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WORKING PAPER N° 34

**The Argentine Church:
From Integralist to Populist Nationalism**

José María Ghio *

September 1996

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the different institutional strategies implemented by the Argentine Catholic Church to extend its influence in the society. The paper covers a long period of Argentine political history, from the crisis of liberalism at the beginning of the century to the Menem's administration. However, rather of being a detailed account of events, it focuses on the main trends developed by the institutional Church and Catholics militants in dealing with the major political developments of contemporary Argentina. Particular attention is given to the relationship between Catholicism and Peronism on the one hand, and to the long lasting link between Catholicism and different forms of nationalism.

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THE ARGENTINE CHURCH:

FROM INTEGRALIST TO POPULIST NATIONALISM

During thirty years of institutional turmoil, the Argentine Catholic Church, one of the pillars of social and political order, confronted several crises and ruptures, affecting both the clergy and the laity. The consequences of these developments have begun to surface in recent years. By the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies, political conflicts caused the desertion of many priests that would rather remain faithful to their ideas than to a hierarchy that, turning to rightist positions, displayed unequivocal signs of intolerance. Lay organizations that had protected the Catholic institutions against liberal attacks at the beginning of the century now lie in ruins. The Argentine Catholic Action (ACA), the Church-established organization of masses, mostly rooted in the civil society, never recovered after the crisis that suffered in the mid-sixties. These organizations have now few followers other than their most immediate participants.

Some peculiarities of Argentina's politics may account for this phenomenon which, undoubtedly, contrasts with the vision of a dynamic and transforming Church offered by analysts who have focused almost exclusively on the so-called

Popular Church of Latin America, especially after the Medellín meeting. Yet, these changes have also been experienced to some extent by almost every national church and, particularly, by the European churches. Indeed, there were some reactions against this phenomenon from which the Argentine Church was unable to escape.

The following are some examples of these "counter-trends": the reemergence of charismatic religious practices, the political activities of the young clergy at the beginning of the 1970s, a brief period of increase in religious vocations at the beginning of the 1980s, the massive support to private Catholic education, the success of the peculiar association between Peronist labor unions and Catholicism and, finally, the institutional preeminence of a Church historically oriented to associating with the state power, but which has not neglected the need for extending its influence to different social organizations.

However, dominant events were the collapse of the old patterns of religious practice together with the institutions that had channeled them and the endurance of a conservative clericalism which has been reinforced during the papacy of John Paul II. If there was a new aspect to the manifestations of religiousness, it was the emergence of a Catholic youth movement in the 1980s. The origins of the movement were greatly favored by the restrictions to political participation

imposed by the military regime and by the so-called **Nuevos Movimientos Católicos** (New Catholic Movements); such as *Comunión y Liberación* (Communion and Liberation), the *Carismáticos* (Charismatics) and others.

The weakening of religious patterns, forged in the first half of the 20th century, set in motion different strategies within the Catholic militancy, each one involving a different way of relating religion with politics. Among these strategies, the relationship between Peronism and Catholicism is the most important and lasting one.

1. Church and State

During the first decades of the century, the militant Catholicism fully supported the rightist sectors. In Argentina, as in many other countries, the organization of the Liberal State was detrimental to ecclesiastical prerogatives. However, there was an apparently unique element in the case of Argentina: the imbalance between a strong State and a weak Church at the time of defining new political alignments and the endurance of those alignment axes even after the original disputes had disappeared.

The massive introduction of Argentines into politics (universal suffrage for men and the emergence of the party system) occurred when secularization was the priority issue in

the Catholic political agenda. The Catholic laity began to perceive the relationship between daily events and politics amidst the increasing secularization of the state. Firstly, the Catholic Church appeared as one of the institutions most closely connected with the idea of "backwardness", one of the most visible legacies of the old colonial order. In other words, the Church opposed the dynamics of "progress" undertaken by the state.

