Struggle and Reconciliation: Some Reflections on Ecumenism in Chile

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Abstract

To engage in ecumenism and common witness is always a challenge when one church predominates in a society. In the case of many Latin American countries, the Catholic Church is both historically and demographically dominant, and often has a history of special relations with the states. Protestants, on the other hand, come mostly from evangelical and Pentecostal traditions with little ecumenical history or motivation. This article outlines some of the 20th century history of the churches in Chile against the background of the reception of Vatican II, and especially its leadership on religious freedom and ecumenism. Social and political events in Chile, as well as the particular demography and history of its Christianity, make this a unique context for ecumenical development. Some of these factors and the churches’ responses are outlined as resources for global Christian reflection on mission, unity and society.

The passion for unity among Christians is a central element of Catholic identity from the second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Much has been accomplished but in many parts of the world tensions continue. A mixed, positive example from the churches in Chile will be a useful illustration of this gradual process of reception in an historically Catholic country with a significant population of churches committed to the ecumenical movement but with the

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major evangelical and Pentecostal Protestant presence characteristic of most of Latin America.\(^3\)

Conversion to Christ's call to unity is a gradual process, so patience and reflection on the reception of the ecumenical movement in a variety of churches and cultures is an important task. Ecumenical development is a contextual process in that it is inculturated in the variety of situations where the churches live, and depends on the culture, demography, history, power relationships, and leadership in each place.

In this brief essay, I will focus on the impact of the reception of the Roman Catholic Church's second Vatican Council (Vatican II) and its ecumenical commitments in Chile. To look at this fascinating story, we will need to recall some of the developments of Vatican II and the context of Latin America, as a prelude to looking at some elements of the Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic ecumenical pilgrimage in Chile.

Vatican II

It would have seemed unlikely to anyone who attended Vatican II, following its announcement in 1959, beginning in 1962, and conclusion in 1965, that such massive developments would take place in Catholicism in these last 40 years, as have happened.

It was not a forgone conclusion, for example, that the Catholic Church would move from a position of state-enforced Catholicism as the norm, with exceptions like the United States, where Catholics had not yet taken control, to a position of advocating religious liberty as a right for all based on human dignity. There were strong voices from Latin America and Spain committed to the position that error (meaning anyone who was not Catholic) had no rights. On the other hand, cardinals Angelo Rossi of Sao Paulo, Brazil and Raúl Silva Henríquez of Santiago, Chile, representing a number of Latin American bishops, threw their weight behind the Declaration on Religious Freedom.\(^4\)

The World Council of Churches had a significant influence on forming the debate and outcome of this Catholic decision. The advocacy for religious liberty that is providing a legal basis for civil equality is a *sine qua non* for any dialogue or credibility for the Catholic Church in its ecumenical or interreligious outreach.

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What many do not realize is that the Declaration on Religious Freedom affirms this fundamental human right, and the importance of constitutional guarantees. In doing so, the declaration departs definitively from the Constantinian wedding of religion and society. However, it does not reject historic relations with particular states, where Catholicism was the established religion. Bishops in Spain and Colombia, where Catholicism was established, were able to come home and say to their people and their governments that nothing had changed but, eventually, it did!  

It was not a forgone conclusion that the Catholic Church would enter the modern ecumenical movement. However, Vatican II moved the church away from an exclusive approach to fellow Christians and a defensive approach to the modern world, to a posture of dialogue. Pope Paul VI initiated his pontificate with an encyclical, Ecclesiam Suam, on the centrality of dialogue in the identity of the Catholic Church; he also gave a forceful witness to the Catholic commitment to religious freedom in his talk at the United Nations.

Of course, the council was a seminal event in Catholic leadership that will take centuries, no doubt, to be received, inculturated and understood in the myriad of local situations around the world. Issues of power and authority within Catholicism, among the churches in any local situation, and between Christians and the various states in whose territories they live, are important, even when not acknowledged.

