

A Cold War Perspective of Religions

The Catholic and LDS Churches in Chile, 1973-1990

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Abstract

The recent selection of the first Latin American pope as the head of the Roman Catholic Church draws attention to the deep scars left in South America by the Cold War. The Cold War was an iconic period in history, one of great religious conflict when the faith and democratic ideology of Christianity stood in direct opposition to the Marxist atheism and totalitarian dogma of communism. The U.S. government led the world struggle against what it saw as repression; indeed, many of its leaders believed that the U.S. government had a divine mandate to rid the world of communism. Against the backdrop of this sociopolitical struggle, President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, decided that it was in the United States' national interest to intervene in Chilean politics. The U.S. government abetted a coup d'état in 1973 against Chile's socialist government led by President Salvador Allende, justifying the installment of the dictator General Augusto Pinochet as a necessary step in the Cold War battle against communism; democracy became an unfortunate casualty in this global contest. Organized religion played its role in this holy call to combat communism, but different sects interpreted their moral obligations in contrasting ways. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or LDS Church, felt a sacred responsibility to serve and comfort the Chilean people in a time when oppression and terror were widespread. But while the Catholic Church took an active position in response to human rights violations during Pinochet's reign, the LDS Church chose to refrain from taking any official stance against the policies of the government's military forces. The Catholic Church offered fundamental legal defense, international condemnation, and service to victims as it challenged the Chilean government. The LDS Church's socially conservative position in not actively opposing the Chilean government can best be understood by examining church documents from this period along with personal stories from the people who lived through this tumultuous time. The actions taken by LDS Church leaders, missionaries, and Chilean members during Pinochet's rule serve to illustrate the Church's doctrine regarding the Cold War; peace comes through personal development and correction, not by directly opposing corruption and oppression by groups or nations. The LDS Church viewed itself as acting from an eternal point of view, while the Roman Catholic Church worked from a more immediate perspective.



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Even though Lorena Riffo-Jenson was only six years old at the time, the memories of that day are still very vivid in her mind. The sound of helicopters instantly transports her back to Tuesday, September 11, 1973, the day she watched the bombing of the Chilean Presidential Palace, *La Moneda*, on television. “I remember having to experience sleeping on the floor and hearing machine guns, and always seeing the military and the chaos – those are pretty strong memories in my mind.”¹ After the coup d’état took place in Chile that day, the socialist President Allende was dead and the military junta led by Augusto Pinochet Ugarte was in power. The military leader publically announced the rationale for the governmental overthrow; the takeover was due to the “terrible economic, social, and moral crisis destroying the country” along with “the government’s failure to adopt measures to prevent the growth of chaos.”² Riffo-Jenson didn’t understand the political ideologies that were playing out at the time, but she does remember living with a sense of uncertainty and a fear of the unknown. “It was a time when I never knew if my father or my parents were going to be picked up for some unexpected reason.”³ And when her father was taken, Lorena never knew when or if she would see him again.

By the early 1970s Chileans were ready for the political and financial turmoil that had recently plagued their country to end. A peaceful democracy, Chile had been controlled by the wealthy and the landed elite for most of the 150 years since it had declared independence from Spain in 1818. With a view toward sweeping socioeconomic change, Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens was elected as president of Chile on a socialist platform in 1970. Allende nationalized the copper, coal, and steel industries and increased welfare spending through constitutional means. But inflation rose to 500 percent in 1973, and domestic conditions deteriorated. “I remember standing in line to get food because, even though you may have had money to purchase food, the whole country kind of stopped functioning as we knew it,” describes Lorena.⁴ Chile, unable to pay the \$1.4 billion it owed to U.S. creditors or the millions it owed other countries, experienced an economic shutdown.⁵ In addition to causing unrest at home, Allende’s Marxist government proved to be a threat to the United States’ anti-Communist stance that dominated the

¹ Lorena Riffo-Jenson, interview by author, February 4, 2013.

