

# OCCASIONAL PAPER

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**A Sign of Hope:  
The Past and Present of the  
Vicaria de la Solidaridad**

**Rev. Cristián Precht Bañados  
October, 1993**

*The Center for Civil and Human Rights  
Notre Dame Law School  
Notre Dame, IN 46556*

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**THE CENTER FOR CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
NOTRE DAME LAW SCHOOL**

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**A Sign of Hope:  
The Past and Present of the  
Vicaria de la Solidaridad**

**Rev. Cristián Precht Bañados  
October, 1993**

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**A SIGN OF HOPE:  
THE PAST AND PRESENT OF THE  
VICARIA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD**

**Rev. Cristián Precht Bañados  
Vicar General for Pastoral Concerns  
Archdiocese of Santiago, Chile  
October 29, 1993**

I feel deeply honored to address you on this solemn occasion in which the Center for Civil and Human Rights of the University of Notre Dame has invited us to celebrate the Twentieth Anniversary of the Committee for Peace and the Vicariate of Solidarity. As requested, I shall try to present to you a brief history of these institutions and draw some conclusions about its main characteristics.

**1. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE VICARIA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD**

September 11, 1973, was a critical day in recent Chilean history. Coup d'état! On that day, the military forces struck a deadly blow to our democratic tradition, putting a violent end to the institutional crisis that had eroded Chile's traditional way of living. Early that morning the armed forces took over and by noon we heard the sad news: President Allende was dead. Next news: curfew at 3:00 p.m. and the list of those who should voluntarily show up at any military unit.

A long nightmare had begun for the Chilean people: curfew, detainees, missing, political parties banned, trade unions under suspicion, universities intervened, deep structural changes, military courts, exiles, and the suffocating rule of fear.

**1.1 The Committee for Peace**

From the first moments of the coup d'état, the Church was in action. As a matter of

fact, on September 13, the Permanent Commission of the Chilean Bishop's Conference issued a statement about the recent events that the ruling military junta disliked. Yet, the Church had been present much before these events. It, in fact, had been present in the days prior to the putsch when Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez had attempted a last moment dialogue between President Allende and Senator Patricio Aylwin, then President of the Christian Democratic party. Too late. While Aylwin and Allende were guests of the Archbishop of Santiago, the army and the navy had already agreed on the outcome of Chile's ideological and political crisis.

After the coup, the people spontaneously turned towards ministers and parish priests, especially in the marginal areas of Santiago. Even some of the *Unidad Popular* leaders also looked for shelter in Church houses. Similar activity was being done by Lutheran and Methodist pastors and by the Jewish Rabbi. This explains why the Church was quick enough to create two ecumenical committees only twenty-five days after the coup. The Committee for the Refugees would look after the undocumented foreigners who had come to participate in Chile's experiment to socialism. The Committee for Cooperation for Peace in Chile (COPACHI) was meant to give support to those Chileans having problems on account of the military rule. The birth certificate of these committees, issued on October 6, 1973, was signed by Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, then Archbishop of Santiago, whose determination was essential to the human rights commitment. It also bears the names to which we are linked in deep gratitude: Catholic Bishop Fernando Ariztía; Lutheran Probst Helmut Frenz; Methodist Pastor Tomas Stevens; Jewish Rabbi Angel Kreiman; and a young Jesuit priest, only recently ordained, Fr. Fernando Salas, S.J., who was appointed Executive Secretary of this Committee.

The only thing they, and the small group of laypeople that gathered around them,<sup>1</sup> knew

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<sup>1</sup> Daniela Sánchez; Jorge Ríos; and José Zalaquett; were among the first who joined COPACHI.

was that they had to act with determination, even though none of them had any experience in the field of human rights, even less in dealing with dictatorships. Thus, COPACHI was born on the fifth floor of the offices of the Archdiocese of Santiago around a table, two chairs, and an old typewriter. Much too soon, it would be organized in all the dioceses of the country and it would grow according to the rhythm of repression. When massive arrests filled the National Stadium with the people thus arrested, it was time to stand in solidarity with their families; when war trials were opened, it was time to organize the juridical department; when union and *campesino* leaders were persecuted, it was time to organize a task force to defend and support them. And during all that time, keeping the lowest of profiles, there was a group of very courageous laypeople together with priests and sisters who would risk their lives hiding the persecuted, facilitating their way through the Andes, or literally *dumping* hundreds of them in the embassies based in Santiago. The group was called "Johann Sebastian Bach," simply because the priest in charge of it loved this baroque composer. You can imagine that Bach had never been so investigated by the secret police as he was in those bad days. Good thing he never got caught, nor did his wonderful orchestra. Thanks to them, there are thousands of Chileans who survived violent persecution.

Later on, in 1974, as a result of an economic crisis, a lot had to be done to support the poorest of the people of Chile. This was the moment for COPACHI to extend its action into social rights and the birth point of soup kitchens, jobless groups, polyclinics, patchwork and other types of popular artistry, and many other initiatives born out of an urgent and creative dialogue between grassroots communities, COPACHI workers, and Church people.

