

Catholic Nuances

In Paris, the Conciergerie, a palace that had been the seat of royal power dating back to the sixth century, was repurposed to serve as a jail during the Revolutionary Tribunal (BnF, 2010). Having undergone another transformation, the site is currently a tourist destination where visitors descend into its dungeon to view the (reconstructed) holding cell of Queen Marie-Antoinette. It is there that she spent her last days before execution. The ghostly space is “personed” with a mannequin of the Queen dressed in a black veil and seated before a crucifix. Apart from that dramatic display, the scholarly narrative of the Conciergerie chronicles the grim events surrounding the Reign of Terror. In the years following the fall of the monarchy, thousands of civilians were put to death under a capricious judicial system aimed at identifying “counter-revolutionary” threats. Attention is directed at the broad sweep of the Committee for Public Safety, which through its Law of Suspects “ordered the arrest of anyone presumed to be an enemy of the Revolution or confessed to being so” (Conciergerie, n.d.). Former holding cells expose their profane past. Between 1793 and 1794, more than 2,700 people appeared before the tribunal, and then carted off to the guillotine in groups of 12. A sparsely lit room lists the names of those who perished under the Terror. With its new place identity, the solemn space performs memory.

In its afterlife as a place for learning history, the Conciergerie offers rich details on political imprisonment during the revolutionary period. Its exhibition, however, seem careful to avoid some of the more controversial events that fueled the Terror, among them the September Massacres of 1792. At the time, there was growing fear that foreign and royalist militias were plotting to invade Paris; their plan was to open the prisons and recruit inmates to join them. In reaction to that fear, violence spread throughout the city’s prisons and the number of brutal killings quickly mounted to more than 1,400 (Tackett, 2011). It is estimated that more than half the prison population was summarily executed, with more than 1,000

murdered in the span of 20 hours. Victims of that wave of slaughter included not only political prisoners but also common criminals as well as women and children.

A defining trait of the September Massacres was the deliberate targeting of priests. In 1790, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was passed to subordinate the Catholic Church in France to the French government, thereby requiring priests to pledge their allegiance to the Revolution. Even clergy who had complied with the Civil Constitution were not spared casualties inflicted by knives, axes, hatchets, sabers, and in at least one incident, a carpenter's saw. Historians for decades have debated the underlying threads of this mass hysteria (Caron, 1935; see also Bluche, 1986; Schama, 1990). Etienne Bericourt captured the spectacle of death in a drawing titled *Transporting Corpses during the Revolution*, currently housed at the Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet. The graphic image shows officials supervising a gleeful work crew disposing of naked corpses and severed heads. Among the patriots in attendance is one of "le vainqueur de la Bastille" recognizable by his emblematic helmet (Schama, 1990: 637–38).

In this chapter, the nuance of Catholicism as it manifests itself in political imprisonment is carefully considered in several historical—and cultural—moments. Correspondingly, thought is given to the manner in which sites and symbols express memory of religious identity. We begin in Montreal, where La-Prison-des-Patriotes reflects on the emergence of both political and penal power. Discussion expands to how Catholic institutions contended with the Protestant establishment. This "Political Catholicism" is followed "Contrasts in Catholicism," as were apparent in Buenos Aires, where progressive offshoots of religious activism were eradicated by reactionary forces with the complicity of the Argentine Catholic Church. Those atrocities suggest a duality of purity and danger (see Douglass, 1966). Elsewhere in the southern cone of Latin America, the Catholic hierarchy in Santiago strongly defied the Pinochet regime, going so far as to establish the Vicariate of Solidarity, which provided social and legal services to the families of political prisoners. Performances of Catholicism are also interpreted with regard to Northern Ireland, where the hunger strike of 1981 raised the stakes for faith and morality. Altogether, socio-religious developments in Montreal, the southern cone, and Northern Ireland open critical space to contemplate diagrams of control and the resistance they produce. The back-and-forth between justice and injustice is reinforced by more impulsive remedies to restore order and contain disorder. Of course, what constitutes those binaries is often contested, making Catholicism under these circumstances very much a nuanced phenomenon.

POLITICAL CATHOLICISM

The prison officially named Au Pied-du-Courant served not only the City of Montreal but the entire district as well, and as discussed in previous chapters its role in the rebellions of 1837 and 1838 is central to its story. Curiously, a storyboard within the transformed space since renamed La-Prison-des-Patriotes explains that the prison was "baptized" as Au Pied-du-Courant because it was on the banks

of a river and at the foot of the Sainte-Marie stream. Any further religious references at La-Prison-des-Patriotes are conspicuously absent: the narrative maintains a strict secular perspective on the controversies in Lower Canada. Two exceptions are worth noting. In the first instance, a poster tracks the influence of British investors, which prompted anxiety among French Canadians, who worried about the Protestant direction the territory was taking. Second, a portrait of Jean-Jacques Lartigue, Bishop of Montreal, is prominently displayed. However, the accompanying biographical sketch (in French) seems more than a little disparaging:

Jean-Jacques Lartigue is a cousin of Louis-Joseph Papineau. . . . Appointed bishop in 1821, his relations with the Canadian Party are relatively cordial at the beginning of his episcopate. But at the time of the publication of the two mandates against rebellions, he has become one of the greatest opponents of the Patriotes and Papineau.

Visitors to La-Prison-des-Patriotes who arrive expecting more discussion than this of the role played by institutional religion may well be disappointed, or perhaps perplexed given the wealth of historical records on the subject. Michel Ducharme, in his characterization of the “Last Chapter of the Atlantic Revolution,” reminds us that French Canadians and the Patriotes adhered to highly vetted sources of inspiration. Those “colonial republicans” sought respectability, credibility, and legitimacy. As a consequence, their role models were the Americans—and to a lesser extent the Irish—both of whom had waged war on the British. “Rousseauian-style rhetoric about the social contract was widely used, especially in Lower Canada, but its author was rarely mentioned or quoted extensively, nor were other French republicans. The painful memory of the Terror and the ultimate failure of the Revolution, heralded by the Restoration, led the Lower and Upper Canadian republicans to turn to Anglo-American references” (Ducharme, 2007: 420).

