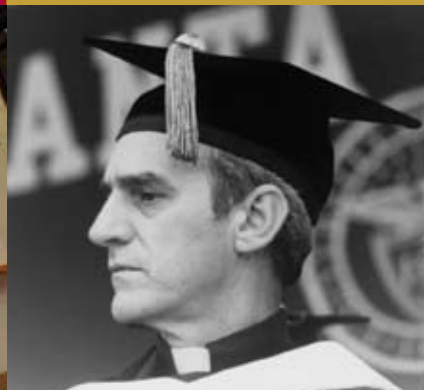


# explore

PUBLISHED BY THE IGNATIAN CENTER AT SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY

AN EXAMINATION  
OF CATHOLIC  
IDENTITY AND  
IGNATIAN  
CHARACTER IN  
JESUIT HIGHER  
EDUCATION

FALL 2009 VOL. 13 NO. 1



## The Legacy of the Jesuit Martyrs



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20 Years Later

20 Rising to the  
Martyrs' Challenge



Peter Thamer '08

FALL 2009

# explore

PUBLISHED BY THE IGNATIAN CENTER FOR  
JESUIT EDUCATION AT SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY

## FROM THE CENTER DIRECTOR

In the early hours of Nov. 16, 1989, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her teenage daughter were brutally murdered by Salvadoran soldiers on the campus of the University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador, El Salvador. For speaking truth to power in war-ravaged El Salvador, for defending the poorest of the poor, and for ultimately promoting a faith that does justice without qualification, these Jesuits were considered traitors by certain members of El Salvador's elite and so were summarily executed. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jesuit assassinations offers an important opportunity to reflect on the enduring legacy of the martyrs and to ask what this legacy could mean for Santa Clara University and for Jesuit higher education in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This issue of *explore* is one piece of Santa Clara's larger commemoration of this anniversary entitled *The UCA Martyrs of El Salvador, Jesuit Education, and Santa Clara University: Commemorating Their Legacy and Celebrating Our Future*. (For more on this, visit [scu.edu/elsal20](http://scu.edu/elsal20).) To remember our fallen Jesuit brothers and fellow educators is particularly appropriate in light of Santa Clara's enduring relationship with UCA. In his 1982 SCU commencement address, then-UCA Rector (President) Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., challenged all present with a new vision of a Christian university, one that "must take into account the gospel preference for the poor...to be a voice for those without voices." Jon Sobrino, S.J., eminent UCA theologian and one Jesuit who survived the killings only because he was away from campus, sought refuge in Santa Clara's Jesuit Community for several months after his community mates were assassinated. And Santa Clara's Casa de la Solidaridad—an academic program for students from Jesuit universities throughout the United States to study in El Salvador—was launched on the tenth anniversary honoring the UCA martyrs. (For more on Casa, visit [www.scu.edu/studyabroad/casa/](http://www.scu.edu/studyabroad/casa/).)

The articles assembled here tell us why the Jesuits were killed, describe El Salvador today, and present various perspectives on a vibrant legacy and how it does or should impact Jesuit and Catholic higher education. Folks in El Salvador talk about the "hope of the martyrs" and refer to Mons. Romero's famous dictum: "If you kill me I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people." We celebrate the legacy of the Jesuit martyrs to keep alive their memory and our hope.

Peace,

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The Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education seeks to preserve and extend the Catholic identity and Jesuit mission at Santa Clara University. As a Center of Distinction, the Ignatian Center is dedicated to advancing the University's strategic vision of "educating men and women to be leaders of competence, conscience, and compassion," by serving students, faculty, staff, and community partners.

Santa Clara University, a comprehensive Jesuit, Catholic university located 40 miles south of San Francisco in California's Silicon Valley, offers its more than 8,000 students rigorous undergraduate curricula in arts and sciences, business, and engineering, plus master's and law degrees and engineering Ph.D.s. Distinguished nationally by one of the highest graduation rates among all U.S. master's universities, California's oldest operating higher-education institution demonstrates faith-inspired values of ethics and social justice. For more information, see [www.scu.edu](http://www.scu.edu).

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# The Jesuit Martyrs of the University of Central America

Why Were They Killed?



BY ROBERT LASSALLE-KLEIN

*Associate Professor of Religious Studies/Chair of Religious Studies and Pastoral Ministries,  
Holy Names University*

## OVERVIEW

THE JESUIT MARTYRS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL AMERICA (UCA), THEIR HOUSEKEEPER AND HER 15-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER WERE BRUTALLY ASSASSINATED ON NOV. 16, 1989. THE ORDERS CAME FROM THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE MILITARY OF EL SALVADOR, WITH POSSIBLE APPROVAL BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNTRY. U.S. MILITARY ADVISORS MAY HAVE HAD ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE OF THE PLOT, AND U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIONS CERTAINLY ASSISTED IN THE COVER UP. WHY? THE ANSWER IS THAT IGNACIO ELLACURÍA AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL AMERICA POSED A REAL THREAT TO ONGOING BI-PARTISAN U.S. SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF EL SALVADOR IN THE COUNTRY'S TWELVE YEAR CIVIL WAR. In this essay, I will argue that the UCA's self-understanding as a Christian university rooted in God's preferential option

for the poor was concretized through its decade-long advocacy for peace and a negotiated solution to the war. I will examine the interaction of this position with U.S. counterinsurgency in El Salvador. I will demonstrate that Ellacuría, his fellow Jesuits, and the UCA faculty and staff were considered traitors by elements of El Salvador's military-civilian elite for their advocacy of negotiations. And I will explore how the threat of negotiations led to the deaths of Ellacuría and his colleagues.<sup>1</sup>

## "IT'S THEM OR US!"

Around 11:00 p.m. on Nov. 15, 1989, the director of the Salvadoran Military Academy, Col. Guillermo Alfredo Benavides Moreno, summoned a young graduate of the Jesuit High School of San Salvador and ordered him to murder Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., well known president of the University of Central America (UCA), and to leave no witnesses. Lt. José Ricardo Espinoza Guerra protested, telling his superior, according to later judicial testimony, that "this was a serious problem."<sup>2</sup> Living with Ellacuría was

the young lieutenant's former high school principal and teacher, Segundo Montes, S.J. Knowing he might face Fr. Montes, Espinoza asked for a bar of black camouflage grease with which to disguise himself, and about three hours later he gave the order to kill the priests.<sup>3</sup> Espinoza testified that he left the Jesuit university residence as his troops riddled the helpless victims with bullets, his eyes filled with tears.

On the U.S. side, Maj. Eric Warren Buckland, senior U.S. military advisor to Salvadoran Psychological Operations, faced a similarly complex dilemma. Several weeks earlier his Salvadoran counterpart, Col. Carlos Armando Avilés Buitrago (Chief of Psychological Operations for the Salvadoran Joint Command), revealed that a group of high-ranking Salvadoran military officers was planning to assassinate Fr. Ellacuría and some other Jesuits. According to the major, Avilés recruited Buckland to accompany him on a mission from Col. René Emilio Ponce, Chief of Staff and second ranking officer of the Salvadoran Military High Command, in order "to solve a problem with Col. Benavides."<sup>4</sup> When they arrived, Buckland was told to wait outside, but Avilés later reported that Benavides said Ellacuría "was a problem," and that "they want-

ed to handle it in the old way by killing some of the priests."<sup>5</sup> Maj. Buckland did nothing to prevent the planned murders, however. He later testified that he thought, "if Chief of Staff Ponce assigned a senior colonel (Avilés) to address the problem," then it meant the assassinations "would not happen."<sup>6</sup> The major would soon realize he was being played.

One month after the murders, on Dec. 20, 1989, Buckland learned from Avilés that Col. Benavides had indeed ordered an Atlacatl commando unit to assassinate Ellacuría and his companions, and that an active cover-up was underway. The major would come under intense pressure from the U.S. Embassy, the FBI, and his own military superiors, to back away from his story.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a week after his Jan. 12, 1990 testimony, Buckland would recant the portion admitting prior knowledge of the plot to assassinate Ellacuría and the other Jesuits. *Newsweek* later reported, "The administration didn't want that story to come out, because it 'wasn't productive to the conduct of the war.'"<sup>8</sup> Buckland continued to insist, however, that Avilés said Benavides had ordered the assassinations, information the major had already shared with his sister Carol Buckland, a CNN reporter, first by



Daniel Murdock J.D., '09

A view of the memorial rose garden at the University of Central America where six Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter were murdered in 1989.

telephone and later in a letter dated Dec. 25, 1989. This testimony would play an important role in breaking through the wall of lies supporting the cover up, and protecting those who had ordered and committed the murders.

The truth is that, like so many other soldiers before and after, Lt. Espinoza and Col. Buckland were small players in a larger geo-political drama of power and corruption. We now know that the Jesuits were murdered under orders by the highest levels of the military of El Salvador, with possible foreknowledge by the President of the country, Alfredo Cristiani.<sup>9</sup> At the time of this writing, 20 years after the assassinations, the Spanish National Court has reserved the right to indict former President Cristiani for criminal activity in the cover-up.<sup>10</sup> U.S. officials, which, as we have seen, may have had advance knowledge of the plot, certainly assisted in the cover-up that followed.<sup>11</sup> And three quarters of the officers involved in the killings were trained in counter-insurgency tactics by U.S. personnel from the School of the Americas located at Fort Benning, Ga.,<sup>12</sup> while Atlacatl commandos interrupted training after just three days with U.S. Special Forces on Nov. 13, 1989, in order to commit the assassinations!<sup>13</sup>

The 1993 report of the U.N. Commission on the Truth for El Salvador adds some crucial pieces. Around 10:30 or 11:00 p.m., “Col. Ponce called over Col. Guillermo Alfredo Benavides and, in front of the four other officers, ordered him to eliminate Fr. Ellacuría and to leave no witnesses.”<sup>14</sup> It adds that Ponce “ordered him to use the unit from the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion which had carried out the search two days earlier.” Thus, rather than thwarting the plot, Col. Ponce turned out to be its author, and Col. Benavides the organizer! As we have seen, U.S. advisors first admitted, then denied, advance knowledge, and were in the company of the killers immediately before the assassinations. Lt. Espinoza and Maj. Buckland were simply pawns in a deadly game.

