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A Catholic Response to Free Trade in Costa Rica**

AMY REYNOLDS

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University of Notre Dame
130 Hesburgh Center for International Studies
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Robert Fishman, Working Paper Series Editor
rfishman@nd.edu



**“WITH OR WITHOUT CAFTA, WE NEED A PLAN”
A CATHOLIC RESPONSE TO FREE TRADE IN COSTA RICA**

Amy Reynolds

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Amy Reynolds is an assistant professor of sociology at Wheaton College (Illinois). She has a PhD from Princeton University (2010) and an MPP from Georgetown (2005). Prior to coming to Wheaton, she was a visiting fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies. Her work occurs at the intersection of the sociology of religion and the international political economy, with a focus on North and Central America. She has published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Latin American Research Review* (forthcoming). Her book manuscript, “Saving the Market: Free Trade and Faithful Globalization” is currently under review.

ABSTRACT

Within Costa Rica, trade policy was a recent topic of public interest. Years of debate began in 2003, and culminated with a majority of citizens voting in a 2007 referendum. Catholic leaders played a prominent role within the public discourse, as evidenced in by the number of official statements they issued over the topic. They officially took a neutral political stance, while raising substantial procedural and ethical concerns. After considering the content of their involvement, I examine how the bishops used religious warrants in support of their critiques. I find that appeals to Catholic Social Thought, as well as references to official Vatican sources, ground most of their economic critiques—in particular, claims of human dignity, solidarity, and peace were central. I also examine the ways that organizational factors shaped their political engagement, finding that both their hierarchical structure and political context are critical towards their political strategy.

RESUMEN

Recientemente, la política comercial fue un asunto de interés público en Costa Rica. Los años de debate comenzaron en 2003 y culminaron en 2007 cuando una mayoría de ciudadanos votó en un referéndum. Los líderes católicos ocuparon un rol destacado en el discurso público, como lo demuestra el número de declaraciones oficiales que emitieron sobre el asunto. Oficialmente, adoptaron una posición política neutral, al tiempo que expresaron preocupaciones sustantivas y procedimentales sustanciales. Luego de considerar el contenido de su involucramiento, examino cómo los obispos utilizaron las órdenes religiosas para respaldar sus críticas. Encuentro que sostuvieron la mayor parte de sus críticas económicas sobre apelaciones a la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia y referencias a las fuentes oficiales vaticanas, en particular, reivindicaciones de la dignidad humana, la solidaridad y la paz fueron centrales. También examino los modos en que los factores institucionales dieron forma a su compromiso político y encuentro que tanto su estructura jerárquica como su contexto político son decisivos para su estrategia política.

The day of the Virgin of Los Ángeles is commemorated in Costa Rica by a pilgrimage to Cartago on August 2nd every year. Thousands of *peregrinos* (pilgrims)—adults and children alike—begin their journey from the capital city about 23 kilometers away. Costa Rica’s president and other public officials attend the event, arguably the nation’s most important public holiday. For a week beforehand, bishops deliver homilies in the public square, street vendors fill the city, banners fly overhead, and many of the faithful enter the church on their knees to pay tribute to Mary. It is a holy event.

Bishop San Casimiro of Alajuela, Costa Rica, delivered the keynote homily in 2007 to honor the Virgin. Notable were his political statements referencing the heated debates over Central American–Dominican Republic–United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR).¹ He called for people to show the “strength to construct a type of more inclusive country...based on pillars of justice, solidarity, truth, and respect.”² As the nation prepared for a public vote over the trade agreement, the future of CAFTA-DR—or the TLC as it was called in Costa Rica—was the prominent issue on the minds of many, even in the midst of a traditional religious festival.

Costa Rica officially entered the CAFTA negotiations at the start of 2003, and the official national debate over whether Costa Rica would ratify CAFTA began in January of 2004. Oscar Arias won the presidential election by less than 1 percent of the vote in 2006, after running primarily on a pro-CAFTA-DR agenda. When the country eventually voted to implement CAFTA-DR in an October 2007 referendum, it was a narrow victory (51 percent to 48 percent). Costa Rica was the only country in Central America where the agreement was so hotly contested in the public square before it ultimately came into force in 2009.

How did the Costa Rican Catholic Church come to engage in the debates over CAFTA-DR, an economic policy that in other countries might be characterized as a matter for technical policy experts? I first examine the content of their political statements, to assess how they framed these specific economic policies as social issues.

¹ The Central America–Dominican Republic–United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) initially started as the Central America–United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and the DR was added in 2004. However, within Costa Rican public discourse it was referred to as the TLC (Tratado de Libre Comercio, or Free Trade Agreement).

² All translations were done by the author.

The paper then focuses on two questions to understand the reasons that such engagement occurred. First, in what ways were religious claims used to support political positions? Second, how did the institutional and social context of the Church influence her strategies for engagement? I first turn to the context of globalization in the region, as well as an overview of the actual political response of the bishops towards trade policy.

BACKGROUND ON THE ECONOMY AND RELIGION IN COSTA RICA

Trade Policy within Central America

Although Central America disintegrated into five separate nations shortly after its independence from Spain in the nineteenth century, in 1960 the logic of economic unity was strong enough to promote economic integration. The Central American Common Market (CACM) formed in 1960—it supported import substitution, while increasing regional integration. Although it disbanded in 1969 due to inter-state conflict, CACM was resuscitated in 1990, witnessing a growth in regional trade (Brignoli and Martinez 1983; Rosenberg and Solis 2007).

Discussion over trade policy, however, is a relatively new phenomenon, beyond smaller efforts at regional integration. Only in the last twenty-five years have international policies dictated the nature of trade relationships. Even as the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) played a governing role in global trade, states had a lot of autonomy over the management of their economy and lowering tariffs was the primary way GATT sought to increase trade. The Uruguay Rounds of GATT (1986–1994) changed some of these dynamics, as they limited state decision-making power. Dunkley (2000) argues that the Uruguay Rounds allowed for the international management of new policies: customs procedures, marketing of exports and imports, administrative practices, uses of state authority for protectionist measures, and the contentious issue of subsidies. Promoting free trade went beyond reducing tariffs and now focused on eliminating other barriers to trade. During the Uruguay Rounds, bilateral treatments started to form, with the Canada–United States FTA (1987) being the first in this region. The conclusion of the Uruguay Rounds also witnessed the formation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995.

The emergence of free-trade agreements and the increasing reach of the WTO in the twentieth century led to changing institutional dynamics. In place of the state, the market gained more power; with the increased power of the market, the importance of business actors also rose. After a perceived failure of governments to manage the economy effectively during the middle of the century, faith in economic progressivism and the “scientific management of society” waned (Nelson 2001, 113–14). Capitalism continued to challenge the previous relationships of power between the state and the sovereign (Hirschman 1977), as capitalism and free trade grew in the twentieth century.

Since the original Canada–United States FTA and its subsequent expansion into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA 1994), a number of free trade agreements have been ratified. The Central America–United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which later became the Central America–Dominican Republic–United States Free Trade Agreement in 2004 (CAFTA-DR), is similar to NAFTA. Its intent was to open up relationships between the United States and Central America.

These free trade agreements decreased the power of the state, with the intent to encourage freer markets. Yet they did not just promote free trade. They provided quotas on how countries may trade, relaxed regulations on businesses, changed legal relationships among businesses and nations, and required states to privatize public services. With the passage of CAFTA-DR, Costa Rica was required to rewrite its constitution and privatize national public services (such as electricity and telecommunications). Developing states are often concerned with the power they have in trade negotiations, and the sovereignty they lose with the implementation of FTAs (Rosenberg and Solis 2007).

