

In Pursuit of Liberation: Religion and Resistance in Post-Coup Honduras

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Abstract

The popular resistance movement in Honduras arose in opposition to the June 2009 coup and is a key force in demanding basic human rights and decent living conditions for all Honduran people. Many religious clergy, laypeople and organizations that adhere to liberation theology as their driving ideological and methodological force are working within and alongside the resistance movement. Through an examination of existing literature on liberation theology and an analysis of interviews and observations conducted during a field research trip to Honduras, this paper analyzes how the religious groups that adhere to liberation theology frame resistance to the coup and to the post-coup regime as a central mechanism for the liberation of the poor. Its focuses on how the Catholic Church is utilizing the media, its hierarchical structure, and its theological teachings in order to mobilize popular movements to demand the rights of the Honduran people against state-sponsored oppression.

Introduction

This paper will discuss the role of liberation theology in Honduras in the context of the post-coup period. The June 28, 2009 coup d'état that ousted President Manuel Zelaya served as both an oppressive and liberating force in Honduran society. Increasing threats against resistance members, murders of individuals who have challenged those in power, and repression at public demonstrations have intensified the climate of fear. On the other hand, the coup gave the Honduran people a newfound awareness of the structures that have long oppressed them. As a result, many social justice groups that had existed prior to the coup converged to form a popular resistance movement.

In order to understand the effects of the Honduran coup it is necessary to explore its causes. The coup d'état occurred on June 28, 2009 when members of the armed forces entered the house of President Manuel ("Mel") Zelaya early in the morning and forced him onto a plane. The plane stopped at the United States' Soto Cano military base before landing at its final destination in Costa Rica.

Roberto Micheletti, the President of the Congress, assumed power and began a brutal de facto regime that was denounced internationally.

The orchestrators of the coup are members of the wealthy oligarchy in the country. Most of Honduras' wealth is in the hands of an elite minority, which creates a wide economic, social, and ideological gap (Varela Osorio 2010, 69). These same elite families are also the politicians and the owners of the major media outlets. Leticia Salomón, an economist and sociologist from the National Autonomous University of Honduras, explains the overlapping political, corporate and media interests of the wealthiest and most powerful families:

...the media interests...brought together the country's main media owners, including Rafael Ferrari of the Liberal Party, who owns TV channels 3, 5 and 7, a radio chain and several minor radio stations. Another powerful Liberal Party media owner is Carlos Flores, a former President of Honduras, owner of La Tribuna, a newspaper influential in the country's central zone. He's also the father of the National Congress vice president, who was assured her post by Micheletti's friendship and dependent relationship with Flores. Also influential is the National Party's Jorge Cañahuatti, owner of El Heraldo and La Prensa newspapers, respectively very influential in the central zone and on the national level. (2009)

These families are the biggest supporters of the coup. They have launched media campaigns to manipulate information about the coup and funded Washington lobbyist Lanny Davis in an effort to garner support for the Honduran government (Silverstein 2009). Many of Mel Zelaya's policies threatened their interests because, as authors of the Honduras Coup 2009 blog argue, they benefited the poor at the expense of the rich. For example, Zelaya took steps to reduce the cost of petroleum through subsidies and a contract with Petrocaribe. As a result, the profits of the owners of the petroleum companies and their investors decreased. Zelaya also convinced bankers to reduce interest

rates on home loans by one-half or one-third, which limited banks' profits as well (RAJ-1 2009). In addition, he raised the minimum wage by 60%, which was a further blow to corporate profits (Pastor Fasquelle 2011, 18). These reforms, however, greatly benefited the poor, who saw an income increase and the price of transportation and home loans decrease (RAJ-1 2009). In Honduras, which is a country with extremely high poverty levels, this could have prevented the forced migration of poor campesinos to urban slums in Honduras, to Mexico, or to the United States; in some cases, it may have saved lives.

Zelaya's proposal to convoke a constituent assembly in order to rewrite the constitution was an important factor in sparking the coup. He scheduled a nonbinding poll for June 28, 2009, in which the Honduran people would respond yes or no to the question: "Do you agree that in the general elections of November 2009 a fourth ballot box should be installed to decide whether to convene a National Constitutional Assembly that would approve a political Constitution?" (RAJ-2 2009). The elite politicians, media owners and businessmen incorrectly claimed that by proposing to reform the constitution, Zelaya was attempting to extend his term in office. However, this was based on a false assumption because Zelaya had never proposed to lengthen his term, and the assembly would have happened after his term was over. Others, including the Honduran Supreme Court, argued that the poll itself was illegal. According to a report released by the American Association of Jurists and several other international law organizations, "The powerful economic forces, politicians, and influential sectors that control the media vehemently opposed the referendum and appealed to the judiciary and the legislature to initiate accelerated procedures, ignoring due process, to justify baseless actions against President Zelaya" (2009, 2). None of these actions or claims justified ousting Zelaya, in what pro-coup individuals call a "constitutional succession" rather than a coup d'état. All international actors, including the United States and the other OAS member states, agree that a coup occurred (Varela Osorio 2010, 67), and therefore this paper will refer to Zelaya's removal from office as a coup d'état.

The coup affected every sector of Honduran society. The powerful elite and ruling politicians benefited from their new power in office, but they had little legitimacy, both internationally and among the Honduran people. Within Honduras, widespread resistance to the arrest and deportation of Mel Zelaya, even among those who had disagreed with Zelaya's actions and policies before the coup, sparked the formation of the resistance movement. This movement emerged in the days following the coup during street protests and declared itself a nonviolent movement (Frank-2 2010). According to Dana Frank, it united "the campesino movement; indigenous, African-descent and women's organizations; human rights groups; trade unions; and, most astonishingly welcome, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender movement, in what they together refer to as *un movimiento amplio*, a broad movement" (Frank-1 2010).

Out of the broad resistance movement, the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (National Front of Popular Resistance or FNRP) formed. The FNRP recognizes Manuel Zelaya as its general coordinator, and it calls for a National Constituent Assembly just as Zelaya did before he was ousted.

Another effect of the coup was that the 2009 elections were considered fraudulent by many international organizations, including the OAS, the UN, the EU, and the Carter Center (Pastor Fasquelle 2011, 20). While the United States government declared them "free and fair", Laura Carlsen, who served as an election monitor, describes a different situation:

The coup's dictatorial decrees restricting freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and freedom of movement held the nation in a virtual state of siege in the weeks prior to the elections. Over forty registered candidates resigned in protest. Members of the resistance movement were harassed, beaten and detained. In San Pedro Sula, an election-day march was brutally repressed. (2009)

Due to these conditions, the FNRP called for the people to boycott the elections. According to anthropologist Adrienne Pine, the abstention rate was extremely high:

As of August 22, the FNRP's "Citizen Declaration," calling for an inclusive constituent assembly to rewrite the Honduran constitution, had garnered 944,330 signatures. This, according to a source within the Honduran Supreme Electoral Tribunal who requested anonymity for fear of reprisals, is more than the number of Hondurans who voted in the 2009 presidential election.

(2010)

The winner of this election, Porfirio Lobo, assumed power in January 2010 and failed to improve the already dire human rights situation. According to a recent article in the Latin America News Dispatch, ten journalists, 60 lawyers, 155 women, and 59 gays, lesbians or transgender people have been killed in Honduras since 2008. Resistance members are specifically targeted. For example, seven of the ten journalists were known members of the resistance, according to FNRP leader Gerardo Torres (O'Reilly 2011).

These murders and threats have occurred in a context of impunity, which the Inter-American Commission described in its 2010 report:

The Commission was informed that only one person is incarcerated for human rights violations and only 12 have been indicted. Furthermore, the cases are not moving forward, in part because the various organs of the State are not investigating, especially the security forces charged with conducting the investigations. The widespread impunity that attends human rights violations is due in part to the Supreme Court's decisions, which undermine the rule of law. Apart from the questionable role that the Supreme Court played during the *coup d'état*, since then it has acquitted the military accused of participating in the *coup* but has dismissed judges

and magistrates that endeavored to avert the *coup* by democratic means. (“Preliminary Observations...” 2010)

These widespread human rights abuses and the accompanying impunity have created a climate of fear among Hondurans, especially those involved in the resistance. However, this oppression has not stopped Hondurans in the resistance movement from speaking out against the Lobo regime.

Religious Groups and the Coup

According to a 2007 nationwide survey by CID-Gallup, the major religious groups in Honduras are Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonites, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and evangelical Protestant groups, of which there are about 300. The same survey found that 47% of Hondurans self-identify as Roman Catholic, and 36% identify as Evangelical Protestants (United States Department of State-1 2010).

Within the context of political unrest and oppression following the coup, many religious leaders have expressed their opinions either for or against the coup. On the one hand, many Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Mennonite churches have denounced the coup and the de facto regimes that followed. Other religious groups that are in resistance to the coup are the Agape church, the Christian Popular Movement, the Network of Pastors in Resistance, and the Ecumenical Human Rights Observation (“Christians in Resistance Honduras” 2010). On the other hand, many clergy from the Catholic and Evangelical Protestant church hierarchies have either remained silent on political issues or have come out in favor of the coup. For example, Pentecostal pastor Evelio Reyes of the Vida Abundante megachurch has publicly expressed his pro-coup stance and collaborated with the Micheletti government (RNS 2009).

One of the most prominent splits that occurred was within the Catholic Church. Shortly after the coup, Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez read a statement on national television that justified the coup (“Comunicado de la Conferencia Episcopal de Honduras” 2009). This document was signed by all of the Honduran bishops, although not all of the bishops were in agreement (Santos 2011). After reading the document, the Cardinal added his own commentary, warning Zelaya that if he returned, it might result in a “bloodbath” (“Los obispos...” 2009), a statement that regarded members of the resistance movement as a threat and that, together with his other pro-coup actions, has earned him the nickname “el Cardemal” (“mal” meaning bad). Many Hondurans link the Cardinal’s prediction with the death of Isis Obed Murillo, who was shot by a member of the Honduran Armed Forces at a demonstration that took place in Tegucigalpa two days after the Cardinal’s statement (Rights Action 2009).

However, many religious leaders and laypeople do not agree with the Cardinal’s statement. In fact, many Catholic and Protestant clergy, laypeople, and organizations are now working both alongside and within the resistance movement.

This paper will focus on the religious groups that adhere to liberation theology in their methodology and practice. Most of these churches are supporting the resistance movement by fostering the strength of popular movements at the grassroots level. I will examine the ways in which they frame resistance to the coup and to the post-coup regime as a central mechanism for the liberation of the poor.

Methodology

Through examination of existing literature on structural violence and liberation theology and an analysis of interviews and observations conducted during a week of field research in Honduras, I will explore where religion and resistance converge in post-coup Honduras.

