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Fernando Muñoz, *Universidad Austral de Chile*



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Competing Narratives about Sacrifice: Three Readings of the 11 September 1973 Coup in Chile and their Conflicting Constitutional Projections

FERNANDO MUÑOZ LEÓN

Universidad Austral de Chile, Chile

This article argues that different narratives involving sacrifice compete to ascribe meaning to the 11 September 1973 coup against Socialist President Salvador Allende, and as a result, structure contemporary Chilean constitutional politics. From that event, it is contended, three competing narratives emerged, each seeking to make sense of political sacrifice, and each providing a basis for the constitutional projects of the Left, the Right, and the Center.

KEYWORDS political theology, Chile, constitutional politics, coup, dictatorship, transition to democracy, Salvador Allende, Augusto Pinochet, Patricio Aylwin

Introduction: political theology as search for the sacred in the constitutional order

Political theology, as an intellectual project, entails the critical examination of the Weberian idea that the “fate of our times” — quite interestingly a theological expression in itself — is characterized, above all, by the “disenchantment of the world.”¹ Attempts at this examination can either begin with universal assertions about the political — “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception”² — or with particular and concrete situations from which broader conclusions can be substantiated. In this article, I take the second path, seeking through an analysis of contemporary Chilean constitutional politics, to sustain the thesis that “our

¹ Weber M. *Essays in sociology* (New York: Routledge; 2009), p. 155.

² Schmitt C. *Political theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press; 2006), p. 5.

political practices remain embedded in forms of belief and practice that touch upon the sacred.”³

That thesis, it should be noted, is not limited to political practices that explicitly invoke the divine. In fact, the subjects in the case that I will study here make almost no such calls,⁴ with a few significant exceptions. The starting point of the case lies in the recent past of the Chilean polity; more specifically, in the 11 September 1973 coup waged by the Armed Forces against the Socialist President of the Republic, Salvador Allende. This event represented a violent ending to the radicalization of class conflicts in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a “most intense and extreme antagonism”⁵ that drew the Chilean people towards a confrontation that would destroy the existing constitutional order, and endanger or put a tragic end to many lives. I argue in this article that three conflicting narratives emerged over the years to make sense of the violence that marked that event. Each of these narratives expresses the perspective of a distinct political subculture within the Chilean political spectrum: the Left, the Right, and the Center. Each confronts in different fashion the implications of death incurred for political reasons; in other words, of death by sacrifice.

Sacrifice has been placed at the center of contemporary political theology by Paul W. Kahn, who has argued that understanding the phenomenon of violence committed in the name of the state requires supplementing liberal political theory with political theology because “political violence has been and remains a form of sacrifice.”⁶ Kahn’s account rests on an understanding of love as an “experience of meaning in and through a union with a particular other who is our mythical other half.”⁷ For Kahn, this “eros” can have as its object another individual, the lover, an intergenerational structure, the family, or a collective self, such as the polity. It is love for the political community that “can ground an ethos of sacrifice.”⁸ Liberalism, based on consent rather than on eros, cannot understand the “erotic foundation of the state.”⁹ Political theology, instead, renders visible the violent consequence of that erotic foundation: “[t]he fundamental character of the relationship of citizen to sovereign is not contract — as in the social contract — but sacrifice. To be a citizen is to imagine the possibility of the sacrificial act.”¹⁰

To be sure, in his time, Max Weber also reflected upon the religious texture of political violence. In order to introduce what he called the “ethic of ultimate ends” in politics,¹¹ that is, the willingness to pursue morally compelling ends at the cost

³ Kahn P. *Political theology: four new chapters on the concept of sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press; 2010), p. 3.

⁴ For an analysis of explicit links between religion and politics in contemporary Chilean constitutional politics, see Muñoz León F. *Morning-after decisions: legal mobilization against emergency contraception in Chile*. *Mich J Gender Law*. 2014;21:123–76.

⁵ Schmitt C. *The concept of the political* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press; 2007), p. 29.

⁶ Kahn P. *Political theology: four new chapters on the concept of sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press; 2010), p. 7.

⁷ Kahn PW. *Putting liberalism in its place* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; 2008), p. 212.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Kahn P. *Political theology: four new chapters on the concept of sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press; 2010), p. 121.

¹¹ Weber M. *Essays in sociology* (New York: Routledge; 2009), p. 120.

of bringing about undesirable consequences, Weber dwelt upon the demanding and uncompromising “ethic of the Sermon on the Mountain.”¹² Kahn and Weber, nevertheless, differ in their appraisal of the link between violence and politics. For Kahn, the willingness to kill and to be killed in the name of the collective self is “sacred violence,” a bond that defines what it means to be part of a political community. For Weber, political violence is clearly acknowledged — after all, he declares, “[t]he decisive means for politics is violence”¹³ — yet it remains a possibility that, although ever lurking in the shadows, only emerges when politicians, in pursuit of their lofty objectives, forget that they are playing with fire — the violence monopolized by the State.¹⁴

I believe that these two different views about the political significance of violence are at play in the different narratives that I will study. Kahn’s understanding of the political role of sacrifice — an *a priori* and defining trait — can be said to inform the first two narratives that I will study, those of the Left and the Right, while Weber’s understanding — that of sacrifice as a contingent symptom of failure — can be seen at work in the narrative adopted by the Center.

The apex of sacrifice: 11 September 1973

A brief sketch of Chilean political history may provide important context for this story. Between 1810 and 1925, Chileans struggled over the central definitions of statehood that were to remain in place from then on. What emerged from those struggles were a unitary form of state, a presidentialist form of government, and a state formally separated from the Church in the context of a predominantly Catholic society. A Constitution enacted in 1925 reflected these decisions, and served as a framework for the contestation of other problems; namely, the “social question.” Between the early 1920s and the late 1930s, new political parties sought to represent the working and middle classes, converting the political system into an arena of interclass competition and negotiation. At the same time, the size of the administration grew, creating new forms of intervention in social disputes. Increasingly, the scope of property rights, particularly the private ownership of the “means of production” — agricultural land, mineral resources, industrial production, and financial services — became highly disputed. These issues were especially contested during the *Unidad Popular* (1970–73), as the Presidency of Salvador Allende was known, whose attempts to accelerate the pace of social change met with a violent seizure of power by the Armed Forces.