² Letter from Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, Commander-in-chief of the Chilean Army, to armed forces radio, <http://www.redwedgemagazine.com/history.html>

³ Riffo-Jenson interview.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 133.

Cold War. Events triggered by the domestic instability in Chile and the world sociopolitical conflict led to the 1973 coup d'état that drastically changed many Chileans' lives.

Eleven-year-old Roberto E. Leni Olivares witnessed the events of that day first-hand, events that not only changed the country politically, but also altered his home and family. "I looked out the window and saw that our house was being surrounded by hundreds of soldiers. Seven or nine of them with their faces painted black, in full gear, with their fingers on the triggers of M-16s stormed through the door."⁶ His brothers Rene and Raul were forcibly taken to the concentration camp of Puchuncavi where they were beaten and forced to work. Later Raul was moved north to Chacabuco, where he was tortured so badly that he wasn't ever expected to walk again.

The Catholic Church was a major participant in the Cold War in Chile, taking an active position in response to human rights violations during Pinochet's reign. It offered fundamental legal defense, international condemnation, and service to victims in an effort to address the temporal needs of the people.⁷ In contrast to Catholicism, which had been the major religion in Chile for centuries, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or LDS Church, had really only been an official presence in the country since 1925. As a result, the LDS Church did not have a strong political influence, but it too played a role during the reign of Pinochet in the 1970s and 1980s. The LDS Church, because of its beliefs and doctrines, chose to refrain from taking a position against the government's military forces. Instead, it took a broader perspective, believing that its role was to serve as a spiritual refuge for the thousands of Chileans who were terrorized and tortured.

Since the founding of the Thirteen Colonies by groups seeking spiritual autonomy and freedom, religion has played an important role in the history of American political theory and executive actions. Whether termed "governmental theism"⁸ or civil religion, many Americans believe

⁶ Roberto E. Leni Olivares, "Chile 1973: a Testimony, a Demand and a Poem," (lecture, School of the Americas, Georgia, November 22, 1998).
<http://isla.igc.org/Features/Chile/chile1.html>

⁷ Gilberto Aranda Bustamante, "Cuando El Báculo es la Voz de los sin Voz: El Papel de la Iglesia Católica tras el 11 de septiembre de 1973," *Stockholm Review of Latin American Studies* 5, (2009): 43.

⁸ Jeremy T. Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 9.

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that the government should “promote official state declarations about the importance of God.”⁹ This stems from the fact that faith and religion are imbedded in American society and culture; Americans identify with the philosophy that God and their country are intertwined. “The state is portrayed as serving a higher and more noble calling.”¹⁰ By adopting the belief that it is divinely appointed and endowed, the United States empowers itself. “Civil religion fosters a worldview in which the state is all-encompassing and all-powerful, and from which all other organizations must derive their meaning.”¹¹

With this ideology in mind, government leaders urged Americans to view the Cold War as a war of religion. President Truman spoke to Congress on March 12, 1947 at which time he characterized the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union as a struggle between freedom and tyranny. The declaration of the Truman Doctrine became a juncture in America’s foreign policy. From that point on, “Truman tirelessly proclaimed [that] the fundamental conflict in the world was between those nations who believed in God and morality, and those who did not.”¹² Leaders held the belief that the United States was the only nation strong enough to stop the ideology of communism from spreading. “I have confidence in our ability to master the international problems which confront us and to achieve world peace,” Truman stated in 1949. ‘Above all, I have confidence because I believe Almighty God has set before this Nation the greatest task in the history of mankind, and that He will give us the wisdom and the strength to carry it out.’¹³

As Truman “invoked the righteous nation narrative and demonised [sic] the Soviet Union as a threat to western civilisation [sic] and Christianity,”¹⁴ other countries were forced to take sides. This struggle between political philosophies quickly expanded into a global conflict, and

⁹ Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons*, 10.

¹⁰ Kenneth D. Wald, “The Religious Dimension of American Anti-Communism,” *Journal of Church & State* 36, no.3 (1994): 497.