Religious tensions, to be sure, were deeply entrenched in Lower Canada, especially in the run-up to the rebellions. French Canada was still a Catholic and conservative society that bristled at the democratic, anticlerical, and revolutionary instincts of the Patriote movement. In the eyes of traditional historiographers, the rebels possessed some admirable qualities but were destined to fail. “They lost because they had to lose; they were not simply overwhelmed by superior force, they were justly chastised by the god of History” (Greer, 1995: 3). The nuances of “political Catholicism” are insightfully sorted out by Maureen Slattery (1997), who delves into the strands that wove together the Catholic Churches in Quebec and Ireland. As noted in the previous chapter, Papineau, alongside his trusted patriot O’Callaghan, greatly admired Daniel O’Connell, who had secured the political—and religious—freedoms of the Irish people. But even though O’Connell’s campaign had the backing of the liberal Catholic Church in Ireland, O’Callaghan and his editorials in *The Irish Vindicator* failed to draw similar support from the conservative Catholic Church in Lower Canada.

Slattery explains that the Catholic Church in Lower Canada played a sharply different role than it did in Ireland. After 1791, the French Catholic Church

in Lower Canada was rewarded by the British government for remaining politically neutral. The benefits of this were clear given that the governor held a veto over the appointments of newly ordained priests. Moreover, the local Catholic Church “retained its land and aristocratic privileges gained during the ancient regime. . . . [Hence] it saw no advantage in supporting the liberalism of its French Catholic petite bourgeoisie, much less of an Irish-Catholic editor” (Slattery, 1997: 34). As a result, the French Catholic clergy occupied a fixed position in Lower Canada, where the feudal society of the *ancien régime* had long endured. Unsurprisingly, when the Patriote party officially formed in 1834, its platform was rejected by the local Catholic Church, which viewed “democracy as a machine producing mass atheism” (Wallot, 1973; translated in Slattery, 2007: 34). The French Canadian clergy served valuable disciplinary functions. Priests promoted a doctrine of submission to lawful authority and reminded their congregations of the “good government” they enjoyed under British rule (Dickinson and Young, 1993: 160). O’Callaghan was undeterred, and in his writings he even resorted to biblical devices by comparing Lower Canada to Egypt during the Plague of the locusts. He also repeated a common metaphor adopted by certain Irish Catholics who identified themselves as a “chosen people in exile from their natural rights” (de Paor, 1985: 160).

Given the socio-religious context of Lower Canada, it is understandable why the exhibit at La-Prison-des-Patriotes adopts an unswerving commitment to secularism. While the former prison marks the site of political imprisonment—and execution—it also performs heritage in a style that honors the memory and ideals of the Patriotes. Ducharme (2007) describes the Patriotes as a movement that transcended institutional religion. Put simply, the republican framework in the 1830s was built on virtue—a quality imbued with political liberty, not necessarily individual rights or civil liberties. Echoing a call to arms made during other rebellions of the Atlantic Revolution, Ducharme interprets virtue as having three meanings:

First, a virtuous citizen was a citizen who was independent socially and economically: this independence was the best guarantee that he could not be corrupted and that he would be independent politically.

Secondly, to be virtuous implied an ethic of simplicity and frugality.

Thirdly, virtue meant the willingness of a citizen to defend the common good instead of his own personal interests; in this sense, virtue meant patriotism. (2007: 426)

In sum, it is suggested that Canadian rebels envisioned a virtuous society. Departing from classical liberals, they were not demanding more civil freedom or even more autonomy from the state. To reverse the diagram of control, the Patriotes sought to “control the state” (Ducharme, 2007: 426; see also Greer, 1995, 1993). Moving from issues contained in “political Catholicism” to more nuanced “contrasts in Catholicism,” we detect tension not between religious groups but within an otherwise shared institutional faith.

CONTRASTS IN CATHOLICISM

The last dictatorship in Argentina was established along contrasting visions of Catholicism. Polarizing those binary opposites, the authoritarian military leaders directed violence against progressive religious workers for their “dangerous” views of theology. Admiral Ruben Chamorro announced: “They will not confuse us either with their titles or their ecclesiastical robes, nor with their cunning and speculative behavior. An infinite minority cannot be allowed to continue upsetting the minds of our youths, teaching them foreign ideas and converting them into social critics, with an interpretation cunningly distorted of what Christian doctrine is. All this is subversive” (Andersen, 1993: 184). The transformation of ESMA from a rather mundane naval academy to a profane place of violence is described by Julio Cesar Urien, who was expelled by the Marines in 1974 for opposing the repressive model. In 2010, he testified in the ESMA Trial Case 1270 (May 8). “At the Naval School an excerpt of the movie *The Battle of Algiers* is played. It shows how the French colonial army throws the National Liberation Front from Algeria into disarray in the cities by a sequence of abduction, torture, and missing.” The Argentine junta replicated the French “dirty war” in Algeria, instituting similar tactics while relying on the complicity of the Argentine Catholic Church. Urien’s 2010 testimony confirmed that the military bishop was present during the viewing of the film *The Battle of Algiers* to offer moral support, thus inverting notions of purity and danger (see Robin, 2003).

