

## READING 4

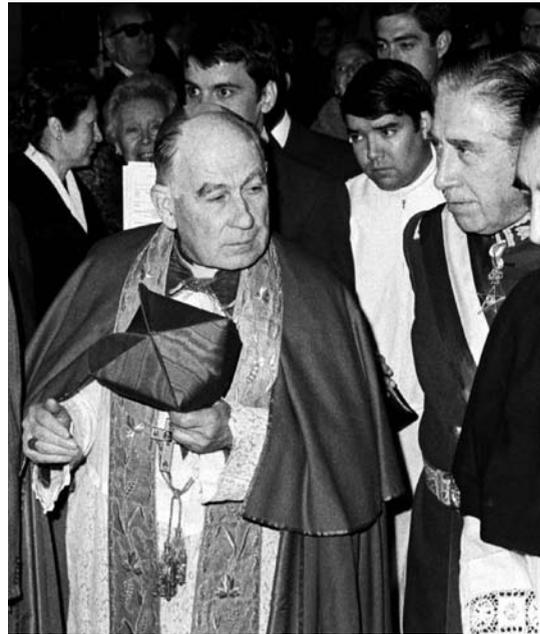
### *Taking a Stand Against Pinochet: The Catholic Church and the Disappeared*

In Pinochet's Chile, Roman Catholic priests played a central role in defending the rights of the poor and the disenfranchised. Early in her search for her brother, Violeta Morales found the church her only support:

After our brother's disappearance, we began looking for him everywhere—like all the relatives of the detained. . . . We began doing things immediately and found out that at the Pro-Paz Committee, which was located on Santa Monica Street, they were getting all types of reports about abuses and violations of human rights. We began looking for our brother in jails, cemeteries, morgues, commissaries, and anywhere a military regiment existed. We also went to the law courts, and at many of the places we went, they received us with machine guns just for asking questions and for going around searching for the detained-disappeared. We sent thousands of letters abroad asking for help as well. We even went so far as sending letters to the leaders of the dictatorship themselves, but nothing came of all this.<sup>1</sup>

The man behind the interfaith Comité Pro-Paz was Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez. Shortly after the coup, Silva, who had served as archbishop of Santiago since the 1960s, stepped into the role of “upstander,” a term the author and activist Samantha Power coined to distinguish people who stand up to injustice—often at great personal risk—from “bystanders.”

The clampdown on newspapers, radio and television stations, and political parties left the church the sole remaining public voice. Soon after the coup, Silva and other church leaders published a declaration condemning and expressing sorrow for the



AP Photo/Santiago Llanquin

**Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez (center) was instrumental in speaking out against General Pinochet (right of Silva) and his abuse of human rights. Cardinal Silva established the Comité Pro-Paz to help families of the disappeared.**

bloodshed. This was a fundamental turning point for many members of the Chilean clergy: some of them, including Cardinal Silva, had previously believed that only a military intervention could restore law and order. The cardinal visited the National Stadium and, shocked by the scale of the government crackdown, instructed his aides to begin collecting information from the thousands flocking to the church for refuge. Silva's actions led to an open conflict with Pinochet, who did not hesitate to threaten the church and the Comité Pro-Paz.

Undeterred, the organization soon “had established a large network in order to help relatives of the disappeared and had provided information to the press and international organizations regarding human rights abuses in Chile. . . . By mid-1974 [it] had 103 staff members in Santiago and 95 others in the provinces.”<sup>2</sup> The work of the Comité Pro-Paz helped Violeta Morales realize that she was not alone in her search. She tells us that

At the Pro-Paz Committee we realized that every day more people were arriving with problems like ours. After getting together with all these people, we decided to form a coordinating committee to get better organized. Without naming the people involved, we took turns directing the organization so that everyone would have a chance to learn and gain experience looking for help in our cause. Father Daniel, a French priest who was expelled from Chile and [exiled to] Peru, together with a nun called Maria de los Angeles, were the first ones to welcome us into the Pro-Paz Committee. They received us and gave us support and comfort in the first hours of desperation and grief.<sup>3</sup>

All together, the Comité Pro-Paz established 24 offices, all of them working under constant threats and routine harassment by the authorities. At the end of 1975, Pinochet announced that the dissident group had been banned once and for all.