¹¹ Herbert Richardson, “Civil Religion in Theological Perspective,” *American Civil Religion*, eds. Richey and Jones, 161-84, quoted in Lee Canipe, “Under God and Anti-Communist: How the Pledge of Allegiance Got Religion in Cold War America,” *Journal of Church & State* 3, no.2 (2003): 307.

¹² William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 107.

¹³ Richard S. Kirkendall, “Faith and Foreign Policy: An Exploration into the Mind of Harry Truman”, *Missouri historical review* 102, no.4 (2008): 220.

¹⁴ Dianne Kirby, “Anglo-American Relations and the Religious Cold War,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 10, no.2 (2012): 167.

those who opposed the Soviet Union “equated Christianity with Americanism and saw the world locked in a life-and-death struggle between godless communism and Christian democracy.”¹⁵ No country was exempt from the fight. “The United States and the Soviet Union were driven to intervene in the Third World by the ideologies inherent in their politics.”¹⁶

The United States sponsored coups and overthrows of governments in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, and Guatemala and in other Latin American countries in the name of anti-communism, putting military leaders and dictators in power that used brutality to terrorize and control their citizens. “The United States waged Cold War in Latin America because it judged that communism in the region, however loosely and broadly defined, threatened U.S. national security, impeded the U.S. ability to act elsewhere, and would incite nasty domestic political debate at home.”¹⁷ This occurred despite a policy declaring that “it was vital ‘third world’ countries develop ‘along lines broadly consistent with our own concepts of individual liberty and government based on consent.’”¹⁸ Many believed that the ideals of the United States and the actions of its government at this time were not compatible. The United States was trampling the very values upon which it was founded.

In 1973, Salvador Allende, the president who had been democratically elected by the voice of the Chilean people was violently removed from office and killed by “a Chilean army that received support from Kissinger and the U.S. military and was well supplied with North American arms.”¹⁹ Lorena Riffo-Jenson grew up in Santiago after the leader’s overthrow and affirms that “there was a strong belief in Chile that the United States had a hand . . . in the coup d’état. The United States wanted to get rid of Allende. I think it was common knowledge.”²⁰ The United States had a divine mandate to rid the world of communism, and democracy had been consigned to a position of secondary importance in this global battle. “A nation blessed by God may see itself as above criticism, inhibiting internal

¹⁵ Ronald Oakley, *God’s Country: America in the Fifties* (New York: Dembner Books, 1986), 324.

¹⁶ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 96.

¹⁷ Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 194.

¹⁸ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 223.

¹⁹ Walter Laferber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), 204.

²⁰ Riffo-Jenson, interview.

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dissent and ignoring the legitimate needs and interests of other states.”²¹ In the eyes of U.S. leaders, the fate of the Chilean people did not enter into the equation.

General Augusto Pinochet became the dictator of Chile, in command of a military junta which enforced his mandates with violence and brutality. Marisol Blanchard, now a successful human rights attorney, grew up in Santiago during his rule. “There were constant reminders of her country’s repressive conditions, including curfews, curtailed personal freedoms and, she recalls vividly, virtually no access to outside communication. ‘Newspapers weren’t allowed to circulate. Information was controlled by the state. We used to tune [into] one radio [station] and read one newspaper to get information.’”²² Riffo-Jenson remembers the military’s abuse of power and how it affected her family. “If they didn’t like you they would make up a charge against you and throw you in prison. Or if they wanted something that you had, they would make up a charge against you and throw you in prison and torture you. So that is what my father experienced.”²³ Chileans were systematically detained, imprisoned, and tortured, and according to Chile’s official human rights inquiry, some 3,197 of them were killed.²⁴ The atrocities committed against female political prisoners were especially appalling. Documents released in 2004 provide evidence that the use of sexual torture was not isolated or spontaneous, but an accepted procedure ordered by high ranking military personnel. The use of sexual torture was a calculated strategy spared neither means nor methods.²⁵

The extent of the abuse was not known until decades later because of the tight control that Pinochet and his government exercised. “A lot of times what happens is that there is so much oppression and everyone is afraid... It’s almost like psychologically you have to survive, you live there, and you learn to fight the battles that you can win. The rest of them you kind of look away. I think the entire world kind of looked away at what was happening in Chile.”²⁶ Even when the regime was implicated in human

²¹ Wald, “The Religious Dimension of American Anti-Communism,” 496.

