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## Chile

### Identity and Diversity in Urban Popular Catholicism

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*"Now if you ask me whether I believe in the evil eye, well, they put the evil eye on my son about four times. I used to say I didn't believe in the evil eye: 'That's nonsense,' I'd say. But you have to go through it yourself. You go into a room, you know, the room where the child is, and you get this odd feeling. I got that feeling: he cried and cried, and he had a fever. I mean, you didn't know what he had; but you went into the room and felt something very odd, something dense, it was like . . . there was no explanation for it. But you have a sort of sixth sense that tells you something's wrong. Like, you look at the roof and have a funny feeling; you turn around and you have the sense that something's smothering you. 'Ah,' I said, 'they've given my son the evil eye again! Bring me that piece of paper my sister-in-law gave me, the one who knows about praying to the saints.' It's full of prayers, all right, and some really nice ones, too: it's kind of a family thing with us. You lay the baby down on its back and you pray the prayers you know best; then you make several crosses with a silver crucifix on its forehead, its back, its chest. And finally you say, 'Spirits (of the person you're healing), go out of him and let him come back to his senses!' And you know how you feel afterward:*

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*you absorb all that. The person who does it, they can't be weak in character. It's tricky: I didn't even believe it and it happened to me three times. So now it's something I believe in: I've been through it. There are spooks abroad, as the old saying goes. I believe in it because it's happened to me. All these curses fall on the weakest people or animals in the house. A child can get sick on you, or some little animal can. Anyway, after the healing rite you end up with your arms hanging down this way . . . you're simply drained. Also, there always has to be somebody waiting outside. Afterward you give the child oregano tea to relax, and the child sleeps well all night long. And after you get done praying you have to pay somebody for the prayers. Even if it's only ten pesos, you have to pay. Anyway, when it's all over the person who's been waiting outside comes in and yells, 'Hey, what the hell's going on here? What's all the fuss about? Get out of here, all you good-for-nothings!' That's the way it has to be. And then it's all over, just like magic."*  
(Interview with M.H.)

A major sign of our times is the complex and often profoundly contradictory process of globalization (Robertson 1992). This process is first of all economic, a result of the creation of an integrated worldwide market. Another key aspect of the process is the communications revolution; and finally there is the fact that throughout the world people have become aware of their planetary identity, their belonging to something far larger than their local region or their nation.

Globalization is a process that is spreading modern culture throughout the entire world. At the same time it is shrinking time and space. Often, however, the globalization process is paralleled by an opposing process in which local cultures and traditions are taking on new life. The interaction between global and local realities has not been a simple reproduction of Western modernity: it "has indeed generated plural modernities that may resemble the Western variety, but nonetheless remain distinct" (Schreiter 1997: 12). This process has brought about changes throughout Latin America that are having a major impact on the Church and its evangelizing mission.

Here we will observe, albeit in a partial way, how this process is taking place within the Chilean urban context. Among these changes, the prevalence of the market as the entity that regulates not only economic but also social relationships has taken on special importance. Another change is the fact that public attention is focused not on political life but on the economy. Finally there is the internationalization of communications brought about by the dizzying scientific and technological changes that mark the end of this century.

All these changes go beyond the economic sphere. We are faced not just with a new economy but also with a new culture that is being born out of the transition to a postindustrial society. And Latin American societies, while they are being subjected to deeply contradictory processes and continue to endure poverty and social inequality, are not exempt from the influence of the globalization process imposed by neoliberal development models.

In order to deal with this reality, the Catholic Church faces the need to design an appropriate strategy for carrying out its mission of inculturated evangelization within the emerging global framework (Arroyo et al. 1992; Bosch 1991; Shorter 1988).

### THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, GLOBALIZATION, AND MARKET HEGEMONY

Faced with these sociocultural changes, the Church, like so many other organizations, is forced to deal with a new situation. Since its basic mission is the evangelization of the world, it has understood for several decades that it needs to face the challenge of cultural change. Ever since *Evangelii Nuntiandi* it has spoken of the evangelization of culture, and more recently of the inculturation of the Gospel as a way of updating its mission in history.<sup>1</sup>

For this reason, it is essential to understand what we mean today by "cultural dynamics." In carrying out the New Evangelization, the Church will not be dealing with a cultural "tabula rasa," either in our countries or anywhere else. Rather, it will be involved in a dialogical process in which, relying on the Spirit's mysterious intervention in history and building on previous evangelizations, the evangelizers will be evangelized and the evangelized will also be evangelizers. Hence it is necessary to examine the double dynamic involved in the process of evangelizing culture:

- a) Sociocultural diagnosis and a theological-spiritual discernment of seeds of the Gospel already present and active in the people's cultures; and
- b) The evangelizing action of church institutions and communities, which should be carrying out appropriate cultural mediations through missionary action.

A highly significant question then arises, one that marks all case studies in this international study: to what degree is Christianity, and specifically Catholicism, inculturated in popular sectors, in different settings, within this emerging global context?

The theoretical assumption that makes the above question possible is related to secular cultures' own dynamics. A dominant official culture never eliminates the most essential values harbored by members of dominated cultures or subcultures. In other words, no globalization process is capable of totally destroying local, private identities and values. We can go so far as to affirm that the dynamics of globalization, as we observe them today, encourage and spawn local values and identities in reaction to itself. Having said this, we need to analyze the degree to which cultural confrontation and/or interaction occurs in each specific society.

Within every society we need to acknowledge the existence of a dominant culture, the one that exercises hegemony; today this culture is clearly linked to the logic of the market, both in Chile and in Latin America in general. At the

<sup>1</sup>See the reflection on inculturation in Center for Mission Research, 1994. See also Shorter, 1988.

same time, every society has many internal cultural dynamics that are independent of it and act as subcultures or countercultures.

If the dominant culture that emerges from the globalization process and market supremacy is one in which pragmatism and consumerism reign, the questions we need to ask are: To what extent, despite the presence of this dominant culture, do people hold onto their Christian values and identity? And how, in recent times, has this consumer culture coexisted with the people's religious spirit?

### IS CATHOLIC IDENTITY BEING CHALLENGED BY THESE CULTURAL CHANGES?

The theoretical framework used in our international research has defined broadly but rather precisely what we understand by Catholic identity.<sup>2</sup>

Considering that every identity makes itself known as soon as it is challenged by an opposing one, we could ask, within the Chilean context, to what extent Catholic identity is challenged by religious diversity and by new cultural norms that emphasize the market above everything else.

A key factor to consider, in the light of Weber's analysis (Weber 1958 and 1964), is the fact that Catholicism, as opposed to Protestantism in general, is not well matched with capitalism. Its attitude toward accumulation is not built on an austere and individualistic foundation; instead it develops a communitarian ethos centered on sharing and "festive squandering" (see González et al. 1993; Parker 1996). Is our Catholicism changing as a result of these new cultural norms? Is it becoming privatized? Is it losing its communitarian, festive, and life-sharing character?

These questions lead us to inquire into the urban popular<sup>3</sup> Catholicism that is present in slum areas and tenements in the working-class neighborhoods of Santiago's most populous districts.

We understand popular Catholicism as a dynamic form of religious expression that evolves with the people's lived experience. It revitalizes the traditions out of which it emerges. It has an ambivalent relationship with official Catholicism. As it has been regarded by the Puebla and Santo Domingo meetings of the Latin American bishops, popular Catholicism is "a privileged expression of faith's inculturation" (Santo Domingo Final Document, No. 36; also see Johansson 1990).

Other questions arise. Is popular Catholicism in urban, postindustrial, underdeveloped society threatened by secularizing<sup>4</sup> influences? What seeds of the Gospel are carried by this expression of popular Catholic identity? What other Catholic identities are appearing in popular urban settings?

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<sup>2</sup>See "Theoretical framework for the study," in CERC-UAHC 1997.

<sup>3</sup>"Popular" in Latin America refers above all to poor and marginal people: the working class, urban slum dwellers, and the rural poor.

<sup>4</sup>By "secularization" we mean a historical process in which beliefs are rationalized and diversified, and sectors of social life are removed from the control of religious institutions, rather than the loss of religious influence in societies. See Parker 1996.

## A STUDY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF AN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT

The present article describes the essential elements of a case study carried out from 1995 to 1996 in the municipality of San Joaquín in Santiago, Chile (CERC-UAHC 1997). The municipality of San Joaquín is a district (or borough) of 114,000 total inhabitants in the national capital of over 5 million inhabitants. It is a mixed urban sector where you find services, industries, and lower-middle- and working-class neighborhoods, together with urban slums where a significant number of poor and marginal people live.

Ecclesiastically, San Joaquín is comprised of five parishes of the Santiago archdiocese which are located in the jurisdiction known as the Zona Sur (southern zone). The Church is very active pastorally. There has been considerable development of Base Christian Communities, and the Church was known for its commitment to the defense of human rights during the period of military dictatorship which began in 1973.

In this municipality we interviewed 147 popular secular community leaders<sup>5</sup> on their religious practices and beliefs as well as on other forms of cultural expression. The study used a multifaceted triangulation method whose central axis was a survey. The poll's quantitative material was complemented by qualitative methods that included a permanent reflection workshop with pastoral agents working in the sector,<sup>6</sup> in-depth interviews with selected leaders, on-site observation, and secondary sources such as previous studies on popular religion (especially Parker 1992a and 1992b). The study focused on leaders who identified themselves as Catholics, though the data presented here will be for all of the leaders, except as otherwise indicated.

The Chile case study was designed to focus on the changes brought about by rapid modernization and globalization processes in a totally urban and popular context. It focused on the cultural changes brought about by the market-centered economy and the globalization process, and their impact in the religious field.

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<sup>5</sup>Of the 223 community leaders in the district we studied, 56% were women and 44% were men. A random sampling of this total was polled: 66%, or 147 leaders. For statistical reasons, in order to ensure sample representativity, only 117 leaders' responses were considered for statistical analysis: 55% from neighborhood councils and 45% from the *Comités de Adelanto* or "Progress Committees" of fourteen "neighborhood units," seven of which had a high percentage of poor residents while another seven had a low percentage of poor residents (i.e., lower-middle class). Our sample is 59% female and 40% male. It comprises a group of experienced and relatively well educated leaders. Forty-three percent are 40-55 years old, 34% are 56 or over, and 23% are under 40. Forty-seven percent have completed secondary school and 39% have finished primary school; the remainder have gone on to study a specialized technical subject or have been to college. In terms of personal income, most are in the lower stratum, earning less than US\$250 (100,000 pesos) a month. Only 37% earn more than US\$450 (180,000 pesos) a month, which places them in the lower-middle-class category.