During a week-long field research trip to Honduras in March of 2011, I conducted several interviews with religious clergy, laypeople, and resistance members. I spent the first part of my trip in San Pedro Sula, Honduras's second largest city. Then, I traveled to Santa Rosa de Copán, which is a smaller city located in western Honduras.

In San Pedro, I interviewed three Honduran resistance members from the Colectivo Plaza la Libertad, a collective of the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular that holds daily demonstrations in San Pedro's central park (Plaza la Libertad). They were Samuel Madrid of the Lawyers in Resistance, Sociologist Ernesto Bardales, and David Contreras Riviera. I also visited Radio Progreso, a Jesuit-run radio station, and interviewed one of its journalists, Gustavo Cardoza. Later, I attended a Lutheran church service and interviewed the church's pastor, Rev. Hernán López.

During my time in San Pedro, I stayed in the home of Carlos Román, percussionist of a band called Montuca Sound System, and his family. They had felt the repression closely, as Carlos was brutally beaten in a concert on September 15, 2010 by police, and his mother, formerly a journalist at an anti-coup radio station called Radio Uno, received death threats. As a result of these threats, the family moved into exile for two months before returning to Honduras. In order to protect her safety, Carlos's mother no longer works for Radio Uno.

In Santa Rosa de Copán, John Donaghy, a lay volunteer with the Catholic diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán, generously hosted me and scheduled my interviews. He is originally from the United States, but has lived and worked in Honduras for the last three years. I will also be citing information from his blog throughout this paper.

While in Santa Rosa, I spoke with several staff members of Cáritas, diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán, which is a Catholic social development organization that is present in over 200 countries and territories ("Worldmap"). These included its director Father Efraín Romero, educator and community

organizer Manuel Vásquez, Salomón Orellana, and Osiris Canales. I also spoke with the bishop of Santa Rosa de Copan, Monseñor Luis Alfonso Santos, and long-time political and religious activist Father Fausto Milla. I had a short interview with Misael Cárcamo of the Alianza Cívica por la Democracia (Civic Alliance for Democracy), which is an organization led by the bishop.

Finally, I visited a session at one of Cáritas's Schools of Political Formation "Santo Tomás Moro" in the village of Trinidad, to which students of various ages from rural parishes around the diocese traveled to discuss political issues. They were then expected to replicate the session in their own communities.

Through interviews, observations, and informal conversations, I gained a greater picture of how church organizations, leaders, and laypeople involved in liberation theology are engaging in political resistance to the coup. I found that the church organizations, clergy, and laypeople that adhere to liberation theology in Honduras frame resistance to the coup and to the post-coup regime as a central mechanism for the liberation of the poor.

In this paper, I will first discuss the development of liberation theology through analysis of its historical and theoretical influences. I will then examine how these influences are still relevant today in Honduras among those who practice liberation theology. Later, I will discuss how liberation theology is practiced in Honduras with relation to the resistance movement to the 2009 coup.

Oppression, Inequality, and Poverty in Honduras

Currently, Honduras has high levels of political, economic, and social inequality. According to the World Bank, 59% of Hondurans live below the poverty line and 36.2% live in what it considers conditions of extreme poverty (2010). In addition, the Gini coefficient, which measures the level of income inequality on a scale from 0 to 100 where lower numbers represent higher levels of income

equality, is 55.8. According to a ranking on the CIA World Factbook, Honduras has the twelfth highest Gini coefficient among the countries with available data (Central Intelligence Agency 2011).

Wealth inequality foments unequal power structures, in which the rich minority has control of the majority of the country's resources. Economist Amartya Sen states, "The asymmetry of power can indeed generate a kind of quiet brutality" (2003, xvi). This "quiet brutality" is often hard to perceive because it is embedded in the structure of our society, producing a pattern known as structural violence. Paul Farmer expands upon this notion, stating that "suffering is 'structured' by historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire—whether through routine, ritual, or as more commonly the case, the hard surfaces of life—to constrain agency" (2003, 40). Structural violence takes shape through "racism, sexism, political violence, *and grinding poverty*" (ibid. 40). Therefore, while statistics like the Gini index, help us to understand the extent of economic inequality, they do not give us a full picture of what suffering means on a human level. Farmer describes why it is difficult for us to perceive structural violence: First, suffering is "exoticized", placing us at a distance from the reality of oppression; second, it is not easily conveyed in facts or objective reports (ibid. 40); third, suffering is a widespread phenomenon and cannot be easily understood from an individual case. Rather, it requires a look at "the larger matrix of culture, history, and political economy" (ibid. 41).

According to Farmer, those who are most acutely victimized by structural violence are the poor. In addition, as the poor are increasingly victimized, their suffering is hidden by a metaphorical wall that is constructed between the rich and the poor, "so that poverty does not annoy the powerful and the poor are obliged to die in the silence of history" (ibid. 50).

In Honduras, the coup "took off the masks" of the political leaders—as the popular resistance refrain "se quitaron las mascararas" states—thereby revealing much of the oppressive structural violence

in Honduras. However, liberation theologians in Honduras and elsewhere have long been engaged in highlighting and combating structural violence.

Introduction to Liberation Theology

Liberation theology, in its current iteration, took shape within the Catholic Church during the 1960s out of an oppressive political, economic, and social climate in Latin America. Liberation theologians have declared their commitment to stand in solidarity with the poor and overcome structural violence, which they often refer to as “structural sin”.

Leonardo Boff explains three fundamental tenets that the Catholic Church adopted during conferences of clergy in the 1960s and 1970s. The first of these tenets is the preferential option for the poor. In stating this option, the Church proclaimed its formal commitment to solidarity with the poor.

Boff states:

The Church’s option is a preferential option *for the poor, against their poverty*. The “poor” here are those who suffer injustice. Their poverty is produced by mechanisms of impoverishment and exploitation. Their poverty is therefore an evil and an injustice. An option for the poor implies a choice for social justice. It means a commitment to the poor in the transformation of society and the elimination of unjust poverty. It means a struggle for a society of more justice and greater partnership. (1989, 23).

The second tenet to which Boff refers is an option for integral liberation. This liberation occurs on many levels:

On a first level, we mean the social liberation of the oppressed. This implies the historical surmounting of the capitalist system, the principal producer of oppression, and a movement toward a society of greater sharing, a society with structures that generate more justice for all.

In political terms, liberation involves moving toward a society of a socialist type, a participatory democracy. (ibid., 15)

On a spiritual level, liberation “anticipates and makes concrete the dimensions of the utopia that Jesus Christ called the Reign of God” (ibid. 16). According to Boff, through the liberation of Jesus Christ, the people will know that “their hopes for total liberation are not condemned to fade into the distance of some unrealized utopia” (ibid. 16). Therefore, politics, social conditions, and spirituality are all intertwined within the meaning of liberation.

Boff’s third tenet is the option for the base church communities. In the base communities, liberation theology is put into practice; they are “where the poor gather, meditate on the word of God, take a moral inventory of their lives, offer one another their help, and forge links with popular movements” (ibid. 16). These communities give a voice to those who were once silenced by society.

The preferential option for the poor, integral liberation, and base communities are all essential elements of liberation theology and represented a break from the Church’s past. However, a variety of historical and theoretical antecedents are important to take into account in order to study the development of this body of religious thought.

The Historical Development of Liberation Theology

Because liberation theology arose among Catholics, I will focus primarily on the history of the Catholic Church in Latin America. Leonardo Boff divides the history of the Catholic Church in Latin America into three principal periods. The period of Latin American colonial Christendom lasted from 1492 to 1808; the second period was the time of new Christendom, from 1808 to 1960; the third lasted from 1960 to the 1980s, and broke with the Christendom of the past (1989, 9).

During the first period, the Church was closely aligned with dominant groups (ibid. 9). Religious conversion was used as an agent of power in order to exploit the indigenous and black people. According to Tombs, “The church, landowners, and institutions of civil government formed an alliance as the three pillars of colonial society” (2002, 19). Although some Catholic clergy set a precedent for further challenges to the status quo by speaking out against the enslavement of the Indians—notably Dominican friar Antonio Montesinos, Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, and the Jesuit missionaries in Brazil and Bolivia—the same power structure remained in place. As Boff explains, “The Church had concern *for* the people, but it never produced activity *with* the people or *as* the people would desire” (1989, 9).

In the nineteenth century, Latin American criollo independence movements put an end to the colonial period. However, the main structures of power remained in place. Thus began the period that Boff terms New Christendom (ibid. 9). During this time, the Church continued to collaborate with the most powerful at the expense of the poor. Its alliance with power was the Church’s attempt “to maintain its position in society and continue to exercise the power over society it had enjoyed since the conquest” (Tombs 2002, 41).

During the papacy of Leo XIII (1878-1903), the Church took a small step towards a preferential option for the poor, and assumed a more sympathetic position with regard to social movements. Leo issued a social encyclical called *Rerum Novarum* (Of New Matters): *On the Condition of Labor*, which marks the onset of formal Catholic social teaching (ibid. 44). It was a response to Leo’s concerns about the social conditions of European workers and its near-slavery labor conditions. According to Tombs, “*Rerum Novarum* provided the first clear principles for the church to...address social justice....These principles became central to the Catholic social tradition and have influenced liberation theology” (ibid. 45). In 1931, Pius XI reaffirmed the Catholic Church’s social mission in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, published on the fortieth anniversary of the *Rerum Novarum* (ibid. 55-56).

Also during the 1930s, the Catholic Action movement arose with the goal of promoting “the moral values of traditional Catholicism in the wider and more secular society” (ibid. 59). While it was not a radical challenge to injustice, it laid a foundation for liberation theology with its “see-judge-act” methodology (ibid. 59). Liberation theologians utilized this same methodology years later.

These small steps towards a more explicit commitment to social justice led to great change in the 1960s. According to Boff, it was this during this decade that “the pact between the Church and the dominant class entered into crisis” (1989, 10). One key event that influenced a reevaluation of the Church’s social mission was the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban government challenged the Church’s traditional role in society by repressing its leaders and seizing its property. According to Tombs, “More than any other single event, the Cuban Revolution was a wake-up call to an institution, which in many areas, had become distant from people’s lives” (2002, 73). This prompted the Church to reevaluate its place in society.

In response to this uncertainty, a new encyclical entitled *Mater et Magistra: On Recent Developments of the Social Question in the Light of Christian Teaching* called for greater international cooperation and was the first encyclical to speak explicitly in favor of agricultural reforms. According to Gladys Gruenberg, this was a reaction to the Cold War’s ideological polarization and the growing skepticism of unions that linked them with communism. In the encyclical, the Pope discusses the importance of unions in reaching democracy in the workplace (1998). He did not openly criticize socialism or communism, and spoke in favor of agricultural reforms. *Mater et Magistra* also formally endorsed the process of “see, judge, act” in social teaching (Tombs 2002, 75).

