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This publication has been edited with Open-source software OpenOffice and Gimp. We have used Garamond for our main-body text and titles and LHF New Trajan for the logo.

Cover page: Cavalry Battle (1600s) by Jan Martszen de Jonge, privately held.
Foreword

As will become apparent, there have been some adjustments made to the Strife Journal since Issue Two. We hope the most discreet will prove to be the change in editorship: our thanks are due to Pablo de Orellana, who has stepped down after two issues’ toil at the helm, and we hope we can continue his excellent work.

Other modifications are more cosmetic, and hence perhaps more obvious. The font and formatting is slightly different, and we also have a new logo, aligning us with the blog (at www.strifeblog.org) and illustrating more clearly than ever how unified the Strife project is across blog and journal. As in the last issue, we have reprinted an extract from our online counterpart: the excellent five-part series on drone warfare entitled ‘The Good, The Bad, The Drones’, which was posted online over the course of April.

The other major change has been the revamping and expansion of the reviews section, thanks for which must go to my co-editor Nikolai Gourof. We have four reviews this issue, on texts ranging from early modern history to (post)modern political theory. Issue four will see this section expand further.

Of course, the skeleton of Strife Journal has been and remains its extended pieces, and there are four in this issue. Nikolai Gourof writes about Sergei Eisenstein’s Ivan The Terrible, and draws parallels between it and Stalin’s contemporary regime. Alexander Langer, meanwhile, draws attention to Church resistance against state oppression in Latin America. Langer speculates as to why the state responses to broadly similar resistance movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador took such different forms. Alexandra Gallovicova’s piece is another Strife first: it is split into two instalments, the first of which is printed here, the second of which will be published in Issue Four. In her first part, Gallovicova explores the idea of the ‘image’ in IR theory, and lays firm groundwork for the case study that will form her piece’s second instalment: French and British perceptions of Germany in the wake of its abstention from the UN Security Council vote on establishing a no-fly zone in Libya during the 2011 Libyan Civil War. Finally, Thomas Colley looks at propaganda in the Yugoslav conflict of the 1990s. Colley asks whether any of the lessons learnt then can be applied to the current crisis in Ukraine.

As always, many thanks are due to the department of War Studies at King’s College London, which has provided unceasing support. Special thanks are due to Dr Christine Cheng, Prof. Vivienne Jabri, Dr Oisin Tansey, Prof. Mats Berdal and Dr Kieran Mitton. Thanks are of course also owed to all the contributors to this issue, who have handled our editorial demands with grace and rapidity. We have continued with the peer-review model established in Issue 2, and we thank all our reviewers.

We are always on the lookout for interesting perspectives on conflict for both the journal and the blog; anyone interested in contributing is encouraged to pitch an idea or simply declare interest via email.

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On 3 August 1959, Monseñor Vicente Alejandro González y Robleto, Archbishop of Managua and leader of Nicaragua’s Catholic Church, advised Catholics on the permissibility of political action under a tyrannical government:

You should all know, as the Apostle says, all Authority comes from God, and all things are arranged by that same God. Therefore he who resists that Authority, resists God, the arrangement undertaken by God, and in doing so condemns himself. (Romans 13:21)

Romero claimed in 1980 that ‘These are insurrectional times. The morality of the Church permits insurrection when all other paths have been exhausted.’

Yet, while Romero was assassinated and the Church in El Salvador faced shocking violence and repression at the hands of the state and allied paramilitary death squads, the Nicaraguan Church was left largely alone, with its leadership remaining unharmed even as they openly called for the downfall of the Somoza regime. The 1970s saw steadily increasing state repression of the Catholic Church and its ministry in El Salvador in reaction to Catholic-led opposition, particularly from the grassroots ‘progressive Church’ but also from the Church hierarchy. By contrast, in Nicaragua the state response to similar Church opposition was less coherent, especially in response to the more moderate opposition that emerged from Archbishop Obando y Bravo and the Church hierarchy.