The second kind of conflicts between the Church and the State has to do with the international position of the Church. The ruling elites, led by Roca, Yrigoyen and Perón in 1955, considered the intrusion of the clergy in state affairs as question related to international politics.

Finally, there was a serious conflict between the Church and the State over the values, beliefs and loyalties of the Argentine people. The liberals believed that the formation of citizens required that the State instill the same values in all men and women. The dissemination of values was to take place in an institution common to both of them, i.e., the public school. The Church, in turn, maintained that the formation of Catholics involved the acquisition of a certain understanding of the world that could only be transmitted in Catholic-controlled schools. The battle for the souls of the Argentine youth, between the republican and Catholic models of authority and citizenship lasted until 1958, when the law

authorizing the creation of Catholic universities was enacted amid student disputes over "lay or free education."

Tensions arising from the first two disputes gradually eased up as institutional channels were found that could solve the *Patronato* problem. The Church managed to remain in an ambiguous legal status whereby, although not fully independent from the state, it continued to enjoy the prerogatives to which it was entitled by virtue of the Constitution. By contrast, the passionate debates about the issue of Catholic education continued to run high throughout the century. In fact, they have become stronger than the ones around the delayed Divorce Act promulgated during Alfonsín's administration.

2. The Original Matrix

I have begun by showing the Church's institutional weakness facing the advance of liberalism, which characterized the organization of the modern Argentine state. This process was the beginning of a rupture that resulted in the progressive disestablishment of the Church and the substitution of the State for the Church. A docile and dispersed clergy impotently witnessed the secularizing assault of positivist philosophies. In general, this controversy gave birth to two factions within the Church; namely, the

integralists and the liberals. As we have seen above, the main organizations within the integralist faction were linked to the ACA and its intellectuals. On the other hand, the liberals were always a minority and marginal organization without the support of the hierarchy.

When ultra-Montanism was incorporated to oppose liberalism, the conflict assumed the proportions of a holy war. The resulting authoritarian, Roman, clerical Catholicism, which initially prevailed among the clergy and later among the laity, defined the entire project of the New Christianity as dictated by the Vatican. Paradoxically enough, the Church's censorship to the project of modernization of the Liberal State favored a liaison with the emerging "social question" in a society profoundly transformed by massive immigration. Therefore, when the Church was separating from the political domain, and its moral authority was relegated to the private sphere, the Church reinforced its social role and began to organize the laity. The "defensive" attitude became a "quest for the social realm". The convergence of social Catholicism with integralist nationalism at the beginning of the 1930s is fundamental to understand the coincidences between Catholicism and Peronism a decade later.

Integralism, "intransigentism" or intransigent Catholicism evolved in Europe. In Argentina, this current of thought provided the inspiration for an increasingly

influential brood of Catholic intellectuals who regarded the "Catholic nation" as a remedy for the evils of liberalism and democracy. Three major features characterized Catholic integralism. First, the conception of the world utterly rejected secularization, the autonomy of human activities and the privatization of religion. Second, integralism vigorously criticized any form of ideological, economic or social liberalism. Liberalism was held responsible for all possible evils, including democracy, socialism, communism and materialism. Finally, Catholicism established as a counter-society, an organic hierarchically-arranged society which appreciated the Armed Forces and was a pyramid of "natural" bodies and communities.¹

In the first decades of the century the confrontation between the two blocs was apparent. The conflict declined when the political mobilization of popular sectors transformed the old liberals into new conservatives. More specifically, the process of industrialization of those years had given birth to a working class that endorsed socialism and had inherited a strong liberal hostility against the Church. A third player had joined the game. Since then all political strategies have been viable within the newly-formed ideological triangle.

Throughout the 20th century, several ideological combinations have been shaped in Argentina's political arena.