## **1.2 End of COPACHI**

The activity of COPACHI was never well-accepted by the military junta. Its mere existence meant a permanent criticism to its deeds and misdeeds. The information COPACHI

had and shared with human rights groups outside of Chile was something they simply could not bear. Therefore, the relations between the Church and the Government came to its hottest point in the second half of 1975: Helmut Frenz, Lutheran Co-President of COPACHI, was barred from returning to the country, strong pressure was exerted against the evangelical communities which supported our Committee, and, by the end of the year, after offering sanctuary to a group of a group of MIR runaways, sixteen of the COPACHI members -- priests and laypeople -- were arrested on different charges.<sup>2</sup>

Given these circumstances, General Pinochet sent a letter to Cardinal Silva stating that the roots of the difficulties between the Church and the Government could be tracked to the Committee for Peace and, therefore, he strongly demanded the disbandment of COPACHI. Cardinal Silva then consulted with the ecumenical board of the Committee and decided to bring it to an end. Yet, in his reply to General Pinochet, he stated that he was *forced* to do so, but that it should be clear that every religious community which formed the Committee had the right to organize a charitable response to the needs of our people. This was the requiem for COPACHI and the prelude for the VICARIA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD.

### 1.3 Birth of a Vicaría

The Vicaría came to life with strong birth pains. Many disagreed with the Cardinal's decision of bringing COPACHI to an end. Others mistrusted Don Raúl and thought the Church would drop its involvement with the victims of the regime. There was also harsh discussion on what should be the institution to continue the work of COPACHI. Finally, by the end of the

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<sup>2</sup> The group belongs to the MIR, a violent, extreme leftist movement, which was trapped outside of Santiago. Some were killed. Other escaped. If caught, they would be shot without any trial. Even though we did not agree on their position, we could not turn them in, knowing what their fate would be. Among those arrested were Fr. Fernando Salas, S.J.; Patricio Cariola, S.J.; Gerald Whelan, C.S.C.; Fermín Donoso, C.S.C.; and José Zalaquett and Hernán Montealegre, prominent lawyers.



year, after hearing his closest advisers -- among whom were Bishops Enrique Alvear and Jorge Hourton -- Cardinal Silva decided to create a Vicariate. This meant bringing the work of human rights closer to his direct concern. Its name would be "La Vicaría de la Solidaridad," and its executive -- to show its continuity with COPACHI -- decided that its Vicar should be the same priest who had been Executive Secretary of the Committee for Peace since September 1974.

One could write an essay on the reactions to the Cardinal's decision. The important thing is that the Vicaría came to birth and the man called to organize it would be a young, active, well-known lawyer named Javier Luís Egaña. The birth certificate of the Vicaría was dated January 1, 1976. Its requiem was celebrated in Santiago's Cathedral on November 27, 1992, when Chile had positively regained its democracy. While in action, the Vicaría was strongly supported by Cardinal Silva Henríquez, by his successor, Cardinal Juan Francisco Fresno, and by the present Archbishop, Carlos Oviedo Cavada.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. DESCRIPTION OF THE VICARIA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD**

If we were to characterize in two sentences the differences between COPACHI and the Vicaría, we should say that COPACHI was the result of great generosity in a period of emergency. It had to be formed with no previous pattern or experience. The Vicaría was the fruit of mature decisions. It had a framework given by a Pastoral Letter on Solidarity issued by Cardinal Silva in 1975 and, given the Committee's previous experience, it could also be more professional than testimonial.

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<sup>3</sup> Vicars in charge were Rev. Cristian Precht (1976-79), Rev. Juan de Castro (1979-83), Fr. Ignacio Gutiérrez, S.J., (1984), Mons. Santiago Tapia (1985-87), and Mons. Sergio Valech, Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago (1987-92). Executive Secretaries were Mr. Javier Luís Egaña (1976-81), Deacon Enrique Palet (1981-89), Mr. Alejandro González (1989-91), and Mrs. María Luisa Sepúlveda (1992).

To characterize the Vicaría, one may say that some of its traits were:

## **2.1 A holistic Approach to Human Rights**

We believe that human rights stand in solidarity with each other. Therefore, you cannot promote one of them while neglecting the others. Or, conversely, if one is violated, the others are automatically left vulnerable. This holistic approach, nevertheless, has a preferential option for those rights nearer to the right to life. This is essential. And, of course, it highlights and protects the rights of the poor. This is evangelical.

## **2.2 Human Rights are Related to Solidarity**

Human rights are related to solidarity both as an attitude and as a practice. Therefore, we believe that the promotion of human rights means standing next to whoever is wounded, but it also means to try and organize the victims of human rights so that they themselves can take the lead in their defense. This means bringing together human assistance and human promotion.