<sup>6</sup>Throughout the stage of fieldwork and data analysis, a Permanent Pastoral Agents' Workshop met with relative frequency. Participants were Sister Marie Aimé and the following priests: Mariano Puga, Carlos Coopman, Oscar Berger, S.V.D., James Weckesser, M.M., and Eugene Toland, M.M.

How do these shifts challenge the inculturation of the Gospel? Does popular Catholicism still have a vibrant identity? How is it changing in the face of modernizing trends?

### RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES AND BELIEFS

We worked with urban popular community leaders, assuming that their beliefs and religious identities would differ from those found among the great mass of the faithful. Still, we should note the common features shared by both leaders and followers. When it comes to sociological dynamics, no reality or popular group can be understood in isolation. "There are no leaders without followers, at least not for very long. By the same token, popular groups, beliefs, and practices do not spring full-blown 'from the people' " (Levine 1992: 23). These should be understood as historical creations that emerge out of complex relationships between the masses and their leaders; and between these masses and their leaders, on the one hand, and the dominant institutions, among them the churches, on the other. This has been called the dialectics between official and popular religion (Amaladoss 1989; Dussel 1986; Lanternari 1982; Vrijhof and Waardenburg 1979).

On the other hand, community leaders are more directly influenced by socio-cultural change: it is they who are most affected by the processes of modernization, globalization, and secularization; and this is reflected in their mentalities. A study of the influence of these processes on the beliefs and practices of urban popular Catholicism will therefore give privilege of place to popular Catholic leaders. In all probability, what affects them will in time affect the wider population they lead. For this reason, our study will focus on Catholic leaders; but these leaders will be observed within the context of the beliefs, rituals, and values shared by all the municipality's leaders.

### RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

We began by analyzing respondents' religious affiliation. The following list shows their distribution according to religious convictions:

Category	Percentage
Catholics	70.9
Believers without religious affiliation	15.4
Protestants	7.7
Atheists	5.1
Other Religions	0.9

More than 70% of respondents called themselves Catholics. This figure concurs roughly with the results of Chile's 1992 national population census.<sup>7</sup> In con-

<sup>7</sup>The figures of the national population census of 1992 for San Joaquín district are 77.6% Catholics, 10.9% Protestants, 6.6% indifferents and atheists, and 4.9% other religions.

trast to earlier trends, however, it appears that today there is an ever more significant presence of a type of noninstitutional religious belief classified in our poll as "believers without religious affiliation." In this sample they outnumbered even Protestants. There is a trend toward increasing numbers in this sector at the expense of traditional, church-affiliated religious practice. It is a new phenomenon that we have been able to corroborate with the conclusions of several other empirical studies in popular urban settings (Parker 1992a). Here we see the emergence of an interesting new religious category that constitutes a challenge to inculturation in modern urban settings, even popular ones, in a society that is under the influence of the globalization process.

Besides believers without religious affiliation, there are "self-styled Catholics" who say they are Catholics "in their own way." For example, one respondent told us:

**M.H.:** "I'm a Catholic and my wife is a Pentecostal Methodist. My father-in-law is a Protestant. Spirituality goes beyond all religions and all materialisms. The reason my wife and I got married is that while I'm a baptized Catholic, I don't give a damn about the Catholic religion. I believe in a God and I respect everybody's ideals and political views . . . I believe in a God, but to believe in a God you don't need a religion. All you have to do is to think and believe that there's a far greater person who's in charge and who guides your whole life."

Our studies indicate that the trend toward secularization in these popular settings appears to move in three directions:

- a) A tendency toward religious diversification, that is, toward the loss by Catholicism of the monopoly it once enjoyed in Chilean society. Traditionally, Catholicism was part of Chile's heritage of "colonial Christendom." In these urban popular settings, the movement toward an emergent plurality of religious options is very clear.
- b) A notable rationalization of beliefs accompanied by institutional estrangement (that is, a certain aversion toward religious institutions or institutionalized "churches") rather than by the relinquishing of basic belief in a transcendent realm. Only 5% call themselves atheists, a figure that is much lower than in other social classes and strata. We have been able to corroborate this conclusion in the present survey. All those who call themselves "believers without religious affiliation" believe in God, and the great majority also profess their belief in Jesus Christ. To the category of the institutionally estranged we would have to add the above-mentioned "self-styled Catholics" who report that they are Catholic "in their own way"; in using this phrase, they show their estrangement from the institutional Church. We should also add Catholic believers whose basic practices do not include the observance of Church precepts and official rituals (the 50% of Catholics who report that they "almost never" or "never" go to Mass, for example). These respondents adhere to "popular Catholicism," the prac-

tice of a folk religion that is more or less independent of clerical control (cf. Tables 1 and 3, Official and Popular Beliefs).

- c) A tendency toward an increase in "diffuse" noninstitutional beliefs that have been characterized by contemporary sociology as "new age" (Valveçius 1995; Soneira et al. 1996: 269 ff.; Pace 1995). This category comprises a heterogeneous collection of mysterious and magical beliefs combined with esoteric and nature-based traditions, many of them influenced by Oriental perspectives. These are found in syncretistic combinations with Christian, Gnostic, and indigenous traditions.

The data obtained by correlating beliefs and educational levels reveal that the higher the individual's educational level, the greater the tendency toward both institutional estrangement and the rationalization of beliefs: saying, for example, that one is a believer without any religious affiliation. The lower the educational level, the greater the degree of adherence to institutionalized religion.

Comparing Catholics and Protestants, we find contradictory trends. In the former group, church affiliation diminishes as educational level increases; while in the latter, church affiliation increases with educational level. The number of atheists and believers without religious affiliation also increases with formal education. This suggests the hypothesis that people distance themselves from Catholicism as their educational level rises. This could mean that the educational system tends to influence the religious sphere by acting as a transmitter of secularizing trends in modern urban society, opening up a greater number of religious options.

Looking at these urban settings, we are able to conclude that Catholicism is still a component in the religious identity of the great majority of the people. This is true despite what we have said about the ongoing influence of modernization and globalization on the attitudes of the community leaders interviewed. There are varying degrees of alienation from Catholic beliefs and rituals; but as we shall see, there is still an adherence to the basic tenets of Christian faith and of Catholic doctrine.

The religious identity of popular Catholics studied is neither closed nor intolerant. Respondents were asked about their views on whether members of Christian religions that are not their own are "sisters and brothers in the faith"; 72% of the Catholics responded in the affirmative, while the overall mean was 65%.

When asked what is the difference, in faith terms, between Protestants and Catholics, and why we distinguish between Catholics and Protestants, two respondents answered:

**G.T.:** "I think Protestants aren't ashamed of their religion. They actually have to go out and preach their religion in the streets, they go right out there . . . Some of their pastors don't have college degrees, but still they have more time to talk with you. I've seen them in the hospital visiting sick people, for example, but when I was in the hospital I never saw any priests. I think Protestants are really more present among the poor, and it's like they help one another more."

L.V.: "I've never discriminated against people from a particular political party or from another religion. If they invite me, I go . . . with Protestants . . . because I like to listen and understand and get an idea what it is, what it's about, so I'm not talking about things I don't know about."

This kind of openness toward "sisters and brothers in the Christian faith" indicates tolerance rather than agreement with others' beliefs. The interpretive hypothesis we would need to verify is that Catholics feel less threatened by religious plurality than Protestants. Because they are a minority, Protestants would tend to be more wary of Catholic hegemony. In the workshop too, we saw that Catholics historically show a more tolerant attitude toward different leanings, groupings, charisms, and options within their own church than do Protestants. In the latter churches, the emergence of diversity quickly leads to the formation of new denominations.

### RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Regarding religious beliefs, the leaders were asked about their faith in a variety of supernatural beings. They were given a list that included sacred entities found in Christian doctrine, others that appear in popular beliefs, and still others that coincide with new age ideas, several of which have magic or superstitious connotations, that is, specific modes of relating to the supernatural world, and where no pejorative connotation is implied.<sup>8</sup>

The overall results can be seen in the three tables below.

**Table 1: Official Religious Beliefs**

	Sample	Catholics
God	93.3%	100%
Jesus	92.2%	97.6%
The Bible	88.8%	97.6%
Holy Spirit	80.2%	80.2%
The Virgin Mary	74.8%	88.9%
The Devil	65.2%	69.5%
The Saints	59.6%	78.8%

Examining official religious beliefs, we can see that the most widely accepted are those that are part of the dogmatic creeds of the institutional churches, both Catholic and Protestant: God, Jesus Christ, and the Bible.

<sup>8</sup>For a more elaborate discussion see Parker 1996, especially Ch. 10.

**Table 2: Traditional and New Age Beliefs**

	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Catholics</b>
Herbs	75.9%	78.0%
Horoscope	52.2%	61.3%
Aliens	46.9%	43.2%
Reincarnation	42.1%	39.5%
Spirits	42.1%	46.3%
Telepathy	40.7%	37.5%
Iriology	38.2%	36.2%
Yoga	38.1%	40.0%
Acupuncture	36.9%	32.1%
Astrology	36.8%	40.7%
Selfknowledge	30.7%	39.6%
Hands healing	30.4%	29.6%
Gnosis	28.8%	24.7%
Spiritism	26.5%	30.0%
Palmistry	26.3%	28.4%
Phantoms	21.9%	24.6%
Tarot	21.4%	26.6%

**Table 3: Popular Religious Beliefs**

	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Catholics</b>
The other life	64.4%	66.6%
Paradise	61.4%	71.6%
The end of the world	57.4%	62.4%
Hell	53.0%	59.2%
Souls in Purgatory	45.2%	54.3%
Intercessory Spirits	41.7%	53.1%
Curses	33.9%	39.5%
Aromatic herbs for Purification	28.0%	36.3%
Witches	27.0%	30.8%
Dwarfs	20.0%	23.4%

All Catholics said they believed in God and almost all in Jesus Christ. Contrary to what could be expected from the results of earlier studies, there is a greater percentage that says they believe in the Bible (98%) than believe in the

Virgin Mary (89%). The latter devotion remains very common, however. Examining respondents' emphasis on belief in the Bible, we can suggest two hypothetical explanations:

- a) Traditional belief in the Bible as Sacred Scripture, as the Word of God, as sacred, as powerful and untouchable, and as evoking magical associations; and
- b) The renewed importance of the Bible in postconciliar Catholicism.