On the morning of 11 September 1973, the somber streets of Santiago witnessed an aerial bombing for the first time in history. The primary target of the missiles shot from the Air Force’s Hawker Hunter aircraft was the Presidential Palace, *La Moneda*. Inside the building, amid flames and shattered windows, President

¹²Weber M. *Essays in sociology* (New York: Routledge; 2009), p. 119.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁴Weber beautifully expresses this idea by observing quite theologically, that “the early Christians knew full well the world is governed by demons and that he who lets himself in for politics, that is, for power and force as means, contracts with diabolical powers.” *Ibid.*, p. 123. “Anyone who fails to see this is, indeed, a political infant,” he concludes.

Salvador Allende spent his last hours trying to respond to what he hoped was an uprising by only a part of the military. The airwaves, however, carried the truth to the whole nation: in their first joint declaration, the Generals of the four branches of the military called Allende to “surrender his office to the Armed Forces and Carabineers of Chile” and declared their unity “to begin the momentous mission of fighting for the liberation of the Fatherland and to avoid that our country falls under the Marxist yoke and (for) the restoration of order and the institutional system.”¹⁵

The event gave rise to irreducible interpretive disagreements. Three different narratives, I contend, emerged from the smoke and debris of the bombardment of *La Moneda* on 11 September 1973, for as Robert Cover put it, “never only one but always many worlds are created by the too fertile forces of jurisgenesis.”¹⁶ Each articulated in its own way, the political implications of suffering and death. One expressed the perspective of the Left overthrown by the military, and built upon Allende’s own prophetic rhetoric. A second, constructed by the Right in unison with the Armed Forces, focused on the salvation of the Fatherland by the military through their willingness to engage in sacrifice. A third, devised by the Centrist leaders of the transition to democracy, can actually be regarded as an effort to renounce political sacrifice — and thus, from a Schmittian point of view, to “neutralize” and “depoliticize” the transition to democracy — by pointing out its deadly consequences, namely, the victims of the dictatorship.

From the perspective of constitutional politics, each of these narratives served as the foundation for the creation and contestation of differing constitutional projects. The suicide of President Salvador Allende during the attack fueled the uncompromising denunciation of the absolute illegitimacy of the institutional order that emerged from the coup. The redemptive rebellion of the Armed Forces was translated into the creation of an authoritarian constitution equipped with procedural and substantive mechanisms to better defend itself against enemies. In turn, the ethos of moderation stemming from a renunciation of political conflict sustained the Centrists’ project of gradualist constitutional reform.

Certainly, suffering and death was unevenly distributed among these groups. Yet, they all resorted to similar discursive patterns: each tried to link individual suffering to the collective life of the nation, and in that process, ended up translating political arguments into constitutional visions. At the same time, these narratives are competing in that, to a large extent, each of them disqualifies the others as valid instances of sacrifice. For the egalitarian republicanism based on Allende’s death, the revolt of the military was an act of treason, not of salvation; and the gradualist transition to democracy, a defeatist compromise. For the Armed Forces, Allende was a suicidal tyrant, not a martyr; and the *desaparecidos*, terrorists rightly killed. And for the leaders of the transition to democracy, Allende paid the consequences of his irresponsibility, and the Military Junta was simply a politically successful dictatorship. Each of them thus denied the veracity of the sacral claim of the others.

¹⁵ Fontaine A, González M, editors. *Los Mil Días De Allende* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos; 1997), p. 942.

¹⁶ Cover R. *Nomos and narrative*. *Har Law Rev.* 1983;97:16.

The martyr president: a prophecy of redemption to come

Radical politics, Michael Walzer has suggested, finds its historical origins in an act of theological politics; specifically, in the Calvinist transposition of the values of the saint — his “sense of civic virtue, of discipline and duty”¹⁷ — to the citizen. Allende adds another element to this comparison: openness to martyrdom.

In Salvador Allende’s speeches as President of Chile, a theatrical rhetoric is employed in an effort to identify his person with the Chilean working class. “I owe this triumph to the people of Chile,” he declared on the night of his presidential victory, “who will enter with me to *La Moneda* this November 4.” His rhetoric also evidences, however, his awareness of possible political sacrifice in the name of that people. This is how he addressed Fidel Castro in 1971, bidding him farewell at the Chilean National Stadium after a 1-month visit by the Cuban leader:

I can tell you, comrades of so many years, I say it calmly, with absolute confidence, that I don’t have an ounce of the blood of the apostle or messiah in my veins, nor am I a martyr of any sort. I am a social fighter who’s carrying out a task, the task that the people have given me. But hear me now those who want to roll back history and to ignore the will of the majority of Chileans: not being a martyr, I will not take a single step back. Let it be known, that I will leave *La Moneda* only when I have fulfilled the mandate that the people gave me. Let it be known, let it be heard, let it be engraved in their minds: I will defend the Chilean revolution and I will defend the Popular Government because it is the mandate that the people has given me. I have no other choice. Only by cutting me down with bullets will they be able to block the fulfillment of the people’s program.¹⁸

In these lines, the relationship between Allende, entrusted with a mission for whose sake he is willing to give his life, and the people, the object of his uncompromising allegiance, reminds us of the relationship between prophet and god. As a result, while denying that he is either apostle or martyr, Allende is in fact affirming that he is willing to become one: that he is willing to die in defense of the mandate that has been bestowed upon him.