²² New Voices, A National Fellowship Program, <http://newvoices.aed.org/fellows/Marisolprofile.html>

²³ Riffo-Jenson, interview.

²⁴ John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 67.

²⁵ Javier Maravall Yáñez, “Las prisioneras políticas bajo la dictadura militar,” *Stockholm Review of Latin American Studies* 5, September (2009): 34.

²⁶ Riffo-Jenson interview.

rights violations, no action was taken by the United States government because American policy placed more importance on having Pinochet's "help in maintaining the world balance of power against communism"²⁷ than on protecting the lives and welfare of Chilean citizens.

The moral undertaking of defending the people was assumed instead by the Roman Catholic Church in Chile. The Church assumed the roles of defender, protector, and caregiver to the Chilean people. While originally supporting the coup d'état against Allende in 1973, the Catholic Church quickly changed its stance on the new leadership when confronted with the political, educational, and social oppression imposed on the Chilean people by Pinochet and his military junta. "The [Catholic] Church [was] the most formidable and enduring opponent of the dictatorship."²⁸ From 1973, and at least until 1990, the Episcopal leadership of the Catholic Church played a central role in defending human rights in Chile. The immediate concern for the safety, the emotional well-being, and the physical welfare of the people governed the Church's actions during this era.

Catholicism is the predominant religion not only in Chile, but throughout Latin America. Being Catholic for many, however, is less about religion and more about tradition and societal norms. Various sources estimate that about 60 percent of the Chilean population identified themselves as Catholics during the mid to late 20th century, but that only 20-25 percent of the upper classes and only about 5 percent of the working classes attended church consistently.²⁹ During the 1970 election and continuing into Allende's presidency, there was a deepening of division within the Catholic Church. Radicals fought to influence politics in Chile, departing from the official position of neutrality endorsed by the Catholic Church and voiced by Cardinal Raul Silva Henriquez. As a result of this split, "the percentage of Catholics active in religious organizations fell from 4.1 in 1970 to 2.8 in 1973."³⁰

Catholicism was introduced in Chile during the 16th century by the Spanish, and this religion grew to be an integral part of the system of

²⁷ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 205.

²⁸ Carl E. Meacham, "Changing of the Guard: New Relations between Church and State in Chile," *Journal of Church and State* 29, no.3, (1987): 433.

²⁹ Paul E. Sigmund, "Revolution, Counterrevolution, and the Catholic Church in Chile," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 483, (1986): 27.

³⁰ Michael Fleet and Brian H. Smith, *The Catholic Church and Democracy in Chile and Peru* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 59.

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governance in the country. Starting in the mid-1800s the Church started to lose the advantages it enjoyed as part of the power structure. But it was not until the adoption of a new constitution in 1925 that a mutually approved break in ties between the Catholic Church and the Chilean civil government took place. “The Church retained its property and gained autonomy while forfeiting nearly all its state-provided privileges, including the state payment of clergy salaries.”³¹ Because of this separation, the Chilean Catholic Church was free to act autonomously when it was confronted with the violation of human rights that occurred after the coup d’état.

Soon after the coup occurred Chileans began to turn to the Catholic Church for relief from the repression imposed by the new dictator through his military junta. The Catholic Church, along with Jewish and Protestant leaders, launched a multi-faith organization called Committee of Cooperation for Peace in Chile (COPACHI) which “protested against rights violations, provided legal aid, documented abuses, and founded social programs for the poor.”³² The Chilean bishops were divided in their reaction to the new government which promised to defend Christian values, but in April 1974 “the official statements of the Bishops Conference . . . criticized the abuses of the regime and urged the restoration of democracy.”³³ The local Catholic parishes set up soup kitchens for the hungry and offered physical asylum for those who were being coerced by the military. They also allowed community groups to use the churches as locations for safely holding meetings. As human rights violations continued to occur during Pinochet’s reign, the Catholic Church continued to denounce and condemn the actions endorsed by the dictator.