Both religious freedom and commitment to the unity of all Christians launched Catholics with fellow Christians on a pilgrimage in faith. As we look back these 40 years later, we can begin to discern some of the paths taken, and continue to move forward in hope but without a clear road map. Because the bishops voted for religious liberty and for ecumenism did not mean that they had a clear idea about how they would lead their people back home. For example, the Brazilian bishops, with characteristic German-style organization, had sketched a four-year plan before leaving Rome in 1965, and continue to publish a book of their pastoral priorities every four years. However, this sort of intentionality about conciliar reform is more the exception than the norm, and, of course, God always gives the churches a history that diverts the most logical of human plans.

Latin America

Chile, like most of the Latin American countries, has had a rocky history since independence in the 19th century. Governments of French revolutionary anti-clerical, laicist style...
alternated with conservative clericalist regimes. In this, Chile is no exception. A unified Catholic hegemony in Latin America is a myth perpetuated by friend and foe alike. Popular devotional religion became the primary bearer of the gospel for the majority of the people. From colonial times, people experienced lay pastoral leadership in the absence of priests.

The result is that today, while now 70% to 90% in many Latin American countries self-identify as Catholic, about 10% of these attend church on a Sunday morning. There are claims of great "losses" of Catholics to Protestant and other religious groups. However, I have yet to read studies that document that there are fewer Catholics at Sunday Mass as a result of the rise of these minorities. In fact, there may be more Christians worshipping on Sunday as pluralism becomes part of Latin American life. Likewise, the globalization of a culture of choice gives young people many more options, including no religion at all, as they move away from tight-knit extended families, neighbourhoods and rural communities. This is certainly true of Catholic youth in Chile.

In spite of some attempts to group "Hispanics" or "Latinos" into one category because of language, the 18 Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries, and 22 Catholic bishops' conferences of Latin America and the Caribbean are as different as the countries that might use languages like English or French. The great liberator Simón Bolívar said that trying to bring unity among the emerging Latin American nations was like ploughing the sea. This is no less true of Christians than the general population.

However, in the 1950s, initiatives spearheaded by Bishop Manuel Larrain of Talca, Chile and Dom Hélder Câmara of Brazil resulted in the formation of an international agency to serve collaboration and unity among Catholics. In 1955, the twenty-two national Catholic churches formed an international, continental organization called the Council of Latin American Episcopates (CELAM). CELAM has developed a bureaucracy, regular sets of committees for collaboration, and a series of meetings. The best known of these meetings is that of Medellín, Colombia in 1968, with its option for the poor and its bringing to international attention the debates over liberation theology.

It is of particular interest to note that this meeting was a major moment in the reception and inculturation of Vatican II for the Latin American churches. Yet, of all the 16 documents of Vatican II only three are not mentioned, among them the Declaration on Religious Freedom and its Consejo Sur: Argentina, Chile, Uruguay y Paraguay, Salamanca, Ediciones Sigueme, 1994; Maximiliano Salinas Campo, Historia del Pueblo de Dios en Chile: La Evolución del Cristianismo desde la Perspectiva de los Pobres, Santiago de Chile, Rehue, 1987.


the *Decree on Ecumenism*, though there were ecumenical observers present. 10 This was not because no Latin American bishops were committed to these Catholic values but rather because the bishops were divided in their interpretations and priorities. 11

This is not the place to go into the history of CELAM, the debates on liberation theology or the vagaries of the ecumenical commitments. 12 It is enough to say that there has not been a consensus among the Latin American bishops about their priorities in social advocacy, religious liberty, 13 and liberation in approaches to ecumenical dialogue and "defence against the sects", or a number of other areas of Catholic life.

The Commission for the History of the Church in Latin America (CEHILA) 14 has shown us how important it is to get beyond the history of bishops and religious orders, which is the traditional approach to Catholic church history in Latin America, to a narrative of the pilgrim people of God that takes account of social movements, indigenous and minority Christians, women's voices, catechetical styles and debates, popular/folk religiosity, and social, economic and political factors. In studying ecumenism and the reception of Vatican II, this inclusive perspective is key. We cannot neglect the bishops, of course, as we shall see in Chile.

On the other hand, the majority of Protestants in Latin America are in Pentecostal or evangelical churches that often have no ecumenical interests, usually have North American rather than classical Reformation origins, and sometimes continue anti-Catholic attitudes left behind by ecumenical Protestants decades ago. 15 These demographic and theological differences, together with the numerical size and historical hegemony of the Catholic Church, make relations among the churches particularly challenging.