In pursuit of ideological support to legitimize its power, the junta turned to the hierarchy of Argentine church for spiritual guidance. Admiral Emilio Massera and General Jorge Videla were personally close to Archbishop Adolfo Tortolo, chief vicar of the armed forces, who offered his blessings for the coup and praised the junta for its “clean and efficient action” (Andersen, 1993: 184). Similarly, Monsignor Victorio Bonamin, another military vicar, recognized a primordial struggle between the sacred and the profane, declaring that “the army is purifying the dirtiness in our country” (Andersen, 1993: 184; see Lernoux, 1985). Clerical support for state violence was not confined to rhetoric. Among the findings of the 2017 ESMA trial is clear evidence that Church officials participated in the hiding of detainees from international human rights inspectors. A photograph at ESMA shows the island of “El Silencio” in the Argentine Delta. The caption states that the island had belonged to the Catholic Church, which sold it to the navy to serve as a clandestine detention and torture center; moreover, detainees were relocated to the island from ESMA in 1979 to conceal them from legal monitors.

Exhibits at ESMA go to great lengths to trace the indoctrination of the Argentine armed forces. Since the 1930s, a poster explains, a “authoritarian, Catholic and nationalist” right-wing perspective had guided military training in tandem with “Nazi and Fascist” ideologies fueled by “anti-Semitism and anti-Communism.” The military regarded itself as the “moral reservoir” of society that would protect the nation from its enemies; by the 1950s the Cold War had institutionalized

that worldview. The influence of France and the United States accelerated those political developments. As France stretched out its colonial wars in Algeria and Indochina, Argentine military leaders shared a quest to eradicate communism and defend a “free and Christian world.” They also believed that the “enemy” was not in a distant land; rather, even more ominously, it festered as a “subversive” force within Argentina itself. Students, intellectuals, and trade unionists were all under suspicion, for they embraced “dangerous” interpretations of political power. To combat all of this, military expertise were recruited from abroad. French generals arrived in Argentina to teach cadets the tactics of nonconventional war, including “clandestine murders, infiltration, plundering, psychological actions and dirty press campaigns.” On display at ESMA is the 1960 France–Argentina Agreement that documents the mission to train the Argentine army and “provide technical assistance” for the nonconventional doctrine. Providing that apparatus a veneer of legitimacy, local ecclesiastical—and secular—authorities opened a branch of the French organization called the Catholic City (see Ranalletti, 2010; Robben, 2005; Verbitsky, 2006).

As part of a wider campaign to enlighten Argentines and visitors to Buenos Aires about the Church’s complicity in human rights abuses, an art installation at the Parque de la Memoria y Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado takes aim at “Iglesia Complice.” The lengthy commentary on Church complicity insists that while many priests and nuns were committed to social justice, the Church leadership sided with the junta, which claimed to be carrying out detentions and genocide in the “del nombre de Dios” (the name of God). A key method of extermination was the death flights. As noted in chapter 4, detainees at ESMA would be injected with a sedative, transported to the nearby airport, and loaded onto military aircraft. Once airborne, victims were pushed to their deaths into the sea. It is known that Major Luis María Mendia sought approval from the ecclesiastical authorities to authorize the death flights as a Christian and humanitarian practice (see Andersen, 1993; Morello, 2019). Journalist Jacobo Timerman (1998), who himself was abducted but who survived, reported that Admiral Emilio Massera had told him that the use of firing squads was unacceptable because the pope would oppose such forms of violence.

As they returned from the death flights, some pilots were plainly traumatized; as a form of intervention, chaplains consoled them with biblical parables. In doing so, the priests reaffirmed that the military was justified in using violence to eradicate the threat of the profane, for in doing so it was defending the eternal good (see Katz, 1988). At ESMA, human rights organizers recognize the importance of sitedness—the power of place—for promoting remembrance. They have planted a sign where the original chapel, Capilla Stella Maris, once stood. It informs visitors that in its previous incarnation the building housed the chaplains who participated in the genocidal dictatorship and its state terror by comforting the marines for their criminal actions. In 2007, naval authorities demolished the chapel before

human rights organizers could recover the site, thus ridding the compound of its profane past. Physical and cultural transformation would give the site a new place identity. There, a new building has been constructed for ecumenical prayer, bringing the site back to its original sacred purpose. It is named after Patrick Rice, an Irish priest who relocated to Buenos Aires to assist the poor and the families of the disappeared. Due to his missionary work, which supposedly was driven by “dangerous ideas,” Rice was kidnapped by the military junta in 1976, then detained and tortured at ESMA. The Irish government and other religious groups lobbied successfully for his release, and he was deported. Rice returned to Buenos Aires 1984. Having since left the priesthood, he married Fatima Cabrera, who had also been detained and tortured by the military. Together they continued their human rights advocacy until his fatal heart attack in 2010 (*Irish Times*, 2010). In 2012, the President of Ireland, Michael Daniel Higgins, visited “Espacio Patrick Rice” and, embracing themes of heroic ascent, dedicated it to Rice and others who had fought for “Memoria, Verdad y Justicia.”

Other exhibits at ESMA promote memory and human rights while condemning the last dictatorship. Centro Cultural Memoria Haroldo Conti is named after an Argentine intellectual and author who was disappeared by the military junta on May 5, 1976. To commemorate Conti, that date is known as the “Day of the Buenos Aires Province Writer”; it celebrates the courage to circulate writings that portrayed the junta as unjust. The center sponsors an array of cultural activities. A large banner titled “Obispo Angelelli” introduces visitors to the career of Bishop Enrique Angelelli. Nearby, a montage of photographs commemorate the assassination “of a Bishop who wanted a free and fraternal world.” News clips recount that in 1976 Angelelli was murdered by the junta, which then concocted the story that he had died in a car accident. His death remains deeply divisive within the Argentine Catholic Church; even so, well-publicized events have been dedicated to Angelelli. In 1986, US Senator Edward Kennedy traveled to Argentina to memorialize Angelelli as well as the tens of thousands of people who had been disappeared. His pilgrimage restored the sacred while paving the way for a transition to democracy (Andersen, 1993).