While free trade agreements with Mexico and Chile caused little political tension within Costa Rica—and were a source of less political change—debate over this most current FTA caused much polarization in society. Those who supported CAFTA included many who populated the business sectors throughout Central America (Spalding 2007). In Costa Rica, the *solidarismo* movement, an employer-supported alternative to unions that seeks to avoid conflict between workers and businesses, was a particularly strong advocate of the treaty, and the president pushed much of his political power behind the treaty. Universities and anti-globalization actors have been perhaps the most vocal

opponent of the treaty. This includes a number of trade unions, and non-official local Catholic actors.

The Public Discourse over Globalization

In debates over globalization and economic liberalization, many have sought to avoid the discussion of the moral questions associated with free trade policies. They have minimized discourse on the ethics of markets, arguing that economic policies are technical matters, best dictated by the values of efficiency and growth. Within Latin America, technocrats have increasingly played an important role in policy decisions, with deference often shown to such experts when it comes to economic issues (Centeno 1994; Centeno and Silva 1998; Roberts 2008).

Discourse is especially important in this context, where macroeconomic decisions are often *not* a source of ethical or moral reflection, left instead to the deliberation of economic experts. Discourse itself is a political act in which nongovernmental actors may engage. Such discussions in civil society have the potential to shape political identities, attitudes, and solidarities, all with implications for political mobilization (Wood 2002, 127). Lichterman (2005) further finds that political discourse is often the site where issues of economic life and moral understanding come together, particularly in the case of progressive religious communities.

Within such a context, religious communities are one set of actors engaging in discourse on such topics. As both Hart (2001) and Wood (2002) contend, religious groups can play a crucial role in political life through their discourse; such discourse is a central way that they produce the sacred in the economic realm (Wuthnow 1994).

Hart notes that religion may be one of the few sources of “transcendent talk, using standards of values that are grounded in things outside of normal life...and giving these standards a morally binding quality” (2001, 18). Eliasoph (1998) suggests that religion is important in that it can provide the vocabulary to discuss larger value concerns. Religious discourse, then, may serve both as a source of larger moral values to talk about public life and as a source of authority to ground such values.

Religious organizations have power in part because they provide collective values that can be used by followers to engage the market. Although religion is often overlooked

by political theorists, the “sacred canopy” of religion (Berger 1967) has the potential to shape economic understanding by declaring basic values about human interaction. Although Berger ultimately challenges whether this sacred canopy can hold up in the modern age, his argument assumes that religion can and has shaped our understanding of other social spheres and institutions.

Sociologists of religion have given attention to how religious values potentially shape the economic realm and political life. Hart (1992) connects the moral building blocks that religion provides to how people think about public life. Notions of the individual and community (what he calls volunteerism and universalism) are religiously influenced but have profound implications for ideas about the politics of economic life. Likewise, Davis and Robinson (1999), in their survey of Europe, also focus on the way religious beliefs can highlight the importance of the individual or the collective. They find that those with more orthodox religious values tend to emphasize concepts like justice and community when thinking about the market and subsequently translate a community emphasis into a greater value for economic justice.

Religion’s emphasis on the transcendent offers unique authoritative resources when it comes to political discourse and provides cultural materials for a value-laden public dialogue (Hart 2001). This paper, then, focuses on the nature of the warrants and values that religious organizations use in their political engagement over trade. Such warrants and values draw in part from religious traditions, especially those historically engaged with the political world. Given that “cultural traditions provide the raw material for creating and revising the means and ends of protest—but also for determining the boundary between means and ends” (Jasper 1997, 83), it is not surprising that several specific religious traditions proved important for the cases here.

Trade Policy and Religious Actors: The Case Study of CECOR

The key actors in this paper are eight Costa Rican bishops (priests who have authority over a particular diocese). They serve as the official representatives of the official Catholic Church. Appointed by the Vatican, a bishop usually serves until his eightieth birthday, when he is informally expected to retire. The archbishop of Costa Rica resides

in the capital, San José,³ and serves as the figurehead. These eight bishops make up the Episcopal Conference of Costa Rica (La Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica, CECOR). While the archbishop may have the most authority, the bishops in Costa Rica often speak with one unified voice, producing collaborative documents; their relatively small number facilitates their sense of unity.

CECOR has issued many statements on CAFTA and has contributed to statements issued by both the Latin American Episcopal Conference (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, CELAM) and the Central American Episcopal Secretariat (Secretariado Episcopal de América Central y Panamá, SEDAC).⁴ The bishops have spoken in churches, granted media interviews, given testimony before the legislative assembly, and written pastoral letters on the issue. The contents of the pastoral letters are very accessible to citizens, given that they are not only reproduced in national newspapers—often with accompanying background or context—but also read in masses throughout Costa Rica. Given the hierarchical structure of the Church, such statements from bishops and other leaders have public influence.

Utilizing qualitative comparative-analysis software, I analyzed official Catholic documents. I also consulted a Catholic periodical, *Eco Católico*, which published a number of articles on trade treaties during 2003–2007. Documents were coded for different references to authority, invocation of values, attitudes about the political economy, and particular political positions on trade. In order to capture the full range of variation in these categories, such coding was done without a defined set of initial codes; by this practice, I induced the prominent elements of discourse.

I complemented this analysis of these official texts with participant observation and

³ The diocese of San José, in addition to representing over 50 percent of the population, also has a number of its own ministries. What happens in this diocese, more than in others, impacts people throughout the country. For example, although the city's vicariate office (VEPS) is charged with coordinating social issues in the diocese of San José, people throughout the country use its materials and resources.

⁴ Costa Rica plays a more significant role in SEDAC than in CELAM. While CELAM covers all of Latin America, only the five Central American countries and Panama are involved in SEDAC. In CELAM, Costa Rica has been careful to distance itself from some of the more liberationist ideas of the group, although Bishop Arrieta was involved in the leadership in the 1980s. As a large group representing all of Latin America, there is much diversity of opinion within the organization. Within a more unified SEDAC, CECOR plays a central leadership role. Since 2002, Bishop José Ulloa has served as the president of SEDAC; Bishop San Casimiro has been secretary general since 2005.

interviews, spending time at the CECOR offices in Costa Rica. I spent the summer of 2007 in Costa Rica interviewing Catholic leaders and using the archives of the Catholic Church. Interviews were conducted mostly in Spanish and lasted between thirty minutes and two hours.

The Historical Involvement of the Costa Rican Church in the Political Economy

At an international level, the Catholic Church has continually voiced concerns over economic liberalism. Stemming from various viewpoints, Burns (1990, 1992) provides an excellent analysis of how past papal authorities have dealt with the Church's relationship to economic liberalism, so I will only briefly discuss this here. Before the turn of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church had been quite involved in temporal affairs. With the Enlightenment, resistance from European states prompted the Church's retreat from this role (Burns 1992), and with it came a redefining of social issues as distinct from other issues of faith. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as a unique development came about in 1891 with the publication of *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII. CST encouraged religious engagement with economic and political issues, reaffirming the Church's relevance in social life, while not claiming temporal authority in such areas. Paradoxically, while the creation of CST emphasized the Church's concern for the common good (Palacios 2007), it also signaled a hierarchy of theological concerns where social issues were now distinct (and less important) from other "spiritual" matters of faith (Burns 1992).

The first Costa Rican foray into CST followed soon after, with a letter on the just salary penned by Archbishop Thiel (1880–1901) (Picado 2007; Williams 1989). Written on the eve of the 1894 presidential elections, the letter expressed concern that day workers were not being paid the true value of their work. Archbishop Thiel called for fairer salaries. His doing so established the Costa Rican Catholic Church's moral obligation in economic matters. Although the two Costa Rican archbishops following him, Archbishop Stork (1904–1920) and Archbishop Castro (1921–1939), ignored significant social questions, Archbishop Sanabria (1940–1952) was politically active and more outspoken on economic and social life (Williams 1989). In fact, current bishops still

reference his critiques on the economy. He worked with Catholic trade unions, supported state-sponsored social reforms, and even suffered criticisms from some for being too sympathetic to the Marxist party (Williams 1989). After Archbishop Sanabria's twelve-year term, however, the Church in Costa Rica was again largely silent on many issues of social concern until the latter part of the 1970s.