However, it is important to emphasize a set of ecumenical principles: i) the responsibility of the majority church for ecumenism in a minority/majority situation; ii) the fact that ecu-

menism is more important and demands more creativity where it is most difficult; iii) no matter how gradual they may be, authentic ecumenical advances are in some ways irreversible. In Chile there are hopeful dynamics for Pentecostal Catholic rapprochement.16

Chile’s story

It is tempting to take the story of Chile from the conquest, or at least from independence, and talk about the religious policies of the liberator Bernardo O’Higgins, tensions between the bishops and the government in the 19th century, and the rise of early Protestantism during that period. We could also explore the roots of religion and Chilean society in imperial Spanish policies, catechetical strategies, and charisms of the orders that evangelized various sectors of what became the nation of Chile. However this essay will focus on more recent developments.

Church situation on the eve of the Second Vatican Council

Coming into the 20th century, the Catholic Church and the society were quite polarized, as in many parts of Latin America, with the church leadership siding with the Conservative Party against the forces of secular and laicist liberalism. There was much debate about whether one could vote for the Liberal Party without committing a sin. Finally, the cardinal secretary of state, Eugenio Pacelli, wrote a letter in 1934 that said Catholics could vote their conscience, which more or less settled the question of partisan politics.17

Until 1925, the one, holy, catholic, apostolic and Roman church was established by the Chilean constitution, though there had been freedom of conscience since independence and de facto freedom of worship, if not of missionizing, since the government’s encouragement of German immigration and foreign commerce. In that year, the government, with the concurrence of Pius XI and secretary of state Cardinal Gasparri, removed church establishment from the constitution. The Archbishop of Santiago was unsympathetic but he was loyal to the pope.18

More can be said about this moment and the debates. However, the Catholic Church continued to exercise powers like an established church, with laws that required Catholic worship in the armed forces, obligatory Catholic religion classes in the public schools, Catholic


chaplains in hospitals, the military and police, an annual civil thanksgiving Mass, with the shrine of our Lady of Mt Carmel, patroness of the country, as the centre of the civil ceremony, canon law serving as the marriage law of the land, the outlawing of civil divorce, and religious feasts continuing as civil holidays. God language remained in the constitution. Chile was not to be a secularist, laicist, anticlerical state like Mexico, France and other formerly Catholic countries.¹⁹

Within the Catholic Church, because of the struggles with the state, there was a great loyalty to the papacy. One of the gains for the Church in the separation from the state was its ability, for the first time, to appoint its own bishops without state approval, and to construct new dioceses based on pastoral rather than political considerations. On the other hand, loyalty to Pope Leo XIII's social teaching and the church's involvement with the union movement contributed to a polarization among Catholics, some of whom resisted the church's concerns for human rights, the poor and the rights of workers.

In the 1930s and 1940s, under Belgian and French influence, promotion of lay leadership through Catholic Action, with Young Catholic Students, Young Catholic Workers, and the Christian Family movement, a new generation of socially active priests and lay people emerged. From these movements came: i) episcopal leaders such as Manuel Larrain,²⁰ a founder of CELAM and its president during the council, who were advocates of land reform, the workers and the poor, and were liturgical innovators; ii) a progressive wing among young Catholics in the Conservative Party, who, strongly influenced by the political philosophy of Jacques Maritain, eventually separated to form the Christian Democratic Party in 1938²¹; iii) St Alberto Hurtardo, who in 1941 questioned the taken-for-granted Catholic hegemony with his book, Is Chile Catholic?, which generated debate even at Vatican II in the 1960s. Hutardo raised challenges that led those sympathetic to his point of view to be open to ecumenism, when it became a possibility for Catholics:

One of the causes of the success of this (Protestant) campaign in Chile is the lack of religious cultivation of our popular masses. They are sheep without pastors, but with a profoundly religious nature ... The responsibility for the success of the Protestant campaign in Chile belongs to the Catholics who have not knowingly cultivated their Church and of all those who have not heard the divine voice ... Protestantism in Chile lives on our errors;