In 2006, Argentine president Nestor Kirchner called for a national day of mourning for the religious workers who were victims of state terrorism. In 2014, after decades of prosecution, the former commander of the Third Army Corps, Luciano Benjamin Menéndez, and Luis Estrella, at the time head of the air force base and torture center at El Chumal, were sentenced to life in prison for the murder of Angelelli (Andersen, 1993). The following year, Pope Francis, who had served as the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, joined others in supporting the canonization of Angelelli. Despite those pronouncements, many among Argentina’s church hierarchy accepted the military’s version of Angelelli’s death. Among them was Cardinal Juan Carlos Aramburu, who consistently denied any complicity with the junta. Moreover, Aramburu brazenly dismissed revelations of the forced

disappearances, common graves with unidentified bodies, and other human rights abuses. In his 2004 obituary, he is remembered for turning a blind eye to Argentina's last dictatorship (Vidal, 2004). At ESMA, an exhibition hall sponsored by the Families of the Disappeared and Political Detainees is signed "Edificio: 30,000 Companeros Presentes." There, an extensive collection of political posters rekindles another memory of Cardinal Aramburu, who is condemned as a "Minister of Genocide."

Also at ESMA, matters of detention, torture, and extermination are diffused through accounts of state violence against religious workers. Survivors testified that the lack of hygiene compounded the dehumanization. Rare opportunities to shower were met with caution, since detainees risked being beaten, humiliated, and abused. Yet the bathroom was also a privileged space where detainees could have a moment of human contact. Sometimes they were able to speak to one another, or at least look silently at one another. During the trials of former military officers, many of the disappeared were identified by survivors. Ana Maria Marti told the court: "There was a woman seriously beaten, with a shocking look, in grey shirt and white blouse or similar color, [who] whispered . . . 'what's your name?' I said my name and asked 'and you, what's your name?' and she replied 'I'm Alice Domon.' I knew Alice asked a lot of people what their names were, and I knew she thought she was going to be freed and wanted to know the names to declare that we were there" (2010).

The memory of Alice Domon and her colleague Leonie Duquet, two French nuns who relocated to Argentina to conduct missionary work and support families in search of their missing relatives, is encountered in several locations within the memorial space. In an area designated as "the fishbowl," a display describes the media operations at ESMA. The military established an elaborate propaganda apparatus to misinform the public about abductions and disappearances: mainstream media outlets contributed directly or indirectly. In "the fishbowl," a team of abducted writers were forced to prepare press statements for the junta. Shown is a photograph of Domon and Duquet that was taken in the basement of the Casino on December 14, 1977. Days later, the image was sent to the French press along with a fabricated story that the nuns were involved with the Montoneros, left-wing guerrillas. In fact, they had been kidnapped by military operatives and detained at ESMA, where they were tortured and then placed on the death flights. The junta mocked the extermination of Domon and Duquet, referring to them as "the Flying Nuns" (after a popular television program). The tour guide at ESMA adds a curious twist to the kidnapping of Domon and Duquet. Directing attention to the propaganda piece containing the photographs of Domon and Duquet, the guide points to the banner of the Montoneros. Argentines familiar with the Montoneros would detect a mistake in the military's message: the insignia appears as a circle rather than as an oval. Apparently at the demand of the military propaganda

