Despite growth, the Catholic University lagged behind the more rapid expansion of the public university system, reinforcing student perceptions that access remained restricted and socially unequal. It was against this backdrop that the reformist consensus that had defined the FEUC in the early 1960s began to break down. Data collected on the FEUC elections between 1966 and 1973 demonstrate a rapid expansion of student electoral participation and organizational density. The electoral data from student government contests also reveal a clear pattern: the steady collapse of Christian Democratic dominance and the simultaneous rise of both right-wing and left-wing alternatives.[172] Whereas DCU candidates had secured comfortable majorities in the mid-

[169] Cox, *La Reforma,* 182.
[170] Cox, *La Reforma,* 183-187.
[171] Ibid., 191.
[172] Cox, *La Reforma*, 149-151. In 1966 the DCU won FEUC elections by 54%; in 1967 by 59.7% but gremialistas increased to 40.2%. By 1968 the gremialistas narrowly won by 51%, and again in 1969 by roughly 44% (versus the

1960s, by the end of the decade their support had sharply declined. In their place emerged two increasingly consolidated blocs: on the one hand, the *gremialista* movement, which articulated a conservative, anti-Marxist vision of university life (which they framed as "apolitcal"); and on the other, a growing left composed of student groups aligned with socialist Popular Unity currents, that at times rivaled or surpassed the remnants of DCU support.

The result was not a linear ideological shift, but a fragmentation of the reformist coalition that had previously unified Catholic student politics. In this sense, the trajectory from reformism to polarization was not an external imposition on the Catholic University, but a development that emerged from *within* its own reformist project. The very processes that had defined Catholic student activism in the early 1960s—engagement with marginalized communities, commitment to social transformation, and the integration of recent Catholic Social Doctrine into political life—also generated new forms of ideological differentiation. For some students, these commitments led toward more radical critiques of capitalism and growing support for socialist alternatives. For others, they provoked a defensive reaction, grounded in the language of institutional autonomy, "pluralism," and a resistance to politicization. By the eve of the Unidad Popular period, the Catholic University had thus become a microcosm of the broader political realignment underway in Chile. The Christian Democratic center that had once anchored reformist Catholic student activism was no longer able to contain the divergent trajectories it had helped set in motion. Instead, it gave way to a polarized field in which competing visions of Catholic responsibility—

DCU (12.8%) and the Frente de Izquierda [Left Front] which pulled 43% of student votes). In 1970 Gremialistas still held a plurality (45.3%) which was consolidated in 1971–72 to about 48%. By then, the DCU was reduced to about 24% and the Unidad Estudiantil de Izquierda (a student coalition supportive of the Unidad Popular government which included the FI) had gained 29%. This clear fragmentation of the FEUC in which the DCU collapsed, and gremialistas *and* left forces grew, was consistent in other student elections. *Claustros* (University Senates dealing with internal university affairs' appointments and individual faculties, departments, and political movements) show similar splits: gremialistas were often the largest bloc by a very small majority, but the Popular Unity (UP) and University Leftist Movement (MUI) increased, while the DCU shrank steadily.

revolutionary, reformist, and conservative—contested the meaning of social change, political engagement, and the role of the university in national life.

Catholicity, pluralism, and the political battle for the university during the UP years

By the early 1970s, the fragmentation of the reformist Catholic center at the Pontifical Catholic University had given way to an increasingly explicit ideological struggle over the meaning of "Catholicity" itself. This is abundantly clear in student journalism at the PUC. Between 1970 and until shortly after the 1973 coup, the biweekly PUC newspaper *Debate Universitario* showed how students and faculty debated not only the future of the university, but the broader relationship between Catholicism, socialism, and political authority in a rapidly polarizing national context. The university had become, in effect, a key site in which competing visions of Catholic social responsibility were articulated, contested, and institutionalized. Throughout the Unidad Popular period, *Debate Universitario* consistently reflected the growing politicization of campus life. Articles, editorials, and transcripts of public forums reveal a student body deeply engaged with questions that extended far beyond the university itself: the legitimacy of socialism, the role of Christians in revolutionary change, and the extent to which Catholic institutions should align themselves with or resist the Allende government's so-called "Chilean path to socialism." These debates were not abstract. They were grounded in the lived experiences of students who had participated in agrarian reform, literacy campaigns, and university extension programs, who staffed the rapidly growing DUOC program, and who now grappled with the political implications of those encounters. One of the clearest expressions of this moment was the series of "University Dialogues" hosted at the PUC and later published in *Debate Universitario*. These forums brought

together clergy, academics, and political figures to debate the compatibility of Christianity and socialism. Student responses to these discussions suggest a growing openness among many students and faculty to the possibility that socialism could be reconciled with Christian ethics. A May 1971 issue of *Debate Universitario* featured a discussion between Belgian priest and socialist Francis Blanquart and the FEUC-elected Rector, Fernando Castillo Velasco.[173] Though the latter expressed some caution about the kinds of socialism Catholic people were bound by moral obligation to avoid, the student response to the men's discussion was a recognition that "socialism can also be a regime that respects freedom and constructive criticism, that changes our structures for other, more just, more fraternal ones, that effectively seeks the integral progress of the people… We, the Christians, must contribute our work and conditions so that the new society is defined on the basis of that free and human socialism."[174] Such statements did not represent a wholesale abandonment of Catholic identity, but rather its reinterpretation: Catholicity was increasingly understood as a mandate to participate actively in the construction of a more just social order.

At the same time, other sectors of the university advanced sharply different interpretations. For conservative and *gremialista* students in particular, the growing politicization of campus life was itself the central problem.[175] The cover of the subsequent issue of *Debate Universitario* featured the newly elected FEUC president Tomas Irarrázaval of the Gremialist Movement, who was quoted as saying "the Gremialist Movement has fought to rescue the University from the claws of *politiquería.'"*[176] The *gremialistas* framed their movement as a defense of the university

[173] The first layman elected to the position.
[174] Paul Blaquart and Fernando Castillo Velasco, "University Dialogues," *Debate Universitario* (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago), May 1, 1971, 11.
[175] "*Gremialista*" comes from the Spanish word "gremio" for a guild, and was chosen by the movement's founder, Jaime Guzmán, to evoke the more corporatist, right- wing Catholic connotation.
[176] Mario Zañartu "The Christian and the UP Option," *Debate Universitario* (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago), June 1, 1971.

against "politicization" and "partisan capture," presenting themselves as advocates of pluralism and institutional autonomy.[177] In this discourse, the university's role was not to align with any specific political project, but to preserve a space for intellectual freedom and ideological diversity. Yet this language of "pluralism" was far from neutral. It functioned as a critique of the left's increasing influence on campus and, more broadly, of the Unidad Popular's transformative ambitions. By positioning themselves as defenders of an "apolitical" university, *gremialista* leaders sought to delegitimize their opponents, while masking the political character of their own project, using a term ("pluralism") borrowed directly from Catholic Social Doctrine, in order to imbue their cause with Christian legitimation. As my later chapters will show, this rhetorical tactic became ubiquitous in opposition framings of the UP's proposed educational reform.

The contest over "Catholicity"–that is, the authentic definition of Catholic social responsibility and who decides it–sharpened these divisions. Faculty and students across the ideological spectrum agreed that a Catholic university could not be defined solely by formal ties to the Church hierarchy. But they differed profoundly on what this recognition implied. For many within the theology faculty and the Catholic left, Catholicity required active engagement with the social and political struggles of the time. As members of the theology department put it, "A Catholic university must be first of all a true university—not only training professionals but producing authentic culture and serving as a living conscience of society… [its] dialogue… must project outward to the community to which it belongs and before which it is responsible."[178] Others such as Father Pablo Richard went further, arguing that authentic Catholic identity could only be realized through immersion in historical processes of change, even at the risk of institutional

[177] Ibid.
[178] "Catholicity Questioned," *Debate Universitario* (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago), June 1, 1971.

destabilization: “To realize itself as Catholic, the University must strip itself of its Christian specificity, be prepared to lose it—and thus, within the historical process, begin to find it… If the University is overly concerned with defining itself, it will… isolate itself and be less Catholic.”[179] Conservative voices, however, warned against precisely this conflation of Catholic identity with specific political agendas. They emphasized instead the importance of maintaining the university as a site of “free, pluralist expression,” often invoking Catholicism as a source of balance and restraint, rather than transformation. As I’ve already highlighted, for these conservative Catholics, the language of pluralism took on a distinctly anti-Marxist inflection. As one student critic observed, Catholic identity was increasingly being mobilized “in opposition to Marxism,” turning “Catholicity” into a defensive category rather than a basis for social critique.[180] The result was a discursive struggle in which both sides claimed fidelity to Catholic Social Doctrine while accusing the other of distorting its meaning.

These tensions were not confined to the Catholic University. They intersected with broader national conflicts, particularly the escalating crisis within the public University of Chile in 1971. In November of that year, a flare-up of escalating tensions peaked at the University of Chile, where a power struggle had emerged over who actually governed the university under the brand-new 1971 Statute: Rector Edgardo Boeninger, or the Superior Normative Council of students and faculty–where the Unidad Popular–aligned student lists held a majority. The clash quickly became a proxy fight over whether the university should align with Allende’s “process of changes” or resist it in the name of “autonomy.” For some, it represented a legitimate attempt to democratize university structures in line with broader social transformations. For others, it signaled the

[179] “Catholicity Questioned,” *Debate Universitario* (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago), June 1, 1971.
[180] Ibid.

dangerous politicization of higher education and the erosion of institutional authority. Each side accused the other of violating the new rules established by the University Reform Movement, and by late November, counter-occupations, strikes, and street confrontations spread; the campus was largely paralyzed into early 1972. Student journalism at the PUC captured these competing interpretations, highlighting not only the depth of division but also the ways in which national political conflicts were refracted through Catholic institutional frameworks. In back to back November 1971 issues of *Debate Universitario* the crisis of authority at the University of Chile and its interpretation by the left versus right wing elements at the PUC were huge centerpieces. While the first November issue of *Debate Universitario* featured the headline "FEUC in solidarity with Mr. Boeninger!" as well as a half dozen images from a right wing counter-protest on the University of Chile's campus that some FEUC members had attended in solidarity. The second November issue however illustrated the sharp criticism from non-gremialist-aligned students and faculty. In a letter published in late November, student Juan Rada, president of the Sociology Student Center, argued that the newspaper's previous issue had been one-sided and irresponsible for publishing pictures and op-eds about the public university's conflict, as if Boeninger were widely supported by a majority of PUC students; though in reality, he said, only a minority of the FEUC and an even smaller minority of the general student and faculty population sided with the Rector. He drew clear attention to the PUC's right- wing coalition's tactic to claim they were a "pluralist" and "apolitical" grouping, arguing:

> Your paper has not published the Progressive Academic Front (FAP)'s statement nor that of the Leftist Workers' Front, both widely circulated at our University. The Christian Democratic professors' statement from the Institute of Sociology came out Monday around 11 a.m.; the FAP statement the day before—I personally know—was only partially read

> on Channel 13's newscast Sunday night.[181] BUT IT WAS NOT PUBLISHED…We would accept speaking of the "University Community" as a whole , if the march had been led by the Rector and the Superior Council [of the FEUC] in full. But this was not the case—the march was led by Gremialist and Chrisitan Democrat leaders. You, sir, are in a poor position to speak of pluralism or democracy when your weekly [publication] does not respect nor give space to dissenting positions, and practices journalism clearly guided by your personal political convictions, ignoring Superior Council directives and the diversity of positions at the PUC.[182]

In addition to publishing the Leftist Workers' Front statement supporting the Superior Normative Council at the University of Chile, the same issue of *Debate Universitario* (published at Manuel Antonio Garretón's request), printed an essay in which a large group of PUC professors in the Progressive Academic Front contended that PUC's right-wing groups were trying to drag the Catholic University into the University of Chile's crisis as a way to attack the Allende government and "halt its reform process."[183] The FAP essay makes it clear that they backed the University of Chile's Council as the legal expression of reform, supported PUC neutrality and mediation in the struggle, and vowed to resist efforts to sow chaos.[184]

By the final year of Popular Unity governance, the Catholic University had become a central battleground in the struggle to define the relationship between religion and politics in modern Chile. The reformist project that had emerged from within Christian Democratic student circles in the early 1960s had not simply radicalized or collapsed. Instead, it had fractured, generating multiple and competing trajectories. The Catholic left increasingly interpreted social

[181] Channel 13, or "Canal 13," as it was called in the press of the period was the Catholic University-owned television station that is frequently cited in cultural and social historical analysis for how often it served as a news medium to host political and religious debates during this period.
[182] Juan Rada, "Correspondence," *Debate Universitario* (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago), November 1971.
[183] These were the gremialists, who were aligned with Patria y Libertad, the National Party, and parts of the Christian Democrats.
[184] Manuel Antonio Garretón, "Declaration of the FAP," *Debate Universitario* (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago) November 1971. It is worth noting that Manuel Garreton, himself a Socialist Party member, had been FEUC president in 1964, before becoming a Sociology professor at the PUC.

doctrine as a call to revolutionary transformation and alignment with popular sectors, while the Catholic right reframed that same tradition as a defense of pluralism, institutional autonomy, and resistance to ideological domination. This dual appropriation of Catholic language was not incidental. It reflected the extent to which Catholic Social Doctrine had, by the late 1960s, become a shared but contested framework for political legitimacy. Because earlier reform efforts—particularly under the Frei administration—had grounded educational expansion, agrarian reform, and social policy in Catholic principles, subsequent political actors were compelled to articulate their positions within that same moral vocabulary. In this context, the right's emphasis on "pluralism" and opposition to "politicization" can be understood not simply as a rejection of reform, but as a strategic redefinition of Catholic engagement in response to the left's increasingly radical claims. The outcome was a profound reconfiguration of Catholic political identity within the university. By 1973, the center that had once anchored reformist Catholic student activism had largely disappeared, replaced by a polarized field in which competing visions of Catholicity underwrote totally divergent political projects. The Catholic University thus did not stand apart from Chile's broader crisis. It was one of the key arenas in which that crisis was lived, debated, and given ideological form.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the University Reform Movement in Chile cannot be understood simply as a product of secular left-wing radicalization in the late 1960s, but rather as the continuation of grassroots Catholic organizing that had begun in other sectors of Chilean society by the mid-1960s. At the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, reform emerged in

significant part from within Catholic student movements shaped by the intellectual and pastoral transformations associated with both the Second Vatican Council and the rise of the Christian Democratic Party of Chile. These developments encouraged a generation of Catholic students to reinterpret Catholic Social Doctrine not as a framework that stood apart from politics, but as one that demanded active participation in the transformation of Chilean society. The reformist project of the Christian Democratic government proved decisive in this shift. By expanding collaboration between the state and Catholic institutions—particularly through agrarian reform and national literacy campaigns—the PDC drew Catholic university students, clergy, and lay activists into unprecedented forms of cross-class social engagement. Yet these initiatives produced outcomes that exceeded the party's intentions. Rather than consolidating a unified reformist constituency, they exposed participants to the structural limits of gradual reform, which intensified debates over the meaning of Catholic social responsibility. For many young Catholics, these experiences fostered frustration with the pace and scope of Christian Democratic reform, contributing to the emergence of a Catholic left that increasingly viewed more radical change as both necessary and legitimate.

At the same time, these transformations provoked an equally forceful response from conservative sectors. Catholic educational institutions had long been understood as spaces insulated from partisan conflict, where social engagement took corporatist or charitable forms–like the creation of the Peasant and Workers' University Department–rather than overt political ones connected to large-scale state-led projects. The politicization of Catholic student activism during the 1960s destabilized this expectation. As Catholic actors entered more explicitly political arenas, they also helped generate a Catholic right that sought to reassert the "boundaries" between religious authority and political mobilization–despite actively engaging in right-wing political

organizing. In this sense, Catholic university reform did not simply contribute to a broader leftward shift; it fractured Catholic political culture itself, producing competing visions of Catholic praxis that would come into direct conflict with one another by the 1970s.

These developments suggest that the polarization typically associated with the Unidad Popular period had deeper roots in the Christian Democratic reform era. The unraveling of the political center was not merely a consequence of Allende's presidency but was in fact already underway prior, as Catholic students, clergy, and lay actors grappled with the implications of implementing Catholic Social Doctrine through state policy. In the process, Catholic universities and even the Metropolitan Cathedral–places that had once been viewed as safeguards against ideological conflict—became key sites of political contestation. As recent scholarship has emphasized, opposition to the Unidad Popular would later draw on a broad-based, socially embedded mobilization that was structured by shared ideological languages and moral frameworks.[185] The transformations traced in this chapter help explain how Catholic actors and institutions became deeply implicated in those wider dynamics.

Finally, the experiences of Catholic university students within agrarian reform and educational initiatives also point to an important dimension that extends beyond student politics alone. The same programs that politicized young Catholic activists reshaped the forms of civic participation available to women, particularly within education, social service, and community development: precisely those areas targeted by state reform policies during this era, in which women made up a majority of their respective work force. In doing so, they produced a distinctly gendered vision of Catholic developmental modernity—one that positioned women as moral

[185] Marcelo Casals, "The Chilean Counter-Revolution: Roots, Dynamics and Legacies of Mass Mobilisation against the Unidad Popular," *Radical Americas* 6, no. 1 (2021): 13, https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ra.2021.v6.1.013.

intermediaries between family and nation, while simultaneously delimiting the terms of their political agency. As the following chapter demonstrates, these gendered forms of participation would become central to both the implementation of educational reform and the conflicts that emerged in its wake.

Chapter Three: The Woman-as- Mother-Educator: Gender, Moral Authority, and the Politics of Educational Reform in Chile

Introduction

This chapter examines how the agrarian and educational reforms of the Christian Democratic and early Unidad Popular years reshaped gendered citizenship in Chile by channeling women—especially Catholic women—into pedagogical and social service roles. I argue that, during the late 1960s, state reformers, Catholic clergy, and lay organizations all converged on a shared vision of feminine modernity rooted in the figure I describe as the "woman-as-mother-educator." Through programs promoting birth control, adult literacy, and rural education, both Church and state sought to mobilize women as moral and civic intermediaries between family and nation. The successful introduction of family planning during Frei's presidency (with the tacit approval of the episcopate) and the rapid expansion of women's secondary education created a new class of female professionals whose entry into teaching and social work signaled the feminization of Chile's "moral" and educational labor force. By tracing this process, the chapter argues that Catholic and developmentalist projects did not simply mobilize maternalist discourse, but institutionalized it within the expanding educational and social-service sectors, transforming women's moral authority into a technocratic and professionalized form of civic labor. Reformers presented women's participation in teaching and community development as a modernizing

imperative, yet continued to frame it as an extension of their "natural" maternal vocation, rather than emphasizing their entrance into the organized labor force as a matter of autonomy. The result was a gendered model of "Catholic developmental modernity" that positioned women as both subjects and instruments of national reform. In other words, while the reforms pushed by the Frei and Allende governments empowered women to a certain degree—expanding access to education, professional training, and even birth control—they remained circumscribed within a "politics of difference" that naturalized teaching, caregiving, and community work as extensions of maternal vocation.[186] The chapter proceeds in four sections. The first examines how agrarian reforms and literacy campaigns initially led by the Catholic hierarchy recruited women as volunteers. When both efforts became key programs of the Christian Democratic (PDC) and Popular Unity (UP) governments, women's participation in them became redefined as civic responsibilities, rather than charitable work. The second explores the Church's evolving stance on family planning and its implications for female moral authority leading up to Allende's term in office. The third traces the expansion of women's access to secondary education and the feminization of the teaching profession and how both public and Catholic universities institutionalized women as the guardians of moral literacy. The final section connects these developments to the broader "politics of difference" that underpinned reform discourse, showing how they laid the ideological groundwork

[186] Susan Franceshet, *Women and Politics in Chile* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 35-36, notes that first-wave feminism in Chile relied on a "gender-differentiated" model of citizenship, because "The prevailing language of politics did not permit the politicization of women's 'private' identities as mothers and community caretakers. Consequently, women's citizenship, once granted, was exercised according to the ideal of 'mobilized mothers,' an identity that kept women on the margins of Chile's class-based politics." By "politics of difference," I am pointing to the fact that, as Franceshet points out, "because women demanded to enter politics based on their difference (i.e. they insisted that they would bring something to politics that was lacking), they had a difficult and complex relationship with the political parties, which dominated Chilean politics, right from the beginning. The parties initially could not merely incorporate women's issues into politics because women themselves framed their issues as being outside of, even above, the realm of class-based partisan politics. Most women's organizations in this early period sought autonomy from the world of traditional politics monopolized by the parties."

for later conflicts over educational authority during the Unidad Popular years. I conclude by illustrating how this feminized model of moral authority—rooted in women's roles as educators of both children and communities—helped shape the terms through which educational reform would later be contested. By the early 1970s, challenges to parental and maternal authority over children's moral formation could be framed not simply as political disagreements, but as threats to the social order itself. It was within this context that the Allende government's Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) proposal became especially susceptible to attacks by right wing Catholic groups in the name of protecting "ideological pluralism" for minors, thereby appealing to Catholic parents' fears of communist indoctrination in schools. In the fifth chapter, I illustrate how these fears themselves were deeply gendered and rooted in the familiarity of the "woman-as-mother-educator" civic participation that had become firmly entrenched across the spectrum of Chile's politics by the ENU's proposal in 1971.

While this maternalist framing of women's civic participation was not new in drawing on earlier twentieth-century traditions that linked motherhood to social reform, what distinguished the late 1960s was the degree to which these ideas were institutionalized through state and Church-led development programs and embedded within an expanding, feminized professional sector. The role of the Catholic Church in Cold War Chilean society has drawn ample attention from scholars in recent decades. Following World War II and especially following the Second Vatican Council, Latin America saw an explosion in Catholic lay organizations in the form of workers' unions, mutual aid programs, and specialized Catholic Action groups geared towards specific segments of the population, notably university and high school students, and agricultural workers and other working-class groups. Though Catholic Action was a broad umbrella of co-ed lay groups, the leadership of specialized Catholic Action groups such as the JOC (*Juventud Obrera Católica* or

Catholic Youth Workers), the JUC (*Juventud Universitaria Católica* or Catholic University Youth*),* and the JEC (*Juventud Estudiantil Católica* or Young Christian Students) were also organized into chapters or wings based on gender. It was in this same context of Catholic lay fervor and organizing that the Christian Democratic Parties began to grow throughout the region but especially in Chile. Efforts of many Catholic professionals and politicians throughout the world (but most notably in Europe and Latin America) to create a large-scale political movement by grouping Catholic voters into a more homogenous constituency led to the coordination of regional and international meetings amongst members of Christian Democratic parties.

As a result of national and international organization, the Christian Democratic Party made steady electoral gains in Chile throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, culminating in the election of a Christian Democrat President, Eduardo Frei Montalva, who had been one of its founding members. In numerous works that cover the social and political history of mid-to-late twentieth century Chile, historians often mention the large majority (which was indeed unprecedented at that time) by which Frei won. In doing so, they frequently point to the growth in middle and working class votes he received, as well as his tacit endorsement from the Catholic hierarchy as crucial factors in his electoral popularity.[187] Despite efforts to make a democratic political party inspired by Catholic Social Teaching and the "third way" politics that many Catholic politicians (especially following Vatican II) promoted as an alternative to communism, the apparent popularity of Christian Democracy belies a much more heterogeneous Catholicity in Chile. In other words, despite appealing to what were thought to be broadly held Catholic convictions, building a political party, and designing policy geared towards embracing those

[187]Hannah Stewart Gambino, details the Chilean Catholic hierarchy's shift away from supporting the Conservative Party to supporting the Christian Democratic Party throughout the fifties and sixties in *Church and Politics in the Chilean Countryside* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

convictions, the six-year presidency of Eduardo Frei actually highlighted the growing socio-political divisions of Chilean Catholics rather than a growing cohesiveness amongst them, as I've demonstrated in my previous chapters. While the last chapter explored that growing division as it related to students, this chapter analyzes the large-scale democratic social projects for which the Frei years (1964-1970) are most remembered–the National Education Reform of 1965 and the Agrarian Reform movement–as it related to teachers. I argue that in spite of the seemingly broad consensus amongst many Catholics in support of these projects, the educational and agrarian reforms during the Frei years also hinged on a decidedly gendered understanding of the role of education in creating nuclear families, and specific and narrow allowances towards female civic participation, in ways that have not received adequate scholarly attention, and that later came to bear on the subsequent education reform proposal of Frei's Socialist Party successor, Salvador Allende.

Historiography

Scholars of Latin America have long traced how motherhood became both the moral language of women's civic inclusion and a mechanism of constraint, where "motherhood" became a political idiom that cuts across ideologies.[188] Edited volumes such as *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debate in Theory and Practice* often situate these maternalist, public–private negotiations in late-20th-century contexts (neoliberalism, redemocratization), underscoring why

[188] Asunción Lavrín, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Social Change, and Uruguay 1890-1940* (University of Nebraska Press, 1995). Lavrín shows first-wave feminism as supranational and heterogeneous (socialist, liberal, and conservative actors), with campaigns for labor protection, public health, and civil rights frequently articulated through maternalist language. As Lavrín points out however, maternal reverence was hardly apolitical: it shaped feminists' self-image and policy goals and left a long afterlife in regional gender politics. Donna J. Guy's *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) traces how prostitution debates were framed through safeguarding "good women," family purity, and national honor—anxieties that made motherhood a proxy for regulating sexuality and citizenship.

"women's entrance into the public sphere" often didn't unsettle entrenched gender hierarchies.[189] As Elizabeth Dore and her collaborators emphasize, the politicization of motherhood in Latin America cannot be separated from the symbolic and material centrality of the family. Dore's essay "The Holy Family: Imagined Households in Latin American History" and Ann Matear's contribution, "Desde la protesta a la propuesta: The Institutionalization of the Women's Movement in Chile," traces this logic into late twentieth-century Chile, showing how women's activism was gradually institutionalized through state feminism and civic programs that re-inscribed the moral authority of motherhood even as they promised equality.[190] The Chilean historiography shows similar trends to that of the region's literature more broadly: Karin Rosemblatt's *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures and the State in Chile 1920-1950* demonstrates how, from the 1920s through mid-century, family, sexuality, and social policy were persistently gendered domains through which broader state and class projects were negotiated—an early genealogy of the "politics of difference" that later actors would inherit.[191] Heidi Tinsman's *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform* brings those tensions into agrarian reform, showing through extensive oral and archival history how gender, labor, and sexuality structured peasant households and mobilization in the 1950–73 reforms.[192] Lisa Baldez's *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile* focuses on the period that follows, explaining

[189] Elizabeth Dore, ed., *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debate in Theory and Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 20, 233.
[190] Other recent work, namely Okezi Otovo, *Progressive Mothers, Better Babies: Race Public Health and the State in Brazil 1850-1945* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2016), interrogates the intersections of race and gender by illustrating Afro-Brazilian mothering as a site where philanthropy, medicine, and the state negotiated authority—making poor Black women central to national debates over "good mothering." That racialized maternalism persisted across regimes and policy instruments (e.g., Vargas-era arrangements), which–as Otovo points out–further complicates any linear "modernization" story of maternal politics.
[191] Karin Rosemblatt, *Gendered compromises : Political Cultures & The State in Chile, 1920-1950* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
[192] Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

mobilization under Allende and Pinochet via "tipping, timing, and framing," highlighting leaders' strategic deployment of nonpartisan, maternal frames to build cross-party coalitions.[193] Margaret Power's work on right-wing women maps how regime supporters re-coded themselves from "apolitical mothers" into overt political actors—again, through explicitly maternal identities, something Susan Franschet's *Women and Politics in Chile* touches on as well.[194] [195] While this literature charts the rise of first-wave Latin American feminism and shows how maternalist frameworks structured women's activism (including in Chile), I argue that the rapid feminization of Chile's teaching profession *institutionalized* such maternalist politics. This professional, state-sanctioned channelling of women into teaching roles consolidated a "politics-of-difference" logic within everyday governance, helping to shape both support for PDC social-welfare pedagogy and, ultimately, later opposition to the UP's ENU proposal–despite its continuities with the 1965 National Education Reform.

Feminine Modernity and the Moral Politics of Development (1964-1967)

Prior to Eduardo Frei's election, the Church had already begun to implement a small-scale version of agrarian reform and literacy campaigns, that the PDC would later nationalize and expand. Women proved to be a crucial part of the Church's so-called "national literacy campaign," something that would shape their participation during the six years of PDC government. In January

[193] Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10.
[194] Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende, 1964–1973* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).
[195] Susan Franceschet, *Women and Politics in Chile* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005). Her later work"'State Feminism' and Women's Movements: The Impact of Chile's Servicio Nacional de la Mujer on Women's Activism," *Latin American Research Review* 38, no. 1 (2003), JSTOR. on Chile's *Servicio Nacional de la Mujer* (National Women's Service) rethinks the "NGO-ization/state co-optation" thesis by demonstrating that rather than demobilizing, Chile's "state feminism" reshaped the opportunity structure, and offered discursive and institutional resources that movements could leverage—even as parties remained the primary gatekeepers

of 1963, the Church launched its "pilot plan" for the literacy campaign in two working class neighborhoods of Santiago: La Legua, and San Gregorio. In March of 1963, the Executive Committee of the newly formed National Literacy Campaign met to discuss what the pilot project had revealed, a copy of which was sent to Cardinal Raul Silva. The 1963 report of the pilot plan in Santiago reveals that women were a crucial part of the literacy campaign. While the gender split in La Legua was not so dramatic (there were 7 women teachers and 6 men), the organizing committee for overseeing the pilot project was composed of four women and only one man. In addition, the San Gregorio teachers were overwhelmingly female: eleven women teachers and two men taught the literacy classes there. This seems to have been something that the Church found worth noting, as the sex of each of the "alfabetizadores" (literacy teachers) was recorded as either "feminino" or "masculino" in the report. At the end of that section in which the need for more teachers was mentioned, they made the choice to identify the ten newly recruited teachers by name (five of whom were men and five of whom were women) perhaps in an effort to even out the gender distribution of teachers involved in the project. Because the pilot plan had demonstrated that "the best system" of teacher and student recruitment was done through "personal contact, combined with general and local outreach," the recruitment of an even number of new male and female teachers seems intentional–likely to draw in more students. Indeed the report also illustrates that in La Legua (where there was an equal number of men and women teaching) far more students registered, in comparison to those in San Gregorio (with majority female teachers): The literacy courses in La Legua recorded a total of 373 students registered for literacy classes, 149 of whom were receiving their classes at private centers or residences.[196] In San Gregorio, 137

[196] "Report on the Pilot Literacy Plan in 'La Legua' and 'San Gregorio,'" Document 3, folders 17–18, bundle 167, Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Santiago, Chile, ca. 1963, 6.

individuals registered for classes.[197] Church officials attempting to orchestrate a national literacy campaign thus faced a dilemma: women were more likely to volunteer as teachers, which was something they could not afford to dissuade in a situation which already lacked sufficient numbers of teachers to begin with. Yet they seemingly drew in fewer students than their male counterparts.

This mutually beneficial relationship whereby Church and State actors hoped to recruit women into the folds of state-led social transformation (as both actors and subjects) continued from 1964 onwards. By the time the PDC government was expanding a national literacy campaign a year later–often relying on Church resources and volunteer recruitment–women were a key group that the Christian Democrats sought to incorporate into their social transformation plan known as *Promoción Popular*. Key to the facilitation of Church-State congruence on the consolidation of female support were the Centros de Madres (Mothers' Centers).

Popular Promotion and the Moral Family

Originally created under the wing of the Catholic Church in 1954, by 1964, the PDC saw the utility in expanding the Mothers Centers and drawing them more directly into alignment with the PDC itself. Because of the PDC's close relationship with the Catholic hierarchy, the Mothers Centers became directly linked to the Juntas de Vecinos (Neighborhood Committees) that were the base of Popular Promotion's key initiative: bringing marginalized communities into social welfare programs and civic participation. Under the PDC government, the Mothers Centers came to depend directly on the Executive Branch, and the President of the Mothers Centers became the

[197] Report on the Pilot Literacy Plan in 'La Legua' and 'San Gregorio,'" Document 3, folders 17–18, bundle 167, Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Santiago, Chile, ca. 1963, 7.

First Lady.[198] As historian Maria de la Luz Silva Donoso noted, "during the Frei administration (1964–1970), the Women's Department of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano promoted the formation of Centros de Madres throughout Chile. This meant the massive incorporation of women into the government's social-reform project, with which these centers became an important political clientele for the party."[199] In addition to the Mothers Centers prompting an increase in housewives' civic education and connection to the PDC, they also coincided with a massive increase in young women' s completion of secondary education, and an even more pronounced gender divide in the teaching profession. Due in large part to the National Education Reform of 1965–which expanded compulsory education and the numbers of schools in Chile–the number of women entering *educación superior* (higher education) in either *escuelas normales* (teaching training schools) or university grew substantially. In 1960 only 33.3% of girls ages 15-19 were still enrolled in school. By the end of Frei's presidency in 1970 that had increased to 45.8%.[200] At the university level, 70.7% of students pursuing degrees in education in 1965 were women, and that grew to 72% by 1968.[201] Frei's push for modernization also resulted in a rapid formalization of teaching credentials as part of the National Education Reform. Chile moved from nearly half its primary teachers lacking certification in 1961, to only 10% lacking certification by 1965—one of the lowest rates in Latin America.[202] A 1966 review of Latin American laws and policies that determined the necessary qualifications of teachers noted that–in Chile–to become a teacher in the public school system, laws required that "one must possess civic fitness (*"idoneidad civica"*) and

[198] María de la Luz Silva Donoso, *La Participación Política de la Mujer en Chile: Las Organizaciones de Mujeres* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Friedrich Nuaman, 1987), 56.
[199] Silva Donoso, 57.
[200] Miguel Barrera, *La Mujer en la Estadística Educacional y en la Fuerza de Trabajo Chilenas* (Santiago: Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación, 1976), 35.
[201] Barrera, 160.
[202] Carmen Lorenzo, *Situación del Personal Docente en America Latina* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria UNESCO, 1969), 29.

moral fitness ("*idoneidad moral*")."[203] Chilean law from 1964 onwards also stated that a "permanent appointment" as a public school teacher would require the certification of *normalista*, while the 1965 reform specified that teachers "devote about four hours to administrative work, social-assistance work, or pedagogical tasks. In addition, they must participate in all of the school's cultural, civic, and social activities."[204] The teaching profession in Chile was also unique in comparison to other parts of Latin America in terms of gendered benefits: from 1952 onwards, teachers were guaranteed a prenatal allowance and maternity leave by the State, and were also entitled to family allowances for any dependents 21 years old and younger, and up to 23 years old if that dependent were enrolled in a university.[205] From 1967 onwards, female teachers were also allowed to retire early (after 25 years of service).[206]

The combination of employee benefits, institutional formalization of teaching certification requirements, and the government's encouragement for teachers to teach about and participate in the civic process meant that many young educated women were drawn to the teaching profession, especially after 1965. Being a teacher–especially a primary school teacher–had been a socially acceptable career field for women since the late 19th century, and by the mid-twentieth century, they predominated in it. The modernization of the field and how this shaped class consciousness in Chile was something that itself was gendered: as former Superintendent of Education and historian Ivan Nuñez has pointed out, the professoriate had emerged as a distinct political group by the 1930s because of their rapid and cohesive unionization process. The political effect of the field's continued feminization is something that has not received adequate scholarly attention

[203] Lorenzo, 34.
[204] Ibid., 76.
[205] Lorenzo, 264; 273-275.
[206] This explicitly gendered benefit was negotiated by a national teachers' union movement that will be discussed later in this chapter.

because–though women made up a majority of the field–they participated in unions less frequently and made up less of union leadership. Iván Nunez noted in one his books that outlines the history of teachers' unions in the country, "Some teachers rejected unionism because it "would not be compatible with the 'professional dignity' of the teaching profession" and entailed "practices more typical of the working-class world and unacceptable among educated professionals."[207] Not only did class expectations frame teacher understandings but so did gender expectations: "by educational branch: primary teachers tend[ed] to be more active [in unions]…but by sex: men participate proportionally more; but women teachers are numerically the majority."[208] The overall effect of the PDC's developmentalist policies thus not only pushed for standardizations of the teaching field, but produced a female majority in a key area of the national workforce, but specifically in an area of the workforce that–because of its feminization– came to be seen as a group that should be "above politics." As the rest of this chapter will show, that was rapidly changing, and the professoriate became a deeply politicized and consolidated group in the years leading up to 1973.

Besides being one of the few broadly socially encouraged jobs for working women to enter at the time, there are several other factors that explain women's gravitation towards the teaching profession. The first is that Chilean state regulations required that teachers seeking a job in "the capital or in cities of significant size" must have first "served a minimum of three years in the provinces."[209] This meant that while the PDC was beginning to redistribute land in the countryside as part of the Agrarian Reform Movement, its attendant adult education programs coincided with the expansion of rural schools which drew in large numbers of young urban teachers and university

[207] Ivan Nuñez, *Gremios del Magisterio Setenta Años de Historia: 1900-1970* (Santiago: PIIE, 1986), 117-118.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Lorenzo, 77-78.

students completing their mandatory state service or research for their degrees. Because popular cultural values often sought to naturalize women's supposed innate care-giving and servicial qualities, and because both the PDC and the Catholic hierarchy had framed agrarian reform as a moral imperative (for Catholics in particular), many women might have felt compelled by Christian and civic duty to become teachers. This linking of Christian and civic duty was especially felt by teachers during this era because of Paulo Freire's influence on the direction of the National Literacy Campaign and the Agrarian Reform. Though discussed at length in a previous chapter, it is worth noting that many urban college students linked Christian and Freirian concepts in a way that is especially pronounced in Chilean education discourse of this period.

