Introduction

The Argentine leader of the Cuban Revolution, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, proclaimed in 1965, "The true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality." The Colombian priest Camilo Torres comparably concluded before joining the guerrilla forces that same year, "Revolution is . . . the way to obtain a government that will feed the hungry, clothe the naked and teach the unschooled. Revolution . . . will carry out works . . . of love for one's fellows." For both of these Latin American revolutionaries, love was to be expressed in practical and concrete action, and it could not fully exist in an exploitative capitalist system. To make an alternative system "efficacious," it was imperative to create what they respectively called a "new man" and an "integrated man." The Brazilian bishop Hélder Câmara agreed, but in his call for liberation, he strongly condemned armed struggle, insisting that "without justice and love," peace will always be a great "illusion." Similarly, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire described the rebellions of the oppressed as "gestures of love," and the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez noted that "love must guide the process of liberation." Prioritizing the pacifist and most utopian elements of the counterculture, the Beatles comparably noted in their 1967 single, "All you need is love."[1]

From the perspective of progressive Catholics who came of age in Latin America during the 1960s, love represented the opposite of disinterest. While selfishness created a repressive world without scruples, love encouraged individuals to identify with those around them in self-sacrifice and service, free of personal gain. They contended that if individuals worked collectively they could foster the values needed to improve a society capable of guaranteeing freedom, economic equity, and democracy. Only unselfish love

had the potential to break the walls of fear, conceit, envy, corruption, and greed that kept people alienated and subjugated to authoritarian leaders. Through the practice of love as action, selfishness could be overcome. Only then would the soul blossom with strength, the humanities triumph over alienating philosophies, justice be guaranteed, and the possibility of creating a holistic society be materialized.[2]

In this book I examine these divergent notions of love as differently conceived by self-defined Catholics who became invested in youth activism and the counterculture from the postwar period (1945–ca. 1955) to the Global Sixties (ca. 1956–ca. 1976; hereafter referred to as the Sixties), including priests, university students, journalists, intellectuals, and filmmakers. Like the famous revolutionaries of the era, these figures spoke of love in an effort to create an inclusive world. But in the repressive context of these years, they were not always successful. They often faced a sense of despair in the form of disillusionment, alienation, suicidal frustration, perceived madness, cooptation, censorship, political disenfranchisement, social marginalization, and state violence. In this sense, Mexico did not represent an exceptional country in the Latin American region. It too witnessed a violent period of repression, economic exploitation, and authoritarianism that dramatically undermined the utopian aspirations of the Cold War era.

Progressive Catholics who welcomed a dialogue with divergent expressions of modernity during these years effectively called for countercultural change. This was evident in the emergence of an increasingly less conservative society that overwhelmingly rejected the socialist utopia of militant activists but proved more receptive to the less dramatic and everyday cultural changes that the nation experienced with secularization, including the liberation of sexuality, the questioning of traditional notions of gender, the emergence of innovative expressions of spirituality, and the rejection of authoritarianism.

The demand for radical change originated also among a small group of priests concerned with the most pressing problems of the world. They drew from encyclicals, sociological studies, Marxist texts, dependency theory, and religious documents on social teaching to ameliorate the lives of the oppressed. Their impact was significant, as evidenced in the proliferation of religious activists in grassroots base communities and political institutions. The same was true of Catholic journalists, university students, intellectuals, and filmmakers who were instrumental in bridging the gaps between the secular and religious worlds.

The political and cultural changes that came with the participation of these actors were compelling but mostly moderate, selective, and gradual. They often took place outside the realm of social movements and were primarily evident in new magazines designed for a rising middle class; in sociological discussions on poverty, marginality, development, and reproductive politics; in national and international conferences that spoke of Catholic youth as the vanguard of continental change; and in cultural shifts depicted in cinema, everyday interactions, shifting notions of gender roles, intergenerational relationships, and transnational networks and solidarity. Moreover, they frequently happened apart from the strict binaries of "Left" and "Right" and beyond the hegemony of the United States, which all too often have dominated the narratives of the Latin American Cold War but are not always useful in describing the activism that characterized the Sixties.[3] Rather, the demands for change were often simultaneously expressed in both progressive and conservative language, mostly independent of secular actors and in ordinary and less radical fashion but emblematic of "the internationalization and politicization of everyday life."[4]

In understanding the particularities of the political and countercultural challenges to the status quo during the Sixties, it is crucial to see the church as a heterogeneous institution, not as inherently irreconcilable with modernity, as often depicted in the liberal scholarship and the official state narratives that have monopolized the history of modern Mexico, but rather as a crucial player in the secularization of a nation with multiple internal schisms. It is also imperative to take into consideration the reformist movements of the earlier postwar years in the broader Latin American and European contexts.[5] This period gave rise to a new concept of liberation and paved the way for a new generation of activists, artists, and intellectuals who radicalized in the Sixties, not strictly in response to political events, but also in relation to innovative expressions of culture and Catholicism.[6]