This is not to suggest that it is the change in archbishops that is the causal explanation for the changed emphases of the Catholic Church in Costa Rica over time. Bishops are accountable to the Vatican and are charged to interpret Catholic teaching to their particular context. As Hagopian (2009a) argues, to understand the decisions made by bishops, we have to consider both their individual beliefs and the bishops' assessment of political opportunities and risk. That is, the political ties the Church has to the state, the type of society that the Church operates within, and the reactions of the laity to the Church all matter.

The Catholic Church's Vatican II council (1962–1965) brought renewed attention to CST and the responsibility of the Church to speak to social issues, even as they accepted a less powerful role in the political sector (Burns 1992). A decade after Vatican II this new emphasis took hold in Costa Rica. During the latter years of Rodríguez's tenure as archbishop (1960–1979), some of the concerns articulated by Costa Rican bishops today first received critical attention. Two bishops, Arrieta Villalobos (who would become the next archbishop) and Trejos Picado (who later provided strong public religious arguments against CAFTA), signed a letter during the 1974 elections that rejected both liberal capitalism and Marxist socialism, critiquing the power of the market in society more generally (CECOR 1974). In 1975, several bishops and priests spoke on the issue of agrarian reform and criticized some of the then-current attempts at privatization (Trejos Picado, Coto Orozco, et al. 1975). Around the time that Bishop Arrieta Villalobos became the archbishop in 1979, the council itself exhibited greater willingness to engage with political issues (Williams 1989). This discourse both made connections between religious values and political policy for citizens of the Church and also engaged political leaders and the state.

Coinciding with the rise of global capitalism under the Washington Consensus, the Church was addressing many of the issues raised by CAFTA before the treaty came

into existence: the role of global capitalism, the national importance of agriculture, state provision of social services, and the need for political participation within the country. Hagopian finds in her analysis of the region that the Catholic Church throughout Latin America has been vocal on these issues (2009a).

In its lengthy and politically engaged 1994 letter, “Mother Earth,” CECOR critiqued the export-oriented focus of the nation that had resulted in a shift towards the production of export crops and increased power and favor for transnational corporations (TNCs) and large businesses. In evaluating the changes that economic globalization had wrought, the bishops called for the government to maintain strong social-welfare programs. In 2000, they were integrally involved in efforts to resist the privatization of the electric company. However, in both of these cases, the focus was on the Costa Rican state with less attention to international actors.

The perspective and concerns of the bishops reflect Costa Rica’s place in the international political economy. While Costa Rica had preferential access to US markets under the Caribbean Basin Initiative, CAFTA sought to deepen these agreements. In doing so, CAFTA required lower tariffs and restrictions on protectionist policies, which impacted the publicly run institutions in Costa Rica. Under CAFTA, transnational corporations and other international business actors gained access to new arenas such as water, electricity, and the telecommunications industries that had been previously denied.

CURRENT DISCUSSION SURROUNDING FREE TRADE: WHAT THE BISHOPS SAY

The bishops’ first statement on free trade came in late 2002. A letter by SEDAC condemned the possible harm that would fall upon peasant farmers under CAFTA: if “forced to choose between money and the person, we choose the person, even though that could mean a possible setback in economic progress” (SEDAC 2002). Following this statement, the bishops in Costa Rica encouraged dialogue within the country over CAFTA. In 2003, the Vicariate in San José brought together a number of people from different sectors to discuss the treaty. That year, three individual pastoral letters were penned voicing concerns over US subsidies and the crisis that already plagued agricultural communities in the country (Caritas 2003; San Casimiro 2003; Ulloa Rojas

and Vargas Varela 2003). The *Eco Católico* also published many articles criticizing CAFTA during that year.

The Catholic Church produced the most literature on CAFTA after Costa Rica's president had signed the treaty, as the nation had to decide whether to ratify the agreement. The Church applauded all those who held forums and contributed to dialogue in society, while it also demanded that special attention be paid to those sectors negatively impacted by the treaty. The bishops issued their first corporate and most detailed letter in 2004 (CECOR 2004), and three more letters in 2005 (CECOR 2005a, 2005b, 2005d), in addition to three governmental addresses (CECOR 2005e, 2006b, 2006c).⁵ While offering values to shape economic policy, CECOR was insistent in declaring itself neutral in debates over CAFTA. In 2007 they issued a letter to priests reminding them of their responsibility to remain neutral in their political proclamations from the pulpit (CECOR 2007a). In their final letter on CAFTA, they encouraged people to vote their own conscience, asking "all sectors, agencies and individuals ...to show respect for the will of the majority," (2007b) and to move forward with an appropriate agenda.

A number of factors coalesced to allow for such political discussion on a specific international economic policy. The year 2002 marked a new era as Barrantes became archbishop, and he has demonstrated more willingness to criticize the state. Second, as Father Jorge Arturo Chaves (a consultant for the bishops) suggested, the political context of the region is an important part of the story of CECOR's previous silence on similar issues (Chaves Ortiz 2007). The past concerns over the spread of communism and liberation theology—neither of which were adopted by the institutional Church in Costa Rica—contributed to a hesitancy to critique free market policies and agendas. Such concerns are no longer pressing, allowing the Church more freedom to criticize economic policies. Finally, the FTA with the United States was much more significant economically than treaties with smaller countries, stirring a more urgent response.

Three central concerns mark the bishops' discourse over CAFTA, concerns that found expression in earlier statements by the Church in Costa Rica. The first is that

⁵ These are in addition to a 2004 letter issued by CELAM about trade agreements in the region more generally, a 2004 joint letter between the United States bishops and SEDAC, and a 2005 letter by SEDAC.

markets need ethical constraints (and guidance). Second, they affirmed the sovereignty of Costa Rica, as well as the responsibility of the state to play a role in managing the economy. Third, they voiced procedural concerns, arguing that dialogue and democratic consensus were essential in policy decisions.

Free Markets Need Ethical Constraints

The bishops supported the role of free markets in contributing to growth, but they noted the failure of free markets alone to achieve real development. Bishop Ulloa clearly asserted, “I am not against free trade. I am for free trade,” (Ulloa Rojas 2007b) before going on to comment on the specifics of CAFTA. The bishops commended negotiators for “looking to secure a key aspect in our economy: the exportation of our agricultural products” (CECOR 2004, 21). In the event that CAFTA was not passed, the bishops argued that Costa Rica would have to find other export markets. In a joint statement with bishops throughout Central America, they remarked that FTAs “have the potential to increase productivity, creativity, and economic growth, which can be an important part of integral human growth” (SEDAC 2005). Bishop Barrantes highlighted the need for exports from Costa Rica to access US markets in a homily celebrating the Day of the Worker (2005).

Although supporting the export-oriented model and the participation of the nation in the global economy, the bishops rejected the dominance of markets and critiqued the lack of ethical frameworks embedded within the market. Much like CELAM, since the mid-1970s, CECOR has consistently cautioned against the egocentrism of capitalism. For example, its 1974 letter rejected the notion that capitalism or socialism is God-honoring, and its 1994 letter criticized the economic order of Costa Rican society and its impact on agricultural workers.