The most crucial events in concretizing the fundamental tenets of liberation theology were three series of regional conferences of Latin American bishops. The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) was the first of these conference series, and it laid the framework for the Church’s formal recognition

and adoption of liberation theology. According to Lernoux, “Vatican II widened the floodgates by establishing two radically new principles: that the Church is of and with this world, not composed of some otherworldly body of celestial advocates, and that it is a community of equals, whether they be laity, priest, or bishop, each with some gift to contribute and responsibility to share” (1980, 31).

This set the stage for the 1968 Second Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM II) in Medellín, which Tombs calls “one of the most important landmarks in the first five centuries of the Latin American Church” (2002, 107). The documents produced during these conferences and later documents, most notably *A Theology of Liberation* by Gustavo Gutiérrez, constitute the foundational texts of present-day liberation theology.

The third major conference was CELAM III, which was held in 1979 in Puebla, Mexico. Penny Lernoux states that “the great themes of Puebla—a commitment to the poor and to human rights—represent a major advance over Medellín. For whereas the Medellín document dedicated only three sections to these issues, the sequel written at Puebla is imbued throughout with an overwhelming concern for the poor and oppressed” (1980, 437-438). It was during this conference that the phrase “preferential option for the poor” was officially sanctioned (Tombs 2002, 144).

Theoretical Foundations of Liberation Theology

A number of emerging theories had great influence on the fundamental documents of liberation theology. These theories and liberation theology’s tenets were heavily influenced by the political, economic, social, and theoretical context of that time. During the years leading up to the Vatican II Council, increasing U.S. support for Brazil’s military dictatorship, the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic, the U.S.’s encouragement of import substitution programs, and its economic aid programs that did little to rectify economic inequality were all factors that created disconcertion with U.S. influence in Latin America (Tombs 2002, 89-90, 92). In response to these problems, theorists Celso

Furtado, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Andre Gunder Frank argued that Latin America was stuck in a cycle of dependency and underdevelopment (ibid. 91). This became known as dependency theory. They believed that “what Latin America really needed was not further *development* along these lines but a *liberation* from its position in the world economy” (ibid. 92).

Dependency theory’s influence on liberation theology is clear in the documents produced by the bishops at CELAM II. The following is an excerpt from one of these documents, which is entitled “Peace”:

INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS AND EXTERNAL NEO COLONIALISM

8. We refer here, particularly, to the implications for all countries of dependence on a center of economic power, around which they gravitate. For this reason, our nations frequently do not own their goods, or have a say in economic decisions affecting them. It is obvious that this will not fail to have political consequences given the interdependence of these two fields. (Latin American Bishops-2 1968)

The use of the terms “neocolonialism” and “dependence” reflects the influence of dependency theory. The document goes on to detail several dimensions of economic and political dependency and their implications.

Gutiérrez also echoes dependency theory in *A Theology of Liberation*. He argues that the liberation of the people is necessary to escape dependency, stating that “there can be authentic development for Latin America only if there is liberation from the domination exercised by the great capitalist countries, and especially by the most powerful, the United States of America” (1971, 88). In this way, Gutiérrez points to the connection between biblical concepts and theories of underdevelopment in Latin America.

In addition, some claim that liberation theology has been influenced by Marxist thought. In the past, the Vatican has used such claims to discredit liberation theology. However, many liberation theologians deny that there is a significant link between these two bodies of thought. Philosopher and sociologist Michael Löwy points out some parallels between Marxism and liberation theology. For example, liberation theologians believe that they should work in solidarity with the poor to fight for their liberation instead of giving paternalistic charitable aid to the poor. This mirrors the Marxist idea that “the emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves” (ibid. 30). Others point to a parallel between the belief by Marxists, dependency theorists and many liberation theologians that capitalism is the root of poverty. A 1973 document called *The Cry of the Churches* that was written by bishops and other Catholic clergy in Brazil states:

We must overcome capitalism: it is the greatest evil, an accumulated sin, the rotten roots, the tree which produces all the fruit we know so well—poverty, hunger, illness and death...In order to do this it is necessary to go beyond private property of the means of production (factories, land, commerce and banks)... (qtd. In Löwy 1988, 32)

While liberation theology may converge with Marxism on these points, liberation theologians denounce Marxism’s “materialist philosophy, atheist ideology and the characterization of religion as the ‘opium of the people’” (ibid. 33). The CELAM III conference in Puebla criticized Marxism, stating that although it correctly criticizes the fetishism of the market, it also rejects that there is a God of love and justice (Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano 1979). In addition, the Vatican Congregation for the Defense of Faith has criticized several liberation theologians for supposedly adhering to Marxism. In 2006, it criticized Jon Sobrino, a prominent liberation theologian, by claiming that he was reading theology through the lens of Marxism. In response to these claims, Sobrino wrote:

It is false that I speak of the kingdom of God within the context of Marxist hermeneutics. It is true that I give decisive importance to reproducing the praxis of [the teachings of] Jesus in order to obtain a conception that can bring us closer to that of Jesus. But this last point is a problem of philosophical epistemology, which also has roots in the biblical understanding of what it means to know. As Jeremiah and Hosea say: “to do justice: is that not what it means to know me?” (2006)

Sobrino’s statement reflects an ongoing debate about Marxism among liberation theologians. While the Vatican and other theorists may claim that they employ Marxist analysis in theory and practice, liberation theologians make a clear distinction between these two fields of thought.

Another key theoretical influence on liberation theology is Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s concept of *conscientización* (consciousness-raising). In his influential book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and elsewhere, Freire focuses on education as a mechanism for consciousness-raising. Ultimately, he argues, the people are responsible for their own liberation: “The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientização*” (1970, 67). Freire’s adult literacy projects provided the framework for the *Movimento de Educação de Base* (MEB), created in 1961. In this movement, the church and the government collaborated in order to transmit literacy programs on church radio stations, and local literacy coordinators worked in small literacy circles in the Northeast and Amazon regions of Brazil (Tombs 2002, 94). The bishops at CELAM II echoed Freire’s ideas and the importance of base communities in the document called “Justice”.

It is necessary that small basic communities be developed in order to establish a balance with minority groups, which are the groups in power. This is only possible through vitalization of these very communities by means of the natural innate elements in their environment.

The Church--the People of God--will lend its support to the downtrodden of every social class so that they might come to know their rights and how to make use of them. To this end the Church will utilize its moral strength and will seek to collaborate with competent professionals and institutions. (Latin American Bishops-1 1968)

Conscientización and working *with* the people rather than *for* the people are essential concepts in the theory and practice of liberation theology in Latin America. This parallels the liberation theologians' focus on solidarity with the poor rather than charity for the poor.

Relevance to Honduras

Dependency theory, the Marxism debate, and Freire's *concientización* are all highly relevant theories in Honduras today. The dependent relationship between the United States and Honduras takes shape through U.S. military and economic presence in Honduras. U.S. military strongholds include the Soto Cano military base (also known as Palmerola), and training of the police and military; both of these are considered by many Honduran people as threats to Honduran sovereignty. In addition, the United States is Honduras' largest trading partner (United States Department of State-3 2010) and is by far the largest investor in Honduras. According to data from 2009, the U.S. invested \$342 million in the country, which is equivalent to 70.7% of the new foreign direct investment in Honduras (United States Department of State-2 2011). Honduras also participates in the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which allows 80% of U.S. goods to enter Central America tariff-free. These tariffs will be completely phased out by 2016 (United States Department of State-3 2010). As demonstrated by these statistics, U.S. neo-colonial influence is still fostering Honduras' economic and military dependency on the United States. Furthermore, after the coup, the United States' support for Porfirio Lobo and its ongoing aid for an abusive military have perpetuated this dependency. According to Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle,

...in the hours after the [coup] took place, Obama condemned the coup but refused to qualify it as a “military” coup, which would have obliged the government to suspend all Honduran aid. The State Department took months to even recognize that a coup had taken place. Although Obama announced he would not recognize the coup government, he did not invite Zelaya to the White House. But he did invite Micheletti’s successor, Porfirio Lobo, after he came to power in the November 2009 election, which was marked by violence and fraud...And the State Department’s inertia translated into ambivalence, which encouraged a predictable turn to appease the U.S. Senate’s powerful right wing. (2011, 19-20)

Therefore, since the coup, U.S. support for Honduras has both revealed and strengthened a relationship of political, economic, and military dependency. Further evidence of this dependency is the conference scheduled for May 5th and 6th of 2011 called “Honduras is Open for Business”, which, according to its website, is aimed at “relaunching Honduras as the most attractive investment destination in Latin America” (“Honduras is Open for Business”). It will be hosted at the Crowne Plaza Hotel by the Chamber of the Americas, “a private non-profit that facilitates US companies doing business in Latin America” (RNS 2010).

Liberation theologians in Honduras denounce this dependency and promote a more just economic and political model. Often, this coincides with what outside observers characterize as Marxist, which attaches a stigma to liberation theology. Father Fausto Milla, an influential liberation theologian who publicly participates in the resistance movement, stated in an interview, “we do liberation theology, but we don’t call it liberation theology...The Church worries about liberation theology because it coincides with Marxism in its methodology” (Milla 2011).

Freire’s *concientización* heavily influences the work that liberation theologians, churches, religious laypeople and faith-based organizations are doing in Honduras today. It occurs not only in the

base communities, but also on Catholic radio stations, during church services, through distribution of church-produced documents, and in special programs set up by religious organizations. I will discuss these programs further in a later section.

The Bible as a Force for Social Change

As liberation theology is founded upon religious ideas, it is necessary to analyze how the Bible and religious themes have been interpreted as a force for social change. The following religious concepts are essential elements of liberation theology, both historically and in Honduras today:

Jesus Christ as a Liberator

The figure of Jesus Christ is central to Christianity, and therefore central to liberation theology. Jesus himself was a “poor, fragile person of this world” who had a preferential option for the poor (Boff 66). The CELAM II document called “Poverty” states, “Christ, our Savior, not only loved the poor, but rather ‘being rich he became poor,’ he lived in poverty. His mission centered on advising the poor of their liberation and he founded his Church as the sign of that poverty among men” (Latin American Bishops-3 1968).

Jesus Christ is also seen as a symbol of hope in the fight for justice:

We have faith that our love for Christ and our brothers and sisters will not only be the great force liberating us from injustice and oppression, but also the inspiration for social justice, understood as a whole of life and as an impulse toward the integral growth of our countries. (Latin American Bishops-1 1968)

Sin

Liberation theology also views sin as a universal, rather than a personal, concept. Gutiérrez writes, "Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation...Sin demands a radical liberation, which in turn necessarily implies a political liberation" (1971, 175-176). He points to the Christian belief that Christ redeemed us from sin and therefore liberates us.