LIBERATION AND THE NEW LEFT: FROM THE POSTWAR ERA TO THE SIXTIES

The postwar years witnessed the emergence of a new understanding of the modern world. This coincided with the expansion of the welfare system, the consolidation of a growing middle class, the "discovery" of youth as a new political actor with purchasing power, and the politicization of social

movements caught between optimistic aspirations for change and authoritarian politics. At the center of this tension emerged an innovative sense of liberation embraced by a new generation of Latin Americans who called for hemispheric unity.[7]

Their efforts reflected concerns about momentous contemporary world events that had a profound impact on their universities. These included the anticolonial wars in Algeria and Indochina; the rise of military dictatorships in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic; the "iron fist" following the Hungarian insurrection; and the Chinese and Cuban Revolutions. Asserting their ideological positions in the incipient language of the Cold War and favorably responding to the ideas of self-determination and peaceful coexistence in the Third World, as originally conceived during the Bandung Conference of 1955 in Indonesia, the new generation portrayed itself as the "vanguard" of Latin America's future and participated in key international conferences to further their cause.

Without question, the multiple meanings of "liberation" echoed during these years were overwhelmingly political. For example, the term served as part of an innovative language of dissent and an egalitarian ethos that young student activists embraced to confront capitalism and imperialism as well as the reformism, authoritarian structure, and corporatist apparatus of an older Left.[8] But liberation meant something countercultural and spiritual as well. It encompassed styles of dress, sexual mores, intergenerational relationships, educational norms, defiant hedonism, literary genres, musical tastes, and religious beliefs.[9]

Not immune to the rebellious ethos of the era, young Catholics across Latin America embraced the concept of liberation, and while some rejected the paternalistic notions of charity and the Eurocentric language of social justice that had shaped their activism in earlier decades, others forged concrete alliances with Europeans who became interested in the anti-imperialist movements of Latin America. Both pushed for innovative and more Latin Americanized notions of political and countercultural action. With time, these were often framed as concrete acts of love that demanded greater participation in social movements, a critical pedagogy, *concientización* (personal and social transformation), the creation of new spaces of debate and cultural production, and the fruition of a productive dialogue with the "New Left." The latter term referred to "a movement of movements" that proliferated across the Americas and Western Europe during the Sixties.[10]

In the broader Catholic world of Latin America, the New Left peaked in the aftermath of the Bandung Conference (1955), the Soviet invasion of Hungary (1956), the Cuban Revolution (1959), the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), and the rise of military dictatorships (1964) in the region. It was followed by the irreverence, politics of fun, and erotic energy of the counterculture and a more open engagement with the sexual revolution. It reached violent overtones of despair, first with the state repression of the late 1960s and early 1970s and then with the waning years of an "economic miracle" that that had brought steady prosperity to urban centers since the postwar period. It concluded with innovative expressions of armed struggle, the crumbling of the welfare state and the rise of its neoliberal alternative, and the commercialization and excess of defiant nonconformity.[11]

In postwar Mexico, the language of liberation and the call for concrete acts of love challenged but did not entirely defy the traditional status of Catholicism. While the geopolitical conflict of the Cold War had just started to grow in intensity and the nation consolidated its collaboration with the United States, the church reinforced its relationship with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), founded in 1946. The PRI government solidified its authoritarian structures with the support of conservatives, including those who made up the majority of ecclesiastical authorities. In this context, the Catholic hierarchy partially restored the social and political influence that it had maintained before the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920s).[12] It supported new lay organizations in the peasant, labor, and student sectors that actively discouraged the radicalism of the Cristero past, when militant peasants in the late 1920s had waged a violent war in the name of "Christ the King" against the secular and anticlerical state. Moreover, the anticommunist propaganda coming from Rome promoted a new wave of religious affiliation that overlapped with the repression the government unleashed on those who questioned the authority of the PRI.[13]

The renewed moral authority among the conservative middle class turned young laypeople, both men and women, into key actors.[14] During the Sixties, they defied the conservatism of the past. These challenges derived from multiple individuals and were manifested at different levels of political and cultural engagement. A push for religious pluralism and a greater dialogue with modernity, social action, political tolerance, innovative artistic expression, and the liberation of sexuality questioned the hierarchical structure of the ecclesiastical authorities and shaped the ways a new generation of young

people understood their changing religious identities. Many redefined their Catholicism not exclusively in relation to the poor, as it is often assumed in the scholarship, but also in reference to the anticolonial, humanist, reformist, autonomist, existentialist, cinematic, and countercultural movements of this period.

The early Catholic movements of the postwar period demanded a democratic nation, but they ultimately fell short in transforming the authoritarian ethos that continued to characterize Mexico in the decades that followed. When their leaders failed to achieve the utopian expectations of the era, or when they were repressed and their ideas co-opted, marginalized, and commercialized, the liberating hope of love often turned into despair. In making these arguments, I examine innovative spaces that opened across the nation in response to the most significant social, cultural, ideological, theological, and political changes that characterized the broader Cold War period but that have received little attention from historians.[15] In agreement with the historians Odd Arne Westad and Tanya Harmer, I examine the Cold War "as a conceptual framework for explaining a wider twentieth century struggle between different visions of modernity."[16] With an emphasis on film and cinematic representations of Catholicism as an analytical window into the past, moreover, I draw specific attention to the changing notions of and divergent responses to youth activism, state repression, and the counterculture during the Sixties.

