

Critical Theology

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Introduction

By *Scott Kline*
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This summer I found myself reading a series of articles marking 100 years since the death of Franz Kafka, on June 3, 1924. As I consider the three articles in this issue of Critical Theology, I am reminded of Kafka's novel *The Trial* and an exchange between Josef K., who has been arrested and accused of some unknown crime, and a priest, who as prison chaplain is supposed to provide K with spiritual support. After K has explained to the priest that the accuser's story is impossibly absurd, the priest offers K a dose of *reality*: "No," said the priest, "you don't need to accept everything as true, *you only* have to accept it as necessary." 'Depressing view,' said K. 'The lie made into the rule of the world.'"

The articles in this issue of Critical Theology challenge the cynicism and resignation of Kafka's priest in *The Trial*. The first article, by James Scott, recounts the history of the churches in abolishing capital punishment in Canada in 1976. As Scott argues, ecumenical coalitions and grassroots mobilization played an essential part in convincing Canadian politicians to end the death penalty. The second article, by Liisa L. North, highlights the role that ecumenical coalitions played in fostering solidarity between Canada and Chile in the wake of the right-wing overthrow of the Salvador Allende government in 1973. These coalitions were vital support networks for immigrants fleeing Chile

and looking for a home in Canada. The third article, by Carmen Celestini, introduces readers to a far-right-wing Christian nationalist movement in the hope that, with greater understanding, readers will be better equipped to engage, not dismiss, those who seem to have an increasing voice in the Republican Party of Donald J. Trump.

Contents

Introduction By Scott Kline	1
"Contrary to the Spirit of Christ": Canadian Churches and the Abolition of Capital Punishment By The Rev. Dr. James V. Scott, O.C.	2
Why Canada Cared: Canada-Chile Solidarity 1973–1990 By Liisa L. North	10
Tactical Civics and the Repentant Remnant: Mobilizing for God and Country By Carmen Celestini	14

“Contrary to the Spirit of Christ”

Canadian Churches and the Abolition of Capital Punishment¹

By The Rev. Dr. James V. Scott, O.C.
United Church minister

On July 14, 1976, the Parliament of Canada voted to abolish capital punishment as a penalty under the Criminal Code. Mainline Christian churches, including my own United Church, significantly influenced that decision. Yet, I confess that I was only vaguely aware of their role in the intense political and moral wrestling that had taken place in advance of the vote. That same spring, I graduated from Emmanuel Theological College at the University of Toronto, was ordained by Toronto Conference of The United Church of Canada, and was settled in a pastoral charge in Saskatchewan. The issue of the death penalty would have a more central place in my life nearly a decade later, when Canadians and the churches faced an effort to restore it.

Capital punishment has been opposed, periodically reviewed, and increasingly restricted since before the birth of Canada. Prior to 1865, multiple offences were eligible for a death sentence under British law, but by Confederation, capital punishment was limited to crimes of murder, treason, piracy with violence, and rape. According to Joel Kropf, in his master’s thesis focusing on the death penalty debate between 1957 and 1976,² two special parliamentary committees, formed in 1937 and in 1954–56, examined the issue. Both approved the continued use of execution but made different recommendations on the methods by which it should be carried out, based partially on what was considered humane at the time.

Private members’ bills calling for abolition were introduced in 1950 and 1959, and the House of Commons held debates on capital punishment in 1960 and 1966. While these efforts did not bring about abolition, changes in the law in 1961 further restricted the death penalty to capital murder (intentional), murder in the commission of another crime, and the killing of a police officer or prison guard. The last execution in Canada was in 1962, the double hanging of Arthur Lucas and Ronald Turpin. In 1967, the government secured a five-year moratorium on capital punishment when a full abolition amendment failed. A second five-year moratorium was passed in 1973 after a prolonged nine-month debate. Despite political steps to restrict its use, however, public support for capital punishment remained high.

The Evolution of Church Views

Most mainline Christian churches officially affirmed the right of the state to impose a death sentence into the 1950s. However, the views of church leaders were beginning to change. Kropf writes, “Similarly, between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, the United Church of Canada, Anglican Church, and Presbyterian Church – in that order – for the first time indicated themselves to be of abolitionist mind.”³ After a very contentious debate at its 1954 meeting, for example, the General Council of the United Church of Canada narrowly passed (112–111) the following motion: “That this Council place itself on record as being of the opinion that the Criminal Code of Canada should be amended so that no person in Canada shall be sentenced to death for the commission of an offence punishable under the provision of any Canadian Statute and that the Executive of General Council be instructed to make such representations as may appear to be necessary and advisable to bring this expression of opinion to the attention of the Federal Government.”⁴ Subsequent votes by the United Church on abolition over the next two decades were much more decisive.

In 1958, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada also adopted an abolitionist position. An editorial in the *Canadian Churchman* (the precursor to the *Anglican Journal*) argued that: The death penalty is an easy way out for an apathetic public. We can feel secure in the knowledge that one death has been avenged by another, that society has been purged of a threatening element. Murder and violence are conditions of our society. It is the pathetic story of poverty, [mental illness], poor health, alcoholism, drug addiction and mounting pressure ... Surely there are better alternatives. More research, more humane efforts to combat misery, more attempts at rehabilitation.⁵

In 1965, the Lutheran Church in America—Canada Section adopted a resolution expressing to the Government of Canada its view that capital punishment ought to be abolished, and in 1967, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada stated: “[W]ithout prejudice to the statement of 1954,

this Assembly favour[s] the abolition of capital punishment.” The 1954 statement had affirmed the state’s right to use the death penalty.

The long-running debate between retention and abolition positions in Canada included both pragmatic and moral questions: Was the death penalty effective as a deterrent? Did the murderer not “deserve” to die? Was the death penalty not “natural justice” ordained by God, with the state acting as the agent of the divine will? A growing awareness during the 20th century of the complex social and psychological factors that gave rise to criminal behaviour shored up the abolitionist argument that the finality of the death penalty precluded any possibility of redemption and rehabilitation and was contrary to a “civilized” society.

In 1960, the 19th General Council of the United Church of Canada statement on capital punishment said:

Man is a responsible being. The gospel teaches that people can choose between good and evil. This is a privilege and responsibility, for the same will that may choose evil may also choose good (Romans 7:13 ff). This is in full recognition, however, of the fact that there are sociological and pathological situations in which the responsibility of the individual almost ceases and he becomes the instrument of mental, social and physical conditions.⁶

Perhaps the most potent abolitionist argument was concern that an innocent person might be executed. Lingering questions and doubts about William Coffin’s guilt following his 1956 hanging in Quebec caused unease among politicians and the public about the frailty of the justice system. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, whose opposition to capital punishment was formed during his years as a defence lawyer in Saskatchewan, argued during the 1966 House of Commons debate: “From my experience at the Bar I say that anyone who says an innocent man cannot go to the gallows is wrong, because I know differently.”

In the same debate, Thomas Clement (“Tommy”) Douglas, a Baptist minister and the leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP), said,

I believe that any society that practices capital punishment brutalizes itself. It has an effect upon that society, and I do not believe that society can rid itself from murderers by itself becoming a murderer ... I believe that the measure of a nation is the manner in which it treats its misfits and its offenders. Capital punishment has already been abolished in most of the advanced nations of the western world. The abolition of capital punishment has come to be taken as the hallmark of a nation’s conscience.

An Issue of Moral Justice

Despite denominational movement toward abolition in the decades prior to the 1976 vote, there remained support for retention in the churches. While the question of deterrence dominated parliamentary debates, for many Christians, the central issue was justice. The Reverend E.L.H. Taylor, an Anglican priest and ardent retentionist, wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Globe and Mail* on April 18, 1958, “The argument that capital punishment should be abolished because it does not always act as a deterrent is utterly irrelevant to the basic issue involved, namely that justice be done ... It is just that the killer must himself be killed.”⁷ For many churchgoers, biblical justice was retributive, based on the Old Testament concept of *lex talionis* (law of retribution), an understanding of Mosaic law as punitive, requiring “an eye for an eye.” The state was God’s agent of punishment.

Nearly two decades later, the Reverend Dr. Reg Stackhouse, an Anglican priest, professor of Theology at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, and a former member of Parliament (Scarborough East), similarly held that:

The point is that the death penalty would not only be a punishment of the murderer but a demonstration of society’s abhorrence of the crime of murder, and society’s serious concern about this threat to public security ... The Biblical ethic requires us to stress personal responsibility, to conclude that each offender must be ready to pay the price of his deed ... It is because life is sacred that murder is the worst of all crimes and requires the highest of all penalties.⁸

Many conservative Christians agreed. *Faith Today*, Canada’s leading news magazine aimed at evangelicals, reported in its March/April 1987 issue that, in an evangelical opinion poll, 76% of evangelical churchgoers who responded indicated a desire for reinstatement of capital punishment.⁹

The Catholic Church in Canada, following Vatican II (1962–65), had expressed its opposition to the death penalty. In 1973, for example, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote to members of the House of Commons:

It is an illegitimate use of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, to quote texts in order to argue in our time, for the retention of the death penalty ... The question of the death penalty, in our opinion, ought to focus not on whether a convicted murderer ‘deserves’ to die. The focus should be on us, should Canadians as a community try to break the escalating spiral of violence by refraining from violence even as a deterrent.