Now, in the Chilean political system, obedience to the people is considered to be expressed in submission to legislation; as article 1° of the Civil Code puts it, “[l]aw is a declaration of the sovereign will.” But the relation of Allende’s government with the rule of law became a contentious issue due to his use of “legal loopholes” to expropriate private companies. The climax of this discussion took place on 22 August 1973, when congressmen of the National and Christian Democratic condemned the “serious breakdown of the legal and constitutional order of the Republic” committed by the *Unidad Popular*. To them, Allende replied in this form:

With a calm conscience, and aware of my responsibility before the present and future generations, I declare that there has never been in Chile any Government more

¹⁷ Walzer M. *The revolution of the saints. A study in the origins of radical politics* (New York: Atheneum; 1969), p. 2.

¹⁸ Allende S. *Discurso de despedida a Fidel Castro*. In: Fariás V, editor. *La Izquierda Chilena 1969–1973* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos; 2000), p. 1360.

democratic than the one that I take honor in presiding, or that has done more to defend the economic and political independence of the country, and for the social liberation of workers. The Government has been respectful of the laws, and has sought to transform our economic and social structures [...]. Therefore, it is possible for me to accuse the opposition of trying to block the historic development of our democratic legality, which would raise it to a more authentic and higher level. In the parliamentary document, hides behind the expression “Rule of Law” a state of affairs that presupposes an economic and social injustice among Chileans that our people have rejected. They try to ignore that the Rule of Law can be fully realized only to the extent that the inequalities of a capitalist society are overcome.¹⁹

These words, written a few weeks before the coup, contain a powerful message with prophetic overtones: the rule of law is a promise that can only be realized through an egalitarian transformation of social structures. By arguing this way, Allende reinterpreted the political theory of the Chilean legal order through the lenses of liberation theology, which had famously argued that the reign of God, and therefore, obedience to his rule, was a project that had to be realized historically through human action oriented at ending the grip of alienating idols such as money and power. Similarly, the rule of law and social justice — obedience to the people and their simultaneous redemption — are, in Allende’s account, projects that unfold historically and that can ultimately become a reality only in tandem.

During the tragic events of 11 September 1973, Allende had the opportunity to present his death as an act of martyrdom through his last speech, broadcast the morning of the coup by a few resisting loyalist radio stations. Allende’s speech is an impressive work of rhetoric, passionately delivered. A document that attests to his decision to give his life in the name of equality and democracy, it includes a prophetic vision announcing a better future:

Given these facts, the only thing left for me is to say to workers: I am not going to resign! Placed in a historic juncture, I will pay for the loyalty of the people with my life. And I say to them that I am certain that the seeds that we have planted in the good conscience of thousands and thousands of Chileans will not be shriveled forever. They [the military] have the force, they might be able to dominate us, but social processes cannot be arrested by crime or force. History is ours, and is made by the people. Workers of my homeland! I want to thank you for the loyalty that you always had, the confidence that you deposited in a man who was only an interpreter of great yearnings for justice, who gave his word that he would respect the Constitution and the law and did just that [...].

Workers of my homeland! I have faith in Chile and its future. Other men will overcome this dark and bitter moment when treason seeks to prevail. Go forward knowing that, sooner rather than later, you will open again the broad alamedas where the free man will walk through to build a better society.²⁰

¹⁹ Allende S. Respuesta de S.E. el Presidente de la República al Acuerdo de la H. Cámara de Diputados. In: Fariás V, editor. *La Izquierda Chilena 1969–1973* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos; 2000), p. 1269–70.

²⁰ Allende S. *Discurso Final*. In: Fontaine A, González M, editors. *Los Mil Días De Allende* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos; 1997), p. 1294.

The sacrificial tone in these words was not lost on the ears of its audience. Alain Touraine, who lived in Chile at the time, expressed in his diary the impression he felt when listening to Allende's last speech: "9 h 20: On *Radio Magallanes* I listen to Allende: voice of sacrifice and not of revolution. Accuses imperialism and reaction. Calls workers to fight but without losing their lives: is addressing history, and bids farewell to the popular masses. He knows everything is lost, but he won't resign."²¹

For those imprisoned, tortured, and exiled, Allende's death exemplified the sacrificial implications of putting the collective greater good above individual well-being. His address, as an act of political theology, carried an oppositional message with prophetic undertones of redemption to come. In terms of constitutional politics, its content could only be interpreted as instructing his followers to repeal the constitutional innovations of the military regime and to re-establish the rule of law and social justice. This mandate reverberated in the statement issued by the exiled leadership of the *Unidad Popular* in 1979 to reject the Junta's constitutional project, where they declared that "[w]e are convinced that the general mobilization of all democratic and popular forces, of every man and woman, of the Chilean youth, will corner the dictatorship and, sooner or later, will eventually overthrow the Pinochet regime."²²

But in 1980, the Junta held a fraudulent referendum to approve the new Constitution. The only dissident demonstration authorized by the government took place in a small theater located in downtown Santiago, featuring two speakers: philosopher Jorge Millas and former President Eduardo Frei, a Christian Democrat who had opposed Allende's government. In his speech, Frei accused the Junta of confronting the nation with a "false dilemma" by presenting an eventual rejection to their Constitution in the referendum as a "return to September 10, 1973." "What an absurd fiction!" roared Frei, "What country in the world can be brought back seven years in time? Are they resurrecting the dead and the disappeared? Are the thousands and thousands of exiles going to be back in Chile?"²³ Resurrection, obviously, was not among the aims of the Junta. But it was within the range of symbolic powers that Allende's acolytes, mixed among the crowd listening to Frei, had: Frei's mention of the dead met the cries from one part of the crowd, "*¡Se siente, se siente, Allende está presente!*" ("We can feel it, we can feel it, Allende right here with us!").

That rallying cry would be heard again in the massive 1983 protests against the dictatorship, summoning Allende's message and sacrifice. The same year, the Communist Party adopted a "politics of popular rebellion" that resulted in the creation of an armed front, the *Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez* (the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front). The *Frente* unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Pinochet in 1986, and carried out other attacks on the regime and its leadership,

²¹ Touraine A. *Vida y Muerte del Chile Popular* (Ciudad de México: Editorial Siglo XXI, 1974), p. 156.

²² *Unidad Popular en el Exilio. La Unidad Popular ante el Proyecto Constitucional*. Chile-Am. 1979;50-51:144.