I understand the Sixties as a unique period of student radicalization and nonconformity of youth that expanded from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. These years were characterized by accelerated secularization, rapid urbanization, and the commercialization of the entertainment industry. It is a unique era that witnessed the waning of economic growth and what the historian Mary Kay Vaughan has called "the domestication of violent masculinity."[17] In addition, it is a period that experienced a peak in the growth of the middle class and a rising critique of authoritarianism, patriarchal authority, and traditional notions of Catholicism that allowed for the possibility of dialogue between Marxism and Christianity. As the Chilean historian David Fernández has argued, it was in the Sixties when this dialogue was "brought into the open for debate and as part of everyday life." Catholics embraced the Left, "not as something tacked on to their Christianity, but as a socio-political choice illuminated by faith."[18] Similarly, European and US historians have noted, for example, that this was "a period of decisive change in the religious history of the Western world." As the British historian Hugh McLeod has

explained, the "main novelty was that those who rejected [or questioned] Christianity were increasingly ready to say so loudly and openly."[19] These voices emerged with support from Catholics who frequently saw themselves as modern, progressive, countercultural, even revolutionary actors. Yet while a minority of them conceived it as impossible to find effective acts of love in a capitalist society during the Sixties, others—the overwhelming majority—proved more flexible. For the most radical of these actors, the evolution of the Cuban Revolution served as a litmus test. Many initially sympathized with the humanist and anti-imperialist language of its leaders, but most eventually disapproved of their relationship with the Soviets, which in agreement with a significant sector of the New Left they overwhelmingly saw as totalitarian.[20]

The importance of Che Guevara and his radical ideology certainly loomed in the background and influenced the Catholicism of a group of activists and intellectuals. Yet the martyred leader of the Cuban Revolution represented only one of a larger number of figures who shaped the youthful activism and countercultural movements of the Cold War era. Rising generations of Catholics forged alliances with leaders of the National Action Party (PAN), lay activists who welcomed the social programs of the Mexican Social Secretariat, and intellectuals in the Christian Democratic movement. In addition, they found inspiration in an array of international figures participating in the progressive dioceses of Cuernavaca and traveling across Mexico who benefited from their friendship with the radical bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo; in new combative voices in journalism calling for a democratic nation; in filmmakers, novelists, and artists who welcomed a dialogue with religion; and in ordinary national and foreign priests representing various religious orders.

In their individual attempts at building a tolerant church and challenging the authoritarianism of the governing elite, these figures understood their respective movements in the transnational world in which competing forms of Catholicism operated. For inspiration they often looked to Freire, Câmara, Gutiérrez, Torres, and the Beatles but also to less famous figures in film, academia, journalism, international organizations, and countercultural movements of the era. In forging national and at times international alliances and framing their participation in their respective movements as an act of love, they called on Catholic youth to improve the lives of the oppressed, empower the politically disenfranchised majority, engage in a productive dialogue with modernity, explore the aesthetics and artistic expressions of

the counterculture, shed light on the perceived alienation of the era, question traditional notions of gender, and challenge the conservative ideology and language of the government and ecclesiastical authorities.

In *Love and Despair* I see ultraconservatives as influential figures who interpreted the Sixties as a chaotic period of anarchy and immorality in need of law and order. But I primarily pay attention to those who saw themselves as modern, apolitical, liberal, progressive, countercultural, and leftist and who often sympathized with the revolutionary figures of the era and frequently expressed the need to create an "integrated man." To paraphrase Camilo Torres, these new actors were expected to reject paternalistic notions of charity and could no longer afford to be satisfied simply with receiving the sacraments.[21] While some accepted the spirit of sacrifice in creating real structural changes and were presumed to bring together the natural and the supernatural, others saw the need to forge new ways of engaging in the most inspirational movements of the time. Many remained hopeful of the church; others left it altogether.

The polarizing and shifting ideas that unfolded from love and despair in the broader context of the Cold War shaped Catholic youth and the authorities who responded to their activism. While a minority saw the existence of reciprocal love and liberation exclusively in the creation of a socialist society, the overwhelming majority instead found themselves and their respective movements in the middle. For them, a better world was possible in the capitalist society that solidified in the postwar period. But as the Beatles and others noted in relation to the counterculture, true liberation and genuine love were unthinkable in a selfish world that prioritized the repressive minority. These revolutionary ideas resonated throughout the Sixties, but it was in 1968 that they reached a pivotal moment across Latin America.[22]

LOVE AND DESPAIR IN THE AFTERMATH OF VATICAN II

The Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) meeting in Medellín, Colombia, in August 1968 called for the Christian community to embrace the perspectives of the marginalized sectors of society and the colonized world. The participants concluded that the developmentalist projects of the imperialist North had only intensified dependency and exploitation in the Global South. Solidarity with the poor could guarantee true liberation of