For the Liberation of Man

Inaugural Address at the First Convention of the Christian Democratic Party. May 27, 1959[1]

Intending to express what the advent of Christianity meant for Humanity, Pasternak—the controversial Russian poet—puts these beautiful and evocative words into the mouth of one of his characters: "And look, into that orgiastic world of bad taste in gold and marble—that of the Roman world—came He, weightless and dressed in light, fundamentally human, deliberately provincial, the Galilean; and from that moment nations and gods ceased to exist, and man began: man the carpenter, man the farmer, man the shepherd among a flock of sheep at sunset, man whose name sounded neither solemn nor fierce, man generously offered to all mothers' lullabies and to all the art museums of the world."

I think this sentence contains the entire meaning of our struggle.

The human creature was placed upon this world to be a person. Not only to grow and multiply and fill the earth, but also to master it. Not to live like just any other animal, but to be a subject, to be an actor, to fulfill itself in work, and to develop all the aptitudes of one's being—both physical and spiritual—and through it, to conquer the joy and fulfillment of family life and peace.

This is the task and destiny of every man. Not just of a few, but of the great community of brothers and sisters, all made from the same mold, all created in the image and likeness of God, all with a right to the same dignity, who together constitute the human family.

We are not here for a compromise

Yet twenty centuries have passed since the Son of Man suffered for his little brothers, and Humanity has still not learned its lesson. Divided into two worlds, it sacrifices peace and mutilates man for the sake of partial or limited ideals. One part, which calls itself Christian and claims to love freedom, does not truly or practically recognize the condition of the person, nor does it offer effective possibilities to develop one's attributes except to the privileged minority that attains wealth. The other, which proclaims itself atheist and claims to seek justice, demands that man renounce his own being, reduces him to a crushed and insignificant number within the omnipotent whole, and condemns him to a life in which misery is replaced by fear or servility. In both worlds, the common man, especially the one belonging to the vast multitude of the poor, is consciously or unconsciously set aside or forgotten. Beautiful words—so often profaned—or theoretical schemes of a promising future serve to soothe his suffering and intoxicate his hunger and thirst for a life worthy of being called human.
This is the reality in which we have been called to live. And against it we, the Christian Democrats, rise up, ready to vindicate man.

[1] The title of this speech was given by Patricio Aylwin. He delivered it at the inauguration of the First Convention of the Christian Democratic Party, held between May 27 and 30, 1959, nearly two years after this political party was founded on July 28, 1957. The speech summarizes the political thought of the author and the party.

We are not here to take sides between private enterprise and the Communist State, nor to seek a compromise between them.

We are in the fight to represent the man who knows nothing of systems or philosophies, but who refuses to resign himself to choosing between misery or tyranny, who does not want to be cannon fodder, and who believes in truth, yearns for justice, feels called to freedom, prefers love over hatred, and seeks a dignified place under the sun.

Together with him, we say that a world in which 75% of its population is undernourished cannot be called Christian or human, nor can a world where millions of people lack decent shelter and sleep in shantytowns, hovels, or on the streets, while a minority enjoys luxuries such as an ocean liner offering *"the most luxurious kennels ever built, air-conditioned and sized appropriately for passengers of all shapes and sizes of the canine race."*

Together with him, we say that it is hypocrisy or foolishness to speak of the “sacred right to private property” in a social order where property is the privilege of the few and remains practically unattainable for the vast majority of men.

Together with him, we say that it is a mockery for those who chain consciences, enslave peoples, accumulate military power, and subjugate foreign nations—or those who applaud and imitate them like mindless puppets—to speak of justice, peace, and brotherhood among men.

Two world wars were necessary for Christians to wake up and for the peoples of the West to turn their eyes back to the principles of the Gospel in search of a path. Today, Christian Democracy is a living and powerful force that in Europe and America is forging new paths, offering its own solutions, and overcoming the false dilemma of capitalism or communism. Other peoples, such as Nehru’s India and Nasser’s Arab world, are also seeking to overcome that dilemma, inspired by different principles, but along analogous paths.

The Liberation of Man Is Our Task

Here, gentlemen, is the great task for the people of this century: the liberation of man.

Liberation from misery, through the harmonious economic development of nations and a just redistribution of wealth.