²³ Frei E. *Discurso con motivo del Plebiscito de 1980*. In: Pinochet O, editor. *Eduardo Frei M., 1911-1982: Obras Escogidas (1931-1982)* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Políticos Latinoamericanos Simón Bolívar; 1993), p. 598.

suffering several losses in the struggle: embracing the path of “sacred violence,” of sacrifice. As a member of the *Frente* puts it,

I am not a terrorist. We are revolutionary fighters, social reformers. I say it proudly. To be a revolutionary means to stand in the higher step of the human species. We are persons with a strong social sensibility, open to all kind of sacrifices. We fight for life, not for death. Sometimes, the price that one pays is death, and we are willing to pay it, but we are not striving for suicide [...]. It is impossible to compare our actions with the systematic terror of the military. We are fighting against a social order that we do not recognize as legitimate.²⁴

The complications for Allende’s message, however, began when his own party, the Socialist Party, split in the late 1970s out of strategic disagreements. One faction maintained its alliance with the communists throughout the 1980s. The other embarked on a process of ideological revision, the *Renovación Socialista*, which led them to shift from Marxism to social democracy and to seek an alliance with the centrist Christian Democratic Party. But by adopting a moderate project, the *Renovación Socialista* abandoned its commitment to Allende’s political message of principled but uncompromising rejection of the dictatorship and its institutional order. And when both Socialist factions reunited in 1990 to form part of the *Concertación*, only the Communist Party clung to Allende and his denunciation of the absolute illegitimacy of the institutional order that emerged from the coup and was perpetuated through the Constitution still in place.

When a statue of Allende — wrapped in the Chilean flag and made of the copper that he nationalized — was inaugurated in the *Plaza de la Constitución* (Constitution Square), across *La Moneda*, a sacral but hardly contentious statement from his last speech was engraved on it: “*Tengo fe en Chile y su destino*” (“I have faith in Chile and its destiny”). Allende’s entrance into the official pantheon seems to have been made at the price of whitewashing the conflictual character of his sacrifice.

The victorious fatherland: authoritarian constitutionalism

The assumption of power by the Chilean Armed Forces on 11 September 1973, had a decidedly Schmittian flavor. The friend–enemy distinction was widely present: the military accused the *Unidad Popular* government of threatening the very existence of Chile as a sovereign nation by causing social unrest and aligning itself with the Soviet Union. The politico-theological dimension was instantiated by a narrative that emphasized the willingness of soldiers to endure sacrifice for the Fatherland. These two threads provided the inspiration for the creation of a new constitutional order; one that could defend itself from its enemies, an idea that supporters of the regime summarized with the notion of “protected democracy,” and that would recognize explicitly the role of the Armed Forces of being, as Article 90 of the Constitution put it, the “guarantors of the institutional

²⁴ Vidal H. Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez: El tabú del conflicto armado en Chile (Santiago: Mosquito Editores; 1985), p. 9.

order” — a notion that reminds us of the Schmittian concept of the “guardian of the Constitution,”²⁵ referring to the political authority who defends the concrete order against those who would subvert it from within. Salvific violence leads, in this narrative, to legitimacy, which in turn leads to constituent power and, as a result, to legality.

In justifying their intervention, the military presented Marxism as a disease — a “cancer” that had to be “eradicated.” Anti-Marxism was not unknown in the country; in fact, between 1948 and 1958 the Communist Party had been banned by law and many of its leaders were imprisoned in Pisagua, a camp supervised by none other than Augusto Pinochet. Furthermore, immediately after Allende’s election, sprouts of violent anti-Marxist nationalism became visible among the Armed Forces when recently retired General Roberto Viaux and members of the Far-right movement *Patria y Libertad* (Fatherland and Freedom) tried to kidnap Commander in Chief of the Army, René Schneider with the purpose of triggering a coup. Schneider was murdered in the attempt, and Viaux, incarcerated. From the prison, Viaux declared that the Chilean Army would have to act whenever “the very independence of the Fatherland were in danger” in order to follow the example of so many soldiers and ordinary people who have “offered their lives many times in defense of the Independence of Chile.” Respect for the law, Viaux observed, could not act as a constraint on this duty; as he put it,

Our oath binds us inextricably to the fate of the Fatherland. The laws, the Constitutions, are born, grow, and die. The Fatherland remains. The Constitution and the laws are made by the people to govern themselves for a certain period; and when the times change, so do the laws. The Fatherland, instead, endures, and that is fundamental. Everything else is just details.²⁶

These are fascinating claims, particularly when one juxtaposes them with Allende’s appraisal of law as intimately related to social justice. While Allende saw an immanent value in law that nonetheless depended on the simultaneous realization of social justice for its legitimacy, Viaux questioned the value of legality from a completely externalist perspective. For him, law was a contingent accident that had no internal connection to the ultimate good; that is, the preservation of the traditional social order. Yet, at the same time, if for Allende it is the people who play the godlike role of the superior who is unbending in its demands on the self, that position is reserved, in Viaux’s discourse, for the deathless and immutable Fatherland.

To justify their intervention, the military also resorted to the crisis of legality triggered by the confrontation between Allende and Congress and between Allende and the Supreme Court. These two branches of government had accused him of breaking the spirit, if not the letter, of the Constitution; the Junta turned their arguments into a justification of the coup. The vehicle for their pronouncement was *Bando* No. 5, an address from the four Generals broadcast on the morning of

²⁵ See Vinx L, editor. *The guardian of the constitution: Hans Kelsen and Carl Schmitt on the limits of constitutional law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2015).

²⁶ Rivas F. *Conversaciones con Viaux* (Santiago: Eire Impresora; 1972), p. 81.