The spirit of solidarity and the holistic approach to human rights explain why the Vicaría was also committed to trying to solve the most urgent needs of the poor, and thus going beyond the defense of only civil and political rights.

## **2.3 An Option for Active Nonviolence**

The Vicaría clearly took stands in the nonviolent struggle inspired by St. Francis Assisi, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others. This also meant that we would not take the defense of those actively involved in violence unless, of course, they had acted in self-defense. We would present the habeas corpus, but, after thorough consideration, we would not take their legal defense. We thought it was fair to fight against all types of violence, first of all the one proceeding from the State, but also the one coming from certain political groups. This did not mean neglecting the right to defense or to due process. We would never abandon anyone, but we did not want the Church as such to appear ambivalent, defending an option which clearly

stood against what we were promoting.

#### **2.4 A Pastoral Concern**

The Vicaría, as a visible body of the Church, was formed by laypeople and very few priests and sisters. Most of the time, the only priest was its Vicar. Yet there was very fruitful work done jointly by the group as such, considering the promotion and defense of human rights as a pastoral concern of the Church. As a matter of fact, we believe strongly that the promotion of human rights forms part of the core of the gospel message.

#### **2.5 An Ecumenical Commitment**

The Committee for Peace was born ecumenically. This was its testimonial strength and also its weakness vis-à-vis the government. The weakness clearly appeared when pressure was exerted against the communities supporting it. The Vicaría was a visible part of the Santiago Archdiocese, an office under the direct concern of the Cardinal. Therefore, going against the Vicaría meant going explicitly against the Catholic Church. Yet, the Vicaría never lost its ecumenical spirit: some of those who worked in it belonged to other sister churches, and we kept close contact with evangelical and Protestant groups. We also owe a deep debt of gratitude to the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Geneva, and to the National Council of Churches in New York, as well as to other Protestant churches which continuously offered us their moral and economic support. And we, of course, acknowledge the great support we received from Catholic funding agencies and from sister churches such as the U.S. Catholic Conference. The names of Rev. Charles Harper from the W.C.C., Rev. William Wipfler of the N.C.C., and Mr. Tom Quigley of the U.S.C.C., here present, are very dear to us as well as many, many others whom we would like to mention with similar gratitude.

#### **2.6 A Non-Ideological Fraternity**

Not only the Vicaría had an ecumenical spirit. It was also an open house to all of those

who stood for the Charter of Human Rights as stated by the United Nations. This meant that among the workers of the Vicaría, there were Catholic and non-Catholics, Christians and non-Christians, believers and nonbelievers. As a matter of fact, our only martyr was a member of the Communist Party, *José Manuel Parada*, a close friend and loyal servant of the cause of human rights, who was killed in a very cruel way. He not only worked in the Vicaría, but, due to his outstanding human qualities, was entitled to very special responsibilities.

## 2.7 An Evangelical Inspiration

Last but not least, the Vicaría was inspired in its action by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially in the image and the text of the Good Samaritan. Our greatest desire, shared by all of those who took part in this challenging task, was to become and to be seen as the Good Samaritan who is ready to give a hand to anyone who is wounded, regardless of his or her religion, ideology, or political commitment. We also wanted to be a concrete expression of the Church of Vatican II and of Medellín and Puebla, Episcopal assemblies which marked our options in Latin America.

Showing deep wisdom, Pope John Paul II has repeatedly told us that humankind is the first path the Church should follow. She does not exist to look after herself but to offer to humankind what She has received from the Lord. Her aim is to help develop the human being in all of his or her dimensions, for God is glorified when each one of His creatures attains life in plenitude.

The Vicaría de la Solidaridad loyally tried to follow this path bearing the unavoidable weaknesses of any human endeavor. Nevertheless, in doing so, the Vicaría became aware that many other people had taken the same path. As we have just mentioned, some of them believed in Jesus, others did not; some believed in God, others did not; some had similar society projects, others had very different ones . . . And yet, everyone felt summoned by the dignity of the

human person and wanted to take a leading role in developing a humanism able to restore in Chile our ability to live together. It is my honor to tell you how nice it was to work hand-in-hand with up-till-then unknown people or with some others whom we would have considered strangers in earlier times. It was important to all of us to discover our mutual humanity and to respect our different cultural backgrounds. Again, the fundamental lesson given by the Good Samaritan was relevant to this situation. Whenever we make the decision to become fellow persons, many barriers are removed and we rediscover our vocation and our willingness to work together in pursuit of major goods.

### **3. WITNESSING TO THE GOSPEL**

#### **3.1 Farewell to the Vicaría de la Solidaridad**

It was very difficult to decide that the time had come for the Vicaría de la Solidaridad to come to an end. It was even more difficult for those of us who had taken active part in its creation. Yet, we are convinced that knowing how to live also means knowing how to die. There is nothing worse than those persons who never retire and desperately cling to their positions . . . and nothing worse than those groups -- or even congregations -- who never pass away. We believe in the wisdom of the grain of wheat that, by freely giving in, is able to bear fruit in many other ways.