Liberation from tyranny, through the practice of an effective democracy that guarantees the natural rights of man and in which everyone participates in political power.

Liberation from ignorance, through the maximum expansion of education at all levels, with no limits other than each person's vocation and capacity.

This is what Christian Democracy fights for. This is what it calls all people of goodwill to fight for. It does not demand uniform religious faith, which is a free gift from God; instead, it demands a love of truth, a vocation for justice, a clear awareness of the personal dignity of every human being, a vivid

feeling of human brotherhood, and a generous giving of oneself.

Christian Democracy makes a special appeal to the vast and ever-growing world of labor. The redemption of the working class, through its access to the benefits and responsibilities of culture and political and economic power, must primarily be the fruit of its own effort. Those who in our day talk about "giving" this or that to the people reveal an archaic misunderstanding of the social reality of the era we live in. The problems of this era cannot be solved through the old path of private generosity or paternalism. As an authoritative teacher instructs, no one can ignore or deny that the workers' efforts to improve their condition collide with a certain "structure" that contrasts with the natural order and the proper purpose of earthly goods. That "structure" must be changed and a new order created. A profound transformation is necessary, and such a thing can only be achieved through a social movement rooted deeply in the hearts of the people.

Basic Structures Must Be Changed

Let no one be deceived into thinking that an honest and efficient administration is enough to solve the ills that afflict nations today. No solution will be possible without first eliminating the vast social inequalities that divide and convulse societies. When 11% of agricultural property owners in Chile own more than 75% of the country's irrigated land, and 5% of the population collectively enjoys more than a third of total production, nothing effective can be accomplished without reforming the very structures that have generated such acute inequalities.

If property is, as has been said, "the material foundation of personal existence," and "he to whom nothing belongs soon ceases to belong to himself," one cannot honestly consider any measure that keeps workers on the margins of ownership to be a solution. In this, there are no middle grounds: either everyone becomes a property owner, or we head toward state-controlled collectivism. We know well that the modern characteristics of industrial production—requiring vast capital and operations in often gigantic enterprises—do not favor the extension of individual private property. But faced with this difficulty, Christian Democracy proposes one of its genuine solutions: community ownership.

We believe that property can only be spoken of as one of the fundamental pillars of the social order when it extends to all, not only regarding goods for personal use, but also regarding the means of production. Personal property regarding the goods each person exclusively needs for their own existence and that of their family, or that they work themselves with their family's help; common property regarding the goods exploited or worked jointly with others.

This community conception, nourished by the finest Christian tradition, opens new horizons for suffering humanity. Individualism—which, through individual initiative and free competition, brought fantastic 19th-century progress to the world—ended up plunging man into an atomizing selfishness and has proven sterile for modern forms of life and creation, which necessarily carry a social character. Every day it becomes clearer that to live is to live together. In this shrinking world of ours, man needs his neighbor more every day: he needs more than ever to feel part of a community—be it a family, a trade union, a neighborhood, or a community. These are what we call "natural intermediate communities," through which man integrates into society and ceases to be an inert individual before

the State.

We Want a Just Solution, Without Hatred

To those who, settled in their small or large comforts, look but do not see, hear but do not listen, we ask that they open their eyes and pay serious attention. Do not let yourselves be seduced by the illusion of the comfortable bourgeois life. Realize in time the unstoppable avalanche heading our way. The American diplomat Chester Bowles, in his interesting book *Las nuevas dimensiones de la paz*, demonstrated—by comparing the revolutions in Indochina, India, and Burma unfolding before our eyes—how tragically useless it is to oppose the currents of history, and how nations capable of understanding them in time, adopting them, and providing them an adequate channel can overcome their crises. Hear this well! It is not by clinging to this decaying world where money is king, nor to the formal tranquility of an unjust order pregnant with rebellion, nor to individual possession of goods that belong to us rightly or wrongly, that man's spiritual dignity will be saved. Nothing will be achieved through anti-communism made of mere words or police persecution. Only generous and costly dedication to the demands of justice, the voluntary and timely renunciation of all privilege, and the effective, real integration into the brotherly community of the poor—where all give according to their ability and share in the product according to their contribution—can save the free world from the communist threat.