By the end of Eduardo Frei's tenure in office, the way in which some Catholic students synthesized Freire's ideas took on a reactionary–and gendered–angle. Though most of the education students' theses written between 1965 and 1968 at the Catholic University show an engagement with Freirian principles and their own volunteer work in the countryside that are marked by structural and more revolutionary critiques of Chilean society and economics, some of the education student theses are noticeably less radical than their student counterparts in agronomy and psychology. These later and less radical education theses–all of which were written by students pursuing the newly-created major of *Educación Familiar* ("family education") also demonstrate a renewal of traditional gender roles and traditional family values within the Catholic University system. While earlier theses I examined focused on the need for large scale socio-economic change and Chile's vast inequalities as the main determinants of young Chileans' success in secondary and higher education, those I examined from 1965 onwards often showcase the importance of education *within the family* and parents' roles in educational outcomes. At least some of this can be explained by institutional shifts made during this time in Chile more broadly.

By the late 1960s, the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC) had institutionally recognized a career training program titled "Educación Familiar", likely housed within or alongside its teacher-training and social-work schools. Student graduation lists from 1967 and 1969 bear the Escuela de Educación Familiar stamp and show a predominantly female student body. The "Elvira Matte de Cruchaga School of Social Service" in Santiago merged with the Educación Familiar program to form the later Escuela de Trabajo Social of the Catholic University, thus marking the end of Educación Familiar as a discrete major.[210] Though finding documents on how and why this brief major was created and how long it operated is difficult, what is clear from the Catholic University's patrimonial archive is that this track operated as a gendered and Catholic-family-oriented pathway designed to professionalize women's roles as educators of the family and community. Although the Escuela de Educación Familiar at the PUC represented a distinctly confessional effort to professionalize women as moral educators of the family, it did not emerge in an institutional vacuum. Public universities—above all the Universidad de Chile—had long operated highly feminized training programs oriented toward home, childhood, and the family. Since the 1920s, Chile's first Escuela de Servicio Social–later incorporated into the (public) University of Chile–trained *visitadoras sociales* (female social workers) in child protection, hygiene, puericulture, household administration, and civic education, forming women as intermediaries between state and family through a secular, welfare-state logic.[211] By mid-century, the University of Chile had also established Latin America's first university-level Escuela de Educadoras de Párvulos (School for Early Childhood [female] Educators) in 1944, which

[210] Jaime Caiceo Escudero, "*Anales de la Facultad de Educación de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 3.ª etapa*," *Aula. Revista de Educación* 27 (2021): 147–158, accessed February 12, 2025, https://revistas.usal.es/tres/index.php/0214-3402/article/view/aula202127147158

[211] M. Cristina Ponce Carrasco and Natalia Zamora V., "Formación inicial de las Educadoras de Párvulos en Chile: Una perspectiva histórica (1906–2006)," *Perspectivas Educacionales* 8 (2008): 33–41, accessed October 20, 2024.

emphasized affective, psychological, and community-oriented work with families and young children. These careers expanded nationally during the 1960s, reinforced by the creation of Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles (National Council of Nurseries) in 1968, and by new parvularia programs at regional public campuses.[212] What distinguished the PUC's Educación Familiar track, then, was not its focus on the family—already central to public-sector social work and early childhood education—but its transformation of the family into an explicitly Catholic moral and pedagogical domain. In this formulation, maternalist ideals were not simply affirmed but *systematized* through theological language, pedagogical training, and institutional certification, embedding the "family-educator" within a broader project of Catholic social formation.

The students pursuing the education degrees in 1965 and 1970 made this especially clear in their theses. These students often framed teaching as a profoundly moral, relational, and quasi-spiritual vocation. In a 12 student *seminario-memoria grupal* (a seminar group research paper required as part of obtaining certification to be a state teacher), 9 women and 3 men repeatedly described education as "the orientation of [the child's] growth toward the realization of one's vocation," insisting that the task of the educator was not merely instructional but fundamentally affective, emphasizing—"assistance and accompaniment, counsel, support, information, dialogue." [213] Even the relationship between school and community was articulated through the lens of Catholic complementarity: the individual and community were "complementary beings, like man and woman," and the educator's job was to ensure that this "union… be done well."[214]

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[212] Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, "Historia de la Ley – Vista expandida, N°. 20.835: Crea la Subsecretaría de Educación Parvularia, la Intendencia de Educación Parvularia y modifica diversos cuerpos legales," *Historia de la Ley*, accessed November 19, 2023, https://www.bcn.cl/historiadelaley/historia-de-la-ley/vista-expandida/3999/.

[213] Sergio Cortés G., Fresia E. Doizi S., Clara I. Durán A., *et al.*, *Conceptos de Educación, Orientación y Vocación en la Reforma Educacional* (Seminario memoria, Escuela de Pedagogía, Universidad Católica de Chile, 1969), 11-12, 14-15.

[214] Sergio Cortés G., Fresia E. Doizi S., Clara I. Durán A., *et al.*, *Conceptos de Educación, Orientación y Vocación en la Reforma Educacional* (Seminario memoria, Escuela de Pedagogía, Universidad Católica de Chile, 1969), 12.

Teaching, in this formulation, became a kind of feminized moral mediation, a "duo of educating-educator" that grew together in intimacy and mutual transformation.[215] In one especially revealing passage on vocational "dislocation," the students grouped teachers alongside mothers and priests–three archetypal Catholic roles of moral care–lamenting a world in which there were "mothers without children, teachers behind an office window, priests without a parish."[216]

A parallel moral vocabulary emerged in Amparo Mendizábal García's 1970 thesis "The Process of Conscientization in the Psychosocial Method of Paulo Freire and its Relation to Family Education," completed as part of her degree in Family Education, which likewise cast women as affective mediators of social transformation. Although she drew extensively on Paulo Freire, Mendizábal explicitly neutralized his political radicalism, insisting that the method was "just that, a method" whose values "depends on those who apply it."[217] By stripping *concientización* of its structural critique and reframing it as a process of discovering personal worth and dignity, she recoded Freire's call for political awakening into a form of Christian-humanist self-realization. In this softened version, the educator—especially the explicitly female *educadora familiar*—was to renounce "an authoritarian attitude" and instead embody humility, sympathy, and "horizontal participation" rooted in dialogical encounter.[218] Literacy and community education thus became interior moral renewal: women realized they were not "*ignorantes*" (ignorant people) but persons "*con inteligencia y voluntad*," (with intelligence and will) capable of working, sewing, teaching their children, and even "creating culture."[219] As participants in her study gained confidence, their

[215] Ibid.,15.
[216] Ibd., 38.
[217] Amparo Mendizábal García, *El proceso de concientización del método psico-social de Paulo Freire y su relación con la educación familiar* (Memoria para optar al título de Educadora Familiar, Universidad Católica de Chile, Escuela de Educación Familiar, 1970), 21-22.
[218] Mendizábal García, *El proceso de concientización*, 1970, 25.
[219] Mendizábal García, *El proceso de concientización*, 1970, 55.

meetings evolved and eventually formed into a Centro de Madres, which Mendizábal framed as a maternal civic cell where self-esteem, solidarity, and moral responsibility were cultivated collectively.[220] In her concluding reflections, Mendizábal expressed concern that calls for "total liberation"—associated with more radical interpretations of Freirean pedagogy and, at times, radical political movements—might displace values she understood as central to Christian social order.[221] In this configuration, the *educadora familiar* became a gendered agent of moral development, bridging household, community, and nation through a Catholic-inflected pedagogy that tamed Freire's radicalism into affective, disciplined transformation. As the state sought to modernize rural life and the teaching profession, Catholic actors framed modernization itself as an ethical pedagogy: training mothers to teach citizenship. In this sense, these practices drew on long-standing maternalist traditions while simultaneously incorporating newer pedagogical emphases on horizontality and participation, producing a hybrid model that was both familiar and distinctively shaped by Catholic intellectual currents of the 1960s and developmentalist discourse underpinning the PDC's Popular Promotion initiatives.

Family Planning as Moral Citizenship

Unsurprisingly, the Christian Democratic government–with its emphasis on modernization and incorporating marginalized families into the national fabric of representative democracy–aimed many of its community initiatives at working-class parents. Because of the perceived threat of "demographic explosion" in the Third World, international bodies frequently looked for solutions to the high birthrate in Latin America by advocating local governments' use of family

[220] Ibid., 58.
[221] Ibid., 59-60.

planning services. The role of family planning in Latin America and debates about the use of contraceptives however– in the context of the Cold War and the ongoing discussions of the Second Vatican Council–did not fall along easily predictable political lines in 1960s Chile. As several sociologists and historians have pointed out, some left-wing politicians developed pro-natalist stances more in line with the Catholic Church's prohibition on abortion, believing concerns around "overpopulation" to be imperialist myths, bound up in racialized views of impoverished Latin Americans as inferior, and/or a burden to national economies.[222] Many reform-minded and developmentalist politicians however viewed emerging birth control debates as well as the related issues of "overpopulation," and women's deaths caused by illegal and unsafe abortions, not as issues of women's autonomy, but rather through the lens of development discourse. This view was expressed clearly in the final resolution of a UN Food and Agricultural Organization conference held in Santiago, Chile, in 1965, which stated that "the principle obstacles that impede development… [were] institutional, deriving fundamentally from the fact that agrarian structures were unjust and antiquated in the majority of countries in the region" rather than due to unnaturally high birth rates that led to overpopulation.[223] Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney has highlighted in her work how the surveys conducted by Chilean epidemiologists and doctors in the 1950s and 60s (men who often had experience in U.S. universities and whose research was financed by U.S. institutions) helped to form "a new public consensus about the acceptability of family planning programs, when physicians linked two parallel discourses: the need to prevent maternal mortality and self-induced abortions, and the need to stimulate modernization and development by

[222] Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).
[223] Conferencia Latinoamericana sobre Agricultura y Alimentación, "Conferencia Latinoamericana sobre Agricultura y Alimentación: Proyecto de Informe—Preámbulo," *Cuadernos Médico Sociales (Chile)* 6.2 (1965).

controlling family size."[224] The PDC government's Popular Promotion begun in 1964 was an initiative intended to promote community organizations and strengthen the participation of sectors traditionally marginalized from national discourse. In keeping with the broader PDC ideological stances, this incorporation of existing (and creation of new) community programs and organizations into national decision-making aimed to be an alternative to state paternalism and private individualism. In this way, the Popular Promotion placed its main focus on encouraging civilian participation in various areas such as neighborhood organizations, cultural, sports and social training, Centros de Madres (Mothers' Centers), training of popular leaders, and union organization.[225]

Though the Mothers' Centers themselves did not necessarily provide classes on family planning or provide contraception, they had nevertheless existed in the country prior to their official incorporation into the government's Popular Promotion campaign and had frequently collaborated with the National Health Service, which *did* partake in information campaigns about family planning. The proliferation of Mothers Centers during the Frei years as part of Popular Promotion thus served as an important opportunity for women to have spaces to gather and discuss their own issues around family life and political stances.[226] Moreover, the widespread growth of

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[224] Pieper Mooney, Jadwiga E. "Family Planning and Reproductive Rights in Chile." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History.* 3 Nov. 2015; https://oxfordre.com/latinamericanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001/acrefore-9780199366439-e-103. See also her chapter titled "Planning Motherhood Under Christian Democracy" in her work *The Politics of Motherhood: Maternity and Women's Rights in Twentieth-Century Chile* (University of Pittsburgh Press: 2009).

[225] In 1968, Law No. 16,880, known as the *Ley de Promoción Popular* (Popular Promotion Law), was passed. Along with giving legal recognition to the aforementioned organizations, it established channels through which these entities could improve their social conditions through the increase of community infrastructure (such as paving roads, renovation of public lighting, improvement of sewerage etc) and also created the *Conesjería de Promoción Popular* (the National Council of Popular Promotion), the body in charge of encouraging, managing and monitoring the Popular Promotion process.

[226] Both Margaret Power and Heidi Tinsman have discussed the crucial role that *Centros de Madres* played during the Frei and Allende years– Tinsman's *Partners in Conflict:The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform Movement 1950-73* highlights how Mothers' Centers were prominent in rural areas as part of the Chilean state's efforts to involve women in community development and welfare programs, mainly promoting

Mothers' Centers in Chile coincided with the creation of the Chilean Association for the Promotion of the Family (APROFA)–the first family planning organization in the country–in 1965. Information campaigns by APROFA to promote family planning fit well into the political platform of the Christian Democrats' opposition to abortion but attunement to the wellbeing of the nuclear family, and their concern with improving the material conditions of mothers and children. In 1966, the government of Eduardo Frei Montalva granted it legal status, which allowed it to receive national and international funding (especially from the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and the Rockefeller Foundation among others) as well as support for its medical intervention programs, its educational programs, and for its cooperation with the National Health Service (SNS). In 1967, APROFA organized the Eighth International Conference of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in Santiago–the first time it was held in Latin America. Public health representatives during this period often encouraged women to use APROFA services as well as those of Chile's SNS, which worked in partnership with APROFA.[227] By 1967, the Christian Democratic government increased the funds allocated for family planning services to cover an additional one hundred thousand women.[228] [229] This developmental framing was not limited to centrist Christian Democratic circles. In a June 23 1965 Senate session debating

typically domestic activities such as sewing, cooking, and child-rearing. She also notes that *Centros de Madres*–despite reinforcing traditional gender roles–also became spaces where women could develop political consciousness and mobilize around social issues, sometimes indirectly engaging with agrarian reform and social justice debates. Similarly, Power's *Right Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende 1964-73* illustrates how Mothers Centers played a pivotal role in opposing leftist policies and shaping the political trajectory of the country during the 1960s and early 1970s. For right-wing urban women, the Centers became powerful political tools for asserting their influence, mobilizing mass opposition to Allende, and contributing to the broader anti-communist movement.

[227] Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood: Maternity and Women's Rights in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 73-76.

[228] R. K. B. Hankinson, ed., "Survey and Status of IPPF Family Planning Programmes," *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Santiago, Chile, 9–15 April, 1967* International Planned Parenthood Federation, 181.

[229] Additional information regarding the number of women who received contraceptives and/or numbers of family planning clinics opened in Chile can be found in Pieper Mooney, Jadwiga E. "Family Planning and Reproductive Rights in Chile." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History.* 3.

the nomination of a new Director General of the National Health Service, future president Salvador Allende–then a Senator of the Socialist Party–likewise framed abortion and contraception as urgent issues of public health and economic justice rather than moral transgression. Drawing on his earlier analysis of Chile's *"*medico-social reality*,"* Allende condemned the country's *"*cowardly, narrow morality*"* for ignoring the structural conditions that made abortion "the second leading cause of death among Chilean women."[230] Poor women, he argued, sought abortions not because they rejected motherhood, but because *"*an economic imperative*"* made it impossible to fulfill what society idealized as maternal vocation. Moreover, avoiding frank sexual education "at the higher levels of *teacher training* and medical training," he insisted, prevented young people from confronting "a biological reality" obscured by prudish norms.[231]

While one might expect some sort of pushback or moral criticism from the Chilean Bishops–who throughout the 20th century frequently published pastorals and circulated letters throughout Chile's dioceses and parishes regarding pressing social and political matters such as divorce law proposals–the Christian Democratic government received no push back or condemnation for their role in facilitating women's access to family planning information and contraception via the National Health Service, nor for APROA's proximity to Mothers' Centers. There are several factors that explain the Chilean clergy's more open attitude towards family planning initiatives and education on emerging contraceptive technologies. The first is that the clergy's primary preoccupation with preventing abortion had been the subject of discussion for some time and contraception seemed to be a debated but possible solution. In October 1962 for example, the Institute of Christian Humanism held a four day "Congreso Sobre La Regulación de

[230] Salvador Allende, "Intervención, 'Designación de Director General de Salud,'" *Diario de Sesión: Sesión Ordinaria N.º 10 del Senado, Legislatura Ordinaria año 1965*, 23 June 1965, Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, https://www.bcn.cl/laborparlamentaria/participacion?idParticipacion=940830
[231] The added emphasis on "education" is my own.

Natalidad" ("Conference on the Regulation of Birth") attended by doctors, educators, economists and theologians, during which they discussed the extremely high numbers of Chilean women who had procured illegal abortions and the number of women who had died as a result of unsafe practices related to them.[232] One of the priests who presented at the conference, Fr. Jose Aldunate, publicly stated that although Catholic couples are called to have children "they must do so according to their economic possibilities, their physical and nervous health, and their capacity as *educators*" (emphasis is my own). Notably, this language framed reproductive decision-making in terms of "couples," rather than women specifically. Yet in practice, educational and pastoral initiatives surrounding family planning were overwhelmingly directed at women, reinforcing their role as the primary mediators of moral upbringing and demographic responsibility. Acknowledging that there is a "practical need to space out and even limit the number of children," he implicitly suggested that contraception is admissible for married couples in order to avoid "disfiguring or frustrating the marital union" as that "would be sinning against nature."[233] In the same conference, another theologian, Father Pedro Beltrao, presented what he saw as the ethical and social aspects of birth control, noting that "a process of fertility control is already underway in our country. It is a matter of channeling it and giving it a legitimate form and a Christian meaning." He even went so far as to say that people with "an anti-contraceptive mentality [were] socially harmful from many points of view."[234] By 1964 with the Christian Democratic president newly in office, Catholic publications in the country including the widely circulated Jesuit-run magazine *Mensaje*, continued to publish articles written by doctors and theologians who attended the 1962 congress. Dr. Eduardo Parker–an obstetrician who attended the conference–published a

[232] *Mensaje*, 11(114): Nov 1962, p. 551-552.
[233] Mensaje, 11(114):nov 1962, p. 552
[234] Ibid.

lengthy essay in *Mensaje* in 1964, detailing the science behind hormonal birth control pills, and suggesting that the solution to women seeking abortions, was that youths receive a scientific and psychological sexual education as part of Catholic premarital counseling, and that birth control pills and other forms of medically safe contraception be considered when "responsible intentional procreation" was not an option in their marriage.[235]

All these views resonate with later statements made in 1967 by the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardenal Raul Silva Enriquez, with regards to "responsible procreation" within a couples' means.[236] In fact, when the Chilean Council of Catholic Bishops met in April 1967 to host a "Conferencia Sobre Planificación de Familia," (Conference about Family Planning) their statements indicate very little concern with the actual use of artificial contraception or birth control, and much more concern with the idea that a State not impose birth limits, nor forced birth policies. Their statements on family planning are rather comprehensive with regards to the reality in Chile, noting that a "wise population policy" is a condition of social justice, "which includes, along with a prudent and fair demographic rationalization, a powerful action to promote development and culture, focused on an authentic promotion of the most deprived sectors to incorporate them into the economic, social and political dynamics." As Chilean bishops framed it, the family constituted the "basic component of society," and thus a central site through which both Church and state exercised authority. While affirming the principle of subsidiarity, they argued that the state retained responsibility for promoting the common good, including through policies addressing demographic concerns. At the same time, they emphasized that decisions regarding reproduction ultimately belonged to individual families, reflecting an effort to balance state intervention with

[235] Mensaje, 13(132):sep 1964, p. 422-42

[236] Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez, "La Iglesia y la Regulación de la Natalidad: Palabras del Exmo. Sr. Cardenal Raúl Silva H. en la Academia de San Lucas de Santiago, Junio de 1967," *Mensaje* 16.161 (August 1967): 362.

moral autonomy, "which demands, for the couple, the possibility of choosing whether or not to regulate births and the possibility of choosing the means to do so in conformity with their conscience."[237]

As seen here, the main emphasis throughout the twenty-one page declaration is on how the State should not overstep its authority in regards to population control, but nor should it shy away from creating policies that help marginalized Chileans improve their material conditions, including via "indirect" and "subsidiary" action, such as providing information and resources on family planning possibilities. They even acknowledge that the Church should not overstep its moral authority in relation to the "private" and "intimate" lives of Christian couples. In addition to noting the ways in which the demographic conditions of Chilean society merit options and policies provided by the State, the Chilean Bishops throughout the document also highlight issues of key importance to the Christian Democratic government's political platform. They draw on Vatican II documents and several papal encyclicals to acknowledge the need for representative democracy, respecting political and religious pluralism, and the right of couples to choose options "in conformity with their conscience," rather than making any direct statement which morally condemned the use of contraception. Two months later, the Latin American Center of Population and Family (CEPAL) and the Center for Social and Economic Development of Latin America, (DESAL) jointly published a book titled *Iglesia, Población, y Familia: Estudios Doctrinales*, a collection of 15 essays written by Catholic theologians that echo in various ways the same tacit moral permission the Bishops gave in their declaration regarding couples' use of contraception.[238]

[237] *Declaración de la Conferencia de los Obispos de Chile sobre la Planificación de la Familia* (Santiago, Chile, 1967), 3-8.
[238] See for example, a summary of each of the essays published in a book review in *Mensaje*, 16(159): June 1967, p. 253.

The news of this book's publication was announced in *Mensaje* as well, which is not surprising, since CEPAL and DESAL were interdisciplinary organizations created by the Jesuit priest Roger Vekeman (discussed in chapter 1) in the late 1950s. The publication of the book and the dissemination of reviews of it suggests that Catholic intellectuals, politicians, and those interested in the PDC government's continued modernization and development plans knew that illustrating to the broader Chilean public that the Catholic hierarchy was not hostile towards family planning initiatives and contraceptives, would aid in the continuation of activities already being carried out in various community centers and organizations as part of the Popular Promotion. When the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) was published a year later and strictly prohibited the use of all artificial contraception for devout Catholic couples, it was shocking not only to the Chilean episcopate but also to other members of the Catholic clergy throughout Latin America.[239] In addition to viewing abortion and poverty as more prescient moral issues that might be partially alleviated through the use of contraception, I argue that a final reason that the Chilean episcopate showed remarkable openness to the subject, lie in their desire to preserve their connection with the Christian Democratic Party, in order to regain contact with and relevance in the lives of working class Chileans and especially Chilean women, by aiding in the PDC's political and social reforms. In their attempt to maintain connections with international groups that helped fund development projects, the PDC had already shown their willingness to make contraception more available. The Chilean episcopate's open attitude towards the subject can be seen as emblematic of their desire to end suffering caused by poverty and unplanned pregnancies on the one hand, *and* to encourage women to have more social and educational opportunities in

[239] See for example "Profesores de teología de la U. C. de Santiago se refieren a Humanae Vitae" in *Mensaje,* 17(172):sep 1968, p. 426-428 or "Declaraciones de los episcopados nacionales acerca de Humanae Vitae" in *Mensaje,* 17(175):dic 1968, p. 651-658.

traditionally accepted "feminine capacities," as will be illustrated in the next section. Furthermore, the Catholic episcopate had to contend with the fact that young educated women played a critical role in the continued project of Catholic education. The Chilean hierarchy's endorsement of 'responsible procreation' therefore marked not secularization but the recasting of Catholic maternal virtue as civic duty.

Gendered Citizenship through Developmental Institutions

Technocratic visions of social development in the mid-1960s also framed teaching as a naturalized site of service—an ideological move that dovetailed neatly with the Church and PDC's efforts to channel women into teaching roles. In his 1965 thesis on secondary-education planning, PUC student Wilfredo Pailas Rivera cast education as a domain whose modernization was essential to the nation's democratic and economic future, insisting that "education… must incorporate the recommendations from meetings and congresses… to guarantee adequate education for the population."[240] This developmental framework moralized teaching as continuous, organic work in social formation, arguing that secondary education had to ensure "the integral development of personality" and prepare citizens capable of contributing to "the life of democracy" and "economic life" alike.[241] Rivera reinforced that teachers were the key human resource through which this national project would be achieved, asserting unequivocally that "the teacher is the central element in educational work" and calling for a concrete system of training and permanent professional improvement.[242] Crucially, he rooted this need not only in administrative efficiency but in the

[240] Wilfredo Pailas Rivera, *La educación secundaria en el planeamiento educativo* (undergraduate thesis, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1965), 6.
[241] Pailas Rivera, 49.
[242] Ibid., 53.

ethical demand that teachers cultivate "citizens who can fulfill their duties in a democratic society."[243] Such language—grounded in developmental psychology, civic duty, and the language of "integral" human formation—mapped seamlessly onto the gendered vocational ideals Catholic and Christian Democratic leaders were simultaneously promoting. By framing teaching as a form of planned, continuous service essential to democracy's stability and economic modernization, technocratic planning documents like this one helped render women's pedagogical labor into a "natural," socially necessary expression of citizenship, rather than a contingent product of political strategy.

This discursive move—treating women's service and instructional labor as both natural and developmentally efficient—was echoed in social-science theses of the late 1960s, which framed gendered educational pathways as the logical expression of class background and national modernization needs. The technocratic developmentalism of the 1960s also naturalized women's place in service and pedagogical fields by framing their educational choices as the predictable outgrowth of both class position and "feminine" vocation. As PUC sociology student Roberto Jarry Richardson's 1967 thesis shows, university programs coded as "modern"—above all Pedagogía—absorbed nearly all women students; the authors note that "almost the totality of women follow modern types of studies" (92,1%) and that roughly 70 percent of all female university students clustered in pedagogical tracks, followed by nursing and social services.[244] These patterns were not random but reflected moralized expectations: as the thesis explained, women "possess values that tend toward caring for others," and thus avoid fields like Agronomy or technical careers, which

[243] Ibid., 30.
[244] Roberto Jarry Richardson, *Estratificación social y oportunidades diferenciales de ingreso a la educación superior en Chile* (Sociology thesis, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Escuela de Sociología, 1967), 86-89.

were characterized as "unsuitable for women" by many in the 1960s.[245] At the same time, these gendered dispositions intersected with classed developmental logics. Students from lower-income families, Richardson argued, gravitated toward "more 'practical' technical studies" because their upbringing, limited resources, and the risk of being "looked down on" made high-status professions seem inaccessible.[246] The convergence of these gendered and classist narratives allowed reformers and policy planners to treat women's concentration in teaching and service as both culturally natural and developmentally rational: a technocratic sorting that simultaneously reproduced existing hierarchies, while presenting them as the efficient allocation of human capital.[247] In other words, by the mid-1960s, developmental rationality itself had become gendered: modernization required women's moral labor even as it limited their economic mobility, by constraining them to only professional fields that revolved around moral or physical nurturing–such as teaching–precisely as the salaries associated with teaching were stagnating, and in many areas, declining.[248]

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[245] Richardson, 88.

[246] Roberto Jarry Richardson, *Estratificación social y oportunidades diferenciales de ingreso a la educación superior en Chile* (Sociology thesis, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Escuela de Sociología, 1967),84-85.

[247] Ibid., 78, 86-89.

[248] As scholars of development and gender in other contexts have shown, modernization projects frequently relied on feminized forms of labor—particularly in education, health, and social welfare—while simultaneously reinforcing gendered hierarchies within professional and economic structures. See Mary Kay Vaughn's "Modernizing Patriarchy: State Policies, Rural Households, and Women in Mexico, 1930-1940," as well as Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, "Domesticating Men: State Building and Class Compromise in Popular Front Chile," in *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debate in Theory and Practice*, ed. Elizabeth Dore (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997). Vaughn's *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (University of Arizona Press, 1997) illustrates in various ways how "In the case of Mexico, rural educational policy in the 1930S envisioned a modernization of patriarchy. It aimed at destroying regional patriarchal networks of power and provisioning in favor of national, horizontal networks. It sought to remake the family-men, women, and children-in the interests of nation-building and development. As such, it engaged thousands of women as schoolteachers, technicians, and, in rare instances, policy makers," 11. Barbara Weinstein, "Unskilled Worker, Skilled Housewife," Thomas Miller Klubock, "Morality and Good Habits," and Heidi Tinsman, "Household Patrones," in *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*, all illustrate this in projects of both urban and rural state-led modernization efforts.

Educating the Mother-Teacher: Feminization of Pedagogy and Catholic Humanism

Catechesis, Certification, and the Expansion of Teaching

Since a 1951 legislation passed under President Carlos Ibañez, the private Catholic schools in the country became eligible to receive state grants at a rate equal to half the amount paid by the State in respect of each pupil in public schools.[249] In addition, the Church had (and still maintains) ample inclusion even in public schools, which are required to offer an elective (that is non-obligatory) religious class. In a majority Catholic country, the default religious instruction chosen for the school is usually Catholicism. Because of the rather generous state funding enjoyed by Catholic schools, the clergy had a clear imperative to support the PDC's educational reform plan, as private schools too would receive beneficial fallout from the expansion of the Chilean education system and the increase of its domestic and international funding. In fact, even prior to the PDC reform and slightly before the advent of the Alliance for Progress, the Church had seen steadily increasing enrollments in Catholic educational institutions. Between 1930 and 1955 public enrollment had grown at an annual rate of 3 percent, while private enrollment did so at 11 percent. Following the legislation that granted more generous state subsidies to private schools, between 1951 and 1955, roughly 470 public schools and 70 private schools had been added to the system. This was especially true of the private middle school enrollment, which rose by 17% while public middle school enrollment only rose by 8 percent[250]. Historian Macarena Ponce de Leon has pointed out how, since the vast majority of private school students attended Catholic schools, this

[249] Pablo Toro-Blanco, "Educational Freedom or Teaching State? Political Discussion of the School Subvention Law in 1951. A Key Episode on a Deep Cleavage in the History of Chilean Education," *Hungarian Educational Research Journal* 4, no. 4 (December 2014), 37-38, https://doi.org/10.14413/herj.2014.04.05

[250] Macarena Ponce de Leon, "'Los Dilemas del Crecimiento de la Educación,'" in *Historia de Educación en Chile (1810-2010) Tomo III (1930-1964)*, by Sol Serrano (Santiago, Chile: Taurus, 2018), 118.

positioned the Catholic Church as one of the main supporters of education in Chile, "with all the cultural weight that this meant among the urban middle classes, the teaching profession, and the countryside" and that this caused political and technical alarm "because the systematic admission of students at an accelerated pace, increased the pressure on an educational system that did not have the installed capacity to incorporate them all."[251]

In May of 1960, likely owing to the steady growth in Catholic school construction and increased enrollment, the Catholic Bishops sought to maximize the catechism opportunity presented by this increased connection to Chile's youths. In a collective edict released to the Chilean public titled "Graviter Onerata Conscientia Parochorum," ("The Heavily Burdened Conscience of Pastors") the Bishops declared that 1960 and 1961 would be "National Catechetical Years" in which 'the greatest importance will be given to the diffusion of Christian Doctrine and to the effective, modern and agile organization of Catechesis and religious Instruction."[252] These "Catechetical Years" entailed a national Catechetical Congress, hosted by the episcopate, as well as diocesan Catechetical Congresses that local clergy led and sponsored throughout Chile. In addition they added to the Episcopal Commission of Education, Catechesis and Religious Instruction (OCEC) a specific Office of Catechesis, dedicated to studying the role of catechists in Churches and schools, and implementing more regular training and workshops for them. Noting the existence of "Catechetical Houses" which already existed in Santiago, Valparaíso, Talca, Concepción, and Rancagua among others, who work to prepare religion teachers for public schools, they also noted that a more formal process was underway at the Catholic Universities (of Valaparaíso and Santiago) that would require all "all priests and religious who teach Religion in

[251] Macarena Ponce de Leon, "'Los Dilemas del Crecimiento de la Educación,'" in *Historia de Educación en Chile (1810-2010) Tomo III (1930-1964)*, by Sol Serrano (Santiago, Chile: Taurus, 2018), 119.
[252] Letter by Obispos de la Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, "Edicto Colectivo del Episcopado de Chile acerca de la Catequesis e Instrucción Religiosa," May 8, 1960.

public high schools and technical schools [to] be in possession of said title" and "that current Religion Teachers, with less than ten years of service, take summer courses at our Universities."[253] The edict closes with the exhortation that the Major Superiors of Catholic institutes ensure that the religious teachers in their schools obtain the official title of Religious Teacher obtained via a Catholic university or catechetical center.

By the time the Education Reform of 1965 was in effect, the Chilean school system had expanded to incorporate significantly more students. Statistics available from national census data collected between 1957 and 1974 illustrate that the number of Chilean university students pursuing degrees in education also increased significantly, and along gendered lines. These statistics show that degrees in education were consistently earned predominantly by women, a trend that became even more pronounced during the 1960s and early 1970s—particularly at the primary school level, where expanded teacher training accompanied efforts to standardize certification.[254] Furthermore, data collected on female university enrollment during this period illustrate that the three universities who recorded the highest steady annual growth in their enrollment of female students corresponded to the three universities that had expanded their course offerings in education (the University of Chile, the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile and the Austral University).[255] The steady growth overall of young women's enrollment in universities can also be attributed to the fact that the expansion of secondary education achieved by the Education Reform had created a higher demand for post-secondary education that universities and technical colleges had to respond

[253]Maria Aragonés, "La Mujer y los Estudios Universitarios: 1957-1974," 1976, in *Chile: Mujer y Sociedad*, comp. Paz Covarrubias and Rolando Franco (Santiago, Chile: Alfabeta Impresores Limitada, 1978), 740.
[254] See pg 746 in Maria Aragonés, "La Mujer y los Estudios Universitarios: 1957-1974." In 1957 for example, roughly 3,000 men and 4,000 women got degrees in education, but by 1974, roughly 16,000 men and 36,000 women finished degrees in education.
[255] Aragonés, "La Mujer," in *Chile: Mujer*, 749. These 3 had also maintained their primacy in teaching health sciences, the second most commonly chosen degree path by women

to by expanding their campuses and course offerings.[256] Moreover, because one of the biggest changes imposed by the Education Reform of 1965 was to increase the obligatory cycle of primary school from six to eight years and to make secondary education more accessible, the need for primary and secondary teachers across Chile increased.

The Frei years thus saw a convergence between the clergy's catechetical campaigns and the state's Popular Promotion initiatives, especially agrarian-reform courses and those taught at Women's Centers, since both the PDC government and the clergy sought to channel working women into formal and informal teaching. Between 1966 and 1967, Catholic school enrollment (not including university and other adult education centers) made up 17 percent of the national total.[257] Of that total, 77.3 percent were Catholic primary schools–where the vast majority of educators were women.[258] The fact that most Catholic education took place at the primary school level, where the teaching force was predominantly female is a feature of Chilean education history and Church history that remains largely unexplored; nor was it sufficiently analyzed by various technical experts of the period, making statistics on female participation in this particular sector of the workforce harder to find. What is apparent in various reports on the Chilean education system during this period is that the profession was both rapidly expanding in raw numbers and a larger majority of women were making up the field than even previous decades.[259] While existing historiography has largely attributed this mobilization to the PDC itself and to the curriculum of

[256] During this period in Chile, universities not only expanded their course offerings in the traditional setting of their main campuses, but also began creating short-term courses and degrees at various satellite campuses throughout the country that corresponded to more modern and technical mid-professional pursuits.
[257] Jorge Ochoa and Raimundo Barros, "Antecedentes y Dilemas," in *La Educación Particular en Chile:*, ed. Luis Brahm (Santiago, Chile: CIDE, 1971), 78-80.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Cristián Zurita, Pedro E. Henríquez, and Luis Cárcamo, "Del estatuto docente a la evaluación docente: genealogía de una política", *Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa* 12, no. 2 (2010): 5; Florencia Fiorucci et al., "Feminización y profesión docente en perspectiva comparada: Argentina, Chile y Uruguay (siglos XIX y XX)", in *Feminización docente en perspectiva histórica y comparada* (Madrid: UNED, 2022), 190.

rural education centers, that emphasis risks obscuring the extent to which the rapid expansion and feminization of the teaching profession itself constituted a crucial, yet underexamined, institutional framework through which gendered political identities were formed. In this sense, the growth of a predominantly female educational workforce was not simply a byproduct of reform, but a central mechanism through which both Catholic and state actors shaped women's participation in public and political life. My shift to focus on the feminization of the teaching force reframes the relationship between gender and politics in this period, by suggesting that the institutionalization of women's labor within education may have been as consequential—if not more so—than explicitly political mobilization through party structures. The ways in which women participated in the educational trajectory of Chile, and how this in turn shaped the political landscape in the years leading up to the coup d'etat of 1973, is something that merits scholarly attention, especially since some of the largest unified teachers strikes in the country's history took place during the Frei years, and led to both a political radicalization of teachers, as well as the highly contentious debates around the UP's educational reform proposal.[260]

While the University Reform Movement is not the subject of this chapter, it is necessary to mention here that because of it, between 1966 and 1968, Chilean universities sought to respond to student demands that the Chilean university system serve the interests of all Chileans and not just the middle and upper classes, and that its coursework be geared more towards modern national needs, by creating courses that deviated from the "classical academic-professional" model and offered courses and degrees for more "technical and mid-level professionalization."[261] Thus as traditional degrees became somewhat displaced from their primacy in university education by new

[260] This will be discussed in detail in chapter four, which focuses on the *Escuela Nacional Unificada* at length.
[261] Maria Aragonés, "La Mujer y los Estudios Universitarios: 1957-1974," 1976, in *Chile: Mujer y Sociedad*, comp. Paz Covarrubias and Rolando Franco (Santiago, Chile: Alfabeta Impresores Limitada, 1978), 735.

career paths geared more towards engineering and industrial technology, they attracted more men. This, in conjunction with the fact that more women were entering the university system by the late sixties, paved the way for an even more pronounced female predominance in the university study of education and pedagogy.[262] At the two largest Catholic universities in the country (the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in Santiago and in Valparaíso) the education degree courses took a turn towards focusing much more on "educación familiar" (family education) and the study of education in rural and indigenous zones of the country and urban working class zones, both of which make sense in the context of a national education and agrarian reform led by a Christian Democratic party, especially during the years of the University Reform movement. However, at the Pontifical Catholic Univeristy, pedagogy faculty actually declined between 1967 and 1973, even as national figures show an increase in women entering teacher-training programs and teaching jobs.[263] The paradox points to a gendered division in Chilean higher education: elite Catholic institutions invested in agronomy, engineering, and the sciences (something demonstrated in the previous chapter), while the state, public universities, and Catholic institutions increasingly drew more women into pedagogy. By the time Allende's ENU proposal emerged, this feminization of pedagogy—already reinforced by Frei's Popular Promotion initiatives and the Church's catechetical reforms—meant that women's role in education was both highly visible and politically charged. Moreover, the contradictions of Chile's mid-century development model help explain why the teaching profession—precisely as women entered it in large numbers—remained structurally underpaid and permanently mobilized (for strikes). As Núñez emphasizes, the import-substitution model relied on a modest redistribution toward the middle sectors but operated within

[262] Ibid., 749.
[263] Cristián Cox, *La reforma en la Universidad Católica de Chile*, comp. Manuel Antonio Garretón and Javier Martinez, vol. II, *Biblioteca del Movimiento Estudiantil* (Santiago: Ediciones Sur, 1987), 118-119.

two hard limits: a slowly growing surplus and a "compromisoria" distribution that could not encroach on capitalist interests. Chronic inflation eroded any gains, forcing teachers to launch repeated wage campaigns that, in turn, fed the inflationary cycle.[264] One might expect the *magisterio*, as a large middle-class pressure group, to benefit from this model, but its power had a weak point: education was not a sector producing "essential goods," so strikes exerted no direct economic pressure. Furthermore, teachers confronted the State as an employer, without legal bargaining mechanisms and with strikes deemed illicit and technically illegal.[265] Paradoxically, the *gremios* (guilds) themselves pushed for continuous expansion of the teaching force, a strategy that increased their numbers but made salary improvements fiscally untenable in a system where most budgetary spending was allocated to wages. This meant that in practice, teacher salaries were "sacrificed" in favor of system growth. By the mid-1960s, then, the feminizing profession was already locked into low relative pay—an outcome not of women's presence, but of a development model and union strategy that privileged coverage over remuneration. As this section has shown, state expansion and ecclesiastical catechesis efforts moved in tandem, institutionalizing women as both the guardians of moral literacy and the frontline of educational expansion, both of which became a key part of the kind of Catholic-inspired push for modernization and an expanded civic life–hence the need for constant moralizing rhetoric around a profession that drew in proportionally more women and relatively lower pay.