¹⁹ Humberto Lagos, Chile y el Mitó del Estado Laico, Santiago, Icthus el Editor, 2005, pp. 9ff. While the Catholic Church leadership was able to take a prophetic stance in the 1973-1990 period, adaptation to pluralism continues to be a challenge as the situation changes, and the bishops' ability to affect policies in matters of law, as well as personal and sexual ethics continues to diminish. Vert Strassne, "La Iglesia Chilena desde 1973-1995", Teología y Vida, vol. XLVII. No. 1, 2006, p. 89.
it grows where Catholic life has been uncared for and nourishes the Christian nature of our people.\textsuperscript{22}

Likewise, he attempted to dispel a prejudice still current among Latin American Catholics in the 21st century:

\begin{quote}
It has not been the case that the Protestant movement was above all a campaign of foreign money. The majority of the money that they earn in Chile is from Chilenos. The Pentecostals or canutos, the national sect, do not rely solely on foreign pastors and they cover all their expenses with tithes and offerings gathered among their faithful.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Catechetical renewal, the formation of Christian base communities, the promotion of lay leadership through Catholic Action, special attention to the biblical apostolate, proactive participation in international Catholic networks, and investment in collegial structures among the bishops all laid the ground work for the reception of the Vatican Council in Chile.\textsuperscript{24}

On the eve of the council in 1959, Marcos McGrath was the dean of the theological faculty of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. He would go on to be bishop in Panama, a member of the theological commission at the council, and a leader in CELAM until his death in 2000.\textsuperscript{25} The faculty began a new journal to prepare for the council.\textsuperscript{26}

In 1961, a new archbishop was appointed in Santiago, the Salesian Raúl Silva Henríquez, the 100th anniversary of whose birth was celebrated in 2007. He was a compromise between Larrain, who was considered too liberal, and Alfredo Silva Santiago, the Archbishop of Concepción and rector of the university, who was considered too conservative. When the draft council documents were sent out to the bishops, Silva Henríquez shared them with the theological faculty for advice and feedback. He brought three of these theologians with the Chilean bishops to Rome as advisors.\textsuperscript{27}

This faculty was a prestigious group that included a Jesuit who went on to be part of Father General Pedro Arrupe’s cabinet, a Salesian who became superior of his order, the young

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Idem}.
\textsuperscript{24} See Max Salinas in José Oscar Beozzo, \textit{Cristianismo e Iglesias de América Latina en viseras del Vaticano II}, Colección, San José, Departamento Ecuuménico de Investigaciones, 1992, 121-52; Saball, \textit{op. cit.}, 42-123.
\textsuperscript{27} Cavallo, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. 1, p. 246.
Jorge Medina Estevez, who recently retired as a cardinal of the Curia, and the now-patriarch of liberation theology José Comblin. They even provided a full draft for the document on the church in 1963, as did the bishops of France, Italy and Germany, between the rejected draft of the preparatory Theological Commission and the emergence of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*. During the council, Larraín, president of CELAM, and the Brazilian Dom Hélder Câmara (1909-1999) organized weekly meetings to brief the progressive Latin American bishops for their leadership in the council hall.

Events in Chile caught the church up in a variety of affairs that influenced its reception of Vatican II. In 1964, during the course of the council, Cardinal Silva had to fly back to Chile for the installation of the first Christian Democratic president, Eduardo Frei Montalvo. Frei began to implement moderate land reforms and some nationalization of foreign investments. Larraín and Silva modelled the land reforms by turning over some church properties to poor peasants with deferred purchase payment. For the socialists and Marxists, these reforms were too modest. For the landowners and corporate executives, they were a challenge to private property and the status quo.