Therefore, liberation theology views the fight against injustice as one of liberation from sin. It is intertwined with politics because political change is considered necessary to create a world that is closer to the Kingdom of God on Earth. While sin and salvation were traditionally seen as personal notions that were confined to the Church and otherworldly realms, liberation theology considers them integral parts of the human reality. Therefore, in order to achieve liberation and follow their liberator, Jesus Christ, the Church must fight against injustice in solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

The Honduran Context

With a foundation in the historical and theoretical influences on liberation theology, I will focus on how liberation theology takes shape in Honduras in the post-coup period. The 2009 coup d'état brought to the surface many of the instances of structural violence that had existed in the past. Corporate interests that had long been agents of oppression of the poor ousted a democratically-elected president that had enacted policies that benefited the poor and promoted participatory democracy. In a sense, the coup served as an instance of *conscientización* for Hondurans.

Today, liberation theology has a strong presence in Honduras. Adherents to liberation theology tend to align themselves with the resistance movement, which is fighting for the rights of the poor and oppressed. In the next sections, I will discuss how clergy, laypeople, and religious organizations that adhere to liberation theology are engaging in resistance in Honduras.

Three Definitions of Resistance

In Honduras, the word “resistance” can be defined in multiple ways. First, it can refer to social movements and organized struggles for social justice that have been active since before the coup. Many religious clergy and lay leaders have been involved in this type of resistance work for decades. For example, educator and community organizer Manuel Vásquez stated that he has been in resistance for his whole life, referring to his long history in resisting the unjust power structures in Honduras through education (Vásquez 2011). This type of resistance is both social and political. In an interview, Bishop Santos explained that “the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few is what has this country in poverty. If we want to combat poverty, we have to resist the political parties because they are responsible” (Santos 2011). Therefore, this definition of resistance refers to an ongoing fight for social justice that necessarily implies a political struggle.

In fact, it was a political event, the 2009 coup d’état, which gave resistance a new meaning as the Honduran people began to declare themselves in resistance to the coup and its supporters. Many of those who had previously embodied the first definition of resistance declared themselves in resistance to the coup because the coup perpetuated the unequal power structures that democratically-elected President Mel Zelaya was attempting to change. The Honduran people commonly refer to this conglomeration of groups and individuals in resistance with the general term “la Resistencia”. This movement supports the return of Zelaya to Honduras, as well as the return of the other individuals living in exile. It is also in favor of a popular, representative National Constituent Assembly, as Zelaya had proposed before he was ousted. This would allow normally excluded sectors of Honduran society to participate in rewriting the Honduran constitution, creating a participatory democracy that would give all people a voice in how they want their government to function.

A third meaning of “resistance” is used to refer to the National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP). The FNRP (or the “Frente”) is made up of grassroots “collectives” that are active around the country, as well as other civil society organizations, including indigenous groups, afro-descendant groups, teachers unions, lawyers, nurses, student organizations, LGBT groups, and many others. The FNRP also supports the return of those in exile and the National Constituent Assembly, and it recognizes Mel Zelaya as its general coordinator. The Frente has held nation-wide assemblies in which delegates from many different organizations and collectives come to participate. It also organizes public demonstrations around the country. However, not all of those who consider themselves in resistance to the coup or in resistance to the general power inequalities affiliate themselves with the FNRP.

The Honduran religious organizations and individuals that adhere to liberation theology have embodied the first definition of resistance for decades. In seeking the liberation of the poor, they have been resisting the power structures that oppress the poor. Most of the liberation theologians and organizations that adhere to liberation theology saw the coup as an effort to continue this oppression, and adopted the second definition of resistance. Subsequent human rights violations and a rising cost of living reaffirmed that resistance to the coup and the post-coup regime is part of the ongoing fight for social justice. However, most of these religious groups and organizations have not affiliated themselves with the FNRP, although many individuals within these organizations or belief systems are part of the FNRP.

There are various explanations as to why these religious groups and individuals do not affiliate themselves with the FNRP. First, there is a climate of polarization in Honduras that has had an especially acute effect on the churches. Gustavo Cardoza explained how this affected the Catholic Church:

...the political parties, the businessmen in the country were not divided. They had a pro-coup position...Nor were the media, at least the media with national coverage that have the most

influence. But the Church was one of the sectors that experienced the greatest split, and it was more evident. (Cardoza 2011)

If the Church had become affiliated with the FNRP, this split would have grown greater because it would have further polarized the political climate. In addition, when the Catholic Church is not explicitly aligned with a political entity it has a greater power to act as a force for reconciliation between rival sectors of society. In a January 2010 statement, the Jesuits explain what they mean by reconciliation:

Let us remember some words from John Paul II in his message on the Day of World Peace in 1997: 'The weight of the past, which cannot be forgotten, can be accepted only when mutual forgiveness is offered and received; this is a long and difficult process, but one that is not impossible'. 'Mutual forgiveness must not eliminate the need for justice and still less does it block the path that leads to truth. On the contrary, justice and truth represent the concrete requisites for reconciliation'. ("Palabra..." 2010¹)

This statement, issued shortly before Porfirio Lobo took office, was ignored by the Lobo regime. Although Lobo pledged to foster reconciliation, he ignored "the need for justice" when he signed an amnesty decree on January 27, 2010 that dismissed charges against the military chiefs that had carried out the coup ("Preliminary Observations..." 2010). When I asked Gustavo Cardoza about the Cardinal's position on the coup, he said that he believed that the Cardinal should have called for reconciliation rather than allying himself with one side of the conflict. In this way, the Catholic Church could have avoided such a sharp internal divide (Cardoza 2011). Therefore, many groups and individuals that adhere to liberation theology believe that the Church should not explicitly align itself with either the

¹ English translation of statements of John Paul II found at: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: Chapter Eleven." CatholicCulture.org. 1997. <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7221>.

pro-coup politicians or the FNRP. This allows it to play a reconciliatory role as it seeks justice for past crimes.

Ideological splits resulting from the coup are also evident in smaller churches. Reverend Hernán López explained that while the Lutheran Church has officially expressed its opposition to the coup, there are still about 5% that are pro-coup. In addition, there have been divisions within families in the church. Therefore, while Pastor López has been an active participant in resistance marches, he stated that he cannot tell his congregation how to think because this would only sharpen divisions. Instead, all he can do is educate them and have what he calls a “social influence” on his congregation (López-1 2011).

Bishop Santos also believed that the Catholic Church’s hierarchy should not ally itself with a certain political group either on the left or on the right. He cited French writer Charles Péguy, who wrote that when the hierarchy of the Church affiliates itself with the most powerful people, the poor move away from the Church. However, he does not support open alliance with the FNRP either. He stated, “One always has to pay attention because it could be that the resistance [FNRP] is not actually interested in the poor, but rather is interested in power” (Santos 2011). Some FNRP members have proposed the conversion of the FNRP to a political party, which many believe would feed into the same power system that the Resistance considers illegitimate. Most members of the FNRP did not want to become a political party, and they voted against this move in their assembly on February 26, 2011. However, because the political parties have been known to exclude the poor, this proposal was seen as a separation from the desires of the poor. This may be one reason why the churches that adhere to liberation theology are suspicious of the FNRP. In the end, these churches and religious authorities choose to remain firm in their commitment to the poor by making sure that they do not align themselves with groups that might not have the same firm commitment in the future.

The Bishop also explained that “it is better that the people develop consciousness by themselves” (Santos 2011). For example, he admitted that he boycotted the November 2009 elections because he considered them illegitimate. However, he said that it is not his job to tell others whether or not to vote. Instead, that is their personal decision (ibid.). This reflects the common notion among liberation theologians that the poor must be the agents of their own liberation. It is not the churches’ job to liberate the poor, but rather to work in solidarity *with* the poor in pursuit of liberation.

This is consistent with what many of the churches that follow liberation theology are doing today. Through the use of *concientización* in various programs, they employ liberation theology in a way that supports resistance to systemic injustice and to the coup in solidarity with the poor. *Concientización* is an important mechanism for the religious groups that practice liberation theology in Honduras. It helps the people decide for themselves whether to affiliate with a certain political or social entity while at the same time the churches can avoid polarization within their congregations and among their clergy.

Areas of Focus

In what follows, I will focus on the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán, the Jesuits, and the Lutheran Church as examples of three religious entities that practice liberation theology. The Diocese of Santa Rosa and the Jesuits are among the most outspoken against the coup at a national level in Honduras. The Lutheran Church is much smaller with only about 1,500 members and 10 congregations nationwide (“Honduras: Call for Lutheran Communion Solidarity...” 2011). However, it has also expressed its opposition to the coup and employs the tenets of liberation theology in its worship services.

I chose the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán and the Jesuits due to their public visibility within Honduras. The Lutheran Church will serve as a point of comparison, as it is Protestant and is not tied to such a hierarchy, although it is under the umbrella of the Lutheran World Federation. In comparing

these different religious groups, I will analyze the scope and nature of the impact of these churches on the resistance movement against the coup.

According to Gustavo Gutiérrez, “To be with the oppressed is to be against the oppressor” (Gutiérrez 1971, 301). In keeping with this theme, I will first discuss how each of these religious entities exercises a preferential option for the poor. I will then describe how this option affected their decision to engage in political resistance.

The Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán

The Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán has been committed to liberation theology for decades. Bishop Luis Alfonso Santos explained to me that he studied theology during the 1960s, and was therefore highly educated on the principles of liberation theology. He has been known to participate in street demonstrations, and is active in denouncing open-pit mining in Honduras. He also makes frequent visits to the villages in the diocese, including the most remote. Through these actions, he has gained a high level of respect among the laypeople of the diocese (Donaghy-3 2009).

On July 2, 2009, Bishop Santos read a statement of the Diocesan Pastoral Council entitled “Message of the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán”, which formally declared the Council’s opposition to the coup. It states, “As those who are responsible for guiding the Catholic Church in Western Honduras, we repudiate the substance, the form, and the style with which a new Head of the Executive Branch has been imposed on the People” (“Message of the Diocese...” 2009). It went on to denounce the illegality of the coup, citing specific articles of the constitution and rights that were violated. The Council also pointed to the economic interests involved in the coup:

As the Catholic Church on pilgrimage in the West of Honduras we want to remind the 124
[Congress members] of the Liberal Party and the National Party responsible for the Coup d’Etat

and presently in power that they are not the owners/masters of Honduras and that no one can be above the law... [The Congress members] preferred to be faithful to the economically strong groups, both national and transnational. We hope that in the next elections the People will give them a vote of punishment. (ibid.)

