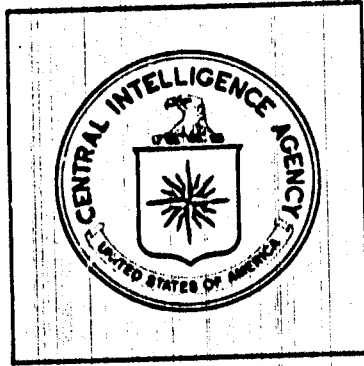


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Chile: Church Again Blasts Regime

The Chilean Catholic Church has taken another step toward open criticism of the junta this week by publishing a document implying strong condemnation of the government's human rights stand. In public statements last month, church leaders hinted that they were becoming impatient with the lack of progress in curbing the more flagrant abuses by security and intelligence forces. ([REDACTED])

Although the government apparently is not taken to task directly in the document drafted by the bishops, it is clear that the regime is the unspoken target. The statement emphasizes that there will not be any real peace in Chile until its citizens enjoy "the right to physical and moral integrity." In their toughest language yet, the church leaders state their conviction that man "cannot be subjected to physical torture, outrage or terror, either by way of punishment or to force him to say what he is not willing to say in order to harm himself or others." Implicit in the statement is the church's concern over the security forces' continued practice of ignoring existing legal safeguards against arbitrary detention and torture.

The government's social and economic policies also come under fire, particularly the reduction in public services and the suffering of the needy as a result of current austerity policies. The church has consistently taken issue with the government over the failure to institute measures to improve the well-being of the lower classes.

In other portions of the document, the church expresses its belief in the right "to study" and "to think"--obvious references to the widespread purge in the universities evidently being undertaken by the

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government. The recognition that some sectors have lost their rights, that a number of national leaders have been "dispersed or scared," and that almost all possibilities of dialog have been closed is a clear indictment of official treatment of the "recessed" opposition parties, especially the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). PDC leaders have privately voiced the same criticisms.

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While the church acknowledges the service rendered by the armed forces in freeing the country from Marxist dictatorship, it warns Chilean leaders not to "create new obstacles by making mistakes which might turn out to be irreparable." The strong tone of the bishops' statement is probably intended to pressure the government to take some positive action to remedy its "errors." President Pinochet is reportedly planning to announce some liberalization measures in a major address on the September 11 anniversary of the coup, and church leaders evidently hope their plea will be heeded. The government will undoubtedly flinch at the latest blast from the church hierarchy, but it will probably try to reconcile its differences without resort to polemics.

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