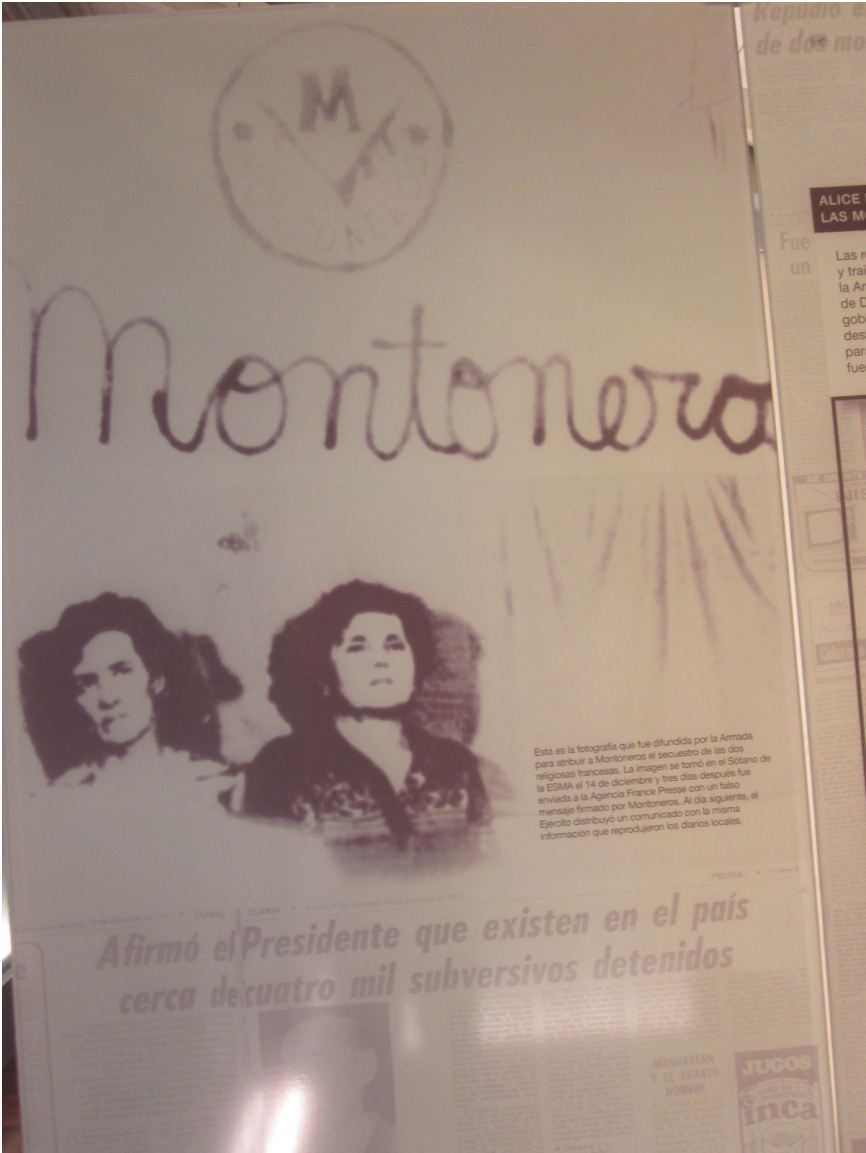


FIGURE 13. “The French Nuns.” Upon their detention at ESMA, Alice Domon and Leonie Duquet were photographed. Their images along with a concocted story about their involvement in a paramilitary group, Montoneros, was released to the press. © retrowelch 2022.

machine, mainstream news outlets did not refute the contrived story. Photographs of the French nuns serve to “person” the place of memory at ESMA (see figure 13).

In the San Cristobal neighborhood of Buenos Aires, the story of state violence against religious workers resonates at the Iglesia Santa Cruz. In the late 1880s, Santa Cruz was a social and religious community of Irish immigrants (“Los Irish Porteños”), and during the turbulent 1970s the parish became known for its human rights activism. The solemn courtyard offers visitors an opportunity to deepen their understanding of local heritage. A large banner, “Detenidos—desaparecidos de la Iglesia Santa Cruz,” displays the photographs of 12 activists who were abducted, detained, and disappeared between December 8 and 10, 1977. Four storyboards focus on the sequence of those events. Text explains that the military coup, in 1976, used violence and terror to establish a neoliberal Argentine economy designed to concentrate wealth in the hands of the few. Wide-scale detention was eventually met by opposition, especially by the mothers and families of the vanished, who demanded to know the whereabouts of their relatives. On December 10, 1977, to commemorate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they released a statement titled “For a Christmas in peace. We only ask for the truth.”

Alfredo Astiz (the “Blonde Angel of Death”) infiltrated the group at Iglesia Santa Cruz by pretending to be a brother of one of the disappeared. In a brazenly profane attack on a sacred place, Astiz and a military task group from ESMA raided the church on December 8 and carried out kidnappings there and elsewhere until December 10. The detainees, who became known as the “Santa Cruz 12,” included Alice Domon and Leonie Duquet, founders of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Esther Ballestrino, Mary Ponce, and Azucena Villaflor), and several other activists. All of them were all transported to ESMA and later sent on death flights. The bodies of Ballestrino, Ponce, Villaflor, and Duquet (as well as activist Angela Auad) washed ashore, and in 2005 they were positively identified by a forensic team. Their remains are interred in the courtyard at Santa Cruz. The body of Domon has yet to be recovered (Goñi, 2017). In 1990, Astiz was condemned in absentia by a Paris court for the murder of the Domon and Duquet. In Buenos Aires in 2011 and 2017, he was convicted of crimes against humanity. During his sentencing in 2011, Astiz remained defiant, laughing in the face of Judge Daniel Obligado. With nationalist fervor, he pinned a ribbon with the blue and white colors of the Argentine flag to his coat lapel. In his closing words, he accused the court of being “accomplices of foreign colonialism” by finding him guilty of murder (Goñi, 2011; see also D. Taylor, 1997).

As another reminder of the extent of clerical involvement in state violence, Father Christian Federico von Wernich, a former chaplain of the Buenos Aires Province Police, was convicted in 2007 of complicity in seven murders, 42 kidnappings, and 32 instances of torture. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. During the trial, Reverend Rubén Capitanio was called as a witness. Capitanio “condemned the Roman Catholic Church’s ‘complicity’ in atrocities during the Dirty

War,” saying: “There are some that think that this trial is an attack on the church, and I want to say that this is a service to the church. This is helping us search for the truth” (Barrionuevo, 2007). That same year, the City of Buenos Aires declared Iglesia Santa Cruz a historical site in memory of the “Mothers, Families, and Militants who fought for Human Rights.”

Presidential politics continue to inflame the controversies over the last dictatorship, a reminder of the enduring forces of the justice vis-à-vis injustice. Past Argentine president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, a champion of human rights, consistently cites 30,000 as the widely accepted number of those who were disappeared. Past president Mauricio Macri, however, often suggests that the number is closer to 9,000 (based on a much earlier, and inconclusive, count). His use of the term “dirty war,” bristles human rights advocates, for whom it chimes with “denialist thinking, which holds there was no genocide—only an internal battle between the dictatorship and terrorists” (Goñi, 2016). Argentine historian Mario Ranalletti, who studies dictatorship denial groups, adds: “They consider military repression was a good and morally unquestionable act. To them the cold war was a religious war” (Goñi, 2016; Ranalletti, 2010). Macri, whose neoliberal economic policies stifled the poor (and the middle class), also took a swipe at Pope Francis by donating a sum with 666 embedded in a 16,666,000-peso contribution to an educational foundation (Goñi, 2016). Given the offensive reference to Satan, the pope returned the gift, perhaps another sign of lingering tensions in Catholicism over notions of danger and purity (Douglas, 1966).