The liberal-conservative-Catholic alliance confronted the socialist and anarchist threat in the 1920s and 1930s. The liberal-socialist alliance within the Democratic Union was forged to oppose the candidate sponsored by the Church after the 1943 Revolution, which took Catholic integralism to power. The national-populist-Catholic alliance was formed with the advent of Peronism and, even though it has changed over time, the alliance has lasted to this day. Finally, the alliance of Catholic leftist groups with Peronist and Marxist groups ("national socialism") was established by the end of the sixties.

The nature of the above coalitions should not overshadow the fact that the categories hereby used (liberal Catholicism, Catholic left and/or integral Catholicism) are not to be automatically transferred to the political concepts of Right and Left. In fact, the majority of the Argentine Catholic left is and has been clearly anti-liberal, having completely skipped the liberal democratic phase in the journey to socialism. Nonetheless, a central issue in the traditions of liberal Catholicism and Catholic integralism is not the political Left or Right; but a radically opposed conception to the relationship between religion and politics. Thus, while a liberal Catholic can be socialist and Catholic at the same time, an integralist Catholic would be socialist **because** he is Catholic. According to the latter, faith unites those who are

divided in politics because faith is the first and last motive. Politics, on the other hand, is either justified or condemned from the point of view of faith. In sum, politics is subordinated to the higher principle of faith rather than being in the hands of the individual autonomous will.

Since the first decades of the century, and with certain variations to this day, the Argentine Church has been seeking the "third way." Catholicism has proposed Christianity as the third way via different institutional strategies; namely, social Catholicism, Catholic Action, Christian Democracy. Catholicism established as a "movement" was, at the same time, an apostolic work, an institution, a social organization, labor unions and political parties.

3. Christian Democracy

Before analyzing the trends that characterized the behavior of integralist sectors, the Catholic Left and their contributions to contemporary politics, it is worth looking at the unsuccessful example of by the Christian Democratic Party (CDP). On the one hand, the CDP played a minor role in the mediation of the political-religious transformations in Argentina during the past three decades. In fact, the CDP's absence from the political scene is interesting and most revealing in itself. Firstly, the ecclesiastical hierarchy

continuously discouraged the militant laity from creating a Catholic party. Instead, they preferred to expand their influence across the ruling sectors through education and family counselling or to negotiate their corporative interests directly with the political parties and the State.

Secondly, when the political climate at the end of the Second World War augured a Catholic rebirth through the Christian Democracy Party, the Peronist experience completely ruled out this possibility for Argentina. Not only did Peronism captured prospective Christian-democrat voters and many of their banners, but also their political cadres.

In retrospect, the actual weakness of the CDP referred to the organization's incapacity to lure and, in some cases, retain the generation of Catholics engaging in public life. An important group of voters who had had the institutional experience and political vision of the liberal tradition and the integralist tradition as well. Yet the CDP proved to be more successful with the liberals, who had always kept a distance from the authoritarian temptation. Attempts to rally the support of the conservative tradition of integralist Catholicism did not succeed. The conservative groups had, in fact, retained their old dislike of party politics or were more attracted to the possibilities of participation offered by the Peronist "national movement". The integralists preferred to collaborate in the 1966 coup d'état and to assist

General Onganía in re-founding a corporative society in Argentina.

As a matter of fact, the post-war wave of ACA militants never envisaged being part of the CDP as the natural destiny of their political militancy. By the end of the 1950s, this group considered the CDP as a party similar to others and, sometimes, given the CDP's participation in Perón's overthrow, as even worse than other parties. Finally, many Catholic Action militants remained outside party politics until the end of the 1960s, when the climate of growing social unrest against the military regime pushed them to the left.²

4. The Integralists

The Second Vatican Council represented a mortal attack on the theological foundations of integralism. The collapse of the walls that had sheltered the Catholic sub-culture from the threats of the outer world deprived integralist organizational proposals of ideological support. Yet, this was not the case in Argentina. As a matter of fact, the logics of integralism for understanding society, the State and political action were maintained with some minor modifications. This logics has oriented many of the ideas and attitudes of both the leftist and rightist Argentine Catholics to this day. The most

notable peculiarity probably lies in the fact that the re-appearance of integralist contents in the post-council Argentine Church had to do with the re-appraisal of the Peronist experience from a populist standpoint.