The Vicaría de la Solidaridad chose the path of the grain of wheat and, in the last days of November of 1992, handed over its treasures to other groups and institutions that may continue serving those who need it. La Agrupación de Detenidos-Desaparecidos ("The Relatives of the Missing") is an independent association and works with FASIC, the social service organization of the Christian churches. Some cases still in court were taken over by the same lawyers backed up by the Corporación de Reparación y Reconciliación, created upon the advice of the **Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation**. And the

archives of the Vicaría, which were courageously defended by Bishop Sergio Valech, are now in the hands of a newly created Church organization. And the spirit of the Vicariate of Solidarity should continue in the Vicariate for Social Pastoral (Vicaría de Pastoral Social), created to meet the challenges coming from the needs of the poor and the suffering in Chile's actual condition. Both organizations are headed by Monsignor Valech and some of the people that had worked till the end in the Vicariate of Solidarity.

### **3.2 The Vicaría, Banner of Hope**

In the first pages of the Bible, there are two stories about the first act of Creation. One of them speaks to us of God as an expert potter. He does not say a word, yet Creation is borne out of His mighty hands. The other text reveals to us that Creation rose up from the might of the Word of God.

Coming back to the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, I think that in the years to come, it will be remembered more by its deeds than by its words, by the clay in the hands of the potter rather than by its word. As a matter of fact, in the heart of most Chileans, the Vicaría is spontaneously associated with a sign of compassion, a witness to the truth, and a banner of hope.

Rev. Cristián Precht Bañados  
Vicar General for Pastoral Concerns  
Archdiocese of Santiago, Chile

Notre Dame du Lac, October 29, 1993

**GRACIAS, VICARIA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD  
(MY GRATITUDE TO THE VICARIA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD)**

**Speech by  
H.E. the President of Chile, Patricio Aylwin Azócar,  
on the Sixteenth Anniversary of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad  
October 3, 1991**

**1. THE COMMITTEE FOR PEACE AND THE VICARIATE FOR SOLIDARITY**

I have accepted with real pleasure the cordial invitation of Bishop Sergio Valech to take part in the celebration of this anniversary of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad and of its predecessor, the Committee for Peace in Chile. I believe it is essentially an act of justice solemnly to call to mind and attest to the great significance of its deeds during eighteen years of altruistic and accurate work worthy of gratitude and admiration. I have come here in my capacity as President of the Nation to pay heartfelt homage to those who have devoted so much effort and generosity to the activities of this institution. I am very well aware of the risks each one of them took in deciding to promote and defend human rights. The majority among them had to cope with criticism and incomprehension; some had to undergo imprisonment or exile; many of them were persecuted and harassed; and all had to endure the violent death met by José Manuel Parada. Each and every one of them shared the pains and sufferings of the many thousands of Chileans who turned to the Vicaría de la Solidaridad for help, or collaborated in dozens of institutions that were created along with this Vicariate.

This is not the first time that I have come to visit this institution. I remember taking part in the formal celebrations organized by the Church to commemorate the *Human Rights Year* in 1978. Several meetings of union and slum leaders, as well as of professionals, artists, and

intellectuals, were held then to develop Chile's awareness of the dignity of the human person. These events were inspired by the meaningful slogan: "Everyone has the right to be a person." If we look back on those distant days, it becomes amazing to even realize that there was then a need to assert such a solid and indisputable truth. In that year, when the corpses of missing detainees buried in Lonquén were found, this Vicariate pointed out our essential vocation as human beings.

In those times when political parties had been banned and their activities restrained, it was difficult and even dangerous to hold meetings in order to reach agreements about the projects we could conceive for Chile's welfare; such activities aroused suspicion. At the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, the Church organized meetings, workshops, seminars, and discussions that helped to work out agreements among persons with differing points of view. In this way, a positive spirit developed among Chileans with differing ideologies but sharing the common desire to restore a free and democratic coexistence. This spirit would find its concrete expression in several institutions such as the Chilean Human Rights Commission and the Group of Constitutional Studies, also known as the Group of the Twenty-Four.

Therefore, I am certainly expressing the common feeling of most Chileans when I join the celebration of this anniversary of the Vicariate to express my gratitude to its Board of Directors, to its staff and collaborators, to all those who served as Vicars and, in particular, to its founder, H.E. Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez. His name and those of all these persons are engraved on the Chilean soul that Cardinal Silva taught us to recognize, love, and respect.

It is odd that we recapture the past when our eyes are fixed on the future. However, it is necessary to do so. Besides the need to pay a debt of gratitude, all people need to be aware of their memory. Otherwise, they lose their identity, betray their roots, and run the risk of repeating the same mistakes they made in the past. Along these lines and looking into the



future, I would like to share my thoughts on the outstanding legacy that this Vicariate has handed down to us.