But why implicate virtually the entire command structure of the Salvadoran military in order to kill one priest and a handful of associates? The answer is that Ignacio Ellacuría, and certain faculty of the University of Central America were considered serious threats to continued

U.S. support for the government of El Salvador, and its campaign to suppress Salvadoran civil society and its growing demands for more just economic conditions, and political freedoms. As Col. Benavides told the former Jesuit student, Lt. Espinoza, in giving the order to assassinate the Jesuits, “This is a situation where it’s them or us; [and] we are going to begin with...the university and Ellacuría...”<sup>15</sup>

**“THE MOST EXPLICIT TESTIMONY OF THE CHRISTIAN INSPIRATION OF THE U.C.A. WILL BE...[ITS] SERVICE OF... OPPRESSED PEOPLE...”<sup>16</sup>**

The trailhead of the path followed by Ignacio Ellacuría, the Jesuits, and their lay collaborators at the University of Central America can be said to begin with the worldwide meeting of Catholic bishops at Vatican II (1962-1965). Its signature document, *Gaudium et spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, sent the leadership of churches on every continent home with the mandate “...of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the Gospel.” (GS 4) Barely three years later, Aug. 26-Sept. 6, 1968, the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellín, Colombia took up the Council’s mandate, declaring, “A deafening cry pours from the throats of millions of men and women asking their pastors for a liberation that reaches them from nowhere else.”<sup>17</sup> The final document reflects the bishops’ epoch-shaping discernment that God was calling the Latin American church to embrace what has come to be called in Catholic social teaching, “the preferential option for the poor.”<sup>18</sup>

Building on the use of “integral development” by Pope Paul VI to critique developmentalist strategies that changed little and legitimated an oppressive status quo, Medellín asserts, “If development is the new name for peace, Latin American underdevelopment, with its own characteristics in the different countries, is an unjust situation which promotes tensions that conspire against peace.”<sup>19</sup> This criticism is concretized by Medellín’s use of the word “liberation”<sup>20</sup> to highlight and clarify its claim that fundamental social and structural “change will be essential in order to liberate the authentic process of Latin Ameri-



*Why implicate virtually the entire command structure of the Salvadoran military in order to kill one priest and a handful of associates? The answer is that Ignacio Ellacuría, and certain faculty of the University of Central America were considered serious threats to continued U.S. support for the government of El Salvador, and its campaign to suppress Salvadoran civil society and its growing demands for more just economic conditions, and political freedoms.*

can development and integration.”<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the document insists that God’s call to live out a preferential option for the poor implies real economic, political, and cultural change.

A little more than a year later, the Jesuits of Central America gathered at the diocesan seminary during Christmas 1969 for a Province retreat to prayerfully discern how to respond to Medellín’s prophetic interpretation of Vatican II. The team, which included Ellacuría, used the long-neglected tradition of group discernment described in *Deliberatio primorum Patrum*,<sup>22</sup> the official account of the 1539 discernment by Ignatius of Loyola and his companions to found the Jesuits. “Following the parameters of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius,”<sup>23</sup> the team sought to achieve prayerful consensus on the fundamental principles for how to renew the Province and its works by constituting it as a single subject united “in communal reflection and prayer.” The retreat concluded by recommending the Province develop an apostolic plan to implement the option for the poor in its internal life, its apostolic works, and Central America as a whole. Juan Hernandez Pico, S.J., suggests that it was officially first here that “the Jesuits committed themselves to...attend to the cries that were coming from the unjustly impoverished and oppressed majorities of Central America, putting aside disordered affections for established works and lifestyles [in order to promote]...efficacious action on behalf of the poor.”<sup>24</sup> From this point forward, the Central American Jesuits began to see the UCA as a Catholic university whose Christian character

would be defined in part by its preferential option for the poor.

A decade later, in May 1979, following a university-wide consultation, the board of directors published a seminal statement of the UCA’s self understanding as a university.<sup>25</sup> The document begins with a charter statement of the UCA’s self-understanding.

The UCA seeks to be an institutional university response to the historical reality of the country, considered from an ethical perspective as an unjust and irrational reality which should be transformed. This is rooted...in a purpose: that of *contributing to social change* in the country. It does this *in a university manner* and...*with a Christian inspiration*.<sup>26</sup>

We should note that the call of Paul VI and Medellín to “integral liberation” has been concretized in the UCA’s mandate to work in a specifically “university manner” to transform the “historical reality of the country” guided by the “Christian inspiration” of the Jesus of the Gospels and Catholic social teaching. This formulation is closer to the original call of *Gaudium et spes* (GS 4) to read the signs of the times in light of the Gospel.

The document says the UCA seeks to be a university working a) “for social change,” b) “in a university manner,” and c) guided by a “Christian inspiration.” This leads to several conclusions. First,

The UCA does not exist for itself, or for its members. Its center is not within itself, nor in its students, nor in its professors, nor in

its authorities. It exists for the Salvadoran people...for the majority of our people who suffer inhuman conditions... This means the work of the UCA is decidedly oriented by social outreach.<sup>27</sup>

Second, the UCA must always go about its work precisely “as a university,”<sup>28</sup> analyzing the reality and the causes of oppression, and the developing ideas and theoretical models for “more human and humanizing structures.”<sup>29</sup>

And third, the UCA’s Christian inspiration should draw attention to secular and religious values consonant with Christian faith. Thus,

The most explicit testimony of the Christian inspiration of the UCA will be putting itself really at the service of the people in such a way that in this service it allows itself to be oriented by oppressed people themselves. This will make it see and denounce what there is of sin in our reality; it will impel it to create models which historically correspond better to the Reign of God; and it will make it develop typically Christian attitudes, such as operational hope, the passion for justice, the generous self-giving to others, the rejection of violent means, etc.<sup>30</sup>

In the end, it was precisely their role in implementing this vision of the UCA that led to the deaths of Ellacuría and his companions. Their effectiveness in promoting a negotiated end to the decade-long civil war contributed to the collapse of U.S. Congressional support for the war, which in turn helped bring about a negotiated peace. But how and why did this advocacy contribute to their deaths?

**“THE U.S. WAS PREPARED TO MAKE A ‘PACT WITH THE DEVIL’ TO ACHIEVE ITS STRATEGIC GOAL...”<sup>31</sup>**

By May 1979, El Salvador was sliding inevitably toward civil war. A 1991 Rand Corporation study done for the Pentagon asserts that 1979 concluded a decade during which El Salvador’s sometimes contradictory forces of reform and rebellion had finally reached critical mass. It says the impoverished state of the vast majority of Salvadorans was clearly tied to the fact that “over 70 percent of the land was owned by only one percent of the population, while over 40 percent

of the rural population owned no land at all and worked as sharecroppers on absentee owners’ land or as laborers on large estates.”<sup>32</sup> And it asserts the stubborn refusal of successive repressive civilian-military regimes to debate the status quo simply fueled the push for land reform and a change in government, whether through elections, coup, or revolution.<sup>33</sup>

The *Cambridge History of Central America* describes 1979-80 as the end of a “period of political monopoly by the army, which, in totally controlled elections, secured the election of Col. Julio Rivera (1962-7), Gen. Fidel Sánchez (1967-72), Col. Arturo Molina (1972-77), and Gen. Carlos Humberto Romero (1977-9).”<sup>34</sup> For its part, the UCA enacted its new mandate through a June 1973 study exposing the Molina government as having fraudulently stolen the 1972 elections from Jose Napoleon Duarte, whose platform included the promise of real agrarian reform.<sup>35</sup> Frustrated by a succession of such events, five nationalistic political-military organizations had emerged by 1979, each calling for the overthrow of the ruling regime. Two of these had roots in the home grown communist party of El Salvador, whose leader Augustín Farabundo Martí led the unsuccessful 1932 peasant revolt against the military government of General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, infamous for his genocidal campaign against the indigenous population of El Salvador. Adding fuel to the fire, on July 19, 1979 the Sandinista movement led a rebellion overthrowing the repressive regime of General Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua, and installing a government they said would blend socialism, capitalism, and democracy. In the U.S., however, Jimmy Carter and Democrats in Congress were facing upcoming elections, and could not accept a second Central American revolution in El Salvador open to socialist ideas. Accordingly, the overriding concerns of Central America policy under the Carter administration became, as stated by New York Democrat Mario Biaggi, “basic human rights,” and preventing “the threat of a Communist takeover in our own backyard.”<sup>36</sup> This position hardened when Iranian militants stormed the U.S. Embassy in Iran on Nov. 4, 1979, capturing approximately 70 hostages. Ronald Reagan hammered Carter in the media and the polls,



while making an illegal arms-for-hostage deal that formed the basis of the Iran-Contra scandal.

Recognizing the gathering storm, reformist Salvadoran military officers carried out a coup on Oct. 15, 1979, recruiting a number of UCA faculty to the new government, including Román Mayorga Quirós, president of UCA, as its civilian leader. It was a last ditch effort to avoid a bitter civil war over the need for land reform, economic democracy, civil rights, and other long-simmering issues. During its ten short weeks of life, the reformist junta careened from one crisis to the next, unable to achieve civilian control, much less to enact stated objectives of purging the military of human rights abusers and corruption, and addressing land reform. Thus, on Jan. 2, 1980, after being informed that attempts to control human rights abuses by the armed forces would be rejected, Mayorga and Dr. Guillermo Ungo Revelo, leader of the opposition party, resigned from the cabinet with the other civilians during a meeting at the seminary called by Archbishop Oscar Romero. Not surprisingly, the country drifted toward war. On March 24, 1980, while saying mass, Archbishop Romero was shot through the heart by a paid

assassin with government links. On Oct. 10, 1980, four of the five political-military organizations formed the FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional) and prepared for war. A wave of right wing death squad and military assassinations against reformist civilian leaders followed. And on January 10, 1981, the FMLN launched its “final offensive,” almost one year exactly after the Jan. 3, 1980 failure of the reformist coup.

Within days, however, it became clear that the government would not fall anytime soon. The FMLN had no unified plan and little coordination for waging a sustained war, beyond its hope for a Nicaraguan-style overthrow of a repressive regime.<sup>37</sup> In the eyes of some, the failed offensive presented El Salvador and its U.S. ally with a genuine opportunity to embrace a meaningful political negotiation. U.S. Ambassador, Robert White, saw it this way and strongly promoted a “political solution.”<sup>38</sup> But the incoming Reagan administration was determined to internationalize the Salvadoran conflict, using it to symbolically “draw the line”<sup>39</sup> against Communism. White was immediately removed as ambassador by the new administration. And on



A fresco portion of a memorial wall in El Salvador, with an image of Archbishop Romero.