CATHOLIC ACTION

In Santiago, Plaza Padre Juan Alsina at Puente Bulnes memorializes victims of the Pinochet dictatorship, most notably the priest who was executed at the site on September 19, 1973. Father Alsina relocated from Spain to Chile to serve its impoverished people, an outward sign of his commitment to the eternal good. At the height of the coup, the military took him into custody, then transported him to the bridge, Puente Bulnes, where Nelson Bañado, an 18-year old soldier, riddled his body with a submachine gun bullets. Bañado later confessed and provided unnerving details of the assassination. In a scenario reenacted on murals at the memorial, Alsina refused a blindfold. Instead, he instructed Bañado to shoot him in the front because “I want to see you to give you forgiveness.” Bañado stood trial and was convicted. Overcome by guilt, he later committed suicide, compounding tragedy with tragedy as cyclical violence (*Nation* [Chile], 2007). The memorial at the Plaza is “personed” not only by renderings of Alsina but also with photographs of victims of state violence (see figure 14).

In Chile, as in Argentina, violence against religious workers occurred, albeit not on the same scale. Moreover, in sharp contrast to the Argentine Catholic Church, the Chilean religious hierarchy took action against the dictatorship.



FIGURE 14. “Plaza Padre Juan Alsina at Puente Bulnes.” In Santiago, Plaza Padre Juan Alsina at Puente Bulnes preserves the memory of the victims of state violence with murals that include the famous words of Father Alsina. © retrowelch 2022.

The internationally recognized *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (Vicariate of Solidarity) resonates in Chileans’ collective memory, due in large part to its commitment to human rights, which would endure throughout the Pinochet years. The organization was founded in 1973 as the Committee of Cooperation for Peace in Chile (*Comité Pro Paz*), but Pinochet demanded that the group cease its legal work on the fabricated claim that it was being used by subversives. Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez seemed to comply but in fact soon reorganized the agency in 1976 under the Chilean Catholic Church and Archdiocese of Santiago. In this way, activists thwarted the military’s efforts to disrupt their social and legal services on behalf of the disappeared. As an extra measure of insulation from the dictatorship, secret passages connected the vicariate to the adjacent cathedral. At Museo de la Memoria y Los Derechos Humanos in Santiago, an extensive exhibit chronicles the vicariate’s activism. It features a larger-than-life photograph of Cardinal Silva, who emerged as “a constant thorn in the Government’s side” (Kinzer, 1983). Photographs also show the vicariate’s crowded law office, where long queues of families are filing *habeas corpus* petitions for political prisoners.

Among the more visible symbols of the vicariate are the *arpilleras* (meaning items of burlap or sackcloth). Those patchworks of brightly colored folk art

provided emotional outlets for women who were coping with their anguish over missing relatives. The vicariate sponsored workshops so that participants could work together, engage in political discussions, and build solidarity. *Arpilleras* also generated income for families while raising consciousness for the vicariate's human rights campaign (Adams, 2000). The Museo de la Memoria y Los Derechos Humanos displays and catalogues an array of *arpilleras* as cultural artifacts of civilian life under military rule. Unsurprisingly, much of the needlework is decidedly political, including scenes depicting protests, candlelight vigils for executed political prisoners, and demonstrators being watercannoned by a police. *Arpilleras* also disseminate memories of the victims of the dictatorship. As a gift, Eliana Horta, a Chilean-born nurse, gave one titled "Andres de La Victoria" to a former priest and a former nun. It "honors the memory of a missionary who, while serving the poor in the shantytown of La Victoria, was shot and killed by the military. With stark symbolism, the image shows two holes where the bullets entered the house, and a cross and heart show where the priest was standing. Outside, a kneeling woman lights a candle, while two men stand with their arms raised, a sign of protest in Chile" (Robinson, 1989).

The vicariate promoted its role in defending the community's cherished values by publishing a biweekly magazine aptly titled *Solidaridad*. Articles fused evangelical sermons with statistics on unemployment and malnutrition. Throughout its mission, the vicariate found inspiration in the gospels aimed at protecting the world, most significantly the parable of the Good Samaritan in St. Luke. Still, its nondenominational work served people of all faiths, and it did not expect anything in return, becoming a "frontier" ministry that supported grassroots social justice. Despite years of harassment by the dictatorship, the agency amassed records of more than 19,000 cases of human rights violations. The collection is regarded as "the best administered and most complete private human rights archive in the country" (Collins, 2011: 256). Naomi Roht-Arriaza, in *The Pinochet Effect*, concurs: "Those files, carefully guarded over the years at the Vicaria de la Solidaridad, would prove a treasure trove of information when political conditions changed" (2005: 70). After Chile returned to democratic rule, attorneys relied on those documents when drafting lawsuits; so did truth commissions investigating the assassinations of Pinochet's opponents (i.e., Schneider, Prats, Leighton, Letelier) (Dinges and Landau, 1980: 215–17).

PERFORMING CATHOLICISM

In this final section, attention is turned to Ireland, where Catholicism is performed as a ritual to memorialize political prisoners. The collection of paramilitary and religious artifacts at Roddy McCorley's Club in West Belfast contributes to its post-conflict heritage. That same collection opens a window onto how Catholicism is presented as a tribute to the 1981 hunger strike in the H Blocks of the Maze prison.

A visual montage contains still shots and published reviews from the “multi award winning film HUNGER,” in which Bobby Sands (played by Michael Fassbender) is given hagiographic treatment. “Positively riveting, an artistic masterpiece . . . a harrowing, poetic film”—*Time Out New York*. “Both horrifying and, strange to say, beautiful”—A. O. Scott, *New York Times* (see McQueen, 2008). In displaying those movie reviews, curators are tapping into their use-value and their signifying-value, adding greater weight to the cultural importance of *Hunger*. With even more authenticity, a framed copy of *The Irish News* captures the historical moment with this bold headline: “Sands Dies on Day 66 of Fast in the Maze.” Those words seem to stress a certain degree of Catholic reverence for Sands’s death, in that a fast is a religious act of faith. Toward that end, stills from the film show the half-naked—and starved—bodies of Sands and fellow hunger strikers as they protest their conditions of confinement.