When we observe the distribution of percentages regarding traditional and new age beliefs (Table 2 above), we see that the majority of community leaders believe in medicinal herbs and in horoscopes. Looking at the next highest percentages, we see that they coincide with perspectives that have begun to prevail in Western culture in the current transition to a postindustrial society (which some have mistakenly identified with "postmodern" culture). The latter include beliefs in natural medicine, horoscopes, parapsychology, and unidentified flying objects, all of which are characterized by the conviction that trans-rational mysteries and energies impinge on individual, collective, and planetary life.

There is a tendency to understand the sacred as a diffuse energy and to see God not in personalized form, as Christian theology does, but in terms of cosmic energy, often flowing from within the individual:

**M.H.:** "To me, God is an interior power I carry within me and project toward others. It's like a power, and I know it's not just inside me; it's also outside me. Don't ask me how I feel it: it's something intangible. But I can feel it."

It is interesting to note that some of the "Oriental beliefs" that, along with the above-mentioned convictions, make up what Western and North American sociology of religion has called new age beliefs, have similar percentages—from 36.8% to 42.2%.

In the in-depth interviews with Catholics, some curious new age elements appear, especially the ideas of reincarnation, the transmigration of souls, and extraterrestrials.

"Do you believe in reincarnation?"

"Yes."

"How do you think reincarnation takes place?"

**G.Q.:** "You can turn into an animal or you can go on being the same person. You don't know what you'll end up being. . . I imagine you'll go up and then come back again reincarnated as another person, or as a plant, or as an animal: we move on eternally in circles. . . I imagine we meet all the people we know who have died."

**M.H.:** "I don't know what's going on with me, but when I go to certain places I have the impression I've been there before. I don't know how to explain it: let's just say I might be some kind of reincarnation."

**L.V.:** "At this point, psychologically speaking, I don't know whether the

spirits exist or not; I don't know about reincarnation and all that, but people have seen there's such a thing as reincarnation."

Belief in ghosts and in "Gnosis" is much less common among the leaders interviewed: 21.9% and 28.8%, respectively.

In all this we note a trend toward more cosmological visions of religion and religiosity, featuring a syncretism that brings together elements from traditional Catholicism, indigenous religions, Eastern religions, current science and technology, and new age practices. There appears to be a secularization process that relativizes traditional, orthodox Catholic beliefs and appears in conjunction with religious diversification and the relativizing of all beliefs. In other words, there appears to be a process of secularization without secularism.

Regarding those beliefs that fall into the category of popular religiosity (Table 3), we would underline some interesting observations about responses given by the community leaders polled.

First of all, the data indicate that among all the popular religious beliefs mentioned, the leaders have the strongest faith in the end of the world, "the other life," heaven, and hell.

Regarding traditional magical-religious beliefs (Table 3), a large percentage (42%) believe in intercessory spirits (*animitas*); spells and curses (34%); and the burning of aromatic herbs to chase off evil spirits (28%).

A significant percentage also believe that a baby can be affected by the evil eye (33.3%).<sup>9</sup> The baby that has been "eyed," or looked at by a person with "heavy blood," is affected by a spell that causes a serious, life-threatening illness. The only cure for the "evil" that provokes this illness is a magical-religious healing rite called a *santiguamiento* or *santiguerio* that is carried out by a popular healer, the *santiguadora* (see interview that opens this chapter).

Besides the one-third of persons who really believe in the possibility of the "evil eye," 36% doubt its existence. When the latter say they are not sure whether a baby can be "eyed," they are giving tacit credence to the possibility of extranatural intervention by evil forces, and consequently to practices such as healings, amulets, and incantations.

The overall data on religious beliefs offered by this study allow us to affirm that there is a relative (and not strong) secularization process among a significant segment of the leaders polled. This process shows two tendencies: one toward the rationalizing of belief; and the other toward an increase in new age beliefs. While the majority still adhere to the dogmatic teachings of the official churches, there

<sup>9</sup>Belief in the evil eye or *ojo* is traditionally related to a sickness found among the Latin American and Chilean poor; its main symptom is severe diarrhea, and it can occasionally bring about the child's death (Parker 1992b). The idea of the evil eye is widely held; it is passed on orally and goes back to the most ancient roots of religious history. It was present in the Old Testament and in classical Greece, and it is also spread widely throughout Africa (Plath 1981; Read 1966). Its etiology has clear magical-religious connotations, and there has never been an empirical-rational explanation for the phenomenon (Grebe 1971).

remains a very significant proportion of magical-religious beliefs typical of traditional popular religion. The latter beliefs have been reshaped in the urban setting, and are different from the traditional religiosity of peasant communities, in that they are no longer shaped by the regular cycles of nature.

### TYPES OF POPULAR CATHOLIC

In the light of our study's objectives, based on the indications provided by the statistical sample, and using the qualitative data generated by the interviews, we created different types of Catholic leaders: a first type who would be closest to the official Catholic Church; a second type who would more often practice rites associated with traditional folk Catholicism; and finally a third type who would tend to be closer to some new age beliefs. We discovered that all of them, for reasons we will analyze, can be validly classified as "popular Catholics." We proceeded to do in-depth interviews with those leaders who seemed most representative of each type.

We should keep in mind that these people all call themselves Catholics. And in fact, if we analyze their religious beliefs by type of Catholic, we will find that there are not great differences in their attitudes toward official teachings: they all share the basic Catholic beliefs in God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit, and the saints. The differences are to be found in other areas, and it is these we will analyze.

#### *First Type of Popular Catholics*

These are "practicing Catholics," that is, people who go to Mass with a certain regularity and who basically believe in the dogmatic teachings of Catholicism: God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin Mary. They also believe in the intercession of the saints and in the afterlife. This last major belief associated with official Catholics is consistent with classic Christian faith statements about the Resurrection.

This type of Catholic is clearly closer to the doctrines of the institutional Church than to unofficial beliefs such as popular magical-religious tenets and new age ideas, both of which they criticize.

In general they have a more acutely formed ethical sense that can be attributed to their understanding of the devil, who is seen to be present in every person and above all in human activity in the form of sin.

#### *Second Type of Popular Catholics*

These Catholics believe in and practice popular magical-religious rites that have grown out of rural settings and are reproduced or reinvented in the urban world: promises to God through the intercession of the Virgin Mary or of the saints (*mandas*); the evil eye; spells and curses; ritual curings; and herbal medicines linked with traditional healing rituals.

This type is distinguished by its great belief in Chile's folk religious tradition,

which is marked by *animitas* or intercessory spirits, to which we will return below.

It also practices ancient Catholic ritual traditions that have become popular in urban settings, such as the celebration of Mary's Month and Palm Sunday.

Members of this type keep a certain distance from the official Church; nonetheless they go to Mass rather frequently.

Consistent with its popular magical-religious beliefs, this type of Catholic sees God, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints in very concrete terms and makes use of traditional iconography.

### *Third Type of Popular Catholics*

This is a new kind of syncretism within popular Catholicism. It combines elements from traditional folk religion with some of the new beliefs and spiritual sensibilities of the new age movement.

Catholics of this type, together with traditional beliefs, make use of yoga and believe in astrology and horoscopes, as well as in reincarnation and healing through the laying on of hands. They also believe in spiritism, Gnosis, extraterrestrials, and astral bodies.

Their spirituality sets the spiritual against the material, opting for the first but recognizing that the second is functionally necessary.

They identify themselves as Catholics, but they are not identified with the Church as an institution and they are critical of the churches, but still say they are profoundly influenced by Catholicism.

These leaders' image of God is more abstract, resembling a kind of energy that can take on different forms.

Members of this type display a comparatively greater range of "beliefs," colored by certain superstitious traits. They have a comparatively greater belief in the devil and in almost all the things we saw in Tables 2 and 3. They are more "credulous": they are more likely to believe in hell, the "souls in purgatory," spells and curses, and witches and elves.

### *Open or Closed Identity and the Various Catholic Types*

Finally, an aspect that is of special relevance for our study is the degree of adherence by Catholics to their own "Catholic identity." The question "Do you think yours is the only true religion?" yielded various outcomes. Clearly, the third type shows the greatest openness to other religions; this is quite consistent with the diffuse and deinstitutionalized faith that characterizes these Catholics. The first type, on the other hand, remain most closed to religions other than their own: they regard their faith as the only true one. The second type's openness is greater than that of the first, but far less than that of the third.

## RITUAL IN POPULAR URBAN CATHOLICISM

As descendants of peasant groups that immigrated to the cities generations ago become more settled in the urban setting, and as new generations are born

into this world, popular piety is shaped by the urban way of life. This phenomenon can be observed in San Joaquín. We can begin to speak of a "popular urban Catholicism" that has grown out of experiences in the city. This type of Catholicism is far less drawn to typical folk rituals or massive public expressions of devotion than it was in the countryside. Its life becomes more privatized, but the religious dimension is still present in daily life and in certain parish celebrations. As we will observe, it becomes a less ritualistic and less "practicing" piety.

### "PRACTICING" CATHOLICS AND POPULAR CATHOLICS

An analysis of the data from our study reveals that Catholics are generally less observant of their religion than Protestants, but they are far more devoted than "believers without religious affiliation." Protestants participate much more frequently in their own religious services than do Catholics in theirs. Reflecting on these data, we propose two hypotheses about "nonpracticing" Catholics:

- a) Catholics do not see going to Mass as essential to their life: they see it as less important than how they live.
- b) Nevertheless, they tend to persevere in the practice of certain popular rituals; this could be because they find meaning in popular devotion despite all secularizing trends, as well as to the deep rootedness of Catholicism in Chile's national culture.