Feb. 23, 1981, a White Paper entitled, “Communist Interference in El Salvador” was released. It argued, “The insurgency in El Salvador has [become]...another case of indirect armed aggression against a small Third World country by Communist powers acting through Cuba.”<sup>40</sup>

Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas wrote to Vice-President Bush on April 6, 1981, arguing “The administration does not understand the composition and nature of the junta,” and asserted that “political dialogue” and “negotiations” are “the only road to peace in our country.”<sup>41</sup> Two days after the White Paper, former Ambassador White asked Congress, “How do you supply military assistance to a force that is going to use that military assistance to assassinate, [and] to kill, in a totally uncontrolled way? Do you want to associate the United States with the type of killing that has been going on...in El Salvador?”<sup>42</sup> But the Reagan administration’s unapologetic acceptance of this liability found an ambivalent collaborator in Congress, cementing a pattern that would continue for a decade. Negotiations were out, and the push for victory was on.

Ellacuría and the UCA, however, had a different solution. In March 1981, a month and a half after the failure of the “final offensive,” Ellacuría came out in favor of “A Process of [Political] Mediation for El Salvador.”<sup>43</sup> On April 27, 1981 he wrote to the board that “the social outreach of the UCA should now ground itself in the perspective of [promoting] a political solution and...a process of mediation”<sup>44</sup> for the civil war. He insists this commitment must be carried out in a thoroughly “university manner”<sup>45</sup> through the activities of the president; the editorial, production, and distribution work of the University’s overall communications center, its press and journals; and through community service. He proposed a vigorous agenda of public contacts including open events like “round tables, conferences, congresses, etc.,” ongoing contacts with leading “politicians, economists, religious, military figures, etc.,” and the addition of a university radio station and weekly newspaper designed to provoke the “national collective consciousness” of Salvadoran civil society to reflect on current events.<sup>46</sup>

This commitment to negotiations, however, proved to be dangerous. In 1983 the ARENA

party, through what the CIA describes as its clandestine “paramilitary organization,”<sup>47</sup> made a direct threat on the lives of all who would dare to advocate dialogue: “Dialogue is treason to the fatherland, and so we warn all the parties, political and military forces interested in negotiating the future of the country, that the eyes and the guns of the true patriots of El Salvador are on them.”<sup>48</sup> Within days a bomb exploded at Ellacuría’s Jesuit residence, and flyers were found claiming responsibility for the group who had issued the warning: the Secret anti-Communist Army (ESA).

For its part, the U.S. vigorously opposed serious negotiations throughout the decade as incompatible with U.S. counterinsurgency goals in the region. In her study of U.S. foreign policy in El Salvador from 1976-1993, however, Cynthia Arnson notes that by late in Reagan’s second term, congressional support<sup>49</sup> for the government of El Salvador and its brutal war began to wear thin. Also, the geo-political situation was changing. On Aug. 7, 1987 Costa Rican President Oscar Arias led the Central American presidents to a framework for a comprehensive regional peace (for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize). By 1989 the ongoing military stalemate between the FMLN and the military, the emphasis of the Esquipulas agreements on ending guerrilla insurgencies, and the collapse of the Cold War as a linchpin for U.S. foreign policy were rapidly eroding congressional support for U.S. counterinsurgency in El Salvador.

Then, on Jan. 23, 1989, the FMLN surprised everyone with a proposal to postpone upcoming presidential elections for six to eight months (Sept. 15, 1989), to implement a series of guarantees for a free and fair election, and to abide by the results.<sup>50</sup> The Duarte government rejected the proposal, but the first Bush administration (1978-1982) encouraged a reconsideration. Three weeks later, on Feb. 20-21, 1989, the FMLN met in Mexico with 13 political parties and proposed to renounce the armed struggle and incorporate into the political process. After a brief period of hope, however, negotiations collapsed. The military party, ARENA, was confident of victory in the upcoming elections, which it eventually won with 54 percent of the vote on March 19, 1988. The FMLN, which

*Ellacuría and the UCA remained a powerful voice both in El Salvador and the North in favor of negotiations, which made him a threat to economic and political interests on the far right, and to the military leadership. Why? The Pentagon report explains that right wing land owners remained virulently opposed to land reform.<sup>51</sup> Military leaders were largely corrupt, enjoyed impunity for violations of human rights, and “did not wish to win the war because in so doing it would lose the American aid that has enriched it for the past decade.”<sup>52</sup>*

had been planning an offensive since 1987, began a series of assassinations against government officials, and the far right escalated its ongoing campaign of violence and murder against reformist civilian leaders.


Ellacuría and the UCA, however, remained a powerful voice both in El Salvador and the North in favor of negotiations, which made him a threat to economic and political interests on the far right, and to the military leadership. Why? The Pentagon report explains that right wing land owners remained virulently opposed to land reform.<sup>51</sup> Military leaders were largely corrupt, enjoyed impunity for violations of human rights, and “did not wish to win the war because in so doing it would lose the American aid that has enriched it for the past decade.”<sup>52</sup> The government depended on U.S. aid for survival and shared a commitment to defeat the FMLN, but there was little confidence and often outright opposition among the civilian-military elites to aspects of U.S. counterinsurgency promoting reforms directed at disenfranchised peasants. Thus, on March 3, 1989 the Crusade for Peace and Work denounced the “tiny group of satanic brains led by Ellacuría and a pack of communist hounds” ruining the country.<sup>53</sup> On March 14 a grenade exploded at the University’s emergency electric power plant. On March 18 a paid advertisement denounced the “deceptive Jesuits Ignacio Ellacuría, Segundo Montes, and others, who with their doctrines, are poisoning many young minds.” On April 16 the Armed Forces High Command published an

ad charging Segundo Montes with defending the FMLN’s use of land mines, and placing him with “groups and individuals who insist on defending the terrorism of the FMLN-FDR and its front groups.” On April 20, Col. Juan Orlando Zepeda said the UCA is a “refuge for terrorist leaders, from where they plan the strategy of attack against Salvadorans.” And on April 28, three bombs exploded at the UCA printing press.

The threat of negotiations and peace nevertheless continued to build. When the new president, the businessman Alfredo Cristiani, took office on June 1, 1989, he revealed a surprising five-point plan for talks with the FMLN that did not make surrender a precondition. Talks began Sept. 13-15, 1989, in Mexico, and continued Oct. 15-17 in San Jose, Costa Rica. Both sides agreed to a third meeting Nov. 20 and 21, 1989 in Caracas, Venezuela. During the next few weeks, however, El Salvador was plunged into a murky sea of assassination and irresponsible rhetoric, and the meeting never took place. On Nov. 11, 1989 the FMLN invaded the capital and threatened to take over the city. The military decided to assassinate civilian leaders, trade unionists, and others they saw as FMLN supporters.<sup>54</sup> And on Nov. 16, 1989, members of the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion assassinated Ellacuría; Ignacio Martin-Baró, S.J.; Segundo Montes, S.J.; Amando López, S.J.; Joaquín López y López, S.J.; Juan Ramón Moreno, S.J.; a friend and community housekeeper, Elba Ramos; and her 15-year-old daughter, Celina.



What, then, does the Pentagon report suggest is to be learned from the U.S. involvement in this disturbing story? It concludes that the Salvadoran government, the right wing land owners and their allies, and the Salvadoran military knew that they “had America trapped,”<sup>55</sup> and understood the U.S. was prepared to make a kind of “pact with the devil” in order to insure that El Salvador not fall to the FMLN. Given the current insistence by former U.S. Vice-President Cheney and others on torture as a legitimate weapon in the war against terror,<sup>56</sup> the Pentagon report seems prescient in pointing to the potential threat to basic and enduring American values posed by the practical aspects of U.S. counterinsurgency and anti-terrorist policy. The Pentagon report asserts that making victory for an inept and corrupt ally the cornerstone of U.S. counterinsurgency objectives in El Salvador helped to defeat its efforts to promote development and human rights. The report concludes, “In attempting to reconcile these objectives,... we pursued a policy by means unsettling to ourselves, for ends humiliating to the Salvadorans, and at a cost disproportionate to any conventional conception of the national interest.”<sup>57</sup>

For those interested in the future of the Catholic university, it must be said that the commitment of Ignacio Ellacuría and the UCA to the option for the poor led them to confront violent, powerful, and dehumanizing forces with a reasoned and compassionate plea for negotiations and peace. In the end, the sanity and humanity of this approach proved a dangerous threat to ongoing U.S. support for an immoral ally in a brutal and unnecessary civil war. Twenty years after these deaths, we have come to appreciate the risks to individuals and institutions that concretize a commitment to the dignity of every person, especially the marginalized, through effective opposition to the sometime follies of U.S.-financed wars on foreign soil. 

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article synthesizes elements addressed in much greater detail and depth in a manuscript by the author, who will be the Winter-Spring 2010 Bannan Fellow at SCU (*Blood and Ink: Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, and the Jesuit Martyrs of the University of Central America*).