A. The Catholic University and the Pedagogical Vocation

My previous chapter illustrated the ways in which university students in Chile contributed to the work of the Popular Promotion, and how their participation in the educational sector and

[264] Núñez, *Gremios del Magisterio,* 202-203.
[265] Núñez, *Gremios del Magisterio,* 202-203.

agrarian reform's attendant educational projects brought them into contact with impoverished Chileans, the Catholic clergy, and state agents, contributing to national political tensions and the fissuring of the Christian Democratic Party's support. As this chapter has illustrated, the fact that young women were increasingly entering the university and the workforce in conjunction with a national expansion in birth control access meant that the Catholic clergy became more concerned with how to resolve the tension between promoting traditional family values (in which women figure primarily as wife and mother,) while still serving to moderate their increasing social opportunities and work opportunities brought on by the Popular Promotion– a project which the clergy themselves had supported. An example of this tension and its precarious resolution can be found in the Catholic University system in the final years of Frei's presidency.

As a result of the PUC's University Reform Movement, student demands for new governance and broader access to the university were granted: before the end of 1967, students at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile were able to elect their own Rector and Vicerector for the first time, and more importantly, the University created the Worker and Peasant University Department (DUOC) and the Interdisciplinary Program of Education Research (PIIE) the following year.[266] The DUOC, created in 1968 provided free education to students belonging to the lower classes (children of workers and peasants in particular) who could not otherwise access university. They opened university classrooms to workers and low-income students who could study technical careers at the Catholic University in Santiago despite their limited economic resources. DUOC proved to be an extremely successful program— in its first year it only had one campus with 475 students; the following year, two more campuses were added, and 3,033 students

[266] The PIIE was created in 1970 and formally institutionalized in 1971. It will be discussed in the next chapter, since its activities fall within the Popular Unity years, but because its creation was spurred by the University Reform, I chose to mention it here.

were recorded; by 1972 DUOC already had 30,000 students enrolled in its courses and programs.[267] The creation of DUOC and its continued success are a testament to the work of women students at the Catholic University during this early period. Not only was DUOC initiated by a group of students and faculty in the education department, but so too was much of the DUOC's coursework and programming sustained by female student volunteers. Catholic University students assisted professors by teaching some of the courses offered by the DUOC, but female students in particular–in fact, almost exclusively–participated in another key part of the program: childcare. Because many of the adults completing their degrees and training at DUOC were also parents, the DUOC offered free childcare onsite so that parents (who likely could not have come for night classes otherwise) could come with their children. Student magazines and newspapers on campus during this period advertised weekly announcements run by the DUOC volunteer leadership (almost all of whom were women majoring in Family Education or Primary Education).[268] This dovetailed neatly with recommendations that the Latin American Conference of Catholic Bishops (CELAM)'s Department of Education had made in their December 1969 meeting to discuss educational planning in collaboration with State ministries and agencies. Their suggestions–while arguing for the need for better salaries for teachers–also included gendered recommendations such as "Create nursery rooms in girls' schools, which the girl [students] would staff in shifts to care for the children of the women who work there" and selecting and promoting teachers based on their "attitude of service."[269]

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[267] Rircardo Krebs, M. Angelica Muñoz, and Patriciio Valdivieso, *Historia de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile : 1888 - 1988* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2001), II:159,195-198,206-207.

[268] Nearly every issue between 1970 and 1973 of the biweekly Catholic University magazine *Revista Debate Universitario* advertised the need for more volunteers for DUOC's free childcare service, often alongside photos of cheerful university women and young children at a DUOC center; the FEUC also published essays about DUOC and occasionally ads for volunteers to help with teaching and childcare in their pamphlets and their magazine *Revista FEUC.*

[269] *Los católicos y la educación en América Latina: Nuevas perspectivas para el planeamiento* (Bogotá: CELAM, 1969), 9, 22.

Female university students' from 1968 and 1969 show how many lay Catholics in education–like the CELAM—internalized both Freirean vocabulary about "liberating education," with gendered, Catholic understandings of "moral formation." In the 1969 PUC seminar *Política y Educación*, 12 education students approached the "social question" through an ambitious effort to reconcile Marxist and Christian understandings of humanity and history. Their comparative opening framed both as humanist projects: Marxism sought man's liberation from alienating structures through labor, while Christianity offered transcendence through grace and community. "Man is essentially social; without society he could not live," they observed of Marx, yet they counterposed the Christian notion of man as the image of God, whose fulfillment depends on others but also on divine aid.[270] Work, for both, carried salvational potential—the Marxist path of self-creation through labor paralleled the Christian idea that "human activity…perfects man himself."[271] The conclusion—that "man is worth more for what he is than for what he has" already anticipated the shared moral language that would structure Chile's educational reform debates at the end of the decade.[272] From this philosophical synthesis the students turned to the Socialist Party, whose *Declaration of Principles* rooted education "in the concept of Revolution."[273] Education was the instrument through which the proletariat would acquire consciousness and transform both production and morality. The students summarized socialism's dual imperative: to create "objective and subjective conditions" for a new order," insisting that education must "serve the Revolution by breaking traditional structures of power."[274] For the Socialist Party, the school

[270] Ilse Callejas Miranda et al., *Política y educación: Análisis del pensamiento político de algunos partidos sobre educación* (Seminario de memoria para optar al título de Profesor de Estado, Facultad de Filosofía, Letras y Ciencias de la Educación, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1969), 71-72.
[271] Ibid., 76.
[272] Ibid.,77.
[273] Ibid., 85.
[274] Ibid.,86.

should "create the objective conditions … and create in the proletariat an awareness of its rights to combat the imperialist counterrevolution."[275] Yet despite its militancy, this framework mirrored the Christian Democrats' own conviction that education was the means to regenerate society. The PUC students even borrowed socialist developmentalist language to describe the Catholic project: both defined education as the decisive site for producing a new moral subject. The second half of the thesis made this convergence explicit through a sympathetic reading of the Christian Democratic Party and Frei Montalva's *Reforma Educacional*. The students described Christian Democracy as the inheritor of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, drawing on a philosophy of "integral humanism" that sought "a society in which the human being develops fully and integrally."[276] Education thus became the privileged means of national modernization without class struggle—a project "to intensify progress: to develop man integrally, so that he may occupy his proper place in society with a store of moral and spiritual values."[277] Unlike the socialist ideal of collective emancipation, the Christian Democratic vision revolved around moral harmony among social groups ("the community as both means and end") given the Catholic doctrinal conclusion that class warfare necessarily entailed violence and was therefore a sin. Its reform agenda echoed developmentalist planning but moralized its objectives by using education as a primary locus that transformed the economic logic of growth into an ethical one. At the same time, the PDC preserved the Church's paternalist gender order: as the students noted in their collective seminar paper, the family was "the basic cell of society," and education defended "the dignification of woman and the safeguarding of her children's future," while the State's role was to "respect the family's right to guide the education of its children."[278] The woman appeared not as a political

[275] Ibid., 87.
[276] Ilse Callejas Miranda et al., *Política y educación,* 166.
[277] Ibid., 173.
[278] Ibid., 168-170.

actor but as guardian of moral continuity, the domestic counterpart to the male citizen whom the schools were to "awaken in his capacity to be conscious of things and of the world."[279]

Across these three sections, the students' synthesis of Christian and socialist discourses illuminated a generational attempt to articulate a third path: revolutionary in scope yet moral in tone, technocratic yet salvific. Both systems imagined education as the decisive terrain for forming the "new man"—Marxist pedagogy sought class consciousness through collective labor, while Christian Democracy sought civic virtue through "integral education" and community. The difference lay not in their utopian scale but in their anthropology: where socialism made [hu]man[ity] the maker of history, Christian Democracy made him its moral subject. By 1969, the PUC students cast education as the bridge between these visions—a redemptive labor through which Chile might reconcile modernization with faith, equality with hierarchy, and revolution with the family. This group thesis helps expose how Catholic teachers—women in particular—reframed social justice discourse through a maternalist lens, positioning themselves less as political actors engaged in class struggle, than as moral educators of the poor. In doing so, they did not depoliticize social reform so much as recast it in ethical and pedagogical terms that aligned with Christian Democratic visions of social harmony. Thus they did not reject politics, but rearticulated it as moral authority, thereby displacing conflict into the ostensibly apolitical domains of family, education, and social service.

Conclusion

When the Unified Center of Chilean Workers (CUT) was formed in 1953, one of its founding constitutive federations was the Federation of Chilean Educators (FEDECH).[280]

[279] Ibid., 180.
[280] Nunez, *Reformas Educacionales*, 217.

FEDECH–which since the 1940s had coordinated the various teacher associations—called national mobilizations whenever salary negotiations stalled, drawing tens of thousands of teachers into assemblies, marches, and public demonstrations. Teacher militancy in the mid-1960s intensified the politicization of the magisterio, as repeated wage conflicts thrust educators into open confrontation with the State, leading to strikes in 1965, 1966, and 1968. The 1965 and 1966 conflicts unfolded amid deepening inflation and worsening teacher pay, pulling in not only primary teachers (the strongest base of FEDECH) but also secondary teachers affiliated through the National Society of Teachers (SONAP) and other sectoral bodies. These mobilizations sharpened teachers' sense of themselves as salaried workers embedded in the broader political coalitions of the "Estado de Compromiso," and accustomed them to tactics—street marches, mass meetings, and strikes—typical of the broader labor movement.[281] The fact that FEDECH itself had been a founding component of the (CUT) reinforced the perception that teachers were part of the broader working-class struggle. Across these strikes, teachers repeatedly faced police repression, tear gas, and the militarization of protest control—experiences that left "marks on the consciousness of educators" and helped disseminate the idea that they were not only public servants but politically situated "workers of education."[282] Already in 1967, at its national convention, SONAP–which had historically been more moderate and professionalist–had debated the structural weakness of the teacher movement and the need for deeper organizational reform, a conversation that now gained new urgency. Their 1967 Convention however did lead to women's early retirement (after 25 years of service) and the establishment of the Corporación de Bienestar del Magisterio, a social-welfare, health, and mutual-aid organization specifically for teachers.

[281] Nuñez, *Reformas Educacionales*, 216-217.
[282] Ibid,.

The turning point came with the 1968 strike, the longest in the history of the Chilean teaching profession, which lasted 59 days. It was triggered when the Frei government—despite earlier promises—failed to deliver the scheduled salary increases intended to support his educational reform. FEDECH called the strike, but participation revealed organizational fragility: unlike earlier mobilizations, the 1968 stoppage was obeyed by "a barely sufficient majority" of 50,000 teachers.[283] Inside FEDECH, this produced intense self-criticism and generated discussions about abandoning the old federative model in favor of "organic unity" that could increase representativeness and strike capacity. The brutal repression of the 1968 strike—marked by clashes with police, public vilification, and the State's refusal to negotiate until exhaustion—further radicalized many teachers, pushing them toward more overt political identification within left and center-left parties. The experience cemented widespread acceptance of the notion of the teacher as a "worker of education," underscored their structural conflict with the State-employer, and paved the way for the later push to create a single union–the Sindicato Unico de Trabajadores de Educación (SUTE), by the Allende government, which was openly aligned with the CUT and conceived as an organization representing all education workers.[284]

The memories of officials who negotiated the 1968 conflict further illuminate how fully teachers had become politicized actors that the State could not easily discipline. In a later interview, [then] Education Minister Máximo Pacheco recalled that Frei advised him not to receive FEDECH leaders in the Ministry, forcing negotiations into Pacheco's private home—a symbolic inversion that underscored the government's unease with the teachers' growing political leverage.[285] Over the course of "a hundred days" of nocturnal meetings, he found himself

[283] Ibid., 218.
[284] Nuñez, *Reformas Educacionales*, 219-220.
[285] Máximo Pacheco Gómez, "Huelga de profesores 1968," interview by Soledad Ferreiro Serrano, *Entrevistas ex parlamentarios y ex parlamentarias*, Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile (BCN), 2009, accessed February 6,

physically exhausted while FEDECH's rotating delegations "wore [him] down" and outmaneuvered him procedurally, a dynamic he attributed to the union's superior organizational skill and political training.[286] Pacheco's own account of turning to Communist intermediaries to break the stalemate—because he felt the FEDECH leadership was "making tricks" and that negotiations "would never end" without partisan mediation—speaks to the complex web of cross-party alliances, tactical sophistication, and ideological clarity teachers had developed by the late 1960s.[287] Far from passive professionals asking for wage adjustments, FEDECH leaders appeared to Pacheco as seasoned political actors who understood their power, the electoral stakes, and the vulnerabilities of the State. Their behavior in 1968 thus offers a window into how teachers–increasingly radicalized by repression and economic crisis–entered the 1970s as crucial participants in Chile's broader political realignment. Though the meetings with FEDECH leaders that Minister Macheco remembers likely took place with men (male leadership in unions was overwhelmingly common) "participation [in the 1968 strike] was quite high in primary education, but only barely a majority in secondary education."[288] This is telling because primary education was far more feminized in the 1960s than was secondary education. Though women are hardly brought up as the instigators of the 1968 strike explicitly in the historiography, the aesthetics of the strike: "ollas comunes" ("common pots" which were collective, community run soup kitchens) became "as public centers radiating the strike… In Santiago, 'ollas comunes' were set up in all four cardinal directions of the city."[289] "Ollas comunes" are historically feminized forms of protest

2024.
https://www.bcn.cl/historiapolitica/entrevistas/detalle.html?handle=10221.1/20525&handle_hc=10221.1/12711&tema=Huelga%20de%20Profesores.

[286] Ibid.

[287] Ibid.

[288] Nunez, *Gremios del Magisterio,* 220-221.

[289] Ibid.

infrastructure, meaning women teachers likely played key organizational roles, even if not explicitly stated in accounts of the strike. In fact, a few years later women would once again lead the charge of a mass protest utilizing soup pots and pans as a protest gesture during the infamous "March of the Empty Pots"—an anti-Allende government protest against food shortages.

Chilean teachers tended to align themselves with parties that championed social reform and public expansion of education. Teachers—especially primary teachers and normalistas—were historically aligned with center-left and left parties because these groups supported expansion of public schooling, increased state funding, improved teacher status and salaries, modernization and democratization of schooling. Teachers' organizations long saw themselves as agents of national modernization, but in Chile this role became increasingly gendered, as a predominantly female workforce was tasked with advancing social reform through pedagogical and moral authority rather than formal political power.

Thus teachers–including those at Catholic institutions (though they likely participated less frequently in national unions)–naturally gravitated toward political currents supportive of state expansion and public welfare. This explains why throughout the 1960s–1973 period, teachers disproportionately supported the PDC and later UP reforms—teachers were a crucial political constituency.[290] However, public policy officials and technicians often saw the magisterio as belonging to "'semi-professions'" which "differ from fully developed professions due to the presence of a high percentage of women and because they work predominantly within bureaucratic institutions." In other words, teachers–who in Chilean public and private Catholic schools alike

[290] Ivan Nuñez, "El Cambio Educativo en Chile: Estudio Histórico de Estrategias y Actores, 1920-1973," in *Jornada de Historia Educacional Chilena* (Universidad Catolica de Valparaíso, Instituto de Educación, 1984), 26-29.

had become seen as part of a moral and civic service provider—were not taken seriously as a cohesive political bloc because, as contemporary sociologists noted at the time, "their training period is shorter than that required for more developed professions, they have lower social status, possess less specialized professional knowledge, and do not have guaranteed rights to privileged communication."[291] By 1970, the Chilean education system was serving over 2.6 million students–2.2 million of whom were in primary school, where the vast majority of teachers in both public and private (Catholic) schools would have been women.[292] Teachers' dissatisfaction with the effects of the Christian Democrats' Educational Reform of 1965 and its subsequent mobilization of a massive number of workers–who had previously been viewed as a maternal and somewhat apolitical sector of society—forced politicians and average Chileans across the political spectrum to contend with the fact that teachers wanted to be part and parcel of policymaking. In the early days of the Unidad Popular government, this realization prompted the creation of the SUTE, and eventually, the proposal of the Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) reform. While both the SUTE and the ENU have received ample scholarly attention insofar as the ENU helped mobilize opposition forces in Chile enough to generate the coup of September 11, 1973, the role that gender played in that movement has not been studied.

This chapter has shown that the expansion and reform of Chile's educational system in the 1960s depended on the construction of a gendered labor force in which women—particularly as teachers—were positioned as moral agents of national development. By tracing how Catholic and state actors alike framed pedagogical work as an extension of women's maternal authority, it

[291] Z. Legatt, "Teaching as Profession," in *Profession and Professionalization*, ed. J. A. Jackson (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 157, quoted in Iván Núñez, *Reformas educacionales e identidad de los docentes: Chile, 1960–1973* (Santiago: PIIE, 1990), 17.
[292] Cristián Cox D. and Cecilia Jara B., *Datos básicos para la discusión de políticas en educación (1970–1988)* (Santiago: CIDE/FLACSO, 1989), 4.

reveals how modernization projects both expanded women's participation in public life and constrained it within a feminized politics of care. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates that the "woman-as-mother-educator" was not simply a cultural ideal, but a structuring logic of educational reform that shaped both the possibilities and limits of women's political engagement. As the next chapter shows, these dynamics would crystallize in the conflicts over the ENU, which exposed not a monolithic Catholic resistance but a field of competing actors divided over the meaning of education, authority, and social change.

Chapter Four: Catholic Fractures and the *Escuela Nacional Unificada*, 1970-1973

Introduction

In February 1973, the Popular Unity government distributed nationwide a document titled *Informe sobre la Escuela Nacional Unificada* (Report on the National Unified School), summarizing its proposed transformation of Chile's educational system. The report quickly became the focal point of escalating tensions between the government and sectors of Chilean society, including the Catholic Church. As Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez later recalled, its circulation marked "one of those miscalculations [that] became the worst problem the Popular Unity government would face with the Church."[293] In late March, Silva Henríquez met with Minister of Education Jorge Tapia and later with President Salvador Allende to discuss the proposal. While affirming that the Church had long supported profound educational reform, he

[293] Raúl Silva Henríquez, *Memorias: Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez*, ed. Ascanio Cavallo (Santiago: Ediciones Copygraph, 2009), 464.

insisted that such reform must be grounded in pluralism—something he argued the ENU did not guarantee. Allende responded by promising to postpone the project if it lacked broad agreement.[294] Yet in the weeks that followed, the government proceeded with a more cautious strategy, promulgating Decreto Supremo Nº 224, which established the ENU's proposed local, regional, and national councils as consultative bodies. The result was an uneasy coexistence of postponement and partial implementation: even as the ENU stalled as a unified curricular project, its institutional framework remained in place, ensuring that education would remain a central site of political conflict in the final months of the Popular Unity government.

Many scholars' work emphasizes the Catholic Church's opposition to the ENU, often using the "Catholic Church" as a metonym for the Chilean episcopacy.[295] Still others even point to the ENU as being a final flashpoint that mobilized Chile's centrist political groups into supporting an overthrow of the Unidad Popular government in 1973.[296] More recent historiography, however, has shifted attention away from focusing on episcopal opposition, instead situating the ENU within longer trajectories of democratization, popular education, and critical pedagogy, and in doing so, has hinted at the heterogeneity of Catholic actors and educational projects during the Unidad

[294] Ibid., 466.

[295] Works on the ENU which reference the Church as a primary or decisive element of ENU opposition are countless, but of note are Alberto Villarroel Carmona, "El derecho primario de los padres en la educación de los hijos," *Revista Chilena de Derecho* 28, no. 2 (2001): 447–458; Beatrice Ávalos, "Luchando por educación 'para todas y todos': La visión educacional de la Unidad Popular y de Salvador Allende," in *La vía chilena al socialismo 50 años después*, vol. II (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2020); Iván Núñez, *La ENU Entre Dos Siglos: un Ensayo Histórico sobre la Escuela Nacional Unificada* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2003); and Cristián Cox, *Políticas educacionales y principios culturales, Chile 1965–1985* (Santiago: Ministerio de Educación, Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación, 1986). Together, these works emphasize the Catholic Church's opposition to the Escuela Nacional Unificada, frequently treating the Church as a unified institutional actor—most often through the public interventions and authority of the Chilean episcopacy—rather than disaggregating internal Catholic positions or actors.

[296] Joseph P Farrell's *The National Unified School: The Role of Education in the Destruction of a Revolution* (Toronto: The University of British Columbia Press, 1986) is the most thorough and sustained analysis of the politicization of the ENU, and cites it as one of the crucial final factors in generating the military coup.

Popular period, rather than treating the Church as a unified institutional antagonist.[297][298] In this chapter, I add to that growing historiography by illustrating that Catholic responses to the Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) were not uniform, clerical, or doctrinally grounded. Instead, the ENU exposed a deep fracture across Catholic Chile, one which I've documented throughout the dissertation by focusing on the fissures within the Christian Democratic Party. By tracing these divisions, the chapter demonstrates that the most consequential cleavage shaping the fate of the ENU was not a simple opposition between religion and revolution, but rather a contest among Catholics themselves over authority, pluralism, and the proper relationship between Church, state, and society. In this sense, the ENU debate reveals less about a unified Catholic resistance to socialism than about the internal fragmentation of Catholic political and intellectual spheres in late twentieth-century Chile.

The chapter moves forward in three sections. The first situates the ENU within a longer trajectory of Catholic–state collaboration in educational reform, demonstrating that the proposal emerged from a decade-long process that expanded access, professionalized teaching, and

[297] See Beatríz Areyuna, Fabián Cabaluz, and Felipe Zurita, "Educación Popular y Pedagogías Críticas. Corrientes emancipadoras de la educación chilena," in *Educación popular y pedagogías críticas en América Latina y el Caribe: Corrientes emancipatorias para la educación pública del siglo XXI*, ed. Anahí Guelman, Fabián Cabaluz, and Mónica Salazar (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2018); and Leonora Reyes-Jedlicki, Luis Osandón-Millavil, and Fabián Cabaluz-Ducasse, "Educación y democratización en tiempos de crisis: Alcances contemporáneos de la experiencia de la Unidad Popular," in *La vía chilena al socialismo 50 años después. Tomo I* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2020). Areyuna, Cabaluz, and Zurita's references the Church almost exclusively in connection to progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, especially liberation theology, Church-based human rights organizations, and Catholic spaces that sustained popular education during the dictatorship, while Reyes-Jedlicki, Osadón-Miillavil, and Cabaluz-Ducasse reference the Church minimally but rather than framing it as oppositional, they highlight Catholicism as a source of pedagogical affinity folded into broader conversations about education and humanization.

[298] On educational reform as a transnational Cold War project, see Lorenzo Delgado Gómez-Escalonilla and Óscar J. Martín García, *Teaching Modernization: Spanish and Latin American Educational Reform in the Cold War* (Berghahn Books, 2022), who argue that educational modernization in the 1960s and 1970s was shaped by the convergence of U.S. development policy, international organizations, and modernization theory, which framed education as a tool for producing "human capital" and containing communism. Their case studies of El Salvador, Brazil, and Chile further demonstrate that these reforms were often tied to state-building and regime legitimation, while also generating conflict, as local actors adapted, resisted, or reinterpreted externally promoted models of development and educational change.

reconfigured educational authority. The second shows that, in its aims and pedagogical vision, the ENU echoed many of the principles advanced by Catholic reformers, highlighting that conflict emerged less over goals than over questions of authority and implementation. The third analyzes the divergent responses to the ENU across Catholic sectors, demonstrating how opposition coalesced primarily among conservative lay sectors rather than within the episcopacy itself. Together, these sections reframe the ENU controversy as a moment that laid bare the internal fractures of Catholic Chile, rather than a unified institutional confrontation between Church and state. In doing so, it lays the foundation for my fifth chapter, which details the gendered anxiety which underpinned opposition and which have gone unanalysed in historiography of the ENU.

A Decade of Democratization: Setting the Stage, 1964-1971

Far from constituting a rupture introduced by the Unidad Popular, the Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) emerged from a reform trajectory already well underway during the Frei administration, one in which Catholic actors were not peripheral observers but active participants. Beginning in the mid-1960s, Chilean educational policy increasingly linked literacy, teacher professionalization, and expanded access to schooling with democratic citizenship and national development. Catholic universities, research institutes, and pedagogical networks collaborated closely with state agencies in this process, helping to modernize curricula, expand adult education, and integrate previously marginalized populations into formal educational structures. By the early 1970s, the core premises later associated with the ENU—state coordination, pedagogical standardization, the expansion of the teaching corps, work-study programs, and the incorporation of community councils into school governance—were neither novel nor uniquely Marxist. Rather, they reflected a decade-long Catholic–state reform continuum that had already begun to reshape educational authority and the relationship between schooling and citizenship.

By the end of the Frei administration, educational reform was explicitly framed as a project of civic integration and social participation. A 1970 planning report prepared by Ernesto Schiefelbein for the Ministry of Education defined basic (i.e. primary) education not merely as instruction but as a mechanism to "equip the student to participate effectively in social life" and to provide the tools necessary for adolescents to "choose intelligently between immediate incorporation into working life or the continuation of studies."[299] Such language closely anticipates later ENU formulations linking schooling to democratic citizenship, social responsibility, and entrance into the work force. Rather than representing a Marxist-Leninist innovation, these ideas emerged from a broader technocratic and developmentalist consensus that understood education as a vehicle for integrating individuals into collective social life. This reformist vision also presupposed a significant degree of state coordination across both public and private sectors. As Schiefelbein's report noted, private and state schools coexisted at all levels, with many private institutions receiving state subsidies.[300] Although a minority of private schools continued to rely on tuition, private education was not insulated from state oversight: by 1970, curriculum approval, textbook selection, and institutional supervision already fell within the authority of the Ministry of Education.[301] In this sense, the ENU's emphasis on coordination and standardization did not introduce a new relationship between the state and Catholic private education, but rather extended regulatory practices that had been normalized over the previous decade.

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[299] Ernesto Schiefelbein F., *El sistema educacional chileno (versión preliminar)* (Santiago: Instituto de Economía y Planificación, Ministerio de Educación Pública, junio de 1970), 2.

[300] Schiefelbein, *El sistema educacional chileno,* 3. Since a 1951 legislation passed under President Gabriel Gonzalez Videla, the private Catholic schools in the country became eligible to receive state subsidies which set at a fixed rate of each student attending free private schools to a 50% of the revenue cost per student. See Pablo Toro-Blanco "Educational Freedom or Teaching State? Political Discussion of the School Subvention Law in 1951. A Key Episode on a Deep Cleavage in the History of Chilean Education." *Hungarian Educational Research Journal* 4, no. 4 (December 2014). https://doi.org/10.14413/herj.2014.04.05.

[301] Ibid., 11.

Simultaneously, reformers identified structural limitations within the educational system itself. The Ministry of Education's administrative framework, largely unchanged since 1953, was widely criticized as "extraordinarily centralized" and ill-suited to a period of rapid social and institutional transformation.[302] In response, policymakers experimented with decentralization and invested in educational research and evaluation. A 1969 national meeting of educational researchers at the Seminar of General Basic Education for example, had called for a shift away from rote memorization toward a more holistic conception of education oriented around its "true objectives," since the "effective participation of the ordinary person in the structures of a democratic society requires a higher level of culture."[303] These initiatives underscore that, on the eve of the ENU debate, reform-oriented actors—including Catholic educators embedded in state planning bodies—were already committed to pedagogical modernization and technocratic evaluation, neither of which was framed as ideological indoctrination.

These reform efforts also translated into concrete institutional changes. Enrollment expanded rapidly, particularly with the extension of basic education, which saw dramatic increases in participation by the late 1960s. As discussed at length in previous chapters, enrollment in the newly extended seventh year had increased by 61 percent over the previous year as early as 1966—an expansion contemporaries described as "a real phenomenon of educational democratization."[304] At the same time, policymakers emphasized curricular integration across different educational tracks, insisting on a shared foundation of "integral formation" despite the formal division between humanistic–scientific and technical–professional pathways. The ENU's later emphasis on unified

[302] Schiefelbein, 11.
[303] Mario Leyton Soto and Antonio Carkovic Eterovic, *La reforma educacional en la raíz del pueblo* (Santiago de Chile: Ministerio de Educación, 1969), 30.
[304] Mario Leyton Soto and Antonio Carkovic Eterovic, 32.

curricula, civic formation, and the integration of study and work thus did not emerge ex nihilo, but built upon reform principles already embedded within the Frei-era educational state.

Developments within Catholic education further complicate interpretations of the ENU as a destabilizing rupture. By the mid-to-late 1960s, Catholic secondary schools had already become sites of pedagogical experimentation, institutional strain, and political conflict. As Kathleen Fischer demonstrates, elite Jesuit institutions in Santiago such as St. George's School and San Ignacio introduced innovations including work-study programs—later central to the ENU—while simultaneously experiencing growing tensions among students, parents, and faculty over the meaning and direction of reform.[305] These schools were not outliers but early indicators of broader transformations within Catholic education. At the same time, subsidy policies introduced under Frei placed Catholic institutions in an increasingly precarious position: restrictions on state funding, limits on tuition increases, and rising salary requirements for teachers forced many Catholic schools to confront a difficult choice between economic exclusion of marginalized students they wished to attend to, and institutional viability.[306] The result was not simply ideological disagreement but a deeper structural crisis, as Catholic educators committed to democratization found themselves constrained by the very policies designed to expand access. In this context, the ENU intensified rather than initiated conflicts over authority, resources, and the limits of state intervention.

Longstanding patterns of collaboration between Catholic institutions and the state further reinforce this continuity. As early as 1958, the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile hosted the

[305] Kathleen Fischer, *Political ideology and educational reform in Chile, 1964-1976* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1979), 62.
[306] Gerardo Alcalde Ormeño, "Nuevas Perspectivas Conciliares y la Crisis en la Educación Católica en Santiago de 1962 a 1973: El caso de los colegios Sagrados Corazones, San Ignacio, Liceo Alemán, y Saint George" (PhD diss., Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, 1998), 157-158.

Sixth Inter-American Congress for Catholic Education, which brought together educators from across Latin America to discuss the "social formation of students" and to advocate for greater integration of parents, teachers, and communities into school governance through participatory councils.[307] The presence of high-ranking state officials at these proceedings reflected an already well-established relationship between public and private educational institutions.[308] By 1970, this relationship had been formally codified in the Pact of Constitutional Guarantees—a set of constitutional assurances negotiated with the Christian Democrats to secure congressional ratification of Salvador Allende's presidency—which defined education as a "primary function of the state to be carried out through a national system that included both public and private institutions."[309] While affirming the importance of private education, the pact also required such institutions to adhere to state-approved curricula and programs, thereby reinforcing a model of regulated pluralism rather than institutional autonomy.

Importantly, this framework did not represent a sharp departure from prior practice. As Christian Democrat senator (and future president) Patricio Aylwin noted at the time, the requirement that private schools follow official curricula had long been in place, even if it was only now enshrined constitutionally.[310] Private education in Chile had never operated as a fully independent sphere; rather, it functioned within a system of state recognition, subsidy, and

[307] Raimundo Barros, S.J., "El Sexto Congreso Interamericano de Educación Católica," *Estudios* (Santiago), no. 413–414 (1964): 452-455

[308] The opening and closing ceremonies were hosted in the Salón de Honor of the Chilean National Congress, and were attended by the President of the Senate, the Minister of Education, the Rector of the University of Chile, and then President of Chile, Carlos Ibañez del Campo.

[309] Luis A. Brahm M. et al., comps., *Educación Particular en Chile: Antecedentes y Dilemas* (Santiago: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación, 1971), 40.

[310] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 38. In his speech to the senate floor, Aylwin stated that "The only condition that the constitutional provision imposes on private education in order to be part of the national education system is that it must adhere to the curricula and programs established by the educational authorities. This condition, while new in that it is now incorporated into the constitutional text, is not new in practice, since private education institutions that have received official recognition for their studies have already been required to follow official curricula and programs. Moreover, since the 1965 educational reform, these programs have become fairly flexible and have been approved by commissions composed of representatives from both public and private education."

oversight, albeit one marked by significant legal ambiguity. As a detailed and lengthy 1971 report by the Jesuit-run research institute Center for Research and Development in Education (CIDE) observed, the regulatory framework governing private education was fragmented across various laws, administrative practices, and ministerial directives, lacking a coherent legal definition. This ambiguity would later prove central to debates over the ENU, particularly as different actors invoked competing interpretations of "freedom of education" and "pluralism."[311]

Catholic educational organizations themselves operated within—and helped sustain—this system of coordination. The Federation of Private Educational Institutes (FIDE) was founded in 1948 "in response to the increasingly pressing need to coordinate and link the activities of private educational establishments in their pedagogical, technical, and administrative functions vis-à-vis the Ministry of Education."[312] Its existence underscores the extent to which Catholic education was already integrated into national structures, rather than functioning as a parallel system. In this context, later claims by conservative lay Catholics that the ENU threatened to subsume private education under state control reflected not a sudden break with past arrangements, but a rearticulation of longstanding tensions over authority and regulation.

Debates over parental rights further illustrate this point. While Catholic actors frequently invoked the idea that parents were the "first and principal educators" of their children, this principle did not necessarily imply opposition to state involvement in education. The Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in 1969, for instance, emphasized that parents should participate

[311] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 37. The CIDE researchers illustrate this concretely, highlighting the fact that "There is, evidently, no single legal text where [private education's] essential definition, main characteristics, relationships with state education and the community at large, rights, or obligations can be found. On the contrary, all of these matters are scattered incoherently across various legal and regulatory texts, mere instructions from the Ministry of Public Education, and administrative practices without any clear or defined basis. In fact, certain legal systems—especially in the field of labor—have been imposed on private education because, despite its unique characteristics, no specific legal framework existed for it."

[312] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 217.

actively in educational institutions through organized associations and collaborative structures, rather than standing outside or in opposition to them as they wrote that parents "cannot be left excluded from the educational process. It is urgent to help them become conscious of their duties and rights, and to facilitate their direct participation in activities and even in the organization of educational centers, through Parents' Associations, which must be created or strengthened where they already exist, at the local, national, and international level."[313] CELAM's broader educational vision endorsed coordination between Church and state, the professionalization of teaching, and the expansion of access to schooling—positions that aligned in significant ways with the reformist trajectory that culminated in the ENU.[314] Taken together, these developments demonstrate that by the early 1970s, Catholic educators, institutions, and intellectuals had already accepted—and in many cases helped shape—a model of education that combined state coordination, pedagogical modernization, and social integration. The ENU thus did not represent a radical break from Catholic educational thought or practice. Rather, it crystallized and extended a set of principles that had emerged through a decade of reform. As the next section will show, this convergence helps explain why conflict over the ENU unfolded not primarily over its stated goals, but over competing claims to authority, interpretation, and implementation within an already shared reform framework.

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[313] Conferencia Episcopal de América Latina, "Los Católicos y la Educación en América Latina: Nuevas Perspectivas para el Planeamiento," in *Los Católicos y la Educación en América Latina: Nuevas Perspectivas para el Planeamiento*, vol. 10, *Documentos CELAM* (Bogotá: CELAM, 1969), 19.