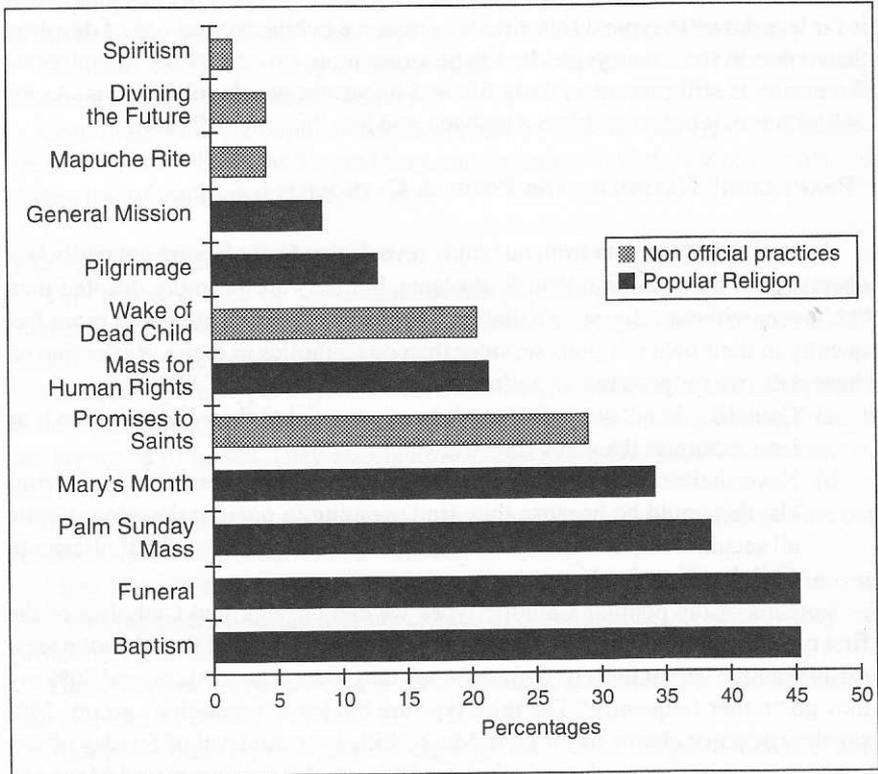
Looking at the popular Catholic types we can observe that Catholics of the first type are more likely to be "practicing Catholics," but that they do not necessarily practice very intensely. Only 20% say they always go to Mass, and 80% say they go "rather frequently." The third type are the least "practicing" group: 54% say they never or almost never go to Mass. Still, a certain level of Sunday observance does exist among these Catholics: 15% say they always attend Mass and 31% say they go rather frequently. Finally, the second type of popular Catholics appear to be the most constant regarding Mass attendance, perhaps because of their traditional Catholic sensibilities: 57% say they always go to Mass, and only 22% say they never or almost never go.

### RITUAL PRACTICE: RITES AND TRADITIONS

As shown in Graph 1 below, which lists the ritual practices in which respondents said they participated most frequently, there is a very wide range of rites that mark different moments in the lives of these community leaders. Graph 1, "Ritual Practices," tallies responses to the question, "In the last year, have you participated in . . .?"

Clearly, the practice of attending baptisms and funerals is widespread. Forty-five percent of respondents attended one of these during the last year. Nevertheless, only 30% engaged in "popular religious" practices such as *mandas* (promises to the saints, the Virgin Mary or to *animitas*) during the last year. Only 4% admit having attended practices such as divining the future, and only 2% had participated in spiritist sessions.

Graph 1: Ritual Practices



Mass attendance is low, while participation in baptisms and wakes is high, perhaps because there is a lack of deeper motivation in the former case, while in the latter they abound:

“You told me you’re a Catholic?”

**C.Q.:** “Yes I’m a Catholic, but only halfway. If I go to Mass it’s to participate in a wake or when there’s a first communion or a baptism. I’m lazy about going to Mass . . . I get bored, and I find priests very boring.”

“What does Baptism mean to you?”

**C.Q.:** “You don’t know anything when you’re baptized; you’re becoming a Christian, because nobody is a Christian until they’re baptized. What happens is that if you’re not baptized, you’re a pagan [literal translation: a Moor].”

“What do you think happens to them?”

**C.Q.:** “I’ve seen older children who aren’t baptized and they’re sickly; it’s like they don’t have any defenses. All kinds of things happen to them, and they’ve always got problems; that’s the difference.”

The frequency of religious practice is not determined within a social and cultural vacuum. It reflects the variety of needs, values, and aspirations of people who live in the context of poverty and social and cultural oppression. What can certainly be affirmed is a kind of "spiritual warfare" involving certain symbols of popular faith. This "spiritual warfare" separates popular Catholics who are closer to Christian Base Communities from those who display a "popular" faith deformed by the sociocultural exploitation that defines their whole context.

In 1992 a young San Joaquín man was run over on an avenue in his working-class neighborhood. Immediately his friends built an *animita* for him, a tiny temple erected by the roadside near where he was killed. According to popular tradition, the soul of the victim of a tragic death "dwells" there. The *animita* becomes a consecrated spot where people go to pray and to offer *mandas*, promises to the soul of the departed, just as they do to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints.

So it happened in the case of this particular *animita*, which became the object of an odd symbolic conflict between a group of Catholic women, members of a Christian Base Community, and the young man's own group of friends. To complicate matters, the victim's mother belonged to the Christian community. The young man had been a member of a working-class street-corner gang that gathered to drink and use drugs. They liked rock music, and their religious beliefs had drifted ever closer to those of a satanic cult, which probably grew up within the group itself. The curious thing is that, with macabre syncretism, the young people included among their "satanic" beliefs the ancient and traditional popular faith in *animitas*. While usually this roadside *animita* would be adorned by an image of the Virgin Mary and by many decorations and flowers, in this case the only thing to be found in the tiny temple was a black throne; the idea was that it would be used by Satan. Around the temple there were no flowers or pious images; the only image was the austere and foreboding darkness of the black paint that completely filled the tiny space.

When the women who belonged to the community saw what had happened, they immediately set out to give the *animita* a "Christian baptism." They painted it in lively colors, adorned it with several images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and various saints, and inundated it with flowers.

Here we see how Catholics from a church community turn to the symbolic weapons inherited from the deepest of their popular faith traditions in order to take action and attempt to overcome the influences of the "powers of evil" incarnated in the confusing religious influence of the new youth subcultures, which mix hard rock, drugs and satanic notions—subcultures that are characteristic of the small but very degraded "postmodern" atmosphere found in the lower-class neighborhoods of a large metropolitan area.

This story points to the survival of older popular faith traditions in the heart of the city, but it also shows how these traditions are reappropriated by new religious groups that are under the influence of a globalized culture, moved by a diversified religious field, and diluted by multiple influences—including new age culture on the one hand and a renewed Catholic pastoral practice on the other. The simple and direct reproduction of the traditional manifold of peasant

folk superstitions and religious traditions is no longer found in these urban conditions.

In contrast to what is a frequent practice where traditional rural culture is the norm, these urban popular Catholics do not appear to seek solutions to their problems through magical-religious practices that reflect a dependent, fatalistic mentality. Instead, what seems to prevail is the attitude of people who, far from seeking the tutelage of heteronomous forces, take the initiative and believe in human action. This stands in paradoxical contrast to their religious beliefs, where, as we have seen, the influence of magical-syncretistic beliefs is significant.

In any case, it is important to note that most respondents made it clear, in answering other survey questions, that they did not have much regard for classical State paternalism. They opted instead to encourage collective actions in which the community organizes to solve its own problems in conjunction with the State or the municipal government. Observing their style of social action, it is apparent that they believe in organized community action. Let us look now at what happens in the area of health care.

#### FAITH AND PROBLEM SOLVING: HEALING AND HEALTH

What we have been saying becomes clearer when we look at the alternatives available in resolving health problems. While our study did not focus on the poorest and most marginal of the slums, we know that the life of the urban poor is lived out in constant tension because many of their basic needs go unmet. Chile's public health indicators are somewhat above the Latin American average, but it is still not an exception in the region. Because of social inequality, poorer sectors have deficient access to health services and do not always have job situations that guarantee adequate medical benefits. Public health facilities lack adequate resources and are chronically deficient.

Our question aimed at getting respondents' view of modern medicine and the health services it offers, as well as their opinion of the types of healing that characterize traditional popular medicine, dispensed by popular healers or "wise women."

Informants were asked about the way they proceed when a sick family member is abandoned as incurable by modern medical practitioners. The alternatives they had were as follows:

- a) Take the person to the priest or pastor.
- b) Take them to a popular healer or "wise woman."
- c) Take them to a priest or pastor *and* the popular healer.
- d) Keep them home, because if the doctor couldn't do anything nobody else will be able to cure them.
- e) Other.

Because the popular healer or "wise woman," a typical practitioner of traditional medicine, is mentioned in two of the possible alternatives (b and c), we have combined both in order to carry out our analysis. In this way we have set up

a comparison between those who trust only modern medicine and institutionalized religion and those who have some degree of openness to popular medical practices that have magical-religious components.

While the average community leader is inclined to leave the ailing family member at home, it is significant that slightly more than 30% turn to the popular healer, or else to the healer and a clergy representative at the same time. Only 18.6% say they would go only to a priest or pastor.

It is interesting to analyze this attitude in terms of community leaders' educational level: we learned that the lower their educational level, the more frequently they turn to healers. Those with more education prefer to leave the sick person at home or find some other solution, such as persisting with modern medical treatment.

Among community leaders with only a grade school education, most prefer consulting the healer to other alternatives. Leaders with a background in higher education say they would leave the person at home or find some other solution. Leaders with a high school education are distributed close to the mean.