The central objectives of integralism were re-conquering society combined with an "integral" application of the principles derived from the Catholic creed. Integralism flatly refused to leave any sphere of life outside religious regulations. Therefore, the doctrines of Social Catholicism, far from reflecting a liberation of the Church, were dominant in defining the role of the Church in modern democratic societies. The doctrine constituted instruments for restructuring social relations in the Catholic world.³

The implementation of the integralist project entailed an enormous transformation within the Church, expressed mostly in ideological changes and in a new relationship between the clergy and the laity. The scope of the changes expanded in the Argentine case because of the early successes attained by the Liberal State and by the Argentine Church's dependence upon Rome. Thus, under the strict control of a Romanized hierarchy, the Argentine Church launched a reform process, which affected religious practices, doctrinary formation and Catholic institutions, in an outright revengeful manner. Argentine Catholicism was thus following the guidelines of the Vatican. The Church's institutional vision, which had been

present since the days of the Counter-Reform, crystallized by the end of the 19th century and reached such hegemony that it displaced other alternative concepts.⁴

As a result, the Argentine Church built an extensive network of organizations to lure Catholics of all ages and from all social classes. Some of these organizations had religious aims only, others had socio-professional goals. The most important association was the ACA, and its organizations specialized in the penetration and transformation of social groups and their distinct environments.

As Argentine Catholicism set out to re-conquer society with its new organizations, a rather pessimistic scenario began to emerge. Even though the Argentine society of the first decades of this century formally regarded itself as Catholic, apathy prevailed in religious matters. The meager church attendance of the working class and the growth of left-wing unionism shifted the focus of the debate on the Christianization of society to a more specific issue; namely, rallying the participation of the working class.

Extending the influence beyond the middle sectors of society was not an easy task for the Church. Moreover, the strategies implemented to achieve the objective proved institutionally costly. With the advent of Peronism, the Church had, for the first time, the chance to be the ideological guarantor of an extensive transformation project

with a popular basis. The army, the people, and the Church realized themselves in the model of integral society. Peronism recovered and put into practice the entire tradition of social Catholicism, from the *Círculos de Obreros Católicos* (Association of Catholic Workers) to the *Juventud Obrera Católica* (Catholic Working Youth) of the end of the 1930s. The Church, as it had been the case since 1930 (especially in 1943), considered strengthening its ideological role further through the legitimization of state policies (e.g., education).

Income distribution, which characterized Peronist initial economic policies, was accompanied by a nationalist philosophy that incorporated the anti-liberal and anti-democratic attitudes developed within integralist Catholicism. The greatest novelty was the recipient of these teachings: the working class, "the people", "the *descamisados*" (those who wore shirts untucked). Peronism would successfully complete the process of instillation of integral Catholicism principles and would disseminate them to sectors of the society that the Church had been unable to reach. Consequently, unionism, which had grown from the traditions and struggles of international socialism, was "nationalized" and "Christianized" from the State as it was being incorporated into the new movement.

However, the process of Christianization was rather

diffuse. It was expressed through a vague doctrinary body made to suit Peronism; but not the Church. Most Catholics had initially considered Peronism as a fertile soil for spreading the influence of the Church in the Argentine society. But when Catholic influence expanded during the Peronist government, the militants entered a secularizing whirl in which preserving their religious commitments entailed subsuming them under political action.

On the ideological level, social-Christianism legitimized Peronist social reforms, which eventually ameliorated the situation of the working class. The association between social-Christianism and Peronism outlived the first Peronist governments. In addition, it became the basis for the clearly populist re-examination of Peronism conducted by some reformist integralist Catholics at the end of the 1960s. The re-assessment of Peronism certainly had an impact on the political orientations adopted by the hegemonic sectors of Argentina's Episcopacy.