Ed Broadbent, an NDP member of Parliament for Oshawa, offered a powerful judgment on the retributive approach to justice in a House of Commons debate on July 24, 1973. He said, “After all the arguments for capital punishment have been knocked down, emotional vengeance remains the only reason for hanging. Vindictiveness is no foundation for morality.”¹⁰

Mainline churches were shifting their views from what the offender might “deserve” to the moral values they felt society should embody. Christian abolitionists understood the teachings of Jesus to be the call of the Spirit to a new ethic with respect to justice and wrongdoing, a faith response of compassion, understanding, mercy, and even forgiveness. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do....” Embracing a theology of grace, they felt that the state should model and call its citizens to the highest values and behaviour rather than replicating the violence it is repudiating. An approach to justice wherein the “prodigal” had the opportunity for accountability and rehabilitation was, in their view, more reflective of gospel values. Additionally, biblical scholars saw no discrepancy between Old and New Testament teachings, pointing to the response of God to the murder of Abel by Cain as one of accountability but also one of mercy and protection—i.e., the “mark of Cain”—and interpreting the Mosaic law, *lex talionis* (law of retribution), as restricting rather than demanding vengeance.

Abolitionists Mobilize

Other powerful and influential voices in Canadian society also advocated for abolition. Perhaps the most prominent was defense counsel Arthur Maloney, Q.C., a member of Parliament (Parkdale) from 1957 to 1962 and subsequently chairman of the Canadian Society for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, formed in 1964. Having had two clients executed, Maloney had grave concerns about the procedural weaknesses of the criminal justice system and felt that the common good was better served by non-lethal means of deterring crime. He spoke eloquently in the House of Commons and in the public media.

In 1975, with the end of the second five-year moratorium looming and a free vote in Parliament on the horizon, the denominations of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) formed the Inter-Church Task Force for the Abolition of Capital Punishment. The Task Force included Council members as well as the Salvation Army, the Canadian Unitarian Council, and justice and advocacy groups such as the Canadian Elizabeth Fry Society, the John Howard Society of Canada, Amnesty International Canada, and the Ontario Association of Professional Social Workers.

The Task Force monitored the efforts of retentionists, shared educational strategies, and undertook ecumenical advocacy. Member churches prepared congregational resources with background information on the death penalty, statistics on deterrence, and theological arguments supporting abolition. Churches published articles in their denominational magazines and sent press releases and letters to the editor to media outlets. They encouraged the faithful to individually write to their MPs.

The Church Council on Justice and Corrections

The death penalty controversy also led to broader conversations among CCC members about the need for the Church to play a more prophetic role in the justice system. Prison chaplains were calling on their denominations to go beyond the pastoral role of supplying chaplaincy to correctional institutions by setting up an initiative to “examine the morality of criminal justice policies and practices.”¹¹

Norma McCord, the widow of the late Rev. Dr. J. David McCord, a United Church minister in Cowansville and half-time chaplain at the Cowansville Correctional Institution, recalls her husband having conversations in the early 1970s with the Rev. Fr. Noël Mailleux, a Dominican priest and head of the Department of Psychology at the Université de Montréal, about the need for the churches to speak to the personal and systemic realities of the inmates they dealt with on a daily basis. Theological reflection on our social understanding of crime and justice, how we “do justice” in Canada, was needed. In a 1973 article, “Nyet to the Hangman’s Noose,” the Reverend W. Clarke MacDonald of the United Church noted, “We are beginning, just beginning, to accept the fact that prisons should be for the rehabilitation of the criminal, not a place where society extracts a pound of flesh.”¹²

In August 1972, the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops created an independent, ecumenical Council for the Study of the Responsibility and Action of the Churches in the field of Justice and Corrections in Canada – Conseil pour l’Étude de la Responsabilité et de l’Action des Églises dans le Domaine de la Justice et de la Criminologie au Canada, renamed the Church Council on Justice and Corrections, or CCJC (in French, Conseil des églises pour la justice et la criminologie) in 1983. The Council would examine the justice system from a more holistic perspective than the “trail ’em, nail ’em, and jail ’em” offender-focused approach, examining alternatives to incarceration as well as the need to acknowledge and address the harm done to victims and communities. (The Church Council, where I continued on staff for 11 years, went on to become

a leading voice for a restorative approach to justice, critiquing our societal addiction to punishment as “social sin.”)

Dave McCord was seconded from Correctional Services Canada to be the executive director of the Church Council. The immediate and urgent priority of the Council and its member churches in 1972 was the impending death penalty vote. McCord travelled the country educating and promoting abolition among church members.

The 1976 Parliamentary Vote

A month before the vote, on June 15, 1976, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau addressed the House of Commons with what I consider to be a powerful “large picture” moral argument:

Are we, as a society, so lacking in respect for ourselves, so lacking in hope for human betterment, so socially bankrupt that we are ready to accept state vengeance as our penal philosophy? ... To retain [capital punishment] in the Criminal Code of Canada would be to abandon hope and confidence in favor of a despairing acceptance of our inability to cope with violent crime except with violence.

Trudeau’s speech echoed his call during the 1968 election campaign for a “just society” characterized by inclusion and equality.

On July 14, 1976, after a highly emotional 98-hour debate, the House of Commons voted by a slim margin (130–124) to abolish capital punishment under the criminal code (retained in military law until 1998). On May 3, 1978, Clarke MacDonald reported to the Canadian Council of Churches’ Commission on Canadian Affairs that government officials confirmed that the voice of churches and synagogues was significant in the decision by the House to abolish the death penalty. In doing so, Canada joined 28 other abolitionist nations.

The abolitionist victory had come at a cost, however. To secure enough votes for abolition, the government had agreed to a mandatory penalty for first-degree murder of life without parole eligibility for 25 years. Prison chaplains and members of the CCJC were concerned that the extraordinary length of sentence, one of the longest in the Western world, was inhumane and would create despair in offenders and a burgeoning population in the correctional system. The CCC’s Inter-Church Task Force had met with Solicitor General Warren Allmand to voice these concerns. The final legislation included a “faint hope” clause permitting offenders to seek a judicial review of their parole eligibility after 15 years in custody.

To meet the anticipated impacts of these sentences, the Inter-Church Task Force for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, while retaining its primary function of keeping a watching brief on the death penalty issue, broadened its scope. It asked the Triennial meeting of the Canadian Council of Churches to appoint a task force to study effective ways of dealing with persons convicted of murder. The Inter-Church Task Force for Responsible Alternatives to the Death Penalty (RADP) was created. Anglican Phyllis Creighton developed resource materials for congregations. Members of the Task Force, led by the CCJC, met with the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs and with federal correctional institutional staff about their concerns.

Agitation for Reinstatement

Despite the successful abolition vote in 1976, public support for capital punishment remained over 70%, and agitation began immediately to reopen the question. In 1978, CCC’s Commission on Canadian Affairs heard from Dave McCord that police associations across the country had initiated a fundraising campaign to raise \$200,000 to support the reinstatement of the death penalty. Re-energized, the Inter-Church Task Force for the Continued Abolition of Capital Punishment developed and sent a package of information to its church and social justice networks across the country in April 1979, with a covering letter saying:

The complexity of this issue requires that we all join efforts – that is why the work of your congregation, diocese, synod, conference, presbytery, synagogue, temple, meeting house, campus, social agency, trade union, polling division, mill or mart – where people in the ordinary course of life, meet, work, and come together is so important. WE URGE YOU TO MAKE YOUR CONSTITUENCY AWARE OF THE MATERIALS THAT ARE AVAILABLE.

The package included a fact sheet on the death penalty, a position paper, and a list of actions recipients were encouraged to take. The CCJC began seeking funds to hire a part-time death penalty worker.

Inevitably, death penalty reinstatement became an issue in the 1984 election campaign, supported by many Conservative candidates and bolstered by public alarm over the unusually high number of police officers killed that year (eight). Progressive Conservative party leader Brian Mulroney promised a free vote on the question, if elected. In September 1984, when the Tories swept to power with the largest majority in Canadian history, winning 211 of 282 seats, it appeared as if the restoration of capital punishment was only a matter of time.

Immediately, there was pressure from within the new government caucus to fulfill the campaign promise, led

principally by MP William (Bill) Domm (Peterborough), the son of a United Church minister. Among his supporters were police, several Evangelical churches, and victim advocacy groups that had formed to promote victims' rights. Victims of crime, who often felt voiceless and invisible in the criminal justice process, began to organize for better victim services, input into the sentencing process, and a voice in criminal justice legislation. They saw the reinstatement of the death penalty as society's recognition of the harm done to them.