This statement upholds the preferential option for the poor by denouncing those who violated the law in favor of the economic interests of the elite. This preferential option informed the diocese's decision to oppose the coup. A later statement of the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán from September 24, 2009 expands upon this initial statement:

The Coup d'Etat is a product of the unjust distribution of wealth, which generates profound inequalities in Honduras—in diet, in work, in education, health, the possibility of expressing one's voice and citizen participation—since 80% of our impoverished population is once again victims of a power play in which the arrogance of the wealthiest is imposed upon the poorest. (“Comunicado de la Diócesis...” 2009)

Therefore, the diocese's preferential option for the poor is the guiding motivation for its resistance to the coup. Because the coup was largely motivated by economic interests, and because these interests have been protected at the expense of the poor since the day of the coup, resistance to the coup is a fundamental theme among the Catholic Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán.

The Jesuits

In a January 2010 statement by the Honduran Jesuits, they professed their preferential option for the poor:

3. Preferential option for the poor.

To decenter ourselves from our own interests in order to seek a way out which has as its center

the life and dignity of the most defenseless sectors is what we in our Christian faith take as the Mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of a God who saves all of humanity by becoming flesh in the weakest of this world and which, from the perspective of the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, we call the preferential option for the poor (“Honduran Jesuits Statement...” 2010)

Motivated by their preferential option for the poor, the Jesuits have come out strongly in opposition to the coup. In fact, on the day of the coup, Radio Progreso, a Jesuit-run radio station, was one of the only media channels that was broadcasting that a coup had indeed occurred. Because this was against the interests of the powerful elite who funded and carried out the coup, the military proceeded to silence Radio Progreso when they barged into the station at 11 am and forced the radio broadcasters to turn off their equipment at gunpoint. Father Ismael Moreno, the station’s director, writes:

That afternoon we sat down to make some decisions. What should we do? After just a few exchanges we were quite clear: we’re a radio station, a voice. If we don’t have a voice, we’re not a radio. We’re going to defend the radio because it’s the voice of people who otherwise don’t have one. And so we reopened Radio Progreso during the early hours of Monday June 29 and haven’t stopped broadcasting since. Our schedule was limited by the curfews and above all the security of colleagues who risked their lives from the microphone. (2009)

It is clear from this anecdote that Radio Progreso’s strong commitment to the poor compels it to speak out against the coup. Despite the repression that it has faced, it continues to work in solidarity with the most marginalized members of society.

The Lutheran Church

Following the coup, the Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras (ICLH) released a strong statement that denounced not only the coup, but the religious leaders that supported it. It stated:

We denounce:

The Honduran State's institutions and their leaders who planned and continue to carry out the coup d'état as a means by which to usurp power to ensure that the interests of the elites prevail.

The hierarchies of the Christian Churches have allied themselves with the most powerful and dominant sectors in our country. They use and abuse the Sacred Scriptures to justify the arbitrary practice of power, which is manifested in support for the coup d'état. These churches preach to a "Monarchical Celestial Christ", who is in the heavens and who has his representatives on earth to govern in his name, with hard and belligerent hands. In addition, they have a blessing to dominate and exploit other people. They preach to a Jesus that continues to be crucified, defeated, lacerated, and killed. "The people should adore this Jesus and accept that his destiny should be the same here on earth".

We denounce that this ecclesial theology and practice is justifying death, and we emphasize that God has already condemned it (Micah 3: 9-12). **We remember that all those who defend domination and oppression forgot about the great commandment of Love that Jesus Christ taught and lived, and they pass by the beaten and fallen who are lying on the side of the path (Luke 10:25-37).** (Iglesia Cristiana Luterana de Honduras-2)

This statement reflects the Lutheran Church's preferential option for the poor through a harsh criticism of those who do not exercise this option. The ICLH signals religious leaders' support for the coup as a mechanism through which religious hierarchies are "[dominating] and [exploiting] other people". Using

the figure of Jesus Christ, they justify their commitment to serving the poor. This commitment is closely tied to their denunciation of the coup d'état.

While there are many other churches that are similarly denouncing the coup in favor of the poor, this paper will focus on the three described above.

Concientización as a Mechanism for Liberation

The religious clergy, laypeople, and organizations in Honduras that adhere to liberation theology and the preferential option for the poor are carrying out activities whose goal is to liberate the poor from the multifaceted oppression that they face. Using the method of *concientización*, first coined by educator Paulo Freire, these programs are raising the poor's awareness about how they are oppressed. Resistance to the coup is an integral part of these activities because the coup has perpetuated and intensified the rich-poor divide.

Concientización is an essential element of resistance to the coup and the Porfirio Lobo regime because many owners of the mainstream media funded the coup. Journalist Manuel Torres Calderón explains that the media repeatedly manipulates information in order to support the government. It has been known to omit news of police and military repression, and to manipulate coverage of protests. For example, the newspaper *El Herald* excluded 200,000 resistance marchers from its coverage of the September 15, 2009 commemoration of Independence Day (Torres Calderón 2010, 25). According to Torres Calderón, "The challenge that is faced in times of coup d'états is *communication versus incommunication*, and the experience lived by Honduran society confirms that" (ibid. 25). In order to overcome this situation, religious media sources and other church-related programs are working to counter this "incommunication". In doing so, they are fostering resistance to the coup and to structural violence in Honduras today.

I will discuss four examples of *concientización* in Honduras: Catholic radio stations, sermons during church services, the Schools of Political Formation Santo Tomás Moro, and church-produced documents that support the resistance. By looking at these programs, I will analyze how *concientización* is fostering resistance among the poor as a mechanism for their liberation.

Radio Programs

Radio programs are one means by which the Catholic Church is raising the consciousness of the population. They are especially important in reaching the poor because many of the poor do not have access to televisions, computers, or newspapers. In addition, those with a low level of literacy must depend upon auditory media sources for news and information.

Radio Progreso is a Jesuit-run radio station in the city of Progreso that is dedicated to *concientización*. Its director, Father Ismael Moreno ('Padre Melo'), is well-known for speaking out against the coup. Radio Progreso has various programs that carry out what they call "analysis of reality". In addition to these programs, Radio Progreso also broadcasts music and religious programs.

Through "analysis of reality", Radio Progreso highlights the information that the elite-controlled mainstream media fails to show. It works hand-in-hand with ERIC-SJ (Reflection, Research and Communication Team), which is also Jesuit-run, and complements the work of Radio Progreso by providing data and information on issues that are affecting the poor (Cardoza 2011). Journalist Gustavo Cardoza explained:

For us, liberation theology is an essential part...of our work...because we continue to commit ourselves to the majority sectors of the population, to the poor. We believe that...the Church may not be able to change things, but we can at least contribute to change in the hopes that the people will be protagonists of those changes. So our work is of accompaniment. (ibid.)

Therefore, the radio's analysis fosters resistance to the coup by serving as a voice in solidarity with those who were most victimized by the coup. It does this through its news programs as well as its comedy programs, such as *Prosilapia Ventura*, which use culturally-appropriate humor as a base liberatory tool. Through its work of *concientización* and accompaniment, it hopes that "the people will be proponents of change" (ibid.). Therefore, by promoting *concientización* and resistance to injustice, it encourages the poor to seek their own liberation.

Radio Santa Rosa, the radio station of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, also has a variety of programs. While most are religious-based, there are also news programs that present and analyze issues that are currently affecting the local population. One of these is "Dando el Clavo" ("Hitting the Nail on the Head"), which airs every Saturday and offers analysis of the political situation in terms of the poor. This is also a way in which *concientización* is used to challenge the status quo and encourage the people to be proponents of their own liberation.

Because these Catholic radio programs challenge those in power, many broadcasters have received death threats and attempts on their lives. Salomón Orellana and Misael Cárcamo, broadcasters on *Dando el Clavo*, received identical death threats after one of their programs. One week later, Salomón was driving back from another town where he was investigating a human rights violation when somebody shot at his car. Fortunately, he fled to a nearby house and was not injured. However, these types of occurrences are frighteningly common among those who speak truth to power in Honduras (Donaghy-1 2010). Radio Progreso has also been a victim of many instances of oppression. As noted above, on the day of the coup, the police and military took over the station and forced it to shut down. It reopened the next day, but repression continued. Padre Melo began to receive death threats after speaking out on behalf of a young woman who was raped by four police officers after they beat her at a peaceful demonstration in August of 2009. Several other journalists from Radio Progreso and ERIC-SJ

have received threats, including Gerardo Chévez, Leticia Castellanos, and Luci Mendoza (“Honduras: Death Threats...” 2010). Radio Progreso continues to receive threats on a regular basis. Despite these dangers, Radio Santa Rosa and Radio Progreso are persistent in their efforts to speak out on behalf of the most oppressed, motivated by their commitment to the liberation of the poor.

Sermons

Another powerful way in which Honduran churches are raising consciousness among the people is through sermons at church services. The church sanctuary is a space in which the priest or pastor can connect theological themes to the realities of the congregation members.

While I was in San Pedro Sula, I attended a service at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. Pastor Hernán López gave the sermon, in which he explained that the church’s duty is to go where there is diversity and hardship. He criticized the churches that do not do this and instead use the name of Jesus to seek personal gain. Many churches, he explained, have become a business, which is detrimental to the poor. (He was mainly referring to the fundamentalist Evangelical Protestant and Pentecostal churches). He also criticized that the poor were excluded from the Catholic Church’s February 2011 celebration of the Virgin of Suyapa, Honduras’ patroness (López-2 2011). While he did not explicitly mention the coup in his sermon, Pastor López revealed many of the power structures that are maintaining the poor in terrible living conditions. Therefore, his sermon was an agent of *concientización* among the congregation. It was also participatory, and many of the congregation members added their ideas and asked questions during the sermon. This reflects the horizontal structure of liberation theology and its belief that the poor should be the protagonists of their own liberation.

In an interview, Pastor López explained the church’s duty to raise consciousness among the people. He stated, “The churches have the power to influence the people. If the people know their social situation, they become part of the fight for social justice. So the church has the prophetic duty of

education and *concientización* of the people” (López-1 2011). According to López, when the church does not enact this prophetic duty, it aligns itself with power, and it becomes “comfortable and withdrawn” (López-1). He later put this in the context of Honduras’s situation: “The media tries to manipulate and mislead the people, saying that everything is fine and that this is the will of God. However, the church gives the people an alternative space, like a social club of the poor” (ibid.). He described to me that he has participated openly in resistance marches and hopes that his “social influence” will allow his congregation to understand the injustices surrounding the coup (ibid.). Therefore, using his sermons as a mechanism for *concientización*, Pastor López encourages his congregation to become protagonists of their own liberation.