- <sup>2</sup> Martha Doggett, *Death Foretold: The Jesuit Murders in El Salvador* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1993), 65. Cited from “Narración de los Hechos” prepared by the Jesuits of Central America, which appeared in *Estudios Centroamericanos* 493-494 (Nov.-Dec. 1989): 1125-1132.
- <sup>3</sup> United Nations Security Council, “From Madness to Hope: The 12-year war in El Salvador,” *Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador* (March 15, 1993): 47. This report may be accessed at <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/salvador/informes/truth.html>.
- <sup>4</sup> Sworn statement by Eric Warren Buckland, Jan. 11, 1990, hand-written addendum, Washington, D.C., at 10 (on file at Lawyers Committee for Human Rights). Cited in Doggett, 225.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 226.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 143-145, 166-168, 221-236.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., 228.
- <sup>9</sup> U.N. Security Council, 45-54.
- <sup>10</sup> The Center for Justice and Accountability, “El Salvador: the Jesuits’ Massacre Case.” May be accessed at <http://www.cja.org/cases/jesuits.shtml>.
- <sup>11</sup> See the stories of Lucía Barrera de Cerna and Major Buckland in Doggett, 218-228.
- <sup>12</sup> Leo O’Donovan, “Martyrs in El Salvador,” *Washington Post*, 16 November 1999. Cited in “The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador,” *Congressional Record*, Volume 145, Number 163 (Wednesday, November 17, 1999, Hon. James P. McGovern of Massachusetts in the House of Representatives, Tuesday, November 16, 1999), 30451-42.
- <sup>13</sup> Doggett, 281.
- <sup>14</sup> U.N. Security Council, 50.
- <sup>15</sup> Extrajudicial statements of Lt. José Ricardo Espinoza Guerra and Lt. Yushy René Mendoza Vallecillos. Cited in Doggett, 65.
- <sup>16</sup> Universidad Centroamericana Simeón José Cañas “Las funciones fundamentales de la universidad y su operativización,” in *Planteamiento universitario 1989* (San Salvador: U.C.A., Febrero 1989), 53.
- <sup>17</sup> Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, “Poverty of the Church,” in *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council: II (vol. 2) Conclusions*, second ed. (Washington, D.C.: Division for Latin America. 1973), 2.
- <sup>18</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Dec. 30, 1987, #42; also Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean*, Fifth General Conference, Brazil, May 13, 2007, 3.
- <sup>19</sup> “Document on “Peace,” in Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, 1
- <sup>20</sup> Examples include documents on: “Justice,” 3, 4; “Education,” 2, 9; “Youth,” 1; “Catechesis,” 6; “Lay Movements,” 2, 4, 9, 13; “Poverty of the Church,” 2, 7 in Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> “Document on “Justice,” 11 in Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> *Constitutiones societatis Iesu* I, 1-7; in *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, Monumenta Ignatiana*, Series III. See: Jules J. Toner, S.J., “The Deliberation That Started the Jesuits: A

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- 25 Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, “Las funciones fundamentales de la universidad y su operativización,” in *Planteamiento universitario 1989* (San Salvador: Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, 1989): 37-121.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 47. My emphasis.
- 27 “Las funciones fundamentales,” 48-49.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 31 Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, National Defense Research Institute, 1991), 82.
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- 40 Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, “Communist Interference in El Salvador,” Special Report No. 80 (February 23, 1981). Cited in Arnson, 56.
- 41 Letter of Apostolic Administrator of San Salvador Arturo Rivera Damas to Vice-President George Bush, April 6, 1981. Cited in Montgomery, 195, 147.
- 42 Testimony of Robert White, U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on *Foreign Operations, Foreign Assistance and Related Programs Appropriations for 1982*, Hearings, Part 1, 97th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981) 3, 17. Cited in Arnson, 58-59.
- 43 “Ignacio Ellacuría, “Un proceso de mediación para El Salvador,” *Estudios Centroamericanos* 36, Nos. 387-388 (Marzo 1981) 3-16. Reprinted in Ignacio Ellacuría, *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador (1969-1989)*, vol. 2 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991), 937-949.
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- 45 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 1-3.
- 47 “Comunicado del Ejercito Secreto Anticomunista (ESA),” *Estudios Centroamericanos* 418 (September 1983), 834. CIA/State Department, “Briefing Pope on Right-Wing Terrorism in El Salvador,” October 27, 1993. U.S. document declassified November 1993, Washington, D.C. Cited in Whitfield, 292.
- 48 “Comunicado del ESA, atribuyendose las acciones terroristas del 6 de septiembre de 1983,” *Estudios Centroamericanos* 419 (October 1983), 903. Cited in Whitfield, 292.
- 49 Arnson, 226.
- 50 Montgomery, 213-14.
- 51 Schwarz, 46-50.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 53 The attacks cited in the paragraph are from the Jesuit Lawyers Committee chronology of “Attacks on El Salvador's Jesuits.” Summarized in Doggett, 308.
- 54 U.N. Security Council, 50.
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# El Salvador— 20 Years Later



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DURING THE LAST 20 YEARS, SALVADORAN NATIONAL LIFE HAS UNDERGONE IMPORTANT TRANSFORMATIONS. THE FACT THAT ITS RURAL POPULATION DECREASED FROM 49.6 PERCENT TO 37.3 PERCENT<sup>1</sup> SINCE 1992 OR THAT ITS ENTIRE POPULATION DID NOT GROW ABOVE SEVEN MILLION PEOPLE, AS HAD BEEN PROJECTED, BUT INSTEAD WAS ALMOST A MILLION AND A HALF LESS THAN THAT, SHOULD ALREADY PAINT A PICTURE OF THE DIMENSION AND NATURE OF THE CHANGES.

What has changed very little is the economic and social situation of the “popular majorities,” as Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., conceptualized that immense number of Salvadoreños and Salvadoreñas who live in poverty, struggling on their own for survival between unemployment and underemployment. According to the most recent Report on Human Development in El Salvador

(Informe de Desarrollo Humano de El Salvador, or IDHES), published in 2008, decent employment was a privilege enjoyed by less than 20 percent of the economically active population in 2006. As for the rest, 7 percent of the population was unemployed; 43 percent was underemployed; and the remaining 31 percent of the people were so precariously employed that even if they earned more than the minimum wage, they could not afford the basic basket of goods at market prices, nor could they enjoy labor rights or social security.

In other words, two years before the onset of the economic crisis in the United States and the rest of the world, 80 percent of the economically active population of El Salvador had great difficulty in finding dignified employment in order to survive, just like what had been happening in the three decades preceding the country’s armed conflict. What is more, this was taking place after almost 20 years during which the country carefully followed the recipes of the neoliberal program for economic



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modernization as the most effective means to combat poverty, according to the international financing organizations discourse.

A review of the data in the aforementioned IDHES reveals that in the last 60 years, half of the Salvadoran labor force has been underemployed: In 1950, the underemployment rate was 49 percent; in 1970, it was 45 percent; in 1980, it was 49 percent once again; and in 2006, it was 43 percent. Therefore, this sign of grave injustice in El Salvador is very similar to the one faced by so many martyrs in the history of the country—a sign for which they were willing to sacrifice their lives.

It is still surprising that today, like yesterday, those who hold the economic and media power and who themselves are quite trans-nationalized, continue to defend, with the same conviction, the same policies and “economic liberties,” even if the *raison d’être* and the activities of the state have never been focused on the human being, on the immense majority of the population, as dictated by the First Article of the Constitution; for poverty and the lack of dignified employment continue to have the same historic rates. If anything has ameliorated this poverty, it has been the solidarity shown by the emigrants who, through their suffering and remittances from other countries, contribute 18 percent of the GDP.

As in the past, the need to legitimize power continues to include the truth among its first

victims. According to the official discourse, in 2005 the statistics placed the level of poverty at 30.4 percent of the Salvadoran households. In fact, according to more realistic calculations, poverty affects 58.4 percent of the population.<sup>2</sup>

There is, in close relationship to the aforementioned economic policies, the fact that El Salvador remains among the 20 percent of the countries of the world with the greatest income inequity, a situation in which 20 percent of the wealthiest segment of the population keeps nearly 60 percent of the national income, while 20 percent of the poorest segment of the population must survive with 3 percent of the same.

Therefore, one should not be surprised by the multiple and dramatic social effects caused by the prolonged history of this unjust and unacceptable inequity. Among such effects, there is a permanent exodus<sup>3</sup> of Salvadorans, whose numbers now represent a third of the country’s population living elsewhere, mainly in the United States. Although, as mentioned before, remittances constitute the main lifeline of the Salvadoran economy, such massive emigration has had devastating effects, such as the destruction of households and the erosion of the family unit and the social fabric of the country.

This same matrix of institutionalized injustice has also placed the country, for almost an entire decade, among the most violent in the world, and among the most violent in

Latin America, with a homicide rate of 48.8 per 100,000 according to a 2008 special report produced by the Latin-American Information Technology Network<sup>4</sup> (Red de Información Tecnológica Latinoamericana). This phenomenon of violence, as proven by many studies throughout the world, is more directly associated with the inequity in the distribution of wealth than with the phenomenon of poverty itself, as evidenced by a 48 percent degree of determination in the variance of all the violence indexes.<sup>5</sup>

In absolute figures, this violence is equivalent to an average of 300 murders per month during the last three years. These numbers are often disputed by those responsible for the formulation of public safety policies and they represent nothing more than a media image headache for the government, given the absence of concrete follow-up actions.

These daily deaths represent a social and human catastrophe of proportions that are equivalent or superior to the number of monthly victims registered during the intermediate stage of the armed conflict between 1984 and

1989. But in financial terms, they represent but an insignificant cost to the state budget, given that the state normally spends money just on the elaboration of police reports, forensic inspections, and the transportation of cadavers to the morgue—the bare necessities for the upkeep of the statistical records on violence.

According to a study on judicial efficiency sponsored by the PNUD Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, or United Nations Development Program and published in 2007, 85.6 percent of the total number of homicides that took place in 2005 did not even make it to initial stage of a judicial procedure due to insufficient evidence to bring forth indictments.

No other ultimate responsibility is assumed by the state for those deaths, either through payments of death or handicap insurance policies, or medical or psychological attention to the victims of violence or the victims' families. These human losses do not reverberate in the country's economic activity since they represent a labor force that is either unemployed or easily replaceable.



Daniel Murdock J.D., '09

Profound poverty is everywhere in El Salvador, where large numbers of people are unemployed or underemployed, and many cannot afford even a basic basket of goods at market prices.

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If the state or the economic structure of the Salvadoran society were to become responsible for these expenses, surely the accountability of those responsible for public safety would increase. And even though the fiscal and police authorities have attributed almost 100 percent of the homicides to the youth involved in gangs, or “maras,” during the last period of the ARENA presidency, this phenomenon is much more complex than that, since state agents are also involved in such homicides. The investigations undertaken in 2006 and 2007 by the Ombudsman (Attorney General's) Office for the Defense of Human Rights (Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos) and the Office of Human Rights at the Archdiocese of San Salvador<sup>6</sup> (Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de San Salvador) revealed the existence of death and social cleansing squads which, in some cases, were linked to the National Civil Police Policía Nacional Civil, or PNC in different zones of the country.