Coalition Against the Return of the Death Penalty

Members of the CCC's Inter-Task Force were seized with a profound sense of urgency. Led by Dave McCord of the CCJC, Eleanor MacDonald of Elizabeth Fry Canada, and Gordon MacFarlane of the John Howard Society of Ontario, the members formed a new group with the sole purpose of organizing against reinstatement. On February 5, 1985, the Coalition Against the Return of the Death Penalty (CARDP) was created as "a national coalition of religious, voluntary and professional organizations which, for ethical, sociological or theological reasons have come together to oppose the return of the death penalty." The Coalition originally had 25 members, nine of which were churches, but soon grew to over 40 organizations. It was initially chaired by Rev. John Duncan of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and was later co-chaired by former Moderator the Rt. Rev. Bruce McLeod of the United Church and Rabbi Dow Marmur, Senior Rabbi of Holy Blossom Temple. The Canadian Jewish Congress added its opposition to the restoration of the death penalty at its 21st Plenary meeting on May 11, 1986, passing a resolution that said, in part: "Whereas said study concluded that Jewish experience and values support a position against the death penalty ... Be it resolved that the Canadian Jewish Congress oppose the restoration of the death penalty in Canada."

In May 1985, I was hired by CCJC as the full-time project director for the Coalition. During the 1984 election campaign, I had worked for the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), developing educational materials and travelling across the country organizing and training citizens to raise peace and disarmament issues with candidates at their riding level. This experience, combined with my personal opposition to capital punishment, based on my faith, made it a good fit for CARDP. Having preached the unconditional love of God, I had the opportunity to live out that belief in a societal and political context.

Marie Beemans was hired half-time to work with the Conseil des églises pour la justice et la criminologie in Quebec, and Eleanor MacDonald, on loan half-time

from Elizabeth Fry Canada, was named Coalition coordinator. In August 1986, Amnesty International (Canada) hired Paul Larose-Edwards as a half-time staff person to lobby members of Parliament.

The Coalition initially adopted a low-profile approach to avoid precipitating the vote. No date had been set for the parliamentary free vote, but the prime minister had indicated that it would take place sometime within their first mandate.

Church Basements and Community Halls

The priority for CARDP was the creation of an education/action kit for use by church and community groups. The dramatic cover of the kit posed the central issue at stake: "Why kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong?" This question was encircled by a noose in the shape of a question mark. The 55-page kit was divided into six sections: Facts, The Experience, Commentary, The Context, The Strategy, and Other Resources. It also included pockets stuffed with pamphlets from churches and other organizations outlining their opposition to execution. Demand was high. Over 4,000 kits were printed and distributed across the country.

Over the next 18 months, I travelled across the country, hosted by chapters of the John Howard Society and church congregations, distributing the resource kit and conducting workshops to organize and train citizens to engage in community education and to lobby their local members of Parliament. The Coalition continued to support this local work through periodic "update" newsletters. I spoke at church services, presbytery and diocesan meetings, conferences, and rallies.

In Quebec, the Conseil des églises pour la justice et la criminologie brought together more than 25 groups at a press conference in October 1984 to take a public stand against the potential return of capital punishment. It attracted support from several more groups and, early in 1985, a Quebec coalition was formed, including many of the provincial branches of national organizations that were members of CARDP. The work of Marie Beemans and the Quebec coalition mirrored that of the national campaign with the development of French community education and MP resource kits, work with the media, training volunteers, and contacting Quebec Parliamentarians.

In churches across Canada, sermons and special services were devoted to the death penalty issue. The faithful participated in community vigils, wrote letters, held workshops, and met with their local MPs. These educational efforts by Coalition members and other groups paid off. An *Ottawa Citizen* article by Stephen Bindman on May 7, 1987, reported that polls showed public support for the death penalty was at a 20-year

low. This trend was important because some members of Parliament had stated that their vote would be based on their constituents' views.

The important work the Coalition was doing on the ground was complemented by the voices of the secular influencers of the day. Major Canadian news media were generally opposed to the reinstatement of the death penalty. The *Globe and Mail* editorial of September 6, 1984, stated, "Capital punishment is not a solution. It is an admission of failure to find a solution." Well-known criminal defense lawyer Edward Greenspan said he intended to put his law practice "on hold" to fight full-time against reinstatement of the death penalty. He offered to debate MP Bill Domm on the issue; several debates took place that were well covered by the media. Each also made frequent speeches and personal appearances on the issue.

Despite the number of Conservative MPs supporting the death penalty and the highly visible advocacy of the police and several victims' groups, both the media and community groups reported difficulty finding individuals willing to speak publicly about reinstating it. One who did was Rev. Bob Rumble, a United Church minister well known and respected for his ministry with the Deaf. On February 19, 1987, Rev. Rumble and MP Bill Domm faced off against lawyer Clayton Ruby and me in a televised debate on TV Ontario's program *Speaking Out*. Rev. Rumble expressed dismay that the United Church had taken a position in support of continued abolition and maintained that Canada needed the death penalty to provide comfort to victims of violent crime and "because natural justice demands it."

In another televised forum, Bill Domm unwittingly yet succinctly made the case that the churches had been arguing. As I recall, he was asked by the moderator whether he would personally be prepared to execute Clifford Olsen (infamous for several child murders). Mr. Domm said, "I would run to the button." The moderator then asked, "And if it was your own son?" After a long pause, Mr. Domm replied, "I would do everything I could to save him." His response went to the heart of the matter. Knowing and caring for his son, knowing his story, his challenges, his potential, Bill Domm could not execute him. We find it very difficult to demonize and dehumanize those we care about, those who are "real" to us. For Christians, the death penalty violates the gospel call to see everyone as kin, as intrinsically valuable despite the evil they may have done, to see each person as a loved child made in the image of God.

The archbishops and bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada made this point in a pastoral letter to the members of their church and the citizens of Canada in February 1987:

An answer which destroys human life cannot enhance respect for, and quality of, life in our society. On the contrary, an important Christian conviction is that anything that increases a general recognition within society of the infinite worth of the person will be a powerful agent in the protection of that society. We believe in the sacredness of human life. Life is God's gift, and the Bible teaches us that men and women are made in the image of God. The distortion of that image that is reflected in a person committing a murder does not make that person any less important in God's eyes.

Ultimately, the decision about reinstatement was to be made by members of Parliament. Over the winter of 1986–87, Amnesty International's Paul Larose-Edwards and I lobbied Parliamentarians in person, delivering an educational kit designed specifically for them by the Coalition. We compiled a rolling record of where each member stood on the issue and made that information available to church and community groups so they could direct their efforts most productively to MPs who were undecided. Some MPs, such as David Daubney, a Conservative (Ottawa West), actively supported continued abolition and intensely lobbied their colleagues on the Hill.

Of immense impact was a Coalition postcard campaign created by Graham Stewart of the John Howard Society. The front of the black postcard said simply, "I oppose the death penalty" and "DON'T KILL FOR ME." Congregations and community groups ordered them by the thousands and held signing parties in church basements and community halls across the Canada to address them to members of Parliament. Constituents sent postcards not only to their own member but to all members in the House. Thousands of postcards flooded MPs' offices, reminding them that execution was a societal act representing every one of us, an act which many citizens didn't morally support.

The 1987 Parliamentary Vote

On Monday, February 16, 1987, the government presented the motion that "The House supports, in principle, the reinstatement of capital punishment and directs that a special committee on reinstatement, composed of 15 members, be established to hold hearings and make its final report to the House no later than three months following this motion..."¹³ Since the timetable was contained in the motion, it was now clear that the vote on reinstatement would take place before the House rose for recess on the last day of June. In the final few months, the push to influence the decision intensified.

Increasingly, for Canadians, the issue did not turn on deterrence. Evidence showed that capital punishment does not deter. The central question became: Upon what values do Canadians want to build their society? Were those values represented by the member of Parliament who said, “Hang ’em high and hang ’em often” or by a mother whose 11-year-old daughter had been a victim? Leslie Parrott wrote to every member of Parliament on March 5, 1987, saying,

Alison’s murder has given me a very personal and agonizing experience of the horror of violence and killing. It has more than ever convinced me that we, as a society, cannot ever and must not ever condone killing, whether by state or individual, in any shape or form. I do not want to be part of a society that brings up future generations with the belief that killing can be legitimized under certain circumstances. Let the message be clear and unconditional; human life is sacred; killing is always wrong.

Leslie Parrott was a member of the United Church. Her public statement signalled that not all families of murder victims supported capital punishment. Several members of Parliament later indicated that her letter deeply influenced them.

On June 22, 1987, just a week before the vote, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney rose in the House of Commons to address the issue: “But for those who would change the law in such a fundamental manner, the onus is on them to make a compelling case. For myself, Mr. Speaker, I am not persuaded. I am not persuaded the death penalty works as a deterrent. Nor am I persuaded it is appropriate as a punishment. On the contrary, I believe it is repugnant, and I believe it is profoundly unacceptable.”

The government scheduled the free vote for early on the morning of June 30, 1987. At midnight, the public gallery of the House of Commons was filled with observers, many associated with CARDP. There were also members of the victims’ advocacy group Victims of Violence, who supported the reinstatement of the death penalty, each of them wearing a white ribbon representing a murdered family member.

The tension was electric as the Speaker started the roll call. I furiously tried to keep track of the vote tally. The motion to accept, in principle, the restoration of the death penalty was defeated by a margin of 21 votes (148–127). The celebration on the floor of the House and in the gallery was chaotic, dampened only by the disappointment on the faces of victims who saw the defeat as a denial of their pain and suffering.