11 September just as Allende was transmitting his last speech. Denouncing Allende's government has "proved itself incapable of preserving the collective life of Chileans by not obeying and failing to uphold the law," declaring that the government had "torn our national unity apart by spuriously promoting class warfare," and claiming that the whole country suffered from "anarchy, suffocation of freedoms, moral and economic derangement," the *Bando* proclaimed:

For the reasons here set forth briefly, the Armed Forces have undertaken the moral duty imposed by the Fatherland upon them of removing the Government that, although initially legitimate, has fallen into flagrant illegality, assuming Power only for the time that the circumstances require it, based on the evidence of the sentiments of the great majority of the nation, which in itself makes just before God and History its actions, and therefore, the decisions, norms, and instructions that are enacted to accomplish the tasks of common good and high patriotic interest that they seek to fulfill.²⁷

Schmitt would observe that, by deciding what qualified as exception, that is to say, which circumstances merited the suspension of legality and the destruction of the Constitution, the Junta had erected itself into the sovereign. That in this process the Junta invoked God and History — the latter, a secularized version of the Divine Providence — as witnesses to the justness of the Junta's actions only renders more explicit the theological dimension of the process itself.

Furthermore, the Junta added a further element to their justification: a sacrificial narrative. The infamous *Plan Z*, the accusation that the *Unidad Popular* had been planning a self-coup that included murdering the leadership of the Armed Forces along with hundreds of landowners, entrepreneurs, and opposition leaders, played an important part in this narrative. Fifteen thousand Cuban guerrillas were said to be hiding in the country to back up the military apparatus of the Left. These allegations succeeded in creating the belief among the supporters of the Junta that Chile was not merely going through a political crisis but that it was on the brink of civil war, a war which the Armed Forces courageously pre-empted in the defense of the eternal values of Chilean nationhood. In this way, the military presented the coup as an act of sacrifice and salvation: the Armed Forces had risked their lives to save the Nation.

11 September 1973 thus became a second Independence Day for Chile, the day when the Armed Forces saved the country from anarchy and Soviet imperialism and restored respect for the rule of law. Various symbols graphically depicted this narrative of sacrifice and salvation. A medal depicting a winged woman breaking out of her chains, encircled by the inscription *Misión Cumplida* (Mission Accomplished), was given to the soldiers who had answered the call to action that day. The same image, it bears mentioning, was later chosen to adorn the 10 pesos coin. On the second anniversary of the coup, a memorial was installed at the Santa Lucía hill in downtown Santiago: the *Llama de la Libertad* (Flame of

²⁷ Junta Militar. Bando No. 5. In: Fontaine A, González M, editors. Los Mil Días De Allende (Santiago: Centro de Estudios Públicos; 1997), p. 943.

Liberty), a large rectangular pillar topped with a flame to commemorate the military's salvation of the country. When *La Moneda* was reconstructed and reopened in 1981, the flame was relocated opposite the presidential palace, forming, together with the tomb of Independence hero Bernardo O'Higgins, a monument that received the name of the *Altar de la Patria* (Altar of the Fatherland). Furthermore, the *Altar de la Patria* became an interesting urban site of political contestation; one of the greatest achievements of the opposition during protests in the 1980s was extinguishing the flame by covering it with sacks of sand.

General Augusto Pinochet — who, during the days preceding the coup, must have considered the grave risk to his person involved in both rebelling against the established government and opposing the revolt — frequently recounted the narrative of sacrifice in his speeches as President. In his rhetoric, the Armed Forces were “elevated to an archetypal level” that made them “the model of conduct that must guide the rest of the population to embody the true values of nationhood.”²⁸ An analysis of Pinochet's rhetoric reveals various expressions used to describe the military; among them, that the Armed Forces have “spirit of sacrifice” and are “the mirror of the sacrifice that the Fatherland requires.”²⁹ A speech given by Pinochet in celebration of the Junta's first month in power provides a glimpse of this sacrificial narrative:

Faced with the clamor of the labor unions, of women and the youth, who saw with horror the destruction of the Nation and the denial of a future of freedom and progress for the people, there was no other option for the Armed Forces and Carabineers but to put an end to this state of derangement of all kinds, and to offer the Chilean people, so far so miserably betrayed, hope for peace and recovery [...].

The sinister plans for a mass slaughter of a people that did not accept their ideas had been secretly prepared. Foreign countries sent weapons and hateful mercenaries to fight us; but the hand of God made itself present to save us, only few days before the consummation of such a horrendous crime. Today we know what would have happened, as many documents recently discovered reveal it: international Marxism would have caused a civil war in compliance with their sinister plans, and the lives of more than one million Chileans would have been reaped in blood and fire [...].

For these reasons, every citizen needs to understand the difficult tasks being performed by the Armed Forces and Carabineers, as they constantly risk their lives to preserve peace and security.

Fellow citizens, what we are doing is not a pleasant and easy task; it is a hard and sacrificed work, which requires the solidarity and the collective contribution of all of us. The failure of our mission would be the end of Chile and its children.

Therefore, people who are beginning to judge hastily our actions [...] are wrong, and continue to do evil to the country. They have forgotten that our soldiers are still fighting against armed extremist groups, that injure or kill cunningly in the dark.³⁰

²⁸ Munizaga G. *El Discurso Público de Pinochet. Un Análisis Semiológico* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO; 1983), p. 42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Pinochet A. *Discurso pronunciado por el Señor Presidente de la Junta De Gobierno, General de Ejército don Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, al cumplirse un mes desde la fecha de constitución de la Junta de Gobierno. Rev Derecho Jurisprud Cienc Soc Gaceta Tribun. 1973;70:289-91.*

Pinochet would reiterate this account on many occasions. Addressing young cadets of the Army, he inserted the actions of 11 September 1973 into a larger historical background of military sacrifices, including historical battles in the Independence War and the War of the Pacific:

In its long history, thousands of soldiers have given up their lives fulfilling their duty. Their sacrifice has not been in vain, because the Fatherland does not die, but it is reborn in each of its children, and has arrived to the present without the slightest alteration in the eternal values that awoke it. The soldiers of today, trustees of the same spirit of those who fought and felt in Rancagua, Maipú, Puente de Buin, Chorrillos, Miraflores, and La Concepción, recovered on a September 11 of 1973 the destiny of the Fatherland, shadowed by the demagoguery and the political fanaticism that had chained it to the Marxist totalitarianism.³¹