This paper seeks to explain why the states of Nicaragua and El Salvador reacted so differently faced with outwardly similar forms of resistance from the Catholic Church leadership. The paper finds that these two states reacted differently to Church opposition due to differences in regime structure, ideology and the nature of the broader insurrection faced by each regime. The Somoza regime in Nicaragua was largely non-ideological, focusing on maintaining the power and privilege of the Somoza family and their clique; the Salvadoran regime subscribed to a form of authoritarian liberalism highly intolerant of social groups or institutions standing in the way of the elite’s definition of ‘progress’. Regime structures reflected this division, with the Somoza regime alternately repressing and co-opting various social groups to sustain their position. By contrast, El Salvador’s state apparatus acted as

A similar attitude towards opposition to repressive regimes can be found in the writings and public addresses of Óscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, murdered on 24 March 1980 by a right-wing death squad.

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the repressive instrument for the dominant economic and social elite of the landed oligarchs and the military.

The roots of the ideological and structural distinctions between the regimes of Nicaragua and El Salvador can be seen as early as the late 19th century. Following independence from Spain in 1821, then Mexico in 1823, Central America was unified into a federation. By 1838, this federation had dissolved, with the modern republics of Central America forming. Throughout the mid-19th century, the republics of Nicaragua and El Salvador saw constant political upheaval and frequent fraternal war, with power switching between the Liberal and Conservative parties. Liberals tended to support decentralization, anti-clericalism, free-market economics and private property, while Conservatives tended to support traditional institutions such as the Church, indigenous communal landholding and quasi-feudal property arrangements. Neither respected systems of democratic governance, with political activity restricted largely to elites.

By the late 19th century though, the two countries had diverged. Nicaragua had seen the consolidation of Conservative political dominance following the expulsion of American adventurer and self-proclaimed President William Walker, whereas El Salvador saw the consolidation of Liberal rule linked to the rapidly expanding coffee economy. This meant that in Nicaragua, the church worked in partnership with the state and was granted special privileges and political access in exchange for legitimation of the regime. In contrast, El Salvador in the late 19th century saw the entrenchment of a Church that, while conservative and supportive of state authority, was clearly subordinated to the power of the Liberal-dominated state administration. Nicaragua during this period saw the institutionalization of Church involvement in personal law, education and the economy. Liberal politicians would eventually make peace with Nicaraguan Church influence as part of their bid to return to power; this bargain lasted through the period of American suzerainty of the 1920s and 30s, and into the rule of the Somoza dynasty.4

Under the rule of Anastasio Somoza Garcia and his sons, the state lost even the thin veneer of political ideology that the Liberal and Conservative parties had maintained. Somocismo’s primary goal was the personal aggrandizement and enrichment of the Somozas, and to a lesser extent their extended families, cronies, and the National Guard — the country’s main security force controlled personally by Somoza. The regime was thus characterized by the balancing of various social and political groupings against each other. This is typical of an ‘autonomous personalist state’, whereby the state is free from the control of any particular social class, instead seeking to benefit the specific ruling clique that controls it. The Church, as part of this political balancing act, became a loyal and key ally of the regime. The political bargain between the Church and the Somoza regime was cast in the same mould as those between the Church and previous governments. Catholic priests and the Church establishment would act as a legitimizing force for the regime, counselling acceptance of the political order among their congregants and offering public legitimation. This legitimation came through attendance and the religious blessing of political activities such as the opening of Congress, as well as bestowing accolades on Somoza and members of his clique, such as crowning Somoza’s daughter ‘Queen of the Army’ in a lavish ceremony. In exchange, the Church gained influence in areas of traditional concern, particularly enforcement of ‘public morals’ (sexual and gender norms), combatting the scourge of Communism and Protestantism, control over the education system and personal-status law, as well as material benefits for the Church hierarchy in land and luxury consumer goods.5

In El Salvador, on the other hand, the Catholic Church was largely excluded from a role in the state. Beginning in the mid-19th century El Salvador was dominated by a landowning oligarchy known as the ‘fourteen families’ whose wealth stemmed from domestic coffee production. This oligarchy sought to break with the Church-dominated past and ruled under a framework of authoritarian liberalism. European values were emulated, with the culture of the countryside seen as primitive and barbaric. This included the Church, a stronghold of conservative values that stood in the way of the dominance of the ‘coffee republic’. Liberal rulers, beginning with President Geraldo Barrios in 1859, supported the establishment of secular schools and universities, removed the Church from involvement with legal administration, and revoked many of the remaining privileges it had maintained since independence. The Church hierarchy took this in stride, allying with the state in its repression and expropriation of the cofradías, autonomous Catholic communities that often doubled as communal landholding systems. This authoritarian political system, which subordinated the population to the demands of the market and the coffee oligarchy in a quest for modernization, was entrenched by the end of the 19th century. It formed a ‘non-hegemonic instrumentalist state,’ ruled by and for a particular social class; in this case the El Salvador coffee-growing elite.6