Aftermath

On the following morning, MP Bill Domm was quoted in the *Ottawa Citizen* as saying that the battle for the reinstatement of the death penalty had not been lost in the House of Commons but in the innumerable church basements, local riding halls, and public meetings across Canada. Indeed, the Coalition had organized, resourced, and coordinated the campaign, but it was the work of thousands of Canadians on the ground, committed to preventing their nation from reinstating the death penalty, that won the day. Canada remained on the growing list of 43 nations that had abolished capital punishment in their criminal codes. In 1998, Canada completed abolition by removing the death penalty from military law.

Canada’s journey and the work of the Coalition Against the Return of the Death Penalty was monitored from abroad. As a result, I was invited to speak about the Canadian experience in Washington at a meeting of the US National Coalition Against the Death Penalty in the fall of 1987; at the inauguration of the Lighting the Torch of Conscience campaign against the death penalty at the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta, Georgia, on April 14, 1989; at the launch of Amnesty International’s worldwide campaign against the death penalty in New York on April 24, 1989; at the 2nd World Congress Against the Death Penalty in Montreal in October 2004; and at the 6th World Congress Against the Death Penalty in Oslo, Norway, in 2016. According to Amnesty International, 112 countries have now abolished the death penalty.

Apart from the House of Commons, there were likely no more vigorous debates in Canada on the question of the death penalty between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s than in the policy-setting meetings of the mainline churches. They were compelled to wrestle deeply with their core values and the teachings of the Christian faith, particularly related to responding to harm done. Was the unconditional love of the divine spirit, which they preached, wide enough to embrace even the violent “prodigal”? Could faithful witness and redemptive conviction supersede visceral desires for retribution? The churches, among others, elevated the death penalty debate above arguments of “just desserts” and vengeance. Capital punishment was a moral question about society’s view of the value of human life—all human life.

At a time when faith communities still had influence in government policymaking, and as a divided nation debated its values, its core identity, mainline Christian churches provided a collective moral voice proclaiming that state executions were a denial of the intrinsic worth of every human life. Church leadership informed public debate and awareness of the values inherent in

the “common good” and, in so doing, made a critical contribution to a fundamental building block of our nation. No one is disposable.

James (Jamie) Scott focused his ministry on social justice. His restorative and Indigenous justice work was recognized by appointment as an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2019. He is retired and lives in Chelsea, Quebec.

1 The title is from The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, GC 22, 1966, 163. This article is intended to fill a gap in the history of the death penalty in Canada. It highlights the role of the churches in ending the death penalty, led by the Church Council on Justice and Corrections. This history was not included in the book *Coalitions for Justice*, edited by Chris Lind and Joe Mihevc, and published in 1994.

2 Joel Kropf, “A Matter of Deep Personal Conscience”: The Canadian Death-Penalty Debate, 1957-76” (MA thesis, Carleton University, 2007), 20, https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item?id=MR33745&op=pdf&app=Library&oclc_number=577935807.

3 Kropf, “A Matter of Deep Personal Conscience,” 72.

4 The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, GC 16, 1954, 53.

5 “Editorial,” *Canadian Churchman*, December 1972.

6 The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings*, GC 19, 1960, 139.

7 Kropf, “A Matter of Deep Personal Conscience,” 55.

8 *Issue 8, Capital Punishment*, Department of Church in Society, The United Church of Canada, 1975.

9 *Faith Today*, March/April 1987, 22.

10 House of Commons debates, July 24, 1973.

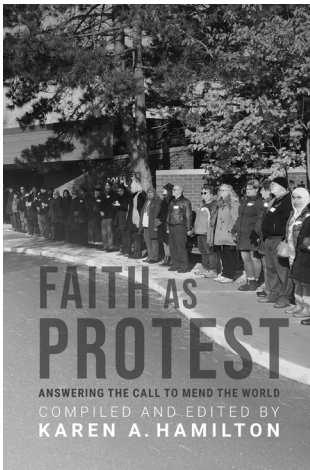
11 *Ecumenism*, no. 99 (September 1990), J. David McCord, 11–13.

12 United Church of Canada Archives, 1972.

13 Hansard, Commons Debates, February 16, 1987, 3446.

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Compiled and edited by Karen A. Hamilton

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Why Canada Cared

Canada-Chile Solidarity, 1973–1990¹

By Liisa L. North

York University, Emeritus Professor

The first elected revolutionary socialist government in the world, the Popular Unity government headed by Salvador Allende, was overthrown on September 11, 1973, by a military coup. It happened in Chile, a country with a continuous history of democratically elected governments since the mid-1930s, whose armed forces were regarded as perhaps the most respectful of civilian rule to be found in Latin America.² The coup sent shockwaves across nations, political movements, and peoples who supported peaceful social and economic transformation. The Popular Unity government's program of social and economic transformation had included land reform, a broad range of policies to improve the living conditions and opportunities of the country's poorest sectors, and the nationalization of foreign corporations as well as national monopolies.

With the coup, hopes of transitions toward greater social justice and equity were profoundly shaken across the world. Both religious and secular civil society organizations across Canada responded rapidly to Chile's tragedy. Since the United States government, led by President Richard Nixon, was clearly complicit in the coup, protest marches and demonstrations took place in front of its Consular offices in the following days, and university panels were quickly set up to analyze the coup's causes and frightening potential consequences. Most importantly, the rapid response was reflected in the foundation of new institutions that created new links between Canadian and Latin American civil society organizations to respond to the human rights crises in Chile and across the region. These included the Inter-Church Committee on Chile (ICCC) that later became the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA) and the Chile Welcome Committee that soon became the Toronto Welcome Committee for Refugees from Latin America, to cover Brazilians, Uruguayans, and others who had sought refuge in Allende's Chile from the military dictatorships in their own countries.³ Within a week of the coup, the Latin American Working Group (LAWG) had set up a Chile-Canada Solidarity (CCS) unit to provide reliable news about the extent of repression, to inform solidarity groups and media across the country, and to provide "posters, films, slides, and literature" as well as assistance in organizing

educational events.⁴ The Montreal-based Comité de Solidarité Québec-Chili provided many of the same services in Quebec.

Often, it was Christian churches and their congregations that led much of the education and mobilization of solidarity across Canada, with strong support among labour unions, the university community, and a broad range of national non-governmental organizations (NGOs). LAWG itself had been founded in 1966 by people in the youth movement of the United Church, the Student Christian Movement (SCM), and the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA). It later incorporated activists from the Catholic Youth movement in Toronto and progressives in general.⁵

Solidarity was particularly deep in Quebec, as reflected in the greater sympathy and understanding in French-language press coverage about the significance and meaning of the coup. Although this was the case, it must be emphasized that condemnations of the military overthrow of a democratically elected government, the Popular Unity alliance headed by Socialist Salvador Allende, were national in scope. They stretched from west to east—from Vancouver through the prairies, on to Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal, the Atlantic province capitals, and many smaller centres in between.⁶

The rapid cross-country reaction was made possible by linkages that had been established before the coup, especially between Canadian and Chilean Christian churches, but also between political parties, unions, and NGOs in Canada and their counterparts in Chile. It should be recalled, for example, that links between the Socialist Party of Chile and the New Democratic Party of Canada (NDP) were long-standing through their common membership in the Socialist International, and the same was the case among many unions, especially those located in Quebec. Nation-wide NGOs, such as Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO/SUCO), OXFAM Canada, and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) had contacts, programs, and/or volunteers in Chile during the Allende years, as did LAWG, which had been set up seven years earlier in response to the US invasion of the Dominican Republic.⁷ Meanwhile,

university groups organized informational panels, and academic associations included analyses of events in Chile in their meetings and congresses. For example, within days of the coup, an information session was organized at the University of Toronto that attracted some 250 people and included interventions by John Foster, the founder of LAWG (*The Varsity*, September 21, 1973), and by me, an historian and the editor of the recent book *Canada-Chile Solidarity, 1973-1990: Testimonies of Civil Society Action* (Novalis, 2023). A similar round table was organized in Montreal (*Le Soleil*, September 15, 1973).

Nevertheless, it was progressive Christian congregations—inspired by liberation theology currents of thought in the Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, United, and other Christian churches—that had the institutional capacities and linkages with Chile necessary to create the infrastructure for cooperation across the country and between Quebec and English-speaking Canada.⁸ “For years, hundreds of young French Canadians had been sent as missionaries to Latin America.⁹ According to the Secretary General of Foreign Missions in Montreal, Father Robert Nolin, they had numbered “more than a thousand” during the decade before the coup, including “priests, nuns, brothers and lay workers. Many who have worked [in Chile] have returned [Father Nolin stated]. They have friends and relatives here. It is natural for all these people to be concerned about what’s going on in Chile.”¹⁰ Trusted contacts in Chile, both Canadians and Chileans, created the basis for well-informed solidarity work and advocacy in Canada.