Two other images from that film demonstrate the distinct manner in which Catholicism is performed between the political prisoners and the clergy. First is a scene depicting a Sunday Mass, in which the priest goes through the motions of the sacraments while the hunger strikers mill about the chapel talking incessantly in an effort to get the latest news on the Troubles. A second photograph shows a defining moment involving Sands and the chaplain as they debate the political and religious merits of the hunger strike. The sharp and witty conversation soon escalates into an intense standoff, with Sands arguing that the political prisoners feel abandoned by the local church. These tensions within a nuanced Catholicism, however, are offset by a performance that ultimately advances themes of ascent, thus forging a unified front for Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Indeed, as a performance of power, the hunger strike became a tactic that showcased to the world that prisoners could resist state-sponsored brutality. By outmaneuvering their captors, Republican prisoners culturally reconstructed the Maze as “a theatre of political allegory” (Feldman, 1991: 148; see also Campbell, McKeown, and O’Hagan, 1998; Sands, 1998).

The film *Hunger* and related images displayed at McCorley’s Club offer visitors a snapshot of the complex series of events that led up to the hunger strikes. Whereas those matters will also be discussed in later chapters, at this stage, a socio-historical approach offers a layered point of view. David Beresford’s *Ten Dead Men: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike* is a book with not just one story, but many. That book’s structure is simple: ten chapters numbered without titles. Ten stories about each of the hunger strikers who died. Since each main character is surrounded by other characters, their stories diverge into overlapping scenarios that move full circle until the performance is complete. Sands, the first to die, emerged as an iconic figure that would foreshadow nine more deaths. The story of Sands is that of a prisoner who immersed himself in the eloquence of poetry, which allowed him to perform his commitment to the struggle with carefully chosen words. By comparison, the others were rather ordinary young men working mundane jobs—

a draper's assistant, a mechanic, an upholsterer, and a milkman. Still, they were all bound together to drive the British occupiers out of Northern Ireland.

In the preface to his book, Beresford is credited for being peculiarly suited for the task of sorting out the many strands of stories recorded as "comms"—the secret communications from prisoners written on tiny pieces of tissue paper and smuggled out of the Maze. While assembling the various stories, Beresford detected an innate sense of colonial trouble since he himself was an outsider. He was neither English nor Irish; rather, he was born in South Africa and raised in Rhodesia, another part of a defunct British Empire where discrimination was administered through brutality. Beresford understood how seemingly minor details held major meaning. Early on, IRA inmates were considered prisoners of war, which among other things allowed them wear their own clothes. In 1976, the prison policy then changed, requiring them to wear the uniforms of common criminals. This met fierce resistance. "The symbolism was enormous: the H-Blocks rang with songs against Britain's attempt to 'brand Ireland's fight 800 years of crime'. . . . The wraiths of these ten men bear immutable witness" (Maas, 1987: xi-xii).

Among their weapons was the hunger strike, so polarizing it would divide not only supporters and politicians but also the Catholic clergy. In *Last Weapons: Hunger Strikes and Fasts in the British Empire, 1890–1948*, Kevin Grant reminds us that "the hunger strike and the fast are reflective experiences, performances of death in which we see ourselves" (2019: 1; see also Bargu, 2014). In Ireland, by ancient Celtic custom, hunger strikes have been regarded as legitimate forms of public protest. A debtor, for example, who complains that his debt is unjust can invoke the *troscéad*, the practice of fasting, upon another. The debtor sits outside the home of his debt holder and refuses to eat until the debt is forgiven. The fast shames the debt holder, and furthermore, the debt can be enforced by the Brehon Law, according to which the debtor can be reimbursed twice the amount owed (Grant, 2019). That legend had been internalized by Irish prisoners, who performed hunger strikes as a sacred ritual. Republican Ernie O'Malley, imprisoned in 1923, wrote to a friend saying that his prison experience and hunger strike intensified his Catholic faith (English, 1998). The socio-religious foundations of hunger strikes are evident not only in individual acts but also in collective performances. "In Ireland, female and male Republicans represented the hunger strike in explicit terms of Catholicism, binding themselves in a shared sacrifice" (Grant, 2019: 19).

Among the witnesses of the 1981 Irish hunger strike were members of the Catholic clergy, most notably Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, officially known as the Prince of the Roman Catholic Church, 112th successor to St. Patrick in the See of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland. His home village, Crossmaglen, has significant purchase in the Irish political directory, for it was known as a place that had long been troublesome for the authorities. In earlier times, the village had hosted rowdy festivals that attracted "undesirables." In 1922, the partition made the village an even thornier problem for the British state, for it was now one of the southernmost towns of the

North. The South Armagh countryside with its winding lanes, ghostly terrain, and proximity to the border provided safe haven for the IRA, bolstering its reputation as bandit country. The partition divided not only Ireland but also the Armagh diocese, geographically as well as politically. Ó Fiaich, a Republican, stressed harmony and professed the motto “Brothers in Unity,” taken from the 113th Psalm. Nonetheless, due to a publicized comment in which he seemed to advocate a British withdrawal from Ireland, Ó Fiaich was maligned as the “Chaplain-in-Chief of the IRA”—at least from the perspective of Protestant Loyalists (Beresford, 1987).