By the early 20th century, the elite was internally divided between ‘agro-financial’ and ‘agro-financial-industrial’ groups. The former rejected any reform of the prevailing system due to their economic focus on landholdings, while the latter supported cautious political and economic reform, meant to boost industrial growth and reduce political pressure within an elite-controlled democratic framework. These groups competed for power primarily through a restricted, sham democracy along with periodic military coups. Both groups agreed that suppression of the peasantry was necessary. La Matanza, the 1932 massacre of close to two percent of the Salvadoran population and nearly the entire indigenous population in response to a small rural uprising, was only the most extreme example of repression from this period.7 Already, there was a clear difference in the social position and level of repression faced by the Catholic Church in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

The shift in the policies of the religious establishment in both Nicaragua and El Salvador can be drawn back to two key years: 1968 and 1972. 1968 is extremely important due to the Conference of Latin American Bishops, held in Medellin, Colombia. The conference agreed to embrace many of the reforms of Vatican II, with support for a ‘preferential option for the poor’ and the creation of ‘Christian Base Communities’ (CEBs) to teach impoverished people to read and organise through Biblical study. These reforms were cautiously embraced by Luis Chávez y González, Archbishop of San Salvador, as well as Archbishop Obando y Bravo in Managua, appointed in 1970. While in both countries the ‘people’s church’ or Iglesia Popular was already being promoted by radical priests, this stamp of institutional approval aided their growth.

The year 1972 also saw traumatic events for each nation that undermined regime legitimacy. In Nicaragua, this was the December 23 earthquake, which killed roughly 6,000 people, left 250,000 homeless and destroyed much of Managua. Anastasio Somoza Debayle – the first Somoza’s younger son and President since 1968 – and the National Guard pilfered reconstruction funds and foreign aid, simultaneously failing to restore order in the wake of the earthquake. They left little money for reconstruction and enraged every social class against the Somozas. By contrast, the turning point in El Salvador was the 1972 election, with the regime-backed candidate

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fraudulently defeating José Napoleon Duarte, the moderate opposition mayor of San Salvador, despite a massive electoral victory for Duarte. Protests against the regime for this flagrant fraud were closely followed by severe repression, which convinced many in the opposition that peaceful change achieved by working through the system was impossible.8

It was in this crisis of state legitimacy that the Catholic Church’s leadership emerged as an opposition force. While some radical parish priests and lay leaders became directly involved in the growing guerrilla movements from an early stage, the Church hierarchy was generally cautious. Both Archbishops Chávez and Obando called publicly for respect for human rights and human dignity, supporting democratic reforms, the freeing of political prisoners, and a political opening to a moderate opposition, while denouncing the violent action of guerrillas and government repression alike. In Nicaragua, Church criticism of the Somoza regime was demonstrated through pastoral letters and church media as well as frequent public refusals by Obando and other high-ranking church officials to participate in legitimating the regime. For example, upon being made Archbishop, Obando sold the Mercedes gifted to him by Somoza and donated the proceeds to the poor. In El Salvador most bishops were deeply conservative, but a succession of archbishops – beginning with Chávez, escalating with Óscar Romero and continuing to a limited extent with Arturo Rivera y Damas – supported moderate opposition to the regime through sermons at weekly Mass, articles in Catholic publications, and frequent interviews on Catholic radio. This became increasingly radical over time, with Romero moving from support for reform and a halt in repression to explicit support for Church relations with the ‘popular organizations,’ to support for violent insurrection against a government that had lost all moral authority to rule.9