Within the current CAFTA discourse, the bishops have argued that the neoliberal agenda pursued by Costa Rica in the recent past has not been fully productive, even though there has been economic growth for the country. In an essay on the Church and development, Archbishop Barrantes echoed the call of “Mother Earth” (1994), criticizing the style of economic policy implemented since the 1980s:

Poverty has not stopped and the inequality in income has grown. This shows that the advantages of the [economic] model are not sufficient to allow social mobility and increased quality of life for persons, but rather allow wealth to accumulate in many cases to serve speculative ends or simply leave the country. Today we confront a choice: Continue the way of the last decades and produce concentrated wealth and escalating poverty, or turn from this development strategy and rebuild a social contract that can be implemented. (2004a, Section III)

Ultimately, the bishops insisted that economic policies must be guided by an agenda of human development, a value absent within a free market system. A joint letter from the Central American bishops stated, “But let us not forget that while the market has its own logic and efficiency, it does not have its own ethics to ensure integral human development” (SEDAC 2005). The bishops insisted that left unregulated, the market would cause social inequality and leave the poor worse off.

Redistribution was part of the legacy of the Costa Rican democratic state; this helped the poor and other marginalized groups gain a greater share of the economic wealth of the country. Bishop Ulloa preached that free trade and globalization needed to result in a greater sharing of the wealth. Bishop Barrantes stated, “What worries us [the bishops] the most is whether free trade, such as the CAFTA agreement, is able to bring about a redistribution of wealth and not just produce more wealth, but spread that out far and wide” (*Seminario Universidad* 2006). In an earlier homily, he had preached that CAFTA should be approved only when the government could guarantee it would benefit the poor (Barrantes Ureña 2004b).

CECOR paid particular attention to the impact of globalization on agriculture, with an emphasis on the consequences for poor workers and small farmers. As mentioned, the bishops had spoken earlier on land rights (1974) and had focused on the impacts of global market dynamics on farmers (1994). Caritas, an international aid organization that addresses social policies related to development, advocated for Costa Rican agricultural products to receive special attention in trade negotiations (Caritas 2003). Along with other Central American and United States bishops, CECOR voiced the following concern:

It seems likely that poor farming communities in Central America will suffer greatly when subsidized agricultural products from the United States expand their reach into these markets. Any reform of such supports should address the needs of small and medium-sized farms and farm workers in the United States

and in Central America, for whom farming is the principal means of support. (USCCB and SEDAC 2004)

The bishops suggested that farmers would be worse off economically when forced to compete with the large, subsidized US agricultural industry; a way of life would be changed as farmers moved to other careers as a result.

The bishops also protested the destruction of the environment for economic profit in addition to their concerns over agriculture. In a weekly bishops' column written before CAFTA entered the scene, Bishop Ulloa decried "the exploitation of environmental and human resources, resources that the Pope has called 'collective goods.' Resources that we are not able to buy and sell—these should be defended at all costs, because they are the heritage of humanity" (Ulloa Rojas 2000). The bishops insisted on increased environmental protections and regulations under CAFTA-DR.

In a similar vein, the bishops also called for more protection of human rights. They had concerns over provisions in CAFTA-DR that governed and allowed for the marketization of human organs. Several Catholic leaders brought this up in personal interviews, expressing their disgust that organs were mentioned in the CAFTA-DR policy as something that could be bought and sold. With both the environment and the commodification of human life, the main concern was the lack of regulations that bound which activities were allowed within the marketplace. The bishops did not so much want more regulations on how organs or the environment could be morally dealt with in economic transactions; they wanted these restricted from trading relationships. Alongside concerns over how to encourage ethical growth, these issues led the bishops to critique CAFTA-DR as a potentially irresponsible extension of the free market without attention to the consequences of growth or the necessary restraints required.

A State Economy Deserves State Regulation

The Costa Rican bishops charged that CAFTA-DR undermined the power of the Costa Rican state to involve itself in national development tasks. The unequal power relationships between the United States and large TNCs and Costa Rica benefited the former at the expense of the common Costa Rican. They insisted that Costa Rica have

more sovereignty in the international political economy, a requirement for the state to promote a complementary development agenda to the treaty. During the initial stages of negotiation, they called for changes in CAFTA that would promote a stronger state. Such a move would allow the government to place necessary limits on the market and shape proper development.

CECOR suggested that CAFTA-DR was of particular concern in comparison to other FTAs precisely because of this unequal relationship. It was an abuse of power. Bishop Ulloa made the following case: “And a third principle is that a free trade treaty should always be founded in justice, that it should be just. That a country, to be powerful, to be grand, to be rich, would take advantage of a developing country, a poor country, to exploit it—No. Justice has to be a fundamental principle” (Ulloa Rojas 2007b). The bishops argued nations have to be in equal power relationships, although few specifics are ever given about what this concretely looks like (CECOR 2004).

A central concern of the power imbalance was the consequence for the Costa Rican welfare state. CAFTA-DR mandated a number of changes. Publicly run state programs were threatened by provisions that required states to open up such industries to private foreign companies. These changes to Costa Rican public institutions and the laws were not guided by national consensus. For the bishops, this translated to a loss of freedom for the country to govern itself.

The bishops had a history of supporting a strong domestic welfare state, and continued to do so in CAFTA debates. In discussions about the fate of the government managed electric industry (Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad, ICE) in 1999, the bishops had helped broker an agreement after mass demonstrations broke out in response to governmental plans to privatize. Ultimately, the state had agreed to not liberalize the industry. During discussions over CAFTA, the bishops called for a new social contract, which endorsed an increased role for institutions and the government in mitigating some of the current economic problems. They consistently argued that a stronger social welfare state would promote the common good—unlike the free market alone. In an early letter on CAFTA, Bishop San Casimiro warned of CAFTA’s potential civic consequences:

We call to the attention of our people the fact that the free trade agreement with the United States is not a simple bilateral agreement like that we would have with another country. It appears in theory to present many opportunities

for our country, and also to present many questions. The consequences [of CAFTA] can be negative for vulnerable sectors (such as agriculture and transportation) as well as for necessary sectors (such as telecommunications) if we do not manage this wisely, and with clear attention to the common good. (Caritas 2003, 99)

Following the referendum, the bishops continued to speak out, this time tying their suggestions for a more active development agenda more closely to CAFTA-DR: “We have a moral obligation, people and government, not simply to mitigate or compensate those who are affected [negatively by CAFTA-DR], but to make necessary changes to the general mechanisms of inequality that we find inside this aspect of the economy” (CECOR 2007b). In their discourse, the bishops consistently reiterated it was the responsibility of the state to promote ethical development, a mandate that required more autonomy than CAFTA-DR provided.

While expressing hope in a more equal power balance, the bishops avoided villainizing the United States and warned against opposition to the treaty for purely ideological reasons. As Father Francisco Hernández, the head of Caritas, noted, “Whatever issue we have with the United States always brings out passion” (Hernández 2007). He encouraged sober evaluation of the issues rather than a rejection of the treaty because of feelings about “los gringos.” In their calls for greater Costa Rican authority, the bishops critiqued the relationship of Costa Rica with the United States. However, what made CAFTA a concern was not the presence of the United States but the dynamics of power relationships between the two.

Dialogue and Democratic Consensus are Essential for Policy Change

Both as a strategy and as part of their discourse, CECOR bishops consistently promoted the idea that the common good—as developed through economic and state policy—must be arrived at through consensus and dialogue. In *A Reflection* (2004, 25), the council enunciated its stance:

The discernment or the ethical reading of an economic medium should be decided in community, in a true dialogue, in a dialogue that examines the economic and social impacts.... It is the way of the Church to encourage discernment according to the principles of the Gospel with respect to the socioeconomic and cultural context; this is, to analyze our reality...in a context of communication, to realize through dialogue our national priorities.

Other religious leaders across the Americas shared CECOR's lament over a lack of dialogue. A letter written by the Central American and US Catholic Bishops made this point clearly: "There has not been sufficient information and debate in our countries about the various aspects of CAFTA and its impact on our societies.... This lack of dialogue and consensus regarding the treaty is also leading to growing discontent. In Central America, this could lead to violence and other civic unrest" (USCCB and SEDAC 2004).