Beyond the reliable and personal information and experience provided through these historic Catholic linkages between Quebec and Chile, “Québec papers had access to better information about actual events ... *La Presse* had its own correspondent, Pierre St. Germain, in Santiago,” and the Quebec “newspapers made use of the French wire service ... which also had a correspondent on the spot.” Summarizing this state of affairs, the Canadian News Synthesis Project, in which LAWG members and other activists participated, concluded that “readers of the Québec Press had a better opportunity than their counterparts in English-speaking Canada to understand recent events in Chile.”¹¹ The Quebec press was also a great deal more sympathetic to the Chilean experiment in the peaceful construction of socialism: for example, “twenty-nine journalists working for *Le Devoir* donated a day’s wages to the Quebec–Chile solidarity committee, amounting to over \$1,000 to be used ‘to actively support the struggle of the popular forces in Chile.’”¹² In Trois-Rivières, the local Comité de Solidarité had access to publishing opinion pieces (*page Reflets*) in the

city paper, *Le Nouvelliste (Informations Québec-Chili 2:7 [avril 1975])*.

In contrast, the English-language newspapers were dependent on foreign news services that were often tinged by Cold War biases and bristled at the fact that the Popular Unity coalition that had won the Chilean elections in 1970 included the then popular Communist Party of Chile alongside the Socialist, Radical, and other smaller political parties. The admission of refugees to Canada who were escaping from repressive right-wing military rule in several Latin American countries, refugees who often had Communist and Socialist affiliations, did not sit well with all Canadians. Indeed, the Canadian Ambassador in Santiago referred to them as the “riff-raff” of the left.¹³

While the special relationships between Quebec and Chile provided for fluidity in the flow of information, the depth of personal connections that existed with Chile among church-linked personnel and progressives in English Canada should not be minimized. For example, among the Canadian resident sources of reliable information and contacts in Santiago were University of Chile professors Arturo Chacón and Florrie Snow-Chacón, who provided on-site commentary to CBC Radio’s *As It Happens* daily news program. Florrie returned to Canada in 1975 to lead the Inter-Church Committee on Chile (ICCC), which had been founded immediately after the coup, and Arturo eventually became the head of the Ecumenical Forum in Toronto.¹⁴

In Chile, despite suffering repression, the Catholic Church and other smaller Christian churches were the only institutions that continued to function openly after the military takeover since political parties, unions, and civic organizations were banned and universities were intervened. Indeed, as the military dictatorship took over universities, the Academia de Humanismo Cristiano/Academy of Christian Humanism, established within the Catholic Church in 1975 by Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, became the umbrella organization for a number of progressive research centres that were able to establish exchanges with Canadian counterparts. In the same year, the Cardinal provided leadership for the establishment of the Vicaría de Solidaridad, under the auspices of Pope Paul VI, thus making it a part of the Catholic Church. Its foundation followed upon the military government’s forced dissolution of the ecumenical Comité Pro Paz that had been organized in September 1973 and included members of the Jewish community as well as Protestant churches. Under the dictatorship, the Vicaría became the most important defender of human rights in Chile, providing legal assistance and myriad social services to the families of hundreds of political prisoners, the thousands of detained, and marginalized commu-

nities. The services were most often provided by women, including nuns and social workers who had been dismissed from government agencies by the military.

In Canada, as noted, the churches established new agencies and began to collaborate with unions, civic organizations, and universities immediately after the September 11 coup. Their first goal was to convince the federal government to withhold recognition from a murderous military takeover and to admit refugees and exiles—not only Chileans, but also others among the approximately 15,000 Latin Americans who had taken refuge in Chile. Later, all the Church-linked organizations—in addition to religious orders of women in particular, along with the Scarboro Foreign Mission Society, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), the Society of Friends (Quakers), the Canadian Council of Churches, and others—collaborated in critiques of Canadian corporate investment in and Canadian bank loans to military-ruled Chile.¹⁵ The Taskforce on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility (TCCR), founded in 1974 with the participation of Anglican, United, Lutheran, Catholic, and other churches, collaborated with LAWG to provide carefully researched findings and leadership for campaigns that demanded corporate accountability.¹⁶

Then, almost within months of their arrival in 1974–1975, Chilean refugees began to publish newsletters across Canada—in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and other cities. They themselves also began to participate in and lead solidarity organizations and campaigns while offering their own evaluations of Canadian solidarity efforts.

With regard to the broader political context in Canada, the left-wing nationalist political moment of those times in Quebec created conditions that were particularly propitious for widespread solidarity (the Parti Québécois ruled the province from November 1976 to December 1985). However, parts of English-speaking Canada were going through their own radical moments, with the popularity of liberation theology in Christian church circles and the formation of the Waffle, a radical caucus that functioned within the NDP for several years. Meanwhile, the NDP formed governments in three provinces—British Columbia (September 1972–December 1975); Saskatchewan (June 1971–May 1982); and Manitoba (July 1969–October 1977 and November 1981–May 1988). In Ontario, a genuinely Progressive Conservative government (1971–1985), headed by Bill Davis, was favourable to the expansion of public education and social housing, sectors in which Chilean refugees eventually made impacts (see Section IV). At the time of the coup, the ruling Liberal Party (1968–1979), headed by Pierre Trudeau, held a

minority in the federal Parliament and thus could be influenced by the NDP, which condemned the human rights violations of the military in Chile and advocated for the admission of Chilean refugees. The press releases, letters, memoirs, articles, reports, and extracts from newspapers and from the books of activists provide testimony to Canada–Chile solidarity. They can all be found in the LAWG collections that are located in the Resource Centre of the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC) at York University in Toronto. CERLAC's foundation and its Resource Centre, in turn, were inspired by refugees from Brazil, Chile, and elsewhere in Latin America who began graduate studies in a variety of disciplines at the University in the 1970s. LAWG itself, with an existing broad range of contacts in Latin America, including Chile specifically, was among the leading organizations of the Canada–Chile solidarity movement. One of the LAWG founders, John W. Foster, had recently spent six weeks in Chile as a United Church observer at the 1972 meetings of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). He was accompanied by Jerry Hames from the *Anglican Churchman* and Greg Arbour from the Catholic Church, and the three met with high-level officials of the Allende government.

In January 1973, together with the Development Education Centre (DEC), LAWG had published *Chile versus the corporations: A call for Canadian support*, a well-researched pamphlet inspired by liberation theology on the predatory nature of capitalism. It included a letter to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau from four Québécois missionaries in Chile who appealed for Canadian government support for President Allende in his battle with mining companies and international finance.¹⁷ At the time, LAWG was organizing a Canadian tour to Chile, but it was cut off by the coup. Although a “small and under-resourced group,”¹⁸ it had a tremendous impact: its publications were in the public domain, reproduced in many formats (including the newsletters founded by Chilean refugees), while it continued to support and lead solidarity actions, gather information, collect documentation, write reports, and lobby government in collaboration with an ever-wider range of organizations during the long years of military rule and repression.

On October 5, 1988, Chileans voted in a plebiscite to reject military rule; on December 14, 1989, they chose Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin as their new civilian president; he was inaugurated on March 11, 1990. On the 40th anniversary of the coup, two leading members of the Church-linked solidarity movement, Bob Carty and John W. Foster, wrote “Canadians and Chile: The first 9/11,” published in the Ottawa-based journal *Embassy* (September 11, 2013). Their article is

the first chapter in the volume *Canada-Chile Solidarity, 1973-1990: Testimonies of Civil Society Action*, which was recently published by Novalis.

Liisa L. North is Emeritus Professor of Politics at York University in Toronto. She has made many important contributions as a teacher, a researcher of rural conflicts and reformist movements in Latin America, an analyst of Canadian policy toward the region, and a social activist.

1 This article is a slightly revised version of Liisa L. North's Introduction to the book *Canada-Chile Solidarity, 1973-1990: Testimonies of Civil Society Action*, edited by Liisa L. North and published by Novalis (2023). Used with permission from Liisa L. North.

2 Uruguay, another country of continuous civilian rule in the 21st century, had succumbed to a military dictatorship earlier in 1973; it lasted for more than a decade, until 1985. Only Costa Rica, whose armed forces were dissolved in 1948, enjoyed stable and continuous civilian rule in Latin America. See my article on Chile's armed forces and the coup that was reprinted in various exile-community publications, including *ChileAmérica* (Rome, 1975) and *Chile Informativo* (Mexico, 1976).

3 The then recently established Centre for Spanish Speaking People (*Centro para gente de habla hispana*) assisted with refugee reception and settlement.

4 From a letter from LAWG, written by Tim Draidin and Rafael Mondragon, to "friends" in the rapidly emerging solidarity movement, September 22, 1973. The letter is in the LAWG collection at the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC), York University.

5 See John W. Foster, "Life-Death-Rebirth: The Latin American Working Group and Civil Society Relations with Latin America," in Pablo Heidrich and Laura Macdonald, eds., *Canada's Past and Future in Latin America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 57-80.

6 In addition to various groups in Toronto and Montreal, some other solidarity committee locations, quite a few of them eventually organized by or with Chilean exiles, included Vancouver and Burnaby in British Columbia; Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge in Alberta; Saskatoon and Regina in Saskatchewan; Winnipeg in Manitoba; Sudbury, Sarnia, Kitchener, and Hamilton in Ontario; Quebec City, Hull, and Trois-Rivières in Quebec; and Halifax in Nova Scotia.

7 On the origins of LAWG, see Bruce Douville, *The Uncomfortable Pew: Christianity and the New Left in Toronto* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021), 117-23.

8 Liberation theology emerged as an important current of thought in the late 1960s in the Latin American Roman Catholic Church; it focused on "sinful" social and economic structures that created poverty and oppression, establishing a dialogue with Marxist theories.