## **2. EXAMPLE OF HUMANITY AND TRUTH**

The Vicaría de la Solidaridad and what it has been able to accomplish represent to us a clear witness to a deep sense of humanity and truth.

A sign of humanity because at a time when peaceful coexistence among Chileans broke into a crisis, when the country was divided between friends and foes, when rights were infringed upon, and when law enforcement was restricted, there was here an institution and a group of persons who did not fail to perceive the significance of life. An example of humanity when they welcomed the needy, regardless of their origin. A sign of humanity to believe that we human beings can be adversaries but never enemies. It is a sign of humanity to summon people adhering to different ideologies and religious creeds to help them find a common course of action to serve humankind. A sign of humanity and magnanimity to spare no effort when meeting the crying needs of people, especially the poor, ignoring the cost of that endeavor. The absence of a sense of humanity and of people to put it into practice paves the way for the establishment of repressive and subversive violence as a means to solve conflicts among people - a painful lesson we have learned from history.

Therefore, I think the promotion of human rights in the aggregate -- civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights -- as undertaken by the Church and, particularly, by the Vicariate, is an endeavor that advances the reconciliation between conflicting parties. Promoting and defending human rights is by nature a conciliatory task. Caring about the respect for men and women, particularly and specifically, is encouraging reconciliation. It is a conciliatory gesture to struggle for the rule of law. It is a conciliatory gesture to meet the most urgent needs of every human being. All these efforts have laid the foundations for reconciliation.

Another critical factor making for reconciliation is truth. The truthful defense of human rights so bravely conducted by the Vicaría de la Solidaridad is worthy of admiration. This institution has helped to establish the truth through accurate and well-grounded accusations, using nouns and not adjectives. It has elicited the truth through the patient and painful collection of data that have helped in the legal defense of prisoners and exiles, and even in the search and posthumous identification of arrested and missing persons. It has sought the truth when reminding us -- through its work and words -- that human rights are God's rights.

The high regard and admiration these deeds deserve have spread beyond the Chilean limits, inspiring worldwide respect and gratitude for a Church institution that has worked with sheer professionalism, efficiency, and truthfulness. Human rights awards granted to the Vicariate are a testimony to these qualities.

As we know, many emotional as well as unfair charges were made against the Vicariate. However, nobody has ever been able to claim that it invented or misrepresented the facts, or magnified figures and events. In every serious legal inquiry, when facts were doubtful, the testimony of the Vicariate has prevailed on account of its thoroughness and truthfulness.

Truth and reconciliation are two concepts, two appeals, two missions that we wanted to give to the commission charged with the responsibility of submitting to the country a serious, comprehensive, objective, and dispassionate report on the dreadful ordeal that many Chileans went through during the years 1973-1990. This has been a way for citizens to receive the exemplary legacy of an ecclesiastical institution. Nobody can ignore the significant contribution that the Vicariate made to the development of the report of the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation.

I cannot conclude my address without pointing to the social work done by this Vicariate. Linked with its name are the solidarity workshops, children's dining rooms, community feeding

services, school supporting services, organized group wholesale purchase, urban settlements, solidarity polyclinics, and so many other organizations created and encouraged to meet the everyday urgent needs of people. I know very well that these endeavors cannot be not ascribed solely to the Vicariate and that it has never claimed the credit for that. This shows us the meaning of the word selflessness: to work with a view of providing a service, without resorting to religious or, even less, political canvassing, and showing radical respect for grassroots organizations. I have laid special emphasis on the massive social work done by this institution because I think the country knows pretty well and appreciates the legal assistance provided by the Vicariate, but is not aware of the extent of the social work it has carried out for the benefit of thousands of Chileans.

Today, when the country has taken again the democratic way, this social work and the organizations they have given rise to are gradually rejoining the social structure to which they belong, and are beginning to receive government support through FOSIS programs and the activities of ministries connected with social welfare. For the Government I preside over, grassroots organizations are a typical feature of Chilean spirit. They are not an artifice. The Government respects their autonomy and their own traits, and knows well that these go beyond the scope of political parties, for people organize on a problem-solving basis and not in terms of political or ideological options.

We know there is still much to do in this field. As I have said so many times, we are determined to put a social emphasis in the current economic system, sparing no effort and devoting most of our resources to assist the needy. In the human society we are trying to build, they must be our main concern.

To end these reflections, I do not find a better word to express my feelings about the work of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad than "thanks." Thanks are due to its staff and to its board.

I give special thanks to those who have conducted and inspired this task. My heartfelt thanks go to those who relieved the pain and defended the rights of so many Chileans. My thanks go to the Archbishop of Santiago and to the Vicar for the Vicariate of Solidarity.

Thank you very much!