Indeed, violent political response is a constant possibility in Central America, and bishops have repeatedly warned the populace of the dangers of polarization. As the only country in Central America where civil war has been avoided and democracy is strong, Costa Rica cherishes its history of dialogue. Historically, political equality and democracy have been prioritized over economic equality. Even as the bishops promoted redistribution, a strong state system, and ethical markets, they ultimately championed the collective making these political decisions. This delicate balance assumes and hopes that people will pursue a common good and a pro-poor agenda.

In pursuit of this democratic yet value-influenced society, CECOR lent its support to the referendum as a political tool. They emphasized the importance of individual discernment and responsibility, even as they promoted their particular values framework. Bishop Ulloa explained why the referendum was so important: "I think that this medium is an important one because the people are going to decide and the result will have to be accepted by both parts. Because whoever wins, the loser has to accept it. Why? Because it is the free and democratic will of the people that is going to decide what it is we want for Costa Rica" (Ulloa Rojas 2007b).

Supporting such a referendum allowed the Church to assert its religious presence within the policy sector, while still acknowledging the authority of democratic processes within a pluralistic democracy. Inglehart (2009) argues that strong religious voices are

compatible within a democracy only when they recognize this power of the vote. After the referendum results were announced, the bishops reiterated their support for the democratic decision, calling the vote legitimate and urging opponents to respect the outcome: “the enthusiastic expression of the citizen in this first referendum of the nation’s history is the voice of the people toward new ethical goals” (CECOR 2007b).

The support of the referendum reflected not only support for democratic processes but also support for the democratic government that is in place within Costa Rica. The bishops valued their relationship with the government. As Bishop Ulloa emphasized, even when the Church has spoken out against the state, “The relationship that we have had is a relationship of dialogue, of understanding. Together we search for what is best for Costa Rica” (Ulloa Rojas 2007b). Even as CECOR was clearly critical of the CAFTA-DR agreement, the bishops sought to uphold the legitimacy and power of the state.

Surely many bishops were disappointed with CAFTA-DR’s acceptance by the public, but they nonetheless projected a consistent understanding of their own authority. They were clearly confident in their theological and ethical positions and their right to evaluate free trade agreements. Yet they did not attempt to wield technical authority. The Church legitimated the role of technical experts, yet insisted that the latter should not be the only voice. Democracy should reign alongside technical opinion. In their letter to priests across Costa Rica, issued five months before the referendum, the bishops expressed their respect for the democratic process. They reminded priests not to instruct congregations how to vote. The vote cast out of an individual conscience, the bishops argued, would “strengthen our democratic system” (CECOR 2007a). Parishioners needed to freely make their own political decisions. In pastoral letters and other public statements, the bishops repeatedly called for people to vote and take seriously their responsibility to vote—not only in this referendum, but also in other elections. So while they raised political and ethical concerns over CAFTA-DR and called for a strong state, they also focused on enabling the less powerful to speak within the political arena. Their ends were strongly influenced by their religious values, as discussed in the next section.

RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISCOURSE

First and foremost, the Catholic bishops of Costa Rica founded their political analysis of CAFTA-DR on religious authority—specifically the principles of CST. As “A Reflection” states, they analyze society “from the lens of the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church” (CECOR 2004, 22). While papal social teaching holds special authority, the current bishops also accord authority to past documents from progressive periods in their own national history. Based on a national and international view of CST, the bishops have primarily emphasized the values of human-centered development, solidarity in a search for the common good, and peaceful interactions and dialogue among citizens. Such are central values in CST.⁶

The Human as the Center of Development

A 2004 joint statement from SEDAC and the US Bishops stated, “the human person must be at the center of all economic activity. FTAs, such as CAFTA, should be a way of achieving authentic human development that upholds basic values such as human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity” (USCCB and SEDAC 2004). These thoughts were echoed in the subsequent SEDAC document on CAFTA-DR (SEDAC 2005), as well as a letter from the Costa Rican bishops from the same year (CECOR 2005d). The value of human-centered development dominated their discourse. CECOR emphasized this theme while CAFTA was initially being drafted, as people were debating whether it should be passed, and after the Costa Rican referendum. They often made reference to the encyclicals of Paul VI (especially *Populorum Progressio*) and his teachings on human dignity, the person, and true development.⁷ Archbishop Barrantes attested to the coherence of this message across time.

In May 2004 and through 2005 we spoke on this theme, and we have always insisted that the human person should be at the center of all economic activity.

⁶ As Coleman (2005) argues, even as there is sometimes disagreement on the terms and the centrality of some themes, there are eight principles of CST: human dignity, the social nature of the human, the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, preferential option for the poor, justice, and integral humanism.

⁷ Palacios (2007) points out that this document, *Populorum Progressio*, was written largely in response to the development gap between wealthy and poor countries and was the first encyclical to significantly address issues of development.

Our discourse has always been very coherent.... The key for us is the dignity of the human being, and we disagree with leaving it [CAFTA-DR] in the hands of technical experts and economists who see everything at the macroeconomic level. (*Seminario Universidad* 2006)

The bishops identified their focus on the human as one often at odds with the logic of current market structures. They repeatedly contrasted liberal economic logic to moral ethics. In a SEDAC statement, the bishops from Central America declared that choosing to focus on human welfare was an intentional act: “We do not oppose, on any level, all types of treaties or commercial agreements.... We proclaim with vehemence that between money and the person, we opt for the person, even though this may mean a possible decrease in economic progress” (SEDAC 2002).

To “opt for the person” includes an emphasis on human dignity, the first principle of CST noted by Coleman (2005). Laczniak (1999) has also focused on human dignity as the central value of CST for decisions by businesses and individual actors. Human dignity is about understanding the nature, rights, and responsibilities of people and the groups in which they are embedded (Coleman 2005).

In the 2004 statement from CELAM, the bishops link human development and human dignity, stating, “We propose that the human person is in the center of the integration process.... The fundamental principle is the recognition of human dignity as a central value” (CELAM 2004, 68). Human dignity is upheld when all people, and especially the poor, benefit economically from policies undertaken by the government. According to Bishop Ulloa, “The first principle that we defend, really, is that the person is the end of all human action and also commerce...the gap between the rich and the poor...should close so that all have a life of dignity” (Ulloa Rojas 2007b). The bishops’ commitment to human dignity guided their participation in politics, given the moral implications they saw of economic policies.

Solidarity and the Common Good

The Costa Rican bishops, along with other international Catholic bodies, often evoked notions of “solidarity” and the common good in their pastoral letters. Given the different ways solidarity has been conceived in Catholic thought, the bishops most frequently

reference Pope John Paul II—rather than CELAM or other more liberationist sources. Palacios (2007), in discussing how solidarity tends to be defined in CST, highlights two important elements. First, society is the whole of many parts; that is, people are in relationships and dependent on one another. Second, this solidarity is often critical of individualism or equality, instead accepting order and hierarchy (Palacios 2007, 44–45).

In their 2004 letter, “A Reflection” (CECOR 2004), the bishops argued that the overemphasis of economic policies on the individual was problematic. Solidarity requires an attention to distributive justice, the common good, and subsidiarity. Palacios has also noted that solidarity does not demand economic or political equality. That is, while fair wages or treatment of people is mandated, because of differential talents or effort, many supporting solidarity may still accept significant inequality. Rather, this solidarity is concerned that all are treated fairly and with dignity. In a sermon given just months before the referendum vote on CAFTA-DR, Bishop Barrantes highlighted the centrality of human dignity for solidarity: “The critical ethic to judge a free trade agreement is to see if human dignity is one of its principles. This only happens when a free trade agreement is founded on the principles of justice and solidarity” (Barrantes Ureña 2007a).