9 On Québécois missionaries in Latin America and Chile, see Catherine LeGrand, "Les réseaux missionnaires de l'action sociale des Québécois en Amérique latine, 1945-1980," *SCHEC, Études d'histoire religieuse* 79:1 (2013): 93-115.

10 Quoted in Rob Bull, "Quebec's Ties with Chile: The Church and Labor Unions," *Winnipeg Free Press* (September 21, 1973), 17.

11 The phrases in quotations are cited from The Canadian News Synthesis Project (CNSP), a project that identified itself as a "voluntary collective" for reviewing and evaluating the Canadian press. It prepared a special report on news coverage of Chile from September 11 to 25, 1973, a report that can be found in the LAWG Collection.

12 Francis Peddie, *Young, Well-Educated and Adaptable: Chilean Exiles in Ontario and Québec, 1973-2010* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014), 60.

13 See Foster and Carty in *Canada-Chile Solidarity*, 29-32.

14 See extracts from Florrie's memoirs in sections I and II of *Canada-Chile Solidarity*, 33-130.

15 See section III of *Canada-Chile Solidarity*, 131-86.

16 See various chapters in the following: Bonnie Green, ed., *Canadian Churches and Foreign Policy* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1990); Christopher Lind and Joe Mihevc, *Coalitions for Justice: The Story of Canada's Interchurch Coalitions* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1994).

17 The four were from the Société des Missions Étrangères du Québec.

18 These are the words of Joan Simalchik, author of the introduction to section III of *Canada-Chile Solidarity*, 131-38.

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Tactical Civics and the Repentant Remnant

Mobilizing for God and Country

By Carmen Celestini
University of Waterloo

Introduction

Tactical Civics is an emerging Christian-nationalistic organization founded more than a decade ago by David M. Zuniga. According to Zuniga, God spoke to him in October 2007 with the message that he needed to create a movement of Christians to rescue America from the nation's enemies—namely, “demons and communists”—who have destroyed the Republic. Appealing to faithful Christian Americans, a group he calls the “repentant remnant,” Zuniga has instructed his faithful followers to establish Tactical Civics chapters across the nation, county by county, to promote what Zuniga believes is the Christian founders' understanding of the United States and the Constitution. These chapters are supposed to apply Romans 13 and 2 Chronicles 7:14 to political action and, in the process, reset the course of the nation toward its Constitutional foundations.¹ In essence, Tactical Civics is a movement that calls for a return to the Christian foundations of the nation to “save and restore” American culture from critical theory, social justice, communism, and other enemies of America's Christian foundations.²

In this article, I introduce Tactical Civics, a Christian nationalist movement that is dependent on Christians who understand the downfall of America through a historical apocalyptic lens. A key to understanding Tactical Civics, and how it differs from other such movements, is appreciating how Tactical Civics interprets America's founding documents and, more importantly, what authority they have for American citizens today. Like many Christian nationalist movements in the United States, Tactical Civics looks to America's foundational documents, particularly the Constitution of the United States, as providentially inspired. As people turn from God, they also turn from America's foundational values—and vice versa. In response, Tactical Civics claims that its members—i.e., American citizens who are a part of the repentant remnant—have the constitutional authority to arrest and indict politicians, social and cultural influencers, and the wealthy to save the nation. While this mission may place Tactical Civics alongside a multitude of fringe militia movements made up of sovereign citizens of the United States, Zuniga rejects the comparison.

Tactical Civics: Membership

Zuniga believes that the United States is currently ruled by criminals and demonic forces. Corporations, wealthy individuals, and tyrannical governments are working together to hasten a communist takeover and imbue these entities with ultimate power and control. Under a private charitable trust called AmericaAgain! Tactical Civics states that it was established to “glorify Jesus Christ by teaching, supporting, and organizing America's repentant remnant to enforce the Constitution for the first time and for the rest of history via Tactical Civics.”³

Zuniga refers to members of Tactical Civics as the “repentant remnant” for Christ and the Constitution. They are instructed to engage in the study of the Constitution, to join local militias in preparation for the government's immanent forceful suspension of rights and freedoms, and to pray.⁴ Membership is exclusive. For example, the organization does not accept members who are public servants or public employees because they are tools of the tyrannical government.⁵ Zuniga also identifies unions as a barrier to authentic government, and together they constitute an anti-American coalition he calls the Deep Axis.⁶ This suspicion of government and unions runs deep in the organization's doctrine. For instance, Tactical Civics teaches and organizes its membership to “arrest public servants and stop runaway government growth, beginning at the local and county levels.”⁷ In doing so, members are taking a stand for Jesus. This also means that this form of resistance is essentially “Christian.” Another example of the organization's exclusive membership centres on religion. According to Tactical Civics, Muslims and those from other religious traditions do not have the moral foundations or the worldview necessary to carry out this kind of mission. On this basis, only Christians can be members.⁸ In this regard, Tactical Civics uses a “red pill” method to motivate and mobilize Christians in America.⁹

Not Camouflaged Snowflakes but God's Constitutional Militia

Tactical Civics holds that mobilization is both political and paramilitary. On a political level, Tactical Civics'

objective is to establish a chapter in every county in America. Each chapter would support the formation of county grand juries (which are called by the people and not by members of the government, including prosecutors) with its proposed county ordinances. These chapters would call for the removal of Congress from Washington, DC, and have representatives in each of the states sitting as genuine representatives. They would “force” through 18 additional proposed reforms to ensure that government belongs to citizens, “We, the People.” To facilitate that objective, they would launch a phone app that would analyze every proposed bill to ensure that lawmakers would be charged with crimes and be punished for infringing on the Constitution. This app has a name: the AmericaAgain! Indictment Engine.¹⁰ Once the indictment is assigned, then a county grand jury would bring the legislator before the state criminal court. This process is supported by the local militia, which, according to Tactical Civics American Militia 2.0, makes “militia fun, cool, and popular again.”¹¹ Foundationally, however, Tactical Civics must first help Christians understand that *they* have a responsibility to enforce the Constitution. That is, government has duties according to the Constitution; however, citizens carry the burden of enforcing it. Once citizens reclaim that authority, the argument goes, the rule of law will be restored across the land, county by county.¹²

Political structures need enforcement to ensure order. In this case, Tactical Civics seeks to establish local militias to protect the rule of law as envisioned by the country’s Founding Fathers and not that of a corrupt political class, the wealthy elite, or the godless unionists who have sought to bankrupt America. The idea is that local militias conduct themselves with the interest of citizens because they are locally formed, authorized, and commanded. The country’s standing military, the National Guard (even though it operates largely under state control, until nationalized), local sheriffs, and local law enforcement officers have long been compromised. In fact, Zuniga believes that the rule of law, which placed power in “We, the People,” existed only from 1789 to 1862.

According to Zuniga, it was Abraham Lincoln who enabled anti-American forces, including early communists, to infiltrate their ranks. Ever since the mid-1860s, America has been subjected to God’s judgment for turning away from God and accepting sin.¹³ The Civil War, or the “War to Enslave the States,” as Zuniga refers to it, was the beginning of the destruction of law enforcement institutions in the United States, which included the corruption of state militia and the misapplication of the grand jury process envisioned in Article 5 of the Constitution. According to Zuniga’s reading of American history, the Reconstruction Era was when

big government was created because Reconstruction removed the sovereignty of the people and turned them into serfs.¹⁴ Zuniga asserts that “every Southern defender” in the Civil War was considered an insurgent defending their properties and communities, while Lincoln’s “illegal national military” attacked.¹⁵ Reconstruction was, Zuniga writes, the “federal master’s capture, occupation, and reprogramming of every state.”¹⁶ In effect, Lincoln and Reconstruction killed the militia as envisioned by America’s Founding Fathers. It was Lincoln, Zuniga asserts, who had troops from the Civil War serving the interests of “elites.” These Yankee troops essentially “stole” the role of the militia as they transitioned into a standing army. According to Zuniga’s interpretation, all the Founding Fathers, except George Washington, had spoken out against a standing national army. Two of the members of this army founded the National Rifle Association (NRA), with the help of subsidies from Washington, DC. This group morphed into the first gun control lobby, then into a gun rights lobby. The changing dynamics of the NRA, in Zuniga’s version of history, caused Americans to forget the militia’s constitutional powers: riot control, border patrol, and law enforcement.¹⁷

As part of his call for a renewed understanding of citizen-led militias, or “Militia 2.0,” as he likes to call it, Zuniga has attempted to engage well-known militia groups. He has acknowledged, however, that these engagements have not been all that pleasant. He describes his encounters with Mike Morris, the founder of the III% United Patriots, an offshoot of the III%s. Morris is a veteran who founded this splinter group shortly after the election of Barack Obama in 2008. Morris and Zuniga met in 2017. According to Zuniga, the initial meeting was positive. Morris not only agreed with the direction of Tactical Civics but also invited Zuniga to speak to Morris’s members at a National Training Field Exercise for the III% Patriots.¹⁸ It seems that the III% Patriots membership was not as welcoming as Morris. According to Zuniga, he and Tactical Civics leaders later received death threats from members of this group.¹⁹ Zuniga also claims that he has met with the Oath Keepers, who “un-invited” him to their regional event in Texas. Zuniga says that Stewart Rhodes, the group’s founder, would not acknowledge him when he arrived at the event.²⁰ Rhodes is currently in prison, having been convicted of seditious conspiracy and evidence tampering for his participation in the events on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2020. These encounters with known militia movements have led Zuniga to denounce these groups as “camouflaged snowflakes” and “hobbyists.”²¹ A constitutional militia is the only defense Americans have against “domestic enemies” who, he writes, “attempt to do what the U.S. Congress and the bogus Beijing Biden bureaucracy are doing right now in 2022, after stealing the election.”²²