[314] Conferencia Episcopal de América Latina, "Los Católicos y la Educación," 19, 22. The Latin American Bishops wrote that "The attitude of the Church in the field of education cannot be that of setting confessional schools against non-confessional ones, private schools against public ones, but rather one of open and frank collaboration between school and school, university and university, between schools and extra-school initiatives of formation and education, between the educational plans of the Church and those of the State" calling it "'a collaboration that the good of the universal community of humankind demands.'" They insisted that "This coordination does not constitute a danger to the confessional character of Catholic schools; on the contrary, it is a post-conciliar duty of the same, according to the new concept of the Church's presence in the world today…All these indications regarding collaboration are especially urgent in the university field… Let there also be sought effective coordination between the educational institutions of the Church and national and international bodies interested in education."

Thinking with the ENU: Overlapping Pedagogical Projects

In its content, aims, and diagnostic framework, the Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) echoed many of the principles advanced by Catholic reformers, complicating interpretations that treat Catholic opposition as inevitable or uniformly clerical in origin. As early as the months following Allende's election, Catholic educators themselves noted these convergences. The Jesuit priest Patricio Cariola, for instance, published an article in a well-known education journal highlighting the fact that there were substantial similarities between the stated goals and principles of the Popular Unity's educational program, and the policy statements adopted at meetings of the Federation of Private Secondary Schools, especially with regard to creating councils for the local and provincial participation of parents, teachers, and students in forming educational policy.[315] Across Catholic institutions—from Santiago to regional centers such as Arica, Antofagasta, Valparaíso, and Chillán—schools had already created systems of self-government and community councils, as well as curricular changes geared towards "the practical arts," while also making concerted efforts to enroll and provide financial assistance to children of the lower classes.[316]

These initiatives were not merely isolated experiments but reflected a broader reorientation within Catholic educational thought. As historian Ivan Núñez (who was, at that time, Superintendent of Public Education for the Ministry) has noted, sectors of the Catholic clergy and especially those involved in education found significant areas of agreement with the ENU project, including commitments to egalitarian access, curricular reform oriented toward solidarity rather

[315] Patricio Cariola and Juan Eduardo Garcia Huidobro, "Nuevas Políticas de la Educación Particular y el programa de la Unidad Popular," *Cuadernos de Educación*, October 1970, 461.Their article was also reprinted in an issue of the Jesuit magazine *Mensaje*.
[316] Fischer, *Political Ideology,* 62.

than individualism, and pedagogies that emphasized critical engagement over rote instruction.[317] This convergence was institutionalized most clearly in research centers such as the Program of Interdisciplinary Research in Education (PIIE), (mentioned in chapter two) founded at the Pontificia Universidad Católica in 1970. Bringing together representatives from the Ministry of Education, UNESCO, labor and peasant organizations, and academic institutions, the PIIE in their 1970-71 annual report noted that the PIIE's work with both public and private institutes was "not a neutral or aseptic form of research, but rather an effort oriented toward understanding education as part of a concrete historical process."[318] In doing so, Catholic researchers explicitly rejected the notion that education was politically neutral, which directly challenges later claims that the ENU represented an unprecedented politicization of education.

A similar openness to reform is evident in the work of the Catholic NGO Center for Research and Development of Education (CIDE). In its 1971 study published as a book titled "*Private Education in Chile: Antecedents and Dilemmas*," the CIDE team—which included clergy members—situated private education within a broader context of social transformation, including demands for democratization, participation, and social justice. They argued that "As far as private education is concerned, these phenomena take very concrete forms, which we can summarize as a demand for the democratization of education—both in terms of its administration and in equal opportunities to access its benefits. This, in turn, implies greater openness of educational institutions to all social strata and—in the case of Catholic education—a reexamination of the relationship between school and ecclesial mission."[319] The authors therefore signaled a willingness among Catholic educators to reconsider the institutional role of Church-run schools in light of

[317] Iván Nuñez, *Reformas educacionales e identidad de los docentes. Chile, 1960-1973* (Santiago: PIIE, 1990), 180.
[318] Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación (PIIE), *Informe de actividades 1971–1972* (Santiago: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1972), 5.
[319] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular ,* 12.

broader societal change. Such reflections underscore that, on the eve of the ENU debate, Catholic educational actors were not simply defending existing structures but actively rethinking them. Nowhere is this convergence more striking than in discussions of educational governance. The CIDE researchers advocated for the creation of *comunidades educativas* (education communities)—participatory councils composed of teachers, parents, and students with deliberative authority over school decision-making. These proposals closely anticipated the ENU's own emphasis on *consejos escolares* (school councils) and community participation. In both cases, authority was to shift away from centralized, rector-centered models toward more collective forms of governance, arguing that they should be deliberative, decision-making bodies, not merely consultative. Education, in this framework, was understood not merely as instruction but as a social responsibility exercised through the participation of the broader community. At the same time, however, Catholic reformers generally envisioned these transformations as emerging from local initiative and institutional experimentation, rather than as mandates imposed from above.[320] This distinction would later prove crucial, as many Catholic actors who supported participatory education in principle expressed reservations about its system-wide implementation under state authority.

More broadly, Catholic educational thought in this period reflected a willingness to rethink longstanding institutional divisions. CIDE and PIIE researchers, for example, argued "If we fail to transform educational and working relationships at a deep level, we may be experimenting with new models, but the educational institution will not have been revolutionized, and no real change will have taken place."[321] For them, that meaningful reform would require confronting the structural duality between public and private education, envisioning instead a more integrated

[320] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 339.
[321] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 339.

national system grounded in shared objectives and participatory governance. While articulated in a Catholic personalist and pluralist register, this vision nevertheless overlapped with the ENU's effort to construct a coordinated national framework for education. In this sense, the ENU did not impose an entirely foreign model onto Catholic education, but rather sought to systematize and extend debates already unfolding within it.

The Popular Unity government itself attempted to engage this reformist current. At the National Congress of Education in December 1971, a nationwide consultative process convened by the Popular Unity government brought together a broad coalition of actors—including teachers' unions, student organizations, neighborhood groups, parents' associations, and representatives of the episcopacy—who participated in discussions over the future of Chilean education.[322] The UP provided at the National Congress its first clear statements of the participatory, unified, socialist logic that later became solidified as the "Report on the National Unified School." It openly called for a single, planned educational system, one with co-direction and co-administration by workers, parents, students, and community, and connected this mass participation in service of the socialist project the UP had undertaken.[323] The proposals that emerged from the 1971 National Congress emphasized democratization, expanded participation, and the creation of representative councils at multiple levels of the system. Even critics within the Christian Democratic Party acknowledged points of convergence. Following the National Congress of Education, the Christian Democratic Party published in their monthly journal *Presencia* an article that was reprinted in pamphlet form. From the article, it is clear that the PIIE

[322] The Minister of Education, the SUTE (the recently consolidated national teacher's union which will be discussed in chapter 5), the CUT (Chile's central labor confederation), the Student Federations of both public and private schools, the Centros de Padres y Apoderados, Juntas de Vecinos, Centros de Madres, and delegates from the episcopacy all participated.

[323] Congreso Nacional de Educación, Congreso Nacional de Educación: Convocatoria, Reglamento y Programa (Santiago de Chile: Gobierno de Chile, 1971).

and CIDE's efforts to work with the Ministry of Education in formulating and implementing more radical educational policy were actually shared amongst many of the Christian Democratic youth, who attended the Congress and who articulated their thoughts in the *Presencia* issue. Though not in favor of the National Unified School plan in its entirety (as it was initially written in the agenda for the National Congress that was distributed amongst schools and universities throughout Chile), the Christian Democrats nevertheless demonstrated many shared goals in their response to it. In it, they acknowledged the value of socialism, and stated that education cannot be neutral in the task of liberating human beings from isolation, suffering and socioeconomic dependency and exploitation.[324] They also acknowledged that they agreed in principle with the proposed "law for democratization of the school system" and its creation of local and provincial representative councils for education policy, so as to democratically integrate school functioning into the community.[325] The main criticisms found in the pamphlet hinge on the Christian Democrats' view that the National Unified School proposal as written contradicted the principle of political "pluralism." The issue of a guarantee to pluralism was a heated issue amongst the roughly 1,000 participants, despite the fact that the vast majority of those present were ardent supporters of the UP government.

By 1972, however, this tentative convergence began to give way to growing unease. Although the ENU continued to draw on many of the same principles articulated by Catholic reformers, its increasingly explicit association with a state-led socialist project—and efforts to implement reform through executive mechanisms—generated friction among even sympathetic actors. This shift is evident in the evolving tone of the PIIE's own reports, which moved from an

[324] Kathleen Fischer, *Political Ideology and Education Reform in Chile, 1964-1976* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Latin American Center, 1979), 98-99.
[325] Martín O. Miranda, "Congreso Nacional de Educación," *Mensaje* 21, no. 206 (1972).

earlier commitment to orienting state policy toward a more cautious emphasis on analysis rather than implementation. A clear indication of this can be found in the PIIE's annual report for 1972-73: their summarization of activities and publications for that period demonstrates a cautious retreat from its stated aim of conducting research for the purpose of orienting state policy, and instead suggests that "It does not fall to educational research alone to resolve the structural problems of the system, but rather to contribute to their understanding."[326] This move suggests that by early 1973, there was friction between research, policy and implementation. Notably, the PIIE's 1972–73 activity report avoids any explicit discussion of the Escuela Nacional Unificada, instead adopting a deliberately diagnostic and institutionally cautious language that frames educational reform as a problem of analysis rather than implementation. This silence suggests neither endorsement nor rejection, but rather a strategic distancing that contrasts sharply with both UP ministerial rhetoric and the moralized Catholic opposition that would soon crystallize around the ENU, especially on the Catholic University's campuses.

Such distancing suggests that by early 1973, disagreements were emerging not over the desirability of educational transformation itself, but over the terms, authority, and political framing through which it would be carried out. At the same time, the ENU's intellectual foundations were neither exclusively socialist nor foreign in origin. While the proposal drew in part on models from Cuba and the Soviet Union, it also referenced contemporary reforms in Peru and international frameworks such as the UNESCO report on educational reform of 1972 (commonly referred to as the "Faure Report").[327] Moreover, "as several supporters of the ENU were quick to point out, similar educational proposals had been discussed in Chile for decades and even the Frei reform

[326] Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Educación (PIIE), *Informe de actividades 1972–1973* (Santiago: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 1973), 7.
[327] Kathleen Fischer, *Political ideology*, 116.

was directed toward similar concepts of incorporation of preschool, adult education, and technical training into the regular school system…[and] the ENU report included a specific guarantee of the administrative autonomy of private schools."[328] The ENU thus represented less a radical departure than an attempt to consolidate and systematize a set of widely shared principles. These developments demonstrate that the conflict surrounding the ENU cannot be understood simply as a rejection of its pedagogical content or goals. Rather, the ENU crystallized an existing field of overlapping educational projects in which Catholic educators had long been active participants. As I've noted throughout this section, not only were the laws and regulations requiring private education to conform to a national curricular plan and structure already in place prior, but they had also been the basis for the introduction of the Frei reforms into the private sector during the previous administration. The convergence between these projects helps explain why the controversy that followed centered not on the desirability of reform itself, but on competing claims to authority, interpretation, and implementation—tensions that would ultimately fracture Catholic responses to the ENU in decisive ways.

A Fractured Catholic Response

Contrary to longstanding historiographical claims that the Catholic Church constituted a unified institutional opposition to the Unidad Popular's educational reforms, contemporary Catholic debates reveal a far more uneven and evolving response. Rather than immediate rejection, early engagements with the Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) were marked by internal deliberation, selective convergence, and competing interpretations of educational transformation. In 1971 in addition to his article published in secular education journals, the Jesuit educator

[328] Ibid.

Patricio Cariola (who had founded CIDE) articulated this openness with unusual clarity. Writing in *Religious Education*, his article was highly attuned to internal Church debates. He stated that many in the Latin American Church were bothered by private Catholic education "for being unconcerned about the social change process; for the relation of dependance between the educational institution and the Church; [and] for the lack of [an] adequate mechanism that could integrate the private effort to National education"[329] Cariola goes beyond that self-conscious examination to state that for many in the Church, "There exists a consciousness of the fact that in the Christian tradition there are important values for the cultural development of certain countries, and that even an important contribution can be made under the sign of certain ideologies whose influences could be considered incompatible with Christianity."[330] At the end of that statement he includes a footnote, citing "The New Man: a declaration by the Student Body of Cuba" republished in the Jesuit magazine *Mensaje* in 1970.[331] This is a remarkable concession in 1971, especially in a journal like *Religious Education* and from someone as institutionally embedded as Cariola. In doing so, he is unambiguously acknowledging that Christianity does not have a monopoly on moral or cultural formation, that projects emerging from non-Christian, even Marxist, ideological traditions can generate values that are genuinely formative, and that the criterion is cultural and ethical contribution, not doctrinal purity. It's a measured opening to dialogue with socialist

[329] Patricio Cariola, S.J., "The Thought of the Church and the Future of Education in Latin America," *Religious Education* 66, no. 6 (1971): 423.
[330] Cariola, S "The Thought of the Church," 422.
[331] By "certain ideologies," Cariola is alluding to Marxist and revolutionary socialist currents, particularly those associated with the Cuban Revolution. The phrase echoes contemporary Catholic efforts, especially after Vatican II and the 1968 Medellín conference, to grapple with the ethical and social claims of Marxism without fully endorsing its materialist premises. The reference to "the New Man" (*hombre nuevo*) invokes a concept popularized by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, who argued that socialist transformation required the creation of a new moral subject oriented toward collective welfare rather than individual gain. See David Deutschman and Maria del Carmen Ariet, comps., *The Che Guevara Reader: Writings of Politics & Revolution* (Seven Stories Press, 2022) for a complete collection of his writings as well as an extensive bibliography, a timeline of his life, and a glossary of individuals, organizations, and publications.

educational projects—including, implicitly, the ENU. It is worth emphasizing that the Cuban student declaration is explicitly Marxist, explicitly anti-capitalist, and explicitly about moral formation, not just economic restructuring. It focuses on solidarity, selflessness, social responsibility, and the subordination of individual accumulation to collective good, which are precisely the areas where Catholic Social Doctrine overlaps with Marxist ethics, even while rejecting Marxist metaphysics or Marxism when it's used to justify political authoritarianism. In other words, Cariola is stating that he and other Catholic educators must take seriously the moral claims being made by revolutionary educational projects, even when they arise from ideological traditions Catholics do not share. While not affirming state monopoly over moral formation, he is nevertheless acknowledging that socialist education is animated by a serious moral anthropology, and the UP's emphasis on collective responsibility, social consciousness, cultural transformation, and the role that private education plays in furthering socio-economic divides cannot be dismissed as merely "marxist indoctrination." Moreover, the overall thrust of his essay, which mentions Catholic figures like Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, and Pablo Latapi, urges Christians to engage these projects on the terrain of values, not just institutional power or ideological origin. In other words, he, like other members of the clergy, carved out space for ethical convergence without ideological submission.

This position was not confined to individual intellectuals. Throughout 1971 and 1972, Catholic-affiliated research centers and academic networks remained actively engaged with questions central to the ENU, including democratization, participation, and the social function of education. Seminars organized by the PIIE, often in collaboration with state and university actors, explored "the role of education in revolutionary processes of liberation," in which the decentralized model advocated for by the Allende administration via the creation of neighborhood

and provincial councils for education planning were broadly supported by both the (private) Catholic University groups and the (public) University of Chile groups.[332] Ongoing work within institutions such as the (CIDE) likewise examined how private education might be restructured to better serve national and cross-class needs, including discussions of integrating or transferring certain schools into the public system. Towards the end of 1972, PIIE researchers from state and private universities and from the Conference of Latin American Bishop's Department of Education joined researchers from the Center of Education Research and Development in analyzing the financing of private schools and how to make them more cross-class and useful to relevant national needs, even considering turning some schools over to be administered by the public system.[333] Several of the works produced and published by the Interdisciplinary Program illustrate support for decentralization and democratization of the Chilean formal school system, as well as for "lifelong learning" and consciousness-raising efforts for workers—all of which were the primary measures pushed for by the Popular Unity government. These efforts suggest that, at least through 1972, many Catholic educators were not positioned in opposition to the ENU but were instead participating in overlapping reformist conversations.

Even among Catholic students, early critiques of educational reform did not initially take the form that later opposition would assume. In a 1971 student seminary thesis for the School of Education sixteen Catholic University students completing their teaching certification wrote a lengthy group report in which they did not frame the problem with the ENU as ideological indoctrination, anti-pluralism, totalitarian pedagogy, or state imposition of a single worldview; that language is noticeably absent. What they offer is not the critique that centrist and right-wing

[332] Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigación de Educación, comp., *Informe de Actividades 1971-72* (Santiago, Chile: Universidad Catolica, 1972), 29.
[333] Brahm M. et. al, *La Educación Particular*, Chapter 4.

Catholics will later make of the ENU; instead it is a critique internal to leftist, Marxist educational thought. The concepts that are foundational to ENU opposition after 1972—namely accusations of indoctrination, absence of pluralism, parents' right to freely choose their children's education– are all conspicuously absent in the seminar's thesis. Their objections are classic Marxist critiques of formal but insufficient equality, rather than a liberal Catholic critique of pluralism. They rejected meritocratic explanations and emphasized "cultural inheritance" while arguing that education alone cannot de-alienate a human being "if profound material and economic transformations haven't taken place."[334] This is a leftist critique of pedagogical voluntarism, not a claim about indoctrination. In their collective thesis, they treated ideology as structural and unavoidable, which aligns more with Marxist premises rather than liberal or Catholic ones. As I've demonstrated in my discussion of the PIIE and the CIDE, before Catholic opposition groups reframed the ENU as a problem of ideological indoctrination and anti-pluralism, critiques of educational reform circulated within left-leaning spaces that accepted the legitimacy of ideological formation but doubted the emancipatory capacity of schooling absent material transformation. This is what the 1971 education seminar thesis reveals, when Catholic University students argued that "every pedagogical action is a form of co-action, in the sense that it induces certain types of behavior and certain forms of valuation, etc., incorporating into subjects an ideology that becomes the screen through which the subject perceives society."[335] Importantly, the students noted a class-based objection to the idea that meritocracy is truly possible in the Chilean education system, highlighting that "the majority of an individual's aptitudes are in no way an exclusively biological fact, nor an exclusively psychological one, but rather the product of a particular cultural

[334] Carlos J. Araya Uñas et al., *Cultura y educación en el programa básico de gobierno de la Unidad Popular* (Santiago: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Escuela de Educación, 1971), 111.
[335] Carlos J. Araya Uñas et al., *Cultura y educación*, 110.

inheritance."[336] The Catholic University students thus pointed to something that other sympathetic, left-leaning critics had also highlighted: that educational reform risked producing only a *formal* democratization; although the system might function "in an apparently very democratic manner," offering identical entrance exams, aptitude tests, and scholarships, such procedural equality operated on deeply unequal subjects shaped by prior "cultural inheritance." Because the state could compensate for material deprivation in some ways, but not for the cultural capital transmitted through class and family, the students cautioned that educational expansion under unchanged social and economic conditions could paradoxically generate an "even greater anti-democratization," by legitimating unequal outcomes as "meritocratic."[337] In other words, this was not a rejection of ideological education per se, but a skepticism about the capacity of educational reform—on its own—to produce genuine social equality. In this sense, early Catholic student critiques often emerged from within materialist, left-leaning analytical frameworks rather than from a confessional defense of institutional autonomy.

Within the hierarchy, it is clear that even by 1972, the Catholic clergy was still debating–rather than outright rejecting–the merits of the ENU plan. In October of that year, Paulo Freire was invited to give an address at the Fundación Manuel Larraín—a reformist ecclesial institution named for the progressive former Bishop of Talca—on the educational mission of the Church in Latin America. In discussing his views on education, he describes two tendencies of perception within the Church, one which he calls "modernizing" and the other he calls "prophetic." He articulates the difference between the two by stating that "The modernizing Church goes no further than peripheral changes within that society, defending palliative measures of a neocapitalist

[336] Ibid.
[337] Carlos J. Araya Uñas et al., *Cultura y educación,* 112.

character."[338] "From the prophetic point of view," he noted "it matters little what the specific field may be in which education takes place; it always represents an effort to clarify the concrete, to which educators-as-learners and learners-as-educators must be linked through their active presence within reality."[339] Though he does not reference the ENU specifically in his address, his words were significant, especially given the setting and that copies of his address were circulated to Archbishop Silva.[340] The Fundación Obispo Manuel Larraín was not a marginal or radical space. It sat at the institutional heart of Chilean progressive Catholicism in the late 1960s and early 1970s: it was episcopally anchored, reformist, deeply influenced by Vatican II, Medellín, and Catholic social doctrine, but still very much inside the Church's intellectual establishment. The fact that Freire delivered the speech there and that it was circulated amongst the hierarchy means this was not a clandestine marxist intervention or a fringe experiment; rather it was being mediated, curated, and legitimated by Catholic educational and clerical authorities who were actively shaping educational thought during the UP years.

By September 1972, the ENU debate was already becoming contentious and accusations of marxist indoctrination were widespread, as Catholic opposition became increasingly framed in moral and parental terms. Freire and Cariola show that the Church itself was internally fractured. Furthermore, delivering this essay in 1972, and taking care to reference a "modernizing Church" offering "palliative, neocapitalist reforms" and a "prophetic Church" committed to structural "clarification" and "transformation" means that this essay was meant as an intervention into an *internal* Catholic debate, not simply a commentary on socialism or Marxism. Freire then was not

[338] Paulo Freire, "La Misión Educativa de las Iglesias en América Latina" (speech, Fundación Obispo Manuel Larraín, Talca, Chile, October 1972), 20.
[339] Paulo Freire, "La Misión Educativa," 26.
[340] I found several copies of Freire's talks given at this 1972 seminar held at the Fundacion, in the Archive of the Archbishopric in Santiago, leading me to believe bishops were likely in attendance at the Talca seminar, and/or at the very least, copies were made and sent to other bishops.

arguing with the UP: he was arguing *within* Catholic reform circles about how far reform should go. Freire's presence at Fundacion Manuel Larrain suggests that key Catholic actors were intellectually open to ENU-adjacent pedagogical frameworks, that they were willing to engage socialist educational projects critically but non-defensively, and most importantly, that the real anxiety was not content (values, social justice, collectivism), but rather *who* defined that process, who governed the institutions, and how guarantees would be enforced. Because Freire does not mention the ENU by name, it is doubtful that he was suggesting the Church support the ENU as it was loosely conceived of at that time. But what he is doing is implicitly rebuking Catholic hesitation that stops at procedural reform and urging the Church to engage structural transformation even when it unfolds under socialist leadership. His distinction between a "modernizing Church" that accepts peripheral reforms and a "prophetic Church" that risks structural confrontation with reality, further demonstrates that he was not criticizing socialist education projects; he was criticizing Catholic actors who refused to cross the line from reform to transformation. Taken with Cariola's essay, Freire and other Catholic educators in the midst of the ENU debates understood that educational transformation emerges in historical praxis, not ideological purity or monopoly, and that Christianity does not lose its ethical force by working within non-Christian political frameworks. Interestingly, Freire makes this more theologically explicit by arguing that refusal to engage those frameworks is itself an abdication of prophetic responsibility.

Complicating all of this further was the persistence of internal clerical dissent. The pressures shaping the episcopacy's increasingly unified public stance were also evident in efforts to discipline visible forms of clerical political engagement. In October 1972, amid escalating tensions between the Church hierarchy and a politicized clergy, the Catholic magazine *Mundo*

revisited what had already become a controversial episode: the 1970 attempt by Father Guido Lebret to seek a seat in the Chamber of Deputies on a MAPU (Popular Unitary Action Movement) ticket, a party within the Popular Unity coalition. Known in Talca as a *cura obrera* (worker-priest), Lebret had announced his candidacy in 1969 before being reprimanded by the Bishop of Talca, and ultimately withdrawing from the race. That the episode continued to circulate in Catholic media two years later underscores the extent to which it remained unresolved and symbolically charged within ecclesiastical debates. In republishing the case, *Mundo* highlighted Bishop Carlos González's justification for intervening to prevent Lebret's candidacy. González framed his decision not in explicitly partisan terms, but as a matter of ecclesiastical authority and vocation. Bishops, he emphasized, were entrusted with guiding the Christian community, and priests were called to exercise a form of authority grounded in pastoral care rather than institutional power. While affirming that "true authority is grounded in love," he warned that it too easily became conflated with power, particularly in a political context marked by what he described as an "idolatry of politics."[341] For González, participation in partisan electoral politics risked collapsing the distinction between pastoral authority and political power, threatening to displace the priestly vocation altogether. What emerges from this intervention is a carefully policed boundary between forms of legitimate Catholic engagement. Priests were authorized to teach, form consciences, and accompany the poor—even to speak prophetically—but only within a framework that preserved the distinction between moral authority and political office. The Lebret episode thus reveals that the Church's response to the ENU unfolded alongside broader efforts to regulate the visibility and limits of clerical political participation.

[341] Monseñor Carlos González, "Padre Guido Lebret: Sacerdote y Diputado," *Mundo '72*, October 1972, 40

As movements such as *Cristianos por el Socialismo* expanded and made internal divisions increasingly public, episcopal interventions of this kind can be understood not simply as isolated disciplinary actions, but as part of a wider attempt to reassert institutional coherence in the face of mounting fragmentation. The expansion of Christians for Socialism between 1971 and 1973 made visible a growing cohort of priests who explicitly aligned Christian commitment with socialist transformation, rejecting claims to political neutrality and identifying education as a key site of ideological struggle.[342] Although Catholic media outlets increasingly reframed such movements in pastoral or conciliatory terms, their continued presence underscored the extent to which the Church remained internally divided even at the height of the ENU controversy. In 1972, the Christians for Socialism had hosted an explicitly political Latin American meeting with over 500 attendees from across the region in Santiago that year.[343] The 1972 "Final Document" of that gathering framed Christian commitment in unmistakably structural and revolutionary terms, describing Latin America as marked by "a situation of institutionalized violence" and insisting that "today in Latin America there exist only two possible alternatives: dependent and underdeveloped capitalism, or socialism."[344] Neutrality, the priests declared, was impossible: the "intensification of the class struggle…excludes every form of supposed neutrality or apoliticism," and explicitly cited education as a terrain of ideological domination of the oppressed by the ruling classes.[345] By 1973—at the height of ENU polarization—Christians for Socialism once again again

[342] The Grupo de los 80 (the group of 80 Chilean priests who in 1971 publicly declared their support for the Chilean path to socialism and hosted the First International Congress of Christians for Socialism in Santiago in 1971) had by 1972 expanded into what the press termed "los 200," and this enlarged cohort of 200 Chilean priests hosted a workshops and congresses throughout the UP years.

[343] The emergence and impact of the Cristianos por el Socialismo is discussed in more depth in my first chapter, but a brief reintroduction to the group was necessary here to contextualize my claim that the Bishops' April opposition to the ENU occurred in a climate of intense clerical division.

[344] *Primer encuentro latinoamericano: Cristianos por el socialismo*, Serie Cristianos y Socialismo, no. 1 (Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1972).

[345] *Primer encuentro latinoamericano.*

convened publicly in Santiago. Yet the August 1973 *Mundo* issue in reporting on this third meeting framed the event far less as a revolutionary intervention, than as an ecclesial tension to be managed. Rather than foregrounding class struggle or socialist construction, the article emphasized what it termed "the conflict with the bishops," presenting the gathering as a moment of clarification and dialogue within the Church hierarchy.[346] In contrast to the group's 1972 insistence that faith must be lived "in the very heart of revolutionary praxis," *Mundo* instead cast the 1973 meeting in a pastoral key, stressing hierarchy, misunderstanding, and the need for unity.[347]

The Lebret incident and the meetings and workshops hosted by Christians for Socialism leading up to mid-1973 help explain the episcopacy's evolving response to the ENU proposal in early 1973. In their March 27, 1973 pastoral letter, the Chilean episcopacy shared that "The Report [on the National Unified School] has, without any doubt, positive aspects that we support without hesitation" namely, "the incorporation of all Chileans into an educational process that discriminates against no one on the basis of economic capacity, social condition, or ideological position" and "the integration of study and work, and the valorization of physical labor."[348] The bishops reiterated familiar principles—particularly the primacy of parents in education—but stopped short of outright rejection, instead calling for postponement, broader national debate, and urging Chileans to have faith in the government's good intentions.[349] At this stage, Catholic bishops' responses remained internally divided, reflecting ongoing uncertainty about both the content of the reform and the conditions under which it would be implemented. For example, he bishops expressed concern at the lack of "human and Christian values" in the report, and also

[346] Jose M. Camarero, "Los 200, ¿Qué son?," *Mundo '73*, August 1973, 31-33.
[347] *Primer encuentro latinoamericano.*
[348] Comité Permanente del Episcopado de Chile, *"Declaración del Comité Permanente del Episcopado de Chile sobre la Escuela Nacional Unificada,"* Santiago, March 27, 1973.
[349] Comité Permanente del Episcopado de Chile, *"Declaración,"* March, 27, 1973.

questioned the UP's claim of national consensus, noting that the "Report on the National Unified School" took "as established that the country accepts, in majority form, a project that declares itself 'socialist, humanist, pluralist,' and revolutionary," which they likely questioned on the grounds that the National Congress of Education had failed to reach consensus (something the Christian Democrats made clear in their *Presencia* article). Within weeks, however, the Bishops' position hardened dramatically. By April 1973, the Episcopal Plenary Assembly declared outright opposition to the ENU's "substance," marking a shift from qualified engagement to substantive moral rejection.[350] Importantly, this transformation was neither automatic nor uncontested. An explanatory note accompanying the April declaration reveals internal disagreement within the episcopacy itself, which noted that some sectors criticized the earlier (March) statement as insufficiently forceful.[351] The bishops' much harsher condemnation of the ENU in April 1973–a document often cited in the historiography to support the claim that "the Catholic Church" broadly opposed the project–can therefore not be separated from the context in which it was written: an increasingly politically polarized country and a visibly fractured Church that wanted to reassert a public image of unity.

[350] Asamblea Plenaria del Episcopado de Chile, *"Declaración de la Asamblea Plenaria del Episcopado sobre la Escuela Nacional Unificada,"* Punta de Tralca, April 11, 1973. The April 11th Plenary Assembly statement marks a hardening of episcopal opposition: it moves from mixed evaluation to outright opposition, from procedural concern to substantive moral rejection, and from episcopal dialogue with the state, to mobilization of lay actors. The Chilean Bishops stated, "We declare clearly that we oppose the substance of the project because of its content, which does not respect fundamental human and Christian values" though "without prejudice to its pedagogical merits, which remain under discussion."

[351] The explanatory note placed after signatures, that not only references the meeting between Archbishop Silva, Bishop Carlos Oviedo, and Allende and Tapia, but also reveals intra-episcopal tensions. It states "The reactions that the ENU project continued to provoke throughout the country forced the Bishops to issue a new declaration. In paragraph 1 there is an explicit endorsement of the steps taken by Cardinal Archbishop of Santiago and President of the CECh, because in some circles—that intervention was accused of being weak and contrary to the actions of other Bishops. The Cardinal, on behalf of the Chilean Episcopate, had personally expressed to the President of the Republic, Dr. Salvador Allende, the reservations that the Bishops of Chile had regarding the ENU and had requested that its implementation be suspended and that a national debate be called on it."

At the same time, opposition to the ENU was not driven solely (or even primarily) by episcopal leadership. As Minister of Education Jorge Tapia observed in his response to the bishops' April Plenary Assembly, much of the escalating resistance emerged from *lay* Catholic networks and media campaigns that framed the reform as a threat to children and families. By distinguishing between episcopal interlocutors and broader currents of public alarmism, Tapia implicitly acknowledged that Catholic opposition was diffuse, contested, and shaped by actors operating beyond the institutional Church or the bishops' authority. Tapia responded to the bishops' claim that the ENU failed to "respect fundamental human and Christian values," and insisted that the ENU "makes possible the implementation of those very values," of humanity and Christianity rather than undermining them, something that underscores the extent to which the UP understood its educational project as compatible with Catholic moral aims, not antithetical to them. By lamenting a "campaign of press manipulation" that sought to exploit "what citizens hold most dear: the fate and destiny of their children," Tapia implicitly treated the bishops *not* as the principal producers of Catholic opposition discourse, but as interlocutors whose authority was being leveraged—and in some cases exceeded—by more militant lay actors.[352]

That same month, the Unidad Popular student union of the Pontifical Catholic University invited Aida Mignone, the Director of Secondary Education, to talk about the ENU as one part of a broader series of events the UP student union had organized to discuss government projects of education, health, and housing. In her discussion with faculty and students she stated that "What interests us is that there be discussion, but not frivolous voting. We are not interested in a simple

[352] Mons. Carlos Oviedo Cavada and Jorge Tapia Valdés, *"Carta de Mons. Carlos Oviedo, Secretario General de la CECH, al Sr. Jorge Tapia Valdés, Ministro de Educación, y respuesta del Ministro de Educación,"* Punta de Tralca and Santiago, April 11-12, 1973, accessed via Iglesia.cl, https://www.iglesia.cl/138-carta-de-mons-carlos-oviedo-secretario-general-de-la-cech-al-sr-jorge-tapia-valdes-ministro-de-educacion-sobre-la-escuela-nacional-unificada.htm

yes or no."[353] The UP educational official explicitly rejected plebiscitary simplifications and framed the ENU as something which would be technical, deliberative, and collective rather than reducible to popular referenda, while noting that the most novel aspect of the reform would be that it would be carried out "with the participation of the entire nation: parents, education workers, and organizations." Her statements echoed the corporatist and subsidiarity principles that Catholic Social Doctrine endorsed. Responding to the now gremialista-run Federation of Catholic University Students (FEUC) editorials in campus publications that had begun constantly denouncing the ENU proposal as anti-pluralist and totalitarian ideological indoctrination, Jorge Tapia also gave several interviews to Catholic University students and spoke at several of their events in March and April of 1973. In one address at the Catholic University, Tapia countered right-wing accusations that the ENU threatened pluralism by redefining the term itself. Pluralism, he argued, could not be understood as "a mere sum of disconnected positions, but rather as a democratic process unfolding within a society undergoing transformation."[354] According to Tapia, "in order to have democratic meaning, pluralism cannot be understood as exhausted by the factual verification that such different groups or currents exist. To say that they exist or to recognize them is intrinsic to democracy; what is important is the real possibility that these different groups or parties truly have the possibility of dialogue— hat there genuinely be a confrontation of opinions."[355] In this formulation, pluralism did not mean the preservation of parallel, insulated institutions, such as confessional schools or autonomous educational spheres, but rather active participation in a shared national project. For his Catholic and Christian Democratic critics,

[353] Aida Mignone, "Más Sobre la ENU: Habla la Directora de Educación Secundaria," *Debate Universitario* (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile), April 1973.
[354] "ENU: El Ministro Tapia En la Universidad," *Debate Universitario* (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile), April 1973.
[355] "ENU: El Ministro Tapia En la Universidad," April 1973.

however, pluralism signified precisely the opposite: the protection of institutional differentiation and limits on state-directed formation. The dispute, then, was not simply over policy but over the meaning of pluralism itself, that is, whether it referred to coexistence within boundaries or to collective engagement in structural change. Tapia's (and by extension one may assume the UP government's) understanding of pluralism was not simply that different ideological groups and political parties continue to coexist per se, but rather an action: "the effort to create points of consensus—points of approximation that allow work to be carried out, or a decision to be adopted that has the endorsement of majority acceptance."[356] He also sought to connect the UP's educational agenda to Catholic discourse of conscientization, democratization, and pluralism, while rejecting liberal pluralism as meaning the coexistence of "disconnected positions." For UP education authorities, pluralism only had meaning if it produced convergences within a society already undergoing structural change, rather than merely neutral coexistence without commitment to shared transformation. For this reason he frequently connected the ENU to the Agrarian Reform during his talks at the Pontifical Catholic University, precisely because it demonstrated earlier socialization processes, and a longer historical arc of structural transformation, one in which the Church and the PDC had been a key and early part. In other words for the UP, the ENU was not a pedagogical or structural reform alone, but rather the educational articulation of Chile's transition to a different socioeconomic order, something that I've demonstrated was not inherently antithetical to Chilean Catholics writ large. Perhaps insufficiently, (given what would come to pass in September 1973), he repeatedly emphasized the "Chilean path to socialism" as being connected to and foreshadowed by the previous PDC administration, stating that Chile has already changed structurally, and education could not remain aligned with an older socioeconomic model. The ENU

[356] "Consejo Superior: Debate Sobre la ENU," *Debate Universitario* (Santiago), May 1973.

therefore was understood by the Minister of Education not as a project of socialist indoctrination, but as necessary for coherence between society and schooling, by building on the Christian Democrats' prior reforms.

After failing to secure approval in 1972, the Popular Unity government reintroduced the Ley de Democratización (Law of Democratization) in early 1973 in a moderated form that the UP saw as a concession, and the right saw as further proof of authoritarianism. Codified as Decreto Supremo Nº 224 and approved by the Contraloría General de la República, and promulgated in April, the revised decree did create the legal groundwork for the local, regional, and national community education councils envisioned in the Report, but limited their participation to *consultative* in nature, rather than granting them binding decision-making authority. This concession was designed to defuse Catholic and parental fears of ideological control. Even in this diluted form, however, the measure became a lightning rod in the escalating ENU controversy, symbolizing deeper anxieties over governance, authority, and the boundaries of state intervention in education. In an April 1973 Public Declaration, the Federation of Students of the Catholic University (FEUC)—by then run by Gremialista leadership—framed the ENU not merely as a contested reform proposal, but as a fundamental threat to education and to the moral autonomy of families. Rejecting what it called an "empty affirmation of 'pluralism,'" the FEUC accused the government of seeking to transform Chilean education into "a mechanism of political conscientization in the service of Marxism," collapsing the distinction between education and indoctrination.[357] The danger, in their view, lay in the project's openly acknowledged ambition to

[357] Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad Católica (FEUC), *El control de las conciencias: Informe crítico preparado por la FEUC* (Santiago: FEUC, 1973), 11–14.