Solidarity was characterized by special attention to the needs of those often ignored. In his 2003 pastoral letter, Bishop San Casimiro declared, “We consider that in these discussions [on CAFTA-DR] social justice should prevail.... The Church is committed in its mission of solidarity, to show itself faithful to Christ, while truly being ‘the Church of the poor’” (San Casimiro Fernández 2003, 358). Bishop Ulloa asserted that the values of justice and solidarity required attention to all groups in society, especially those whose rights often went unprotected: “We see the need to renew our commitment for the promotion of justice, and to denounce all that is against the life and the dignity of the person. We must protect the rights of every man and woman, of every adult and child...of every worker, of every women, ethnic or social group” (Ulloa Rojas and Vargas Varela 2003).

The bishops repeatedly asserted the need for justice for those who have been marginalized: the small farmer and small business people, the elderly, the unemployed, the disabled, indigenous populations, and children. A society had a responsibility to care about the fate of every single person within it. And only then would it achieve a common

good. As the bishops wrote, “Of justice, we understand rights and responsibilities together, as an obligation to make things better for the most disadvantaged, as sharing the wealth, with a consciousness of the social oath that weighs on us for the good of all” (CECOR 2004, 26).

As explained earlier, the bishops encouraged parishioners to vote their opinions. But solidarity clashes with self-interest, and the bishops challenged people to avoid making a decision on CAFTA based on their own interests. In one of the first statements issued in 2003 on CAFTA, Bishop San Casimiro issued such a challenge for the country to focus on the consequences of CAFTA for the entire country, and “not simply for the benefit of a few economic elites” (Caritas 2003, 99).

This emphasis on solidarity translated into a political process whereby the nation might collectively identify and pursue a common good. This common good should include everybody, both at a procedural level and in the final evaluation of consequences: “In effect, there are many economic situations that hurt our communities. At a macro- and microeconomic level, there is an increase in the social gap, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, problems of early education, water, and environmental damage. Many people are excluded from the opportunity to access the common good.... We are responsible for constructing a common good that includes all of our brothers and sisters” (CECOR 2004, 21–22).

To promote the common good, the bishops also relied on ideas of national pride. In a message before the general assembly of the government, they declared their national fidelity: “Costa Rica is first. In this spirit, given the situation that we confront in the future with CAFTA, we make a fraternal call to leave every type of confrontation and compromise. With a serene spirit, we should always have the common good of Costa Rica in mind, looking for ways of understanding, dialogue, and discernment” (CECOR 2006b).

Further supporting such an idea, Chaves argued that the Vatican charged the bishops with the task of proclaiming and clarifying the gospel and CST, which required guiding society in finding the common good:

The correct ethical and religious position before problems such as this [decisions about CAFTA] is a collective one. The discernment of the ethical religious teaching should be made in communities, in collaboration with

responsible bishops, in dialogue with other Christian brothers and people of good will, looking for “options and commitments that will promote social, political, and economic transformation that are considered necessary in that case.” (Chaves Ortiz 2003, citing a letter from Pope Paul VI, *Octagesima Adveniens* [1971])

Many of CECOR’s statements similarly assumed that if everyone processed policies together, there could be a shared understanding of the common good. The bishops established core religious principles to guide people, while the people themselves decided how to enforce these principles. In a sermon on CAFTA-DR, Bishop Ulloa highlighted the specific role of the Church in bringing about the common good. “The mission of church is not primarily political; it is religious and evangelistic. It offers the strength to unite groups...to make decisions that affect the collective group” (Ulloa Rojas 2007a).

CECOR stood in contrast to many Catholic activists involved in KAIROS in Canada, who were more skeptical that a common good would naturally arise from democratic processes. While the emphasis on the common good is central throughout CST—Barbieri (2001) has referred to it as CST’s “linchpin” and noted its connection with the other important CST values—CECOR’s conception of the common good reflects some national biases. Its 2005 statement on CAFTA-DR differs only slightly from a 2004 joint statement issued by the United States and other Central American councils, but this difference is distinctive. The Costa Rican bishops used the exact wording found in the joint letter to endorse human development, yet they diverged when listing the core values that support such development. In place of “human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity” (USCCB and SEDAC 2004) the bishops in Costa Rica listed “dialogue, the common good, equality, solidarity, and subsidiarity” (CECOR 2005d, 401). There is faith in the Costa Rican people to put aside selfish desires and to choose the good of the collective.

Peace

Peace is another value championed by the bishops that finds support throughout the Catholic community, but one that was uniquely shaped and defined by their context. It is interconnected to their belief in the goodwill of the Costa Rican people and has been a

prominent characteristic of much Catholic action within Costa Rica over the years.⁸ Peace was an ever-present element in their discourse on CAFTA, and one that increased in importance over time.

At a basic level, calls for peace were calls for nonviolent resolution. In a 2005 letter calling for dialogue in place of polarization, they appealed to Costa Ricans' affinity for peace, reminding the country that in this specific moment, citizens had the chance to reaffirm their commitment to nonviolence. "Because we know that violence and intolerance are forces that weaken and destroy national unity, we call on all Costa Ricans to solidify their commitment to peace, the fruit of justice and good understanding" (CECOR 2005c, 421).

For the bishops, peace was not just about nonviolence but also about a lack of conflict and confrontation. There is little of the acknowledgement of class divisions, oppression, and struggles that is often present within Catholic liberationist thought. Bishop Ulloa emphasized the bishops' rejection of heated conflict and the value they place on avoiding relationships of high tension: "Ultimately, yes, there are certain themes on which we have had little agreement between the state and the Church. But we have talked, and I think that we have walked well together. We have not had confrontations" (Ulloa Rojas 2007b).

Although peace often translates to avoiding conflict, the bishops do acknowledge that such peace requires justice and is not only about people being able to live together. Peace is not separate from calls for human-centered development, solidarity, and the common good. According to the bishops, the true peace they sought was founded upon justice. They reminded people that "true peace is the fruit of justice, moral virtue, and legal guarantees that respect rights and privileges and distribute costs and benefits equally" (CECOR 2005c, 421). Peace focused on the fate of the marginalized, even as this concept of peace could be achieved without much struggle or conflict.

Unlike some of the other values they espoused, the theme of peace became more

⁸ Sawchuk (2004) has noted the tendency to avoid conflict is often more prominent in conservative wings of the Church. This tendency is also especially strong in the context of Costa Rica, which remains one of the only countries in the region to have not undergone significant civil war. Statements by the bishops reveal a sense of pride in that history of democracy and peace.

prominent in CECOR's discourse as division grew after the 2006 presidential election. The "walking well" with the state referenced above has not been without effort in such a polarized context, where conflict and division appeared at high levels. The bishops called for Costa Ricans to pursue peace first—before any particular CAFTA decision. In a homily delivered at the metropolitan cathedral in downtown San José on the day of the election, the priest encouraged people to embrace the democratically reached decision. CECOR released a memo just days after the election that asked voters to peacefully accept the results.

Even their own interactions reflected the emphasis on peace as division rose in the country. While the earlier individual 2003 pastoral letters by bishops reflect more diversity of thought, once CECOR engaged in analysis over CAFTA (in 2004), only joint letters were issued by the bishops on the topic. Father Hernández explained that even if the bishops came to an issue with slightly different views, once they had decided on a position, they spoke as one voice for the sake of peace. He stated, "Normally there is a unity of the bishops, although you are able to have some bishops who are not initially in agreement, but if the majority decides something, then all of them accept it" (Hernández 2007). Likewise, in personal interviews current bishops readily articulated the council's position when asked about CAFTA-DR and free trade more generally (Barrantes Ureña 2007b; Ulloa Rojas 2007b). Peace as a value was balanced with human dignity and solidarity to shape the bishops' vision of the common good for Costa Rica.