Santiago, October 3, 1991  
Day of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad

**HOMILY AT THE CLOSING LITURGY  
FOR THE VICARIA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD**

**The Most Reverend Carlos Oviedo Cavada  
Archbishop of Santiago  
November 27, 1992**

We come together today in our Cathedral gratefully to bring to mind some memories we have in our hearts and to inaugurate a future of new challenges. We leave behind a historic period during which, as everybody recognizes, the Vicaría de la Solidaridad of the Archdiocese of Santiago, played a providential role. Now its mission comes to an end and it opens the way to the Vicaría de Pastoral Social (Social Pastoral Vicariate), which in turn will deal with new challenges and demands resulting from the present situation in Chile.

**1. GRATEFUL EVOCATION**

**1.1 The Committee for Promoting Peace in Chile (COPACHI)**

It is impossible to talk about the Vicaría de la Solidaridad without mentioning the Committee for Promoting Peace in Chile, which H.E. Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, as well as ministers from other Christian Churches and the Jewish Chief Rabbi, had the courage to create. This prophetic institution was the first urgent response given by the Church in a country where an institutional crisis had broken out, where fraternal coexistence was badly damaged and the immediate future was more than uncertain.

It was urgent to take action. It was necessary to safeguard people's lives, regardless of their political commitments and ideologies. It was necessary to safeguard a wounded country plunged into confrontation, and try to make way for reconciliation. It was necessary to create a symbol that should incarnate hope, which then was ever more necessary. Thus, a Committee

was developed, strong in its testimony, yet to some extent improvised; it gained experience in the course of its development, and spread to almost all the dioceses in the country. Together with the name of Cardinal Silva, that we mention with special affection, the faces and the names of all those who worked in this generous institution are engraved in our heart. We cannot fail to mention Monsignor Fernando Ariztía, then Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago; Probst Helmut Frenz, then President of the Lutheran Evangelical Church; Methodist Pastor Thomas Stevens; Rabbi Angel Kreiman; Father Patricio Cariola, S.J.; and, closely linked to them, Father Fernando Salas, S.J., the first Executive Secretary of the Committee. Among the first to collaborate during those early days, we are gratefully in debt to José Zalaquett, Daniela Sánchez, Pilar Videla, Jorge Ríos, and María Luisa Sepúlveda, to just mention a few on behalf of all those generous workers of peace.

It was not easy for the Committee to carry out its mission. It met with the typical difficulties of any such initiative taken under a state of emergency, as well as with misjudgment which, sometimes stirred by passion, bordered on intolerance. However, this valuable sign of contradiction made its way with inspiration and determination. Thanks to it, thousands of Chileans found shelter, warmth, and understanding, and many other Chileans' lives literally were saved, thanks to COPACHI.

## **1.2 La Vicaría de la Solidaridad**

The opposition to the Committee turned unbearable. It was pointed at as the main cause of strong tensions between the Church and the Government. Several members of its staff as well as some priests were arrested. Urged on by these compelling circumstances, Cardinal Raúl Silva decided to close down the Committee for Promoting Peace, but in doing so he strongly stated that every Church, in fidelity to the Lord's command, would continue in all conscience with its humanitarian work. Thus, on January 1, 1976, he created the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, and

appointed Monsignor Cristián Precht as its first Vicar and Mr. Javier Luis Egaña, a young lawyer, as its Executive Secretary; their mission was to continue and introduce new changes in the work of the Committee for Peace. The Cardinal's decision was to create an institution that would stand in solidarity with all types of sufferings, being faithful to the Gospel's inspiration, and especially incarnating this commandment of love in the defense and promotion of human rights, with a holistic approach to them, as an essential condition to reestablish human dignity.

The work of this Vicariate is familiar to many people and only God knows with how much love it was done. Public opinion witnessed, in those days, several controversies over the activities of the Vicariate but, no doubt, in the hearts of the suffering and in the silent memory of God, there is a preferential place for all those who, even at risk to their own life, decided to dismount their horses rather than to sidestep a person lying wounded on the road. It is not the right moment to draw definitive conclusions. History will take on that task. For the time being, it is important to accept its heritage so that its deeds may inspire those institutions that in the near future will follow the footsteps of the Good Samaritan.

## **2. A SIGN OF LOVE AND HOPE**

### **2.1. The Wounded on the Road**

The biblical readings proclaimed in this Liturgy reveal to us the signs of the new times, the new heaven, and the new earth we are looking for and helping to forge. In both of them, God's look is fixed on the human being who is wounded and humiliated. When God definitely reigns over humankind, there will be no more death, crying, or sorrow. All the same, however much we try to live in harmony at this stage of history, we leave legions of wounded fellow human beings that lie down about to die at the roadside. Many people decide to continue their journey. They have neither the time nor the intention to dismount from their horses to comfort a dying person. They never lack excuses: "He is not one of us" or "Who knows what he has

done?" On the other hand, not too many are aware that history is defined by the attitude we take towards the fallen and by the feeling moved by their injuries. For Christians, this is mandatory; it is not optional. Our Christian identity and the salvation brought by God to the injured depends on the way we treat the fallen through history. As to this point, the Gospel is perfectly clear, because Jesus Himself commanded us that we treat everybody as our fellow creatures, especially those who have been humiliated.