Cardinal Silva, the archbishop of Santiago, was considered the head of the Catholic Church in Chile. He also had strong ties to the Pope, making his declarations more influential with the military junta to some extent as Pinochet tried to project a respectable image to the world. The cardinal voiced strong objections to the suffering experienced by the people following the days of the coup. Thousands of Chileans were being apprehended and made to suffer unspeakable horrors at the hand of the military in concentration camps. Hundreds of Chileans were forced to the

³¹ Benjamin Goldfrank and Nick Rowell, “Church, State, and Human Rights in Latin America,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 13, no. 1, (2012): 25.

³² Goldfrank and Rowell, “Church, State, and Human Rights,” 41.

³³ Sigmund, *Revolution, Counterrevolution*, 33.

National Stadium, one of the detention centers, where they were made to exist in squalid conditions and suffer torture. Relatives and friends of the prisoners petitioned the Catholic Church to intervene on behalf of their loved ones. As a result, Cardinal Silva visited the National Stadium on September 24 where he was visibly stricken by the suffering of so many Chileans. He offered his service to all there regardless of political affiliation. Silva became an outspoken critic of the military junta and voice for the Catholic Church's policy of addressing the temporal, immediate needs of the people, including aiding those being pursued by the junta.

In contrast, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints chose to refrain from taking any official stance against the policies of the government's military forces. The Church's failure to speak out against the atrocities taking place in Chile may seem counterintuitive, but its socially conservative position can best be understood by examining the origin and doctrines of the church along with church documents from this period. Personal accounts told by the people who lived through this tumultuous time can also help illustrate the LDS Church's philosophy in Chile during Pinochet's rule. This philosophy originated from the belief that the LDS Church had regarding its purpose, not only in Chile during this time, but globally throughout eternity.

The history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Chile began when Parley P. Pratt, an apostle of the church, first visited the country in 1851 with his wife Phoebe. They, along with Rufus C. Allen, became the first LDS missionaries to travel to South America. Their charge to preach the Mormon religion and gain Chilean converts proved to a fruitless one however. There were political restraints in place outlawing the preaching or practicing of any other religious beliefs because of the close relationship between the Chilean secular government and the Catholic religion at the time. "The Catholic Church was supported financially by the state and its religious domination was guaranteed by restrictions on all other religions."³⁴

It wasn't until 1925 that the LDS Church gained a real presence in Chile, at which time missionaries began to share the Church's history and doctrines. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS Church) was founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith, a prophet who described seeing God the Father and Jesus Christ in a grove in upstate New York when he

³⁴ Delbert A. Palmer, "Hoping to Establish a Presence: Parley P. Pratt's 1851 Mission to Chile," *Brigham Young University Studies* 38, no.4, (1999): 122.

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was a fourteen year old boy. He testified that God had told him to organize the LDS Church because no other church on the Earth had His divine authority. Although established in the United States, the LDS Church began proselyting abroad almost immediately after its official commencement. In 1837 the first overseas missionaries were sent to Great Britain to preach the restored gospel where thousands of converts joined the Church. The obligation of members to share their beliefs is a tenet that has been strongly emphasized throughout the history of the Mormon Church.

When a newspaper editor, John Wentworth, requested information from Joseph Smith, the prophet wrote the Thirteen Articles of Faith to summarize the beliefs held by members of the Church. The letter became known as the Wentworth Letter and was first published in the *Times and Seasons*, a Church newspaper, in March 1842. On 10 October, 1880, the Articles of Faith were formally accepted as scripture by a vote taken of the members of the Church, after which they were included as part of the Pearl of Great Price, one of the Church's canons of scripture. Although not a comprehensive list of all of the LDS Church's beliefs, one doctrine clearly delineated in the articles relates to the role citizens play under civil government. The twelfth article states: "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law."³⁵ It is the duty of all Church members to follow the law of the land *regardless* of the form of government in power. Obedience is an important mandate in Christianity, no less so in the LDS religion.