Conspiracies and the Repentant Remnant: God's Truth in America

Building on the QAnon movement, which I have written about in *Critical Theology*,²³ Zuniga writes that there are members of the Republican Party who deserted former President Trump after the 2020 election “steal.” He believes these individuals are part of the Deep Axis, a term coined by Zuniga. This term encompasses corrupt politicians and bureaucrats from school districts, the intelligence community, the media, K-12 and higher education, Hollywood, all major corporations, major retailers, professional sports, “black agitators,” the Communist Party of America, and “countless operatives of the Chinese Communist Party in America’s universities and corporations.”²⁴ Zuniga argues that the term “Deep State” does not include the additional players in the movement to destroy America.²⁵ Zuniga defines the Deep State as the CIA, the Pentagon, and the more than 700 armed cities around the world under the Pentagon’s control that are working at the behest of global corporations.²⁶ These people have infiltrated the seats of American power and are trying to destroy America from within. According to Zuniga, the only real defence against these enemies is when Christians embrace Militia 2.0 and assert their constitutional obligation to defend America from these demonic forces.

Under a subheading of “Gaslighting,” Zuniga argues that major events are black flag operations, including 9/11, a terrorization trial by the Deep Axis, continued with years of school shootings and the “manufactured riots, looting, and mayhem” caused by Antifa and Black Lives Matter. These conspiracy theories are not unique to Tactical Civics. But Zuniga puts a spin on them. He believes that they are part of a strategic plan by the Deep Axis to terrorize Americans, which culminated in a global hoax of COVID-19. The final gaslighting act was the stealing of the 2020 election.²⁷ Zuniga believes not only that the 2020 election was stolen but so too were both of President Obama’s elections in 2008 and 2012.²⁸

Zuniga claims that he was inspired to begin his research into America and the Constitution because of the events of 9/11. He claims to have the authority to challenge the official interpretation attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon because he is an engineer. In fact, he claims that his training as engineer tells him that 9/11 was a black flag event. He bluntly states, “I serve Jesus Christ and I refuse to be stupid,” which serves as a motto for his disbelief.²⁹

The connection to religion is foundational for the Tactical Civics movement. Zuniga asserts that “America is unique in three ways: our allegiance to Jesus Christ and the Bible’s norms, our unique Constitution in which We The People claim our col-

lective sovereign position over all government, and the Protestant work ethic forged in the dangers and hardships of colonial life and westward expansion.”³⁰ In Zuniga’s estimation, America has been harmed by the removal of the Protestant work ethic. Instead, Americans have settled for a life of ease. Gone are the Americans of Godliness, honesty, hard work, and ingenuity. People now hold wealth, beauty, sex, and popularity as their ultimate ideals.³¹ Mixing Christian scriptures with a strict membership policy, which accepts only Christians, not including Mormons, Zuniga has created a movement of citizens, the “repentant remnant,” who want to return to America’s Christian values to save America.

The language of the “remnant” stems from the Old Testament and the texts ascribed to the prophets. Biblical scholars often focus on the positive aspects of the word as an attempt to convey discipline and a will to overcome adversity. But with these positive attributes, there is also a strong sense of judgment and the assertion of authority, however warranted it might be, that is linked to hidden truth. For example, biblical scholars understand that the word “remnant” in Isaiah serves various literary functions: the first as a threat of judgment and the second as a guarantee of hope via salvation.³² In Isaiah 24, the writer, presumably the prophet Isaiah, warns of the destruction of the planet as a consequence of “those who have violated the everlasting covenant.”³³ Because of humanity’s disobedience, God promises to punish all of creation—and humanity bears that guilt.³⁴ In Isaiah there is also a sense of hope of salvation for those who are faithful to God. There is a sense that God’s judgment purifies. God’s people may suffer for a season, but in the end those who survive God’s judgment are genuinely faithful. It is these individuals who are the holy remnant.³⁵ Another example is from the book of Amos, where God chastises the nation for its worship of false gods and for not adhering to the nation’s traditional moral code.³⁶ God promises to destroy the nation’s unfaithful but will spare a remnant who has repented for their disobedience. Those who do not repent, and continue in their wicked ways, will not be spared.³⁷ Here, the nation of Israel, even if it falls, will have a small group of people who will follow God’s law and bear the name of Israel.³⁸

Zuniga does not engage in an extended exegesis of Scripture to justify the “repentant remnant.” He doesn’t need to do so. The language of the “remnant” has long run through Christian churches that see themselves as set apart from society and mainstream Christianity, including the Seventh-day Adventists, various Pentecostal churches, and a number of non-denominational churches that emerged during the 20th century. Moreover, with the rise of the Christian right during the 1980s, the “remnant Church” eas-

ily fused with conservative political discourse in the United States, contributing to the notion that America's Christian values were being undermined by godless progressives while God-fearing politicians, usually identifying with the Republican Party, were fighting to preserve America's Christian foundations (e.g., reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, posting the Ten Commandments on school walls, and criminalizing abortion). Zuniga, who is far to the right of many of these predecessors, goes well beyond situating party politics in a religious narrative. For Zuniga, the "repentant remnant" is a call to action, if not a call to arms. He writes, "This is what repentance looks like in the civil realm, in this unique constitutional Republic. With no king but King Jesus, We The People—that is, a small but dedicated remnant of the American people—are finally living *responsibly*. We're finally fulfilling the duties of America's collective sovereign over our lawless, arrogant servants."³⁹ This call to action is against the enemies of Christianity and America, which, he claims, includes Islam. His naming Islam as an enemy stems, in part, from his reading of Genesis 16:11-12, where Ishmael, the progenitor of Islam, will always be fighting against everyone. He further claims that Job 1 reveals that God uses Satan and his minions to attack globalists, but God will also reward the repentant, as evidenced in Nehemiah. If Americans repent, then the Evil Axis cannot succeed.⁴⁰

Similar to Amos, Zuniga places his repentant remnant in the past, present, and future. In other words, the repentant remnant is a historical legacy and a future trajectory. In his version of history, the Industrial Revolution, science, and technological advancements precipitated the fall of Western civilization. In his book *Time to Start Over, America*, Zuniga claims that these advancements removed God from society and the implications. The result is that humanity has broken the seal between God and God's creation. The acceptance of Darwin's theory of evolution demystified the creation narrative. It led people further from the morals and values instilled in biblical teaching. The upheaval continues. With biblical moral foundations gone, women began to abort children, a time referred to by Zuniga as "the great genocide." The two world wars are simply endless European civil wars caused by the rejection of God as saviour and accepting humanity as saviour. America could not simply allow God to evoke his punishment on Europe for their transgressions; the nation had to become embroiled in its Civil War.

In his estimation, the harms done by the Industrial Revolution are being replicated in the Information Revolution, albeit with greater influence and speed. It is a revolution being led by those promoting "more proudly perverted, atheistic, evil ideas and words and styles and music."⁴¹ To Zuniga, humanity is in rebellion against God; and yet, in this moment, there are repen-

tant patriots who can stop this progressive parade against God.⁴² He writes, "We can learn the lessons of history this time, but we need to repent in the Name of King Jesus; reclaim rule of law and common sense just in our *own* country."⁴³ America was once Christian and still has a majority of the population claiming to be Christians. In effect, he believes that the melting pot of American diversity has diminished the Christian foundations of the country. Americans need to repent and accept Christ: not, he declares, "Mormonism, Judaism, or Islam. We The People refuse to have America become Europe—another battleground for a 1,400-year-old Islamic jihad."⁴⁴

The remnant trope is also prominent in the Book of Revelation, which adds to the apocalyptic tones in Tactical Civics. For example, Revelation 12 contains the story of an apocalyptic battle between God and Satan, which ultimately leads to violent outbreaks on earth. Amid the battle, the unfaithful fall to the wiles of evil. Those who keep the commandments (12:17); have the testimony of Jesus (12:17), perseverance (14:12), and the faith of Jesus (14:12); and proclaim the three angels' messages (14:6-12)—they are the remnant.⁴⁵ In the New Testament, especially in Paul's letters, the remnant are both the people of Israel and the people of the church;⁴⁶ those believers who are persecuted by the forces of evil, which is perpetual (Ephesians 6:12, 1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 12:16-17), can survive by holding faith in God's word and covenantal promises.