Engaging and Creating Strategic Discourse

Statements of the Church are not intended to represent public consensus but rather to serve as an authoritative word for the people. Bishops are charged with discerning and applying CST and the gospel to the national context. In this charge, the bishops have relied largely on the stance of the official Catholic Church and the Vatican, with local Catholic organizations largely accepting the bishops' position. But how does the Church decide what issues to emphasize, and how to apply more general CST to a specific context and policy?

Past research has highlighted the different responses of the Catholic Church to various policies—not only between countries, and over time, but also among different

actors within the same national institution. While there may be agreement on some of the general principles of the moral and social teachings of the Church, there is no consensus over how the Church should engage with society on particular concerns. Hagopian (2009b) raises some of the tensions that churches face. Do they pursue moral concerns or social concerns, and how do they divide their political attentions? Do they challenge the state? In assessing the decisions made by the Church, she highlights three important factors to consider: the capacity of the Church to mobilize the laity, the directions in which the laity pull the Church itself, and the nature of the political risk that the Church faces within its particular political climate.

Those representing the institutional Church, then, face different concerns and a different context when deciding how to engage in public discourse than those less connected to authority structures. Within Costa Rica, for example, the bishops seemed to take a more neutral stance than other Catholic leaders (many of whom were opposed to the CAFTA-DR). These leaders also relied on CST, but interpreted it differently. While I do not want to deny that these differences were due in part to varied understandings of conflict, power, and peace and varied interpretations of CST, they were also the result of the different social locations occupied by these actors.

As the leaders of the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church in Costa Rica, the bishops appealed to official Catholic documents and teaching to legitimate their ethical values and religious commitments. They referenced a number of Costa Rican Catholic documents from the past to demonstrate their consistency in applying CST over the years. For example, in his article on the Church and development, Archbishop Barrantes wrote, “The Catholic Church under the hand of Monseñor Víctor Manuel Sanabria also understood the seriousness of the moment and was ready to help in the task of solidarity and justice.” He continued to discuss the social policies of the past and present. “This is not to glorify the past, but to extract the lessons that history and experience has left us” (Barrantes Ureña 2004a).

As a national conference, the bishops were responsible for speaking directly to their Costa Rican context. As Palacios (2007) has noted, since Vatican II there has been increased attention and freedom for bishops to implement CST within their own national context and an acknowledgement that national churches operate in different contexts.

CECOR has not only dealt with FTAs more than many other bishops' conferences, but it has also dealt with FTAs from a particular context. The emphasis of the bishops on peace and the common good was in part influenced by a national history of nonviolence over the years.

In speaking CST to their national context, the bishops referenced not only on their own history but also central documents of the global Church. This reliance on Catholic history and authority was especially evident in their formal letters. When President Arias visited the Vatican in 2006, concerned with CECOR's involvement with CAFTA-DR, the correspondence that followed between the Costa Rican bishops and Cardinal Sodano, secretary of the Vatican, revealed CECOR's allegiance to Rome. The bishops stated in their letter to Cardinal Sodano, "We assure you that in no moment have the bishops opposed economic development policies that include legitimate human development; in receiving the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI, we are illuminating the objectives of justice to which all political action should be directed" (CECOR 2006a).

To a lesser degree, the council at times referred to CELAM documents to support their claims, although this was a process wrought with care. To be sure, Costa Rica is a member of CELAM, a permanent council that has had five general meetings to date. The Costa Rican bishops did not support the liberationist direction of the group and have used CELAM documents associated with liberation theology carefully. Williams (1989) has previously detailed the conflicts of interpretation in Costa Rica over CELAM documents.⁹ The SEDAC 2004 statement referenced the 1968 CELAM Conference at Medellín's call for peace, a topic on which the stance of the Costa Rican Church has been quite conservative. When making claims about the problems of over-empowered TNCs or liberal economies, CECOR cited CELAM's 1979 Puebla conference, likely due to the fact that few other documents have discussed TNCs (CECOR 2004). However, the Costa Rican bishops have mostly relied on papal documents of the Church, while also supporting their positions with the historical tendencies of the Latin American and Costa Rican Churches.

⁹ He cites the example of when Caritas in the 1980s put out a pamphlet using CELAM documents, and then was accused, primarily from the John XXIII Social School (described later), of being Marxist.

Even as they relied on Catholic authority to legitimate their position, they also took seriously the close ties to the power of the state. CECOR strategically used the power it held in Costa Rica to apply CST values and used a strategy of neutrality to legitimate its political discourse to the state. The bishops provided recommendations before the International Commission on of Legislative Assembly on CAFTA-DR (CECOR 2006c). Their ability to call for dialogue between both sides of the trade debate was illustrated best in the forums they instituted in 2007 after the referendum was announced. Each Monday, the Catholic radio channel, Radio Fides, hosted two guests, representing the pro- and anti- CAFTA positions. Such guests included government officials, university faculty, agricultural experts, and business actors. To emphasize the impartial nature of such forums, a large screen in the debate room revealed the exact time that each person had spoken. The bishops had already called for others to promote this type of discussion: “We respectfully invite the national community, and particularly the public and private universities and other Christian denominations, to be united in constructing spaces of dialogue” (CECOR 2005b, 421). They called for priests to give voice to both sides as well, to serve as ethical guides who do not promote their own opinion (2007a).

Such a response must be interpreted in their particular context. Costa Rica officially remains a Catholic state and is one of the only states within Central America where the bishops enjoy official institutional support. Comparing the religious identity of citizens in Costa Rica to neighboring countries, Catholicism remains a dominant force. The Catholic Church enjoys strong support from citizens and has strong linkages with the government. CECOR also exists within a society that has a strong civil society and a well-functioning democracy. When religious heterogeneity is low and civil society involvement is high, the Catholic Church is freer to pursue its full agenda than in other contexts, predicting more critical attitudes on current economic globalization (Hagopian 2009b).

In addition to promoting dialogue among different factions in Costa Rica, the bishops have also prioritized open communication with the government. Their criticisms over CAFTA-DR were framed in terms of what sort of development agenda the country should pursue. In a message to the General Assembly, they asked the government to join

alongside the bishops in a common agenda: “We are first interested in an institutional transformation of our country...with the goals of eliminating poverty and inequality, of sustainable development and a life of dignity for all, without forgoing increasing our production or the competitive capacity of Costa Rica at an international level” (CECOR 2006b).

They used the opportunity of high public interest in CAFTA to speak out about development and economic policies more broadly. So while papal authority was crucial in highlighting the values that CECOR used to legitimate its presence in the CAFTA conversation, the Costa Rican context is important to understanding ways that they chose to communicate the message and interact with the state. The bishops promoted values central in CST, while also promoting values of dialogue and nonpartisanship that increased their legitimacy among the citizens of Costa Rica.

Central Actors in the Production of Discourse

While CECOR speaks on behalf of the Costa Rican Catholic Church, the hierarchy and network of Catholic actors within the state is more complex. Other formal bodies also produce discourse within the Church, and most of these offices have a bishop associated with them.¹⁰

The vicariate office in San José (VEPS, Vicaría Episcopal de Pastoral Social) produced official documents under the oversight of Archbishop Barrantes. Its informational book on CAFTA not only detailed the position of CECOR but also included a number of homilies on the topic delivered by various bishops. VEPS also maintains an electronic database of these statements.

Caritas has produced most of the discourse on immigration in the country. Williams (1989) has documented the role and history of Caritas in the country and notes that before 1981 the organization was largely focused on social services, but after 1981 it has become more of a voice for the poor and marginalized in the country. The former head of Caritas (2002–2006), Father Guido Villalta, currently heads the vicariate office in

¹⁰ For example, Bishop San Casimiro, as the bishop in charge of Caritas, recently issued a letter that dealt with the high levels of migration between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The official Church organizations within the country, such as Caritas, the John XXIII Social School, and the Eco Católico, all have a bishop appointed to oversee them.