The activities of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad have renewed among us the energy of the parable of the Good Samaritan. And this is a major and preferential strength that moves us all. Therefore, today, when the State institutions promote the defense of political and civil rights and, thanks to the good judgment shown by Chilean people, we do not have to mourn new missing persons and exiles, an important part of the Vicariate can come to an end. It is true that there are many pending issues in this field. These are handled by several State and civil agencies, among which I would like to mention the Christian Churches' Foundation for Social Relief and Welfare (FASIC). However, beyond these tasks derived from the past, the mandate that Society and the Church look after these rights is still in force until they become a part of our everyday culture and duly express the Chilean soul. If the Church regards human rights as God's rights, society as a whole should deem the basic rights of life, integrity, and liberty, as a solid foundation to avoid building on sand alone.

## **2.2 The Path of Humankind**

Showing deep wisdom, Pope John Paul II has repeatedly told us that humankind is the first path the Church should follow. She does not exist to look after herself, but to offer to humankind what She has received from the Lord. Her aim is to develop a human being in all of his or her dimensions, for God is glorified when each one of his creatures attains life in plenitude.



The Vicaría de la Solidaridad has loyally tried to follow this path bearing the unavoidable weaknesses of any human endeavor. Nevertheless, in following this path, the Vicaría became aware that many other people had taken the same path: some of them believed in Jesus, others did not; some believed in God, others did not; some had similar society projects, others' were very different . . . And yet, everyone felt summoned by the human being and wanted to take a leading role in a humanism able to restore our ability to coexist in dignity. How nice it was to work shoulder-to-shoulder with up-till-then unknown people or with some others whom we would have considered strangers in earlier times. It was important to all of us to discover our mutual humanity and to respect our different cultural backgrounds. Again, the fundamental lesson given by the Good Samaritan was relevant to this situation. Whenever we take the decision to become fellow creatures, many barriers are removed and we discover our willingness to work together in pursuit of major goods.

### **2.3 Human Rights and Reconciliation**

The activities of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad -- carried out with a holistic understanding of the human being -- dealt with civil, political, economic, and social rights, finding in practice their mutual relationship. Thus, it conveyed through its mission that human dignity in its integrity is an up-to-date way to translate the mission of Our Lord Jesus Christ, although not the only one. He has come to welcome into the heart of life those who, for several reasons, are suffering or have suffered some kind of exclusion. This is a way to denounce our excluding instincts and to announce that if any single human being or all of humankind wants to be saved, it must establish a close relationship with people who are being excluded. This explains why Jesus wants to be recognized among the hungry and the thirsty, among people who are destitute or imprisoned, as well as among those that Society considers to be impure or undesirable. He teaches us through His acts. And He proclaims it compulsorily in the parable of the final

judgment (Cf. Math. 25).

In the ministry of Jesus, the Good Samaritan, there is a strong call to bring about reconciliation. He defends those who are wounded, persecuted, or excluded, and in doing so, He provides the basis to promote a climate of deep understanding of persons with persons, individuals with society, and every human being with his or her own conscience of humanity. In short, He provides reconciliation of humanity with God. Consequently, we think that both the ministry of Cardinal Silva Henríquez as well as that of Cardinal Juan Francisco Fresno are extremely consistent and convergent. Both were inspired by the evangelical command of promoting human dignity and by the consequent passion for law and justice which provides the foundation for consistent social reconciliation.

We are quite aware that this task is not yet finished. There is still a long way to go before the sap of truth and justice helps us approach the grace of reconciliation and forgiveness. But if we view the country in its historical perspective, we have to thank the Lord and so many people for all that we have been able to achieve so far.

Along these lines, the existence of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad that defended justice while searching for the indisputable truth, that consistently denounced the violations of human rights, that trusted and supported the grassroots organizations, that instilled in many people the principles of social doctrine and the supremacy of law over arbitrary procedures, and that always opted for nonviolent procedures, has been a ministry that has promoted a climate of deep understanding and reconciliation. Today, when most of the passions that darkened our conscience have passed away, and when the channels of information leading to the truth about past events have been opened, we see that many people who at one time misjudged the mission of the Vicaría have realized that the restoration of a peaceful coexistence in our country is, to a great extent, the result of the persistent efforts of this church institution and of so many others

who, with similar inspiration, resolutely decided to serve mankind.

## **2.4 A Sign of Hope**

Were it necessary to look for a phrase to characterize the work of the Vicaría which is coming to an end, we would have to look for it under the sign of hope. This is what many experienced when being persecuted and found the Vicaría walking alongside with them. Hope is that what the many felt who took part in soup kitchens, in polyclinics, in community food services, or in organized group wholesale purchasing. Hope is what they rediscovered in the job centers for the unemployed and in the homeless committees. They all felt, and have expressed it, that in the Church and in the Vicaría, they felt at home and found a close friend who held out a hand to them. And even those who never turned to the Vicariate for help knew that, in case of need, there always was a door to knock at and an open heart that showed no discrimination.