These similar forms of moderate opposition were met with drastically different responses. In Nicaragua, the Church, particularly the establishment, saw relatively limited repression. While the National Guard destroyed the commune on the island of Solentiname led by Ernesto Cardenal in 1977, other radical groups such as the CEBs of San Pablo Apóstol and Barrio Riguero outside Managua, or the missionary work of the Capuchin Order on the Atlantic coast, saw little persecution. The Managua CEBs, despite their existence as incubators of revolutionary thought and action, or the Capuchin missionaries’ reporting of National Guard atrocities against peasant organizers, were allowed to continue their work unaccosted. Still, by 1978, the Church was the target of increasing harassment, with even Archbishop Obando y Bravo ominously designated by Somoza as ‘Commandante Miguel’. This rarely went beyond intimidation and harassment though. While Nicaraguan troops launched violent attacks on churches during assaults on already rebellious communities, these atrocities represented incidental violence as opposed to a campaign directly targeting the Church. While this repression was still significant, it did not affect the Church’s ability to function, nor its increasingly defiant stance as an opposition force. With increasing direct calls from the Church hierarchy for the fall of Somoza and his replacement with a democratic government, as well as heavy involvement by the Iglesia Popular in armed resistance to the regime, three priests had been killed by February 1979. Yet, two of these priests had taken up arms against Somoza. Even when the Church finally broke with Somoza completely and endorsed an armed revolution on 2 June 1979, the National Guard did not accost the Church hierarchy in any significant way.10

By contrast, violence in El Salvador was perpetrated to a level and extent that far exceeded Nicaraguan repression. In El Salvador, repression began as soon as Church involvement in the opposition was clear. In

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9 Kirk, 1992, p. 90; Montgomery, 1980, pp. 76-85

10 Kirk, 1992, pp. 65-82, 94-9
1970, following his participation in El Salvador’s first conference on agrarian reform, Father José Inocencio Alas was kidnapped, tortured, and left on the roadside by security forces. Only the personal intervention of Monseñor Arturo Rivera y Damas saved his life. In 1972, another priest was kidnapped and brutally murdered following his involvement in the formation of a CEB in Chalatenango, the epicenter of La Matanza. Expulsions, beatings and periodic murders of priests were common occurrences throughout the 1970’s, such as Father Rutilio Grande in 1977, despite their explicit role as non-partisan community leaders. Lay leaders experienced even harsher repression, with hundreds being arrested and murdered. This only radicalized the Church’s base, including organizations such the Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants (FECCAS), some of whose members began to join guerrilla organizations to fight the regime. Repression duly increased, with the White Warriors’ Union, a right-wing death squad, distributing flyers reading ‘Be a Patriot! Kill A Priest!’ shortly after their murder of Jesuit Father Alfonso Navarro Oveido in July 1977. However, the worst was yet to come. On 24 March 1980, Archbishop Romero was murdered by paramilitaries under the orders of Roberto D’Aubuisson, soon-to-be founder of the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party. Romero’s successor as Archbishop preached dialogue, but he allies through repression, even if the ally exhibited some resistance to the regime. The Church would be especially harmful to repress, due to its status as an institution. While individual members of the business and political elite could be persecuted without threatening the whole elite class, the hierarchical nature of the Church meant that persecution of members of the Church would potentially be treated by the Church as an attack on the entire institution.

Furthermore, even as an opposition force, the Catholic Church was often useful to Somoza. Archbishop Obando acted a number of times as a mediator between the guerrillas of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and the regime, such as in December 1974 during a hostage crisis. The Nicaraguan regime may have been able to repress the Church, but ideology was certainly not a motivating factor in repression as it was in El Salvador. In fact, with the Nicaraguan regime’s power so concentrated in the hands of a single man, the lack of persecution of the Church could be explained simply by Anastasio Somoza Debayle’s personal idiosyncrasies or even his

The reasons for this difference in repression is related in part to the structure and ideology (or lack thereof) of each regime. In Nicaragua, the ‘autonomous personalist state’ used a lower (although still significant) level of repression against the Church for a number of reasons related to its structure. First, the regime, by being centered on maintaining the Somozas and their cronies in power, required allies among the fractured Nicaraguan elite. The Somozas and their clique lacked a basis for their rule beyond their ability to provide patronage to various elite actors. Most of this elite, including the Church, eventually embraced the opposition as misrule and corruption under Anastasio Somoza Debayle became increasingly blatant and concentrated, no longer benefitting the business elite or the Church.