The experience resulted in a unique situation. In 1955, Argentina's labor union leaders were mostly anti-marxist and anti-liberal. They explicitly proclaimed themselves as Catholic and Peronist. Due to its early association with Perón, the Church had to pay a high institutional price. Considering the scope and notoriety of the conflict with the Peronist government in 1955, the Church not only suffered from

an important institutional loss, but it almost alienated its most loyal adherents: the middle classes.

5. The Catholic Left

No integralist project intended to conquer the world paganized by secularism, democracy and industrialization succeeded. In fact, in struggling for the re-Christianization of the Argentine society, the Church set in motion forces that progressively eroded its own foundations. The disintegration of the Catholic world built around the neo-Christian project was rooted in two different yet concurrent processes.

First, an inarticulate doctrine core compounded with changing religious practices destroyed the old models of religious regulation, and failed to replace them with new ones. Many of these changes can be ascribed to the reformist mood created by the Second Vatican Council. As a matter of fact, the disputes between the hierarchy, who accepted but did not subscribe to the Council reforms, and the Catholic militancy, brought about a profound crisis in the institutional Church. As the ecclesiastical authority was being increasingly questioned, the hierarchy felt threatened.

Instead of implementing the reform and renovation proposed by

the Council, they ruled out all possibilities of dialogue which eventually resulted in the deterioration of its own authority. This attitude only added to the crisis, which became more apparent by the end of the 1960s, as political conflicts in the Argentine society peaked. Laymen began to pay less attention to their bishops' directives and shifted to political activity.

Second, the organizations that the Church had created to work outside the Catholic world were under pressure from the outer world. "The conquerors" became "conquered". This process, certainly was not exclusive of Argentine Catholicism, has generally been explained in terms of the advance of secularization of modern life, which gradually pierced and debilitated religious commitment. However, as far as the relationship between Church and politics is concerned, the key to understand a phenomenon which affected both Argentina's laity and part of its clergy, is Peronism's secularizing effect on the Catholic militancy. Paradoxically after having been the vehicle chosen by the militancy to carry out the reform, Peronism took possession of Catholic ideas and cadres stripping them of their religious contents. Only political action was left to Catholic militants, who began to disperse and ended up joining different political organizations (most of them Peronist), leftist political parties and the emerging guerrilla movements. The experience of the *Movimiento de*

Sacerdotes del Tercer Mundo (Movement of Third World Priests) is a clear example of this trend.

The experiences of former ACA militants who joined leftist parties, re-discovered or co-founded "leftist Peronism" at the end of the sixties never lost the original integralist drive to implement in the socio-political reality principles derived from the religious practice. The collapse of structures that had shaped Catholicism in the 1930s allowed some laymen, especially the young ones, to become members of leftist parties or social movements without giving up the integralist ambition of merging their political and religious hopes of transforming the world into a single beam.

The passage to politics, however, did not mean that party politics, or the liberal order for that matter, was being accepted. As long as Peronism was considered as a transforming "national movement" created to fight liberalism and proscribed from competitive politics until 1973, participating in political activities did not imply accepting liberalism. Neither did the notion that religion and politics are two distinct spheres of human experience.

In principle, liberal Catholics who had begun their political experience within the CDP abandoned religion and engaged in politics. Instead, the majority of militants who had assimilated the integralist traditions of the Catholic Action movements carried their elaborate array of religious

interpretations and aspirations to politics. Anti-liberalism would thus be the most salient contribution of Catholics to leftist politics until 1983.

Many of Catholic leftist ideas on politics coincided with the views of the Marxist left. The climate after the "Cordobazo" and Onganía's overthrow, was one of common rejection of both pragmatism and that a series of negotiated partial solutions was required to build a better society. Also, there was a shared conviction that the problems of the Argentine society should be confronted with revolutionary changes rather than with reforms.