As the Catholic Church in Chile began to implement the council, this polarization became more pronounced, with a student strike at the Catholic university in 1967, a takeover of the cathedral by a group representing the “young church”, including eight priests, and a synod where the cardinal tried to bring all sides of the church into dialogue. After the 1968 Medellin CELAM conference, the landowners and corporate leaders boycotted the synod. In the 1967 pastoral orientations of the Chilean bishops’ conference, where the commitment to ecumenism was articulated, the bishops recognized the power relationships involved, and the perception by many Protestants of the Catholic Church as an institutional force in society, more than a Christ-centred mission movement. As one Chilean historian notes:

The reception (of Vatican II) has not always been easy in our ecclesial communities. Furthermore, in the years after the council other events have taken place in civil society that have prolonged the reception for a much longer time.
The Protestant reality

Before going on with the Catholic story, it will be helpful to step back and look at the Protestant reality in Chile. Except for a relatively large German Lutheran immigrant community in the south, most Protestants are of North American origin. Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists came first as part of the post-independence merchant communities. In this guise, they arrived first in the port of Valparaíso, then in Santiago and on throughout the country. Next, these groups came as missionaries, even though technically missions were not allowed until 1925.33

However, in 1909, the Pentecostal revival emerged in Chile in a Methodist congregation in Valparaíso. This indigenous Pentecostalism spread during the same period that similar denominations were beginning to form around the world, including the United States. A later wave of Pentecostal missions from the United States, from denominations like the Assemblies of God and the Church of God, arrived in the 1940s. These later denominations carried many of the anti-ecumenical and socially conservative values associated with US evangelicalism and fundamentalism. By mid-20th century, these two strains of evangelicalism and Pentecostalism were the dominant Protestant reality in Chile.34

The older, indigenous Pentecostal churches have a more ecumenical spirit and less ideological affinity for Cold War and US evangelical values.35 In 1961, two of these churches joined the World Council of Churches (WCC), and thus became the first Pentecostal churches in the world to come into the modern ecumenical movement in a formal way. This was also the year of the first official Catholic involvement in the WCC, and full Eastern European Orthodox membership. So, after the Vatican Council, there was a base for collaboration and dialogue among the Orthodox, historic Protestant and Anglican, and even some Pentecostal churches in Chile.

Events that shaped church relations

I now return to the events of the post-conciliar era. In 1970, socialist Salvador Allende was democratically elected president. This event sent shock waves through many in the Catholic Church and much of the Western world, especially US investors and their friends in the Nixon administration. This was near the height of the Cold War.

The church was already polarized over many of the reforms, including social reforms. Cardinal Silva used his role judiciously; he neither boycotted the socialist regime, nor allowed the church to be manipulated. Allende assured the cardinal that the treatment the

33 Araga, op. cit.
34 Sepúlveda Also, De Peregrinos a Ciudadanos, Santiago, Facultad Evangélica de Teología, 1999.
35 http://www.sepade.cl/.
church had received in Cuba would not be the Chilean situation. The cardinal was cautious; he kept communication open but also raised questions. It was in this era that the ecumenical interreligious thanksgiving *Te Deum* replaced the annual Mass that took place with government leaders present. However, the new event took place at the cardinal’s invitation and in the Catholic cathedral.\(^{36}\)

On September 11, 1973 the centre of government, La Moneda Palace, was bombed by elements of the military. Allende died, reportedly at his own hand, and 17 years of a repressive military government was installed. The bishops’ conference and the cardinal were cautiously collaborative with General Pinochet’s regime but without unconditional submission of the church to civil power.

As the violations of human rights, torture and disappearances began to become clear, an ecumenical Committee for Peace was established with a Catholic bishop and Lutheran Bishop Helmut Frenz as co-chairs. As increased pressure was put on the committee, Bishop Frenz was refused re-entry into the country, and the “transitional” junta lingered. Cardinal Silva and his colleagues were forced to shift the human rights work to the status of a Pastoral Vicariate for Solidarity protected by the constitutional status of the archdiocese. The vicariate, while technically an arm of the church, served an ecumenical and even secular community. Its membership included lawyers to work with the human rights violations, psychologists to deal with the victims of torture and the widows of the “disappeared”, and scholars to analyze the social, political and religious situation of the country.\(^{37}\)

Some of the vicariate’s most interesting research concerned the conservative group of evangelicals, who decided to throw their weight behind the military junta, to create a separate annual thanksgiving service in 1975 more laudatory of “what God was doing through the military against the impious atheists”, and to develop special privileges for this “Evangelical Church”.\(^{38}\) Questions of religious liberty and ecumenism, ironically, were most tense and most poignant between the ecumenical churches and religious communities, Catholics among them, with the evangelicals developing special relationships and privileges with the military.