San José, and he also represented the Church officially as part of a national commission appointed by the government in 2002 to study CAFTA. The current director of Caritas in Costa Rica, Father Francisco Hernández, has also made recommendations before CECOR about CAFTA-DR. His articulated position toward CAFTA-DR is in line with the official position of CECOR, and he is notable for leading not only Caritas (since 2006) but also the John XXIII Social School (since 2007).

Although under the same leadership as Caritas, the John XXIII Social School is a very different Catholic organization and traditionally has been more conservative than Caritas and other parts of the Church. With a staff of over a hundred, it was initially founded to teach and defend CST. It has championed the *solidarismo* movement, which seeks to foster good relationships between workers and employers. “A form of labour organization that renounces collective agreements and the right to strike, *solidarismo* emphasizes the common interests and collaboration of workers and owners,” according to Sawchuk (2004, 142), a scholar of labor rights and the Catholic Church in Costa Rica. Such a movement, although professing to work with workers and employers, is actually a vehicle of the employers and sells its services to businesses (Goldin 2007). When Caritas became more concerned with the structural issues affecting the poor in the early 1980s, it was the John XXIII Social School who critiqued its Marxist tendencies (Williams 1989). Given the central role the John XXIII Social School plays within the Church, it is worth noting that the larger *solidarismo* movement in Costa Rica was a prominent leader in the pro-CAFTA movement, due to its close ties with the larger business community. The former leader of the John XXIII Social School, Father Claudio Solano, was perhaps more important to the CAFTA story than the institution itself. Involved with the John XXIII Social School since 1971, he became a leader in the pro-CAFTA movement. Several interviewees suggested he was asked to step down at the John XXIII Social School because of his growing power and close relationship with the business community.

The Catholic newspaper *Eco Católico* is under the supervision of the bishops but has taken a more critical stance towards CAFTA than the bishops themselves. Father Armando Alfaro served as editor for almost forty years, taking office in 1967 and serving until the end of 2006. From its founding, the paper has dealt with political and social issues. A weekly publication, sold every Sunday outside the cathedrals, it has an

estimated circulation of about 15,000. It is the print source of the Catholic Church to which most Catholics in the country have access. The newspaper serves as both a medium to transmit the official messages from the bishops and a venue for other Catholic voices to express their opinions on social, economic, political, and religious issues.

Father Jorge Arturo Chaves, an economist at the National University and an anti-CAFTA-DR advocate, serves as a consultant for CECOR and the Latin American Catholic bishops. While not heading a Catholic organization in the country, he has played a role in shaping the Church's policy on CAFTA-DR. As an economist, he also has represented the Church on more technical matters. In one interview he was referred to as the "mouthpiece of the Catholic Church" (Cordero Arias 2007). Archbishop Barrantes seems to confirm this view (when it comes to technical aspects of CAFTA). He stated that Chaves "is an asset because he is an economist in addition to being a priest. I think that he is the only economist priest that we have, and he has a very clear understanding of all the mechanisms of the economy and everything that comes with globalization" (Barrantes Ureña 2007b). The official actors within the Catholic Church in Costa Rica have been faithful to the CAFTA position proclaimed by the bishops to various degrees.

Yet to be sure, there have been many within the Church who have disagreed, and I want to note that others have taken different positions towards CAFTA. While many have rejected CAFTA (Ervin Ruiz et al. 2007; Francisco Sota et al. 2007; Picado Gatgens et al. 2007; Trejos Picado 2007), Father Solano publicly supported the movement (Solano Cerdas 2007). Within the anti-CAFTA discourse, actors articulated a similar religious discourse, drawing upon CST. Bishop Emeritus Trejos Picado referenced the same Costa Rican religious history as his colleagues in CECOR to support his anti-CAFTA position: "The Catholic priests who signed below have satisfied our conscience in communicating this ethical judgment on the Free Trade Agreement inspired by the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church and after consulting the best experts in the country" (Picado Gatgens et al. 2007). They called CAFTA-DR a sin.

The protestors and bishops diverged largely in how they sought to analyze policy. While the Catholic Church officially declared that they were not technical experts and could not evaluate the treaty, many opposed to CAFTA-DR in the Church argued that there was no question that the treaty went against Catholic values. The bishops saw their

role as enforcing religious doctrine, while opposition leaders emphasized a moral responsibility to protect values through policy engagement. Anti-CAFTA-DR advocates charged that workers would suffer and many groups would be hurt by the devastation resulting from CAFTA-DR; they did not just assert that this might happen. In adopting deregulatory policies, the current model of Costa Rican life would be lost. Transnational organizations would be given power over indigenous matters, even making decisions about the seeds farmers could use. Protestors raised the question of how the bishops could propose an agenda to promote solidarity when the FTA at its core destroyed solidarity.

Agreeing on values of human dignity, those outside the hierarchical structure mobilized to make claims about the effect of the treaty, an action those with authority refused to take. As discussed elsewhere (Reynolds 2010), different understandings of the public authority of the Church connect to different approaches for how the Church should engage with technical experts.

CONCLUSION

The neutral but politically engaged position of the Catholic bishops in Costa Rica over CAFTA-DR was a strategic decision by the Church. In not promoting a clear path for the political future of CAFTA-DR, the Catholic bishops were able to concentrate on key theological and social values. This strategy allowed them to highlight values shared by many Costa Ricans and to maintain a level of authority within society. Perhaps their criticisms were even taken more seriously by the public and the government than if they had been considered mere ideologues in the debate. It would be naive to argue that the Church was solely responsible for the referendum and its accompanying dialogue, but the bishops were central actors in legitimating this process, even declaring the referendum results valid after the election and praising the process.¹¹ The bishops' political strategy

¹¹ However, the bishops would not advocate a stance of letting democracy universally dictate policy. On abortion, for example, the bishops have not called for people to vote on new laws, but insisted that current anti-abortion laws must stand. In line with CST, issues of "faith and morals" are different than "social" ones.

allowed them to promote their ideal of a common good and retain their role as leaders in establishing that common good.

This is not to suggest that the model of political involvement employed by the bishops was the best model, but rather that the position flowed from the values espoused. That is, this lack of political advocacy for specific policies was shaped in part by values that impacted the ways that the bishops thought about the political process. As Hart has written, “the way we do politics manifests our identity and moral convictions” (2001, 3–4), and for CECOR their values emphasized the democratic process above a specific political goal.

Using their authority, the bishops argued first and foremost for an ethical framework to trade debates. They highlighted the values of human dignity, solidarity, justice, and peace. They accessed their moral authority from these religious values and from religious texts influenced by CST—as it has been understood both in the international and the Costa Rican setting. Their central political goal has been to make and keep such Catholic values and ethics relevant to trade policy decisions. The bishops did not attempt to evaluate CAFTA policy but rather to provide the tools for others in society to do so.

The bishops’ political objective of remaining both neutral and critical may seem contradictory. They simultaneously criticized the specifics of CAFTA while still refusing to oppose it. They protested unrestrained markets and condemned the commodification of life and land, suggesting that such would occur under CAFTA. They repeatedly called on Costa Rica to assert its sovereignty and not bow to US pressure, demanding that democratic processes and dialogue occur as part of the CAFTA decision-making process. But even in the complexity of its position, CECOR was clear in promoting its main message: Whether or not CAFTA was implemented, Costa Rican society needed a new social contract and a reorientation of human development. By airing its criticisms through impartial forums and strategic dialogue, the Church avoided polarizing the nation any further and retained its position of authority in the midst of conflict.

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