In 2007, a military operation that was beyond police jurisdiction resulted in the capture, in the eastern zone, of a PNC officer moments after he had perpetrated a murder. Eventually, the squad led by said officer was credited with at least 31 other homicides perpetrated in the two preceding years. The killer, however, was indicted and sentenced for only the last crime.<sup>7</sup>

The data and evidence of the Salvadoran reality can also apply to other fields, such as corruption in the management of public funds, and these data and evidence can gain a more

exhaustive and documented depth in said fields. But what this information immediately reveals is the persistence of the old structures of injustice and the cynical and indifferent disposition with respect to the suffering, exclusion and abandonment in which the “popular majorities” live and die.

Faced with such a grave social situation one may ask a series of questions. How is it that the citizens have not reacted or effectively demanded a change in priorities and the transformation of such policies during almost 20 years? How is it that this cynical lack of honesty with regard to reality has been tolerated for so long? How is it that the Peace Agreements, which have been used to erase the country's memory, have given a new lifeline to the old policies and have given way to the same exercise of power—a power which today appears under the paralyzing veil of the supposed popular will, expressed through free and democratic elections?

There is no lack of explanations. And although these explanations are complex in nature, they are nevertheless evident, such as the unconditional support that the Salvadoran neoliberal policies have received by the different administrations in Washington, whose moral authority before the Salvadoran public opinion has been and continues to be magnified by the power of the Salvadoran media; or the credentials that the international financing organizations have bestowed upon the policies and decisions of the last four Salvadoran administrations so as to declare them in tune with the future and the needs of globalization.



But there are many other causes that contribute to this tolerance towards injustice, and there are other worrying signs of social insensitivity and dehumanization in the Salvadoran society that appear in the moral and spiritual realm more than in the socio-political arena. These causes have to do with a certain loss of both faith and the profoundly Christian way of life, and the loss of a humanizing dynamism, the existence of which had been made evident by the repeated and unequivocal gestures of so many Salvadorans just two decades ago.

As well, there is a need for individuals with the capacity to interpret the signs of the times, certainly more so now, given the context of expectations and the collective morale that is so different from that which predominated 20 or 30 years ago. There is a need for prophetic voices, as Jon Sobrino calls them, voices that, through a tone of Christianity and humanistic intellect, may help the poor so that they may know how to “reclaim and maintain their self-confidence, develop new practices and transmit hope.”<sup>8</sup>

Much of that spiritual loss is not strictly related to theology or faith issues, but rather to the distancing of the community from its recent historic reality—a reality composed of a single cut rather than temporary pieces that are tailored to the measurements of the powerful. This distancing was the first thing that became evident when, in a national survey of public opinion, it was difficult for the interviewees to cite a Salvadoran who made them feel proud of their nationality. Only 4 percent of the interviewees were able to name Monsignor Romero, surely the most universal of all Salvadorans. This is only one expression, though one of the most salient ones, of the numbness or stupor to which the popular conscience has been subjected.

Perhaps the most devastating blow to the spirit of the Peace Accords was the social marginalization and institutional oblivion imposed upon the Truth Commission Report, whose main recommendation was to exhort the Salvadoran community to undertake the study and reflection of the ideological doctrine, the institutional practices, and the investigation

of the public officials who were responsible for the atrocious crimes and violations of human rights that took place during their administrative terms. This unknown negative opinion presented in the Report prevented the population from taking ownership of its own terrible political and social experience as the sole means of avoiding the recurrence of such history.

But it’s not only the history that is assailed by this decision to impose silence and send into oblivion the crimes of the past. What is also assailed is all paths and possibilities for the creation of a future, of a just and different society, as pastorally alluded to by Monsignor Romero and as discussed in ethical and political terms by Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., the great theorist and advocate of the possibilities for peace and justice in El Salvador.


El Salvador, as well as other countries with similar realities, will not find better sources and guides for the identification of new practices and social behaviors (such as faith and hope in a more just and supportive society) than the example and the thought of those who delved into the soul and the most precious values of the Salvadoran society. Those who would like to steep themselves into this reality and explore the realms of what is possible, or allow themselves to be inspired and encouraged by role models who display an unconditional surrender to the cause of justice, would be wrong to search in other periods of history or latitudes.

The official oblivion to which these role models, Romero and Ellacuría, have been subjected until now, as well as the public silence regarding their memory (both of which have been incorporated into the educational programs and systematically exorcized by the great media corporations), only confirm the predominance of the ideologies and values that produce the death and dehumanization still experienced by Salvadoran society today.

There is no doubt that the current Salvadoran administration, one that demonstrates a different ideological approach these days, will face an immense economic challenge in keeping its campaign promises amidst the grave national and global financial crisis and the recession signs that predominate

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But its main and essential task will be to return to the Salvadoran society its own perception and the transcendental value it places on human life and dignity, both of which have been so despised and violated in the destitute barrios, in the statistical data, and in the discourses of the powerful. In order to accomplish this, the administration should start by promoting the reconciliation of the Salvadoran society—a society that is as or more unjust and inequitable than the one that existed when the Peace Agreements were signed. This constitutes nothing less than the society's honest reencounter with its reality, with its values, and with its martyrs. 

*This article was translated from the original Spanish by Sergio Lopez, ClearTranslations@gmail.com.*

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision*, <http://esa.un.org/unup>

<sup>2</sup> According to a study published in 2007 by the PNUD Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, or United Nations Development Programme in El Salvador, the official poverty figures were based on the estimated cost of the basic nutritional basket that was the equal in 2005 to that of 1996, which is obviously unrealistic. In addition, the statistical figures of the government did not register percentages of individuals in poverty, as suggested by international

practices, but rather percentages of households. This leads to the under-reporting of this phenomenon since the poorest households are composed of more individuals as compared to the households that are not poor. See PNUD: "Cuadernos sobre Desarrollo Humano" (Notebooks on Human Development) No. 6 (May 2007). [http://www.pnud.org.sv/2007/content/view/27/83?id\\_public=74](http://www.pnud.org.sv/2007/content/view/27/83?id_public=74), P.37.

<sup>3</sup> According to conservative estimates, in the last eight years, the average number of daily emigrants, both legal and illegal, has been between 700 and 800 Salvadorans. See the Informe sobre de Desarrollo Humano El Salvador (Report on Human Development in El Salvador) or IDHES, 2005 <http://www.pnud.org.sv/migraciones/content/view/9/105/>

<sup>4</sup> Red de Información Tecnológica Latinoamericana, RITLA Latin-American Information Technology Network. "Mapa de la violencia: Los jóvenes de América Latina 2008" (The violence map: The Latin American Youth, 2008.), 15. Can be accessed at <http://www.ritla.net>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> In 2006 this office investigated 26 of the homicides that followed the pattern of the death squads. Eight out of the 26 (30%) were linked to either officers or structures of the PNC Policía Nacional Civil, or National Civilian Police, who sometimes used patrol cars or other resources of the institution. In 2007, eight homicides out of 29 (27.6%) of the social cleansing summary executions investigated by the Archdiocese's legal counsel appeared linked to PNC officers or structures. Annual Report 2006 (Informe Anual 2006) p. 131; Annual Report 2007 (Informe Anual 2007) p.118. The report from 2006 can be accessed by choosing Tutela Legal Report at <http://www.tutelalegal.org/paginas/boletin.htm>

<sup>7</sup> As a result of this case, in August 2007, the Attorney General for Human Rights, Oscar Luna, proposed the creation of a commission to investigate the PNC National Civil Police, since the PNC lacked effective checks and balances. He was not able to garner the support of the public safety authorities.

<sup>8</sup> Jon Sobrino, "Fuera de los pobres no hay salvación" (There is no salvation without the poor) *UCA Editores*, 2008, 118.

# The Summons of the UCA's Martyrs to U.S. Catholic Universities



BY SUZANNE C. TOTON  
*Associate Professor, Theology/  
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IN JON SOBRINO'S ESSAY, "THE LATIN AMERICAN MARTYRS: SUMMONS AND GRACE FOR THE CHURCH," WE HEAR A POWERFUL CRI DE COEUR TO A CHURCH LEADERSHIP THAT HAS GROWN INDIFFERENT TO TODAY'S SUFFERING HUMANITY. HE WRITES, "(THE CONTEMPORARY MARTYRS) ARE ABLE TO SHAKE THE CHURCH AS ONLY LOVE AND BLOOD CAN, AND THEY DEMONSTRATE THE ROAD THAT MUST BE FOLLOWED TO RETURN TO THE CHURCH OF THE POOR...."<sup>1</sup> "If they do not have the capacity to summon the church, then it is doubtful that anything, or anyone, can."<sup>2</sup> The question under consideration here, on the anniversary of the death of the University of Central America (UCA) martyrs, is how can their powerful witness, their love and blood, summon U.S. Catholic universities to be more responsive to the just demands of the poor and marginalized today? While our tendency might be to dismiss this challenge by thinking, "That was 20 years

ago"; or "That was a civil war"; or "That was El Salvador and this is the U.S."; or "We are not the UCA," we risk the opportunity to examine more carefully what our universities are doing and how they might become more deeply committed and more effectively engaged in the struggle for justice. While the U.S. is not El Salvador and our universities are not the UCA, our Catholic mission and identity require that we respond to the death and continued suffering from the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere, the 33 million refugees and displaced people worldwide, the 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty, the 26,000 children under the age of five who die daily of preventable causes, the genocide in Darfur, and other forms of massive suffering today.

What makes the UCA's leadership so extraordinary is that they allowed the reality of the suffering that surrounded them to place a moral claim on the conscience and the very soul of the university, so much so that both they and the university were transformed into becoming effective instruments for justice and



*Our Catholic mission and identity require that we respond to the death and continued suffering from the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere, the 33 million refugees and displaced people worldwide, the 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty, the 26,000 children under the age of five who die daily of preventable causes, the genocide in Darfur, and other forms of massive suffering today.*

peace in El Salvador. Sobrino attributes this to compassion.<sup>3</sup> He writes that the UCA's martyrs were first and foremost men of compassion who shaped a university that was capable of compassion and introducing compassion into an anti-compassionate society. He writes that in the Christian tradition the defining characteristic of a "human being" is compassion; if you are not compassionate, you are not human.<sup>4</sup> The same is true for universities. Because we have the witness of the UCA's martyrs, it can never be said that this level of commitment is impossible for universities. They have set the standard against which our own universities' efforts for justice and peace must be measured.