The young Baptist scholar, Humberto Lagos Schuffeneger, who did this research for the Catholic archdiocese’s vicariate, was finally exiled. As a result, he got his theology degree from Geneva and his sociology doctorate from Belgium’s Catholic Louvain University.


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is now director of religious affairs for the Chilean government, with Methodist and Catholic lawyers sharing the work.

Even when the human rights work was moved under the protection of the archdiocese, not only the staff but also the resources came from the international ecumenical community. Cardinal Silva and the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr Philip Potter, continued to work together in advocacy for the human rights of all Chileans at home and abroad, and the WCC continued to help finance the vicariate as it had the Committee for Peace. As some reflect today, suffering, martyrdom and oppression were ironically the seedbed for lasting ecumenical relations.

Significant Protestant authors will admit that the prophetic and ecumenical stand of the Catholic Church during these years had a high cost, including loss of members. However, these commentators suggest that losses would have been higher had the church not supported human rights. Of course, human rights was not the only ecumenical initiative of the Catholic Church but the relationships formed in this struggle, and the tensions among churches that took different positions, provided a particularly important context for developments after the restoration of democracy in 1990.

It is interesting to note that Pentecostal leaders from the older, ecumenical, non-US influenced denominations took some of the more important initiatives in healing the tensions between evangelical Protestants and the Catholic Church. One of these leaders, Juan Sepúlveda, was an important observer-participant in the 2007 Brazil gathering of the CELAM bishops.

Recent developments with ecumenical impact

In 1999, many of the churches of Chile were able to sign an agreement on the mutual recognition of baptism. This may not appear a major advance from a North Atlantic or Christian minority-context perspective but when we see the particular history of the churches in Latin America, and the fact that among the churches signing were three Pentecostal churches, we can all take encouragement from this step. Again, there is much more to say about that interesting process.

The biblical apostolate has been an especially important bridge in the ecumenical work in Latin America and Chile. Many Catholic charismatics invest their energy not only in prayer but also in promotion of Bible study and reading. Each Bible emphasis week has an

41 http://www.iglesia.cl/ to Documentos to 1999 to Errázuriz.
42 http://www.iglesia.cl/ to Recursos Pastorales to Biblia.
ecumenical component, and many Bible studies and Christian base communities have full ecumenical participation. In addition to education and catechesis for ecumenism, the Catholic charismatic movement may be the most important beachhead for the reception of the ecumenical movement in Latin America.

We cannot discount the importance of education. As a leading Chilean religious educator noted early on in the catechetical renewal after the Second Vatican Council:

> The various currents of thought present, and the religious pluralism developing in our society have led the Catholic community to assume a tolerant and ecumenical attitude for evangelical reasons requiring a new manner of educating in the faith.\(^43\)

Key Protestant ecumenical leaders have studied with the Jesuits in the Centro Bellarmino\(^44\) and Louvain in Belgium. Key Catholics have studied Pentecostalism at the doctoral level.\(^45\) The Reformation textbook used in the evangelical seminary in Chile begins with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.\(^46\) Education at every level will be necessary to serve the reception of full religious freedom and equality in society, and the ecumenical priority of the churches.

A more complete look at the story would explore the monthly ecumenical fraternity lunches, the development of ecumenical collaboration in chaplaincies like prisons, and the myriad of human rights organizations.\(^47\) In the autumn of 2007, the Ecumenical Centre *Diego de Medellín*\(^48\) and the Latin American Theological (evangelical) Fraternity\(^49\) in Chile celebrated 25 years of co-operation. Interreligious programmes of B'nai B'rith and the Catholic university all have an ecumenical influence as well.