"mold new generations of Chileans," politically subordinating youth to the "process of transition to socialism" and personally subjecting them to the "values of socialist humanism."[358]

All together, these developments suggest that Catholic opposition to the ENU was neither unified nor inevitable. Rather, it emerged through a process of rapid polarization in which earlier spaces of convergence gave way to competing claims over authority, interpretation, and the meaning of educational reform itself. The ENU did not simply provoke resistance from a monolithic Church; it exposed and intensified fractures *within* it, revealing a field of actors, many of whom disagreed not only with the state, but with one another.

Conclusion: Who Really Killed the ENU?

The trajectory toward the *Decreto 224 de Democratización* of March 1973 was neither abrupt nor legally unprecedented. Rather, it represented the late institutionalization of participatory practices that had been developing throughout the Unidad Popular period, particularly through 1971, which the UP had declared the *Año de la Democratización Educacional* (Year of Educational Democratization), given its attendant participatory regional and national Congresses of Education, as well as its experiments in community and teacher participation. Decreto 224 created the legal framework for Education Councils at the local, provincial, and regional levels, explicitly framing democratization as a means of incorporating workers and social organizations into the advisory governance of education. Crucially, however, the decree granted these councils no binding or decision-making authority. This limitation—affirmed by the ruling of the Contraloría General de la República, which upheld the decree's legality precisely because it did not interfere

[358] Ibid.

with executive control—both constrained and clarified the scope of educational democratization. The ruling mattered not because it halted participation, but because it legally codified it as consultative rather than sovereign. The councils established under Decreto 224, however, were not wholly novel: they echoed earlier state efforts to channel popular participation through advisory and intermediary bodies, including the *Juntas de Vecinos* (Neighborhood Councils) created under Popular Promotion policies, and the consultative mechanisms associated with the Christian Democratic educational reform of 1965. In other words, it did not introduce participatory governance so much as formalize and expand existing consultative mechanisms, even as it widened the range of actors included within them.

This shift helps explain why the controversy surrounding the Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) cannot be reduced to a simple confrontation between the Chilean state and a unified Catholic Church. Although existing historiography often attributes the ENU's failure to the "Catholic Church's opposition," such interpretations obscure the internal diversity of Catholic responses to educational reform. The public interventions most frequently cited to substantiate this claim—namely, the April 1973 pastoral letter of the Chilean bishops and the statement issued by the Federation of Students of the Pontifical Catholic University (FEUC)—represented only particular sectors within a broader and more fragmented Catholic field. Such interpretations obscure the internal diversity of Catholic responses to the reform. In 1973 the FEUC was led by the far-right *gremialista* movement, whose lengthy statement represented only one current within the Catholic University community. As discussed in chapter 2, a substantial minority of students at the Pontifical Catholic University supported the Popular Unity government and actively organized debates, conducted interviews with Ministry of Education officials to publish in campus magazines, and coordinated public events aimed at encouraging their peers to reconsider the

meaning of “pluralism.” Similarly, the bishops’ own response evolved over time. Their initial pastoral intervention was comparatively restrained, while the more forceful second letter reflected not only concerns about educational democratization but also growing pressures within the Catholic hierarchy to present a unified public stance amid widening internal disagreements.

As noted earlier in the chapter, the Decree itself legally preserved the autonomy of private schools and maintained the advisory character of participatory councils, which leaves us with a puzzling question: why did it nevertheless provoke such intense anxiety among Catholic students and parents? The answer lies less in the formal provisions of the reform than in the reconfiguration of moral authority that it implied. For decades, Catholic institutions had exercised significant influence over the moral formation of Chilean youth through an educational culture in which teachers—overwhelmingly women—served as socially recognized intermediaries between family, Church, and state. I argue that the conflict surrounding the ENU did not emerge primarily from the formal provisions of the UP’s educational reform, many of which preserved institutional autonomy and overlapped with longstanding pedagogical debates within Catholic circles. But by expanding participation to include teachers, students, unions, and neighborhood organizations, the ENU proposal, and specifically the Decreto 224 challenged the historically restricted domains through which educational governance had been exercised. Authority over schooling, long mediated in the upper echelons by technocratic, clerical, and elite actors, was now subject to negotiation within a more socially heterogeneous and politically visible field. In this sense, the controversy surrounding the ENU centered less on whether education should be reformed than on who possessed the legitimacy to direct that transformation and under what conditions it would take place.

Understanding the ENU in this broader context also clarifies the intellectual genealogy of the reform itself. As Ivan Núñez has emphasized, the proposal did not originate solely in Marxist thought but drew on diverse currents within Chilean educational history, including nineteenth-century positivism, early twentieth-century pedagogical reform, and progressive Christian educational ideas.[359] The project envisioned education not as a self-contained institutional system but as a social process embedded within family, community, and productive life. As I've illustrated in this chapter, Catholic educators themselves had long articulated similar aspirations. As Patricio Cariola argued in 1971, educational institutions should serve as the starting point from which society could reach "the family, the community, [and] all other means of education."[360] The ENU's ambition to integrate schooling into broader social and economic development thus echoed themes that had circulated within Catholic intellectual circles for at least a decade. What changed in the early 1970s was the political context in which these ideas were pursued and the actors who claimed the authority to implement them. At stake in these divisions were not only institutional positions, but competing interpretations of Catholic Social Doctrine itself. Concepts such as "pluralism" and "conscientization," both rooted in post–Vatican II Catholic thought, were mobilized in divergent

[359] Ivan Nuñez, *La ENU Entre Dos Siglos: un Ensayo Histórico sobre la Escuela Nacional Unificada* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2003), 100. As a high ranking Ministry official, Nuñez is well qualified to state that "the ENU proposal was not grounded solely in Marxism. It has already been demonstrated that it had deep roots and a fundamental motivation in the "unifying" current of Chilean education, which did not have a Marxist inspiration. At its origins were implications of nineteenth-century positivism, the organicist functionalism of the 1920s and 1930s, and forms of scientifically based pedagogy that originated in Western European countries and the United States. In Chapter 3, other significant non-Marxist elements of the Informe were also identified, stemming from advanced currents of Christianity and from liberal-progressive educational approaches. Moreover, the Marxism present in the ENU did not necessarily derive from its Leninist version; thus, its action was not governed by the political logic of seizing power in order to impose the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proposal was formulated within Allende's definition of the Chilean road to socialism. The objective fact is that it was an "Informe" intended, on the one hand, for broad public discussion, through which the ENU would obtain its legitimacy. On the other hand, its launch followed the institutional procedures of the Chilean state governed by the rule of law, insofar as it was submitted to the consideration of the representative National Council of Education in order to inform a decision that constitutionally and legally corresponded to the President of the Republic. There was nothing Bolshevik or Fidelista in the character of the proposal. The ENU would exist only insofar as democratic consensus was achieved. This proved impossible, and for that reason the proposal was withdrawn."

[360] Cariola, "The Thought," 422.

ways by actors across the political spectrum. While conservative sectors invoked pluralism to delimit state authority and defend institutional autonomy, reformist and left-leaning Catholics drew on the language of conscientization to frame education as a site of social transformation. These competing appropriations reveal that the conflict surrounding the ENU was also a struggle over who could legitimately define the political meaning of Catholicism. The failure of the ENU was therefore not simply the defeat of a curricular reform. Rather, it marked the collapse of an attempt to redefine the relationship between education, the state, and society in Chile. As Leonora Reyes-Jedlicki and her colleagues have argued, the educational project of the Unidad Popular should be understood less as a failed policy initiative than as a broader process of democratization that sought to resolve the crisis of Chilean education collectively.[361] By incorporating teachers, students, workers, and community organizations into discussions of educational governance, the reform aimed to displace the technocratic and elitist assumptions that had long structured educational policy formation. In doing so, it raised a question that neither the Catholic Church nor the Chilean political system ultimately resolved: who should govern the moral formation of future citizens in a democratic society?

The controversy surrounding the ENU thus revealed a deeper transformation underway within Chilean society. As participation expanded and educational authority became more widely contested, longstanding mechanisms for mediating moral and civic formation could no longer operate in isolation from broader political conflict. The ENU forced these institutions to confront the dilemma that Paulo Freire posed to Catholic audiences in Chile in 1972: whether they were willing to risk losing control in order to remain historically relevant and prophetically committed.

[361] Leonora Reyes-Jedlicki et al., "Educación y democratización en tiempos de crisis. Alcances contemporáneos de la experiencia de la Unidad Popular," 2020, in *Tomo I: Historia*, ed. Robert Austin Henry, et al. (CLACSO, 2020).

The inability to answer that question in a shared political language ensured that the project would remain unfinished. This chapter has demonstrated that Catholic responses to the ENU were internally divided and shaped by struggles over authority and interpretation. The following chapter examines how these tensions were articulated through a different, but closely related, register. As debates over educational reform intensified, conflicts that had initially centered on governance, pluralism, and institutional authority increasingly came to be expressed through concerns about family, morality, and the social role of education. It was in this context that opposition to the ENU took on a distinctly gendered character, as questions of educational transformation became entangled with anxieties over the boundaries between public and private life and the preservation of established, feminized forms of moral authority.

Chapter Five: The "Mother-Child Link Finds Itself in Grave Danger:" Catholic Opposition's Gendered Underpinnings

Introduction

In early 1973, debates surrounding the proposed Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) quickly exceeded the boundaries of technical educational reform discussion. What might have remained a dispute over curricular structure, administrative coordination, or pedagogical philosophy instead became a highly charged moral controversy, one that mobilized parents, students, and lay Catholic organizations in ways that far outpaced earlier, more procedural critiques. Opposition to the ENU was not articulated primarily in terms of policy design, but through a language of moral authority, familial integrity, and the rights of parents over their children's formation. My third chapter demonstrated how increased politicization and feminization of Chile's teaching force contributed to heightened tensions in an already polarized Chilean public.

In demonstrating how teachers' unions became more aggressive in making demands on the state, I also illustrated how the 1965 National Education Reform prompted a retrenchment among many lay Catholics, and educators—often women themselves—toward a traditional gender logic that presupposed women's innate caretaking abilities and moral authority. This logic reinforced the idea that education, despite becoming increasingly technocratic and politicized in the 1960s, was not a modern professional sector deserving higher wages, but rather the primary site for cultivating and embodying the "woman-as-mother-educator" archetype. This was a crucial factor that has gone overlooked in the current historiography of the Unidad Popular's National Unified School (ENU) plan and its ultimate failure. As I discussed in my fourth chapter, though many scholars' work emphasizes the Catholic Church's opposition to the ENU, the nuances of Catholic responses to the National Unified School proposal and their change over time are often absent from the current historiography. The ENU represented less of a dramatic rupture rather than the culmination of a decade-long Catholic–state reform continuum, that widened education access, professionalized teaching, and secularized educational authority. Different Catholic sectors' responses to the Unidad Popular's educational reform proposal between 1971 and 1973 ranged from openly supportive, to cautiously collaborative, to outright oppositional. By 1973 however, opposition surrounding the proposed Escuela Nacional Unificada began to coalesce around shared moral frameworks which explicitly rejected what many saw and named explicitly as "marxist indoctrination," and an affront to "parents' rights," and implicitly as a threat to gendered moral and labor order.

This chapter argues that the intensity and form of that opposition cannot be fully understood through ideological or institutional analysis alone. Rather, it must be situated within a broader set of gendered assumptions about moral authority that had been consolidated over the

previous decade. By the late 1960s, Catholic reformers, educators, and policymakers had come to accept a framework in which women—particularly as mothers and teachers—were understood as the primary agents of children's moral and social formation. Yet this expanding social authority was structured by a persistent contradiction: women increasingly performed the labor of moral and educational formation—within schools, parishes, families, and communiies—while remaining largely excluded from formal decision-making within both Church and state institutional structures. This disjunction between responsibility and authority would prove critical in shaping how the National Unified School proposal was later interpreted, particularly when the state appeared to encroach upon domains long associated with maternal and feminized forms of influence. This tension between feminized moral authority and masculinized institutional decision-making shaped how educational reform was understood and contested. I argue that it was not the episcopacy, but rather the elite lay sector of society, composed of wealthy Catholic parents, university students, and right wing politicians that generated the most sustained, moralizing, and ultimately effective resistance to the ENU, often borrowing the language of Catholic Social Doctrine to do so. Building on my previous chapter, I contend that the cleavage that mattered most in the failure of the ENU was not religion versus revolution, but rather competing visions of who holds the right to shape children's moral and civic formation—especially mothers versus the state. I demonstrate this by situating the UP government's rollout of the ENU proposal in the context of other events that generated debates about state encroachment into family, sexuality, and moral formation more broadly. In pointing to the wider discussions of proposed changes to family law, the possible state assumption of prostitution regulation, as well as gendered tensions internal to the Church and its daily social functioning, I illustrate how the UP's education reform—despite important continuities with the Christian Democrats' own educational reform of 1965—was read

through a wider lens of gendered anxiety about familial disintegration and collapse of traditional femininity, a dimension that has received very little sustained attention in existing scholarship.

This chapter will demonstrate that a key reason many lay Catholics opposed the ENU so forcefully is precisely because the Catholic laity had come to accept that *women* (especially mothers) taught moral formation, yet remained excluded from institutional political power, which made the ENU's state-mandated mixing of moral and civic training within schools register as a loss of maternal authority, *and* as an encroachment on male dominated spaces of policy formation. Conservative Catholics' repeated appeals to "parents' rights to choose" their children's schooling signaled more than resistance to administrative and curricular reform. They also reflected a deeper anxiety about the gendered displacement of moral authority versus institutional power. The teaching force—long associated with women's moral labor and framed as apolitical—was increasingly perceived as politicized, particularly because the ENU proposed local, regional, and national community councils that would broaden classroom decision-making to people beyond the long trusted and overlapping categories of mothers, wives, and teachers.

By foregrounding these gendered dynamics, this chapter explains why opposition to the ENU took the moralized and familial form that it did by 1973. It does so in four sections. The first examines the gendered foundations of Catholic moral authority in the decade preceding the ENU debates. The second builds on my third chapter's analysis of the feminization of the teaching force to show how educational labor was widely understood as moral rather than political work. The third situates the ENU controversy within a broader accumulation of anxieties surrounding sexuality, family, and social change during the Unidad Popular years. The fourth shows how these tensions crystallized in the ENU debates themselves, where educational reform was ultimately framed as a crisis of moral authority. Together, these dynamics reveal that the failure of the ENU

was not simply the result of ideological polarization, but of a deeper, cultural conflict over gender, authority, and the locus of moral formation in modern Chile, both inside and outside the Church.

Gendered Foundations of Catholic Moral Authority

As debates over the ENU made clear, the language of "parental rights," conscience, and moral formation did not emerge suddenly in the early 1970s. Rather, these claims drew on a longer trajectory within mid-twentieth-century Catholic reform, in which the family—and, more specifically, women within the family—had been increasingly positioned as the primary locus of moral and social formation. By the late 1950s and 1960s, Catholic discourse had already consolidated a framework in which mothers were understood not only as caretakers, but as everyday educators and guardians of conscience. This shift was closely tied to broader transformations within Catholic lay activism. As historian Monica Moreno Seco has shown in her study of Catholic Action, women's organizations across the Catholic world moved during these decades from a model of charitable domesticity toward more active forms of social engagement. In her article "From charity to commitment: the Women of Catholic Action, 1958-1968," historian Monica Moreno Seco shows that by the late 1950s and 1960s, Catholic women's organizations, like other secular women's organizations, had already undergone a shift toward moral–civic engagement, while still anchoring themselves in the family as the privileged site of moral formation.[362] This expansion of women's civic activity thus did not displace the family as the central site of authority. Lisa Baldez, and Susan Franceshet have both illustrated in their work that women were encouraged to engage publicly *as women*, often through metaphors of maternity, sacrifice, and moral care, even as they claimed autonomy and civic voice, which therefore

[362] Mónica Moreno Seco, "De la caridad al compromiso: las mujeres de Acción Católica (1958–1968)," *Historia Contemporánea* 26 (2003): 239–265.

reinforced it.[363] Women's increased participation in social and ecclesial life was legitimized precisely through their identification as mothers, responsible for the moral formation of both their children and, by extension, the broader community. In this sense, Catholic reform did not so much secularize women's roles as reframe them, extending maternal responsibility outward, while preserving its gendered foundations. Rather than treating motherhood as a static or purely private role, Erin O'Connor shows how it has been continually reshaped by broader transformations such as state formation, modernization, revolution, and debates over reproduction, making it a key terrain through which women engaged politics, something which she argues in the 20th century "politicized motherhood." Women were consistently "caught between tradition and modernity," as modernization projects—whether revolutionary or technocratic—both expanded and constrained their roles.[364]

This gendered division of labor, especially in the field of education, was more visible and stated more explicitly in Catholic educational circles. For example, at the Eighth Interamerican Congress for Catholic Education (1964) held in Quito, Catholic educators discussed the role of Catholic education in the "development" of Latin America. By 1964 however, the Congress had turned its focus much more towards social and political trends, and the importance of cultivating Catholic youth leadership in social and political movements. The concluding documents of this Congress illustrate not only the Catholic hierarchy's desire for Catholic educators to take part in forming national education policy in their respective countries, but also discussions on how Catholic education should be geared towards promoting a "more just distribution of wealth" and

[363] See for example, chapter two "Mothers of the Cold War, Daughters of the Revolution: a Historical Overview of Women and Chilean Politics," in Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); see also chapter three, "From First-Wave Feminism to 'Mobilized Mothers,' 1932-1973, in Susan Franceshet, *Women and Politics in Chile* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).
[364] Erin O'Connor, *Mothers Making Latin America: Gender, Households, and Politics since 1825* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

"economic development."[365] For the first time in the Interamerican Congress' history, one of the 6 commissions' assigned topics of discussion focused on "the role of women in this development."[366] The Congress' conclusions about women advocated for Latin American governments to increase women's legal rights and civic participation, and urged Catholic primary and secondary schools to increase female students' training in Catholic Social Doctrine, given their "qualities that distinguish them as leaders."[367] The CELAM's conclusions however also warned women not to "neglect their primary purpose as wives and mothers."[368] Similarly, in the CELAM's 1969 writings on "Catholics and Education in Latin America: New Perspectives for Planning," the Latin American Bishops' suggestions for reforming Catholic education not only included the previously mentioned changes to curriculum, tuition structures, and parents and communities councils, it also included the specific suggestion "To create nursery rooms in girls' schools, who would, in rotating shifts, care for the children of working women."[369] In other words, the Bishops explicitly acknowledged that Catholic schools, largely staffed by lay women many of whom may have been mothers themselves, could serve as places where young female students

[365] Jorge Fourcade, S.J., "Octavo Congreso Interamericano de Educación Católica," *Estudios*, no. 115–122 (1964): 115–122.
[366] Jorge Fourcade, S.J., "Octavo Congreso Interamericano de Educación Católica," *Estudios*, no. 115–122 (1964): 115–122.
[367] Jorge Fourcade, S.J., "Octavo Congreso Interamericano de Educación Católica," 120-121.
[368] Because of the rather generous state funding enjoyed by Catholic schools, the clergy had a clear imperative to support the PDC's educational reform plan, as private schools too would receive beneficial fallout from the expansion of the Chilean education system and the increase of its domestic and international funding. As discussed in previous chapters, even prior to the PDC reform, the Church had seen steadily increasing enrollments in Catholic educational institutions. Between 1930 and 1955 public enrollment had grown at an annual rate of 3 percent, while private enrollment did so at 11 percent. Following the legislation that granted more generous state subsidies to private schools, between 1951 and 1955, roughly 70 private schools had been added to the system. This was especially true of the private middle school enrollment, which rose by 17% while public middle school enrollment only rose by 8 percent. See Macarena Ponce de Leon, "'Los Dilemas del Crecimiento de la Educación,'" in *Historia de Educación en Chile (1810-2010) Tomo III* (1930-1964), by Sol Serrano (Santiago, Chile: Taurus, 2018), 118-119.
[369] Conferencia Episcopal de América Latina, "Los Católicos y la Educación en América Latina: Nuevas Perspectivas para el Planeamiento," in *Los Católicos y la Educación en América Latina: Nuevas Perspectivas para el Planeamiento*, vol. 10, *Documentos CELAM* (Bogotá: CELAM, 1969), 43.

could also partake in child care, as a precursor to their own (presumed) eventual path to motherhood.

Within this framework, the family was understood as the first and most legitimate site of education, a principle that would later be invoked repeatedly in critiques of state-led reform, especially during the Cold War.[370] Several historians have shown that after the Cuban Revolution, anticommunist reactions more broadly (that is, beyond just Catholic iterations of anticommunism) frequently played on fears of state-led intrusion into family life and usurpation of parents' rights to raise their children as they saw fit.[371] Although often articulated in formally gender-neutral terms such as "parents," "families," or "the home," this language rested on a deeply gendered moral economy. The everyday labor of moral formation, whether through religious instruction, the cultivation of values, or the regulation of children's behavior, was overwhelmingly feminized.[372] Moreover, women, more than men, were assumed to be the consistent transmitters of religious practice and moral discipline within the household, as well as key actors in parish life through

[370] James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Harvard University Press, 2018), argues that by the 1930s Catholics recognized the necessity of drawing on modernist strategies to combat totalitarianism's threats to their faith from the right and the left, and which of their lesser extremes (either fascist corporatism or socialism) might secure and protect core Catholic values. He argues that this took two paths, one which he labels as "fraternal" and the other "parental" (13-14). The former emphasized traditional family values and the family's private-sphere-separation from broader group solidarity, while the latter embraced solidarity with secular and non-Catholic groups. Though his emphasis is on European Catholicism, his analysis provides useful insights into Cold War Catholicism in Latin America, where similar paths of "parental" versus "fraternal" visions of political Catholicism played out. As his book illustrates, for many Catholics, the family was the key site of moral authority, and anti-totalitarian Catholicism interpretations became intertwined with the defense of family autonomy. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 1988) explores how Cold War politics shaped U.S. domestic life, linking the rise of suburban family ideals with the nation's anxieties about containment and security.

[371] Deborah Shnookal, *Operation Pedro Pan and the Exodus of Cuba's Children* (University Press of Florida, 2020) contrasts U.S. propaganda with Catholic dioceses' materials to interrogate how Catholic priests and bishops were authorized by the US government to sign visa waivers for an unlimited number of Cuban minors, emphasizing the political manipulation of anti-Castro forces as a critical factor in Operation Peter Pan.

[372] On the feminization of moral and social reproductive labor, see Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Elizabeth Quay Hutchinson, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900–1930* (Duke University Press, 2001); For earlier and broader conceptualizations of gender as structuring divisions of social and moral labor, Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053-1075.

catechesis, lay leadership, and devotional activities. At the same time, this expanding moral authority was structured by a persistent limitation.[373] Women's growing responsibility for social and educational labor did not translate into equivalent power within the institutional hierarchies of either the Church or the state. Even as they assumed increasingly central roles in sustaining religious life and shaping moral discourse, they remained largely excluded from formal decision-making structures. Authority, in other words, was bifurcated: women exercised it in the domain of formation, while men retained it in the domain of governance.

This disjunction between responsibility and authority was foundational in mid-to-late 20th century Chile, as it was elsewhere in the hemisphere.[374] It established a model in which women's influence was both indispensable and constrained, legitimized through its association with motherhood while simultaneously bounded by it. As a result, claims about the primacy of the family—and the rights of parents over their children's education—were never purely abstract or procedural. They were embedded in a set of gendered assumptions about who, in practice, carried out the work of moral formation and who possessed the authority to direct it. By the early 1970s, this model had become sufficiently entrenched culturally such that challenges to the autonomy of

[373] Elizabeth Dore, ed., *Hidden Histories of Gender and State in Latin America* (Duke University Press, 2000). The essays in this anthology illustrate that twentieth-century regimes—liberal, populist, socialist, and authoritarian alike—shared efforts to rationalize domestic life and bring children and families under state tutelage, though with different ideological goals. At the same time, women's political influence often depended on strategic engagement with the state, navigating it as both an ally and a constraint, with outcomes that were uneven and frequently produced unintended consequences.

[374] Asunción Lavrín, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, 1890-1940* (University of Nebraska Press, 1995), Lavrin argues that early twentieth-century feminism in the Southern Cone emerged alongside processes of modernization—particularly expanded education and women's entry into the labor force—which prompted a reexamination of women's legal and social constraints. Rather than rejecting motherhood, many feminists developed what she calls a "compensatory feminism," which sought to expand women's rights while preserving gender difference, especially ideals of home and maternity. This approach redefined motherhood as a social and political function, justifying women's increased participation in public life (education, social work, reform movements) while maintaining its moral authority. At the same time, Lavrin shows that this strategy had limits: even as it expanded women's roles, it remained anchored in gendered assumptions, producing a form of political participation that extended beyond the home but was not fully detached from it. As Asunción Lavrin has shown, early twentieth-century feminists in the Southern Cone often advanced what she terms a "compensatory feminism," which expanded women's public roles while preserving their association with motherhood, redefining maternal identity as a basis for social and political authority.

the family could be interpreted as challenges to a feminized domain of authority itself. The following section builds on this foundation by examining how these dynamics were reproduced within the educational system, where the feminization of teaching further reinforced the association between women, moral labor, and the formation of future citizens.

Feminized Labor, Depoliticized Authority

As discussed in my third chapter, by the late 1960s the Chilean teaching profession had become overwhelmingly feminized, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. Women constituted the majority of educators across both public and private institutions, and their presence was especially pronounced in areas associated with the moral and social formation of children and adolescents (especially the humanities). Yet the significance of this transformation lay not simply in demographic change, but in how educational labor itself was understood culturally. Teaching was widely framed less as a technical or political profession than as an extension of women's presumed moral and affective capacities.[375] Educators were expected not only to transmit knowledge, but to cultivate values, discipline behavior, and guide the social development of their students. In this sense, the work of teachers overlapped significantly with the cultural expectations of mothers, reinforcing the broader association between femininity and moral formation that had been consolidated within Catholic discourse. This framing had important consequences for how authority operated within the profession, and why opposition to the National Unified School

[375] Ivan Nuñez, *Gremios del Magisterio: Setenta Años de la Historia, 1900-1970* (PIIE, 1986), 110. The modernization programs undertaken by both the PDC and the UP had begun to expand schooling and professionalize the teaching profession, resulting in internal class reactions, as well. After the creation of the Association of State Teachers was founded, it "was parallel to FEDECH and SONAP, sought to bring together secondary school teachers who had graduated from universities. Its principal motivation was the defense of professional dignity, expressed primarily through the university degree, which was supposedly threatened in its value by the influx of "interim" teachers—that is, instructors without proper training—or by the practice of employing primary school teachers in positions intended for secondary-level educators."

(ENU) plan was implicitly gendered, though the current historiography has not treated it as such. Because teaching was understood as a feminized form of moral labor, care, and service, it was often detached from forms of institutional and political power. This detachment from political forms of organization was not merely structural, but actively articulated by sectors of the teaching profession itself. As Iván Núñez has shown, until the late 1960s, many Chilean teachers throughout the mid-twentieth century rejected unionism on the grounds that it compromised the "professional dignity" of teaching, associating union activity with the working-class world and with forms of politicization deemed inappropriate for educated professionals.[376] Others opposed unionism because of its perceived alignment with Marxism, its secular orientation, or its support for the Estado Docente (Teaching State).[377] In this context, alternative forms of professional organization—such as the Asociación de Profesores de Estado (Association of State Teachers), founded in 1954—sought to defend teaching not as a site of collective labor struggle, but as a corporatist and explicitly apolitical vocation, often shaped by Catholic student networks such as the Union of Catholic Pedagogical Students (UECP).[378] These positions were not simply ideological outliers, but reflected a broader understanding of teaching as a form of moral and intellectual authority that stood apart from (and/or above) political contestation or class interests. Significantly, patterns of participation within existing unions also reflected this divide. Though women constituted the majority of the teaching profession, men participated more actively in union leadership and political organizing, while women's involvement remained more limited,

[376] Ivan Nuñez, *Gremios del Magisterio: Setenta Años de la Historia, 1900-1970* (PIIE, 1986), 119.
[377] Ibid. The concept of the *Estado Docente* (Teaching State) referred to the principle that the state assumed primary responsibility for the organization and direction of the educational system, including the formulation and implementation of educational policy as part of a broader expansion of state authority in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While this model sought to extend mass schooling through centralized initiatives, scholars have emphasized that its implementation was uneven and often mediated by local elites, revealing both the ambitions and limits of state-led educational formation. See Leticia Arroyo Abad "The Limits of the Estado Docente: Education and Political Participation in Peru, 1876-1940," *Revista de Historia Económica* 34, no. 1 (2016)
[378] Nuñez, *Gremios del Magisterio*, 120.

circumscribed by both domestic responsibilities and the persistent association of their work with moral rather than political forms of authority.[379] This disparity was not simply a matter of individual choice, but reflected the broader conditions under which women's labor was organized. Domestic responsibilities, which remained disproportionately borne by women, thus limited their ability to engage in union activity and professional advancement, and prevailing cultural assumptions continued to associate professional demands and decision-making with male actors.

The longer-term transformation of women's position within Chile's educational system expanded women's visibility as both teachers and students, but did not challenge that framework in the ways the ENU would have, had it been implemented. As Ernesto Schiefelbein's analysis of educational trends between 1930 and 1973 demonstrates, women's participation in schooling—particularly at the secondary level—expanded significantly in the decades preceding the UP government.[380] Yet this expansion unfolded within a framework that preserved gendered expectations: women remained more likely to pursue humanistic tracks, to exit schooling earlier than male counterparts due to marriage, and to enter professions, such as teaching, that were compatible with domestic roles.[381] María Aragonés similarly characterizes women's growing presence in higher education during this period as a process of "differentiated integration," in which access expanded without fundamentally altering the traditional division of roles.[382] Pedagogy, in particular, functioned as "the most expeditious access channel for women's entry into the university," reinforcing the association between women, teaching, and moral formation.[383]

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[379] Ibid., 121.
[380] Ernesto Schiefelbein, "La mujer en la educación primaria y media," in Chile: Mujer y Sociedad, comp. Paz Covarrubias and Rolando Franco (Santiago de Chile: Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia, 1978), 703–713.
[381] Ibid.
[382] María Aragonés, "La mujer y los estudios universitarios en Chile," in *Chile: Mujer y sociedad*, comp. Paz Covarrubias and Rolando Franco (Santiago: Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia, 1978), 729.
[383] María Aragonés, "La mujer y los estudios universitarios en Chile," 748.

From this perspective, the ENU did not simply introduce new educational policies but threatened to unsettle a delicate equilibrium. For decades, the expansion of women's participation in education had been accommodated within a framework that preserved their identification with moral and familial roles. The feminization of teaching, far from challenging this arrangement, had helped sustain it by extending maternal authority into the classroom. The ENU, however, suggested a different model—one in which education was no longer anchored in the moral authority of individual women but would have been redistributed across collective, state-coordinated structures (the community councils and Educational Complexes created in the Decreto 224).

The Catholic hierarchy similarly encouraged women's expanded civic and labor roles, but simultaneously emphasized maternal primacy, which extended into Chilean cultural assumptions and governmental structural logic more broadly because Catholic schools were not just a marginal elite sector of the Chilean educational system. As I have covered in previous chapters, Catholic education was a mass institution that was subsidized and embedded in an expanded national system. Battles over educational authority were therefore simultaneously battles over a massive moral infrastructure. Catholic schools constituted the majority of all private educational establishments and educated nearly two-thirds of private-sector students—most of them in tuition-free, state-subsidized primary schools.[384] Enrollment breakdowns from 1971 show that 75% of Catholic institutes were primary schools (the sector where women teachers made up an even greater majority), 20% were secondary, and 5% vocational. By the beginning of the Unidad Popular government, Catholic-run research bodies such as the Center for Educational Research and Development (CIDE) treated private education as a sector requiring centralized statistical

[384] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 80-81.

knowledge for national educational planning, reinforcing its integration into state rationalities rather than separation from them. CIDE's research concluded that by 1971 nearly 70% of teachers at Catholic schools were women, and their median age was 32.[385] Their data showed that the majority of these women were concentrated in basic (primary) education, reinforcing the association between schooling, care, and feminized moral labor that underpinned later parental resistance to the ENU.[386] Moreover, 75% of private-school teachers were lay, while only 25% were religious (priests and nuns combined), and 6% of teachers worked simultaneously in fiscal (public) and private education, something that was especially common in secondary and professional education.[387] In other words, Catholic schooling functioned structurally as a lay, feminized, moral workforce rather than as a clergy-dominated apparatus that had zero overlap with non-confessional schools. Clergy and religious women were vastly overrepresented in directive roles, but the laity dominated classroom teaching. This created a layered authority structure with moral–pastoral authority at the top and feminized lay labor at the base.[388] Because national education law lacked a concise, coherent statute for private education specifically, Catholic school teachers' labor was structurally diffuse, undervalued, and ill-fit to standard labor frameworks, which is crucial for explaining why teachers (especially women) were vulnerable to moralized expectations, and for showing why Catholic actors framed education as vocation or service rather than a true modern profession. This dynamic is also necessary for contextualizing resistance to state-led technocratic innovations to the education system via the ENU.[389] By 1971 more than 28%

[385] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 79.
[386] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 142-145, Cuadros 9–12; Gráfico 3.
[387] Accounting for 3500 teachers. Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 126-129.
[388] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 144-146.
[389] By 1970, there were roughly 1,382 Catholic establishments in the national system, and 79% of Catholic school students attended free (subsidized) school. See Luis A. Brahm M. et al., comps., *Educación Particular en Chile,* 64-70.

of all teachers worked in private education.[390] ENU debates therefore unfolded in a system where teachers' professional identity across public and private schools was already fragmented and precarious.

The result was a profession in which women were central to the everyday work of education but marginal to its formal structures of power. Like the broader Catholic model of moral authority described in the previous section, the feminization of teaching produced a division between responsibility and governance, in which women's influence was often exercised through formation rather than institutional control or unionized political demands on the state. This division helped naturalize the idea that education—particularly in its moral dimensions—was not inherently political, but rather part of a socially necessary, and implicitly feminine, domain of care. It was precisely this understanding that began to be unsettled in 1970, when the 1960s efforts of organized teachers' unions and legislators culminated in the Popular Unity government's creation of the Unified Syndicate of Education Workers (SUTE) by consolidating existing teacher associations. The SUTE, while formally independent of the state, became deeply integrated into the policymaking apparatus of the Unidad Popular, collaborating closely with the Ministry of Education and actively promoting the ENU. As educational reform under the Unidad Popular government sought to more explicitly integrate schools into broader political and social projects, the boundaries between moral formation and political formation became increasingly difficult to maintain.[391]

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[390] Brahm M. et al., *Educación Particular*, 126-9.

[391] Nuñez, *Gremios del Magisterio*, 120-121 notes that late-1960s legislative efforts, backed by the Christian Democratic Party and conservative sectors, attempted to establish a Colegio de Profesores that would obligatorily organize state teachers into a professional body modeled on other liberal associations. Although these initiatives ultimately failed—due in part to opposition from FEDECH (the Federación de Educadores de Chile, the main federative organization representing Chilean teachers prior to the creation of SUTE) and a shift within the PDC itself—they are significant for understanding the alternative, depoliticized model of professional authority that

During the same era in which women's everyday labor in classrooms and homes expanded their role in moral formation, elite observers struggled to interpret their incorporation into formal politics. Following Salvadore Allende's election, a 1970 bulletin from the Center for Studies of Public Opinion described the rapid expansion of the electorate in the late 1950s as "the most transcendental political event" in recent Chilean history, yet acknowledged that its consequences remained only partially understood.[392] It noted in particular that "the significance of the electoral participation of women… has not yet been sufficiently considered," and characterized large segments of the electorate—especially women from lower-income sectors—as resistant to conventional forms of political communication and weakly anchored to class- or party-based loyalties.[393] This was a broader phenomenon of women's participation in electoral politics of the 20th century; as Nikki Craske argues, women's political participation in Latin America varied across arenas (social movements, revolutionary politics, formal institutions), but was consistently shaped by structural constraints—economic priorities, party resistance, and weak collective identities—which limited the translation of participation into lasting political power.[394] Yet in the

competed with union-based organization in the teaching field. Núñez further emphasizes that the eventual strengthening of unionism, including the PDC's role in supporting the creation and legalization of the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Educación (SUTE), a unified national teachers' union created and legalized by the Unidad Popular government, in the early 1970s, emerged in response to both structural and conjunctural pressures. The 1968 wage conflict (discussed in my third chapter) exposed the limitations of existing federative union structures, while the educational reforms of the 1960s—particularly the 1965 National Education Reform, the expansion of secondary education, and the elevation of teacher training institutions to post-secondary status—contributed to a greater integration of the teaching workforce, as well as a narrowing of the social and professional distance between primary and secondary teachers. These developments not only facilitated the push toward a more unified national union, but also reshaped the composition of the profession in ways that would later intersect with gendered patterns of labor and participation.