And to you, who painfully bear the burden of meager jobs and limited days, who feel a longing for justice and want a new, kind, and luminous world for your children, we Christian Democrats say: do not let yourselves be enticed by the temptation of the Russian paradise. It is not by abdicating the faith of your fathers, nor by disowning your homelands, that the poor will find happiness. It is not through submission to a single boss—owner of all enterprises and sole possible employer, who is simultaneously the government, commands the armies, controls the police, and administers justice—that workers will liberate themselves from exploitation. It is not under the banner of hatred and violence that a peaceful society will be built. Come to Christian Democracy! It offers you the true path to give constructive expression to your righteous rebellions. It asks for your trust and effort to tear down everything hateful and obsolete in the world we live in and to build the new community city in which all people are truly brothers and sisters and are glad to live.

We are many, in America and Europe

This is our task. In it are the Christian Democrats of Chile, like those of France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Central Europe, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Uruguay, and so many other friendly homelands. We are glad because we do not feel alone. We know we are part of a universal movement. We are watching the idea sprout in our land. Thousands of men and women are expanding our ranks in every corner of the country. We are, by far, the leading force among university youth—a sure promise that the future will be ours. Leading professionals and progressive business owners are beginning to understand our principles and grant us their support. Our union leaders among employees and workers are winning the trust of Chilean workers and earning a vanguard position for Christian Democracy in the daily struggle of their trade unions. And last September, with the valuable support of our national-popular, democratic, and independent friends from all sectors—all aligned with ideals very close to ours—we received the votes of 255,000 Chileans for the best of our men.

This is a fitting moment to reiterate to our allies of that time our expression of gratitude, the friendship that binds us, and the eager desire to continue our common task together. It is also time to testify to the party's gratitude toward all its anonymous militants, who from one end of the nation to the other offered their best efforts to the cause. And it is also time to render the homage that the Christian Democracy of Chile owes to the generous and fruitful dedication of Eduardo Frei, to his modesty when he seemed victorious, to his fortitude in adversity, and to the selflessness and renewed faith with which he continues to fight.

We will not stop now to look back at the past. It is possible that we made mistakes. What human creature is free from making them? Be that as it may, we have the clear conscience of having always acted honorably, honoring our convictions and with no other goal than the common good of Chileans. We understand that if victory was not ours, it was because it was still premature. And everything prompts us to look toward tomorrow with confidence and optimism.

Those who believe us defeated or embittered are mistaken. We are experiencing the extraordinary and paradoxical phenomenon that, after the electoral defeat, our ranks have more than doubled and maintain the same enthusiasm as before. Both old militants and new ones arriving day by day know very well that they can expect nothing for themselves from this Party, except the satisfaction of feeling like members of a community of builders, dedicated body and soul to the task of building a new world grounded in the eternal values of Christian morality.

We will be faithful to democracy and to the people of Chile

We have a democratic tradition that is not merely formal, but springs from our deepest convictions. Faithful to it, we were the first to recognize the current president's victory and, without delay or bargaining, contributed our votes in the Plenary Congress to perfect the constitutional process of his election.

Eager for the good of Chile and respectful of the legal regime, we have not denied and will not deny the Government the support and cooperation to which every legitimate authority is justly entitled. But no Government can demand that everyone agree with the direction of its policies, and it is evident that the current administration, the men who embody it, and the social forces on which it fundamentally relies have criteria of governance, ideas, principles, and even a certain mindset substantially different from ours. For this reason, and not for petty or circumstantial motives, we have responsibly assumed the leading opposition role that corresponds to us.

Many believe that a government is defined by the honesty and capacity of its members, by its good intentions, or by the success or failure of a few measures. No doubt all of that is important, but the truth is that a government is fundamentally defined by how it tackles the core problem of its time. For us, at this hour in Chile, the essential problem is misery, expressed in the laughable wage levels and the subhuman living standards of a large portion of our working population. To address this problem successfully, a general mobilization of all national resources and energies is required, demanding the greatest sacrifice from those who have the most and offering the greatest incentives to those who need them most. National production must be significantly increased and justly rewarded.

It is necessary to undertake a reform of our agrarian structure to enable it to produce at least the food the country needs and to provide a dignified standard of living for the rural population. All of this requires a harmonious plan for economic development that establishes an order of priorities and combines public and private contributions. Furthermore, it requires faith in the people and effective sensitivity to the human problems of the labor world.