It would be precisely during a ceremony commemorating the battle of La Concepción, on 9 July 1977, that Pinochet gave the most important speech of his tenure, the *Discurso de Chacarillas* (Address of Chacarillas). Speaking in front of 77 of his supporters who wore black capes and carried torches, representing the 77 young soldiers that died in La Concepción, Pinochet sketched the future steps that the Junta would take to consolidate its work through the enactment of a new Constitution. On this momentous event, he could not avoid reviving the ultimate basis for the legitimacy of his government: the heroic military sacrifice of 11 September 1973 that saved the destiny of the Nation:

Not so long ago, the Chilean people revived during our three-year-long heroic struggle against the imminent threat posed by communist totalitarianism, that supreme battle-cry of the Battle of Concepción: “Chileans never surrender!” And when, responding to the anxious call of our citizenry, the Armed Forces decided to act on that September 11 of 1973, our land was again watered with the blood of many of our men, who fell fighting for the liberation of Chile.³²

From his narrative of sacrifice, General Pinochet moved to the articulation of the constitutional ambition that was to inspire the Military Regime: to transform Chile, rather than merely restore the political and social arrangement that existed before Allende’s rise to power. Thus he spoke at the ceremony commemorating the first month of the Junta:

Once the goals above mentioned are secured, the Armed Forces and Carabineers will give way to the restoration of our democracy, which will have to be reborn purified from the vices and bad habits that ended up destroying our institutions. A new Constitution of the Republic should allow the dynamic evolution that the world of today demands, and banish forever petty politics, sectarianism and demagoguery from our national life; it will have to be the supreme expression of the new institutional order, under whose molds the destiny of Chile can be projected. In it, according to our better

³¹ Pinochet A. *Patria y Democracia* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello; 1983), p. 221.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 196.

historical traditions, the people must be the true origin and destination of the exercise of power.³³

For the Junta, the sacrificial narrative of 11 September justified the creation of constitutional means to ensure that the dreadful government against which they rebelled could never again become a reality. This guarantee took the form of a “protected democracy.” What did this “protected democracy” entail? First of all, and along the lines of the friend–enemy distinction, it called for a ban on Marxism. On 8 October 1973, the Junta declared that “Marxist doctrine contains a concept of man and of society that harms human dignity and threatens the libertarian and Christian values that form part of the national tradition” and banned “all entities, groups, factions or movements that uphold the Marxist doctrine or that in their goals or because of the conduct of their supporters are in substantial agreement with that doctrine.” The enemies whose existence had threatened the Fatherland and required the sacrifice of the Armed Forces would be no more. And even after the return to civilian rule in 1990, the “protected” character of Chilean democracy would remain in the form of “authoritarian enclaves,” constitutional structures that favored the permanence of the social and economic program of the Military Regime.

The end of the Military Regime following Pinochet’s defeat in a plebiscite held in 1988 set off a slow process in which the General’s power and prestige eroded, a process accelerated by his arrest in 1998 and by the scandal caused in 2002 by the discovery of his secret accounts in the Riggs Bank. But does the salvific narrative that he once articulated retain credibility? In a recent poll, a 23 per cent of the people who vote for the Democratic Independent Union and an 18 per cent of those who do so for National Renewal expressed their agreement with the following statement: “The deaths during the Military Regime were a necessary evil to avoid communism.”³⁴ To them, the imaginary of sacrifice and salvation advanced by the Armed Forces ever since 11 September 1973 still retains some of its narrative strength. The Kahnian idea that to love the nation one must be prepared to kill and to be killed for it remains a clear political truth.

Never again violence between brothers: reconciliation as the closure of any political theology

During the first part of the 1980s, two political projects with constitutional implications clashed for control of the future of the Chilean polity. One was the project put forward by Pinochet, whose intention was to have his rule ratified in 1988 in another referendum and to govern until 1997. The other one was the principled opposition to the Junta, first articulated by Allende in his final address and whose constitutional consequence, the need to elect a constitutional assembly to draft a democratically legitimate Constitution, had been formulated by Frei in his 1980 speech. I have argued that both these constitutional projects could find a

³³ Pinochet A. *Patria y Democracia* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello; 1983), p. 296.

³⁴ Centro de Estudios Públicos. *Barómetro de la Política*, December 2011.

theological foundation in narratives that embraced sacrifice, in a Kahnian way, as a marker of love for the political community.

But in the middle of the 1980s, there emerged a new narrative, one that adopted a different approach to the implications of political violence. Rather than Kahnian love, it saw Weberian failure in the overflow of death and suffering. Rather than embracing political theology, it was tinged with the aspiration to effectuating the “closure of any political theology” — in Weberian terms, the abandonment of the “ethic of ultimate ends” and the endorsement of an “ethic of responsibility.” And as Schmitt would put it, “de-theologisation implies de-politisation.”³⁵ The result was a local variety of that transnational development that Mouffe characterized as a “post-political” vision marked by “the end of the adversarial model of politics.”³⁶

The collective trauma created by the dictatorship, through acts of violence that ranged from the bombardment of *La Moneda* to thousands of forced disappearances and massive repression in the streets, created fertile ground for this political project. Its sponsors had drawn the conclusion that the politics of radical social change that were pursued in the period immediately precedent to the coup could not be sustained any longer. The person who understood this the best, and who became the spokesperson of the project, was Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin.