Yet, the Church had been a longstanding and loyal ally to the Somozas, along with the business community and the old political elite in the Conservative and Liberal parties. In this sense, it is understandable that the Somozas would be unwilling to alienate a longstanding ally through repression, even if the ally exhibited some resistance to the regime. The Church would be especially harmful to repress, due to its status as an institution. While individual members of the business and political elite could be persecuted without threatening the whole elite class, the hierarchical nature of the Church meant that persecution of members of the Church would potentially be treated by the Church as an attack on the entire institution.

fear of damnation over any ideological concerns.12

Structurally, the Salvadoran regime had advantages over the Nicaraguan regime in being able to repress the Church. The state in El Salvador, more institutionalized and less reliant on the legitimacy and leadership of a single man than Nicaragua, was a ‘non-hegemonic instrumentalist state’ dominated and controlled by an alliance of the Army and economic elite. The elite, while it saw periodic internal conflict between reformists and reactionaries, was broadly unified along class lines. There was near-consensus among the ruling elite on the necessity of retaining power without real input from the majority of the population or other social institutions. With the support of a narrow but cohesive segment of the population, the regime was able to implement repressive measures against the Church, comfortable in the belief that it did not need the support of the Church to legitimize its rule or maintain power.

Further, elite ideology in El Salvador had an important role. From the middle of the 19th century and continuing through until the civil war, El Salvador’s elite rejected the Catholic Church’s influence, seeing it as hostile to what they defined as ‘progress’: a growing economy based on freewheeling, Darwinian capitalism. This is seen both in their policies, removing the Church’s traditional privileges and social roles in education and family life, as well as their attitudes. One of the only direct studies of the political attitudes of the Salvadoran elite shows that

Members of this elite [view] themselves as the heirs of cosmopolitan entrepreneurs who taught the country how to compete, raised the general standard of living, and made possible an industrial future for El Salvador.13

With this self-image, the elite saw impediments to their mission, namely a Church concerned with the poor: at best backwards and worthy of contempt, and at worst a sign of Communist subversion. The carnage of La Matanza was justified as a means of restoring social order to guarantee continued development. Therefore, as the Church was seen as a threat to social order, it would logically become a target of repression. This was inevitable in a system that facilitated the expression of radically reactionary ideological violence from groups like the White Warriors’ Union. Thus, regime structure and ideology were key factors in the varying levels of repression experienced by the Catholic Church as an opposition force during this period of upheaval in Nicaragua and El Salvador.14

In Nicaragua and El Salvador, the regimes in power faced similar forms of resistance of their Catholic Church establishments, but reacted differently. In Nicaragua, the regime repressed political dissent but left the Church largely untouched until, like the rest of the country, it turned irrevocably away from the Somoza dynasty. In El Salvador, the regime reacted to Church opposition with immediate and brutal repression. The reasons for these disparities can be explained by differences between regime ideology and structure on one hand, and the nature of the popular uprisings on the other. While the Nicaraguan state was non-ideological and centered entirely on the Somozas and their clique, the Salvadoran state’s structure was instrumentalized to empower the landowning elite and their allies in the military, who followed an ideology of ‘progress’ and economic development at all costs.

The differing repression of the Church in the two countries has influenced its political position in the post-conflict period. In Nicaragua, following the victory of the FSLN, the Church’s relationship with the new regime quickly soured. Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo became one of the most vocal sources of opposition to the new government, and the Church emerged as an independent and powerful political actor. This has continued to this day, with conflict between Sandinista President Daniel Ortega and the Church over his use of Christianity as a political prop. By contrast, in El Salvador, the Church retreated in the face of the state’s mounting repression.

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13 Paige, 1980, p. 17
14 Lernoux, 1982, p. 68; Armstrong, 1980, pp. 5-7
Under the leadership of Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, the Church denounced violence on both sides and decried the rebels’ unwillingness to engage in peace talks while the country burned and hundreds of thousands of people were killed and displaced, mostly by government forces. Today, Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas, a conservative, leads the Salvadoran Church. He recently and abruptly closed Tutela Legal, the famed Church human rights office vital in recording human rights abuses during the civil war, claiming that it is no longer necessary. It would appear that deep differences continue to exist between the Church’s role in relation to the state in both El Salvador and Nicaragua.

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