In this short essay, I would like to offer a brief overview of how the UCA's leadership understood the university's mission and how it institutionally opted for the poor. And in light of this, I would like to raise the question of whether the focused effort in U.S. Catholic universities rises to the challenge posed by the massive suffering in the world today.

### THE UCA'S COMMITMENT

It is important to begin with some of the fundamental convictions that the UCA's leadership held for a Catholic university. They understood that the university is a force within society. It exists in a particular historical reality and is shaped by that reality, but it also shapes the reality. The Catholic university, however, is not only a social force, it is a moral force in

society. Because the Catholic university takes its inspiration from the Gospel and the Jewish and Catholic Christian traditions, its ultimate responsibility is to further the reign of God in the historical reality of which it is a part. Its end purpose is to institutionally further justice, compassion, and peace, not in principle, in theory or in the abstract, but in the concrete reality in which it exists. It is to serve as the conscience of society. The UCA's leadership also understood that the Catholic university must institutionally adopt a preferential option for the poor. In very concrete terms, this meant that the poor have a moral claim on the university. Their reality must enter the institutional mind and heart of the university and call it to account for itself. Sobrino tells us that Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., the UCA's president, would say, "We think and write and do research at a desk. That's why we need university buildings and libraries... But we don't think from the desk...we try to think from the crosses of the world."<sup>5</sup> He would say that the Catholic university must do its reflection from a different social location, from the "feet of the crucified people."<sup>6</sup> And it must ask, "What have we done to put them on the cross, to keep them there, and what must we do to bring them down."<sup>7</sup> For the UCA's leadership, this came down to institutionally assuming responsibility for solving the problem of the war and its structural roots in injustice in El Salvador. Practically speaking, the social reality of El Salvador became the "learning

field” of the university and the classroom.<sup>8</sup> Each academic discipline, from its own perspective, was charged with the responsibility to know the country and the forces at work in it, to analyze them in depth, and to propose attainable goals and solutions. In addition, the UCA's leadership determined that the university must be in relationship with the poor and “the poor with spirit,” or the organized poor.<sup>9</sup> This was essential to better understand their social reality, and to enlighten, encourage, and defend them in their effort to secure justice. It was also essential for determining how the university's resources, influence, and power might be enlisted effectively in the struggle to bring an end to violence, suffering, death, poverty, and injustice.

The Catholic tradition also informed how the university understood its mission to pursue truth. The UCA's leadership determined that the greatest social lie is the hiding away of poverty, the cheapening of human life, and the flagrant disregard for the lives of the poor. Related to this is the denial of the fundamental relationship of human beings to one another and their responsibility for one another. The UCA's martyrs chose to break the silence and to tell the

truth that society did not want to hear. They did it through teaching, research, forums, institutes, centers, publications, conferences, the media, and public testimony, and especially in places where the truth needed to be heard and could make an impact. They knew well the power of not only the word, but the university's word, and they leveraged it. In his commencement address at Santa Clara University in 1982, Ellacuria said, “The university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those who have no science; to provide skills for the unskilled; to be a voice for those who have no voice; to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to promote and legitimate their rights.”<sup>10</sup> The goal was to use the university's powerful intellectual, professional, technical, and social resources to analyze, propose solutions, and actively contribute to solving the poverty and injustice in El Salvador. The UCA's knowledge changed from being descriptive to becoming liberating.

### OUR UNIVERSITIES

While space does not allow a fuller exploration, let me at least raise some concerns regarding



Paul Woolley

Shortly after the killings, SCU placed memorial crosses in front of Mission Santa Clara, where they still stand today.

where U.S. Catholic universities tend to concentrate their efforts toward justice and peace. To put it simply, we leave it to our students. Many Catholic universities today have vibrant centers for social concern. We take pride in the increasing percentage of students who engage in community service (on some campuses it is 70% or more); volunteer for a year or more after graduation; participate in immersion experiences and study tours; do research projects, microfinance projects, video projects, water projects; and start health clinics in the Haitis of the world. We encourage their selflessness and praise their generosity. And we point to our graduates who are now public defenders, inner city pediatricians, and relief workers in Africa as living proof that these service experiences and our Catholic education are making a real difference and transforming the world. However, in light of the depth and breadth of the UCA's commitment to and engagement in the struggle to secure peace and justice in El Salvador, it is incumbent on us to ask honestly whether the transformation of one individual, the contribution of one creative project, or even the accumulation of transformed individuals and projects over time, meets the moral challenges posed by the systemic massive suffering in our world today. Are our universities opting for changing the minds and hearts of individuals, while neglecting our institutional responsibility for challenging and changing the social order that produces so much needless suffering and death? Have our institutions opted for the safe response that demands little of our institutions in terms of resources, risk, or courage, that avoids conflict—and at the same time provides a sense of satisfaction that we have made a difference in the world? In the company of the world's suffering people and the UCA's martyrs who dedicated and directed their lives and their university to solving the problem of poverty and injustice, we must ask, "What is the truth that our universities must speak and where must it be spoken? What must be the great learning fields for our educational institutions? What are the solutions to systemic injustice and the goals toward which we must strive? What are the various ways we institutionally can advance them?"

In sum, Sobrino writes that a Catholic university "must above all be a converted university. Conversion means putting all its social weight through its specific instrument, rational knowledge, at the service of the oppressed majorities. This is what these men wanted to do and did: in a university and Christian way, they made an option for the poor."<sup>11</sup> In life and in death, this remains the summons of the UCA's martyrs to U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. [e](#)

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jon Sobrino, "The Latin American Martyrs: Summons and Grace for the Church," in *The Option for the Poor In Christian Theology*, ed. Daniel G. Groody (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 94.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 93.
- <sup>3</sup> Jon Sobrino, "The Cost of Speaking the Truth: The Martyrs of Central America, El Salvador," *The Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* 3 (2): 5, 7.
- <sup>4</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 17.
- <sup>5</sup> Sobrino, "The Cost of Speaking the Truth," 9.
- <sup>6</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., "The Crucified People," *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J. and Jon Sobrino, S.J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 580-603.
- <sup>7</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 69.
- <sup>8</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J. "The University, Human Rights, and the Poor Majority," in *Towards a Society that Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits*, ed. John Hassett and Hugh Lacey (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 213.
- <sup>9</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., "Utopia and Prophecy in Latin America," in *Towards a Society that Serves its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits*, ed. John Hassett and Hugh Lacey (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 60.
- <sup>10</sup> Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., and Others, "The Task of a Christian University," in *Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books: 1990), 150.
- <sup>11</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom*, 85.

# Teaching the Teachers

SCU Faculty and Staff Immersions in El Salvador  
Continue the Jesuit Legacy



Bro. Tom Bracco, S.J.

**BY LUIS CALERO, S.J.**  
*Associate Professor, Anthropology  
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**TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE KILLINGS AT THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY IN EL SALVADOR WE PAUSE TO REFLECT ON THE MEANING OF THOSE HORRIFIC EVENTS, PERSONALLY AND COLLECTIVELY. THE IDEALS OF PEACE AND DIGNITY ESPOUSED BY THOSE WHO DIED IN THIS TRAGEDY REMAIN LARGELY ELUSIVE TODAY AND WE WONDER IF THEIR UNTIMELY DEATH HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WAY WE GO ABOUT BUSINESS IN JESUIT EDUCATION.** Do these happenings inform in any way our teaching, scholarship, and learning at Santa Clara? Have we come closer to sharing in the legacy of commitment to the poor by strengthening the tradition of Jesuit liberal arts education within the context of global and concerned citizenship?

One of the ways by which we have appropriated this remarkable story and its meaning has been through faculty/staff immersions. Through yearly visits to El Salvador we have learned that this tragic loss signaled a crucial moment in contemporary Jesuit history

when we painfully grasped the far-reaching consequences of teaching and learning about the truth. This massacre, many have said, was a cowardly attempt to silence the truth about the root causes of endemic poverty and oppression. The attempt did not succeed. The legacy left by those who were murdered in San Salvador on the fateful night of November 16, 1989, lives on in the minds and hearts of many throughout the globe. It calls us into a deeper understanding of why such things happen and thus into the unmasking of falsehood.

As faculty and staff, we are keenly aware that our role on campus goes far beyond our job descriptions and disciplinary interests. We are role models whose thoughts and actions deeply influence how our students learn, not only academically but also in the school of life. This is why providing faculty and staff with meaningful opportunities to learn about the history and character of Jesuit education, such as immersion experiences, is an investment that returns a hundredfold. Immersions in El Salvador have been privileged moments when we are exposed to the harshness of socio-economic





Karen Markus

On a recent faculty/staff immersion trip to El Salvador, Carolyn Silberman, faculty member of the SCU Theater and Dance Department and co-director of the Justice and the Arts Initiative, joins Salvadoran students in a spontaneous dance.

issues in poor nations as well as to the tradition of the Society of Jesus in the contemporary world. The trips provide participants with an opportunity to grow in global social awareness, world citizenship, and—to those that so choose—spiritual grounding.

After nearly 20 years of faculty/staff immersions, Santa Clara boasts a strong record of support for these educational opportunities. It is estimated that close to 200 individuals have participated in these trips—not counting student immersions which have a dynamic of their own. Through the years, we have been able to “graduate” a number of returnees who have increasingly played a leadership role in many facets of University life. Wherever they are, they continue to be mindful of the voices they have heard in their encounters with the poor. They are also keenly aware of the ultimate commitment made by those who died at Universidad Centroamericana so that others may experience fuller life.

As participants return from these trips, they typically express being both emotionally shaken and profoundly grateful for the experience. They

realize that this opportunity is exceptionally formative and feel grateful for working at an institution that both values academic rigor and promotes solidarity with a suffering world. Participant evaluations indicate that individuals are challenged to reflect upon their personal and professional lives and vocation in unanticipated ways. They often define their journey to the developing world as one of inner transformation where they experience a call for greater reflection in their own lives and a desire to share this call with others—particularly their loved ones. Those who share a particular religious tradition often express a re-awakening of their faith and a desire to go deeper into the practice of their tradition.