As Eduardo Frei’s right-hand man, Aylwin had played his own part in the tumultuous events of the 1960s and 1970s. As Senator, he sponsored Law No. 17.280, which gave the Agrarian Reform Agency the power to forcibly seize the property of landowners who refused to peacefully hand over confiscated estates.³⁷ As President of the Christian Democratic Party, Aylwin headed the steadfast opposition to the Allende administration. While Frei’s final public act before dying was to voice a powerful denunciation of the Constitution of Pinochet, however, the first public act of Aylwin after Frei’s death in 1982 was to put forward a new strategy. In a seminar organized by a Christian Democratic think tank in 1984 that brought together moderates from the Right, the Center, and the Left, Aylwin proposed a pragmatic approach to the confrontation with the regime:

Instead of engulfing ourselves in the never-ending debate of whether the Constitution is legitimate or illegitimate, where no one convinces anyone or anyone is willing to concede an inch, let us ask how we could arrive, without sacrifice of anyone’s dignity or self-esteem, to a constitutional text that is acceptable for both supporters and critics of the Government.³⁸

For Aylwin, this meant one thing: accepting the existence of the 1980 Constitution, in order to defeat the government on their own terms. With this project in mind, Aylwin forged an alliance with groups from the moderate Right

³⁵ Schmitt C. *Political theology II. The myth of the closure of any political theology* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press; 2008), p. 124.

³⁶ Mouffe C. *On the political* (Abingdon: Routledge; 2005), p. 50.

³⁷ Ley No. 17.280, Jan 8, 1970.

³⁸ Aylwin P. *Exposición del Señor Patricio Aylwin Azócar*. In: Instituto Chileno de Estudios Humanísticos, *Una Salida Político Constitucional para Chile* (Santiago: ICHEH; 1985), p. 149.

and the moderate Left that in 1988 assumed the name of *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia*. That year, the coalition mobilized their constituencies to vote against Pinochet in the referendum established by his Constitution to legitimize his remaining in office until 1997. During the campaign against Pinochet, Aylwin served as the spokesperson of the *Concertación*. And, after Pinochet's defeat in the referendum, the *Concertación* proclaimed Aylwin as its presidential candidate for the elections to be held the following year. Aylwin thus became Chile's first democratically elected president since Allende.

Implied in Aylwin's strategy was putting aside the long-running dispute between Christian Democrats and Socialists regarding the causes that had brought democracy to an end in 1973, an issue that had aroused deep discord between the two groups in the years immediately following the coup. The intellectuals of the *Concertación* replaced that point of contention with the affirmation of the value of consensus and compromise, portraying the conflictual atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s as intransigent and conducive to violence. Employing terms akin to Weber's dichotomy, these intellectuals characterized their own politics during the 1960s and 1970s as "irresponsible." Instead, the new value placed at the heart of the *Concertación* political project was *governabilidad*, that is to say, responsible governance, pursued in a technocratic manner.

Similar "post-political" politics also guided the *Concertación's* interaction with the Right. The Aylwin administration (1990–94) actively pursued a "*democracia de los acuerdos*" (democracy of agreements) with the opposition, something that helped the government circumvent the veto that they enjoyed by virtue of the presence in the Senate of nine non-elected members who were appointed by Pinochet, in accordance with the Constitution, before he stepped down. The trade-off, obviously, was that any aspiration for radical reform that some within the *Concertación* might have longed for had to be relinquished. Accepting these constraints, Aylwin and his successors pursued what has been called "neoliberalism with a human face,"³⁹ characterized by the alleviation of poverty through social spending while maintaining privatized education, health care, and social security, with all their inequalitarian consequences.

The Aylwin administration even adopted a gradualist approach in the pursuit of justice for human rights violations. Although President Aylwin requested that the Supreme Court investigate human rights violations before applying in specific cases the self-amnesty law enacted by the Junta,⁴⁰ he steered clear from the Argentinean example of repealing the self-amnesty laws altogether. This "*justicia en la medida de lo posible*" (justice insofar as possible) summarized the ethos that would characterize the *Concertación* era.

On the constitutional front, rather than nullifying the Constitution inherited from Pinochet, Aylwin and his successors, once again, sought gradualist reformation. In 1989, after the defeat of Pinochet in the 1988 referendum, a pact between the Junta and the democratic opposition made it possible to eliminate the ban on Marxism. Not all the "authoritarian enclaves," nonetheless,

³⁹ Atria F. *Neoliberalismo con Rostro Humano* (Santiago: Catalonia; 2013).

⁴⁰ Law Decree No. 2191, 1978.

could be overcome at this point. The next grand compromise came in 2005, when a constitutional amendment approved by the *Concertación* and the Right eliminated the non-elected positions in the Senate. Once again, however, constitutional rules that constrain majoritarian democracy, such as the requirement of supermajorities to enact legislation on matters such as education, remained in place. As a result of this protracted restoration of democratic institutions, the constitutional legacy of Pinochet remains to this very day.

I have suggested that the politics of compromise and the constitutional gradualist project found their basis in a repudiation of sacrificial violence, and through it, of the conflictual politics that made such sacrificial violence credible. Aylwin articulated this repudiation through the idea of “*¡Nunca más!*” — “Never again!” In 1990, he spoke from the arena of the *Estadio Nacional*, the stadium where thousands had been imprisoned and many had been murdered in the days immediately following the coup:

From this place, that in sad days of blind hate, of predominance of force over reason, was for many fellow countrymen a place of imprisonment and torture, we say to all Chileans and to the world that looks at us: Never again! Never again violations to human dignity! Never again fratricidal hatred! Never again violence between brothers! [...]. Today we assume the commitment of reconstructing our democracy with fidelity to the values that the Fathers of our Homeland left us, and that Cardinal Silva Henríquez — that just man and great friend of the people to whom we owe so much — has described beautifully as “the soul of Chile”: the love for freedom and the rejection of any form of oppression, the primacy of the law over arbitrariness, the primacy of faith over any form of idolatry, the tolerance of divergent opinions and the tendency not to extreme conflicts, but to try to sort them out through consensual solutions.⁴¹

In these words, Aylwin seemed to implicitly follow Frei, who had already remarked the irreversibility of death caused for political reasons. Aylwin simply drew a different conclusion: rather than summoning a constituent assembly, what needed to be done is not having “violence against brothers,” by tolerating “divergent opinions” and trying to sort them out “through consensual solutions.” It is interesting, furthermore, that to give moral authority to his repudiation of sacred violence, of violence committed in the name of ultimate ends, Aylwin summoned the message of a religious figure, Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, suggesting the impossibility of completely abandoning theological grounds in the articulation of a meaningful political message.