Throughout Honduras, many other religious clergy are speaking out in favor of the poor in their sermons. Some of these sermons make direct mention of the coup while others emphasize resistance to structural violence. Father Efraín Romero, director of Cáritas and priest of the Dulce Nombre parish near Santa Rosa de Copán, gave a sermon in November 2009 in which he also spoke out against the political oppression in Honduras:

This is a time of both joy and sorrow. It is a joy to work together with all of you seeking the people’s liberation, a liberation which Jesus gives us, liberation from sin.

But this joy has been turned into sadness with the situation we have in our country which is for me a pity, a shame. I feel very ashamed to have politicians of the type we have here in Honduras...

Cowardice cannot blind [us to] the essence of the structure of sin which is concealed within, which does not liberate but oppresses, which leads to more illiteracy, hospitals without medicine, teachers who don’t give classes, school without teachers. This is very sad....

Celebrating this Eucharist signifies for me to say to the Lord that you are the king and only you have the words of eternal life. (Donaghy-4 2009)

This excerpt makes evident how political oppression, or the “structure of sin”, is preventing the people’s liberation. Through this sermon, Father Efraín is raising the consciousness of the people about how they are oppressed. By denouncing these problems and relating them to theological concepts, liberation theologians like Father Efraín and Hernán López seek integral liberation for the people with whom they work.

Schools of Political Formation “Santo Tomás Moro”

Liberation theology is the guiding inspiration behind the Schools of Political Formation “Santo Tomás Moro”. These schools were formed by Cáritas Santa Rosa de Copán (a Catholic relief organization) in 2010 in response to a perceived need for political awareness in Honduras after the 2009 coup. There are nine schools that include participants from 43 different parishes (Romero 2011). The priests from each of these parishes choose two individuals from their congregations with leadership abilities to attend the five sessions. After each of the five sessions, the students perform “réplicas”, or replicate sessions, in their communities. The first four sessions were themed “Human Dignity”, “Human Rights”, “State”, and “Crisis of Governability” (Cáritas Santa Rosa 2010). I attended the fifth of these sessions, entitled “In Search of Political Transformation in Honduras”.

Cáritas provides partial compensation for transportation, as well as food during the sessions. In addition, it does follow-up work with the participants and helps them to plan and carry out their community projects (ibid.). Because western Honduras is largely rural, most of the students that attend these schools are campesinos from rural villages. They include youth, adults, men, and women.

The model of education or “formation” is participatory and its goal is to raise consciousness among the participants so that they may do the same in their communities. In the session that I attended, Manuel Vásquez, the “animator” (as the teachers of the schools are called), asked a series of questions that the students, or “participants”, discussed in their answers. Many of them drew upon personal experiences of oppression in their villages. Although the schools are not explicitly influenced by Freire’s *concientización* model, in practice, this model clearly has an impact on their educative methodology. A Cáritas document summarizes the schools’ mission:

In 2010, we began a process of formation with leaders of the diocese with the purpose of promoting a liberating educative process. This process trains individuals that actively participate as citizens with a Christian vision in the construction of a more just, fair and inclusive society in order to ensure conditions of well-being and dignity for the entire population. (Cáritas Santa Rosa 2011)

Even in this short paragraph, education is closely tied to the theme of liberation. The “liberating educative process” seeks a more “just, fair, and inclusive society”, which refers to society that is free of oppressive structures.

According to Paulo Freire, “Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (1970, 79). This was apparent in the session that I attended, where the dedication, passion, and intelligence of the students were evident. Most had traveled for hours to arrive at the school at 9:00 AM for a day-long session. One participant told me that two of the students had traveled four hours on foot to reach public transportation, and then spent a couple more hours on a public bus. Despite their long trips to arrive at the school, which was held in the village of Trinidad, the session was filled with animation and energy. The “praxis” of liberation was demonstrated by the participants’ analysis and dialogue about the problems affecting their communities.

In adhering to the preferential option for the poor of liberation theology, I will highlight the voices of the poor in the next section and how they understand their oppression. I will also look at how they are planning to seek liberation. This will illustrate the development of the theme of resistance during this session of *concientización*.

“La Voz del Pueblo es la Voz de Dios”

In the session of the School of Political Formation that I attended, the first topic that was discussed was “wealth”. Manuel Vásquez, the animator, posted a series of questions about this topic on an easel in the front of the room. Below I will present some of the questions and paraphrase the answers that the participants gave. Then I will analyze their responses.

Q: *What is wealth?*

A: *Wealth is water, land, animals, bodies of water, environment, culture and people in their sources of wealth.*

Q: *Who owns the wealth?*

A: *The oligarchy and the most powerful own the wealth. In Western Honduras, the Buesos, Valle, Medina, Pinto, Aritas, Nazar, and Matas families own the wealth. On a national level, the Flores, Rosenthal, Handal, Facussé, Canahuati, Kaffaty, Carrión, Kawas, Maduro, Ferrari, Lobo, Kattan, and Atala families own the wealth.*

Q: *How did these people acquire their wealth?*

A: *They became wealthy by means of the State, through politics.*

Q: *What have we done to stop this?*

A: *Nothing.*

In response to this answer, Manuel Vásquez began to talk about the importance of taking action, using biblical themes as an empowering force. He explained that we cannot go to church only to pray. Instead, we must act. He illustrated this concept with the parable of the talents. In this parable, a master goes away and gives one of his servants five talents (units of money), one servant two talents, and one servant one talent. The first two used their talents to double their money. However, the servant with only one talent buried it and did not try to multiply its value. The master then criticized the third servant for his laziness and lack of faith. The moral of the story is no matter how little you may have, you can always use what do have to make positive changes. “If we are committed to the people, we are committed to God,” said Vásquez.

Q: *What can we do to stop this [wealth inequality]?*

A: *We are already organized through the church. The church is the “fundamental pillar” in our ability to organize, mobilize, and concientizar.*

In analyzing the discussion of wealth, it is first important to look at how the participants defined wealth. They did not define it as money or material goods, but rather as elements of their environment that are essential for their survival, such as water, animals, and land. They also included the people and culture as elements of wealth. When this is added to the context of the second question, we see just how threatened their survival and well-being is when the wealth falls into the hands of a few families. This brings the official statistics on poverty to a human level. In addition, the participants explained that politics in Honduras serve the wealthy and not the poor. The biblical discussion served to empower the people to be the proponents of their liberation from this state of destitution. A liberatory force in this process is the Church itself.

The second topic for discussion was democracy. The participants divided into small groups to answer the questions that Manuel Vásquez had prepared. Later, they presented their answers to the whole group.

Q: *What is democracy?*

A: *Democracy is living in peace and harmony, but in Honduras there is no democracy because there is hunger and injustice.*

Q: *Who does democracy favor in Honduras?*

A: *It favors the small upper class, which also controls the wealth and the media.*

Q: *Has the government ever consulted the people about the form of political participation that they prefer?*

A: *No, never.*

Q: *What should we do to ensure that they apply democracy?*

A: *The people and the grassroots organizations must unite because “we all feel the same pain”.*

As he elaborated on the students’ answers, Manuel Vásquez emphatically stated, “The voice of the people is the voice of God!” He said that the people wanted to stage an insurrection after the June 28, 2009, but the government said that it would “create a bloodbath” (referring to the statement of the Cardinal after the coup that was broadcast on national television). Then, he reminded the students what Zelaya had done for the poor: he was the only president to lower the price of electricity and raise the minimum wage. The participants added that he was the only president who ever wanted to ask the people what they wanted when he proposed the National Constituent Assembly.

This discussion manifests how the participants closely felt both the benefits offered by Zelaya's government and the negative effects of the coup. Zelaya was certainly not a perfect president, but he did offer hope to the people that the system that had been in place for years could be changed. By giving the poor the opportunity to participate in their government through the National Constituent Assembly, Zelaya proposed an inclusive democratic model. Vásquez tied democracy to spirituality and the preferential option for the poor by stating that "the voice of people is the voice of God".

In this discussion, two major themes of the Resistance are evident: nostalgia for the policies of Zelaya's government and hope in the National Constituent Assembly. The dialogue among the participants revealed that resistance to the post-coup regime is closely tied to the political and spiritual liberation of the poor.

The next topic for discussion was "Sovereignty over Natural Resources".

Q: What are natural resources?

A: "They are goods and services that are meant to benefit the people. They are the property of the present and future generations, and their conservation and manipulation belongs exclusively to the people of Honduras". The State does not take any interest in the people. Examples of this disinterest include open-pit mining, the proposal to create model cities, and the U.S. military base in Palmerola.

Q: How do we understand the meaning of sovereignty over natural resources?

A: We are the owners of the natural resources. They are untouchable. They are the property of the people so the people have the right to take advantage of them.

Q: How do natural resources serve us?

A: They are sources of life so they should be managed by the people that use them. They are the house of the animals and plants.

Q: Who has exploited natural resources throughout history?

A: The most powerful: the businessmen, the transnational companies, those who are benefitted by the law, the large landowners, the drug traffickers, foreigners, NGOs, mining companies, the bankers, the oligarchy

Q: What benefits have the communities and the country received with the exploitation of natural resources?

A: They have not received any benefits. All they have received are illnesses, misery, exploitation, pollution, emigration.

Q: What is one phrase that can describe all of these things?

A: Social sin. (Note: this was stated by John Donaghy, and agreed upon by the participants)

Q: How can we put in practice the sovereignty of the people and the communities over our natural resources?

A: We can do this by joining together as a people.

Manuel Vásquez responded to the participants by explaining that the people must organize “fortified by the blood of Christ..., blood that will build a better tomorrow...with a people committed to their sons, daughters, families, and to God”. He continued by stating that the people must take action, but “before action comes organization...organization, repression, repression, repression – liberation!” Another student talked about the importance of a “*constituyente*” (National Constituent Assembly) to reconstruct Honduras.

Then, Vásquez emphasized the importance of *concientización*: “Those who do not know do not see”. He told the participants, “When you teach the people, you show them the path to follow...founded in what God desires”. He stressed organization, *concientización*, and mobilization, stating “If we are together, nobody can stop us”. Finally, he said, the *constituyente* will “refound” the country. “We must begin to plant seeds so that we may one day have a harvest”.

The dialogue at this session ties together the themes of *concientización*, organization, resistance, and spirituality in understanding the meaning of the liberation of the people. The Church is the pillar of organization, and the *constituyente* represents a way to make the voice of the people and the voice of God heard in the political realm, adhering to a truly democratic model. Through these mechanisms, the people will resist injustice in pursuit of their liberation.