It is interesting to note, however, that from its inception the LDS Church and its beliefs have been politically controversial.³⁶ The doctrine of continuing revelation threatened and incited opposition against members of the Mormon Church beginning in New York and reaching its zenith in Illinois, when the prophet Joseph Smith was imprisoned by state officials and martyred by an angry crowd. This doctrine of continuing revelation is stated in the Articles of Faith. "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." This belief that God continually leads and guides the Church, frequently issuing mandates through his acting prophet, is one of the central ideologies of Mormonism. The members of the LDS Church believe that the prophet is

³⁵ The Articles of Faith are part of the scriptures known as the Pearl of Great Price.

³⁶ B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I, volume 6* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1991), 289.

called by divine revelation and that he is the mouthpiece of God with the authority to direct the Church. Policies or principles stated 'over the pulpit' during one era might very well be amended or negated in the future. This tenet of changing doctrine may seem convenient to the world at large, but to members of the Church it reflects the doctrine of a caring Heavenly Father who is intimately concerned with the needs of His children.

LDS Church leaders expressed their opinions about communism and the Cold War during the 1960s and 1970s. The ninth prophet of the Church, David O. McKay, gave a talk to the priesthood members of the church in 1966 at which time he clearly stated that "the position of this church on the subject of communism has never changed. We consider communism the greatest satanical threat to peace, prosperity and the spread of God's work among men that exists on the face of the earth."³⁷ President McKay also stated that specific the "parties, groups, or persons" who advocated or practiced communism were secondary to the immediate concern of living and practicing the principles of the gospel.³⁸ His view reflects the LDS Church's belief in the significance of eternal principles as opposed to the transience of civil governments in the world.

One especially vocal spokesman for the church was Ezra Taft Benson who served as an apostle and president of the LDS Church for more than fifty years. He also served as Secretary of Agriculture under President Dwight D. Eisenhower from 1953 through 1961 during the height of the Cold War. Benson gave a spirited discourse at BYU in the same year that President McKay spoke in which he did not hesitate to speak his mind. "Satan himself, through his earthly followers is directing the Communist conspiracy."³⁹ He firmly believed that fighting for freedom and against communism in the world was part of an eternal plan because "the gospel and its preaching [could] prosper only in an atmosphere of freedom."⁴⁰ Three years later Benson spoke to the Utah Forum about his view concerning the role that the United States should play in the world. He advocated "a position of independence with regard to other countries, [avoidance] of political connection, involvement, or intervention in the

³⁷ David O. McKay, "Statement Concerning the Position of the Church on Communism" (136th Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Salt Lake Tabernacle, Saturday, April 9, 1966).

³⁸ McKay, "Statement Concerning the Position of the Church on Communism."

³⁹ Ezra Taft Benson, "Our Immediate Responsibility" (lecture, Brigham Young University Devotional, October 25, 1966).

⁴⁰ Benson, "Our Immediate Responsibility."

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affairs of other countries, and [a freedom from] permanent or entangling alliances.”⁴¹ His view regarding the place of the United States was surely influenced by his belief that the eternal doctrines of the Church transcended man-made governments and institutions.