[392] Eduardo Hamuy, *Boletín no. 1: La campaña presidencial de 1970* (Santiago: Centro de Opinión Pública [CEDOP], 1970), 1-2, Museo Casa Eduardo Frei archive.

[393] Ibid.

[394] Nikki Craske, Women and Politics in Latin America (Rutgers University Press, 1990).

Chilean case, this dynamic was further intensified through the educational sphere, where women's roles as mothers and teachers converged in particularly powerful ways.

These assessments reveal a parallel tension to that which structured the teaching profession: women were increasingly central to the social processes through which values, behaviors, and civic dispositions were formed, yet remained difficult for political elites to conceptualize within existing frameworks of representation and mobilization. If newly incorporated voters could not be effectively shaped through traditional party structures or media, as the bulletin argued, then the problem of political formation shifted beyond the sphere of formal politics. In this context, institutions of socialization—above all schools—took on heightened importance as sites where moral authority and civic orientation might be more reliably produced. The following section examines how this shift towards directly incorporating teachers, especially women teachers, into broader labor organization, intersected with a wider set of anxieties surrounding family, sexuality, and social change, producing the conditions under which the ENU would be interpreted as a threat to established forms of moral authority.

Accumulating Crisis: Gender, Family, and Moral Disorder in the Popular Unity Years

Women, Sexuality, and Moral Panic

By mid-1972, Catholic public discourse was already tying women's status, sexual order, and state legitimacy together—impacting the moral atmosphere in which education reform would be read as another front in the struggle over social reproduction. Amidst the UP facing increased opposition in Congress that limited formal lawmaking, municipalities, ministries, and administrative bodies became sites of experimentation. In August of that year, the Catholic lay

magazine *Mundo* began discussing the exploitation and unsanitary conditions of "casas de tolerancia" (brothels) in Santiago and surrounding areas: "We publish this explosive article because we are sure it constitutes a contribution regarding the problem that afflicts thousands of women in our country."[395] This "problem" was one for which left-leaning Catholic circles held state officials accountable, espousing that "much is said about the Popular Unity regime seeking to improve women's condition… but up to now nothing has been done on behalf of Chilean prostitutes."[396] Surprisingly, the author of the *Mundo* article–in considering debates within UP-governed municipalities and progressive circles about a proposal recently made regarding state intervention in prostitution–concluded that "The proposal deserves to be analyzed seriously and coolly. Ultimately it should not be cause for greater scandal in a country where pornography develops without restraint and those who propose legalizing abortion walk free," noting that "Direct state oversight of brothels would allow… an end to the exploitation currently exercised by 'pimps.'"[397] State control and regulation of prostitution was cast as the lesser of other social evils. In a biting closing paragraph, the author tells his Catholic readership that "a government that claims to be committed to the people has no right to leave our prostitutes to their fate."[398] What is notable is not simply the subject matter, but the way in which prostitution was positioned within a broader critique of the Popular Unity government. The article explicitly linked women's conditions to the legitimacy of the regime itself; in doing so, Catholic journalism placed women, social policy, and political authority into the same argumentative frame. The condition of marginalized women and

[395] Raúl Gutierrez V., "Hay que estatizar la prostiución?," *Mundo '72*, August 1972, 20.
[396] Raúl Gutierrez V., 20.
[397] Raúl Gutierrez V., 22.
[398] Raúl Gutierrez V., 21.

sexual dissipation was not treated as an isolated issue, but as a test of the government's moral and social commitments.

This framing reflects a broader tendency within Catholic clerical and lay discourse during the period to understand questions of sexuality and social marginality as indicators of moral order (or disorder) within society as a whole. Prostitution, in this context, was not only a matter of public health or labor conditions, but a visible sign of the government's deeper failures in the regulation of social life. As other historians have noted, discussions of prostitution and women's conditions were part of a broader process through which the boundaries between social policy and moral authority were being renegotiated throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.[399] The persistence of prostitution and such poor conditions for the women engaged in it, under a government that claimed to represent social justice, thus generated a particular kind of dissonance. For critics, it suggested that the transformation of economic structures had not been accompanied by a corresponding attention to the moral dimensions of social reform. At the same time, the focus on women's bodies and social roles reveals the gendered nature of these anxieties. Women appeared simultaneously as victims of structural neglect and as symbolic bearers of moral order or its erosion. Their condition—whether as prostitutes, mothers, or workers—was taken to reflect the health of the social body more broadly. As a result, debates about policy became inseparable from questions of morality, and the figure of the woman became a central site through which these concerns were articulated. Importantly, such critiques did not emerge solely from conservative sectors, but circulated within left-leaning Catholic spaces as well. This cultural dimension of moral

[399] In addition to Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (University of Nebraska Press, 1991), illustrates not only how prostitution and its legalization in the late 19th to mid-20th centuries shaped nationalist discourses, but also how many Argentines, including members of the Catholic hierarchy, saw the government's supervision of bordellos as a way of protecting the virginity and dignity of "good women" by keeping them separated from prostitutes.

discourse suggests that concerns about women, sexuality, and social order formed a shared language through which different actors evaluated the successes and failures of the Popular Unity project. In this sense, the moral framing of social issues was not external to political debate, but constitutive of it. In other words, concerns about gender, sexuality, and social order had already begun to reshape how political authority was understood and evaluated, even before the ENU became a flashpoint of parental anxiety in 1973. It was within this already charged terrain that the ENU proposal would be interpreted, not simply as a technical or institutional change, but as a potential intervention into the moral foundations of Chilean society, precisely because women (as teachers and mothers) and children (as subjects of education policy and social reform) were at stake.

The Family Under Pressure: Law, Legitimacy, and Authority

In November 1972, as debates intensified over the ENU, the Unidad Popular government presented to Congress a *Proyecto de Ley de Filiación Única* (Single Filiation Bill), which sought to abolish the long-standing legal distinction in Chilean civil law between children born within and outside of wedlock. Under the existing Civil Code, children were formally categorized as "legitimate" (born to married couples) or "illegitimate," (born out of wedlock), a distinction that carried both unequal legal standing and profound social stigma. Although rarely analyzed alongside the history of the ENU, I argue that the introduction of the filiation bill likely intensified conservative Catholic concerns about state encroachment into domains long understood as belonging to the family.[400] In an article published in the Pontifical Catholic University's law

[400] Cesar Frigerio, "La Filiación," *Revista Chilena de Derecho* 1, no. 1 (1974): 87-91.

journal, PUC law professor Cesar Frigerio acknowledged that “illegitimate” children should not be disadvantaged, and that the filiation bill would have served as the foundation of a “new morality inspired by values of solidarity and social justice, moving away from individualism.”[401] Yet he also warned that the bill risked equating "marriage with concubinage" and undermined marriage as the basis of the family, which he argued would lead to the decline of marriage and even "polygamy or polyandry," and “institutionaliz[ing] promiscuity.”[402]

The proposal aimed to benefit single mothers and their children by granting equal legal rights to those born outside of marriage, who had long been stigmatized as “*huachos*.”[403] While the reform would not have immediately transformed entrenched social attitudes, it nonetheless represented a significant effort to dismantle legal inequalities rooted in marital status. As historian Nara Milanich notes, the *Ley de Filiación Unica* was the “single initiative to grant natal equality” in Chile up to that point, and remained so until the late 1990s.[404] It was still under discussion in the Chamber of Deputies when the 1973 coup halted virtually all changes to legal reform related to family law. Historian Kemy Oyarzún situates the project within the broader program of the newly created National Women’s Secretariat (SNM), a short-lived state agency established in 1972 as the first centralized governmental body tasked with addressing women’s specific legal, social, and economic status.[405] The filiation reform attempt therefore represented part of a wider set of SNM initiatives—including proposals for divorce reform and the legal recognition of non-marital

[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Claudia Fedora Rojas Mira, *Poder, mujeres y cambio en Chile (1964–1973): Un capítulo de nuestra historia* (master 's thesis, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana–Iztapalapa, 1994), 118. The term “huacho” initially was used to refer to orphans, but across the 19th and 20th centuries, came to refer to abandoned children, children not recognized by their fathers, and children born out of wedlock more broadly.
[404] Nara Milanich, "To Make All Children Equal is a Change in the Power Structures of Society: The Politics of Family Law in Twentieth Century Chile and Latin America," *Law and History Review* 33, no. 4 (2015): 787.
[405] Kemy Oyarzún V., “Unidad Popular: genealogías feministas interseccionales,” in *La vía chilena al socialismo. 50 años después. Tomo I: Historia*, ed. Robert Austin Henry, Joana Salém Vasconcelos, and Viviana Canibilo Ramírez (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2020), 53.

unions—aimed at redefining the juridical foundations of family life. Teresa Valdés likewise notes that these efforts sought to secure women's equality before the law, even if most ultimately failed to be enacted amid the escalating political crisis.[406]

The significance of the filiation bill lies less in its legislative outcome, however, than in how it was perceived. Advanced at the same moment that the state was proposing educational restructuring, and alongside ongoing debates about prostitution and women's welfare, the reform could be interpreted by conservative sectors not as a narrow legal adjustment, but as part of a broader pattern of state intervention into marriage, sexuality, and the status of children. In this sense, even a measure framed in the language of children's equality contributed to a growing perception that the state was encroaching upon domains historically anchored in familial (and particularly maternal) responsibility. This perception was shaped, in part, by the uneven responses of Catholic authorities themselves. While the Chilean episcopate intervened forcefully in 1971 to oppose civil divorce proposals as a threat to the stability of the family and society, they did not issue an equivalent public condemnation of the filiation proposal. This relative silence suggests that concerns over children's social and economic wellbeing could, at times, outweigh strict adherence to doctrinal positions on marriage. At the same time, episcopal discourse on divorce reveals the deeply gendered assumptions that structured Catholic understandings of family and moral order.

In their opposition to divorce legislation, the bishops advanced an explicitly gendered argument in which women were cast simultaneously as vulnerable subjects and as essential guardians of social stability. As they argued, "feminine intuition rightly foresees that divorce takes

[406] Teresa Valdés, coord., *El índice de compromiso cumplido (ICC): Una estrategia para el control ciudadano de la equidad de género* (Santiago, Chile: FLACSO-Chile, 2001), 18.

the woman as its principal and most defenseless victim," leaving her exposed to male selfishness, while also affirming that a "secular wisdom, protective of the very foundations of social order, resides in feminine intuition."[407] In the bishops' formulation, women appeared as both those most in need of protection and those uniquely equipped to safeguard the moral fabric of society. This logic drew on longstanding Catholic ideals of gender complementarity that positioned women, especially mothers, as central to social reproduction while simultaneously denying them full autonomy within the legal and institutional structures that governed family life.

This tension between women's centrality to moral order and their exclusion from decision-making power formed a crucial backdrop to debates over state policy in the early 1970s.[408] Even as reforms such as the Single Filiation Bill sought to expand women's legal rights and protect children born outside marriage, they were interpreted within a framework that associated moral authority with maternal roles rather than with the state. As a result, efforts to redefine the legal basis of family life could be read not simply as progressive reforms, but as potential disruptions to the gendered distribution of moral authority itself. Importantly, similar assumptions appeared in Catholic educational thought, where teachers, like mothers, were framed as key instruments of moral formation while remaining subject to institutional oversight. As Patricio Cariola argued in a 1971 article published in a religious education journal, by drawing on the pastoral orientations of Vatican II and the Medellín conference, "basic education becomes first in the priorities of the Church," requiring not only expanded resources but also "the careful coordination and formation

[407] Comité Permanente del Episcopado de Chile, "Matrimonio y Divorcio (Parte I)," Declaración, Santiago, February 6, 1971, https://www.iglesia.cl/111-matrimonio-y-divorcio.htm.

[408] See for example Elizabeth Quay Hutchinson, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900–1930* (Duke University Press, 2001). Her fifth and sixth chapters analyze vocational schools for women and how middle-class Catholic women assisted and gave moral guidance to poor women. Though these programs benefitted many, Hutchinson highlights that the long term effect strengthened the gendered division of labor and bolstered conservative values of female domesticity.

of educators."[409] Teachers, he noted, were "after a family, the most efficient tools in a society of change," underscoring both their importance and their subordinate position within a broader moral hierarchy.[410] These debates reveal that by the early 1970s, the legal and institutional foundations of family life had become a central site of contestation. Reforms aimed at expanding equality and modernizing social policy were interpreted through a gendered lens that linked women, family, and moral order in complex and often contradictory ways. It was within this climate—marked by both the reconfiguration of legal norms and the persistence of deeply embedded assumptions about maternal responsibility—that the debates about the ENU were unfolding.

Youth, Sexuality, and the Breakdown of Moral Authority

A key early episode in the Popular Unity period that reveals the gendered contours of moral anxiety surrounding education occurred in December 1971, when the first UP-era edition of the Ministry-run magazine *Revista de Educación* provoked a brief but intense controversy over its cover image. The issue featured a photograph of secondary school and university students aboard a graffiti-covered bus traveling to rural areas to participate in *trabajos de verano* (summer volunteer work). Among the various political slogans scrawled across the bus, one stood out for its irreverence: "*María, tú que concebiste sin pecar, ayúdanos a pecar sin concebir*" ("Mary, you who conceived without sinning, help us to sin without conceiving").[411] Popularized by Latin American youth movements in the late 1960s, the phrase invoked demands for sexual education

[409] Patricio Cariola, S.J., "The Thought of the Church and the Future of Education in Latin America," *Religious Education* 66, no. 6 (1971): 422.
[410] Ibid.
[411] *Revista de Educación,* no. 32-33, Santiago, November-December 1971.

and access to contraception through a deliberate inversion of Marian symbolism.[412] The reaction was swift. Raúl Hasbún, a diocesan priest and prominent media figure associated with the Catholic University's Channel 13, publicly denounced the image as an "affront," on television, while three Christian Democratic congressmen raised the issue in the Chamber of Deputies.[413] Their intervention compelled the Minister of Education, Jorge Tapia, to appear before Congress and assure legislators that future issues of the magazine would include only material "selected exclusively according to technical-pedagogical criteria."[414] That such a response was deemed necessary is telling. The controversy was not over curricular content, since the magazine issue itself did not promote sexual education as a central theme, but rather over the symbolic and aesthetic register through which youth culture had entered an official state publication.

This episode reveals how anxieties about education were inseparable from broader concerns about youth, sexuality, and moral authority. The presence of a sexually suggestive slogan—especially one invoking the Virgin Mary—under the official imprimatur of the state signaled, for conservative Catholic observers, a breakdown in the boundaries that had traditionally governed moral formation. What was at stake was not simply propriety, but the question of whether institutions responsible for shaping the next generation were still aligned with the moral frameworks historically anchored in family and Church. Even in the absence of explicit policy promoting sexual liberalization, the visual and cultural language associated with youth

[412] Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* offers a complex analysis of authority, moral autonomy, and ecclesiastical assumptions about women, by tracing U.S. attitudes towards sex and marriage from the mid 19th century to the 1968 issuance of the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* forbidding artificial contraception use for Catholics. Her book represents an excellent capitulation of the fracture between Church authority versus lay practice, particularly as it relates to gender issues.
[413] Sebastián Neut Aguayo, "'Los viejos soñadores de una sociedad nueva enclavada en una sociedad injusta, insensible y podrida han podido despertar de su error' Ideología, política y pedagogía en la Revista de Educación durante la Unidad Popular," 2022, in *Nuevas Historias de la Educación durante la Unidad Popular*, comp. Christián Matamoros Fernández (Santiago: Editorial Sole, 2022), 1:125.
[414] Ibid.

participation appeared to legitimize forms of irreverence that challenged established norms. Importantly, the controversy also points to the ways in which youth culture itself became a site through which these anxieties were articulated. The students depicted in the image were engaged in socially valued activities—volunteer labor in rural communities—that resonated with longstanding Catholic universities' commitments to service and social justice. As I discussed in my second chapter, Catholic students had long participated in summer volunteer works. Yet the incorporation of irreverent, sexually charged language into this context transformed what might otherwise have been celebrated, into a source of concern. Youth participation, in other words, was not inherently problematic; it became so when it appeared to operate outside or in tension with the moral authority traditionally exercised by adults, especially when it symbolically mocked the most highly esteemed archetype of ideal motherhood in Catholicism.[415]

Even prior to the UP period, however, Catholic discourse on sexuality had already begun to exhibit signs of internal tension and reinterpretation. As Patrick Barr-Melej has shown, a 1968 interview with Father Jaime Correa in the widely read women's magazine *Paula* framed the Church's emphasis on premarital virginity not as immutable doctrine, but as the product of historical "tradition," shaped in part by figures such as St. Augustine. At the same time, Correa did not abandon moral regulation; rather, he reformulated it through a gendered lens that preserved

[415] This dynamic is not unique to Latin American Catholicism. See for example, Jeffrey P. Morgan's *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* sex-education activists in the early 1900s in the United States moral and sexual deterioration of middle-class males, infusing their arguments for sex-education with new urgency. He details how from the 1920s onwards, these activists often infused their activism with a strong emphasis on family life. Jonathan Zimmerman, *Too Hot to Handle: A Global History of Sex Education* (Princeton University Press, 2015) also maps the debates around sex-education even later into the 20th century, particularly focusing on the United States and Europe. Though he highlights that Conservative groups, especially conservative parents, in both the U.S. and Europe argued that it was the prerogative of parents to impart sexual knowledge to their children, or not, as they saw fit he demonstrates that the tensions between the state, schools, parents, and teachers played out differently in Europe, where as early as 1970 the European Court ruled that states must impart sex education, eliminating the possibility of families and their students opting out.

women's role as moral arbiters. While affirming women's emancipation as a "very positive phenomenon," he warned against women adopting what he described as a masculine tendency to separate sex from love, insisting instead on mutual responsibility, fidelity, and the moral integration of sexuality within affective relationships.[416] The priest's interpretation reveals that even as certain Catholic voices acknowledged the contingency of inherited sexual norms and adapted to changing social realities, they continued to locate the stability of moral order in women's capacity to regulate sexual desire and sustain relational ethics. Sexual modernization, including discussions of sex education and contraception, in this sense, did not displace gendered moral authority but rather rearticulated it. It was precisely this unstable balance—between reinterpretation and continuity—that made the symbolic transgressions of youth culture, such as those displayed in the *Revista de Educación* controversy, appear to be not merely irreverent but as part and parcel of an education policy that threatened an already shifting moral framework.

This dynamic helps explain why the episode provoked such a strong reaction despite the absence of substantive curricular change. The controversy was not about what students were formally being taught, but about what kinds of subjects they were becoming. The figure of the politicized, sexually self-aware youth—visible through slogans, aesthetic choices, and forms of collective action—raised the possibility that the processes of moral formation were no longer fully under the control of the family or the Church. In this sense, the episode informed and prefigured 1973 debates over the ENU by foregrounding a central concern: that education might become a

[416] Patrick Barr-Melej, *Psychedelic Chile: Youth Counterculture, and Politics on the Road to Socialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 82.

site in which the authority to shape values and behavior was shifting away from its traditional custodians.

These anxieties intensified over the course of 1972, as student mobilization expanded across both public and private educational institutions. As a November issue of *Mundo* observed, the participation of private-school students in strikes and street demonstrations, which might have represented a significant departure from the traditional political quietism associated with Catholic education in the early sixties, was now commonplace.[417] Brought on by a conflict over authority, participation, and politicization in secondary education surrounding the appointment of secondary school authorities without student input, the November 1972 student mobilizations in Santiago entered broader debates over democratization within the educational system during the Popular Unity period. The involvement of the newly formed Unified Federation of Private School Students (FUEP) alongside the public Federation of Secondary Students (FESES) suggested that even spaces long understood as politically insulated (i.e. Catholic schools) were becoming sites of visible political engagement. While some of the Catholic student leaders framed this participation in terms of democratic preparation and civic responsibility, others—those affiliated with conservative Catholic student unions within the FUEP—viewed it as evidence that educational institutions were no longer capable of maintaining their nonpartisan and morally protective role, a fear no doubt shared by their parents.[418]

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[417] "Estudiantes Particulares: Fin de una larga siesta" [Private School Students: The End of a Long Nap], *Mundo '72*, November 1972, 20.

[418] Ibid., 20-22. One of the FUEP leaders, Raúl Montt, explained that "FUEP is not at the service of capitalism… nor does it wish to present itself as capitalist or anti-capitalist, Marxist or anti-Marxist."Another, José Manuel Correa, justified the protests by linking student participation to democratic preparation: "Young people are going to lead the country tomorrow, and therefore we must begin preparing ourselves now." Correa further argued that when students in either public or private schools "are not listened to and are denied participation, actions such as those at Liceo 12 occur," insisting that private-school students must show solidarity and "take to the streets in protest." At the same time, these claims were fiercely contested within Catholic circles themselves. Student activists in the FUEP

As Catholic observers attempted to interpret these shifts, youth political participation and women's expanding labor roles were increasingly understood as interconnected challenges to existing structures of authority. A 1972 issue of *Mundo* framed the growing presence of young people in political life as part of a broader transformation, noting that youth were "increasingly active and resolute in the course of society," incorporating themselves "rapidly into the broader processes of growth and transformation."[419] Political participation was not described merely as ideological alignment, but as formative in itself, providing young people with "knowledge, a broader perspective, and a greater understanding of the world."[420] At the same time, the magazine acknowledged that this transformation unsettled established generational hierarchies, raising urgent questions about how parents and educators might respond to a youth whose commitments were no longer easily shaped within traditional familial or institutional frameworks. Parallel concerns emerged in discussions of women's labor outside the home in the same issue. While *Mundo* recognized that such work brought women into contact with "other groups, problems, and people," expanding their participation in social life, it also suggested that this exposure could foster more "individualistic" orientations that strained established familial roles.[421] The resulting tension was not simply economic or social, but moral: as both women and youth occupied increasingly public and politicized roles, the sites and mechanisms through which values, discipline, and authority were transmitted became less certain. In this context, schools emerged as one of the few remaining institutions capable of mediating these transformations, helping to explain why

associated with the movement *Cristianos por el Socialismo* accused those in the FUEP who did not join the demonstrations of abandoning its founding principles and warned that the Federation's official statement avowing "pluralism" and "neither capitalist nor anti-capitalist" views, was being used as "yet another instrument in the well-orchestrated concert of the opposition." Their critique underscored growing divisions within Catholic political culture, where Christian-democratic reformism, Christian-socialist radicalism, and more conservative Catholic sectors increasingly struggled to define the boundaries of legitimate student activism.

[419] M. Angelica Muñoz G., "La Irrupción de los Jóvenes en la Política," *Mundo*, October 1972, 36.

[420] Ibid., 37.

[421] M. Elsa Richard, "Chilena, casada y trabajo afuera," *Mundo '72*, October 1972, 34.

educational reform would become such a charged terrain in the broader struggle over moral and social order.

The resulting ENU debates revealed a growing uncertainty about the status of youth as moral subjects. They raised questions about whether student mobilizations were signs of legitimate civic engagement, or indications of undue political influence, and whether Catholic educational institutions would remain spaces of moral formation in an increasingly polarized and politically demonstrative society. Crucially, they provoked anxiety about who retained the authority to guide and regulate the behavior of young people, a responsibility that had been granted to women because of structural changes in the education system over the course of the previous decades, and permitted because of the cultural (and often Catholic) assumptions which underpinned those changes. In Catholic publications of 1971 and 1972, these questions did not yet coalesce around the ENU specifically, but they formed part of the broader atmosphere of unease in which education, youth, and morality were becoming deeply entangled. That it was occurring in a terrain long associated with women's labor that had often been construed as maternal-adjacent and apolitical is especially critical for understanding how explosive the ENU became by 1973. These episodes demonstrate that by the time the ENU debates emerged in full force, concerns about youth, sexuality, and moral authority were already well established. The controversy over the *Revista de Educación* cover and the subsequent expansion of (even Catholic) student mobilization did not create these anxieties, but made them visible. In doing so, they contributed to a growing perception that the institutions traditionally responsible for moral formation—the family, the Church, and the school—were no longer operating in clear alignment. It was within this context of perceived instability that educational reform would be interpreted as a potential threat to the moral foundations of Chilean society.

The Family Under Siege: the ENU and the Displacement of Maternal Authority

By early 1973, opposition to the Escuela Nacional Unificada (ENU) had coalesced into a set of arguments that framed educational reform not simply as a pedagogical or political issue, but as a direct threat to the family and, more specifically, to women's role within it. The announcement of the ENU in the form of the Report on the National Unified School in February 1973 triggered a coordinated campaign against it, led by student groups, and parents' associations, in which women condemned the ENU as a threat to their role in rearing and educating children. The gendered language of this opposition was not incidental. One widely circulated article published in *Tribuna* in April 1973 featured an image of a mother gazing at her child, accompanied by the caption: "The always emotional mother-child link finds itself in grave danger. Between the tender bonds of [mother and child] the state imposes the official will to convert the woman into a simple reproducer and the child into just one more item off the production line."[422] Thus by April 1973, the ENU was cast in opposition media, especially conservative media, not merely as a reform of schooling, but as a project that threatened to sever the intimate, affective, and moral ties that defined maternal authority.

Conservative critics repeatedly framed the reform as an attempt by the state to appropriate the formative functions historically exercised by mothers. As one editorial in *El Mercurio* warned in March 1973, the ENU would "replace [the mother] with state functionaries who will take charge of the formation of preschool children at a decisive stage of their existence."[423] Though one of the

[422] Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 110.
[423] Pablo Toro Blanco, "'Convertir el Ministerio de Educación en una especie de Ministerio de Propaganda, a lo Goebbels': Pánicos morales ante la Escuela Nacional Unificada. Una mirada desde la prensa opositora. Chile, 1973," 2022, in *Nuevas Historias de la Educación durante la Unidad Popular*, comp. Cristián Matamoros Fernández and Sebastián Neut Aguayo (Santiago: editorial sole, 2022), 1:75.

stated proposals of the ENU was to expand preschools and nurseries in order to facilitate women's integration into paid labor, the Chilean right framed this initiative as a direct displacement of maternal authority.[424] Read through a gendered division of moral labor, the ENU's promise of democratized "community" educational responsibility and state administered preschools and nurseries could appear as deprofessionalization and dispossession: moral formation was imagined as moving from the (often overlapping) groups of mothers and teachers and households into diffuse, state-administered and planned structures. In the Report on the National Unified school, education was conceived as a task of "the masses and society as a whole," with formal institutions losing their "educational monopoly."[425] Teaching—already feminized, moralized, and underpaid—thus risked being further devalued, as women teachers' authority would no longer be grounded in individual vocation or moral stewardship but instead absorbed into a generalized "community" responsibility, bound up in broader workers' struggles, which was a heavily politicized terrain. Early childhood education (*educación parvularia*) was explicitly justified within the ENU framework by women's increasing participation in productive labor and the need for institutional solutions to childcare. Yet for many Catholic critics, this reframing was deeply unsettling. Where women had long justified their authority in education through maternal proximity, the ENU appeared to redefine motherhood in the modernizing language of a logistical problem of labor allocation. The decentralization and democratization of educational planning—particularly through the creation of *Complejos Educacionales* (Educational Complexes, the

[424] Fischer, *Political ideology*, 110. The proposal discussed at the National Congress of Education stated that"Nursery schools and kindergartens will attend to the needs of children from 0 to six years of age. All early childhood education establishments will be subject to the regulations of the Ministry of Education with regard to their 'education activities, the efficiency and quality of their personnel, and, in general, the scientific conduct of child development in the most important phase of the child's existence.' the need for public education at this level, the report argued, is due in large part to the growing trend in working mothers who must 'partially abandon responsibilities indigenous to the home.'"

[425] See Ivan Nunez's *La Enu entre Dos Siglos*, 40-55, for a detailed explanation of the various kinds of councils, complexes, and regional versus national regulatory bodies proposed.

community councils originally imagined as deliberative for policy formation)—further intensified these concerns. However, "as several supporters of the ENU were quick to point out, similar educational proposals had been discussed in Chile for decades and even the Frei reform was directed toward similar concepts of incorporation of preschool, adult education, and technical training into the regular school system."[426] Furthermore, "the ENU report included a specific guarantee of the administrative autonomy of private schools."[427] When opposition formed, therefore, it cannot be solely attributed to Catholics' fears for Catholic schools' own infrastructures, or even to the Bishops' concern with the Report's ambiguous phrase of "socialist-humanist" values.[428] Rather the opposition to the ENU announcement in early 1973 caused the gendered and cultural anxieties surrounding women, sexuality, and family life that had been brewing from the late 1960s onward to reach a boiling point, because of the redistribution of gendered labor that it represented: in subordinating individual schools to integrated regional and national planning structures, the reform threatened to displace localized spaces in which women exercised authority, but little decision-making power. The Educational Complexes would have placed women teachers alongside technocratic and often male-dominated bodies (such as workers' unions) that were overtly political. In this sense, what the ENU presented as participatory and collective governance could be experienced as the erosion of a deeply entrenched "woman-as-mother-educator" logic that had long structured both educational practice and culturally accepted visions of moral authority. Furthermore, the authority of women as educators, long legitimized through their proximity to maternal roles and their perceived moral vocation, risked being redefined as a function of bureaucratic coordination rather than personal or ethical stewardship. In

[426] Kathleen Fischer, *Political ideology and educational reform in Chile, 1964-1976* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1979), 116.
[427] Ibid.
[428] Here I refer to the Chilean Bishops' April 1973 pastoral discussed at length in chapter 4.

the context of the UP's 1970-1973 attempts at changing laws related to women, children, and prostitution, and especially in the 1973 context rapid political polarization and escalating public demonstrations, I argue that the prospect of changing the role of teachers–especially women teachers–posed a more serious (and clearly gendered) threat to the moral fabric of society than did the curricular values of "socialist-humanism" in the eyes of many Catholics.

As I detailed in my previous chapter, Catholic responses to the ENU varied, and most of the historiography dealing with Catholic opposition to the ENU focuses on the Chilean episcopacy's hardened opposition in April 1973, which I illustrated was informed in large part by the need to show a publicly united front amidst very public clerical divisions. Another crucial factor informing the Catholic hierarchy's sharp pivot from cautious collaboration to outright rejection of the project, however, can be found not in their 1973 public statements, but bound up in anxieties of gendered moral and educational labor within the Catholic Church itself, not only in Catholic educational institutions, but in pastoral networks more broadly. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Catholic influence operated less through direct clerical intervention than through the everyday institutions of family, religious community, and schooling—precisely the domains in which women's labor was most concentrated. As my first chapter detailed, women were at the forefront of grassroots Catholic life and its sustenance. In December of 1968, the Center of Social Action Research (CIAS) conducted a survey of 1,000 men and women in Santiago, stratified by sex, age, education, and socio-economic status, on behalf of Centro Bellarmino, a Catholic-affiliated research center.[429] The study was explicitly concerned with measuring not only belief but also religious practice, institutional authority, and public opinion toward the Catholic Church

[429] Centro Bellarmino is the research center I discussed in my first chapter, established by the Jesuit priest Roger Vekemans that became a crucial part of establishing social and welfare policy as part of the Frei government's "Popular Promotion."

as a social actor.[430] Its findings revealed a highly uneven Catholic field, challenging assumptions of a unified laity. Although 87 percent of respondents identified as Catholic, only 19.1 percent were classified as "active" Catholics based on regular Mass attendance, communion, and prayer, while 32.4 percent were deemed "conformists" and 49.5 percent "indifferent," indicating limited or irregular engagement with institutional religious practice.[431] Women however consistently identified as more religious than men and were more likely to fall into the categories of "active" or "conformist," a pattern the authors note without attributing it to greater doctrinal knowledge or clerical proximity.[432] Instead, they found that religiosity correlated most strongly with early socialization and education, particularly religious instruction received in childhood through family and school, which the study directly identifies as the principal mediators of religious formation.[433] Contact with priests, by contrast, showed little explanatory power: frequent interaction with the clergy did not significantly predict higher religiosity, nor did it shield priests from criticism, leading the authors to conclude unambiguously that "contact with priests does not appear to be a basic indicator of religiosity in a significant way."[434] When asked to evaluate the Church as an institution, respondents overwhelmingly emphasized its educational and social functions over purely sacramental roles. A large majority approved of Catholic education and expressed willingness to send their children to Catholic schools, citing discipline, moral formation, and values as key advantages, regardless of socio-economic status.[435] At the same time, lay Catholics articulated clear critiques of the Church, particularly regarding wealth, hierarchy, and distance

[430] Centro de Investigaciones y Acción Social, *Religiosidad y Opinión de Santiago Sobre la Iglesia* (Santiago: Centro Bellarmino, 1968), 1-2.
[431] Centro de Investigaciones y Acción Social, *Religiosidad y Opinión*, 26-29.
[432] Centro de Investigaciones y Acción Social, *Religiosidad y Opinión*, 29-30.
[433] Ibid., 32-34, 41-42.
[434] Ibid., 54.
[435] Ibid., 49-50.

from everyday life, while affirming that the Church should address social problems and act publicly in the modern world.[436] The report's conclusions underscored that the variable most strongly associated with religiosity was childhood religious education rather than class, sex, or age, a finding that implicitly validated the Church's own fixation on schooling as the primary site of moral and social formation.[437] By the February 1973 announcement of the ENU proposal, these findings would have taken on increasing importance in a context where the vast majority of those entrusted by the Church to carry out religious instruction in schools were lay women, who now might no longer be kept from the broader arena of politicization.

Ministry of Education enrollment data from the period suggest that the gendered character of educational authority was being reshaped not only by the feminization of the teaching profession but also by changes in the student population itself. While boys still constituted a slight majority in public primary schools, secondary education had become increasingly feminized across both public and private systems, with female students forming a slight majority—especially in the public sector. As middle and high school education expanded rapidly in these years, adolescent girls became central subjects of educational policy and reform. Schooling thus emerged not simply as a site of academic instruction or civic training, but as a key arena in which femininity, morality, and expectations of future motherhood were imagined to be formed.[438] These shifts intensified a deeper tension already embedded in Chilean educational culture: the gap between feminized presence and masculinized authority. By the early 1970s, schools were spaces densely populated by women—as teachers responsible for daily instruction, as mothers invested in their children's

[436] Ibid., 46-48, 50-51.
[437] Centro de Investigaciones y Acción Social, *Religiosidad y Opinión*, 65-66.
[438] República de Chile, Ministerio de Educación Pública, Superintendencia de Educación, Oficina de Planificación, Estadística e Informática, *Matrícula de educación básica y media, sector fiscal y particular, 1960–1978* (Santiago: Ministerio de Educación Pública, abril de 1979), pp 5, 8-9, 18.

formation, and increasingly as female students themselves—yet the structures governing educational policy and curricular direction remained overwhelmingly male. In this context, proposals such as the ENU did more than reorganize administration; they threatened to relocate the governance of moral formation from informal, feminized spheres into a centralized national project. For critics, this appeared to collapse a long-standing arrangement in which women exercised significant influence over the formation of youth while remaining excluded from institutional power.

At the same time, pro-UP Catholic discourse contributed to this destabilization by reframing women not as moral guardians, but as workers embedded in structures of class and production. A Pontifical Catholic University (PUC) education student, Sandra Escobar published an essay titled "La Obrera Chilena," ("the Chilean Woman Worker") in a 1973 issue of the PUC's *Debate Universitario,* that was otherwise devoted to ENU debates. In it, she rejected the notion of a unified moral category of "woman," arguing instead that women must be understood in terms of their position within the labor force. By emphasizing women's "double burden" as "workers, wives, and mothers," and by exposing the structural inequalities that shaped their participation in both domestic and productive spheres, Escobar displaced the idealized figure of the morally authoritative mother with a more materially grounded, classed subject. Read alongside contemporaneous critiques warning that the ENU represented "the control of consciences," and a few that opined support for its democratic approach to reform the national system, this shift acquired particular significance. If women were no longer understood primarily as custodians of moral order but as actors within broader systems of production and social transformation, then the feminized domains of teaching and childrearing could no longer be assumed to lie outside politics.