These themes coincide with the Resistance movement itself. The National Constituent Assembly, which Vásquez and the participants proposed as a possible solution to the unjust structures in Honduras, is a fundamental goal of the Resistance. In addition, Vásquez’s promotion of “refounding” Honduras through the “*constituyente*” mirrors the language of the Resistance, and its discourse of “*refundación*”. Furthermore, the participants looked to Zelaya as the first president that had attempted to include them in the political process. Similarly, the resistance movement also looks to Zelaya as a source of hope in rectifying injustice in Honduras. The democratic nature of the session itself reflected the participatory model of democracy that the Resistance is seeking to establish in Honduras. While the Schools of Political Formation are not formally part of the Resistance movement, the participants’ language, goals, and values parallel those that form the basis of the Resistance. As Father Fausto Milla said, “we speak about resistance without naming it, [we do it] in practice” (Milla 2011). This is certainly true of Caritas’s Schools of Political Formation, in which participants practice resistance without formally adhering to the Resistance movement.

Anti-Coup Documents

In solidarity with the people and with the goal of *concientización*, some church organizations have joined together to create materials that support the Resistance movement. One example is a newspaper that ERIC-SJ produces called “A Mecate Corto”. It includes coverage of Resistance protests, stories about human rights abuses, evaluation of the Lobo government, statistics on political assassinations, interviews with common people, news about the Catholic Church, and many other topics. There is also a section called “With a Woman’s Eyes”, which highlights the lives of individual women who are working for justice (Comunicaciones-SJ 2011). It is published every month and is another way in which the Catholic Church is fostering alternative media sources as a method of *concientización*.

Another such anti-coup document is a series of handouts entitled “Zorzal”, which is produced by Cáritas Santa Rosa, Radio Santa Rosa, OCDIH (Christian Agency for Integral Development of Honduras), and INESHCO (Honduran Ecumenical Institute of Community Services). OCDIH is an organization that includes Mennonites and Seventh-Day Adventists, and INHESCO is a natural medicine group founded by Father Fausto Milla (Donaghy-2 2010). The Zorzal pamphlets educate the public about the National Constituent Assembly and why it is important. While religion is not the focus of these pamphlets, they reflect the preferential option for the poor by highlighting the needs of the poor and how the *constituyente* would address those needs. The Zorzal pamphlets also raise awareness about problems in Honduras, including the unequal distribution of wealth, high illiteracy rates, hunger, the unjust distribution of land, and water access issues. These issues are presented with hope for a National Constituent Assembly that would refound Honduras. One pamphlet describes the history of the Honduran constitution, and points out that each time the constitution has been rewritten, the people

have not participated in its elaboration (OCDIH, et al.-1 2010). At the end of this pamphlet, it states the importance and urgency of a National Constituent Assembly that is driven by the people:

Now is our opportunity to refound the country and the Honduran State, but to do this all of us must participate actively, electing assemblymen and assemblywomen, preparing proposals/demands for the Constituyente, and approving the new State Constitution. If not, the dreadful history will have been repeated: 'after each coup d'état, the oligarchies reaccomodate themselves and renegotiate their interests through a Constituent Assembly'. And then we will have lost this splendid opportunity that history has given us to think and construct the country that we dream of for all of us and for our sons and daughters. (ibid.)



Image from a Zorzal pamphlet: "What do we Hondurans demand? - water, rivers, trees, protection of resources, energy, health, education, justice - Of course, a Constituent Assembly" (OCDIH et al.-2 2010)

Another document that supports the process towards convening a National Constituent Assembly is a booklet produced by Cáritas Santa Rosa, Radio Santa Rosa, OCDIH, and CASM (Mennonite Social Action Commission) that edits the 1982 Honduran Constitution to make it more inclusive of all sectors of Honduran society. The document consists of the current text of the constitution and the

authors' proposed modifications, which are placed in boxes next to the article that is to be modified. For example, Article 12 of the Constitution states: "The State exercises sovereignty and jurisdiction in the airspace and subsoil of its territory and islands, territorial seas, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf." The suggested modification is, "No foreign military base will be permitted in national territory" (OCDIH, CASM, et al. 2001, 18). Many of the problems that the students in the School of Political Formation addressed are included in this document. For example, several modifications increased the people's sovereignty over the country's natural resources: "Property and the managing of natural resources cannot be transferred to a private initiative. Water should be managed through public and community initiatives" (ibid. 80). Other modifications deal with inclusion of women and indigenous groups in politics and the exclusion from politics of those who have been involved with coup d'états or acts of corruption (ibid. 41, 46, 59).

The introduction of the booklet states various motives for elaborating this text. It explains that many of the excluded sectors of the country want to write a new constitution through the Constituent Assembly, but "the citizens are almost completely unaware of the contents of the current Political Constitution" (ibid. 5). In addition, it states that the contents of the current constitution are "highly exclusive of the great majority of the country...It is repressive with popular participation and permissive with the transfer of the country's wealth to foreign interests" (ibid. 5). Later, it details the history of Honduras and traces the persistent pattern of exclusion of the majority of Hondurans from national politics. Incorporating religious language, it states "the original sin of Honduras is the exclusion of the great majority" (ibid. 7).

These themes echo what the participants in the School of Political Formation had discussed, and this document translates their needs into a concrete legal text. It incorporates the preferential option for the poor into a proposal for law, and endorses not only resistance to the status quo, but possible

solutions to effect change. Its purpose is to educate the people (*concientización*) about the constitution's text in order to concretize the movement towards a Constituent Assembly since, as the introduction states, many people are not aware of what the current constitution says. Through *concientización* and the proposed modifications, this document hopes to facilitate the formation of a Constituent Assembly as a form of resistance to the status quo. The ultimate purpose of the National Constituent Assembly is to give the Honduran people a voice so they can be agents of their own liberation. In this way, it is consistent with the fundamental principles of liberation theology.

The Advantages and Obstacles of Religious-Based Mobilization

Through these methods and means, religious clergy, laypeople, and organizations that adhere to liberation theology are seeking the liberation of the people, motivated by the preferential option for the poor. The significance of their participation in fostering resistance to injustices in the post-coup context cannot be overlooked. Specifically, their structural organization and their ability to provide resources for popular movements are essential assets for the people's mobilization. Religious entities have a unique ability to provide spaces and resources for the organization and education of the people. In her discussion of liberation theology in Mexico, Anthropologist Kristin Norget, citing Dwight Billings, explains that "religion provides important resources for oppositional struggles, including nondiscursive resources such as meeting places and funding for projects and discursive ones such as the moral authority conveyed in sermons. Also critical...are those aspects conditioning both the views of movement participants and the ability of certain individuals to organize and mobilize others" (1997, 109-110). This statement fits well with the activities that religious groups, organizations, and individuals are carrying out in Honduras. For example, the Schools of Political Resistance provide nondiscursive resources by offering spaces and resources to facilitate the sessions, as well as discursive resources that enable *concientización*. In turn, each parish allows participants to use local church facilities for further

concientización in the replicate sessions. Radio Progreso and Radio Santa Rosa provide discursive resources, and the religious clergy convey “moral authority” in their sermons. Other discursive resources include the documents that are distributed by religious groups, such as Zorzal and “A Mecate Corto”.

Another crucial mechanism through which the Catholic Church can foster resistance and popular organization is its hierarchical structure. While this may seem ironic due to liberation theology’s horizontally-oriented, bottom-up model of political mobilization, many of the Church’s programs in Honduras demonstrate how the hierarchy can facilitate resistance. For example, the Schools of Political Formation could not have existed without the structure of the hierarchy. The schools are organized around the diocesan structures, and the participants are chosen from individual parishes. The participants then use Church facilities to perform their replicate sessions with their congregations and other community members. The support of the Bishop Santos has also been crucial in enabling the formation and success of these schools. As the participants in the School of Political Formation put it, the Church is the “fundamental pillar” of *concientización*, organization, and mobilization.

On the other hand, the hierarchy can also be a hindrance to the Catholic Church. For example, the Cardinal monitors what is happening within different sectors of the Church, and he has influence over their activities. For example, later this year, Bishop Santos will turn 75 years old. In accordance with Church canon law, he will have to hand in his letter of resignation. I was told by a member of *Cáritas* that the Cardinal might try to replace Bishop Santos with a more conservative bishop, which would hinder the diocese’s ability to carry out activities that support progressive initiatives.

The hierarchy also limits the level of inclusiveness that the Church can foster. For example, as theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid pointed out, liberation theology in the Catholic tradition still excludes the topic of sexuality: “The fact that liberation theology never produced a sexual ethics speaks of the

limitation of a project of liberation in a continent where the poorest of the poor are women and where non-heterosexuals have their human and political rights limited by their love life” (2005, 37). In Honduras this is especially evident because some of the most outspoken opponents of the coup have been gay rights groups. In fact, one of the most famous martyrs of the resistance movement was Walter Tróchez, a gay resistance leader who was kidnapped and killed in December of 2009. When I asked Gustavo Cardoza if Radio Progreso ever addressed gay rights issues, he answered:

In that sense, the radio station sometimes has to do a kind of self-censorship because homosexuality is not accepted by the Catholic Church. In our programs we address issues related to homosexuality. But we have to talk about them with a high level of caution because behind us we have an ultraconservative Church that is also watching over us. (Cardoza 2011)

Therefore, the hierarchy limits not only the Church’s ability to exercise a preferential option for the poor through its activities, but it also limits its ability to define who is poor. In Santa Rosa de Copán, I gained a deeper understanding of how gay rights are treated by clergy and laypeople in that region, which is largely rural and socially conservative. Father Efraín Romero, who was one of the people that I interviewed who expressed more outspoken politically progressive views, told me that he would never exclude a gay individual from Church activities. Instead, he would talk to them on an individual basis to determine what problems they had in their past to reach the decision to be gay (Romero 2011). During the School of Political Formation, I witnessed some of the discrimination that exists within some sectors of Honduran society. Manuel Vásquez mentioned LGBT participants in the Resistance marches on the 15th of September, stating that “even the gays with their little skirts were participating” (the participants erupted in laughter), and “nobody was making fun of them because this movement is *inclusive*”. Therefore, while there is an effort to support inclusion of and respect for all people, discrimination still exists. This discrimination is not publicly condemned by the Catholic Church due to the influence of its

official doctrine on the mindset of clergy and laypeople as well as the backlash that would come from the hierarchy if it was condemned. Therefore, Catholic liberation theology's ability to fully embrace the inclusiveness of the Resistance movement has limitations because its hierarchy and official doctrine limit its definition of who is poor.