Three of these eternal doctrines, the commandment to proselytize, the obligation to obey civil law and leaders, and the belief in continuing revelation, all influenced the actions of the LDS Church in Chile during the reign of Pinochet. In order for Mormon missionaries to share their beliefs, they first have to obtain permission to enter a country in an atmosphere of freedom. Riffo-Jenson recounts an event which occurred shortly after she and her parents became members of the LDS Church in March of 1977. “It was when President Kimball [the prophet of the Church] visited Chile, and my dad helped secure locations and some of the places for President Kimball to visit. Even though he was so new into the Church, he had some really good contacts with promoters because he had been in the artistic, musical industry before.”⁴² The prophet arrived in Santiago to visit the members of the Church and to meet with the leader of the country, General Augusto Pinochet. “LDS President Spencer W. Kimball gave the dictator a copy of the Book of Mormon and called him ”one of the great leaders of Latin America” (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, April 1, 2006).⁴³ According to a Chilean newspaper, the purpose of the leader’s visit was to spread the Mormon faith, and to contribute to the education, freedom, and general welfare of the people (*Las Ultimas Noticias*, March 10, 1977).⁴⁴ Church leaders realized the necessity of establishing a cooperative relationship with the Chilean government. “This was the height of the Cold War and Mormon leaders lined up behind Pinochet, whom they saw as an opponent of Communism” (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, April 1, 2006).⁴⁵

When asked about her father’s reaction to Kimball’s affirmation of Pinochet, Lorena explained her perception of the event. “You know you’re taught in the Thirteen Articles of Faith that you’re supposed to honor the government that you’re living under. I think Chileans really believe in the structure of government . . . it serves its function. So even

⁴¹ Ezra Taft Benson, “An address by the Honorable Ezra Taft Benson before the Utah Forum” (lecture, Salt Lake City, Utah, September 12, 1969).

⁴² Riffo-Jenson interview.

⁴³ Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Church Was Pushed, Pulled During Time of Trouble,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, April 1, 2006.

⁴⁴ “Creencias Religiosas Se Respetan en Chile,” *Las Ultimas Noticias*, March 10, 1977.

⁴⁵ Stack, “Church Was Pushed.”

though President Kimball came, remember at this time you couldn't express much because Pinochet was in power until 1990 when the change in power took place. So you learn to survive. You learn not to rock the boat, you learn not to stress things so you get in more trouble."⁴⁶

Two female missionaries, Cynthia Walker and Jeanne Miller, wrote General Pinochet a letter in 1981 asking for the chance to "teach him the reseña", a review of the Church's doctrine, and "the charlas", individual lessons about the Church's beliefs.⁴⁷ The invitation was accepted and the two sister missionaries traveled to the Moneda, the governmental palace, on October 8. This importance of this meeting was not taken lightly by LDS Church officials. The two young Americans were counseled by a member of the South American area presidency of the LDS Church, Elder Gene R. Cook, who urged them to make the visit one in which they shared their personal admiration of Chile and the positive experiences that they had enjoyed while living there. This meeting was treated as an opportunity to increase positive public relations between the Chilean government and the LDS Church.

Sister Jeanne Miller recorded the interview in the historical record of the Chile Santiago North Mission. In her description she recounted her impressions of President Pinochet and the other leaders present at the interview. She described General Pinochet as "a genuinely loving person" with "a very happy and understanding countenance." She and her companion were greatly "impressed by his personality" as he "expressed a real sincere interest in us and our feelings about their country."⁴⁸ The Chilean government also used the meeting as an opportunity for positive public relations. They invited the press to photograph and question the two young women after the meeting with the president had taken place. The missionaries had the opportunity to promote the LDS Church in a positive manner, while the Chilean leaders took the occasion to portray themselves as open-minded and respectful.

The subject of human rights violations was conspicuously absent in both of these meetings. Neither President Kimball nor the two missionaries seem to do more than smile and present President Pinochet with books about Mormon beliefs. In a statement of Political Neutrality published by

⁴⁶ Riffo-Jenson interview.

⁴⁷ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Historical Record, Section B – Historical Events," *Chile Santiago North Mission*, October 8, 1981.

⁴⁸ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Historical Record, Section B."

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the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Church declares that as an institution, it will not “attempt to direct or dictate to a government leader.”⁴⁹ In order to understand this position and why the Church failed to condemn Pinochet’s regime for the imprisonment and torture of thousands of Chileans, it is necessary to understand the LDS Church’s vision of peace in the world.