Conclusion: The Gendered Limits of Educational Reform

Taken together, these developments help explain why the ENU provoked such intense and gendered opposition. The reform did not simply challenge institutional arrangements but called into question the social logic through which moral authority had been organized—one that located the formation of children at the intersection of family, school, and the feminized labor that connected them. Because the legislative initiatives undertaken during the UP years also appeared to critics as encroachment into the "private" sphere of family, yet were simultaneously deemed insufficient (by Catholic media) in safeguarding women's moral dignity in the realms of marriage and prostitution, the ENU became the site where longstanding assumptions about women's role as moral intermediaries between home and society were not only contested but rendered newly unstable. The heightened political activism of the UP years amongst Catholic youth in particular and Chilean youth more broadly amplified these existing tensions. That anti-Unidad Popular discourse, especially Catholic iterations of anticommunism, would leverage perceived threats by the state on the family during the Cold War is unsurprising, especially in Latin America during this period.[439]

What makes the National Unified School stand out as a moment of acute Cold War cultural and moral panic is its gendered dimensions, within a particular work force long associated with the labor of women, and the formation of civic values in children. Despite having significant repercussions for its reception in both Catholic circles and for Chileans concerned with the moral order of society more broadly, this element has been largely absent from the extant historiography

[439] See Anita Casavantes Bradford, *The Revolution is for the Children: The Politics of Childhood in Havana and Miami, 1959–1962* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014) for example, who illustrates how anticommunist discourse exaggerated threats to family authority, which she argues meant that children became symbolic terrain in Cold War conflict, something which played out dramatically in the years following the Cuban Revolution, most notably in "Operation Peter Pan."

of both the Chilean Church and Chilean education. In his work on the ENU, Iván Núñez has emphasized that, whatever its perception by opposition forces may have been, the creation of the SUTE and the ENU proposal represented much less of a dramatic rupture than simply the culmination of broad political groups' attempts throughout the 1960s to create organized labor legislation and curricular and systemic reforms for the teachers and students that composed the national school system.[440][441] Similarly, Kathleen Fischer locates a significant reason for the ENU's eventual withdrawal shortly before the September 11th 1973 coup in the proposal's inability to generate consensus because the Report on the National Unified school released to the public was criticized as "too difficult for popular understanding" while also "too general to satisfy its critics."[442] She suggests that it failed to adequately address the concerns of private education or the Church's "humanistic requisites," and, importantly in obscuring its continuities with the PDC's reform of 1965, it ultimately "further antagoniz[ed]" Christian Democratic supporters, rather than securing their backing, when they might have otherwise remained sympathetic to further structural changes to the national education system.[443] Joseph P. Farrell's *The National Unified School: The Role of Education in the Destruction of a Revolution* offers the most sustained and detailed account

[440] Ivan Nuñez, *La ENU Entre Dos Siglos: un Ensayo Histórico sobre la Escuela Nacional Unificada* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2003), 100. As a high ranking Ministry official of the time, Nuñez is well qualified to state that "the ENU proposal was not grounded solely in Marxism." and that it "had deep roots and a fundamental motivation in the 'unifying' current of Chilean education, which did not have a Marxist inspiration" but rather "nineteenth-century positivism, the organicist functionalism of the 1920s and 1930s, and forms of scientifically based pedagogy that originated in Western European countries and the United States," as well as "from advanced currents of Christianity and from liberal-progressive educational approaches. Moreover, the Marxism present in the ENU did not necessarily derive from its Leninist version; thus, its action was not governed by the political logic of seizing power in order to impose the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proposal was formulated within Allende's definition of the Chilean road to socialism."

[441] Chile, *Ley No. 17.615, Exime a los funcionarios del Ministerio de Educación Pública de las disposiciones que indica y reconoce al Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de la Educación*, January 26, 1972, Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=29152. This law exempted Ministry of Education employees from standard union restrictions, granted SUTE legal personality, established mandatory membership for Ministry (i.e. public education) employees, and allowed (but not require) private education workers to join.

[442] Kathleen Fischer, *Political ideology and educational reform in Chile, 1964-1976* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1979), 117.

[443] Kathleen Fischer, *Political ideology*, 117.

of the ENU as an episode in the final days of Chilean democracy. He argues that education became a key arena in which the revolution overreached and ultimately undermined itself; although the policy language emphasized participation and equality, critics (and Farrell himself, to an extent) interpret it as an attempt to extend political control into cultural and familial life.[444] Farrell also argues that the ENU might have been technically or pedagogically defensible, but the reform required broad consensus and trust, which the UP could not manage in 1973 amidst intense partisan conflict and institutional breakdown, so even moderate and reformist elements interpreted it in the worst possible light. He correctly surmises that the ENU controversy was a turning point in the erosion of middle-class and cross-class support for the UP government, because the opposition was able to convincingly frame it as indoctrination, an attack on parental authority, and a threat to pluralism, thereby broadening opposition beyond just socioeconomic elites.

To some extent and in slightly different ways, these historians and others illustrate how the ENU triggered a legitimacy crisis beyond education. Scholarship on the ENU episode in Chilean education history also has highlighted that much of the broad, cross-class opposition to the project hinged on parental rights' rhetoric.[445] Yet their analyses underestimate how powerfully cultural assumptions about gendered educational labor circumscribed the range of possible responses. Seen in retrospect, the ENU-era conflict echoes a broader pattern inside Catholicism as well: women were indispensable to grassroots pastoral action–such as the catechism and popular literacy efforts I highlighted in chapters one and two–and to formal school structures where they made up the vast

[444] Joseph P. Farrell, *The National Unified School: The Role of Education in the Destruction of a Revolution* (Toronto: The University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 244-245 a poignant example he highlights is how during his time working in Chile, in August 1973 while having dinner with Chileans that included "middle-aged armed forces officers of fairly senior rank" one of them said "Look, these Marxists can wreck the economy, and we can recover. We've done it before. They can change the political institutions, and we can change them back if we want. But they had better keep their damned hands off my kids!"

[445] Both Lisa Baldez and Joseph Farrell highlight this.

majority of teachers. Yet the exercise of formal authority remained structurally barred—making "who forms consciences?" an argument about gendered power, not only ideology. In an essay titled "The Changing Role of Women in the Catholic Church in Chile," sociologist Katherine Gilfeather published her findings from 1975 during which time she conducted extensive interviews and surveys of all the Chilean Bishops. "Women in Chile have taken considerable responsibility for the pastoral concerns of the Catholic Church" she wrote, opening her essay by stating that "Many of these services would not function without these women due to the growing scarcity of priests."[446] Throughout the article, Gilfeather highlights the dynamic that I have attempted to illustrate throughout the chapter: "When we speak of religious authority and the norms and ideals that emanate from that authority, we are speaking of Bishops… However, the Church operates through its 'pastoral action,' and it is precisely within this area that changes are perceptible."[447] In her interviews of the Chilean Bishops with regards to the increased administrator and pastoral responsibilities that women occupied in the Church, "Forty-seven percent responded in terms of 'women's peculiarly feminine qualities: devotion, diligence, constancy, self-sacrifice, generosity, docility, etc.'"[448] These qualities were the ones that a slight majority of Bishops referred to when expressing their support for women to continue their roles in catechesis for children and adults, parish administration (in practice, even if controversial), leadership training for mothers, Base Ecclesisal Communities and neighborhood associations, and heading Catholic charity, fraternal aid, and social service organizations. As the article notes, "There are at present over 80 religious women acting as administrators of parishes… doing many of those tasks traditionally reserved to

[446] Katherine Gilfeather, "The Changing Role of Women in the Catholic Church in Chile," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 16, no. 1 (1977): 39.
[447] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 39.
[448] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 40.

priests."[449] But crucially, this was tolerated because it was framed as pastoral service, not authority. When pressed, "Ninety percent [of the Bishops] declared Major Orders (priesthood) for women impossible and beyond discussion."[450] Even beyond priesthood, 43% of the Chilean bishops felt that women should be excluded from preaching, 17% opposed women administering any sacraments, and 13% rejected women leading Christian base communities in the absence of a priest.[451] Thus even when women were already doing these things in rural or marginal areas, some bishops often refused to legitimate them. Their refusal was based on the same "feminine qualities" used to justify women's inclusion, but this time they referred to "lack of maturity, tendency to be led by sentiment and intuition rather than by reason and intelligence, lack of experience and global vision, delicacy, focus on home and family, etc.'"[452]

Gilfeather's somber conclusions illustrate the gendered underpinnings which shaped the ENU debates: "Though changing structures permit the presence of women in even heretofore sacrosanct areas of pastoral work, the cultural gap makes ordination, preaching, etc. as yet unrealizable."[453] The Chilean woman, she stated, was "permitted to carry heavy pastoral burdens but the exercise of real authority… is kept beyond her reach."[454] "If the ideal vehicle of authority is service, then we can affirm that women working in the Chilean Catholic Church possess authority, at least in theory."[455] Yet, a full 37% of bishops responded "yes, but" when asked whether women's expanded participation was beneficial, expressing "deep preoccupation with the

[449] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 39.
[450] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 40.
[451] Ibid.
[452] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 41.
[453] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 47.
[454] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 41.
[455] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 47.

possible danger of feminizing the Church to such an extent that men would feel alienated."[456] Interestingly, this fear is framed by Gilfeather as cultural, not theological—rooted in Chilean "machismo" and the idea that religion is already seen as "something for women."[457] Bishops broadly approved of women's participation in pastoral, educational, and service-oriented labor, especially where it solved the priest shortage, did not threaten clerical authority, and/or could be justified by women's "good" "feminine qualities."[458] Even more powerful, however, were Gilfeather's conclusions based on her interviews with Catholic lay women. When asked about Church priorities and models, women's responses were quietly but clearly political: women prioritized base communities over clerical vocations; 87% of women preferred a "critical" "prophetic" Church that publicly discussed injustice, compared to only 20% of bishops. Less than two years removed from the 1973 coup, it is perhaps unsurprising that the bishops preferred a Church that avoided conflict with the state. But notably, women favored a public critique of injustice.[459]

Read in light of the ENU controversy, the Chilean Bishops' 1975 attitudes suggest not simply the persistence of this gendered division of authority, but its reassertion in the aftermath of crisis. The conflicts of 1973 and the collapse of democracy had exposed the instability of a system that relied on women's moral labor while withholding formal authority; by 1975, what appears is less a transformation than a consolidation of that earlier arrangement. Though the ENU proposal was technically withdrawn, the March 1973 promulgation of Decreto 224 creating the legal infrastructure for the community-based education councils caused massive moralized opposition,

[456] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 40.
[457] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 40-41.
[458] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 39-40.
[459] Gilfeather, "The Changing," 48-50.

despite their consultative nature. This raises an important question that I've attempted to answer throughout the chapter: if the decree itself legally preserved the autonomy of private schools and maintained the strictly advisory character of participatory councils, why did it nevertheless provoke such intense anxiety among Catholic educators and parents? The answer lies less in the formal provisions of the reform than in the reconfiguration of moral authority that it implied. For decades, Catholic institutions had exercised significant influence over the moral formation of Chilean youth through an educational culture in which teachers—overwhelmingly women—served as socially recognized intermediaries between family, Church, and state. Their authority rested not on institutional power but on maternal and pedagogical legitimacy. Educational democratization did not eliminate advisory structures; instead, it pluralized them. Teachers were now invited to participate alongside unions, neighborhood organizations, and productive associations that were often male-dominated and explicitly political. As a result, the spaces in which educational authority was negotiated became both more socially heterogeneous and more overtly politicized.

The kind of "politics of difference" that women mobilized in the 20th century that I've traced in the previous chapters and in this one, was often used to justify women's entry into politics. It also, however, reinforced perceptions and dichotomies that marginalize women from politics and inhibited the promotion of their issues in the political arena, something which the ENU would have likely changed in many ways. As Susan Franceshet has noted, the discourse that mobilized women's uniquely feminine and moral traits could "also lead to the perception that women's political roles are crisis-driven–that is, women are encouraged to enter the normally male-dominated political world only when their feminine characteristics are needed, particularly in times

of crisis, change, or uncertainty."[460] In this sense, the ENU represented not only a redistribution of institutional authority but also a gendered reorganization of moral labor. Catholic women had long played a central role in the everyday work of education, shaping the moral and civic dispositions of children within classrooms and families. Their influence was broadly accepted precisely because it remained localized, maternal, and socially coded as service rather than politics. Educational democratization disrupted this arrangement by inserting teachers into new deliberative arenas where their expertise was placed alongside other forms of social representation. Male activists and union leaders would have entered spaces that had previously been associated with the feminized work of moral formation. What had once appeared as natural or apolitical guidance now became visible as part of a contested political process. The anxieties that surrounded the ENU therefore reflected not only ideological fears about socialism but also deeper cultural concerns about the displacement of familiar forms of moral authority.

Understanding the ENU in this broader context also clarifies the intellectual genealogy of the reform itself, which, though often cited by historians and contemporaries alike as the chief complaint in opposition camps, cannot on its own explain the moral panic the proposal provoked. As Ivan Núñez has emphasized, the proposal did not originate solely in Marxist thought but drew on diverse currents within Chilean educational history, including nineteenth-century positivism, early twentieth-century pedagogical reform, and progressive Christian educational ideas.[461] The

[460] Susan Franceshet, *Women and Politics in Chile* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 2. This is something which has been documented widely. See for example Jane S. Jaquette and Sharon L. Wolchik, eds., *Women and Democracy: Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury, eds., *Women and Politics Worldwide* (Yale University Press, 1994); Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg, eds., *Women and Social Protest* (Oxford University Press, 1990),

[461] Ivan Nuñez, *La ENU Entre Dos Siglos: un Ensayo Histórico sobre la Escuela Nacional Unificada* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2003), 100. As a high ranking Ministry official, Nuñez is well qualified to state that "the ENU proposal was not grounded solely in Marxism. It has already been demonstrated that it had deep roots and a fundamental motivation in the "unifying" current of Chilean education, which did not have a Marxist inspiration. At its origins were implications of nineteenth-century positivism, the organicist functionalism of the 1920s and 1930s,

project envisioned education not as a self-contained institutional system but as a social process embedded within family, community, and productive life. As I demonstrated in my fourth chapter, Catholic educators themselves had long articulated similar aspirations. The ENU's ambition to integrate schooling into broader social and economic development thus echoed themes that had circulated within Catholic intellectual circles for decades. What changed in the early 1970s was the political context in which these ideas were pursued and the actors who claimed the authority to implement them. While Catholic discourse initially contained cautious optimism and a collaborative attitude with regards to changing the national education system, Catholic opposition came to coalesce around perceived threats to parental authority and "indoctrination," once the executive decree that created the educational complexes was approved in early April, 1973. Joseph Farrell's claim that the ENU accelerated political breakdown in the lead up to September 1973 by unifying disparate opposition groups, intensifying fears of authoritarianism, and in the eyes of many, undermining the government's democratic legitimacy, is an important factor to reckon with when trying to understand the final issues that helped mobilize moderates and reformist actors–especially Christian Demcocrats–into supporting Augusto Pinochet's coup, whose regime they would soon come to vocally oppose. The debates surrounding the ENU however ultimately point beyond the reform itself to the deeper structures that shaped its reception. They not only reveal parental fears of "marxist indoctrination" embedded in school curricula; they reveal a social order

and forms of scientifically based pedagogy that originated in Western European countries and the United States. In Chapter 3, other significant non-Marxist elements of the Informe were also identified, stemming from advanced currents of Christianity and from liberal-progressive educational approaches. Moreover, the Marxism present in the ENU did not necessarily derive from its Leninist version; thus, its action was not governed by the political logic of seizing power in order to impose the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proposal was formulated within Allende's definition of the Chilean road to socialism. The objective fact is that it was an "Informe" intended, on the one hand, for broad public discussion, through which the ENU would obtain its legitimacy. On the other hand, its launch followed the institutional procedures of the Chilean state governed by the rule of law, insofar as it was submitted to the consideration of the representative National Council of Education in order to inform a decision that constitutionally and legally corresponded to the President of the Republic. There was nothing Bolshevik or Fidelista in the character of the proposal. The ENU would exist only insofar as democratic consensus was achieved. This proved impossible, and for that reason the proposal was withdrawn."

in which the work of forming citizens—so often carried out in classrooms, homes, and parishes—rested disproportionately on women, even as authority over that process remained elsewhere. By unsettling this arrangement, the ENU brought into focus the gendered foundations of moral and educational authority in Chile, and the limits of reform in a system built upon them.

Dissertation Conclusion

From Reform to Reconstruction

For good reason, the Chilean military coup of September 11, 1973, has most often been approached in the historiography as a decisive political and institutional turning point, marking the collapse of a period of reformist and socialist experimentation and the onset of authoritarian rule.[462] While scholars have long debated the causes and consequences of this transition, the coup has

[462] Examples of this periodization in the historiography are countless, but canonical works which treat the coup as an abrupt rupture from a revolutionary process include Peter Winn, *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile's Road to Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 1986); Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 1979); and Arturo Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes, Chile* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), all of which treat 1973 as a moment of acute institutional collapse and rapid regime transition. Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988* (Duke University Press, 2006), xxi, implies that this historiographical periodization is all but inevitable due to the collective cultural phenomenon of post-regime "Memory projects—to record and define the reality of the Allende era and its culminating crisis of 1973, to record and define the reality of military rule and its human rights drama—ended up becoming central to the logic by which people sought and won legitimacy in a politically divided and socially heterogeneous society that experienced a great turn and trauma." More recent works like John R. Bawden, *The Pinochet Generation: The Chilean Military in the Twentieth Century* (University of Alabama Press, 2016), centers the final year of the Unidad Popular government as the site of military men's further politicization and the dictatorship's establishment as a distinctive, new type of masculinized military governance, while Sebastián Edwards, *The Chile Project: The Story of the Chicago Boys and the Downfall of Neoliberalism* (Princeton University Press, 2025), similarly locates 1973 as the decisive moment of a new period of economic experimentation.

frequently served as a chronological and analytical boundary separating the reform era of the 1960s and early 1970s from the neoliberal and repressive order that followed.[463] Within that periodization, the projects of the 1960s and early 1970s—agrarian reform, educational expansion, and the Popular Unity government's proposed National Unified School (ENU)—appear as part of a failed trajectory, abruptly terminated by military intervention.[464] Yet, the conflicts that defined these reformist years did not simply disappear with the destruction of democratic institutions. Rather, they were reorganized, rearticulated, and, in crucial ways, institutionalized under the dictatorship that followed. Nowhere is this more evident than in the domains of education, gender, and moral authority, where the questions that animated debates between 1964 and 1973—who should shape the nation's youth, what values should govern social life, and where authority over the family should reside—remained central to the project of national reconstruction after the coup.

This dissertation has argued that these conflicts cannot be understood solely through the familiar ideological binaries of the Cold War. Instead, it has demonstrated that they were deeply embedded within Catholicism itself, unfolding as struggles over the meaning of reform, the scope of political participation, and the nature of moral authority in a rapidly changing society. By tracing Catholic engagement with educational reform from the Christian Democratic administration of

[463] What the historiography demonstrates, in other words, is often 1973 as an end point (of an era of reform, or revolutionary attempts) or a starting point (of dramatic neoliberal restructuring and sociopolitical repression) and its continued legacy in Chilean society and economy.

[464] Here again, Joseph P. Farrell, *The National Unified School: The Role of Education in the Destruction of a Revolution* (Toronto: The University of British Columbia Press, 1986) is the prime example of 1973 as an abrupt end point to radical educational policy, as is Ivan Núñez, *Las Transformaciones Educacionales Bajo el Régimen Militar* (Santiago: PIIE, 1984), I. Varun Guari, *School Choice in Chile: Two Decades of Educational Reform*, Pitt Latin American Studies (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), in his second chapter states that "For most of the twentieth century, Chileans joined in near consensus agreement on the importance of the state's educative role," (14) (i.e. the *estado docente* or "teaching state" doctrine), and argues that the only true opponents of the "teaching state" in the 19th century were "Catholics and classical economists, [who] came together in a historical alliance after 1973" (17). Thus, though Guari's book does not treat the ENU episode specifically, it nevertheless frames its failure as instituting an abrupt new market-theory driven education model, led by groups that had historically constituted a minority opinion of antipathy to state-administered education.

Eduardo Frei Montalva to the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende, it has shown that Catholic actors were not merely reacting to state initiatives or aligning predictably along a conservative–progressive spectrum. Rather, they were active participants in shaping the terms of reform, even as their involvement generated new forms of fragmentation and conflict. In this sense, the crisis that culminated in 1973 was not simply the product of polarization between left and right, but of tensions that had been building within Catholic political and social life throughout the preceding decade.

At the center of these tensions was education, which functioned not merely as a site of policy implementation or Church indoctrination but as a privileged arena in which broader questions of social order, political authority, and moral formation were negotiated. Across the five chapters of this dissertation, educational spaces such as parishes, schools, universities, literacy campaigns, and policy institutes emerge as key sites of interaction between clergy and lay Catholics, between state actors and civil society, and between competing visions of Chile's future. These spaces made visible the extent to which Catholic Social Doctrine, far from providing a stable or unified framework for political action, was subject to competing interpretations, as Catholic actors sought to apply its principles to rapidly changing social and political conditions, and legitimate their choices with Christianity. Initiatives intended to expand participation and modernize social life instead exposed the limits of consensus, as Catholics disagreed not only about the pace or direction of change, but about the very principles that should guide it. As my dissertation has shown, by the early 1970s, these disagreements had crystallized most dramatically in debates over the ENU, where conflicts over educational structure became proxies for deeper struggles over family, gender, and the locus of moral authority.

A central contribution of this dissertation has been to show that these struggles were structured by gender in fundamental ways. Building on and extending existing scholarship on maternalism and the gendered nature of political participation in Latin America, it has argued that the reforms of the 1960s institutionalized a particular model of feminine authority—what I have termed the "woman-as-mother-educator" archetype—as a cornerstone of both Catholic and developmentalist visions of modernity.[465] Women's roles as teachers, catechists, and community organizers positioned them as key intermediaries between the state, the Church, and the family, granting them a form of moral authority that was at once both expansive and constrained. This feminized authority was not peripheral to political life; it was central to how reform itself was imagined and enacted. At the same time, however, it was also deeply contested. The expansion of educational access, the politicization of youth, and the increasing involvement of the state in shaping curricula and values all raised the possibility that this authority might be displaced or redefined. It was precisely this possibility that made the ENU so contentious, as opponents framed it not simply as an educational reform, and not only as "Marxist" in orientation, but as a threat to the family and to the gendered moral order that underpinned it.

Seen from this perspective, the coup of 1973 did not resolve these conflicts so much as it reorganized them within a new political framework. The military regime that emerged in its aftermath placed education, the family, and moral order at the center of its project of national

[465] In addition to works I've engaged with in previous chapters such as Karin Rosemblatt, *Gendered compromises : Political Cultures & The State in Chile, 1920-1950* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Asunción Lavrín, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, 1890-1940* (University of Nebraska Press, 1995), Elizabeth Quay Hutchinson, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900–1930* (Duke University Press, 2001), and Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), among others, my work dialogues well with Rachel Elfenbein, *Engendering Revolution. Women, Unpaid Labor, and Maternalism in Bolivarian Venezuela.* (University of Texas Press, 2019), which underscores the persistence of maternalist frameworks in state projects and highlights the centrality of women's unpaid and reproductive labor to political regimes including late 20th century ones that originated on the left.

reconstruction, but crucially, it did so by dismantling the participatory structures that had characterized the 1964 to 1973 period. The regime's 1974 Declaration of Principles, for example, articulated a vision of Chilean society grounded simultaneously in a free enterprise economy and in the defense of "family, women, and youth" as "foundational pillars of the nation."[466] This formulation was not incidental. It reflected a reconfiguration of the very concerns that had animated earlier debates, combining a neoliberal economic model with a deeply gendered conception of social order in which women's moral authority was reaffirmed, but tightly circumscribed within a depoliticized and hierarchical framework. In this sense, the dictatorship did not reject the centrality of education or the importance of moral formation; rather, it sought to control them, subordinating both to an authoritarian vision of order that eliminated the pluralism and contestation that had defined the preceding decade.

By situating the post-1973 period within the longer trajectory traced in this dissertation, I illustrate that the history of educational reform in Chile cannot be understood as a story of rupture alone. Instead, it must be seen as a process in which the expansion of participation, the institutionalization of gendered authority, and the fragmentation of Catholic political life during the 1960s and early 1970s created the conditions under which authoritarian reconstruction became possible. The sections that follow build on this argument by examining how the dictatorship rearticulated these dynamics—through the restructuring of the educational system, the selective incorporation of women into the regime's political project, and the divergent trajectories of

[466] Junta de Gobierno de Chile, *"Declaración de Principios del Gobierno de Chile"* (Santiago: Gobierno de Chile, March 11, 1974), Archivo Chile, https://www.archivochile.com/Dictadura_militar/doc_jm_gob_pino8/DMdocjm0005.pdf.

Catholic actors in the years after the coup—while also tracing their longer-term legacies in Chile's educational and political landscape.

Synthesis of the Dissertation's Arguments

The chapters of this dissertation trace a historical process through which Catholic participation in Chilean public life expanded dramatically during the 1960s, only to generate new conflicts over authority, gender, and moral formation that, by the early 1970s, could no longer be contained within the reformist frameworks that had initially enabled them. Rather than treating the period between 1964 and 1973 as a simple story of ideological polarization between Left and Right, this dissertation has shown how the very projects that aimed to democratize Chilean society also transformed the terms on which Catholics engaged politics, education, and social reform. In doing so, they widened the sphere of participation while also destabilizing older arrangements of ecclesiastical, pedagogical, and familial authority. Reform, in other words, did not produce consensus; it produced the conditions for rupture.

The first stage of that process was the expansion of participation itself. As Chapters One and Two demonstrate, this expansion did not begin with the Unidad Popular government, nor did it originate solely in the realm of party politics. It emerged first within the social and religious transformations of mid-century Chilean Catholicism, where the pastoral openings associated with the Second Vatican Council, Medellín, new forms of lay organizing, and the social pressures of poverty, rural inequality, and educational exclusion widened the range of actors who could claim meaningful participation in the Church's public mission. Chapter One shows that liberationist Catholic politics in Chile did not arise exclusively from clerical reflection or episcopal pronouncement. Rather, it developed through sustained interaction between clergy and politically

active lay communities, especially in the everyday spaces of parish life, popular education, and Ecclesial Base Communities. In these settings, Catholic commitment was increasingly understood not as a private devotional identity but as a mandate for social engagement. Laypeople did not merely absorb a preexisting theological line from above, but participated in the practical and interpretive work through which questions of poverty, education, and justice were made legible as religious concerns. In this sense, the chapter reveals that the expansion of participation was already reshaping Catholic political culture before the onset of the most visible crises of the early 1970s. Just as importantly, Chapter One demonstrates that this widening of participation was structured by unequal forms of authority. Lay involvement expanded, but not evenly. Women in particular occupied crucial positions within parish organizations, literacy efforts, catechetical work, and community-based religious activism, making them central to the social reproduction of Catholic life. Their roles as teachers, organizers, and moral intermediaries gave them substantial influence over how Catholic teachings were lived and transmitted. Yet this influence unfolded within institutions whose formal decision-making structures remained overwhelmingly male. Women exercised real authority in the family, the school, and the parish, but that authority was coded as service, pedagogy, and care rather than institutional power or the ability to write new doctrine. Already by the late 1960s, then, Chilean Catholicism was being transformed by a contradiction that would reverberate throughout the rest of the dissertation: those who increasingly carried the labor of moral and civic formation were not necessarily those who possessed recognized authority over its institutional direction.

Chapter Two shows how these dynamics of participation moved from the level of grassroots Catholic practice into the sphere of university life and state-led reform. The Christian Democratic government's "Revolution in Liberty" sought to translate Catholic Social Doctrine

into policy through agrarian reform, literacy campaigns, educational expansion, and community development. In doing so, it drew Catholic students, clergy, and lay activists into unprecedented forms of social engagement via its explicitly confessional justification for its political project. Reform was meant to channel Catholic idealism into a centrist project of modernization. Yet, as the chapter demonstrates, the Christian Democratic reform project had consequences that exceeded the intentions of the party's center itself. By sending Catholic students into the countryside, into literacy brigades, in the midst of unfolding university reform movements, the PDC expanded not just the scope of participation, but also the range of political conclusions that could emerge from it. Students who entered reform projects expecting to implement Catholic social ideals often found themselves confronting the structural limits of gradualism. Their direct engagement with inequality, land conflict, and educational injustice made reform a school of political radicalization as much as of moderation, something reflected by the University Reform Movement's generation of institutes aimed at the marginalized (the DUOC) and state educational policy planning (the PIIE).

This is one of the dissertation's central claims: that participation was not politically neutral. The spaces opened by reform did not simply incorporate Catholics into an existing national project; they transformed the Catholics who entered them. Chapter Two therefore shows that the political fragmentation often associated with the Unidad Popular years actually had roots in the Christian Democratic period itself. Catholic student politics at the Pontifical Catholic University were not reducible to the later prominence of gremialismo or the dictatorship-era trajectories of figures such as Jaime Guzmán. Rather, Catholic student activism in the late 1960s was heterogeneous, experimental, and increasingly divided. For some, reform opened the path toward Christian leftism and a more radical reading of Catholic social responsibility, as was evident in many moments I

have pointed to throughout the dissertation: when a large segment of PDC youth broke off to form the UP-aligned MAPU in 1971; when the PDC chose to run a candidate far more progressive than Eduardo Frei Montalva in 1970; when Father Lebret attempted to run for political office under the MAPU-UP banner; and of course when 200 Chilean priests declared themselves to be "Cristianos por el Socialismo."[467] For others, the politicization of Catholic institutions provoked a defensive retrenchment around the boundaries between religion and politics, even as those boundaries were themselves being redrawn through right-wing organizing. What emerged, then, was not a unified Catholic reform constituency but a fractured political field in which shared theological vocabularies could authorize sharply divergent forms of action.

If Chapters One and Two show reform as an expansion of participation, Chapter Three demonstrates that this expansion was also a gendered restructuring of social and political life. The reforms of the Christian Democratic and early Popular Unity years did not merely mobilize women rhetorically through maternalist discourse; they institutionalized women's participation within an expanding educational and social-service apparatus. Chapter Three argued that state reformers, Catholic actors, and lay organizations converged on a shared vision of feminine modernity rooted in the "woman-as-mother-educator." Through programs in family planning, literacy, agrarian reform, and educational expansion, women were increasingly positioned as the moral and civic

[467] *Michael J. Francis and Hernan Vera-Godoy, "Chile: Christian Democracy to Marxism," *The Review of Politics* 33, no. 3 (1971), pg 330 notes that: on many "policy issues, Tomic took a position to the left of President Frei, particularly in regard to the copper companies and the banks. The Christian Democrats had worked hard in the renegotiation of the copper agreements to give Chile its 51% ownership. Tomic, however, stood for a total nationalization of these properties. Part of this position stemmed from the large profits the companies had made under the new Frei agreement inasmuch as the windfall of the rising copper price made Frei's arrangement appear excessively generous. The Tomic platform also called for the nationalization of the foreign banks and the conversion of Chilean-owned banks into cooperatives. In a country such as Chile banking is a lucrative and powerful activity. Most of the big fortunes are built on it; but more important, the control of credit represents tremendous power. Removing this power from a group that was not friendly to reform made the idea particularly attractive and perhaps necessary for Tomic."

intermediaries through whom national development and modernization would be carried out. This model widened access to education, professional training, and social service work, and in that sense it expanded women's public roles. But it did so by naturalizing those roles as extensions of maternal vocation, not as claims to autonomous political authority. That distinction is crucial, as it explains why attempts to frame women teachers as classed political subjects or workers—an explicit component of the ENU proposal—were met with such derision. The third chapter shows that educational reform depended not simply on new institutions or curricular goals, but on a feminized labor force whose authority was simultaneously amplified and contained. Women were called upon to teach, nurture, organize, and morally guide. They were central to the functioning of the school system, to the social legitimacy of reform, and to the everyday work of linking family and nation. Yet the terms under which they entered public life remained profoundly unequal. Their labor was indispensable precisely because it could be cast as moral rather than political, as civic service rather than institutional power, both of which justified their underpayment. The "woman-as-mother-educator" was therefore not merely an ideological image. It was a structuring logic of modernizing reform itself, one that organized the educational sphere and shaped the ways authority could be imagined, delegated, and defended.

This gendered restructuring helps explain why later conflicts over education assumed the form they did. By the early 1970s, educational authority had become increasingly difficult to disentangle from assumptions about family, morality, and feminine service. The more women's labor became central to the moral formation of children and communities, the more schooling came to appear as a domain in which social order itself was reproduced. Challenges to educational governance could therefore be interpreted not just as technical or administrative disputes, but as threats to a broader moral world. Chapter Three thus provides the bridge between the dissertation's

earlier emphasis on expanding participation and its later analysis of political fragmentation. It shows that the democratization of participation was never simply about inclusion; it was also about reorganizing who performed the labor of social reproduction and under what ideological constraints.

Chapters Four and Five then demonstrate how these long-building dynamics culminated in the controversies surrounding the Escuela Nacional Unificada. Here the dissertation moves from reform as expansion and restructuring, to reform as the generator of fragmentation. As Chapter Four argues, the ENU has too often been interpreted as a site of unified Catholic opposition to socialist education. But the controversy initially revealed the opposite: not Catholic coherence, but Catholic fracture. The ENU debate laid bare a field already divided by a decade of reform, pastoral change, and political experimentation. Its deepest conflict was not between "the Church" and the state in any simple sense, but among Catholics themselves, who advanced competing understandings of pluralism, democratization, and the proper relationship between education and social transformation. This point matters because the ENU did not emerge in a vacuum, and Catholic opposition only truly coalesced in the final months of the Unidad Popular government, after months of oppositional propaganda that had moved from framing the proposal as "Marxist indoctrination," to a violation of "parents' rights" and maternal connections to children. As Chapter Four demonstrates, many of its aims and assumptions echoed currents already present within Catholic educational thought and experimentation, the earlier Christian Democratic reform, and broader traditions of pedagogical democratization, rather than a Marxist-Leninist model of proletariat dictatorship. Its advisory councils and participatory ethos did not represent a sudden imposition of an alien model, but rather the further development of existing efforts to widen access to educational governance. What changed was not merely the content of reform, but the actors who

claimed the authority to carry it forward and the political context in which they did so. The controversy surrounding Decreto 224 therefore centered less on *whether* education should be transformed, than on *who* would possess the legitimacy to guide that transformation. Once teachers, unions, neighborhood organizations, and other non-elite actors were invited into the field of educational deliberation, longstanding monopolies over moral and pedagogical authority became newly visible and newly vulnerable.

Chapter Five carries this argument forward by showing that the opposition generated by the ENU was not only ideological or institutional but deeply gendered. By 1973, Catholic resistance increasingly coalesced around the language of parental rights, familial integrity, and moral protection. Yet, as the chapter demonstrates, these appeals cannot be understood apart from the gendered order constructed during the previous decade. The same society that had increasingly relied on women—especially mothers and teachers—to perform the labor of moral formation, now reacted sharply when the state appeared to redistribute authority over that process. Educational democratization did not abolish women's moral role; it destabilized the social arrangement through which that role had been exercised. Teachers, long associated with feminized service and maternal legitimacy, were now drawn into a more openly political and heterogeneous field of negotiation alongside unions, community councils, and other actors. What had once appeared natural, local, and apolitical was rendered visible as contested authority. In this sense, Chapter Five shows that the ENU became the site where multiple anxieties converged: about socialism, about the family, about political indoctrination, about broader fears of moral and sexual decadence, and about the displacement of familiar forms of moral labor, long drawn on gendered lines. Elite lay Catholics, conservative students, and right-wing political actors proved especially effective in translating these anxieties into a moralized opposition discourse that unified multiple cross-class sectors,

including some that were not originally hostile to the UP. Their resistance drew on the language of Catholic Social Doctrine, but it did so selectively: by mobilizing concepts such as "pluralism" and "parents' rights" to delimit the sphere of legitimate (versus illegitimate or "authoritarian") reform. What they opposed was not simply a curricular proposal. They opposed a broader reorganization of authority that threatened to relocate the formation of children from the overlapping, feminized domains of home, parish, and classroom–which had always been subject to masculine, authoritative oversight–into a more visibly politicized and socially plural arena.

Seen across all five chapters, then, the central trajectory of this dissertation becomes clear. The reform era in Chile expanded participation by drawing lay Catholics, students, teachers, and community actors into new forms of social and political engagement. But that expansion did not unfold on neutral terrain. It restructured authority through institutions already marked by gender, hierarchy, and unequal access to decision-making. Women emerged as indispensable moral and educational laborers even as formal authority remained masculinized and clericalized. Catholic students entered reform projects meant to stabilize a centrist political order, yet those same projects pushed many toward more radical or more reactionary conclusions. Educational democratization promised inclusion, but in practice it exposed deeper disagreements about who had the right to govern moral formation in a modern society. The result was that reform did not resolve the tensions of Chilean Catholic political life. It intensified them. By the time of the ENU debates, the conflicts that surfaced were not aberrations produced by sudden polarization, but the culmination of a longer process in which participation, authority, and moral labor had all been transformed. What fractured in the early 1970s was not simply a political coalition or a policy consensus, but rather a broader set of cultural assumptions about how Catholicism, education, and social order could be made to coexist within a shared reformist project. The sections that follow in this conclusion therefore

move beyond the reform era itself to consider how these unresolved tensions were rearticulated after 1973, when the dictatorship appropriated the language of family, women, youth, and national reconstruction even as it dismantled the democratic and participatory structures through which those very categories had previously been politicized.

The Coup as Reorganization, Not Rupture

If the preceding chapters have shown that the reform era expanded participation, restructured authority along gendered lines, and ultimately generated fragmentation, the military coup of September 1973 did not resolve these tensions so much as reorganize them. While the dictatorship presented itself as inaugurating a new moral and political order, its project was in many respects grounded in the rearticulation of frameworks that had already taken shape during the 1960s and early 1970s. Rather than marking a clean break with the past, the regime appropriated and reconfigured existing languages of maternalism, moral authority, social organization, and educational transformation, stripping them of their pluralist and participatory dimensions while preserving their centrality to national life. In this sense, the coup did not displace education, family, or Catholic-inflected notions of social order from the center of Chilean political life, but instead, redefined the terms under which they could operate.

This dynamic is particularly evident in the military government's *Declaración de Principios* of March 1974, which sought to ground the regime's authority in what it described as

a shared "Christian conception of man and society."[468] Framed as an appeal to values held by "the immense majority" of Chileans, the document attempted to reconcile the regime's emerging economic project with Catholic Social Doctrine, even going so far as to characterize a free enterprise economy as an expression of the principle of subsidiarity, despite the fact that the Popes had always been critical of such economics.[469] In doing so, the regime appropriated a language that had been central to Catholic political engagement during the reform era, but reoriented it toward a markedly different set of ends. Where "subsidiarity" had previously been invoked by Catholic actors across the political spectrum to justify forms of participation, social organization, and even state-led reform, it was now mobilized to legitimize the retrenchment of the state in economic life and the consolidation of authority in other domains.[470]

Nowhere was this rearticulation more explicit than in the Declaration's section titled "The Family, Women, and Youth: Pillars of National Reconstruction." Here, the regime located the foundation of its project not in political institutions or participatory mechanisms, but in the family, described as "*a school of moral formation,* of self-giving and generosity toward others, and of deep

[468] Junta de Gobierno de Chile, *"Declaración de Principios del Gobierno de Chile"* (Santiago: Gobierno de Chile, March 11, 1974), Archivo Chile, https://www.archivochile.com/Dictadura_militar/doc_jm_gob_pino8/DMdocjm0005.pdf.