In any case, the reason for turning to the popular healer is faith related. It implies faith in healing power, faith in the healer, and faith in the possibility of a miracle:

**R.P.:** "My husband had been operated on for a kidney stone, and one day I spoke to the gentleman who sells herbs in the market. 'Listen,' I said, 'they operated on my husband, you know, and now he's got gall bladder symptoms.' 'Take along some *llantén*, some *matico*, and some *pangüe* and make him a tea out of it: it's a sure cure,' he said. I believe in herbs because they're natural things, they're from the countryside. Iridologists have a look in your eyes and they know all about you. They sit you down and have a look at you before you tell them anything at all. And everything they say turns out to be just what you have—"

"But they're not doctors . . ."

**R.P.:** "According to them they're doctors. They call themselves doctors. Of course they've been accused of things, of giving out prescriptions; but people have faith in them, and in the long run it's faith that counts."

But this is not blind faith; it doesn't arise from a mentality that depends on blind powers, on providentialism and miracles. Rather, it is a faith in the power of God that does not rule out pragmatic attitudes in seeking concrete ways of overcoming health problems:

**M.H.:** "I'll go out and look for other solutions—not the ones that are easiest, but the ones that will work as quickly as possible. That's what everybody looks for now; it's what either of you would look for. Something that offers me a satisfactory solution and makes me feel I'm playing to win. Winning is not always possible, but you ought to at least

feel satisfied because you did your very best. If there are no other solutions, then may God's will prevail. If God wants your family member to die, then great; but at least they won't die because nobody made an effort. You have to knock on every single door."

When we analyze the responses by type of Catholic we find that the first type leave the sick person at home (46%) or take them to a priest (36%); none of them simply takes the person to the popular healer. The third type, however, are the group who turn most frequently to the popular healer to treat an incurable patient (50% do only this, and another 25% go to the priest as well as the healer). This shows a very high level of faith in spiritual healing (75%). No one of them would take the sick family member only to a priest. The traditional type would leave the person home (31%), take the person to a healer (25%), to a priest (25%), or to both (19%).

Looking at belief in the evil eye, which we have already described, we asked the three types of Catholic whether a baby can receive the evil eye. Most second or traditional types said yes (61%); 46% of the third type also agreed; while only 38% of the first type answered affirmatively.

Since the evil eye is cured by means of a ritual procedure called a *santiguamiento*, we asked about people's familiarity with this type of healing ritual. Responses, by type of Catholic, were as follows:

The first type of Catholics "have heard talk about it" (almost 70%), while close to 40% of the other two know exactly how the ritual is conducted. This indicates that family members of the latter types have direct experience with this magical-religious procedure. It is significant that there are no second type of Catholic for whom *santiguamientos* are totally unknown.

Overall, the data we have collected on the role of faith in dealing with health problems show that it is important for a significant proportion (more than 50%) of popular Catholics, although its role varies for each specific type. The priest is the most important healing figure for the first type, while for the third it is the healer or the laying on of hands. The second type of popular Catholics have a variety of alternatives: they may turn either to the priest or to the healer or to the laying on of hands.

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

We have seen that the different types of urban popular Catholics have different relationships with the institutional Church. The first type of Catholics are closest to the institutional Church, both in ritual observance and in participation in church organizations. The second type of Catholics, while they participate in other aspects of church life and do not share some official beliefs and sacramental rites, are also close to the institution. The Catholics who appear to be most estranged from the institutional Church are the third or new age type.

One reason people of Catholic background give for feeling estranged from the

Church is the search for a more liberal, less authoritarian religion. The reasons most often given by the third type or "self-styled" Catholics is the sense of obligation they perceive in a church whose preaching seems demanding and authoritarian:

**M.H.:** "I don't want to feel obligated to do things. I believe in God, in Jesus Christ, and in the saints, for example; but I just believe, you know? I don't want to feel I have to. If I feel I have to then I won't go, but if I want to then I will . . . The churches, religions, are too rigid."

On the other hand, those who feel close to the Church say they go precisely because of the Catholic Church's relative openness compared to the fundamentalism of Pentecostals or neo-Pentecostals.

**M.M.:** "I'm attracted to the Catholic religion because it's the religion that gives you the least trouble: if you want to go to church, then you go. There are other religions that give you a lot more problems—the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example. They can't drink tea or coffee, they have to fast, and I don't know what all."

We will now look at two factors that are important in analyzing the relationships and interactions between the official institutional Church and the various popular Catholicisms. These are the contexts in which people have received their formation in the faith and the more or less critical attitudes of the various informants with regard to the institutional Church and its role in society.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH IN RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION

Regarding their religious socialization, all respondents were asked: "Where did you get your religious formation?" They were given several alternative replies.

While "the family" is an important locus of basic religious socialization for all, it is most important for Catholics: 90% of respondents mentioned it.

Next in importance is "school." (This can mean having attended religion classes in public school or having gone to Catholic school.) Almost 65% mention two other very relevant contexts within the Church's pastoral life. The first is the "Month of Mary," which is a traditional, widely attended Catholic parochial celebration in November; and the second is "catechetics," which generally refers to a post-Vatican II system of presacramental instruction that is required for all Catholics in their respective parishes. Another significant source of instruction, mentioned by 40% of Catholics, is the Sunday sermon.

Less widespread sources of instruction in the faith, such as Christian Base Communities, study days, workshops, courses, retreats, and participation in ap-

ostolic movements, have less influence on Catholics in general—that is, on those we have called “popular Catholics.” Hardly any of the informants mentioned them, though they are decisive in the formation of lay Catholic leaders and active members of the postconciliar Church in popular sectors.

In general terms, then, the Catholics we studied had not had the exclusively traditionalist religious socialization that characterizes folk Catholicism, as would have been the case had they mentioned only the family: they have also been exposed to more contemporary forms of instruction that include a more nuanced theological, liberating, and missionary content, imparted in formal contexts devoted to the instruction of the laity as part of a renewed pastoral strategy.

From a missionary point of view it is essential to recognize the continuing importance of the family, and within it undoubtedly mothers and grandmothers, in the religious socialization of children in the popular classes.<sup>10</sup> Next, it is important to underline the significance of two activities that constitute privileged conduits of interaction between official Catholicism and popular Catholicism in modernized urban settings: the Month of Mary and parish catechesis.

#### EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH'S CURRENT ROLE

In general, the Catholic Church's image among the leaders polled is positive; this coincides with national public opinion polls, which identify the Catholic Church as one of the Chilean institutions that has the highest credibility. The high regard enjoyed by the Catholic Church in Chile is in large measure a result of the key role it played in defending human rights in the face of the repression and authoritarianism of General Augusto Pinochet's military regime, which governed the country from 1973 until 1990.

These community leaders believe the Catholic Church is playing a more positive role than it did in earlier periods. San Joaquín leaders were asked to respond “Yes” or “No” to the following statement: “I'm pleased with the Catholic Church as it is now; in former times it was more traditional.”

Most Catholics (62%) agreed with the statement, while 31% of non-Catholics (Protestants, no religion, and atheists) agreed. Only 17% of Catholics said they disagreed, showing a degree of critical distance from the contemporary Catholic Church. The Catholics who expressed strongest agreement with the affirmation were the first type, but the results among the others still show strong agreement.

Turning to another issue, the community leaders think the Church should play a role in “social issues.” These Catholics overwhelmingly agree with the Church's position on drugs and on AIDS. There is not the same consensus regarding the way the hierarchy deals with problems such as divorce and abortion: dissidents number one-third of respondents.

It appears that a key variable in differences of belief among Catholics is their

<sup>10</sup>“Latino Popular Catholicism is fundamentally dependent for its existence on the entire community, on the families within the community and especially on the older women within the families” (Espín 1997:4).

relationship with the institutional Church. Those who are the most accepting of dogmatic beliefs and sacramental practices we have classified in the first type. Still, it is important to point out that strictly speaking, members of this group are not the practicing Catholics and Base Community members who have the closest relationship with the official, post-Vatican II pastoral life of Catholicism. The sample was not focused on them.

Those we have classified in the second type have easy, familiar relationships with the various sacramental, theological and educational dimensions of the official Catholic Church, but they hold to their own beliefs and practices. Their degree of attachment to the institutional Church is varied.

Those we have classified in the third type continue to be popular Catholics, but they adhere to syncretistic, magical-religious and esoteric beliefs and practices. It is they who are the most sharply critical of the official Church and its hierarchy, and feel the most alienated from it.

### CATHOLICISM, IDENTITY, AND LOCAL CULTURE

Cultural identity emerges as one of the central themes in the debate over the ability of the modernization process to relate to or destroy values that are intrinsic to each specific culture. Our concern here will be to see how religion—especially popular Catholicism—interacts with the dynamic of identity-modernization.

The modernization process has often been questioned because in its efforts to overcome backwardness and tradition it tends to overlook individuals' sense of identity and to uproot them. They find themselves in an unpredictable environment where they are subjected to deep and accelerating social changes brought about by the globalization process. There is a tendency, then, for the boundaries of our societies' symbolic identities to become fuzzy: all differences are subordinated to the "homogeneous universalization" imposed by the market and by scientific and technological progress.

However, the modern sense of identity is a matter of interiorization, a reflexive act that responds to the basic notion of a thinking-acting being as the center of the world. This notion, which results from the secularization of consciousness, is radically different from the kind of vision that conceives of the human while mired in traditional and religious atavisms.

Our sense of personal identity is linked, first of all, to a sense of belonging; and later it is associated with representations of our bonds to our surroundings, which become ever more evident and familiar to our common sense. The latter make up all that constitutes our familiar, everyday world, the place where we were born, where we grew up and became independent.

For this reason, a sense of identity built on the rational and utilitarian patterns present in highly modernized societies tends to favor an individualism that rests on a totally secularized foundation. That is to say, it favors a sense of the absolute autonomy of each individual, an identity detached from our primary bonds and

relationships. The "self-made man" is sufficient unto himself and no longer needs the community in order to govern his life or get along in the world. In traditional societies, however, the individual relinquishes individuality in the name of tradition and forms an attachment to the events, circumstances, relationships, and interactions that "have always been there" and therefore cannot be changed or questioned. It has been said that religion in premodern societies functioned as a key component of this "tradition," which comprises and sustains collective identities.

The globalization process, then, generates a personal identity that is individualistic, pragmatic, and geared to the market; it is highly competitive and tends to deny traditional bonds. And once it does that it denies its specific local and religious roots.