Those who study conspiracy theory will recognize in Zuniga's mobilization narratives a phenomenon known as conspiracy convergence. This phenomenon occurs when a group's foundational narrative or narratives, such as traditional teaching around end times, merges with popular conspiracies to the point where religious tradition, conspiracy theories, and a group's identity-narrative become inseparable. That is, contemporary conspiracy theories may have nothing to do with, say, Jesus' second coming; however, once that theory converges with traditional teaching, the two become part of a now broader, more complicated story (it is also this phenomenon that allows the "red pill" method to be so effective—once "red pill," you see the connections). The conspiracies that are merged can vary in subject matter, including government control, secret societies, and global conspiracies. Conspiratorial convergence occurs when those who hold conspiratorial beliefs find commonality, shared elements, or perceived connections between their beliefs. This could include common themes, actors, and events, leading them to believe that these theories are not isolated but are a part of a much larger conspiracy.⁴⁷ The role of religion in this convergence can provide a catalyst to action against those behind the events within the conspiracies and be a rationale for the good actions of the believers.

“Setting the tombstone on our civilization”⁴⁸

With apocalyptic zeal, Zuniga believes that the time to repent is running out. People need to repent for replacing God’s law with human law and for walking away from their obligation to protect the nation from evil forces. There is a battle raging. And people must repent before there is a tombstone placed on Western civilization. Zuniga is clear that those in need of repentance are not simply those in the pews; repentance is needed for Christian pastors and other leaders. Indeed, Zuniga wrote *Tactical Civics* specifically for church leaders in the United States and is dedicated to the “remnant pastor” who speaks out against the “cynical, arrogant violation of the U.S. Constitution, thus having become our domestic enemy.”⁴⁹ This dedication speaks to Zuniga’s understanding of *Tactical Civics* as a movement: he believes it to be a Christian organization that is steadfastly battling to save the nation from evil forces—and the repentant remnant are the Christian patriots on the front lines resisting the evildoers.

Tactical Civics publications and media materials are peppered with testimonials from pastors. For example, Martin C. Bonner, an Assemblies of God pastor from Washington, writes that he has encouraged his flock to vote even while recognizing that both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party were one and the same, leading America to doom. Bonner claims he is not working toward a Christian theocracy in the nation but instead wishes to defeat “progressives.”⁵⁰ Pastor Ed Gonzalez from Florida notes that pastors across the nation have been intimidated by the Supreme Court and the Internal Revenue Service “using the misapplied doctrine of ‘Separation of Church and State.’”⁵¹ The premise for Gonzalez’s argument is linked to the Black Robe Regiment, a falsified theory and movement created by former member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives and now pastor Dan Fisher. Fisher’s work is a call to the return of a Christian America led by ministers during the American Revolution, who would preach liberty and politics from the pulpit. In Fisher’s account, these ministers led their male congregants out to the battlefield to fight for America from tyranny, a call Fisher claims needs to reoccur in contemporary times. This tale is not a true historical account.⁵² Pastor Paul Michael Raymond, founder of the New Geneva Christian Leadership Academy in Appomattox, Virginia, admits in his testimonial that he has established a “local (proto-) Militia unit” and has “networked with other county proto-Militia units, pastors, attorneys, and country officials to convince church leaders”⁵³ to join *Tactical Civics*. Pastors are not expected to lead chapters of *Tactical Civics* groups but rather to ensure they inform their congregations about the movement and provide meeting space once a mi-

litia cell has been established in their county.⁵⁴ Further, once these leaders have learned an understanding of civics through Zuniga’s movement, they should spread this information through their sermons, blogs, podcasts, and other communications.⁵⁵ Throughout his speeches and writings, Zuniga focuses on Romans. He interprets Romans 13 as a directive for Christians and church leaders to bend to the higher authority of the US Constitution. Church leaders must speak out on political, ethical, moral, and constitutional issues.⁵⁶

Politically, America must return to the premise of representative government. As a result, *Tactical Civics* wants to approve the only unratified Amendment in the Bill of Rights, from 1879. This amendment states that there would be one representative for every 30,000 people. According to Zuniga, this would limit the “corruption” of Congress by reducing the number of people they represent and by increasing the number of representatives in Congress.⁵⁷ Were the Amendment to be ratified, the consequences would be the election of more than 6,500 members of the House of Representatives, rather than the 435 positions now.⁵⁸ Further to this significant change, the organization would also like to impose a “Bring Congress Home Act” which would remove Congress from Washington, DC, and have the representatives work in their state district offices and use virtual meetings. Each representative would have term limitations of two to four years.⁵⁹

Additionally, the new *Secure Borders Act* would have state militias on the borders, building a border wall. It would defund all agencies that facilitate or support “illegal immigration” and ban from entry any individual who was an “adherent to sharia law” regardless of the citizenship of the person.⁶⁰ The new *Religious Treason Act* would make illegal religious laws or subversive activities that incite violence due to religious beliefs. There would be a three-strike policy that would in time outlaw Islam in America, if there were three terrorist acts by Muslims.⁶¹ Zuniga’s Militia 2.0 plan also includes a training program for young men, similar to the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). This training would not only prepare young men to be volunteers later in the constitutional militia but would also “restore” the young men of the nation who are being pushed to the “dark corners of society” by atheists and Marxists. All young men would be welcome in this training program, regardless of race, but Zuniga points out that this is unlike the Marxist movement currently in America that “demonize[s]” white males.⁶²

Zuniga recognizes that the battle for Christian America may entail bloodshed and pain for the repentant remnant. In describing why America has fallen victim to the “Deep State” and Deep Axis, Zuniga turns to Paul’s letter to the Romans. He writes, “The Apostle Paul ex-

plains in Romans 2 that when a people refuse to glorify Him, God ‘gives them over’ to a panoply of sins and curses. Sexual perversion is the only sin mentioned *thrice*, but abject *stupidity* is among the sins and judgments of God in that long list.”⁶³ In reference to Romans, Zuniga continues, “our own abdication created the Caesar that threatens history’s most blessed Christian civilization. Repentance means never again applying Romans 13 to our constitutional republic as if we’re ancient Rome. And repentance is an action word.”⁶⁴ Militia 2.0 would be “the action key of sincere repentance; the most vital tactical and strategic repentance step in American restoration.”⁶⁵

Conclusion

My aim in introducing Tactical Civics is not to suggest that it will achieve any significant success; rather, my aim is to highlight the narratives that many on the far right believe to be true and worth defending. It would be easy to dismiss Tactical Civics as the deranged rantings of a self-styled prophet. But given that other religio-political movements in the United States are promoting similar views, we might be dismissing Tactical Civics at our own peril.

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1 David M. Zuniga, *Tactical Civics for Church Leaders* (self-published, 2022), 7.

2 Ibid., 8.

3 Ibid., 1.

4 Ibid., 6.

5 Ibid., 1.

6 David M. Zuniga, *The Great We-Set* (self-published, 2023), 3.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 4.

9 Ibid. The “red pill” metaphor is common in far-right narratives. It stems from the film *The Matrix* (1999), in which a character is offered a blue pill and a red pill. The blue pill would serve as a sedative, which would enable him to live blissfully ignorant of reality. The red pill, however, would serve as a pathway to understanding reality as complex, sordid, and brutal—the world would never be the same.

10 Ibid., 10.

11 Ibid., 24.

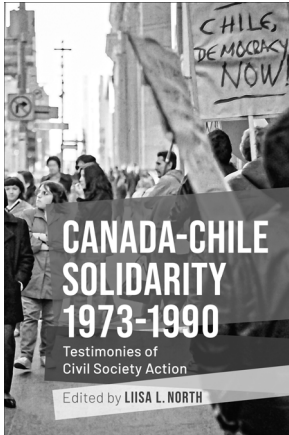
12 Ibid., 9. Tactical Civics maintains a list of 19 initiatives it wants enacted once its chapters have enough power. These steps would be part of a plea-bargaining package offered to those politicians who would be indicted under their phone app or as an immunity package to those who “had not yet been targeted.” One such step is changing the federal court system via the *Constitutional Courts Act* that would “disallow any case involving abortion, euthanasia, marriage, sexual practices, healthcare, education, religious laws (e.g. sharia), or state voter ID laws, out of federal court jurisdiction.”

- 13 Zuniga, *Tactical Civics for Church Leaders*, 19.
- 14 Ibid., 20.
- 15 Ibid., 41.
- 16 David M. Zuniga, *Time to Start Over, America* (self-published, 2022), 1.
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- 45 Fernando Canale, “On Being Remnant,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 24, no. 1 (2013): 127–74, at 127.
- 46 Ibid., 129.
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- 49 Ibid., Dedication.
- 50 Zuniga, *Tactical Civics for Church Leaders*, 1–2.
- 51 Ibid., 2.
- 52 Dan Fisher, *Bringing Back the Black Robed Regiment: A Call for Preachers Who Will Fight* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, LLC, 2013).
- 53 Zuniga, *Tactical Civics for Church Leaders*, 4.
- 54 Ibid., 5.
- 55 Ibid., 37.
- 56 Ibid., 14.
- 57 Zuniga, *The Great We-Set*, 17.
- 58 Ibid., 19.
- 59 Ibid., 20.
- 60 Ibid., 25–26.
- 61 Ibid., 26.
- 62 Zuniga, *Time to Start Over, America*, 8.
- 63 Ibid., 17.
- 64 Ibid., 37.
- 65 Ibid., 22.

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Edited by Liisa L. North



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