Unfortunately, we do not see in the Supreme Government the indispensable understanding of this matter. On the contrary, the proposals it has put forward so far reveal the intention to persist in a socio-economic policy of limited objectives that has already proven sterile in expanding the economy and is sharpening social inequalities by reducing the wage-earning sector's share in the country's income. No matter how many good things the Government does, as long as it perseveres in this disastrous policy on such a fundamental matter, it will find no other help from us than the frank and energetic exposition of our points of view from the opposition.

Our vocation is christian and popular

Comrades and friends:

This Convention starting today aims to find and define the best paths for our party to effectively assume the responsibility to which history is calling it. We very seriously believe that Christian Democracy is the only alternative that nations seeking justice without sacrificing their freedom can offer against communism.

To measure up to this task, we need efficient organization, clarity of objectives, action tactics, and maximum generosity and discipline from every Christian Democrat.

We will review our organizational structure to adapt it to the demands of a modern and agile party.

We will formulate a program that concrete—in accordance with the principles of our doctrine—the practical and immediate objectives around which the Christian Democracy of Chile will concentrate its efforts in the coming years. That program must contain the Party's criteria regarding the approach to and solution of the nation's most far-reaching problems. We will define our line of conduct in domestic politics, international affairs, and the trade union field. This is the work we undertake this afternoon.

It is not up to me to anticipate opinions on the agenda topics. In fraternal democratic debate, this Convention will decide on them, and whatever it resolves will constitute the sole rule to which we will all adhere.

But allow me to reiterate here, on this solemn occasion, the unalterable Christian and popular vocation of our movement.

We are a Christian Party. Independent of all religious confessionalism, our Party exists to give expression in temporal reality to the principles of Christian humanism. The Catholics who serve in its ranks strive to loyally fulfill, not only in letter but in spirit, the social teachings of the Church.

Regrettably, there are those who, more intent on exploiting the banner of Catholicism than on fulfilling its lessons, seem to entertain themselves by defaming us and misrepresenting our conduct. Without stopping to debate with them, we deny them any right or authority to judge us. Their attitude recalls that of those who, according to the Gospel, look at the speck in their neighbor's eye without noticing the log in their own.

We are a popular Party. We believe our fundamental mission is to provide a democratic channel, aligned with our principles, to the enormous stream of longings, rebellions, and hopes for a better life that stirs the working-class world. That is why we have opened our doors wide to workers and peasants. That is why Christian Democratic workers act decisively in the trade union field, fighting to win daily justice for their fellow workers. That is why our Party has defended and will continue to defend—regardless of any coincidences this attitude may determine—the right of workers to express themselves through their trade union organizations and to obtain satisfaction in their legitimate demands.

Foreign delegates:

Your presence at this Convention constitutes the most valuable encouragement for us. In your respective homelands, you represent the most prominent elements of Christian Democracy, which today is carving out a path among the peoples of the world. You have traveled here at great sacrifice because you know we are your comrades in struggle. Thank you very much. Welcome among us.

Mr. President of the National Popular Party:

Your presence, along with that of the other leaders and parliamentarians of your Party joining us on this occasion, is further proof of the close bonds uniting us. We know our principles and ideals are not foreign to your Party, and for that reason, we hold the conviction that we must face the future united.

Convention comrades:

You have come from every corner of our homeland to selflessly fulfill your party duty. Do so with all the seriousness and dedication you are capable of. Remember at this moment the example of the early pioneers; of the precursors like Don Carlos Vergara Bravo; of the advisors like Don Rafael Luis Gumucio; of the doers like Bernardo Leighton and Manuel Garretón. Look at this moment to the example that, with admirable modesty and fortitude, that illustrious man Don Horacio Walker offers us day by day.

Chileans listening: this Convention that Christian Democracy begins today constitutes one more step in a struggle that is also yours, and in which we call upon everyone to take a stand: the struggle to build a Homeland in which man—man the carpenter, man the farmer, man the shepherd among a flock of sheep at sunset, man whose name sounds neither solemn nor fierce—can live a just and dignified life in peace.
Invoking the name of our Father in Heaven, whose protection I implore to illuminate our minds, steel our resolves, ignite our hearts with charity, and clothe us with the armor of justice, I declare the First Convention of the Christian Democratic Party open.