With this frame of reference in mind, then, our study asked the following question: In what way is these community leaders' sense of identity "modern," and how is it related to the Christian faith?

It is beyond the scope of the present study to offer a final or definitive answer to this question. Nevertheless, we believe that the analysis of our data provides enough information to offer a clear picture of the direction in which our informants are moving with regard to religious-cultural models.

Our goal is to offer a detailed look at the three types of Catholics, regarding factors that are especially relevant to our study: the construction of personal identity and perceptions regarding specific cultural values.

#### **IDENTITY AND A SENSE OF BELONGING; THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIMARY, LOCAL BONDS**

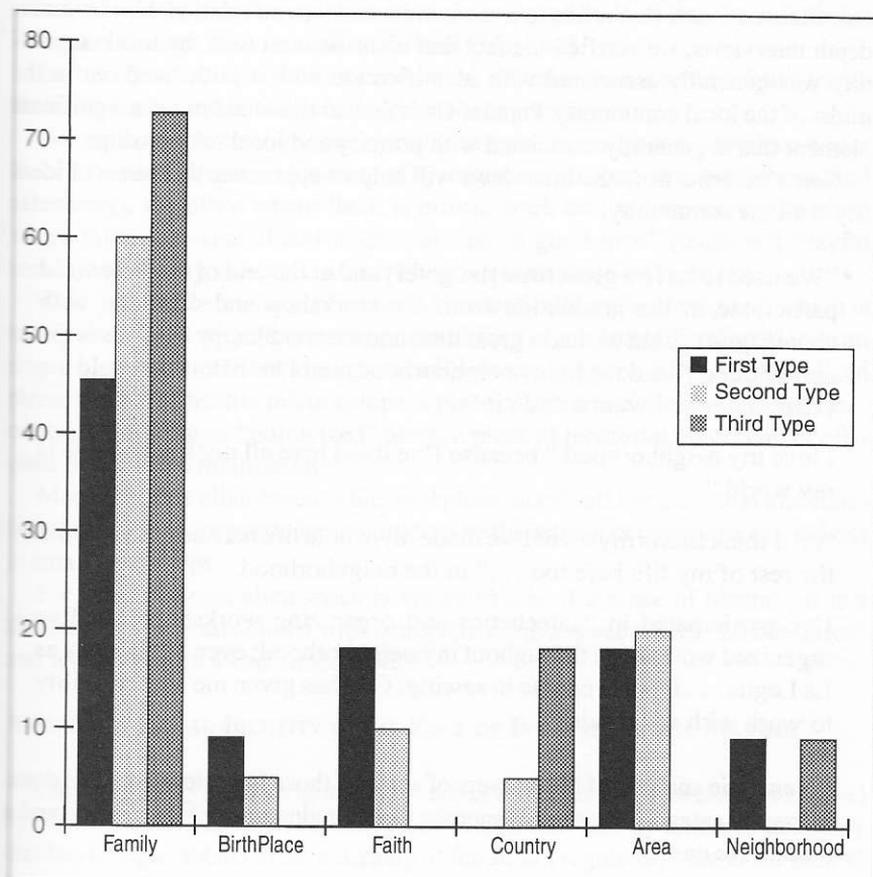
Those interviewed were questioned about what they "felt to be most truly their own" (Graph 2). They were offered a series of alternative categories of groups or collective entities with which they identified to a greater or lesser degree. The responses in terms of their primary preference show that for all types of Catholics, the family is undoubtedly what they "feel to be most truly their own."

In the case of the first type of leaders, we can conclude that their faith and the areas in which they live constitute secondary identification factors. This situation is repeated in a very similar way among the second type.

However, the third type of Catholics do not consider their faith to be a significant factor forming their identity. This fact may be related to the diffuse kinds of beliefs that predominate among this type of Catholic. Members of this group mention the nation and the neighborhood as their secondary identification factors.

It is worthy of note that those interviewed generally did not list their birthplaces as factors in the construction of their identity. This traditional sense of identity, so closely linked to closed, rural, and isolated societies, was of primary importance in earlier times; but today it appears to be irrelevant. The place where one was born, so essential to *campesino* identity, is no longer so crucial among the urban popular classes.

Graph 2: What you feel most truly your own, by type of Catholic



The spatial axis—by means of which territorial identity was expressed in traditional rural societies—has been replaced by a sociological axis made up of “the family.” “Where I was born” and “where I grew up” are deeply marked by communitarian rather than sociostructural bonds. In terms of the typology of Tönnies (1955), the privileged place of the family points to the predominance of community over society. Perhaps we can find here an explanation of the lack of spontaneous or outstanding identification with one’s social class or nation.

Another identification factor that in past decades was very important—that of belonging to a political party—has today been relegated to a low standing. Indeed, in many cases this identification factor seems to be rejected out of hand.

The faith, both for Catholic leaders and for ordinary slum dwellers, appears to

be a secondary factor in defining identity. It is important to point out that both the family and the neighborhood in which one lives refer to social relationships of a private and/or local kind. In contrast, identification with the Catholic faith constitutes a factor that refers to a more universal type of relationship. In the in-depth interviews, we verified the fact that identification with the local community was generally associated with identification with a faith lived out in the midst of the local community. Popular Catholicism thus constitutes a significant element that is generally associated with primary and local relationships.

Some excerpts from the interviews will help us appreciate this sense of identity with the community:

"We used to have a great time [laughter] and at the end of the year we'd participate in the graduation from the workshop and celebrate with champagne . . . but we had a great time and we were happy . . . This is the sort of thing I've done in my neighborhood, and I love it; if they told me I had to move, I wouldn't do it."

I love my neighborhood "because I've lived here all my life and this is my world."

". . . I think this is my own: I've made my whole life here and I'll live out the rest of my life here too . . ." in the neighborhood.

I've participated in "catechetics and organizing workshops . . . I've organized workshops throughout my neighborhood; even as far away as La Legua . . . I took a course in sewing: God has given me a lot of ability to work with my hands."

A semantic analysis of the answers of some of those interviewed can be done, as below, by categorizing their responses as belonging to *one's own space* and a space *outside oneself*.

### One's Own Space

lived-in  
commitment  
organization  
artisan work  
partying  
security  
a good atmosphere  
persons

FAITH  
IDENTITY

### Space Outside Oneself

(dehumanized)  
no commitment  
discord  
(industry)  
(having a tough time)  
violence  
a bad atmosphere  
power

DISBELIEF  
UPROOTING

One's own space is associated semantically with the community: the sense of identification is not with a geographical place (a specific territory); rather, it is with a network of interpersonal relationships and with a life-giving, existential commitment. As one woman interviewed expressed it, her experience is "what I've gone through with the folks, that's all [laughter]."

In this communally lived-out experience, affective relations with family, with the community, and in faith sharing have been decisive.

We can now characterize "one's own" communitarian space as the place where there is commitment and community organization (artisan workshops and catechesis); the place where there is artisan work and artistic work; the place where things are shared and where one "has a good time" (there is a playful sense); and finally, the place where Christian community is lived out.

This *space of belonging* is contrasted semantically with *alien space*, which is tacitly associated with urban metropolitan life: it is semantically referred to as an empty place without life or vitality and without commitment; it is a depersonalized place, a place of hostile relationships, a place of crime and violence and of insecurity; it is a strange, "politicized" place, a place of territorial power and of efficient but divisive relationships.

Moreover, this alien space is the workplace, above all the industrial and functional workplace, opposite in connotation to the artisan occupations carried out in small workshops.

For these reasons, alien space is the antithesis of a sense of identity; it is a threatening space associated with being uprooted, a space where "no one cares" and where "there's a bad atmosphere."

#### A SENSE OF LOCAL IDENTITY IN THE FACE OF INVASION BY THE MARKET

Chilean society has undergone and continues to undergo major changes marked by the neoliberal capitalist model, which is characterized by a market economy that has brought about (a) the eclipsing of the state's regulatory role in the area of socioeconomic relationships, and (b) a growing preponderance of the market and its logic. The corporate pursuit of increased profitability has depended in large measure on companies' ability to increase their productivity and competitiveness in national and international markets. The prevailing logic promotes a "competitive" attitude marked by selfishness and individualism. At the same time, the relationship between producer and consumer has come to be measured exclusively in terms of money, on the one hand, and to be mediated by the advertising industry and by "marketing strategies" on the other. The economy's growing commercialization and market orientation exhibit an inner logic that tends to disrupt social solidarity systems: their expansion is threatening traditional, time-honored patterns, norms, and lifestyles.

We will now analyze the responses of community leaders affected by this commercialization of Chilean society and its reorientation to the market, and see how their faith influences those responses.

First of all we looked at the commercial establishments where people generally make their purchases, from the closest at hand (the corner store) to an extremely modern, consumer-oriented mall (the Plaza Vespucio, a few blocks from the local neighborhood).

While virtually all the leaders have been exposed to the consumer society through the constant influence of TV in the home, a variety of more traditional practices still persists; and to some degree these practices challenge the newer consumer patterns.

Shopping alternatives run the gamut from traditional neighborhood "farmers' markets" to ultramodern "malls," temples of the consumer society patterned on the U.S. model, which have recently been introduced in a variety of Greater Santiago settings. These alternatives represent two types of social networks: the first embodies face-to-face relationships featuring strong collective bonds; while the second is characterized by impersonal relationships that are mainly individualistic and that promote a "U.S.-type" lifestyle.

The data from our survey show a clear tendency: rather than favoring the impersonal mall, these local leaders still tend to prefer spaces that allow the traditional "face-to-face" relationships found in the "farmers' market." This is clearly the case among all of the different types of Catholics.

Graph 3 compares informants' degree of adhesion to values that tend to reaffirm a shared identity with those that are more in line with modernizing tendencies. The graph summarizes the loyalties of the different types of Catholics in terms of these two kinds of value orientation.