The words of Cardinal Silva during the council demonstrate how Chilean leadership has differed from the defensive attitude of much Latin American Catholicism:

> We can attribute such increase (in Protestantism) to several reasons. One is the genuine need of the masses for religious experience, which our own ministry has not been able to satisfy fully because of the scarcity of priests at times, because of the aloofness with which some pastors deal with the laity at other times, and mostly because we have based our pastoral action on the assumption that ours is a secure Christianity, when it is really a mission society calling for vital religious revival.\(^50\)

\(^44\) http://www.cisoc.cl/
\(^45\) Robert Mosher, *Pentecostalism and Inculturation in Chile*, Roma, Pontifical Gregorian University, 1996.
\(^47\) For example, http://www.serpachile.cl/.
\(^48\) http://www.diegodemedellin.cl/home1.htm
\(^49\) http://www.cree.cl/
\(^50\) Gill, *op. cit.*, p. 100. Here, we see resonances of the earlier critiques of St. Alberto.
When the bishops' conference presented a pastoral letter in 1992, two years after the return to democracy, the document provided a more differentiated view of pluralism, and an understanding of different approaches to Pentecostalism untypical of the Latin American bishops' conferences, though it was still defensive in mode. A few years later in 1995, Cardinal Carlos Oviedo of Santiago would say:

Whatever interpretation one makes, there is a profound reason (for Protestant growth) that cannot be ignored. The Pentecostals define their pastoral ministry as an act of salvation of the sinner, trusting the Word of the Gospel as the source of repentance and conversion to a life of sainthood, a conversion that is not limited to the moral aspects of life but can also have a physical and psychological dimension. If their new recruits were Catholics before, it is possible to conclude that they did not find in the church a similar vision of the person and his religious conscience.

Since Chile's return to democracy in 1990, there have been three important church and state developments that have made a deep ecumenical impact: the new religious law of 1999 that gives other religious communities in addition to the Catholic and Orthodox churches public juridical status; the 2004 marriage law that, while recognizing religious marriages, allows for civil divorce; a pending debate on education that, whilst primarily focused on undoing the neoliberal capitalist Chicago school economic experiment in education, will undoubtedly have an important religious component.

Unfortunately, trust levels are not such that the religious communities can work together on the role of religion in the public schools although doing so would give them better leverage against the inevitable secularist, anti-religious education lobby. However, the government office of religious affairs, with its Catholic and Protestant staff, will bring together the religious community for dialogue. Chilean Catholic lawyers are writing more about the Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom than are Catholic theologians. It is interesting that the Catholic staff has been assigned to help the evangelical communities in their initiatives on

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In fact, it was quite a surprise to see the Centre for Religious Liberty at the Catholic university, and a network of legal scholars in Latin America, including Catholics, Mormons, Protestants and unbelievers, all committed to promoting liberty in the legal systems in the continent’s various countries.

The Catholic debate about building bridges vs. protecting privilege and defending itself against the “sects” is not over. However, there are hopeful signs of the reception of religious liberty and education for pluralism that will equip Catholics to deal with the present reality, and with the dialogue to which the church is committed.

Anti-Protestant sentiments and anti-Catholic prejudices go deep in Chilean culture. The 40 years of ecumenical dialogue are not widely known. Conversion, prayer and ecumenical formation will be necessary to begin the dialogue of love. However, the signs of reception of the ecumenical reform, especially in the Catholic Church, have much to teach us.

We are early on in the reception of Vatican II, and of the ecumenical movement but every initiative is an important sign of the Spirit’s work in the world. We can be grateful for the initiatives, especially in the Spanish-speaking world, which is clearly the demographic future of Catholicism and where the conciliar movement is not strong. The leadership of Chile provides a unique challenge for us, and an encouraging support for our efforts to respond to Christ’s prayer that all may be one.

59 See, for example, Andrés Arteaga, “Hacia una comprensión del pluralismo. Aproximación desde una perspectiva religiosa y desde una teología cristiana”, Mensaje, no.493, 2000, pp. 29-33 and in Pluralismo, Sociedad y Democracia.
60 The international Pentecostal-Catholic dialogue will be a particularly useful resource: http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/pe-rc/e_pe-rc-info.html. The Conference of Latin American Bishops’ Conferences (CELAM) and the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) have taken this as a priority but the follow up has not been strong. See, Francisco Sampedro Nieto, Ecumenismo y Tercer Milenio: Nuevo Manual de Formación Ecuménica, Bogotá, Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 2005, p. 442.
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