In contrast, the Lutheran Church is not tied to a hierarchy. While it is under the umbrella of the Lutheran World Federation, the Lutheran Church's structure is based upon individual churches that work in collaboration with one another in a horizontal manner. This has both negative and positive effects on its ability to mobilize within and alongside the resistance movement. One negative effect of its non-hierarchical structure and its small size is that it cannot mobilize on a large scale. It would be much harder for the Lutheran Church to develop a program that is similar to Cáritas's Schools of Political Formation. However, an advantage of its non-vertical structure is that the Lutheran Church is free to speak out in favor of gay rights, birth control, and other issues that would be highly controversial for the Catholic Church. This freedom is reflected in its strong statement entitled "Message of Solidarity of the Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras (ICLH)", which not only denounced the coup, but strongly criticized the religious leaders who endorsed it. The documents of the Catholic Church, while they are critical, are not as strongly worded. In my interview with Pastor Hernán López, we discussed the LGBT community. He told me, "The Lutheran Church has a liberal way of thinking. Sexual marginalization is prohibited and it supports the inclusion of all genders" (López-1 2011). This reflects how the absence of a hierarchy in the case of the Lutheran Church gives it more ideological freedoms, but hinders its ability to organize and mobilize the popular sectors. In terms of liberation theology, its definition of poor is much wider, but its ability to educate and mobilize on a large scale in pursuit of liberation is much more limited than that of the Catholic Church.

The Importance of Religious Support for Resistance

The advantages of religious-based participation in resistance are also evident when considering Honduras’ strong religious tradition. A January 2011 study of public opinion that was released by ERIC-SJ and IUDOP (University Institute of Public Opinion of the Central American University José Simeón Cañas of El Salvador) illustrated the importance of religion in Honduran society. This study asked 1,548 adults in Honduras about their opinions on a variety of issues. In general, its results reflected pessimism about Honduras’ political and economic situation among those surveyed. It found that 84.8% believe that the current government has not improved the country’s situation (IUDOP and ERIC-SJ 2011, 12). In addition, 55% believe that poverty increased in 2010 and only 9% believe that it decreased (ibid. 14). In addition, there is a low level of trust in state, private, and religious institutions. Below is a list of those who said that they had “much” confidence in the following institutions:

Institution	Percentage who had “much” confidence in the institution
Hierarchy/leaders of the Catholic Church	39.5
Hierarchy/leaders of the Evangelical Churches	31.5
Media	26.5
Military	25.7
National Commission of Human Rights	17.0
National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP)	12.9
Supreme Electoral Tribunal	11.0
Political parties	7.2
Business class	6.1

(IUDOP and ERIC-SJ 2011, 17)

While confidence is low across all of these institutions, it is important to point out that the highest levels of trust placed in the leaders of Evangelical and Catholic Churches. According to Father Ismael Moreno:

Despite the anomie reflected by the survey, 7 out of 10 people state that they would rather stay in the country than emigrate. How are we to understand people who say they have confidence in virtually no actors and view 2011 with the greatest pessimism and at the same time claim to have hope in the future? This can only be true if, instead of having confidence in themselves, they are looking for someone else to rely on. Who would that be? In the survey, 39.5% say they put their trust in the Catholic Church and 31.5% say they put it in the Evangelical Churches... This data gives enough basis and reasons to venture the hypothesis that when Hondurans distrust both themselves and institutionality as a whole, their providential vision gets accentuated: they seek a religious outlet to the political crisis, which those interviewed identify as one of the main reasons the cost of living has gone up so much. (2011)

Therefore, for many Hondurans, religion represents a beacon of hope in a generalized context of distrust and political crisis. This speaks to the importance of religion in the lives of Hondurans. Given this information, religious endorsement of political participation and anti-coup activities has the potential to make changes in the minds and actions of the people.

Another important statistic with relation to the political situation is the low level of trust in the FNRP, with only 12.9% saying that they had “much trust” and 8.8% with “some trust” (IUDOP and ERIC-SJ 2011, 17). Upon comparing this with other statistics, one can conclude that this does not translate to low levels of trust in the broader resistance movement to the coup. Another question in the survey asked, “To what level would you agree if a National Constituent Assembly were convened in Honduras: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, completely disagree?” The results showed that 40.4% strongly agree and 15.7% somewhat agree. This amounts to over 50% in support of a National Constituent Assembly. In addition, over 50% agree that the expulsion of Manuel Zelaya was a coup

d'état (ibid. 18-19). Therefore, while the majority does not support the FNRP, it does support resistance to the status quo by means of a new constitution and recognition that a coup did occur.

The low level of support for the FNRP may also be related to the manipulation of public opinion by the media. The survey pointed out that out of the 64.9% who use television as their main source of news, most people watch channels 5 (29.3%), 6 (27.6%), and 7 (13.5%) (ibid. 21). Rafael Ferrari, who is considered one of the authors of the coup, owns channels 5 and 7 (Salomón 2009). The owner of Channel 6, Ralph Nodarse, is a multimillionaire who is considered one of the strongest supporters of the coup ("Ralph Nodarse, figura clave..."). Of the most read newspapers in the survey were La Prensa (56.3%), La Tribuna (18.7%), El Tiempo (12.5%), and El Heraldo (10.3%) (IUDOP and ERIC-SJ 2011, 21). The owner of La Prensa and El Heraldo is Jorge Canahuati Larach, who pro-coup lobbyist Lanny Davis called one of his "main contacts" (Fox 2009); the owner of La Tribuna is ex-president Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé; and the owner of El Tiempo is businessman and banker Jaime Rosenthal Oliva (although El Tiempo did oppose the coup) (Carmona 2009). With the exception of Ralph Nodarse, the students at the School of Political Formation named all of these people in their list of those who control Honduras' wealth. It is no surprise that they too are supporters of the coup and responsible for manipulating public opinion. Taking this information into account, it is clear why many of those surveyed would not trust the FNRP. The most viewed media sources are known to demonize the FNRP in their reports because of their pro-coup and pro-elite position. Ismael Moreno substantiates this claim and offers further explanations for distrust in the FNRP:

Support for calling for a National Constituent Assembly and antipathy for the FNRP is...related to the opinion-shaping role of the national media, owned by a handful of wealthy and powerful Hondurans, and to the fact that the Resistance isn't limited to any one political, organizational or party institution. (2011)

Due the pro-coup media's manipulation of the facts, the importance of the Honduran churches' work of *concientización* and "analysis of reality" is essential not only for increasing public awareness about oppression, but allowing the people to make clearer judgments regarding the FNRP. Moreno continued, explaining another reason for public distrust in the FNRP:

The FNRP emerged from an institutionalization process that progressively and very rapidly separated it from unstructured popular outrage. That is probably why people consider the FNRP as just another political party, joining together traditional leaders from the popular movement, Liberals loyal to Zelaya, and people seeking to capitalize on it for immediate proselytizing interests. The FNRP is perceived for what it has evolved into: a movement intimately linked to the figure and leadership of ousted President Manuel Zelaya. It moved further in that direction as the months passed, and can now be defined as Zelaya's political and ideological structure because he defines its ideas and makes the decisions that give it identity. (2011)

The people's opinion about the FNRP, therefore, may in fact be due to the belief that it may not represent a true challenge the status quo. Instead, it might evolve into a political party or a puppet of Manuel Zelaya. These are also some of the reasons that explain why religious organizations and churches do not formally endorse the FNRP. However, while both church groups that adhere to liberation theology and the majority of Hondurans do not consider themselves part of the Frente, the majority support the National Constituent Assembly as a source of hope for Honduras' future.

If this is true, then who should convene the National Constituent Assembly? The authors of the survey asked this question to those who said that they supported the assembly:

Person or institution	Percentage that believed that the person or institution in question should convene the National Constituent Assembly
Porfirio Lobo	19.3
The churches	14.6
The National Congress	12.7
Diverse sectors in common agreement	12.1
The political parties	9.2
National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP)	8.0
The international community	5.7
Manuel Zelaya	5.6
The Supreme Court	5.1
Other responses	2.2
Don't know	5.4

(IUDOP and ERIC-SJ 2011, 19)

The president came in first place, perhaps because the media portrays his regime as a “government of national reconciliation”, and therefore they see him as the best person to bring together the social sectors. In reality, however, Lobo has not promoted reconciliation nor has he stopped widespread human rights abuses or impunity (Pine 2010).

The churches were in second place, reflecting a high level of trust in religious institutions, not only within the spiritual realm but also in the political realm. These statistics show that the churches play a key role in Honduran society, and that they are truly at the forefront of resistance, despite their pro-coup hierarchies. Those who are applying liberation theology using resistance as a mechanism for liberation have great potential to bring about true political, economic, and social change in Honduran

society. In addition, because the majority of Hondurans support a National Constituent Assembly, the churches that are fostering resistance are crucial to the legitimacy of religious institutions as a whole.

Evangelical Christians

Despite high levels of trust in the Catholic Church, there is also a high level of trust in the Evangelical Churches, which mostly include Pentecostal and Baptist traditions. With a few exceptions, including the openly anti-coup *Ágape Church*, most Evangelical Protestant leaders have either been in favor of the coup or silent on political issues. As explained by Paola Bolognesi in her article on Pentecostal Protestantism, many of these churches focus on an individualistic model of sin, proposing that social ills can be resolved by living a highly disciplined life (2010). According to anthropologist Adrienne Pine, “To see discipline—Christian or otherwise—as the cure for societal ills allows the larger structural roots of those ills to remain unchallenged while at the same time strengthening the legitimacy of violent institutions” (2008, 82). Pentecostal churches undermine the very idea of collective liberation from structural sin that is promoted through liberation theology and the resistance movement itself. In contrast, the churches that adhere to liberation theology have a duty not only to promote resistance to the coup, but also to offer alternative views to an individualistic model that is promoted by fundamentalist Protestant churches by addressing structural sin.

Conclusion

Despite their challenges and limitations, religious clergy, laypeople, and organizations that adhere to liberation theology in Honduras are engaging in resistance to the coup on a widespread level. Motivated by the preferential option for the poor, they are engaging *concientización* through radio programs, sermons, religious-sponsored education programs, and distribution of documents. Through these activities, they frame resistance as a central mechanism for the liberation of the poor.

In doing so, they continue a history of liberation theology's resistance to injustice. Like their predecessors, they suffer repression and threats from those in power. However, only through resistance to this injustice will they be able to seek the liberation of the poor.

Although this paper focused on the Catholic and Lutheran churches, there are many other churches that are engaging in resistance. Further research should be conducted on the other religious groups that have spoken out against the coup and the mechanisms that they are using to foster resistance. In addition, an examination of ecumenical efforts among different churches is necessary to fully understand how resistance is encouraging unity among religious groups that adhere to different beliefs. A comparative perspective with other countries that have a strong tradition of liberation theology would also give a fuller picture of the potential for change in Honduras.

A deeper understanding of religious-based resistance will illustrate how this resistance can be translated into concrete political, economic, and social changes. As this research shows, the high levels of trust in religious institutions among Hondurans point to the importance of the participation of religious groups in the resistance movement. When the most trusted institutions are engaging in resistance, the people will be motivated to continue the struggle against injustice, not only from a political standpoint, but also with a spiritual motive that is justified by God's preferential option for the poor. Through this struggle, the people will pursue a truly integral liberation.

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