Beyond these changes, participants mention being challenged to a lifestyle of greater simplicity, one that is reflected in values and attitudes. People realize how much they have taken for granted their lives of security and privilege, and they express confusion and shock in coming to see how a large portion of the world’s population has to confront material adversity and deprivation. Having spent time among good people who live a life of misery,

they cannot forget what they have seen and heard. Some highlight their desire to rearrange life priorities, to curb compulsive consumerism, to be better guided in their choice of friends and leisure activities. They discover that Salvadorans, in their poverty, can have a richer life of faith and perhaps of human relationships. They want their own lives to express solidarity with the poor—as the lives of the martyrs did—and they want others to be part of their journey, at home and in their workplace.

Confronted with stories of a brutal war, misguided U.S. policies, and the courage of many who gave their lives for others—immersion members feel profoundly moved, and sometimes overwhelmed and disoriented. In their trip evaluations, they report asking why they have remained passive and ignorant, or perhaps apathetic, in the face of such massive adversity. Some even report a sense of complicity in murder, of having done little to gain information and be moved to action. People recognize that their lives have often become

driven by routine, and their way of life has gone un-examined. They come to see that the demands of the academy have often forced them to walk in pursuit of recognition and that—inadvertently—they have created false idols. After their return from El Salvador, participants want to be more proactive and co-responsible in the affairs of this world. They are challenged to greater civic engagement.

High on the list of positive professional immersion outcomes is the bonding experience that takes place among colleagues. Participants report that they regard the discovery of each other, in collegial friendship and concern, to be an unusual occurrence in their academic careers—particularly when people barely knew each other before the trip. They talk about discovering the shared humanity in each person of the group as they individually grapple with the harsh realities of war, poverty, and suffering. They mention that they could not have faced such powerful experiences on their own—without the guidance of leaders and the support



Courtesy of Cynthia Mertens

As one follow-up to her own faculty/staff immersion trip to El Salvador, Law Professor Cynthia Mertens designed and led a one-unit course for law school students to study human rights and social justice in El Salvador with a legal emphasis. Students posed here with Florentín Meléndez (center, standing, with Mertens behind and to his left), a member of the Salvadoran legal community, who has since been named to the Salvadoran Supreme Court.

*The impact of immersion trips is manifested in multiple ways. For example, instructors come up with socially sensitive and creative manners of designing a class, selecting readings that speak of structural injustice, taking on a more participatory and leading role on environmental and peace-oriented campus programs. Others envision playing a more direct role in advocacy such as working for national comprehensive immigration reform. They see a connection between their role as staff or faculty in directing the University toward a place of greater competence, conscience, and compassion.*


of others. At the end, they express gratitude for being part of a university that places great value in direct contact with the poor of the world. They also feel inspired by their newly found friends and colleagues with whom they hope to explore opportunities in campus life.

Respondents indicate that there is a direct correlation between the trip and discovering the mission of the Society of Jesus in higher education today. Some indicate that they had some theoretical knowledge about the Jesuits before this trip, and that they now have a better sense of the values of Jesuit education. It has been a crash course in contemporary Jesuit history, some say. The “service of faith and promotion of justice” takes on a new meaning that makes it possible for them to understand the Society of Jesus today. They feel inspired by the example of Archbishop Romero and the UCA martyrs, and they want to appropriate a legacy that belongs to all Jesuit institutions working to create a more just world.

Back on campus, the impact of immersion trips is manifested in multiple ways. For example, instructors come up with socially sensitive and creative manners of designing a class, selecting readings that speak of structural injustice, taking on a more participatory and leading role on environmental and peace-oriented campus programs. Others envision playing a more direct role in advocacy such as working for national comprehensive immigration reform. They see a connection

between their role as staff or faculty in directing the University toward a place of greater competence, conscience, and compassion—and they regard these opportunities with enthusiasm.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Santa Clara has been able to develop a strong new Core Curriculum which reflects both the tradition of Jesuit liberal arts education and the vision of educating for justice. This curriculum evolved out of many years of effort that entailed much consultation and dialogue in the school community. While the curriculum has multiple components, it clearly reflects a concern for exploring the world the students have inherited—one marked by great disparities. Architects of the new Core include individuals who have come to understand the world today in part through immersion trips, and thus to possess a lived experience of the mission of the Jesuits. They are part of a campus culture that is keenly concerned about promoting academic solidarity and global awareness.

There is no question that Santa Clara has moved to the UCA martyrs’ legacy of teaching about the truth and educating students to become leaders in a globalized world. As we commemorate the events of November 16, 1989, we honor those who died at the Jesuit University in El Salvador. Those simple white crosses placed in front of the Mission Church will continue to remind us that the task of educating for a faith that does justice is far from finished, and that each of us has a role to play. 

# Inspired by Tragedy

The Ignatian Solidarity Network-sponsored  
Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice



BY MATT SMITH  
*Campus Minister,  
Santa Clara University*

THE LEGACY OF THE MARTYRS WE HAVE EXPERIENCED HERE IN THE UNITED STATES GOES MUCH DEEPER THAN WHAT WE SEE AT FIRST GLANCE. THE LEGACY OF THEIR WITNESS HAS BECOME PART OF THE LANDSCAPE OF THE IGNATIAN CONSCIENCE, JUST AS THE COMMEMORATIVE CROSSES IN FRONT OF MISSION SANTA CLARA DE ASIS HAVE BECOME PART OF OUR LANDSCAPE AT SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY. IT IS APPROPRIATE THAT WE SHARE A COMMON SPIRITUAL HERITAGE WITH THESE MARTYRS FROM EL SALVADOR, WITH IGNATIUS AT THE HELM. At the same time, we are reminded that the legacy is not of the select few at the Universidad de Centroamérica, but of a nation's people in the throes of war. Now, as we strive to be women and men who are truly with and for others, we live in the example of the martyrs and the tradition from which they acted.

The martyrs who died in El Salvador were

activists—people who grounded themselves in the reality of the margins and became companions of the poor. They came from myriad walks of life, from housekeepers to doctors, priests to lay people. “Lolo,” as they called Joaquín López y López, the only native Salvadoran in the Jesuit community massacred in 1989, was a catechist in poor neighborhoods, trying to do what he could to educate his people.<sup>1</sup> Some made their statements by participating in public actions against the repressive government, while others used their prophetic voices through their pens and the radio. They walked with others in the reality of a broken country.

The selflessness, faithfulness, and courage of the Salvadoran martyrs have inspired thousands of people. We often focus on the negative aspects of the USA/El Salvador connection, such as the former School of the Americas in Columbus, Ga., a taxpayer-supported military school directly connected to countless murders and massacres in El Salvador. However, we also choose to focus on the positive connections that have endured,




*The selflessness, faithfulness, and courage of the Salvadoran martyrs have inspired thousands of people....Positive connections have endured, including many religious orders and the Jesuits, in particular, that have moved people to respond to these and other injustices from a place of faith and groundedness.*

including many religious orders and the Jesuits, in particular, that have moved people to respond to these and other injustices from a place of faith and groundedness. One such response is the Ignatian Solidarity Network-sponsored Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice (IFTJ), which has become “the largest meeting place of individuals from U.S. Jesuit-affiliated institutions.”<sup>2</sup> Now the IFTJ takes on a different flavor as it broadens its scope. It “has evolved into an inspiring educational event not only about the Jesuit martyrs in El Salvador, but about civil war and institutional violence in all parts of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

In the past, the IFTJ has been held in Georgia, but this November marks the last year it will be held there, as it strives to address issues beyond El Salvador. The theme will be “Presente: Where have we been present, where are we present now, and where will we be present in the future?” Simply by traveling to Georgia with a desire for justice, the participants make this theme a reality. Throughout the weekend they hear from others who are working for justice and peace in concrete ways. The speakers introduce participants to an issue and then call them to some form of action around that issue. There is no lack of work being done “for the greater glory of God” at Jesuit institutions. This teach-in is a testament to that. From fair trade to human trafficking, the passion of students, guided by mentors living and dead, helps to kindle passion in others. As part of the Ignatian family, we are not living in the legacy of the martyrs alone, but in that of the faith that we and they profess. It is fitting that the IFTJ ends with a Catholic Eucharistic liturgy, the source and summit of all we do.

As activists, we need a home—a place to which we return, a place where we are known and loved, and a solid ground from which we act. Thomas Merton, paraphrasing Douglas Steere, says, “There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist fighting for peace by nonviolent methods most easily succumbs: activism and overwork.”<sup>4</sup> When one does not have a home to return to, this self-violence Merton describes insidiously takes over. Activism requires us to soundly discern and rootedly respond to injustice.

Opportunities offered by the Ignatian Solidarity Network, such as the IFTJ, help provide this home for so many people. They beg the question of what it looks like for us, as people of faith, rooted in Ignatian values, to be active agents of change in an unjust world. The ways in which this question is experienced and lived out are unquantifiable and extremely varied. As the Spirit moved the Salvadoran martyrs to respond to the oppression facing the masses of El Salvador, so it moves us to faithfully walk in their footsteps as we discern and address the injustices that most threaten human dignity. 

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría and Others, “Joaquín López y López, S.J.,” in *Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 138-140.

<sup>2</sup> “ISN Programs,” Ignatian Solidarity Network, <http://www.ignatiansolidarity.net/programs/isn.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 73.

# Songs of the Martyrs

A Santa Clara Student's Study Abroad in El Salvador



BY MARTA LANGLAND '09

*Coordinator, Santa Clara  
Community Action Program's  
English as a Second Language  
off-campus program,  
Santa Clara University*

THERE WAS A REASON WHY MY STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE IN EL SALVADOR WITH CASA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD BEGAN WITH A TRIP TO SEE WHERE THE JESUITS WERE MURDERED. ONE CANNOT BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE IDENTITY OF THE SALVADORAN PEOPLE WITHOUT FIRST KNOWING THE STORY OF THE MARTYRS. Though I knew some of their history, it never seemed to truly seep in until I saw their bloodied clothes on display and the ground where they fell that night in 1989. This was my introduction to a crucial piece of Salvadoran culture and one I would come to know through the visions of the Salvadoran people.

During my time in El Salvador, I was fortunate enough to be placed in the community of Jayaque where one Jesuit in particular, Ignacio Martín-Baró, S.J., was an active community member and a true blessing to the town. Padre Nacho, as they called him, spent years


giving hope to this community and sharing in their struggle for justice. I saw his spirit alive today in the community in endless ways, but especially manifested in the Martín-Baró Cooperative. This organization devotes itself to the philosophy of the Jesuits and supports the community in a plethora of projects, including aiding youth with their high school and college tuition. These youth involved with the cooperative found strength from Padre Nacho's teachings and though most of them were not alive to know him in person, they tell his story and remember all that he stood for.