In response, Cardinal Silva founded Vicaría de la Solidaridad on January 1, 1976, to carry on the work of the Comité Pro-Paz. As part of the archdiocese, the new group was protected under the country’s religious laws: the church was recognized as an independent political entity and a sanctuary. The vicariate managed to continue its work until the end of the dictatorship.

Many who sought the assistance of the



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**Arpillera 4: After the disappearance of their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons, women often gathered at soup kitchens organized by the church where they sought comfort and moral support.**

new organization had suffered a double blow: deprived of a family member, they themselves were often targeted because of their political beliefs. Author Isabel Allende, niece of the slain president, explains:

Poor women in the shantytowns were the main victims of the new regime. Thousands of them became the only providers for their homes, as their husbands, fathers, and sons disappeared or roamed the country looking for menial jobs. Repression destroyed their families, extreme poverty paralyzed them, and fear condemned them to silence.<sup>4</sup>

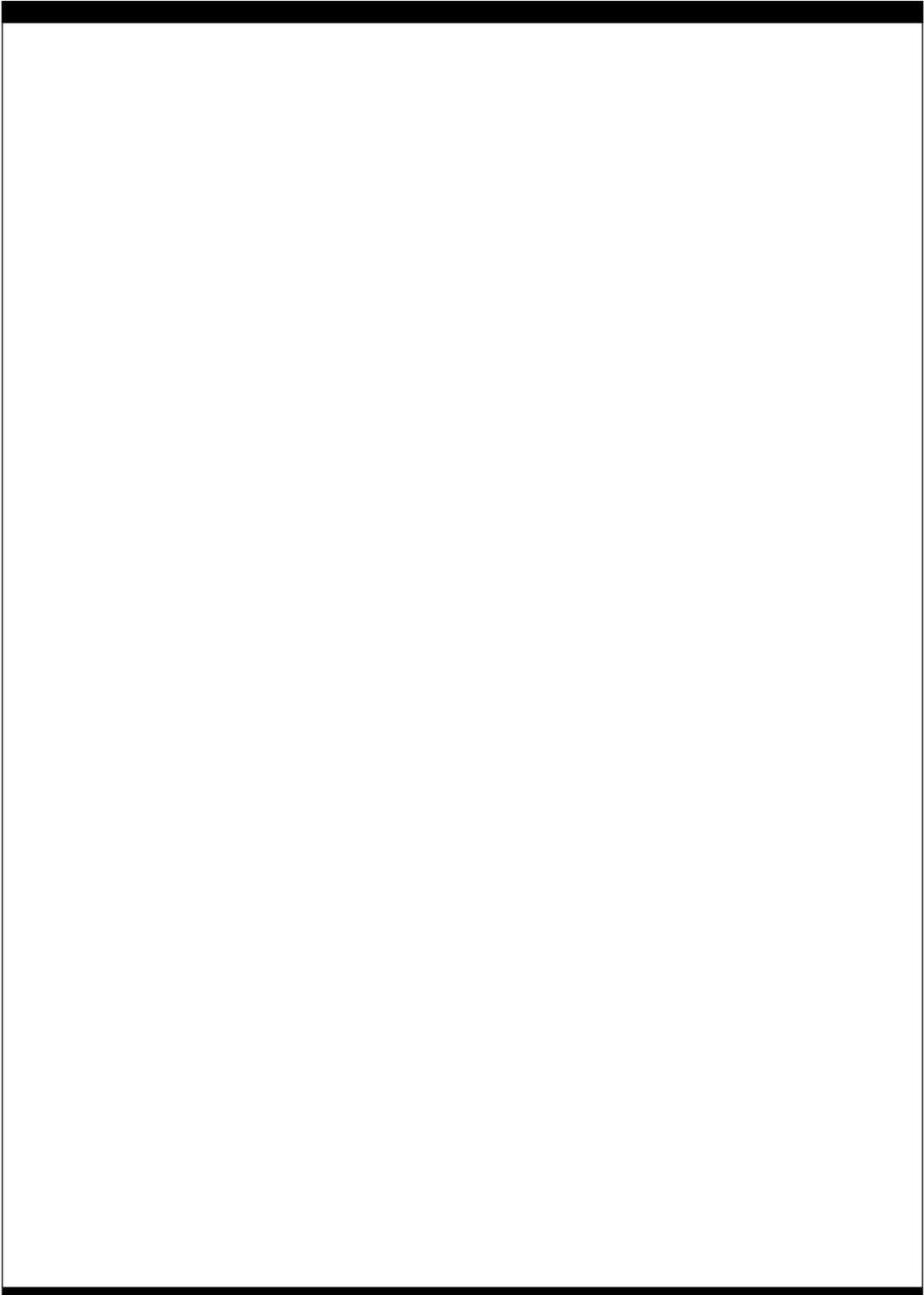
As they struggled along, these women ceased to think and act as victims and became politically active. As Violeta Morales explains, this was a profound change: “We were used to the fact that here in Chile it was the men who got involved in politics, while we women dedicated ourselves to our homes and to our children, nothing more.”<sup>5</sup> Under the church’s protection they began to heal their wounded families even as they took jobs outside the home for the first time. And they found their voice.