In 1978, Ó Fiaich visited the Long Kesh/Maze prison for the first time. Republican prisoners received him with respect, a signal of their high morale as a paramilitary. By the time Ó Fiaich returned for a second visit, resistance to the brutality and inhumane conditions was well under way. Most notable was the “dirty protest” (also known as the “no-wash protest”). The controversy stemmed from the rule that prisoners were required to wear a uniform, as previously noted. The Republican prisoners refused because the uniform would signify that they were common criminals without political status. Instead, they covered themselves with blankets and towels. When the prisoners visited the toilets located down the corridor, the guards violently strip-searched them:

It was all just to fuck guys about trying to break them. We says no problem, keep fucking us about and we'll not use the toilets; so we stopped using the toilets, just used a slop bowl in the cell . . . [then] we'll just put the shit in the corner . . . The screws would have [to] come in and all the shit and urine [w]as in the corner. They lifted your blankets fucked it into the corner and walked the shite all over your blanket . . . So the only effective way of combating that was to spread it on the walls. (Feldman, 1991: 167–68)

In cultural terms, the “dirty protest” was driven by a duality of pollution and courage. On behalf of the prisoners, Ó Fiaich drafted a lengthy statement that criticized the penal regime as unjust. Political status was central to the complaint: the Cardinal noted that the prisoners seemed to prefer “death rather than submit to being classified as criminals.” Ó Fiaich continued: “Anyone with the least knowledge of Irish history knows how deeply rooted this attitude is in our country’s past” (Beresford, 1987: 140). The Northern Ireland Office stressed that those confined at the Maze were not political prisoners but rather criminals who were totally responsible for the situation in which they had found themselves.

High-ranking church leaders—Presbyterians and Anglicans as well as Catholics—publicly denounced Ó Fiaich. Undeterred, Ó Fiaich appealed to the Vatican, but on the day he delivered his report, Pope Paul VI died. Soon after, his successor, Pope John Paul I, also died—33 days after assuming office. By at least one account, John Paul I was reading Ó Fiaich’s report the night before he died. Those events were compounded by political upheaval: the Labour government in Britain collapsed in 1979, ushering in a more strident Thatcher administration. The

following year, Ó Fiaich went back to the Maze, where he met Loyalist leader Gusty Spence. The encounter did not go unnoticed. It symbolized a meeting between “the folk hero of a gang of sectarian killers and the man who represented the ‘Red Whore of Rome.’” Apparently, the two refused to clash, and Spence, himself fluent in Irish, bade the Cardinal “caed mile failte” (a thousand welcomes) (Beresford, 1987: 142).

Amid the commotion, the hunger strike would play out, and so too would deeper religious questions about death. For the Catholic Church, the hunger strike strained relations within its ranks as well as with the British state as Ó Fiaich and other priests tried to persuade the Thatcher cabinet to compromise. Such a negotiation would avert a theological predicament regarding whether the hunger strike constituted suicide and an act of violence, a distressing issue within Catholic morality. In some parishes, pastoral letters were read during mass repudiating the hunger strike. Along the way, Thatcher maintained her criminalization policy, ignoring advice on how she could avert a looming political crisis. When Sands died, Thatcher received a scathing telegram from the Four Horsemen, powerful leaders of the Irish-American community: Senator Ted Kennedy, Senator Daniel Moynihan, Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill, and New York Governor Hugh Carey. For all his performance as an influential Catholic, Ó Fiaich could not change the course of history and the fate of ten dead men. The notion that a hunger strike constitutes a performance of death still resonates. From at least one point of view, the Irish prisoners had engaged in their own form of *troscad* by fasting upon another. That ancient Celtic ritual transcends political and theological entanglements by embracing a commitment to a higher order of justice. Due to the complex meaning of sacrifice—and martyrdom—greater cultural observations are set to unfold in forthcoming chapters.

CONCLUSION

As noted early in this chapter, the 1792 September Massacres in Parisian prisons consumed more than 1,000 victims, among them priests and seminarians. Scholars continue to reflect on the various causes of that “justified violence,” such as the roles of rumor, fear, and anxiety, but one thing is clear: in its aftermath “a great many people came to look on the Massacres in a new light and express their shock and horror over what happened” (Tackett, 2011: 64; see also Caron, 1935; Bluche, 1986; Schama, 1990). Similarly, when dictatorships in the southern cone dissolved under the force of democratic movements, state terror was staunchly condemned. In *The Catholic Church and Argentina’s Dirty War*, Jesuit sociologist Gustavo Morello examines the nuances of the faith. With the Second Vatican Council, Catholicism entered into a dialogue with modernity. Progressive Catholics understood such “religious transformation as a cultural characteristic,” while

more conservative members of the Church “perceived the changes as a corruption of the divine” (Morello, 2019: 181). Morello writes that those internal conflicts within Catholicism represented different forms of relating to the sacred and would ultimately determine the ways in which political life was conceived.

The Argentine junta and its Catholic supporters “believed that the only way to preserve faith was to conserve power” (Morello, 2019: 181). As the nation transitioned to democracy, that power shifted dramatically, giving rise to the memory of political prisoners, religious workers, and other victims of state repression. By engaging in modern institutions, progressive Catholics practiced their political life through enduring human rights campaigns evident in legislation and the prosecutions of perpetrators. Alongside those important developments were cultural rituals that speak to the nuances of Catholicism. In Santiago, for instance, two former detention and torture centers, Villa Grimaldi and the National Stadium, underwent an elaborate ceremony in which a priest—an agent of the deity—performed a spiritual cleansing. Those sites were thus purified of past sins and repurposed as a memorials that would speak to the prevailing sentiment “Nunca Más” (Never Again). Those sacred rituals are just one form of cultural expression that attempts to eradicate residue of the profane while embracing the sacred. To be sure, the authoritarian use of religion is just one example of the diagrams of control. In the next chapter, we discuss architecture as another form of domination aimed at political prisoners and the population at large.