One of my most vivid memories that captures the Jesuits' existing presence in this community was during a weekend I stayed with a host family well connected to the cooperative. The two facts I knew about my host, Don Miguel, before the weekend began were that he was a dear friend of Padre Nacho's and that he had a house happily full of grandchildren. At the time I was thrilled to know I'd have so many

kids to play with but didn't understand how vital that other fact turned out to be. Don Miguel was not overly conversational at first, yet his aura and character spoke of his years of wisdom and experience. We started with names and simple facts and then I eventually asked him about his friendship with Padre Nacho. In that instant, something in him came alive. He lifted his head slowly to look at me, his eyes glowing and his face carrying a knowing smile as if he had a secret to tell me. From then on, the quiet man I had just met became a story teller of this Jesuit and how he inspired faith and guidance to those who needed it most. These stories continued as we traveled to his house and paused only when we were interrupted by the company of fourteen grandchildren awaiting our arrival.

After dinner that evening, Don Miguel played the guitar while his choir of grandchildren began singing to me, not children's songs as you might expect, but rather, revolutionary Salvadoran songs that speak of the reality of the country. Each child's face, ages four to thirteen, looked back at me as they sang about the martyrs and their hopes for a just future. The Jesuits did not preach about forgetting the pain

of the past in order to move on and neither did Don Miguel cover up this past reality of their country's history to his grandchildren or to me. The more important thing was to remember the past and those who fought to make a difference, letting their visions fuel and empower you to keep fighting for all humans to be recognized for their equal dignity. This message from the Jesuits has become a part of Don Miguel's everyday life, is being passed on to his grandchildren regularly, and they have all graciously passed it on to me.

Experiences similar to this one occurred consistently during my time in El Salvador, and organizations similar to the Martín-Baró Cooperative are keeping hope alive throughout the country. The Salvadorans I met truly embodied the spirit of the Jesuits and their perspectives have all had a deep impact on my life in many ways. They have taught me to remember—remember those who have struggled to let you live as you do today. Take nothing for granted. Let your faith make you strong and do all you can to let justice prevail in our world. It is our calling to follow the philosophy of the martyrs and keep their stories alive for the future. 



Kevin Yonkers-Talz

Kelly Miguens, Gustavo, and Beth Mueller walk in a vigil commemorating the life of Mons. Oscar Romero.

# Connecting Through Creativity

El Salvador and the Arts



BY ASHLEY  
BORCARDT '09

*Combined Science Major,  
Santa Clara University*

IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT JUST ONE YEAR AGO I WAS WATCHING THE VERACRUZ BREAKERS SHOW OUR GROUP OF SANTA CLARA ARTISTS WHAT THEY KNOW OF DANCE. IN A COUNTRY PLAGUED BY GANG VIOLENCE AND YOUTH DELINQUENCY, THE VERACRUZ BREAKERS, A GROUP OF ABOUT TEN BREAK-DANCING SALVADORAN TEENAGERS, BECAME A MODEL GROUP FOR KIDS WHO WANT TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE. In this case, dance kept these boys off the streets and gave them something to strive for. This showing turned into an exchange: “We’ll show you what we know if you show us what you know.” In exchange for their showing, the three dancers in our group were asked to show what we know of dance. In an instant dance became a connection between people of different culture, age, economic situation, and language.

In March 2008, faculty and students participated in the first-of-its-kind Justice and the Arts El Salvador immersion trip, organized with the help of the Justice and the Arts Initiative (JAI) and a Bannan Grant from the Ignatian Center. Composed of 11 students and two faculty members, Aldo and Renee Billingslea, the group experienced a unique itinerary that exposed them not only to the political, historical, religious, societal and familial structures of El Salvador, but also to the way in which art creates a space for expression and communication and has the ability to become a catalyst for change and connection.

Since this trip, students have maintained a connection to the people and places they encountered in El Salvador. Studio art participant, James Hanold, returned to El Salvador shortly after graduation where he has connected with Claudia Bernardi at her art school, Walls of Hope, in Perquin, a town devastated by the Salvadoran Civil War. Many



Renee Billingslea



Renee Billingslea



Top: SCU student James Hanold (left) and a member of the VeraCruz Breakers share some breakdancing steps. Bottom: SCU Theatre and Dance Professor, Aldo Billingslea (back, left) and Art and Art History Lecturer, Renee Billingslea (not shown) led a delegation of SCU students who participated in the Justice in the Arts Initiative immersion trip to El Salvador. They pose here with a member of the VeraCruz Breakers (front row center).


*El Salvador has always been a place of great importance for this University. The experience of exploring that country's people and culture under the umbrella of the arts was something that will never leave me.*

students have also found ways to bring this connection back to Santa Clara. In their Senior Fall Dance shows, recitalists Skye Wilson and Maxine Evangelista used themes inspired by their experiences in El Salvador. Elena Zavala is actively pursuing ways to involve more artists in future Ignatian Center El Salvador immersion trips. With the help of the JAI, Francesca McKenzie (not a participant in the El Salvador trip but a strong supporter of using the arts to promote social justice) and I are working with the Arrupe Center to integrate the arts into the Sacred Heart Community Center homework club through our Arts Reach program.

Co-directed by Carolyn Silberman and Kristin Kusanovich, the JAI has continued to foster a culture integrating the arts and social justice from here on. Their Guest Artist Series featuring Erik Ehn, Cindy and Mauricio

Salgado from A.S.T.E.P—Artist Striving to End Poverty, and Claudia Bernardi, encourages students and faculty alike to witness and pursue this connection of arts and social justice. (The Salgados' visit in 2007 is what inspired Maureen McKenzie and me to begin planning the arts immersion trip.) Through their mentoring and support of student-artists as well as active participation in this field, the JAI has been able to live out one of its foundational goals: to create a frame of reference for examining and fostering artistic processes that are critically bound to issues of justice.

El Salvador has always been a place of great importance for this University. The experience of exploring that country's people and culture under the umbrella of the arts was something that will never leave me. While I did not learn how to spin on my head or hop on one arm in time

with the music that night with the Veracruz Breakers, I did gain something more. No one walked away a better dancer, but that "something more" was confirmed: The arts stand as one of the most promising means of connection and hope for the betterment of our future. 

Following the JAI immersion trip, SCU Student James Hanold (right) returned to spend a year in El Salvador volunteering with Claudia Bernardi at the Walls of Hope Project and Sr. Peggy O'Neill at the Centro Arte para La Paz.



Renee Billingslea

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### The UCA Martyrs of El Salvador, Jesuit Education, and Santa Clara University: Commemorating Their Legacy and Celebrating Our Future

NOVEMBER 2-5, 2009 *All these events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.*

**November 2 | Prayer Service**

5:30-6:30 p.m., Mission Santa Clara

**November 3 | Panel Discussion for Students**

4-5:30 p.m., Williman Room  
& Parlors B and C, SCU

**November 4 | Faculty Colloquium:**

**“The Idea of a Jesuit University”**

4-6 p.m., Williman Room, SCU

Keynote Speaker—J. Matthew Ashley,  
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology,  
University of Notre Dame

**November 5 | Lecture by Jon Sobrino, S.J.,  
“The Challenge of the Salvadoran Martyrs”**

7:30-9 p.m., Mission Santa Clara

*Tickets required. Purchase tickets at  
[www.scu.edu/visitors/tickets.cfm](http://www.scu.edu/visitors/tickets.cfm).*

### Guadalupe Celebration

**DECEMBER 6, 2009**

2-5 p.m., Mission Santa Clara, free and open to the public

At the annual celebration of “La Virgen del Tepeyac: The Apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe,” students share the story of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe through drama, dance, and song. Told in Spanish with English commentary, the re-enactment is made possible through the collaboration of Teatro Corazon of Sacred Heart Parish and Santa Clara University students. Reception immediately following in the SCU Benson Center.

### Retreat at Villa Del Mar

**FEBRUARY 12-14, 2010**

Join us for a weekend retreat at beautiful Villa Maria del Mar in Santa Cruz on Monterey Bay. Retreat director Stephanie Russell is executive director of university mission and identity at Marquette University. She is a founding member of the Ignatian Associates, a lay community of more than one-hundred women and men who live and serve in the Ignatian tradition, and the Ignatian Colleagues Program, a comprehensive developmental program for administrators in Jesuit colleges and universities across the country.

**Cost: \$130 Single/\$100 double for SCU faculty, staff, and graduate students. For more information and to register, visit [www.scu.edu/ignatiancenter/events/retreats/](http://www.scu.edu/ignatiancenter/events/retreats/).**



### Santa Clara Lecture Series

#### Dr. Peter C. Phan | “Evangelization and Inter-religious Dialogue”

**FEBRUARY 23, 2010**

7:30-9 p.m., Williman Room, SCU, free and open to the public

This lecture will address the theme of Christian mission (evangelization as part of Christian calling) in the context of religious pluralism. Lecturer Dr. Peter C. Phan, a native of Vietnam, emigrated as a refugee to the U.S.A. in 1975. He is the Ignacio Ellacuría Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University, Washington, DC. He holds three doctorate degrees—Doctor of Sacred Theology from the Universitas Pontificia Salesiana, Rome, and the Doctor Philosophy and the Doctor of Divinity from the University of London.







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University**

The Ignatian Center for  
Jesuit Education

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## Casa de la Solidaridad

Dedicated to fostering men and women for others, Casa de la Solidaridad is a unique community-based learning program coordinated by the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, the University of Central America in El Salvador, and Santa Clara University. At the Casa, students from Jesuit universities throughout the United States integrate rigorous academic study with direct immersion with the poor of El Salvador. Through the experience, students learn deep and lasting truths about justice, solidarity, and themselves. The program draws inspiration from all the people of El Salvador who suffered during the civil war, especially those who were killed in their struggle for solidarity and social justice. For more information, visit [www.scu.edu/studyabroad/casa/](http://www.scu.edu/studyabroad/casa/).

Casa student Mellissa Eells talks with Catherine Michele Leiva during student orientation in the praxis site of Los Sitios.

Kevin Yonkers-Talaz