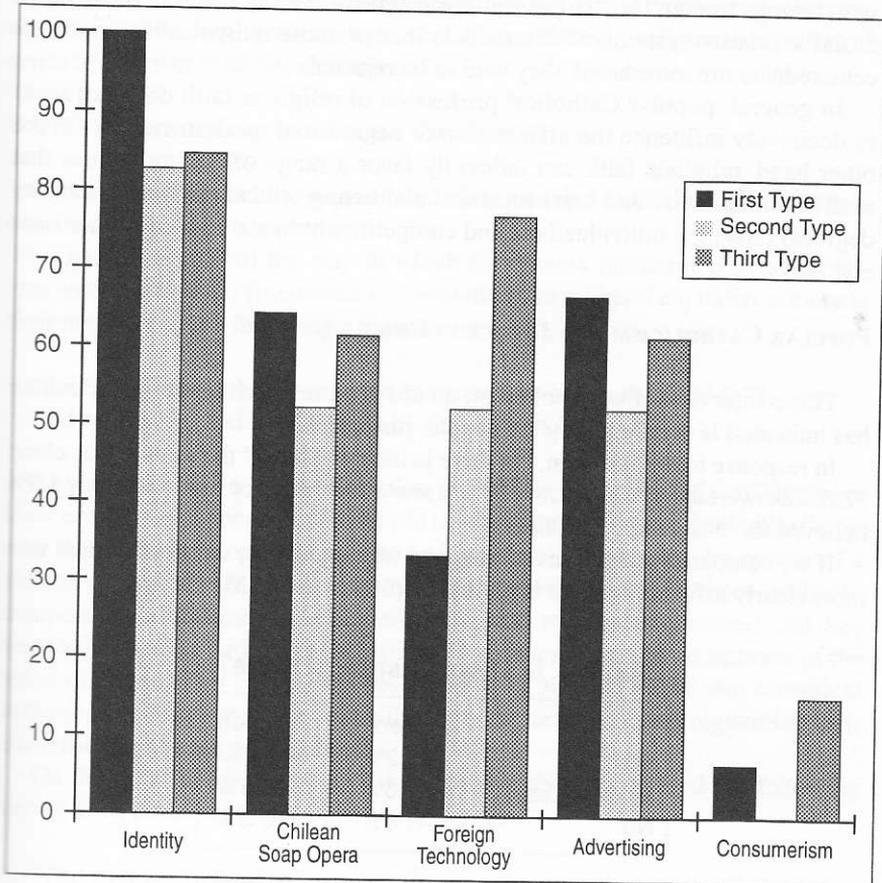
We regard certain values as being associated with the reaffirmation of cultural identity. These would include the items referred to as "the need to do things that revitalize the neighborhood's cultural identity" (summarized in Graph 3 as "identity") and preferring "Chilean TV programs" to foreign ones, which is a way of affirming "things Chilean."

In general terms, as we can see, informants value activities that revitalize community identity. We can interpret this tendency, as we have in the case of preferences regarding places to shop, as the natural result of the weak influence exercised by the consumer society on the mentality of the Catholic leaders polled. If that influence were stronger, then the market, with its pragmatic and individualistic code of values, would tend to break down habits of social solidarity and bring about a decline in concern about issues such as neighborhood identity.

To track values associated with modernization, we asked questions about informants' view of foreign technology. We also asked questions designed to measure whether advertising promoting "consumerism" was understood as something negative, as a manipulation; or whether "advertising" was seen as positive, as necessary information that safeguards consumer sovereignty.

As we can see, for the first type of popular Catholics the most important thing is to engage in activities that revitalize neighborhood identity. At the same time, this group clearly rejects consumer-oriented TV advertising. They are divided in their level of openness to foreign technology.

**Graph 3: Agreement with cultural values, by type of Catholic**



More traditional Catholics (second type) affirm neighborhood identity and “things Chilean”; but their level of openness to foreign technology is greater. They reaffirm their identity by totally rejecting the consumer society, which they say “promotes individualism and selfishness” and clearly militates against the notion of community and of a popular culture marked by solidarity.

Of the three groups analyzed, the third were the most heavily influenced by a modern consumer mentality. They wholeheartedly favored foreign technology, and the level of their rejection of consumer-oriented advertising was relatively low compared to that of the other two groups. As in the previous cases, they reaffirm neighborhood identity and prefer Chilean TV programs.

Given the results of this study, we can see very clearly how the dynamics of the relationship between global and local realities work in this popular urban context. It is not so clear that the introduction of modernizing tendencies has led

to a decline in values that reaffirm cultural identity. Identification with what is "our own" is reaffirmed, but a degree of openness to modernization associated with "things foreign" is also present—whenever it does not tend to break down social solidarity systems. When models that promote individualism and self-centeredness are introduced, they tend to be rejected.

In general, popular Catholics' profession of religious faith does not seem to decisively influence the affirmation or negation of modern values. On the other hand, religious faith can indirectly favor a range of cultural values that reaffirm community and local identities and (using critical analysis to varying degrees) reject the individualistic and competitive values of the consumer society.

### POPULAR CATHOLICISM AND JUSTICE IN CHILE

Those interviewed were polled on a value that research into popular culture has indicated is deeply felt by the people: justice.<sup>11</sup>

In response to the question, "Is there justice in Chile?" the answer was clear: 52.6% answered that there is not; 38.6% answered "more or less"; and only 8.8% believed there is justice in Chile.

If we compare the opinions of men and women, we see that it is women who most clearly affirm that there is no justice (60.3% vs. 41.3% for men).

**Table 4. Is There Justice in Chile?**

	Men	Women
Yes	15.2%	4.4%
More or Less	43.5%	35.3%
No	41.3%	60.3%

A clear sense of justice and a critical attitude toward the national situation are present among all the types of Catholics; this shows that popular Catholicism, faith, and popular piety among grassroots leaders—whatever expression that might take—are not an "alienating" element or an "opiate of the people," either in the classical Marxist sense (Marx and Engels 1979) or in the way that Weber's theory looks at popular religiosity (Weber 1964).

We can verify what we have affirmed on earlier occasions (Parker 1996: 219-246): that in its logical and symbolic constructions and in its syncretistic style of thinking (Marzal 1986), the popular mentality accepts different levels of reli-

<sup>11</sup>In Spanish, *la justicia* can mean either "justice" or the judicial system. Thus, when informants refer to "justice," they may be referring to the unjust distribution of income or to the "unjust structures" of society. In general, however, research has shown that when people speak of "justice" they are talking about the judicial system (Correa and Barros Lezaeta 1993).

gious and social representation and does not see them contradicting one another. The presence of magical-religious elements—especially among the second and third types—does not prevent them from showing a critical sense in their representations of society. None of those studied manifested a religiously reinforced sense of fatalism or social alienation.

### POPULAR CATHOLICISM AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

Let us now analyze how popular Catholics perceive individual advancement, social privilege, and competition.

A good indicator of the way in which informants represented personal advancement within the framework of competition in a liberal capitalist society is their response to the following affirmation:

“Only the most capable manage to move upward in the world. The rest end up losing, and nothing can be done about it.”

This statement is a loose translation to everyday language of the Darwinian ideal extolled by the market. It exemplifies the supposed “natural selection” process that inspires people’s access to and success in the market by means of a vicious competition in which only the most competent survive; those unable to compete are left behind and excluded. Some 41% of those interviewed said they were in agreement with this affirmation, revealing perhaps an acceptance of the value of competition as we have described it, or perhaps a fatalistic or cynical outlook on contemporary economic life, or even the respondents registering their frustration or a sense of impotence.

On the other hand, they were asked whether they considered the following saying to be consistent with Christian teaching:

“The rich get to heaven more easily than the poor.”

It was clear that the vast majority of those interviewed (84%) rejected the idea that the wealthy are privileged by divine design and will be rewarded with a life in heaven beyond the grave. Approximately 50% do not agree that only the most capable manage to succeed in life or that this legitimates the exclusion of the rest.

In my own interpretation these answers reveal the following implicit logic:

- a) The rejection of the exclusionary elitism implicit in the idea of the predestination of the wealthy.
- b) The denial of the underlying fatalism contained in the idea that the poor are doubly excluded.
- c) The affirmation, not made explicit but nevertheless implicit, that wealth and poverty are not situations predetermined by divine design. Rather, they are caused by a status conditioned by social structures.

At the same time, the denial of (a) or (b) implies:

- d) The belief that wealth and poverty are products of a social structure of opportunity and must not be guided by elitist or exclusionary criteria.

The fact that the majority rejected the statement should be interpreted, therefore, as the implicit rejection of an elitist conception of social advancement. It affirms a more egalitarian perception in which the values held by modernity (and often contradicted by the modernization process), whether democratic or mesocratic, prevail over social values identified with an oligarchic (traditional) or an elitist (modern) society.

The model of social modernity implicit in the mentality of these leaders seems to be more inclined toward a modern, anti-elitist, more or less democratic understanding that at the same time recognizes the value of solidarity. But a minority of these leaders would also accept a model of social modernity in which individual interests prevail over collective ones, in which the idea of an exclusivist competition reigns, and in which utilitarian thinking holds sway in the pursuit of individual social advancement.

#### **BY WAY OF SYNTHESIS: GUIDELINES AND CHALLENGES FOR INCULTURATION**

It is difficult to formulate an overall synthesis of this study's results.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, there are certain elements in the cultural and religious situation of the popular leaders interviewed in San Joaquín, especially in the light of other studies carried out in similar popular settings, that allow us to offer the following general hypotheses:

Popular Catholicism, which historically has been an important element in the Chilean people's religious, social, and national identity, continues to be a vital factor in the identity of people within urban popular settings that are going through processes of increasing modernization and globalization. In fact, popular Catholicism continues to accompany most members of the popular classes throughout their entire life cycle.

The neoliberal economic development model is quickly integrating Chile into the transnational capitalist market. In countries where this is happening, popular Catholicism as an evolving religious expression of people's life experience is influenced by an array of sociocultural transformations, among the most important of which are the growing influence of the market in social life.