This shared conclusion is connected with two completely opposite interpretations of society and politics; namely, the point of view of the integralist Catholic left and the vision of the secular republican left. To the Marxists, the principal agents of collective action were the parties and the State. By contrast, Catholic leftists characterized society by a transforming collective dynamism with an enormous organizational capacity. The description harmonized with the Peronist notion of "movement"; which certainly facilitated the association of Peronism with the so-called "popular Catholicism."

6. Populism and neo-integralism

The most important ideological operation of Argentine Catholicism in the post-Council period was marked by the re-examination of the "national question". The effort led to linkages between the concept of "Catholic nation" with that of "popular culture". As we pointed out earlier, such an endeavor operation had both a leftist and a rightist interpretation emerging from the same anti-liberal matrix.

As opposed to the distinctly elitist Catholic nationalism that had monopolized the Catholic movement in the 1930s and 1940s, the new Catholic nationalism politically defined itself in as a revalued version of the "national movement," represented by Yrigoyen's Radicalism and, later on, by Peronism.⁵

The cultural question, consistently furthered under the papacy of John Paul II, was at the heart of popular nationalism. The Theology of Culture has occupied a central position in the recent production of Argentine theologians; and its presence in the Latin American Church through the CELAM has turned it into a privileged ideological weapon in the battle against the Theology of Liberation.⁶

The concept of culture includes a profound reexamination of the relationships between the Church and society and between religion and politics. It also entails a new interpretation of history in order to retrieve past experiences in which popular nationalism had realized.

From this perspective, as we noted earlier, the "national being" is the manifestation of a "Catholic cultural ethos" forged in the evangelization of Hispano-America. Previous to the constitution of the State, a "liberal" invention, the "national being" does not question the legitimacy of the State. Instead, it subordinates the State to a higher legitimacy; i.e., the legitimacy of the "nation," which precedes and differs from the State's legitimacy. Thus, the concepts of "people" and "nation" stem from the notion of "cultural identity," the most distinctive feature of which is its Catholic foundation.

When compared to the old integralist approach, and at first sight, this type of analysis does not seem to be innovative. Yet several distinctive features representing different kinds of political preferences and orientations are worth considering. The organization and mobilization of "popular religiousness" are recognized as significant elements. Simultaneously, the shift from the former objective of re-Christianizing the State, which had characterized old integralism, led to a new emphasis on social issues and intermediate organizations (unions and juvenile movements) where the influence of the Church would spread. In addition, the Church's mediating role in social conflicts was accompanied by a moderate approach to social reformism; which questioned economic adjustments, but did not propose an

alternative other than voluntarist mediation.

These three features have been present in the relationship between Peronist unionism and the Church since the end of the military regime and throughout Alfonsín's government. Not only did the Church promote the Ubaldini-led "Polish movement" of Argentine unionism, but it was also the most prominent mediator in the labor-management disputes of the period. From this position, and especially since the implementation of the "Plan Austral" (*Austral Plan*) in 1985, the Episcopate's most influential sector accompanied the CGT and upheld the social rights of labor and the dispossessed according to the Social Doctrine of the Church.

At times, the Church's opposition was somewhat instrumental. In facing the advance of pluralism, largely interpreted as secularism, the Church reacted by further supporting the unionist opposition and pressuring the government.⁷

7. Church and Democracy: Some Final Comments.

After five decades of institutional growth, in which the Argentine Church put into practice several strategies for influencing society, the Church's central concern continues to be how to resolve the tense relations with liberal democracy.

The end of the military regime and the transition to democracy represented strained the relations between the democratic government and the Church, which was led by traditionalist and conservative bishops. Although many bishops and priests had disappeared during the military regime and several Catholic institutions had been raided, the Church had not felt persecuted. Upon the arrival of democracy, however, the ecclesiastical hierarchy began to denounce persecution campaigns.⁸

It was hardly a promising start. Given the electoral result, however, nothing much could be expected. Actually, against all speculations, including the stakes for the triumph of the Peronist candidate publicly announced by some bishops, the Radical Party won the 1983 presidential election. The victory of Radicalism over Peronism interestingly shows the limits of the democratic commitment of the institutional Church.