In 1990, Dallin H. Oaks, one of the apostles in the Mormon Church and a former justice of the Utah Supreme Court, described peace as being more than the absence of conflict or war. “Gospel peace is the opposite of any conflict, armed or unarmed. It is the opposite of national or ethnic hostilities, of civil or family strife.”⁵⁰ He goes on to quote another apostle of the Church, John A. Widstoe, who in 1943 declared that peace was an individual responsibility. “It cannot be placed upon the shoulders of Congress or Parliament, or any other organization of men with governing authority.”⁵¹ Elder Oaks continues by linking the idea of neutrality to the vital importance of having missionaries throughout the world.

“Like the church that sends them forth, our missionaries have no political agenda They are the Lord’s servants, and . . . by preaching righteousness, our missionaries seek to treat the causes of war. They preach repentance from personal corruption, greed, and oppression because only by individual reformation can we overcome corruption and oppression by groups or nations.”⁵²

Just two years after the two female missionaries visited the leader of Chile, the Santiago Chile Temple was dedicated by Gordon B. Hinckley, an apostle in the LDS Church. Temples are sacred buildings where LDS members learn about the eternal nature of man and where they periodically go to remind themselves of this truth. They believe that life here on the Earth is transitory in nature, and that it makes up only a miniscule fraction of our existence. In the dedicatory prayer given on September 15, 1983, President Hinckley entreated God to render “all that has been done in the past be but the prologue to a far greater work in the

⁴⁹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, “Political Neutrality,” *Newsroom: The Official Resource for News Media, Opinion, Leaders, and the Public*, February 6, 2013, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/official-statement/political-neutrality>.

⁵⁰ Dallin H. Oaks, “World Peace,” *The Ensign*, May, 1990, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1990/05/world-peace>.

⁵¹ John A. Widstoe, “The Nature of Peace,” *Conference Report*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, October 1943, 113.

⁵² Widstoe, “The Nature of Peace,” 115.

future.”⁵³ In other words, events must be seen as a part of an eternal scheme. But that doesn’t mean that God is not cognizant of the pains and trails of his children. In the dedicatory prayer, there is a reference to the troubles that had been taking place in Chile at that time. President Hinckley invoked a blessing on “all who govern that Thy sons and daughters may rejoice in the nation of which they are a part.” He also blessed the temple to “be a haven for Thy people, a house of peace, a house of prayer, a house of love.” The temple was meant to be a spiritual refuge for the LDS Church members in Chile.

Both the Roman Catholic Church and the LDS Church felt a sacred responsibility to serve and comfort the Chilean people in a time when oppression and terror were widespread. But while the Catholic Church took an active position in response to human rights violations during Pinochet’s reign, the LDS Church chose to refrain from taking any official stance against the policies of the government’s military forces. The Catholic Church offered fundamental legal defense, international condemnation, and service to victims as it challenged the Chilean government. The LDS Church’s socially conservative position in not actively opposing the Chilean government was based on the idea that the truths of the gospel and life itself have to be viewed with an eternal perspective. The actions taken by LDS Church leaders, missionaries, and Chilean members during the 1970s and 1980s serve to illustrate the Church’s doctrine regarding the Cold War; peace comes through personal development and correction, not by directly opposing corruption and oppression by groups or nations. The LDS Church viewed itself as acting from an eternal point of view, while the Roman Catholic Church worked from a more immediate perspective, viewing events from a more temporal position.

Lorena, whose family joined the LDS Church when she was ten years old and then immigrated to Utah when she was seventeen years old, has tried to gain some perspective on the terrible events that occurred in Chile during Pinochet’s rule. “Life needs to move ahead and maybe that’s what you do when you’ve gone through something that’s impactful. You don’t forget, but if you’re going to be a healthy, functioning adult, you also need to keep living.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, “Santiago Chile Temple Dedicatory Prayer given by Gordon B. Hinckley,” <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/santiago/prayer/>. (also found in Church News, Sept. 25, 1983: 4).

⁵⁴ Riffo-Jenson interview.

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