Despite the disintegrative impact of the above-mentioned processes, urban popular Catholicism, as an expression of urban popular culture, contributes to

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<sup>12</sup>The following remarks offer a brief synthesis of theological reflections offered by Manuel Ossa and by the Local Theological Consultation carried out in Santiago, Chile, in January 1997. Participants were Doris Muñoz, Pastor Juan Sepúlveda, Cristián Johansson, María José Caram, O.P., Julián Riquelme, O.P., Pastor Osvaldo Herreros, Bridget Cook, Eugene Toland, M.M., James Weckesser, M.M., Mariano Puga, Pastor Juan Salazar, Hernán San Martín, Ana Urmeneta, Mauricio Palominos, and Cristián Parker.

processes of resistance and to countercultural forms that are not in contradiction with modernity. In fact, these processes must be regarded as a conflict-ridden encounter between global and local realities. "Local situations are not powerless either. They work out all kinds of arrangements, from syncretic borrowing to living in subaltern or dual systems" (Schreier 1997: 12).

While it does not do so explicitly and consciously, popular Catholicism offers a structured resistance to, transforms, or simply reproduces many elements of these processes. As we have seen, popular Catholicism generates a very strong sense of local rootedness. At the same time, however, the form of identification it establishes includes a sense of global belonging, given the universal character of Roman Catholic symbolism and practice and its presence throughout the world.

Among the processes of symbolic orientation and transformation that are made possible by urban popular Catholicism, the following deserve mention:

- a) It resists and transforms the processes that are globalizing urban popular life and orienting it toward the market:
  - by sustaining and reinforcing the sense of community and local identity that is already present in popular urban cultures; and
  - by calling for the sense of solidarity and justice that is integrating values, both inborn and constitutive, for the majority of those living in popular sectors.
- b) It resists and transforms modernization and its secularizing tendencies by altering them in various ways and by continuing to offer religious meaning and identity; it does so:
  - by increasing its internal plurality, as we have seen in this study regarding the various "types of urban Catholicism," which certainly constitute a challenge to any inculturated pastoral strategy; and
  - by a limited rationalization of beliefs; in fact, we have seen the revitalization of magic and superstition among some types of popular Catholics.

It is important to add that urban popular Catholicism does not constitute an alienating influence. It tends to favor or at least not to contradict democratizing trends; and it questions elitist tendencies. While we can observe traditionalist attitudes (especially in some types), urban popular Catholicism does not appear to be an obstacle to progress or to modernization processes. At the same time, it is to one degree or another critical of these processes' negative and dehumanizing effects.

Finally, we have said that all popular religion develops within a dialectic interplay with official religion. This dynamic is very meaningful and necessary in the case at hand, since it permits this complex relationship between local and global realities in terms of the reproduction of traditions, the revitalization of beliefs and rituals, and the forging of new syncretisms. Without the Church, urban popular Catholicism would lose its universality and would risk falling into localistic fragmentation or the alienation brought about by the hegemony of the dominant global culture. In fact, however, the Catholic Church continues to be an impor-

tant reference point for urban popular Catholicism, despite the ambivalence of relationships with it. As we have seen, all these types of urban popular Catholicism do in fact interact with the hierarchical Church; and these interactions are not contradictory but rather complementary and complex, to different degrees depending on the particular types of Catholicism.

### THE SENSE OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN POPULAR CATHOLICISMS

The first thing we need to recognize is that the responses of popular community leaders polled offer some guidelines and starting points for deepening the process of inculturated evangelization.

In the face of their socially subordinate situation, which includes poverty, unemployment, hunger, social and psychological insecurity, and the threat of violence in many forms, members of the popular classes turn to Christianity in search of a hope that helps them to go on living. Among the poor majority of the Latin American people there is a shared feeling, a secret reliance on supernatural powers. These constitute a symbolic hope of survival, a form of cultural resistance, and a wellspring of meaning and security not found in the secular symbolic referents generated by official and globalized culture (Parker 1996).

Based on what we have learned in this study, we can affirm that there are numerous signs that point to a genuine search for God, as well as a spirituality that is made present in daily life by religious beliefs and practices, even those we have classified as influenced by some new age beliefs.

All Catholics, however estranged from the institutional Church they may feel, identify themselves as such. Here we can see a foundation, a seed on the basis of which to preach an inculturated Gospel: all these people profess their faith in Divine Providence, in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and in the Bible; and almost all believe in the mediation of the saints and the Virgin Mary.

Indeed, faith emerges as a vital element in one's identity; it is not just a matter of accepting traditional doctrine. It is more an aspiration to life than an adherence to the content of the Christian faith as defined in church teaching.

For this reason, the lived faith of these popular leaders still assumes concrete expressions that require theological and missiological discernment.

A legitimate question would be: What experience of the transcendent Christian God who is revealed in history do these people have?

In the case of the third type and even of "believers without religious affiliation," what is the vacuum that leads many of them to seek answers in astrology, tarot, talismans, and the search for extraterrestrials?

It seems that all spiritual quests arise out of a sense of meaninglessness—a meaninglessness that may have to do with existential situations such as societal oppression or with a feeling of being smothered in the materialism of the consumer society. But while this search does not find an answer in secular society, neither does it seem to be satisfied by the institutional Church.

The defects of popular Catholicisms are, in this sense, a critical mirror held up to the defects of a faith lived out within the institutional Church. A

central challenge for inculturated mission, then, is the recovery of a fuller sense of community and of its center, Jesus Christ, alive in the hearts of its members.

At the same time, the challenge is how to empower this privileged role of popular Catholicism as a significant factor in articulating local identity and at the same time encourage a critical openness to global and universal realities within the context of the globalization process.

#### **INCULTURATION WITHIN A CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND SYNCRETISM**

Our study shows that as secularization has advanced in Chile, religion has diversified and been transformed. Nevertheless we see that religion still plays an active and important role in personal and communal identity.

The in-depth interviews show that people's beliefs are even more widely diverse than the official Church had imagined. Does this attest to the pluralization of faith?

We must remember that biblically and theologically there has always been a plurality of ways of understanding and living out the Christian message. If they recognize the fact of religious pluralism, theological reflections on inculturation will necessarily be different from what they are within the framework of Christendom, however vague or diffuse this latter concept may have become. When evangelization seeks to restore or to create a "Christian culture," it ends up denying the reality of cultural diversity in our societies.

Indeed we need to consider at least two factors:

- a) Anthropologically speaking, every culture is the sum of a complex and dynamic process of social production. If the inculturation of the Gospel is a cultural process, then it must be understood as the active way in which Christian subjects (persons or communities) creatively welcome the Gospel within their history, their geography, and their local social and cultural context.
- b) We never have access to the Gospel in a pure state. What we really have are specific, incarnate, and culturally mediated encounters with the Gospel. And every mediation both reveals and hides the Gospel. The theological consequence of all this is that the spreading and proclamation of the Gospel make it necessary by definition that it continually undergo processes of incarnation and syncretism.

#### **RITUAL: FROM SUPERSTITION TO THE WORSHIP OF THE LIVING GOD**

As we have observed, a certain percentage of popular Catholics participate in official ritual expressions, while others join in more popular rites.

Many of those interviewed sought, through religious practice, a more palpable access to God and a worship that relates better to their daily lives. Indeed, their style of resolving their problems appears to be less magical than that of traditional peasants.

The popular Catholicism we observed has a tendency to make symbols more concrete and objective, preventing them from becoming abstractions. It expresses itself in a symbolism that shows a need to link concrete, tangible objects to divine powers.

The interviews show that popular Catholics use sacramental symbols as well as nonsacramental ones, but that they are not aware of the full meaning these symbols and rites are intended to convey. Also, the Catholic Church's official sacramental practices do not appear to have a vital linkage with people's daily lives; this tends to discourage their participation.

Looking at this overall picture, other questions come to mind. For example, to what extent is participation in worship an indicator of true religious faith in the Christian sense of the word? Furthermore, where Christian religious life is concerned, is participation in nonofficial worship always a negative indicator?

It is not ritual in itself, or the frequency of our participation in it, that constitutes the best indicator of religiosity in the Christian sense, but the content of ritual as it relates to life. For example, participation in a wake for an *angelito* (a baby or small child who has died) can be an expression of very close association with family and neighbors at an extremely painful moment. Participation may have a highly Christian character even though this is not classified as an "official ritual practice." On the other hand, going to Palm Sunday Mass could totally lack this Christian character and resemble the self-interested participation of a few people in a spiritist session.

The high level of participation in wakes for *angelitos* and of belief in *santiguamientos* (the burning of aromatic herbs for purification or to ward off evil spirits) leads us to ask whether the thing that makes them endure is not their ability to deeply touch the concrete lives of people, accompanying and reinforcing networks of solidarity.

Adherence to some of the new age practices shows that even in modern societies, with their high level of economic and technological development, there continues to be a felt need for a space that is both transcendent and immanent (concrete and incarnate). These practices permit a certain contact with "the beyond" while offering a sense of community and of belonging.

Those engaged in the task of inculturation need to be familiar with these poles and to value them in their very specific life settings (those that involve women or men or the poor or the rich).

We could also ask ourselves whether the institutional Church itself (and not just enlightened modernity) has not provoked, within the people, a certain level of self-deprecation regarding their popular faith. How do we distinguish between a faith that respects community traditions and draws us closer to God, and a faith based on superstitions that can end up being harmful?

#### JUSTICE AND THE COMMUNITY OF GOD'S REIGN

As we have seen, it is the perception of the overwhelming majority of informants that justice is not done in Chile, whatever way the term is understood. On

the other hand, there is a clear option for values related to solidarity: our informants value commitment and criticize both social Darwinism and the logic of the market. In general, there is an appreciation of cultural values such as family, community, one's own neighborhood, and one's own culture.

These values, which are part of the mentality of popular Catholics, lead us to reflect on justice and on the community of God's reign.

If God's reign, as Jesus proclaimed it, begins here and now in history, then the Johannine and Pauline ways of understanding justice offer a substantial and critical contribution to the formation of the criteria by which income is distributed and wealth is accumulated (distributive and social justice), and also to criteria for the administration of justice in the court system. And identifying and naming injustice, above all if it is accompanied by coherent action aimed at bringing about justice in the different realms, is an action that, in Christian terms, is on the road to God's reign. It appears that an important challenge for the inculturation of popular urban Catholicisms such as those studied here is to link more explicitly its vital faith and rituals to a prophetic, Gospel-inspired sense of social justice.