This is the sign of hope that today the Church of Santiago makes a solemn pledge to keep alive and in force. The work of this Vicariate comes to an end, but solidarity does not end. Part of the task has been achieved, thanks to God, but we must follow up on another equally important endeavor regarding the living conditions of the poor and the urgency about creating a solidarity culture among us, as requested during his visit to Chile by Pope John Paul II. It is true that today the emergency period has gone away; but the love of Christ urging our heart and our conscience still remains. Unfortunately, there are still many brothers lying at the roadside, victims of exclusion, poverty, terminal illnesses like AIDS, unfair treatment as inflicted on some children and old people; they are also victims of the inability of society to offer equal prospects to all the young people it invites into life. Those of us who defended life with so much zeal in recent years must take on that endeavor in order to promote the culture of life where the culture of death prevails, adopting several forms that have been denounced time and again. On this

account, the Church that defends life wants to set itself up as a champion of the poor's life quality. It is ready to keep on dismounting its horse to apply to wounds the salve of relief, company, healing, and salvation. It looks for and will continue looking for honest innkeepers willing to help watch over people who are excluded. And for that purpose, it is ready to announce, denounce, and exhort to conversion, convinced as it is that the preferential option for the poor and the suffering is a theological, and therefore, deeply religious option. It is also an urging option, as said Pope John Paul II when visiting Chile, because "the poor cannot wait." And he insisted upon this point a few weeks ago during the IV Plenary Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

### **3. A GRATEFUL FAREWELL**

We started these words by gratefully evoking the Pro-Peace Committee and the Vicaría de la Solidaridad. We do it with affection and as an act of justice. To conclude these reflections, I would like to reaffirm my gratitude. And not only out of a sense of duty. The most important and meaningful memorial of the Church is the Eucharist, in which the Lord teaches us that the way to blessing is engraved on the heart of life.

I bless and thank each one of the workers who, at the Plaza de Armas and in the areas, parishes, and communities of Santiago, were living examples of solidarity. Those who experienced pain, tiredness, and misjudgment, sometimes having a rough time, now have the satisfaction of having accomplished their mission and the deep and innermost pleasure of having done good without discrimination among persons.

I bless and thank all of those who, to the best of their ability, were able to welcome and to keep company. Our work was never intended to be a proselytizing or an advertising campaign. We only wanted to perform our duty with love and offer for free what God gave us for free. On account of their closeness to this Vicariate and the great suffering they have

endured, I want to incarnate my gratitude in the Association of Relatives of Missing Detainees.

Before you, we reaffirm our pledge to continue with this task wherever there is pain, unfairness, or exclusion. In this connection, in Santiago there is a Vicariate of Worker's Pastoral Affairs, a Vicariate of Young Hope, and the newly created Vicaría de Pastoral Social.

I bless and thank counterpart churches, other Christian churches, assistance and social welfare and promotion foundations, the European Community, and friendly nations and their honorable representatives in Chile. My gratefulness is symbolized by the persistent actions of European and American Catholics, as well as by the World Council of Churches and Pastor Charles Harper, friend and brother of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

Finally, I bless and thank the faithful servants of the Church of Santiago, lay people and priests, who worked with love and faith to carry on this task. I would like to express my personal and ecclesiastical gratitude to Monsignor Sergio Valech, my Assistant Bishop who served for so many years as Vicar of this Vicariate. I thank with similar affection his predecessors; among them, and for reasons known to all of you, I will make special mention of Monsignor Santiago Tapia, of venerated memory. And I want to pay homage to the first Vicars, Monsignor Cristián Precht and Monsignor Juan de Castro, as well as to the first Executive Secretaries, Javier Luis Egaña, Enrique Palet, Alejandro González, and the current Secretary, María Luisa Sepúlveda. All of them have shown how fruitful the collaboration between lay people and priests can be. By carrying out this common mission, the Lord's Church is forged with a variety of charisms and functions, combining inspiration with efficiency, testimony, and ministry. Thus, acting as a team, we could help the Vicariate to become a community of persons that stood out before the country and the world as a sign bearing the Gospel of Jesus.

In a like manner, even without words, the Blessed Virgin Mary bore that Gospel in her bosom, transforming her faith into service and praise. Drawing on that blessed experience, I

can recognize in its grateful song the greatness of the Lord who gives dignity back to those who are helpless and lavishes food and justice on those who are hungry. May it inspire also any service rendered for the sake of life which, though reaching maturity in the cross of every Good Friday, reaches staggering prime at the dawn of Resurrection. Then the Lord definitely rises from death like "alpha and omega, the beginning and the end," inaugurating a new world that will be the final dwelling of God among his people.

Carlos Oviedo Cavada  
Archbishop of Santiago  
Santiago's Cathedral, November 27, 1992