The most important document produced by the Argentine Episcopate in the last decades, *Iglesia y comunidad nacional* (Church and National Community) (1985) contains arguably the first clear defense of democracy. The document was welcomed by the *Multipartidaria*, which began discussions with the Church hierarchy. This move marked the beginning of a period in which the Church showed the first and belated signs of shifting away from its allegiance to the military regime. In

this document and other publications by the Episcopate in early 1982, the Church hierarchy declared itself against coup d'états and expressed the need to rely on a stable and solid democracy.

Despite this clear advance in political commitment matters, rising tensions during Alfonsín's government can help us envisage the uncertain future of the Church-democracy relationship. The Episcopate held that democracy should also safeguard the opinions of the Church about the concept of nation, the prerogatives of the State in education and all legislation regarding family and abortion.

Within the first year of the democratic government, most of the bishops became hostile to the new administration. In the 1984 document *Construyamos todos la nación* ("Let us all build the nation"), the Episcopate stated that it was their duty to point out the "deviations" that conspired to destroy democratic life. Once again, emphasis was placed on the deleterious effects of secularization and the progressive loss of the national identity.⁹ Democracy was not questioned as long as it did not alter the prerogatives attained by the Church in its long-standing relationship with the State. The stance of 1981 was thus maintained.

At the same time, the bishops raised their voices to warn against the danger of "national dissolution." The emphasis on the idea of nation -the nation was in danger, not democracy-

was not new. We have already seen that the above notion operates as an element of the tradition of integral Catholicism, which seemingly lingers on in Argentine bishops' minds.

The definition of "national", based on its Catholic cultural extraction, is a governing principle in episcopal documents, superior to any other political value. Thus, democracy reveals itself as a political asset subordinated to the preservation of the values that constitute the "nationality." The basis of a belief that, even beyond the Church itself, can pose a real danger as well as a false dichotomy, nation or democracy, are thus outlined.

In fact, the ideological patterns that in the recent past had contributed to legitimize the 1976 coup d'état have reappeared within the most nationalist and traditionalist sectors of the Episcopate. The idea of an "endangered Catholic nation" was advanced to President Alfonsín by the bishops.¹⁰

Another conflictive issue, closely connected with the previous one, refers to the alleged "cultural crisis" in Argentina. To the most conservative bishops, the seriousness of the attacks on cultural identity could be compared to crimes; to the less extremist ones, if the government remained passive, it would be an accomplice of those who offend the founding values of the nation.¹¹

In sum, the hegemonic sector of the Argentine Episcopate took on a defensive stance towards the democratic government; a position similar to that adopted by the Church in the 1930s. Issues such as social, sexual, and family morality have been particularly significant in the denunciation against secular aggression. At the same time, emphasis has also been placed on education policies and, as a result of the State crisis, on the income distribution questions. Here we can see another of the Church's recurrent actions. The Social Pastoral Team, with the clear exception of Monsignor Laguna, endorsed each of the thirteen general strikes with which the CGT confronted Alfonsín's government.

The denunciation against and conflict with the democratic government have also been upheld by moderate minority sectors of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. However, some moderate approaches differentiate them from the bishops who adhere to traditional conservatism.

Firstly, rather than resorting to the State's support for the maintenance of ecclesiastical prerogatives, moderate bishops concentrate on the organization of the civil society. They advocate an acceptable model of non-privileged access to the public sphere, which does not aim at the accumulation of corporative power. Secondly, they support a model of democracy that includes social justice and is compatible with the maintenance of the nationality. Finally, they do not

have the paranoid attitude that characterized the Episcopate's hegemonic sector. Challenging the Church does not constitute an attack on faith. In this case, the concept of "defensive crusade," which was so detrimental to the democratic transition, is absent.