**“CHILE UNDER THE GUN,”  
AN EXCERPT FROM  
*MY INVENTED COUNTRY* BY ISABEL ALLENDE**

In her book, *My Invented Country: A Nostalgic Journey Through Chile*, the author, playwright, and novelist Isabel Allende (niece of Salvador Allende) discusses the painful issue of Chileans’ failure to stand up to the everyday crimes of the dictatorship. Without discounting the challenges Allende’s presidency faced, Isabel Allende explores the enduring weakness of democratic culture in Chile. “The hard question,” she claims, “is why at least one third of Chile’s total population backed the dictatorship.” She suggests that a large segment of society approved of the actions taken by the dictatorial regime and was quite ready to trade civil liberties for a certain kind of order and stability. She also says that while fear of repression led some to support the harsh dictator, the totalitarian regime spoke to a wider authoritarian tendency within society fundamentally at odds with democracy.

To view the excerpt, visit:

<http://news.independent.co.uk/world/americas/article2067626.ece>



## CONNECTIONS

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1. Where can victims of a repressive society find solace, support, and venues to express their outrage? How can they speak when their governments work to silence all criticism?
2. What qualities and authority do religious leaders like Cardinal Silva bring to the struggle against abusive regimes? What advantages might they have had that others did not?
3. Cardinal Silva was an “upstander.” Why do some people and institutions speak out against injustice while others remain silent?
4. In her pioneering work, *Accounting for Genocide* (Free Press, 1979), sociologist Helen Fein defines the circle of people to whom we owe some sort of debt as our “universe of obligation.” What was Cardinal Silva’s universe of obligation after the coup? What is your universe of obligation?
5. In the essay, Isabel Allende explains that a large segment of the Chilean population chose to be bystanders to the actions of the dictatorship; many, she argues, even welcomed it. According to Allende, what reasons motivated supporters of the dictatorship? Why do you think some people and institutions support regimes that violate human rights?

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1 Marjorie Agosín, *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: The Arpillera Movement in Chile* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., forthcoming).

2 Mario I. Aguilar, “Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, The Catholic Church, and the Pinochet Regime, 1973–1980: Public Responses to a National Security State,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 8, no. 4 (October 2003), 724.

3 Agosín, *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*.

4 Isabel Allende, “Foreword,” *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*.

5 Agosín, *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*.