In that same speech, Aylwin seized the opportunity to respond to the objections to his brand of consensual politics that arose among more uncompromising sectors of the former opposition to Pinochet. In order to justify gradualism, he explicitly framed a response that invoked the ghosts of the victims of the previous regime:

There will be difficulties caused by the obstacles and hitches that the previous regime left us in our way [...]. Many will wonder why did we accept those things, and will not

⁴¹ Aylwin P. En el Estadio Nacional. In: Aylwin P, editor. *La Transición Chilena. Discursos Escogidos Marzo 1990–1992* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello; 1992), p. 18.

hide their contempt for the courteous manners that have characterized the transition to democracy while many of these acts were being done. Taking part in the moral condemnation that this conduct deserves — condemnation that, I am sure, future history will share — I invite my fellow countrymen to see the other side of the coin. We are happy for the peaceful and non-traumatic way that the transition to democracy has taken. Should we have exposed our people to the risk of new violence, suffering, and loss of lives in order to avoid those constraints? We, the Chilean democrats, chose to defeat authoritarianism with its own rules as our way of marching towards democracy. That is what we have done, with the benefits and costs that it entails.⁴²

It must be emphasized that the defense of the politics of compromise that his government embraced was delivered in a public ceremony held in memory of the *desaparecidos*. One might be tempted to say that it was not the moment for partisan politics. Indeed, the opposite is true: the clear political implications of the act of disappearing political dissidents demanded that Aylwin provided a political narrative to make sense of their death. What he devised was the demise of political theology in the name of the victims.

An interesting example of the transitional approach to the divisions stemming from the past arose with respect to the *Altar de la Patria*. How to get rid of this symbol of sacrificial politics became a hard challenge for the *Concertación* governments. At one point, in 2003, the government even sought to justify its removal because of the expense incurred by maintaining the flame — an attempt at depoliticizing an object by showcasing it in economic terms. In response, however, Cristián Labbé, a retired Colonel who during the dictatorship had served as personal guard to Pinochet and that at the time was mayor of the district of Providencia, declared that his office would cover the bill for the *Llama* rather than allow it to be extinguished. In the end, the flame was discreetly removed in 2010 when the whole area was redesigned ostensibly so that a memorial to José Miguel Carrera, O'Higgins main rival during Chile's struggle for independence, could be adjoined to the latter's tomb. In this fashion, the *Concertación* managed to transform the *Altar de la Patria* from a monument to the sacrificial narrative of the Armed Forces into a symbol of gradualist reconciliation.

Conclusion: the return of politics and constitutional conflict — and sacrifice?

These narratives studied provide an interesting case for understanding the role that symbolic language and allegorical imagery play in political life, an important goal for any interpretive or hermeneutic approach to the social sciences. In the midst of a collective tragedy, just as in similarly tragic and significant moments in the history of other nations, narratives of the sacred emerged in Chile to make sense of the unexpected, turning it metaphorically into either miracle or divine punishment, and of suffering, seen as both sacrifice and test. That political actors deployed these

⁴² Aylwin P. En el Estadio Nacional. In: Aylwin P, editor. *La Transición Chilena. Discursos Escogidos* Marzo 1990-1992 (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello; 1992), p. 21.

narratives in their efforts to create their own constitutional projects and contest those of others demonstrates the analytical power of political theology.⁴³

Each of the narratives studied here responded to different challenges and different demands. Allende's sacrifice created a world that relied solely on the power of the message of his martyrdom and his prophetic denunciation of a morally abhorrent regime. The Junta broke in forcefully with its rhetoric of sacrifice and salvation, coupled with acts of violence that provided the conditions to effectively embed their narrative in the constitutional text. The resulting political order was passed on to the transitional, moderate governments, who, due to their replacement of sacred violence by consensus, could only gradually and partially alter that which they found objectionable in the military legacy.

The current constitutional order, therefore, presents itself as the result of sensible consensus, but in truth, it finds its ultimate ground in the salvific struggle against Marxism. The persistence of mechanisms to suppress the will of the people when it departs from the neoliberal path has led Fernando Atria to call it a "cheating constitution, designed to neutralize the political agency of the people."⁴⁴ Students protesting the inequalities resulting from a privatized educational system have drawn the same conclusion.⁴⁵ The 2011 student protests revived the demand for the enactment of a new Constitution; a demand that Michelle Bachelet, elected for a new term in 2013, has promised to fulfill.

It would seem that the era of gradualist politics, of *democracia de los acuerdos*, has come to its end, and that conflictive politics have returned. Whether the demands for new social rights and for a new Constitution will succeed remains to be seen. But if successful, they will have to confront the questions raised by this analysis: Will sacrifice play any role in the articulation of new constitutional vision? Can the *desaparecidos* and Allende be invoked as the martyred prophets of a new Constitution? Will the "social question" in its twenty-first century iteration take instead the place of the discursive foundation of a new political order? Can, or should, these two foundations — a theological and a social one — coexist? These questions remain, for now, open.

Notes on contributor

Fernando Muñoz León holds a Doctorate of the Science of Law (J.S.D.) from Yale Law School. He teaches constitutional law and legal history at Universidad Austral de Chile. A preliminary version of this article was presented in at the conference *Comparative Constitutional Cultures*, held at the European University Institute, Florence, February 2012.

Correspondence to: Fernando Muñoz León, email fernando.munoz@uach.cl

⁴³ On political theology and metaphor, or, as the author puts it, analogy, see Kahn PW. Political theology: a response. *Polit Theol.* 2012;13:757–8.

⁴⁴ Atria F. *La Constitución Tramposa* (Santiago: Lom Ediciones; 2013), p. 44.

⁴⁵ See Muñoz León F. The constituent power of student protests in Chile. *Int'l J. Const. L. Blog*, Aug 26, 2013. Available from: <http://www.icconnectblog.com/2013/08/the-constituent-power-of-student-protests-in-chile>.