The Church had made some progress in 1981, when it openly declared its preference for democracy. Nevertheless, between 1984 and until Pope John Paul II's visit in 1987, when Alfonsín's government was regarded as an enemy and democracy was considered risky, the hierarchy's anti-liberal traditionalist sectors reinforced their defensive crusade spirit.

The tradition of Catholic nationalism as re-formulated within the framework of the Theology of Culture, allowed the Argentine Church to incorporate the popular question without having to relinquish the pre-Council integralist heritage. The resulting Catholic conservatism claims that social reforms can be carried out while maintaining an ecclesiastical vision of politics. The basis of which is the belief that only Catholicism can legitimize the social order.

This conception of the world does not only prevail within the secluded realm of the ecclesiastical order. Given the Church's influence on the military, union and business elites, the view is increasingly spreading to the rest of society thus jeopardizing democratic stability.¹²

Of course, not all institutions are potentially capable of becoming agents for democratization. This is certainly the case of the Church in Argentina, simply because democracy seems to be alien to its own hierarchical order. By contrast, in other (Latin American) countries, even though the Church's role becomes uncertain when party politics appears on the scene, the Church is a significant mobilization factor against authoritarian regimes.

The chances to establish stable democratic governments increase considerably if society has no institutions plotting against the rule of pluralism, or whose objectives are clearly anti-democratic. Unfortunately, the Argentine Catholic Church has missed a valuable opportunity for renovation and dialogue originated from the Second Vatican Council. Today does not seem to be the right time to change in that direction. Highly anti-democratic factions/schools still subsist within the Church. They hinder any possibility of change that may come up from lower ranks, and its relationship with democracy is bound to be ambiguous and complex, if not openly hostile.

NOTES

1. The best analysis of integral Catholicism in Emille Pulat, *Eglise contre la bourgeoisie*, Paris: Casterman, 1977.
2. It is interesting to compare the failure of CD in Argentina with the success of *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy) in post-war Italy. In the Italian case, CD managed to attract the Catholic liberal and integralist traditions. Also, they took advantage of the ambiguity by simultaneously presenting itself as: a) the party of Catholics, which manifested its dependence on the hierarchy; b) a Catholic party, whose aims were determined by the Church and c) Italy's major conservative party. While the Italian CD readily filled the gap left by the fascist experience, the Argentine CD failed to occupy the space left by Peronism after its fall. On the contrary, the transfer of cadres operated to the advantage of Peronism.
3. See Emile Poulat, *Eglise contre bourgeoisie*, Paris, Casterman, 1977, p. 197; and also his "'Modernisme' et 'Intégrisme'. Du concept polémique a l'irenisme critique," *Archives de sociologie des religions* 27, 1969.
4. See Avery Dulles' suggestive essay *Models of the Church*, New York, Doubleday, 1978, especially chapter 2 on the Church institution.
5. The most explicit version of this type of analysis can be found in Gerardo Farrell, *Iglesia y pueblo en Argentina*, op. cit.
6. See José María Ghío, op. cit.
7. Interestingly enough, this attitude has disappeared during Carlos Menem's government, even when the popular sectors have been seriously affected by government policies of economic reform.
8. With few exceptions, almost every bishop made public his concern for the advance of secularism, libertinism, pornography and the dissolution of family unity.
9. "Construyamos una nación" in Aica, document 147, pp. 62-63.
10. After a visit of the Episcopate's Executive Committee to President Alfonsín, Monsignor Carlos Galán, Secretary of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, stated that "the bishops expressed their concern about a campaign orchestrated by media groups and other sectors linked to the governing party, aimed at changing or subverting the historical and cultural basis of Argentine society,

which, in turn, is based on Christian principles and on the foundational Catholic tradition of society."

11. "Apology of crime is causing the loss of prestige of the family institution, the misinterpretation of sexuality which considers chastity as taboo, thus lessening the value of religious principles." Monsignor Destéfano in AICA, 14th March 1985.

12. In fact, this view has been associated with rebel military uprisings ("carapintadas") that took place during Alfonsín's government.