[469] See for example Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) in which he wrote that "A small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than slavery itself." Similarly, Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) noted that modern capitalist arrangements meant that "immense power and despotic economic dictatorship" had become concentrated in the hands of a small number of extremely wealthy people. Pope John XXII criticized inequalities generated by modern economic development and argued in *Mater et Magistra* (1961) that economic systems must be judged according to human dignity and the common good rather than profit alone. *Pacem in Terris* (1963), though not primarily about capitalism, reiterates previous Church doctrine that property rights must be subordinate to the common good and that states have obligations to address social and economic inequality. Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) explicitly criticized international economic structures that perpetuated underdevelopment and warned against treating profit, competition, and private property as absolute principles.

[470] Ibid.

love for the Fatherland" (emphasis is my own).[471] Within this framework, women were assigned a central role as "the spiritual bedrock of the nation," while youth were called upon to channel their "generosity and idealism" into the work of "national reconstruction."[472] The document explicitly linked these roles to the recent past, invoking "the courage that women and youth demonstrated…as bastions of the civic movement that culminated in the military pronouncement of September 11," as evidence of their continued importance.[473] In this formulation, the regime did not reject the forms of mobilization that had characterized the preceding period. Instead, it sought to redirect them, transforming participation into disciplined service and reconstituting political action as moral duty within a tightly circumscribed ideological framework.

The gendered dimensions of this project were not incidental. As earlier chapters have shown, the reform era had already positioned women as key intermediaries in processes of social formation, particularly within educational and community contexts. What the dictatorship did was to stabilize and constrain these roles, redefining them as inherently apolitical even as they continued to serve essential political functions. The trajectory of the Centros de Madres offers a particularly clear illustration of this transformation. Under the Christian Democratic and Popular Unity governments, these organizations expanded dramatically—from several dozen in the late 1950s to approximately 8,000 under Frei and 30,000 by 1973—becoming central sites through which women were incorporated into programs of literacy, consumption, and community development.[474] Through their participation in UP initiatives such as the Price and Supply

[471] Junta de Gobierno de Chile, *"Declaración de Principios del Gobierno de Chile"* (Santiago: Gobierno de Chile, March 11, 1974), Archivo Chile, https://www.archivochile.com/Dictadura_militar/doc_jm_gob_pino8/DMdocjm0005.pdf.
[472] Ibid.
[473] Ibid.
[474] María de La Luz Silva Donoso, *La participación política de la mujer en Chile: las organizaciones de mujeres* (Fundación Friedrich Naumann, 1987), 77.

Committees (JAPs), women entered into new forms of public engagement, even if that participation remained framed through the language of domestic responsibility.

Following the coup, many of these organizations were dissolved, their legal status revoked, and their leadership subjected to repression. But the Mothers' Centers did not disappear; rather, they were reconstituted under new institutional conditions, renamed Centros de Madres-Chile (Mothers' Centers-Chile), as formally private and explicitly non-political entities dedicated to the "integral development of women" and the "well-being of the family."[475] In this reconfigured form, women's participation was recoded rather than eliminated. As contemporaries observed, women within these organizations became "receptors and disseminators of the regime's ideological discourse," since Pinochet installed his wife as the official head of the newly privatized CEMAs, even as the official framework insisted on the identification of the feminine sphere with the private and the non-political.[476] At the same time, these organizations reinforced the notion that women's primary mission remained rooted in the family, even as they were drawn into broader networks of social and ideological mobilization. As one scholar has noted, women were thus incorporated into public life "even if only so that they might be continually reminded that [being wives and mothers] is their principal mission in life."[477] The result was a paradoxical configuration in which women's participation from the earlier period was preserved in form but transformed even further in meaning.

A similar process of rearticulation can be observed in the realm of education. If the reform era had treated education as a central arena of political contestation—one in which competing

[475] Silva Donoso, *La participación*, 78.
[476] Ibid.
[477] Ibid., 78-79.

actors sought to define the terms of moral and civic formation—the dictatorship maintained that centrality while fundamentally altering the structures through which it operated. Through a series of decree laws issued in the immediate aftermath of the coup, the regime dismantled key institutional foundations of the mid-twentieth-century educational system and replaced them with mechanisms designed to ensure ideological control and administrative centralization. Decree Law No. 50, issued in October 1973, authorized the military's direct intervention in universities, placing them under the authority of military-appointed *rectores delegados* (military appointed university rectors) and initiating a process of purging faculty, students, and administrators associated with leftist or reformist movements.[478] This intervention not only curtailed university autonomy but also transformed higher education into a site of direct state control. Decree Law No. 179, issued in December of the same year, extended this transformation to teacher training by abolishing the Normal Schools—institutions that had long served as the primary centers for the formation of primary school teachers—and transferring their functions to the university system.[479] The consequences of this restructuring, however, were not entirely new. From 1970 to 1973, the Pontifical Catholic University had created a program in its Education School called the "Academic Special Plan" to incorporate in-service teachers (that is, teachers who had been teaching several years without a state-issued teaching credential) into an accelerated and inexpensive credentialing program, necessitated by the Frei-era reforms. As one study of the PUC's Academic Special Plan observed, the creation of new credentialing requirements generated an "emergency situation," in which large numbers of teachers—many of whom had long worked without formal degrees—were

[478]Chile, *Decreto Ley No. 50: Establece normas sobre designación de rectores delegados en las universidades*, October 2, 1973, Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=5702.
[479] Chile, *Decreto Ley No. 179: Suprime las Escuelas Normales y dispone que la formación de profesores se realice en las universidades*, December 13, 1973, Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=215136.

required to regularize their status through state sanctioned certification programs, even into the UP years.[480] While these initiatives sought to standardize and professionalize teacher formation, they also revealed the persistence of tensions that had already emerged during the reform era. Participants emphasized that the training they received often "did not correspond" to their needs and failed to recognize the value of their accumulated classroom experience, highlighting a continued disconnect between institutional definitions of pedagogical authority and the realities of teaching practice.[481] In this sense, the transfer of teacher training to the university system in late 1973 did not resolve the contradictions of earlier reform efforts; the dictatorship preserved and intensified centralized control over the political and ideological boundaries of education, even as it progressively decentralized its administration and financing. In doing so, the regime made a decisive break with the mid-century model of teacher formation, one that had been closely tied to the expansion of public education and the professionalization of teaching as a socially embedded vocation.

These measures ensured that teacher training would thereafter occur within institutions already subject to military oversight, effectively bringing the formation of educators under direct regime control. This restructuring was not merely administrative. It represented a deliberate effort to depoliticize education by dismantling the networks, pedagogical traditions, and plurality of institutional cultures that had supported the reform-era expansion of participation. Yet even as the regime sought to eliminate the pluralism and contestation that had characterized educational debates under Frei and Allende, it reaffirmed the centrality of education as a key site of national

[480] Marco Antonio Beovic C. et al., *Formación del docente en ejercicio en la Escuela de Educación de la Universidad Católica* (seminario para optar al título de Profesor de Educación General Básica, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Escuela de Educación, 1975), 175.
[481] Ibid.

reconstruction. The goal was not to remove education from politics, but to redefine its political function: to transform it from a space of negotiation and conflict into an instrument of ideological transmission–precisely one of the key fears that opposers of the ENU had stressed. What emerges from these developments is a pattern of continuity through transformation. The dictatorship did not invent a new moral order ex nihilo. Rather, it appropriated existing frameworks—Catholic conceptions of the family, gendered notions of moral authority, and the centrality of education to national life—and then rearticulated them within an authoritarian project that foreclosed the participatory and pluralist possibilities that had defined the preceding decade, invoking a misappropriation of the Catholic principle of "subsidiarity" in order to justify a neoliberal economic order that even framed education in profoundly privatized and market-theory driven terms.[482] In doing so, it "resolved" the tensions of the reform era not by eliminating them, but by fixing their terms. Participation was once again recoded as service–to the regime's articulation of "the nation,"–while pluralism was cast as disorder, and education as a site not of debate, but of discipline. The result was not a departure from the dynamics explored in this dissertation, but their consolidation in a new and much more restrictive form. During the military regime, moreover, the Church not only provided protection to dissidents and preserved spaces for educational and social work; it also sustained many programs established in earlier decades, reinforcing its position as a

[482] Varun Guari, *School Choice in Chile: Two Decades of Educational Reform*, Pitt Latin American Studies (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 27-39. Under the Pinochet regime, education was restructured through a sweeping program of decentralization, privatization, and market-based financing. Beginning in the early 1980s, administrative control of public schools was transferred from the central state to municipalities, fragmenting national oversight while reducing direct state responsibility. At the same time, the regime introduced a nationwide voucher system, in which public funding followed individual students rather than being allocated directly to schools, thereby placing public and private institutions in direct competition for enrollment. This system enabled a rapid expansion of subsidized private schooling, as private providers—many with religious affiliations—could receive state funds while operating with significant autonomy. Public universities likewise experienced sharp reductions in direct state support, forcing them to rely increasingly on tuition and private funding streams. Together, these reforms redefined education as a quasi-market, subordinating pedagogical and civic goals to principles of efficiency, competition, and parental choice, while recasting the state's role as a subsidiary regulator rather than a primary provider.

key institutional mediator in Chilean public life. One striking side effect of dictatorship was a rise in clerical vocations. Whereas the Frei and Allende years had seen fewer men enter the priesthood, that number increased under Pinochet, suggesting that the very conditions of repression and institutional contraction heightened the Church's appeal as a site of both moral legitimacy and social engagement.[483] This development further underscores that the post-1973 Church cannot be understood simply through the language of repression or resistance alone: it remained an institution marked simultaneously by continuity, adaptation, and internal divergence.

Gender, Women, and the Politics of Legitimacy

The preceding section has argued that the dictatorship rearticulated existing frameworks of education, morality, and social order; the gendered dimensions of this process however were particularly central to the regime's efforts to establish legitimacy. Far from dismantling the forms of female participation that had expanded during the reform era, the military government selectively appropriated them, transforming women's moral authority into a key pillar of its political project. In doing so, it preserved the gendered structures of authority that had taken shape in the 1960s while redefining their political meaning, thereby recasting women's participation as both nonpartisan *and* foundational to national reconstruction. This process is especially visible in the regime's relationship to the women who had mobilized against the Unidad Popular government in the years leading up to the coup. As Lisa Baldez has shown, women played a highly visible role in opposition movements, most notably in the December 1971 "March of the Empty Pots,"

[483] "The Decline of Liberation Theology" in *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond* by John Frederick Schwaller, pg 243

(*Cacerolazo*) which became one of the most enduring symbols of anti-Allende mobilization. Yet the aftermath of the coup reveals that this mobilization did not translate into a straightforward incorporation of women into the new regime. Rather, it was subject to a process of selective inclusion that both depended upon and redefined the political character of women's participation. In the months following the coup, "many of the women who had led the female opposition movement accepted positions within the military government," but the regime's criteria for inclusion were highly specific. As Baldez notes, "the only women whom Pinochet singled out for appointment were those who had served as leaders of organizations with no links to the political parties," reflecting the regime's preference for female actors who could be framed as nonpartisan.[484] This distinction proved decisive. Women associated with political parties—even those that had supported the coup—were systematically excluded from positions of influence.[485] In this sense, the regime did not simply incorporate women; it reconstituted the terms under which their participation could be recognized, privileging a form of engagement that could be presented as socially rooted and morally grounded, rather than explicitly political.

The experience of Carmen Puga, a Christian Democratic activist and leader of a mothers' center, illustrates the consequences of this distinction. Despite her support for the opposition and her willingness to collaborate with the regime in its early months, her identification as a party militant rendered her suspect. Recalling a meeting convened by the military to recruit women for "national reconstruction projects," Puga described how her public remarks about the politicization of mothers' centers were met with hostility once her partisan affiliation became known. As one participant interjected, "That's Carmen Puga, she's a Christian Democrat and a party militant;

[484] Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 116.
[485] Ibid.

that's why she's talking about mothers' centers that way. We [Pinochet supporters] have never used the Mothers' Centers for political reasons."[486] In this moment, Puga's political identity not only disqualified her from inclusion but also represented the basis for redefining the acceptable boundaries of women's participation under the military regime. The denial that mothers' centers had ever been political—despite their well-documented role in the mobilizations of the early 1970s—was itself a political act, one that aligned with the regime's broader effort to depoliticize social organizations while preserving their mobilizing capacity.[487]

This selective incorporation was closely tied to the regime's broader ideological project, which sought to recast women's activism as the expression of a unified national will rather than as the product of partisan conflict. Throughout the dictatorship, the March of the Empty Pots was repeatedly invoked as a foundational moment, symbolizing both the moral authority of women and the legitimacy of the military intervention. Regime discourse consistently portrayed the coup as a response to *women's* demands, with Pinochet himself asserting in a 1974 letter that "their voice was the voice of the country, that called upon us to save it."[488] In this formulation, women's protest was transformed into a form of national authorization, retroactively legitimizing the seizure of power by framing it as the fulfillment of a collective moral imperative. At the same time, the regime worked to institutionalize this narrative through symbolic and organizational means. In 1977, it established December 2 as a national "Day of the Woman," (deliberately distinguishing it from International Women's Day, which it rejected as a "communist" commemoration tied to labor struggles).[489] This act of symbolic differentiation underscores the regime's broader strategy: to

[486] Baldez, *Why Women*, 117.
[487] Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende, 1964–1973* (Penn State University Press, 2002. **come back and add more sources**
[488] Baldez, *Why Women*, 118-119.
[489] Ibid.

appropriate the language and visibility of women's mobilization while severing it from its associations with political struggle, labor activism, and partisan conflict. In place of these associations, the regime promoted an image of women as moral guardians of the family and the nation, whose authority derived not from political engagement but from their presumed role within the private sphere.

Yet this redefinition of women's role did not entail a withdrawal from public life. On the contrary, as the reorganization of the Centros de Madres demonstrates, women remained deeply embedded in networks of social participation that were essential to the regime's functioning. What changed was the framing of that participation. As noted in the previous section, women within these organizations were positioned as both "receptors and disseminators of the regime's ideological discourse," even as the official narrative insisted on their nonpolitical character.[490] The insistence that women's activities were "private" and "apolitical" thus operated not as a description of reality, but as a mechanism for redefining the terms of political legitimacy itself.

Seen in this light, the regime's gender politics reveal a deeper continuity with the dynamics explored in my earlier chapters. During the reform era, women's roles as educators, social workers, caregivers, and community organizers had positioned them as key intermediaries in processes of moral and social formation, even as those roles were often framed in ostensibly apolitical terms. What the dictatorship did was to fix this ambiguity, transforming maternal authority from a site of contestation into a stable foundation for regime legitimacy. By elevating nonpartisan women while excluding those with explicit political affiliations, the regime effectively separated the moral authority associated with femininity from the political claims that had increasingly accompanied

[490] Silva Donoso, *La participación*, 78.

it in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This transformation confirms one of the broader arguments of this dissertation: that maternalism functioned not merely as a cultural ideal, but as a form of political infrastructure that could be mobilized in different ways across shifting political contexts. Under Frei and Allende, this infrastructure facilitated the expansion of participation, enabling women to engage in projects of reform that blurred the boundaries between private and public, moral and political. Under Pinochet, the same infrastructure was redeployed to support an authoritarian project, one that depended on women's visibility and moral authority even as it denied the political character of their participation. That infrastructure also continued another trend related to teaching and social services that had been forming during the Frei and Allende years: studies of the teaching profession under Pinochet emphasize that neoliberal restructuring produced both material and symbolic deprofessionalization, illustrated by declining and increasingly stratified salaries—especially disadvantaging municipal teachers, classroom instructors, and, to a lesser extent, women—combined with the expansion of market mechanisms to erode the social prestige of teaching.[491] The result of the dictatorship then was not the elimination of women from politics or from classrooms, but instead the redefinition of what counted as political. By recasting women's activism as an expression of national unity rather than partisan engagement, coupled with the continued tendency from the 1960s to frame the magisterio less as a group of classed workers and more as the frontline of a national project, the regime transformed gendered moral authority into a central component of its legitimacy. In doing so, it both drew upon and restructured the tensions that had emerged during the reform era, preserving the forms of participation that had

[491] Ana Maria Cerda et al., *El Sistema Escolar y la profesión docente* (PIIE, 1991), 123, 157-158 shows that this dynamic was further reflected in persistently lower university entrance scores for pedagogy compared not only to higher-status professions such as architecture, but also to similarly feminized fields such as social work, underscoring the particularly low social valuation of teaching.

made women indispensable to public life while constraining their capacity to act as independent political actors.

Catholicism After the Coup: Fragmentation, Protection, and Realignment

If the dictatorship rearticulated the structures of education, gender, and moral authority that had taken shape during the reform era, it did not do so upon a unified Catholic foundation. Rather, the period following the 1973 coup revealed the extent to which Chilean Catholicism itself had fractured, producing divergent and at times contradictory relationships to the regime. Catholic networks that had once served as sites of reform, debate, and mobilization were reconfigured in multiple directions: some became deeply embedded in the authoritarian project, while others emerged as key spaces of protection and resistance. The result was not a coherent "Catholic response" to the dictatorship, but a field of competing alignments that exposed the limits of the institutional, social, and moral frameworks that had previously structured authority.

One trajectory of this fragmentation led toward consolidation within the regime itself. Catholic actors and institutions played a significant role in the development of the dictatorship's ideological and technocratic foundations, particularly through networks rooted in the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. Figures such as Jaime Guzmán, who had emerged from the *gremialista* movement in the late 1960s, became central architects of the regime's political project, contributing to the formulation of its constitutional framework and articulating a vision of authority grounded in hierarchical order, anti-Marxism, and a restricted understanding of political participation. The so-called "Chicago Boys," many of whom were trained at the PUC before their University of Chicago training and later returned as faculty to the PUC, advanced a program of

economic restructuring that would come to define the regime's neoliberal transformation. While often treated primarily in economic terms, this project also intersected with Catholic intellectual and institutional networks, particularly in its emphasis on (purported) "subsidiarity" and the limitation of state intervention. As in the *Declaración de Principios*, Catholic language was selectively appropriated to legitimize policies that restructured social life along market lines, even as they departed from earlier Catholic doctrines' critiques of unfettered capitalism.

In this configuration, Catholicism did not disappear from the political sphere but was rearticulated in support of a technocratic authoritarianism that combined moral conservatism with economic liberalization. The same institutional spaces that had fostered debates over reform and participation in the 1960s now contributed to a project that sought to curtail both, illustrating how Catholic networks could be mobilized in fundamentally different political directions. Other sectors of the Catholic Church for example assumed a markedly different role, positioning themselves as defenders of human rights and providers of protection for those targeted by the regime. The creation of the Vicariate of Solidarity stands as one of the most significant expressions of this orientation, especially since it was initiated at the highest levels of ecclesial authority.[492] Through its documentation of abuses and provision of legal aid, the Vicariate became a central institution in the defense of victims of state violence, while also contributing to the broader organization of opposition to the dictatorship. Similarly, Catholic-affiliated institutions such as the Interdisciplinary Program of Education Research (PIIE) provided spaces in which educators, researchers, and former participants in reform-era initiatives could continue their work under the

[492] Fátima Esther Martínez Mejía and Nelson Andrés Ortiz Villalobos, "The Leadership of the Vicariate of Solidarity during the Dictatorship in Chile (1973–1990)," in *Peace, Reconciliation and Social Justice Leadership in the 21st Century*, vol. 8 (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019), 207–21. The Vicariate of Solidarity (Vicaría de la Solidaridad), created in 1976 by the Archdiocese of Santiago under Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, functioned as a Church-sponsored human rights institution that provided legal aid, documented abuses, and offered protection to victims of state repression during the Pinochet dictatorship.

protective umbrella of the Church. In these contexts, Catholic institutions functioned as mediating structures, enabling forms of intellectual and social activity that would otherwise have been suppressed.

Yet this protective role, while significant, was neither absolute nor universally effective. As scholarship on the Church's role in Latin America has emphasized, religious institutions could "play a significant role in challenging authoritarian regimes," but their record of opposition was "inconsistent."[493] The Chilean case reflects this ambivalence. While sectors of the episcopacy and clergy actively opposed the regime and supported its victims, other Catholic actors remained aligned with or integrated into the structures of authoritarian power. Catholicism, in this sense, cannot be understood as either a unified force of resistance or a monolithic supporter of the regime. It operated simultaneously as both, its institutional reach enabling protection in some contexts while facilitating consolidation of Pinochet's power in others. These tensions within Chilean Catholicism were further reflected in the responses of political actors associated with the Christian Democratic Party in the immediate aftermath of the 1973 coup. Eduardo Frei Montalva's November 1973 letter presented to the Worldwide Union of Christian Democracy offers a particularly revealing example. In this address, Frei placed "the full responsibility for this situation" squarely on the Popular Unity government, condemning its policies and framing the crisis as the result of Allende's project.[494] Among his critiques was a direct attack on the ENU, which he characterized as an attempt to transform the educational system through "a process of

[493]Amy Edmonds, "Moral Authority and Authoritarianism: The Catholic Church and the Military Regime in Uruguay," *Journal of Church and State* 56, no. 4 (2014): 645.
[494] Cristian Gazmuri et al., eds., *Eduardo Frei Montalva (1911-1982)* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 476.

Marxist conscientization," saying it was one that had provoked widespread opposition from political parties, unions, and religious institutions alike.[495]

Frei's position underscores the extent to which elements of the Christian Democratic and broader Catholic world contributed to the legitimation of the coup, drawing on arguments that had been developed during the conflicts of the reform era. The language used to critique the ENU—particularly the emphasis on ideological indoctrination and the defense of educational pluralism—echoed debates that had already divided Catholic actors in the early 1970s. In this sense, the coup did not produce a new set of ideological justifications so much as it amplified and recontextualized existing ones. The violence of the regime however exposed the limits of the very networks that had historically structured authority and protection within Chilean society. The case of MIR militant Eugenio Ruiz-Tagle Orrego illustrates this rupture with particular force. A civil engineer from one of Chile's most prominent and well-connected families—linked through kinship networks to Eduardo Frei Montalva himself—Ruiz-Tagle embodied the intersection of elite status, Catholic affiliation, and political embeddedness that had long been associated with forms of social protection. Yet immediately following the coup, he was detained after voluntarily presenting himself to the authorities and was subsequently tortured and killed, reportedly under conditions of extreme brutality. As one account describes, he "had voluntarily given himself up…like so many who had trusted that the military would not defile or denigrate them—and had been killed a month or so later, reportedly in the most savage fashion."[496]

[495] Ibid.
[496] Ariel Dorfman, *Exorcising Terror: The Incredible Unending Trial of General Augusto Pinochet* (Seven Stories Press, 2002), 67.

The moralizing language surrounding Ruiz-Tagle's death is especially revealing in this regard. In one of the final issues of *Debate Universitario* (published before the regime suppressed student journalism at the PUC), friends and colleagues remembered him not primarily as a militant of MAPU, the MIR, or blue collar syndicalism, but as a figure defined by service, vocation, and moral coherence. They emphasized that he viewed engineering as "more than the pursuit of knowledge," but rather as "a means of serving others, especially those who never had the privilege of studying at a university."[497] They further described as "inseparable from his life" the conviction "that coherence between thought and action must be carried to its fullest expression." Having graduated as a civil engineer from the PUC, Ruiz-Tagle had moved with his wife and infant daughter to Antofagasta in early 1973, where he became manager of the National Cement Industry (INACESA). According to his family, he deliberately chose to remain in northern Chile despite other higher-paying opportunities because he believed "his contribution would be more useful and necessary there."[498] The emphasis in these commemorations is striking because the very qualities that had once made someone legible within Catholic and elite networks—professional achievement, service to the poor, family responsibility, moral seriousness, and a commitment to living one's beliefs in practice—offered no protection under dictatorship. Ruiz-Tagle's violent death thus revealed the violence of the regime, as well as the collapse of an older moral logic in which social status, Catholic affiliation, and personal virtue were assumed to provide a measure of security.

[497] Guillermo Agüero and Gabriel Rodriguez, "Eugenio Ruiz-Tagle Orrego: Hasta Siempre, Amigo!," *Debate Universitario*, October 1973, 22.
[498] María Alicia Ruiz-Tagle Orrego, "#Voces1973: El Golpe y mi hermano Eugenio," CIPER Chile, June 9, 2023, https://www.ciperchile.cl/2023/06/09/voces1973-el-golpe-y-mi-hermano-eugenio/.

That such a person could be subjected to this level of state violence underscores the extent to which the regime disrupted established expectations of protection, even among those embedded in elite and Catholic networks. The possibility that familial status, political connections, or shared ideological frameworks might offer security proved increasingly untenable in the face of a regime that operated according to a different logic of power. In this context, the Church's capacity to provide protection—while real and significant in many cases—was necessarily partial, shaped by the same conditions of fragmentation and constraint that defined the broader political landscape. These developments reveal a fundamental transformation in the relationship between Catholicism and political authority in Chile. The networks that had once structured participation, debate, and protection did not disappear after 1973, but they no longer operated according to the same assumptions or guarantees. Instead, they were reconfigured within a context marked by both collaboration and resistance, consolidation and vulnerability. The violence of the regime did not simply suppress political opposition; it exposed the fragility of the social and moral frameworks that had previously underpinned it. In doing so, it revealed the limits of Catholicism as a source of unified authority, even as it remained deeply embedded in the structures of Chilean political and cultural life. Moreover, these tensions were not confined to Chile. At the third CELAM Conference in 1979, commonly referred to as the Puebla Conference, Pope John Paul II and some of the Latin American bishops sought to reassert hierarchical authority and place clearer limits on the more radical currents associated with Liberation Theology, signaling a broader institutional effort to contain the forms of lay and clerical political engagement that had expanded in the previous decade.[499]

[499] Pope John Paul II, "Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Bishops of Latin America at the Opening of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate," Puebla de los Ángeles, Mexico, January 28, 1979, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790128_messico-puebla-episc-latam.html.

The Long Term Legacies of Education and Protest

While the dictatorship restructured the institutional framework of Chilean education, its most enduring legacy lies not simply in policy design, but in the transformation of education into a permanently contested political terrain. The reforms implemented under military rule did not resolve the conflicts over authority, morality, and participation that had emerged during the 1960s and early 1970s. Rather, they displaced those conflicts into new institutional forms, embedding them within a neoliberal system that redefined the terms through which education was organized, accessed, and contested. In doing so, the regime ensured that education would remain a central arena of political struggle long after the transition to democracy in the 1990s. The restructuring of the education system under Pinochet represented a decisive shift away from the mid-century model in which the state, teachers, and religious institutions had jointly participated in processes of moral and civic formation. Beginning in the mid 1970s and intensifying in the early 1980s, the regime implemented a series of reforms that prioritized privatization, decentralization, and market competition. Public school administration was transferred to municipalities, a nationwide voucher system was introduced to subsidize private education, and funding for public universities was sharply reduced. These transformations were accompanied by a parallel and equally significant reorganization of the teaching profession itself. The forced dissolution of the SUTE in 1973 eliminated the primary vehicle through which teachers had participated collectively in educational and political life before the coup. In its place, the regime established the Colegio de Profesores in 1974: a compulsory, state-controlled professional body that explicitly sought to redefine teaching as a depoliticized occupation, governed by ethical discipline rather than collective action. As the

founding decree made clear, the Colegio was intended to function as the "unique [i.e. singular] professional and *moral* organization" of teachers, one that would promote their "dignification" while ensuring their "abstention from partisan politics" as a matter of professional ethics—statements that carry even more weight when one considers that women continued to account for over 70% of primary education teachers throughout the dictatorship (emphasis is my own).[500] [501]

At first glance, this shift appeared to socially elevate the status of teachers by framing them as "professionals" rather than "workers." In practice, however, this professionalizing discourse masked the systematic dismantling of teachers as an autonomous collective actor. The Colegio was structured vertically, with leaders appointed by the regime, compulsory membership, and no meaningful internal mechanisms for participation or dissent. Rather than enabling teachers to assert control over their labor conditions or pedagogical practices, it channeled concerns into controlled, top-down forms of petitioning, effectively eliminating the forms of mobilization that had characterized earlier teacher unionism. As several scholars of Chilean education history have pointed out, the Colegio's professionalizing project remained largely formal and symbolic: it "did not translate into a call for its members to actually perform a professional role, nor into a demand on the state to assign such a role," particularly in terms of autonomy or participation.[502] The result was not the strengthening of a professional teaching corps, but its redefinition within a rigid bureaucratic and authoritarian framework.

Teachers, the majority of whom were state employees, remained subordinated to administrative hierarchies, with limited control over curriculum, pedagogy, or institutional

[500] Cerda et al., *El Sistema*, 168.
[501] Carmen Guttman, *All Children Can Learn: Chile's 900 Schools Programme for the Underprivileged* (Paris: UNESCO, 1993), ERIC Document ED369535, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED369535.pdf.
[502] Ibid., 170.

decision-making. Simultaneously, the regime's broader educational reforms fragmented the institutional landscape in which teachers operated. Where the earlier system had relied on a relatively cohesive teaching profession embedded within overlapping networks of state, Church, and community, the new system redistributed authority across municipalities, private providers, and families. Teachers were no longer positioned as central mediators of moral and civic formation, but as functionaries within a decentralized and market-oriented system. Education was no longer framed primarily as a collective project of social formation, but as a field of individual choice within a competitive marketplace. Families were recast as consumers, tasked with navigating a system of differentiated options, while schools competed for enrollment and resources. The result was not only a dramatic increase in inequality—by the 1980s, Chile had one of the most segregated education systems in the world—but also a transformation in the very meaning of educational participation. Moral and civic formation, once embedded in institutional and communal structures, became diffuse, privatized, and mediated through market mechanisms.

Yet if the dictatorship sought to depoliticize education by restructuring it along market lines and neutralizing teachers as collective actors, the long-term effect was paradoxically to ensure its continued centrality to political debates. Even under conditions of repression, alternative forms of organization began to emerge. Responding to the 1978 passage of two Decree Laws that affected the labor regulations of both public and private school teachers, a small but growing group of teachers began to organize protests.[503] As Iván Núñez noted, "These were, obviously, prohibited

[503] These were Decreto Ley 2,200 which reorganized private-sector labor relations around the individual employment contract, employer authority, and a narrower, more disciplinary labor order, that expanded an employer's right to terminate, especially in cases of employees attempts to strike; and Decreto Ley 2,327 which was a statute for the public teaching profession that reorganized teachers into a national hierarchy of rankings, grades, evaluation, promotion rules, disciplinary procedures, and state-controlled appointments. Chile, *Decreto Ley No. 2.200, Fija normas sobre el contrato de trabajo y protección de los trabajadores*, September 1978, Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=6850. Chile, *Decreto Ley No. 2.327,*

actions" but "The Catholic Church provided the necessary protection so that these groupings could survive."[504] The formation of the Guild Association of Chilean Educators (AGECH) in 1981 marked the partial reemergence of a unionist tradition, one that explicitly positioned itself as the heir to earlier, pre-coup forms of teacher organization and engaged in public denunciations of the regime's educational and labor policies. Although limited in scope and constrained by legal and political restrictions, these efforts signaled the persistence of demands for autonomy, participation, and professional dignity that the dictatorship had sought to suppress.

The system's deep inequalities, combined with its fragmentation of authority, generated new forms of contestation that would emerge with particular force in the decades following the transition to democracy. Student movements became the most visible expression of these tensions, repeatedly mobilizing around the question of what education should be and who should control it. The 2006 "Penguin Revolution," led primarily by secondary school students, marked a turning point in this trajectory. Students demanded the reform or elimination of the Organic Constitutional Law of Teaching (LOCE) (a cornerstone of the dictatorship-era educational framework), while also calling for practical changes such as free transportation and examination reform.[505] Beneath these demands lay a broader critique of the system's structural inequalities, particularly its reliance on privatization and municipalization. In challenging these features, students were not simply opposing specific policies, but contesting the underlying logic through which education had been organized since the onset of dictatorship.

Establece la carrera docente y regula su ejercicio, September 22, 1978, Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=6883.

[504] Cerda et al., *El Sistema*, 173.

[505] Victor Muñoz Tamayo and Carlos Durán Migliardi, "Los jóvenes, la política y los movimientos estudiantiles en el Chile reciente. Ciclos sociopolíticos entre 1967 y 2017," *Izquierdas*, no. 45 (February 2019): 143. https://scielo.conicyt.cl/pdf/izquierdas/n45/0718-5049-izquierdas-45-129.pdf.

This critique became even more explicit in the 2011 student movement, which brought together both secondary and university students in one of the largest mobilizations since the return to democracy. Leaders such as Camila Vallejo, (later the Minister General Secretariat of Government under President Gabriel Boric), articulated a vision of education as a social right rather than a market good, directly challenging the neoliberal framework that had defined the system since the early years of the Pinochet regime. The movement's demands—including free public education, the elimination of profit in educational institutions, and structural reform of the voucher system—reflected a fundamental rejection of the idea that educational access and quality should be determined by market dynamics.[506] In doing so, it reintroduced questions of collective responsibility, equality, and public provision that had been central to earlier reform debates. Subsequent reforms in the 2010s, including the gradual elimination of profit in subsidized schools and partial efforts at de-municipalization, indicate that these critiques had a tangible impact on policy. Yet the persistence of educational inequality, and its centrality in the 2019 *estallido social*, underscores the extent to which these tensions remain unresolved.[507]

These movements make clear that the persistence of student protest in post-dictatorship Chile reflects more than resistance to neoliberalism alone. It points instead to a deeper instability in the organization of educational authority—an instability that can be traced back to the reform era of the 1960s and early 1970s. It was in that earlier period that education first became a site of intense conflict over who held the right to shape moral, civic, and social formation. The

[506] Cesar Guzmán-Concha and Nicolas Fleet, "Mass Higher Education and the 2011 Student Movement in Chile: Material and Ideological Implications," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 36, no. 2 (2017): 160-176.
[507] Manuel Antonio Garretón M., ed., *Política y movimientos sociales en Chile: antecedentes y proyecciones del estallido social de octubre de 2019* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2021). Sofia Donoso's essay in the collection, "El movimiento estudiantil chileno y su (re)articulación con la política institucional" offers particularly useful insights on the ways students who participated in 2019 protests made connections to the 2011 protests.

dictatorship did not resolve these conflicts; it reshaped them, embedding them within new institutional forms that continued to generate contestation due to their authoritarian and class-stratified nature. Seen in this light, the trajectory from the reform era through the dictatorship and into the present reveals a set of enduring dynamics that have shaped Chilean political life. First, Catholicism emerges not as a unified ideological force, but as an internally fragmented political field, within which actors mobilized shared doctrinal frameworks to support competing or contradictory projects. Second, education functions as the central site where these conflicts become visible, precisely because it sits at the intersection of state policy, social organization, and moral formation. Third, gender operates as a key organizing logic of authority, structuring both the expansion of participation in the reform era, and its reconfiguration under authoritarian rule, as well as shaping the ways in which legitimacy has been claimed and contested by various political actors in subsequent decades.

These dynamics suggest a broader reinterpretation of the Chilean case within the context of Cold War Latin America. Rather than understanding political conflict primarily in ideological terms—as a struggle between capitalism and socialism—the Chilean experience demonstrates the extent to which these conflicts were also moral and gendered, rooted in competing visions of family, authority, and social order. Religion, in this framework, cannot be reduced to a reactive force responding to political change. It functioned instead as a productive arena in which political projects were formulated, contested, and legitimized. Similarly, the family emerges not merely as a social unit, but as a form of political infrastructure, through which broader struggles over authority and legitimacy were articulated. The long-term evolution of the Christian Democratic Party offers a final illustration of these enduring tensions. The fractures that emerged during the final years of the Unidad Popular—between reform and revolution, institutionalism and

transformation, Catholic Social Doctrine and socialist praxis—did not disappear with the onset of dictatorship or the return to democracy. Instead, they remained embedded within the party's ideological structure, resurfacing in new forms across subsequent decades. The party's 2025 decision to endorse the presidential candidacy of Communist Party figure Jeannette Jara, and the internal divisions and resignation of the party president that followed, reflect the persistence of these unresolved tensions.[508] Rather than marking a definitive ideological shift, that moment can be understood as part of a longer trajectory in which the party has repeatedly been forced to navigate competing political commitments, revealing the limits of a political identity rooted in Catholic Social Doctrine, especially in a context defined by recurring processes of coalition politics and realignment. In this broader perspective, the history traced in this dissertation does not culminate in 1973, nor does it find resolution in the institutional reforms of the dictatorship, nor the democratic transition that followed. Instead, it reveals a set of enduring conflicts over authority, morality, and participation that continue to shape Chilean society. Education remains at the center of these conflicts not simply because of its institutional importance, but because it is the space in which questions of who has the right to form citizens, and on what terms, are most directly contested.

[508] Partido Demócrata Cristiano, "Junta Nacional de la Democracia Cristiana entrega su respaldo a la candidatura presidencial de Jeannette Jara," July 26, 2025, https://www.pdc.cl/2025/07/26/junta-nacional-de-la-democracia-cristiana-entrega-su-respaldo-a-la-candidatura-presidencial-de-jeannette-jara/.

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